

## PROUDLY HE SERVED



### NX 28792 Pte William 'Tich' Foster

#### 2/5 AUSTRALIAN GENERAL HOSPITAL --- Prisoner Of War

William Joseph Foster, better known to his mates as 'Tich', was born on the 30 July 1918, probably in Paddington or Glebe, Sydney.

Little is known of his earlier days of school, work or growing up, but we do know that on 6 June 1940, at the age of twenty two, and at the advent of World War 2, Tich enlisted in the AIF and was assigned to the 2/5 Australian General Hospital.

On the 19 October 1940 the 2/5 AGH embarked on the *Queen Mary* bound for overseas duty. With the *Queen Mary* was the *Aquitania* and the *Mauritania*, and the *HMAS Perth* as the assigned escort.

The first Port of call was Bombay, and after a few days here they boarded the *President Doumer* which was a Free French ship, bound for the Middle East.

The Unit arrived here at Port Tewfik, sailed up the Suez Canal and disembarked at El Kantara. Leaving here by train bound for Gaza in Southern Palestine.

In early December 1940, the Unit moved to a site at Kefa Bilu, a few miles from the Jewish town of Rehovot, and began the task of setting up the 2/5 Australian General Hospital

Tich was to spend his first Christmas here on foreign soil, little realising that he would also spend the next four years travelling through five countries as a Prisoner Of War, and eventually finish up at Hohenstein – Ernstthal a German POW Camp Hospital.

Due to the changing fortunes of the war, the 2/5 Australian General Hospital was packed up ready for the move to its final destination at Ekali in Greece.

The hospital was established and treating wounded by early April 1941.

Because of the rapid advance of the German Army, it was decided to evacuate most of the senior medical staff and other supernumeraries.

Quite a few of the wounded were too ill to be moved, and for this reason 15 Officers and 150 other ranks volunteered to stay behind and tend to their wounded mates.

**Tich was among this number**

On the 27 April 1941 the Hospital was captured by the advancing German Army and so those who stayed behind became Prisoners Of War.

These people, together with others from the 2/6 British Hospital continued to care for the wounded under German Supervision, until December 1941, when the hospital was disbanded, and all personnel were sent to various parts of Poland and Germany to Prisoner Of War camps.

Tich was originally sent to Stalag XXA, Fort 15, Thorn - Poland

In 1943 he is shown as being at Elsterhorst, a 600 bed TB General Hospital

He was then moved to a 240 bed hospital at Konigswater

Early in 1945 he was moved once again, this time to Hohenstein-Ernstthal.

And it was here, on 14 April 1945, during the rapid advance of the American Armoured Corps, and while travelling out in a German Ambulance to pick up wounded troops, that Tich was tragically killed by 'Friendly Fire'.

From this several questions now arise, and we must look to the map below for some clarification.

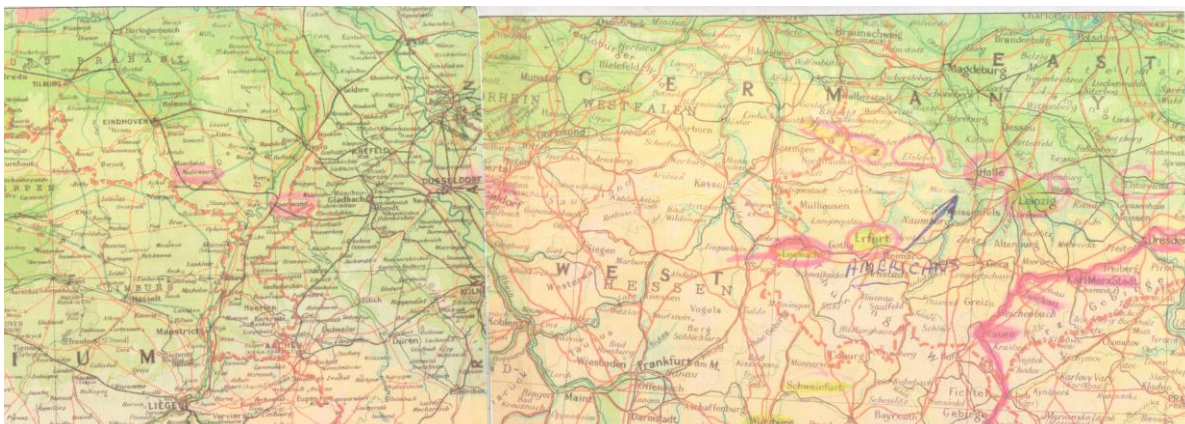


The location of Hohenstein- Ernstthal (also known as Karl MarxStadt) is shown as being in close proximity between Dresden and Zwickau , and is authenticated on maps.

This is where Tich was last reported, yet he was buried at Nederweert War Cemetery, near Roermond in Holland.

According to the Australian War Memorial War Graves Records, Tich was buried in the USA Military Cemetery at Eisenach, Germany.

This leads us to ponder on the fact that his body was exhumed by the War Graves Commission and transported from Eisenach across West Germany to Dusseldorf, then onto Nederweert (Holland) for burial.



This map shows the various Towns mentioned in the above story



**Extract from the book – *The Beginning of the End***

**With a reference to Corporal William (Titch) Foster**

On April 14 1945, American tanks from General George S. Patton's Third Army advanced along the autobahn from Weimar to Chemnitz. They had been informed that there was a prisoner-of-war hospital at Hohenstein-Ernstthal, a small village just south of the autobahn. A small force of one tank and two jeeps was sent to investigate.

R.D. Catteral, A British prisoner of war at Hohenstein, later wrote of the liberating unit:  
“Unfortunately it ran into a group of German SS Troopers and there was a sharp exchange of machine-gun fire. A German was seriously wounded and two Australian medical orderlies from our hospital volunteered to take out our antiquated ambulance and bring him in. They were caught in the crossfire between the two groups, and the ambulance was hit several times.

Titch Foster, a corporal captured in Tobruk (Ekali, Greece) in 1941, was killed instantly and his companion was badly wounded in the leg. A few minutes later the main American force swept up the autobahn and there was no further fighting.