

TSgt Robert Paul Mason Wiltshire

From Paul Carter in the Orange County Historical Society *Record*:¹

“Robert Paul Mason Wiltshire, son of Junius E. and Maud E. Mason Wiltshire, was born 13 April 1918 at home in Gold Dale, Orange County, Virginia. He had three years of high school education and worked as a salesman for the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. in the Fredericksburg area. Certainly ironic is that he never smoked; he also had a reputation as a ‘ladies man’ and was never married.

“Less than a month after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps at Richmond, Virginia on 4 January 1942. From Camp Lee near Richmond, he went to Sheppard Field, Texas for basic training and then was sent to Chanute Field, Illinois where he took a mechanic’s course and graduated in July 1942. He then took a course in special power plant engines, after which he was sent to the Army Air Base, Columbia, South Carolina where he was an aerial engineer instructor until 30 November 1942.

“He was finally assigned to the 489th Bomber Squadron (Medium), 340th Bomber Group (Medium) stationed at Army Air Base, Walterboro, South Carolina in December 1942 flying on a twin engine B-25C Mitchell bomber. Much of the training for the Tuskegee airmen and General Doolittle’s raiders took place at Walterboro.

“While many people were winding down their Christmas activities, Wiltshire was on a night training mission flying from Barksdale Field near Shreveport, Louisiana to Walterboro, South Carolina on 26 December 1942. His plane had a mid-air collision with another plane and crashed into Lafourche Swamp near Monroe, Louisiana, a distance of about 100 miles from Shreveport. An extensive search was conducted, but the plane wasn’t found until 3 January 1943. Of the eight airmen on the mission, seven were found in the plane. One body was never recovered in the swamp. No information was ever given on the other plane.

“Upon his death he was promoted to Technical Sergeant. His body was returned to Johnson Funeral Home in Locust Grove and buried at the New Hope Baptist Church Cemetery in Mine Run. He was only 24 years old and was survived by his parents and five brothers.”

¹ Paul Carter, “TSgt Robert Paul Mason Wiltshire,” Orange County Historical Society *Record*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Fall 2021), 7.