

2025 Premier's Anzac Spirit School Prize

The story of Private James Park "Jimmy" Woods.

Part A:

James Park Woods, better known simply as "Jimmy", came into this world on the 4th of January 1886, in Two Wells, SA (Figure 1). Although very little is known about his life as a young boy, it can be noted that his mother, Ellen Johnson, sadly passed away when he was just 7 years old, and his father, William James Woods, remarried and left the family. He was not heard from again, and Jimmy was adopted by a family in Two Wells along with his brothers.



Figure 1, Location of Two Wells, SA

As a young man, Jimmy departed for McLaren Vale, where he studied to become a vigneron. After he had completed his studies, Jimmy and his two brothers, Sylvanus Samuel Woods and Cecil Thomas Woods, relocated to Western Australia to a town named Katanning. There, he worked as a contract labourer employed at Braeside Station, where he spent most of his time driving the bullock team and cutting firewood for the flour mill.



Figure 2, Studio Portrait of Private James Park Woods.

After several years, Jimmy used his skills as a vigneron and took up grape growing at Caversham in the Swan Valley region. During this time, World War 1 had started in Europe, and Jimmy and his brothers, seeking adventure, all enlisted to serve with the AIF. Sylvanus was accepted immediately in 1914, while Cecil was rejected a year later. According to the book "Stealth Raiders - A Few Daring Men in 1918" by Lucas Jordan, Jimmy himself enlisted on 29 September 1916 in Perth. Initially, he was rejected due to his height, as he stood only 160cm tall. One news article said that: "He is short of stature, his inches being barely sufficient to get him into the A.I.F." (The Toowoomba Chronicle, January 4th, 1919, Pg 5). However, after trying multiple times, he was eventually able to enlist and was shipped off to France to fight in what he thought would be a great adventure.

In the mild December of 1916, 30-year-old Jimmy was dispatched to France to join the 48th Infantry Battalion, in which he would serve for the remainder of the war. The voyage was lengthy, and according to the Virtual War Memorial, at the start of 1917 Jimmy and his fellow Australian comrades disembarked upon the coarse sands of Devonport, UK, before moving on to a training camp at Codford to ready themselves for the battles ahead.

However, it wasn't simple for Jimmy. His height once again came back to trouble him, and it took quite some time before he was finally permitted to leave for France. On top of this, Jimmy was also admitted to hospital with mumps, further slowing down his departure.

It would not be until the 1st of September 1917 that Jimmy's boots at last touched the striking beaches of northern France. Sadly, even in France, Jimmy would face issues with his health. Jimmy developed numerous diseases and issues, which, according to AnzacPortal.gov.au,

included bronchitis and pericarditis, which were most likely caused by a German gas attack. This forced Jimmy back to England, where he would recover in hospital for the coming months. Thankfully, Jimmy made a full recovery, and he was back on the front line, ready to prove his worth to the world.

Jimmy's first major battle would also prove to be the last of his entire military career. According to the Australian War Memorial, the Battle of Amiens was a combined attack of British, Canadian, French and Australian forces which started on August 8th, 1918 and ended on August 11th, just 3 days later. It is known as one of the biggest and most influential battles in all of WW1, as it signified the beginning of the end for the German armed forces. On the night of the 7th of August, just hours before the attack, Gunner J.R. Armitage, a fellow Australian soldier, lay in readiness for the attack and wrote in his diary: "It was utterly still. Vehicles made no sound on the marshy ground ... we could feel that hundreds of groups of men were doing the same thing - preparing for the heaviest barrage ever launched." (The Battle of Amiens: 8 August 1918, AWM)



Figure 3, Australian battle plans for the assault on Amiens

However, before the battle could even properly start, Jimmy was already getting in on the action. Ivy Shaw, a relative of Jimmy, stated in an interview: "While on a patrol to contact the British during the attack, James, as a part of a three-man party, came across a German post holding six machine-guns and over thirty troops. Although forces were being organised to attack and take down the post, Woods led himself and the men against it." (Virtual War Memorial, WOODS, James Park) The London Gazette issue 31082, 26 Dec 1918 stated that: "Although exposed to heavy fire of all descriptions, he fearlessly jumped on the parapet and opened fire on the attacking enemy, inflicting severe casualties. He kept up his fire and held up the enemy until help arrived..." According to Anzac Portal, Jimmy jumped onto the parapet and threw bombs handed to him by his two companions. They held off multiple counterattacks until Australian reinforcements finally arrived.

In a letter written by Jimmy to his sister, he described his experience as such: *We reached our objective that morning, and we took plenty of prisoners and guns. We did another "stunt," which was a bit of a scramble, but it was successful. I didn't have time to think about it at the time. There were plenty of Germans close to me that I had to shoot at. The officer and I were brought up to a machine gun nest of the Germans. I managed to do it after a fashion, but only had a few cartridges left when the others came up.* Further in the letter, Jimmy also states that: *Later, when we were out of the nest, we got 14 machine guns. It was a strong position. We were remarkably lucky to get away with only one slight wound.* He also mentioned how the colonel was "highly recommending me for the highest decoration for the bit I did".

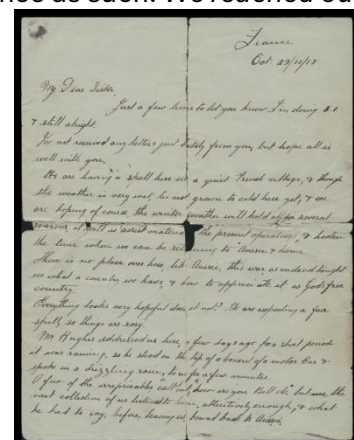


Figure 4: A piece of the letter written by James to his sister

Thankfully for Jimmy, this would be the last battle he and his comrades would ever fight in. It would not be long until the Germans surrendered, and according to awm.gov.au, the 48th Infantry Battalion would officially be disbanded on the 31st of March 1919. However, Jimmy had one more thing to do; he would receive the Victoria Cross, the highest and most prestigious military decoration in the Commonwealth (Figure 5). He would travel to Buckingham Palace to receive his medal, which, according to The National



Figure 6, James Park Woods with his Victoria Cross

Army Museum in the U.K., was just one of 626 that were given out throughout the entire war.

Jimmy returned to Australia in August 1919 after the war to retire into a quiet life. According to the Virtual War Memorial, Jimmy took up a vineyard and orchard in the Swan Valley region to continue working as a vigneron. Just two years after returning from war, James married Olive Adeline Wilson in Caversham, with whom he would have three sons and three daughters. Two of his sons, Gordon and Norman Woods, would follow in their father's footsteps, both serving in the RAAF in World War 2. Sadly, James continued to be plagued by bad health due to gas and infections from the trenches, and he died peacefully on the 18th of January 1963 in Hollywood Repatriation Hospital, aged 77 (Australian Dictionary of Biography).

Throughout his military career, Jimmy expertly demonstrated the Anzac Spirit. He showed true compassion for all his brothers and sisters in arms, and he never shied away from danger, no matter how grim everything looked. The courage and perseverance it took to continue fighting through all Jimmy had experienced is immeasurable. Ivy Shaw stated in her interview that: "James showed courage and endurance that I cannot even begin to comprehend, the horrors that he saw every day and endured I cannot even imagine in my wildest dreams, the friends he saw die, the families he saw ripped apart. I will never understand how he kept on going."

In the battle of Amiens, Jimmy showed more courage, perseverance, ingenuity and mateship than any other who had fought with or against him. To jump onto the parapet and rain hellfire onto the enemy by throwing bombs displays a level of courage that is almost inhuman. To continue holding against the counterattacks until reinforcements could relieve Jimmy and his comrades shows excellent perseverance. To throw himself into the line of fire to protect his friends from the incoming counterattack shows outstanding mateship. Although Jimmy allegedly was not the most disciplined soldier in the army, that is what made him such an excellent soldier. Jimmy's problem-solving skills and ingenuity are what allowed him to survive on that fateful night in Amiens and what allowed him to earn the Victoria Cross. Jimmy proved to himself and everyone around him that he had what it took to be a soldier of the Australian Army, a true ANZAC warrior.



The Australian 48th Infantry Battalion



Figure 5, The Victoria Cross

HASS word count: 1494

Part B:

I started my research by attempting to find a soldier suitable for this text and who I was also personally interested in. I started by looking up WW1 and WW2 soldiers in the Virtual War Memorial who had interesting stories to share. I also looked in other places, such as the National Australian Archives and the Australian War Memorial. Once I felt I had gathered and done some basic research on an adequate number of individuals, I put them all in a list, wrote some basic information about them and read over them to find the one that seemed the most appealing to me. I eventually came to James Park “Jimmy” Woods, and he immediately caught my attention. He was the only person in my list who had won a major medal, that being the Victoria Cross, and he also had a rich backstory and a flavourful wartime experience. Along with this, there was a lot of information on him from trustworthy sources, which I knew would be key to writing my text.

I began by checking that he was not on the list of previous winning entries and continued my research on him by checking out his page on the Virtual War Memorial Website. This included a lot of valuable information, such as a detailed description of Jimmy’s life before the war, during the war and after the war. It also included a range of photos of Jimmy, which helped with painting a picture in my head of who this man truly was. An interview with one of Jimmy’s relatives, Ivy Shaw, was also present there. I ensured that all the research I did was cross-checked with other sources. Much of my information came from the Virtual War Memorial, Anzac Portal and the Australian War Memorial, as they are considered trustworthy and provide a large amount of vital information. If all these websites stated the same fact, then I assumed it to be true. However, if they differed from each other, I researched further, ensuring I only used sources that seemed trustworthy (.gov, .au, historians, family members of Jimmy, etc). This ensured my research was as accurate as possible throughout the entirety of my text. I also did research on things Jimmy was involved in or part of, not necessarily Jimmy himself. For example, I did much research on the 48th Infantry Battalion to guarantee that I knew what Jimmy experienced during his service. I also did a lot of research on the Battle of Amiens, as that is where Jimmy truly shone and won his Victoria Cross. Although all of this research may not be evident in the text, it allowed me to gain a strong understanding of Jimmy and his experiences throughout his life, which I in turn expressed through my writing.

HASS word count: 465

Bibliography:

Shaw, I. (2019). *James Park WOODS VC*. [online] vwma.org.au. Available at: <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/46905> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

Awm.gov.au. (2016). *Private James Park Woods*. [online] Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P11026241> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) (2025), *James Park Woods*, DVA Anzac Portal, accessed 21 August 2025, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/stories/biographies/james-park-woods>

Trove. (1919). *PRIVATE J. P. WOODS, V. C. - PERTH, Friday. - The Toowoomba Chronicle (Qld. : 1902 - 1922) - 4 Jan 1919*. [online] Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/253115990> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

Awm.gov.au. (2016a). | *The Australian War Memorial*. [online] Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51488> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

Australian War Memorial (2021). *The Battle of Amiens: 8 August 1918 | The Australian War Memorial*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/1918/battles/amiens> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

Brosnan, M. (2018). *10 Significant Battles Of The First World War*. [online] Imperial War Museums. Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/10-significant-battles-of-the-first-world-war> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM (n.d.). *The Victoria Cross | National Army Museum*. [online] www.nam.ac.uk. Available at: <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/victoria-cross> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

Jordan, L. (2017). *Stealth raiders : a few daring men in 1918*. North Sydney, NSW: Penguin Random House Australia.

Wikipedia Contributors (2024). *James Park Woods*. [online] Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Park_Woods [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

(Wikipedia itself was not used for information; however, certain references were found using the bibliography section below the text.)