COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Commonwealth Transportation Board

W. Sheppard Miller, III
Chairperson

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Agenda item # 3

RESOLUTION
OF THE
COMMONWEALTH TRANSPORTATION BOARD

June 24, 2025

MOTION

Made By: Mr. Stant, **Seconded By:** Mr. Coleman
Action: Motion Carried, Unanimously

Title: Bridge Naming: "Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr. Memorial Bridge"

WHEREAS, in accordance with § 33.2-213 of the *Code of Virginia*, the Southampton County Board of Supervisors has requested, by resolution dated April 22, 2025, that the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB), to honor and memorialize the life, service to his country and community, and ultimate sacrifice of Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr., name the bridge on Route 647, River Road, over the Assamoosick Swamp, Southampton County, as the "Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr. Memorial Bridge"; and

WHEREAS, Southampton County, by resolution dated April 22, 2025, has agreed to be responsible for payment of all sign costs billed by the Virginia Department of Transportation calling attention to this naming, which will include the costs to produce, place, and maintain the signs; and

WHEREAS, § 33.2-213 provides that VDOT shall place and maintain appropriate signs indicating the names of highways, bridges, interchanges, and other transportation facilities named by the CTB and requires that the costs of producing, placing, and maintaining such signs shall be paid by the localities in which they are located or by the private entity whose name is attached to the transportation facility so named.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, pursuant to § 33.2-213 of the *Code of Virginia*, the CTB hereby names the bridge on Route 647, River Road, over the Assamoosick Swamp, Southampton County, as the "Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr. Memorial Bridge".

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VDOT is directed to produce, place, and maintain the signs calling attention to this naming, and secure payment from Southampton County for these costs as required by law.

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CTB Decision Brief

Bridge Naming: "Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr. Memorial Bridge"

Issue: Commemorative naming, at the request of Southampton County, of the bridge on Route 647, River Road, over the Assamoosick Swamp, Southampton County, as the "Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr. Memorial Bridge".

Facts: The Southampton County Board of Supervisors enacted a resolution on April 22, 2025, to honor the life, service to his country and community, and ultimate sacrifice of Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr.

According to that resolution, Mr. Whitehead grew up in Courtland, Virginia where his parents and grandparents also lived. In January 1941, he enlisted in the United States Navy in Norfolk, Virginia and when he turned 18 on May 5, 1941, he immediately reported for duty without waiting to attend his high school graduation just a few weeks later.

He completed his basic training and "sailorization" as a Seaman Second Class at the Bainbridge Naval Training Center in Maryland and was then assigned as a Gunner's Mate striker to the USS *Savannah* (CL-42), a Brooklyn-class light cruiser.

The *Savannah* was docked in New York City when Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, and it arrived and was moored up in Oran, Algeria, French North Africa, in November 1942 where Mr. Whitehead met up with one of his brothers, Geno, serving in the United States Army in Algeria.

In September 1943, the *Savannah* was lying to (stationary) as a fire support vessel in the Gulf of Salerno off the southwestern coast of Italy. The *Savannah's* powerful guns had already been brought to bear to support the launch of Operation Avalanche, the amphibious invasion of mainland Italy by Allied troops, and on September 10, the *Savannah*, just 5 miles from shore, inflicted serious damage on German armor attempting to thwart the invasion.

At 9:44 AM on Saturday, September 11, 1943, after many earlier attempts to damage or destroy the *Savannah*, the German Luftwaffe successfully dropped a radio-controlled "Fritz-X" glide bomb into Gun Turret Three where Mr. Whitehead was regularly stationed. He and 207 other sailors were killed. Most died immediately and horrifically. The somewhat disabled ship then limped to Malta, 500 miles south of Salerno, for emergency repairs.

The remains on the deceased were solemnly and respectfully buried at sea off Grand Harbor, Valletta, Malta from September 12-27, 1943, with Mr. Whitehead's remains being buried at sea on Sunday, September 23.

A letter dated October 10, 1943, and signed by the captain on the USS *Savannah* informed "My dear Mrs. Whitehead...of the untimely death of your son…" with other details concluding by extending…"the heartfelt sympathy and condolences of the entire Ship's Company".

Seaman 2nd Class Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr., for his service and ultimate sacrifice to his country and community, was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart, the Navy Good Conduct Medal and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal. He was the first person of an estimated 1,000 military men and women from Southampton County to be killed in action during the Second World War.

A sturdy but rough wooden bridge on River Road had spanned the main run of the Assamoosick Swamp for many years. In 1906, Mr. Whitehead's grandfather, J.E. Rowe, was paid $2 by the Southampton Board of Supervisors for "letting and receiving Assamoosic bridge". In 1911, Mr. Whitehead's father was paid $2 to repair the "Assamoosic Bridge". In 1971, River Road was reconfigured at this location, and bridge Number 000017829 or the "River Road over Assamoosick Swamp" bridge, a concrete cast-in-place structure, was constructed 1000 feet north of the old bridge's location to replace the antiquated one. The bridge crosses the run of the Assamoosick Swamp as it makes its way through the "low grounds" to the Nottoway River next to Mr. Whitehead's family's farm and to other Whitehead property. Mr. Whitehead and his brothers enjoyed swimming, fishing, and turtling up and down the "Mussock", the local name for this extensive swamp. The location of this bridge abuts properties presently or formerly owned by Mr. Whitehead's mother's Rowe family and his father's Whitehead family.

Action Required by CTB: The *Code of Virginia* requires a majority of the CTB members to approve a resolution naming a highway or bridge, as appropriate. A resolution will be provided for the Board's consideration.

Result if Approved: The bridge on Route 647, River Road, over the Assamoosick Swamp, Southampton County, will be known as the "Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr. Memorial Bridge". In accordance with law, and by resolution dated April 22, 2025, Southampton County agrees to pay the costs of producing, placing, and maintaining the signs calling attention to this naming.

Options: Approve**,** Deny, or Defer.

Public Comments/Reactions: VDOT has not received any public comments on this proposal.

Resolution Requesting the River Road over Assamoosick Swamp Bridge in Southampton County be Named the Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr. Memorial Bridge

WHEREAS, Jordan Walter "Jack" Whitehead, Jr. (1923-1943), was born and grew up in the house at 19947 River Road, Courtland, Virginia, 23837, where his parents and grandparents had also lived; and

WHEREAS, Jack enlisted in the U.S. Navy at Norfolk, Virginia, in January 1941. He turned 18 on May 5, 1941, and immediately reported for duty without waiting to attend his high school graduation just a few weeks later; and

WHEREAS, Jack left home for basic training and "sailorization" which he completed as a Seaman Second Class at the Bainbridge Naval Training Center at Port Deposit, Maryland. He was then assigned as a "Gunner's Mate striker" to the USS *Savannah* (CL-42), a Brooklyn-class light cruiser; and

WHEREAS, The *Savannah* departed from Norfolk in August 1941, perhaps when Seaman Whitehead joined the crew. The ship first traveled up and down the East Coast and was docked in New York City when Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941; and

WHEREAS, The *Savannah* arrived and was moored up in Oran, Algeria, French North Africa, in November 1942 where Jack met up with one of his brothers, Geno, serving in the army in Algeria; and

WHEREAS, In September 1943, the *Savannah* was lying to (stationary) as a fire support vessel in the Gulf of Salerno, part of the Tyrrhenian Sea off Salerno, a city on the southwestern coast of Italy. The Savannah's powerful guns had already been brought to bear to support the launch of Operation *Avalanche*, the amphibious invasion of mainland Italy by Allied troops; and

WHEREAS, On September 10, the *Savannah*, just 5 miles from shore, inflicted serious damage on German armor attempting to thwart the invasion; and

WHEREAS, At 9:44 AM on Saturday, September 11, 1943, after many earlier attempts to damage or destroy the *Savannah*, the German Luftwaffe successfully dropped a radio-controlled "Fritz-X" glide bomb into Gun Turret Three where Jack, now a Seaman 2nd Class, was regularly stationed. He and 207 other sailors were killed. Most died immediately and horrifically. The somewhat disabled ship then limped to Malta, 500 miles south of Salerno, for emergency repairs, arriving the next day around 4 PM; and

WHEREAS, The remains of the deceased were solemnly and respectfully buried at sea off Grand Harbor, Valletta, Malta, from September 12-27 with Jack's remains being buried at sea on Sunday, September 23; and

WHEREAS, The Fritz-X was the world's first precision-guided weapon deployed in combat. The *Savannah* was the only American vessel ever struck by a guided missile, and this missile was the largest one ever targeted on a US Navy warship during the Second World War; and

WHEREAS, The September 24 issue of the *Tidewater News* reported that "Mrs. Bettie Rowe Whitehead of the Sebrell community received a telegram this week that her son… is missing in action." The October 6 issues of the Richmond *Times Dispatch* and the Norfolk *Ledger Star* published reports stating that Jack was missing in action based on a "Navy Department casualty list"; and

WHEREAS, A letter dated October 10, 1943, and signed by the captain on the Savannah, informed "My dear Mrs. Whitehead….of the untimely death of your son…" with other details concluding by extending…" the heartfelt sympathy and condolences of the entire Ship's Company"; and

WHEREAS, Jack was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart, the Navy Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; and

WHEREAS, Jack was the first person of an estimated 1,000 military men and women from Southampton County to be killed in action during the Second World War, according to the *Tidewater News;* and

WHEREAS, A sturdy but rough wooden bridge on River Road had spanned the main run of the Assamoosick Swamp for many years. In 1906, Jack's grandfather, J. E. Rowe, was paid $2 by the Southampton Board of Supervisors for "letting and receiving Assamoosic bridge." In 1911, Jack's father was paid $2 to repair the "Assamoosic Bridge." In 1971, River Road was reconfigured at this location, and Bridge Number 000017829 or the "River Road over Assamoosick Swamp" bridge, a concrete cast-in-place structure, was constructed 1000 feet north of the old bridge's location to replace the antiquated one. This bridge crosses the run of the Assamoosick Swamp as it makes its way through the "low grounds" to the Nottoway River next to Jack's family's farm and to other Whitehead property. Jack and his brothers enjoyed swimming, fishing, and turtling up and down the "Mussock," the local name for this extensive swamp. The location of this bridge abuts properties presently or formerly owned by Jack's mother's Rowe family and his father's Whitehead family; and

WHEREAS, additional details of Jack's life and service to our county are attached to this resolution and were prepared by William "Billy" W. Cole, Jack's nephew; and

WHEREAS, Section 33.2-213 of the Code of Virginia authorizes the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to give suitable names to state highways, bridges, interchanges, and other transportation facilities and change the names of any highways, bridges, interchanges, or other transportation facilities forming a part of the systems of state highways; and

WHEREAS, Section 33.2-213 provides that the Virginia Department of Transportation shall place and maintain appropriate signs indicating the names of highways, bridges, interchanges, and other transportation facilities named by the CTB and requires that the costs of producing, placing, and maintaining such signs shall be paid by the localities in which they are located.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Southampton County, in accordance with the requirements of Section 33.2-213 of the Code of Virginia, does hereby request that the Commonwealth Transportation Board name the bridge on Route 647/River Road, over the Assamossick Swamp in Southampton County, currently identified as bridge number 000017829, as the Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr. Memorial Bridge.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Southampton County agrees to pay the costs of producing, placing, and maintaining the signs calling attention to this naming.

Adopted on this 22nd day of April 2025.

A COPY TESTE:

Brian S. Thrower
Clerk to the Board of Supervisors/
County Administrator



Virginia Department of Transportation

Maintenance Division

CTB MEETING: June 25, 2025

Southampton County

Proposed Bridge Naming:

"Jordan Walter Whitehead, Jr. Memorial Bridge"