**Lance Corporal Victor Joseph MAROCCO (1881–1918)**

Victor Joseph (Giuseppe) Marocco’s life offers a window into the migrant experience during a formative period in Australia’s history. Born in Italy, he migrated through London to Melbourne, where he became a British subject and established a life as a husband, father, and business owner. In 1915, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force, leaving behind his young family and café to serve at Gallipoli and on the Western Front—frontlines that would shape both his fate and the national memory of the First World War.

Victor was born around 1881 in Moncalieri, near Turin in northern Italy. While little is known about his early childhood, war records indicate he began an apprenticeship at the Savoy Hotel in London as a young adolescent—likely around age 12. Family tradition suggests he may have followed an older brother already working there. His early move abroad fits within a broader pattern of Italian youth migration during the late 19th century, particularly from the Piedmont region, where economic hardship and limited opportunity drove many to seek work overseas.

After nine years at the Savoy, Victor emigrated to Australia. He arrived in Melbourne in 1903 and married Amelia Jessie Hands in 1908. Their son, Victor Joseph II, was born in 1909. Victor became a naturalised British subject in 1912 and owned Café D’Italia from 1914 to 1916. Situated in a bohemian pocket of Melbourne, the café likely served as a community hub, bridging cultures and offering a taste of European hospitality.

Victor enlisted in January 1915. He was assigned to the 6th Infantry Brigade Headquarters, attached to the 21st Battalion. After training at Broadmeadows Camp, he embarked aboard HMAT Ulysses on 15 May 1915. Before arriving at the front, Victor passed through the sprawling Mena Camp in Egypt. A surviving photograph shows him on a camel in front of the pyramids, flanked by fellow soldiers—an image of brief levity amid the dust and drills of military preparation. Yet the arrival of wounded men from Gallipoli sobered the mood. Bandaged, broken, and silent, these men offered a grim preview of what lay ahead.

Victor landed at ANZAC Cove on 30 August 1915—his son’s sixth birthday—just days after the failed August Offensive. Though he missed the fighting, he arrived to a battlefield still reeling from its aftermath. Makeshift graves marked the gullies, medical stations overflowed, and survivors clung to the trenches in grim determination. Victor’s unit was positioned near Steele’s Post and Monash Valley, where the trenches were infested with lice and vermin. Disease, fatigue, and the ever-present threat of shell fire defined daily life. According to war diaries, troops sometimes tried to provoke the enemy out of sheer boredom. In one instance, soldiers threw objects and lit flares to draw Turkish fire. In another, they exchanged cigarettes with the enemy across no man’s land—an improbable moment of shared humanity.

Victor fell ill with influenza in late October and was evacuated to Malta on 2 November. A telegram was sent to Jessie. He was later transferred to a convalescent camp in Port Said and returned to Australia in early 1916 for recovery.

Victor returned to duty in March 1916 and re-embarked for France in July with the 24th Battalion’s 13th Reinforcements. He arrived in France in November and served under punishing conditions. In March 1917, he was hospitalised in the UK, returning to duty that June. The record shows two brief absences without leave—minor infractions in the context of a long and exhausting war. In February 1918, he was promoted to Lance Corporal.

During Victor’s absence, Jessie and young Victor moved between relatives, including time in Geelong. These moves, prompted by financial and emotional pressures, reflect the quiet struggles of families left behind. Young Victor likely attended school during this time, supported by his extended family.

Victor was working as a cook in the 6th Battalion Officers’ Mess at White Château—over two kilometres from the front—when he sustained a fatal shrapnel wound on 6 August 1918. He was evacuated to the 47th Casualty Clearing Station, where he died the next day. He was 37.

He was buried at Crouy British Cemetery, ten miles from Amiens. A chaplain later confirmed his burial. Witnesses described him as composed and conscious when evacuated. Family lore holds that Victor was multilingual—fluent in Italian, French, English, and possibly German—and may have worked as an interpreter, though this remains undocumented.

Victor never returned home, but his story did. It lived on in photographs, attestation papers, and family memory. In 1982, three generations of the Marocco family stood at his grave. His son, now a grandfather himself, wept at the white headstone bearing the name of the man he barely knew. That moment, witnessed by his daughter and granddaughter, brought home the long reach of Victor’s absence—and the depth of his presence.

His name is inscribed at the Australian War Memorial and the Shrine of Remembrance. One of more than 60,000 Australians who died in the First World War, he lies far from home. His story is preserved not only through public memorials, but in the quiet acts of remembrance that continue within his family.

The 24th Battalion war diary for 6 August 1918—the day Victor was wounded—records:

*“7.10am Breakfast – Porridge, fried bacon and hot tea supplied to troops.”*

Victor, working in the officers’ mess, would likely have helped prepare that meal. The following day’s entry—7 August, the day he died—simply reads:

*“Sunny day.”*

*Family memories and archival material compiled by Victoria Strong, great-granddaughter of Victor Joseph Marocco.*