

NATIONAL WORLD WAR I

# Lost medals of fearless WWI flying ace find home at war memorial

By **Tim Barlass**

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He might best be compared to the fictional aviator Biggles or an Australian equivalent of The Red Baron.

In the First World War Flight-Commander Alfred Youdale, 28, from Ashfield "knew not fear" according to his obituary published in the *Herald* in 1917.

He may have died more than a century ago but a final piece in the history of the highly decorated airman has finally been put in place.



Captain Youdale is seen pointing to a hole in his biplane caused by a shell. On a previous flight he returned with 30 bullet holes. SMH

At a handover ceremony on Tuesday, the Australian War Memorial received a set of military medals that had been lost for 40 years.

The medals, a Military Cross and two additional Bars, were awarded to Captain Alfred Clarence Youdale for a series of courageous actions in late 1917.

Assistant Director and Branch Head of Collection Services at the memorial, Major-General Brian Dawson (Ret'd), said Captain Youdale's record of being awarded the Military Cross three times in six months was unusual. He was one of only nine airmen to receive the Military Cross and two Bars.

"After serving throughout the Gallipoli campaign, Captain Youdale joined the British Royal Flying Corps and quickly proved himself a daring and skilful airman," Major-General Dawson said.

A commercial traveller for Messrs. Barlow, Jones, and Co of York Street, Youdale signed up in 1916 and served in Gallipoli before transferring to the Royal Flying Corps.

A London newspaper correspondent, covering the fighting north-east of Ypres in August 1917, wrote of Youdale: "One young pilot flew right among our barrage and emptied his drums when we were attacking the strong fortress of Au Bon Cite between Langemarck and the Yser Canal."

The obituary continues stating that the correspondent wrote on October 6 of the fighting on Zonnebeke Ridge where the Australians were engaged in hard fighting.

"The hero of the day in the central fighting was an Australian airman. In spite of rain and half a gale of wind, he flew over the German lines for hours, and necessarily flew low.

"The enemy were both terrified and angered. They fired every explosive engine they possessed — rockets, rifles, machine guns, anti-aircraft and even field guns and heavies. Our man's plane was riddled, some of the controls were shot away, and bits of metal lodged in the body of the machine.

"It was tossed about by the force of the explosions, and at last, bent and battered by the strumpet wind,' his engine half out of action, he slid down behind our lines, crashing just at the end. He and his observer were unhurt. They shared some bruises, and he had a broken nose, but this morning he asked leave to go out again."

A photograph of the machine, showing how it was holed and damaged by the enemy, with the daring airman alongside it, appeared in the *Sydney Mail* on November 7.

Captain Youdale was killed in action on the afternoon of December 23, 1917, when his aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire. His body was not recovered, and today he is commemorated on the Arras Flying Services Memorial in France.



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