

Request to Honor

1st. Lt. Robert Yowell, U.S. Army Air Corps

Honorable Board of Supervisors,

This letter of proposal is for the naming of a bridge in Madison County, for one of our sons that paid the ultimate sacrifice, during World War II.

1st. Lt. Robert Yowell, U.S. Army Air Corps, Airman, shot down in the Pacific, captured, Prisoner of War and executed by beheading.

The family has endured 70 years, without any closure for the loss of a son, brother and great uncle. This request is to give remembrance to a son of Liberty that answered the call, when the bells of freedom called. 1st. Lt. Yowell, never returned to the foothills of Old Rag mountain and never crossed the waters of the Robinson River, that would lead him back to the loving family that that was waiting for his safe homecoming.

Robert Yowell's father, Mr. Waverly Yowell was a teacher and School Administrator for the county for many years. The elementary school is named for him. He has one living brother remaining, Mr. Everett Yowell. He was the last family member to see Robert, as he drove him to the train station in Culpeper. I, was a friend to Robert's youngest brother, Mr. Mayo Yowell. Mayo and I would talk about his brother that never returned from the war. I, am only an extended friend of the family now, since the passing of Mayo. Carty Yowell is Mayo's oldest sons. Robert has many nephews and nieces throughout the county and across the country. One of his great nephews is serving in the Virginia Air National Guard and just last year returned from a tour in the Middle East, Theater of Operations. The Yowell family farm is located on the F.T. Valley road in Etlan, and still being farmed by the family.

I, request that you recommend to Virginia Department of Transportation that the Bridge over the Robinson River on Route 231 in Banco, be named and dedicated to 1st. Lt. Robert Yowell, U. S. Army, deceased.

Thank you for the consideration of this proposal.

Very Respectfully,
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GENERAL INFO

Robert William Yowell

February 3, 1916 – February 10, 1945

Written by Robert's great niece, Erin. She has spent many hours researching the history and has included some dates that might suffice for the POW status. The family has a telegram that was delivered to them providing notice of the aircraft being lost over the Pacific.

Robert William Yowell, "Bob," was the first of eight beloved children of Albon Waverly & Mary Elizabeth Hale Yowell, and was the only one to be born in his mother's family's home in Pratts, Madison County, and Virginia on February 3, 1916. Shortly after his birth, the small family set up housekeeping in an old farmhouse on a picturesque farm in Etlan, Virginia where the remainder of his siblings were born. Growing up, he and his family attended F. T. Baptist Church in nearby Rappahannock County. He attended elementary school in Etlan, which was about a two-mile walk from the house. He then attended the old Criglersville High School. As a child, he loved to trap animals, would rather ride a horse than a bike, he raised chickens, and talked his father into growing peaches. He loved that orchard. He graduated from University of Richmond and later studied Agricultural Science at Virginia Tech. He taught 7th grade in Barboursville at the school where the Four County Players perform. He then took a 7th grade teaching job and the principal at The Plains, Virginia. Later, he worked over the mountain at Toms Brook High School in Toms Brook, Virginia as an agriculture teacher. At the outbreak of WWII, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. Then his brother, Everett, drove him to the train station to drop him off for his tour of duty. Before Bob departed, he instructed his brother Everett to take care of his peach orchard and his car: a Dodge.

As a First Lieutenant, Bob served in the 44th Bombardment Group at Dudhkundi Airfield in India. From Calcutta, India, the group flew bombing raids throughout the India-Burma Theater of War. 1st Lt. Bob Yowell had flown over 72 missions.

The family has suffered decades not knowing what happened to their missing, beloved brother. Recently, with the help of the internet, information was uncovered about what really happened all those years ago. The story has been pieced together thus: On January 11, 1945, Bob, a 1st Lieutenant, radar technician with the US Army Air Corps, and his crew, flew their B-29 in a raiding mission over the Japanese ship repair facilities in occupied Singapore, Malaysia. At 22,000 feet, the plane was hit by antiaircraft fire in the bomb bay area causing an explosion. Bob escaped by bailing out of the rear bomb bay and parachuting to the ground. Four of the eleven crew members did not survive the explosion or plane crash. The others parachuted. Two crew members, later joined by a third, were found by Chinese guerrillas on the ground and Bob was able to make contact with them through Chinese guerrillas who found him and another crew member. At dawn the following day, the guerrillas were attempting to move Bob and 1st Lieutenant, Heiss to a safer location when they were caught by a Japanese patrol while crossing a road.

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The Japanese had captured two more of the crew members and took the total of four to be confined in a wooden hut near the Naval Club at Selatar air field, Singapore. Meanwhile, the three who survived the crash and were harbored safely by Chinese guerrillas were picked up by a British submarine. At the beginning of February, the four prisoners of war were joined by ten survivors of another B-29 crash. The prisoners were interrogated and tortured. On the 10th of February, just after Bob's 29th birthday, he and four or five of those prisoners were beheaded on the grounds of Nee Soon Rifle Range, Singapore. The remaining seven or eight prisoners were executed in like fashion a few weeks later. To cover up war crimes, the bodies were dug up August 20th and cremated, their ashes spread in the Johor Straights.

It is important that atrocities like this be remembered and honored, told and retold unapologetically and straightforward, gruesome detail and all. The government withheld the information they knew in the hopes of preventing the families of the fallen from becoming upset at the news, however, the reality is, it only withheld closure and proper honor to the fallen. These stories buried in the past must be retold to future generations so that an understanding is ingrained in them that their freedom was paid for at a heavy price.