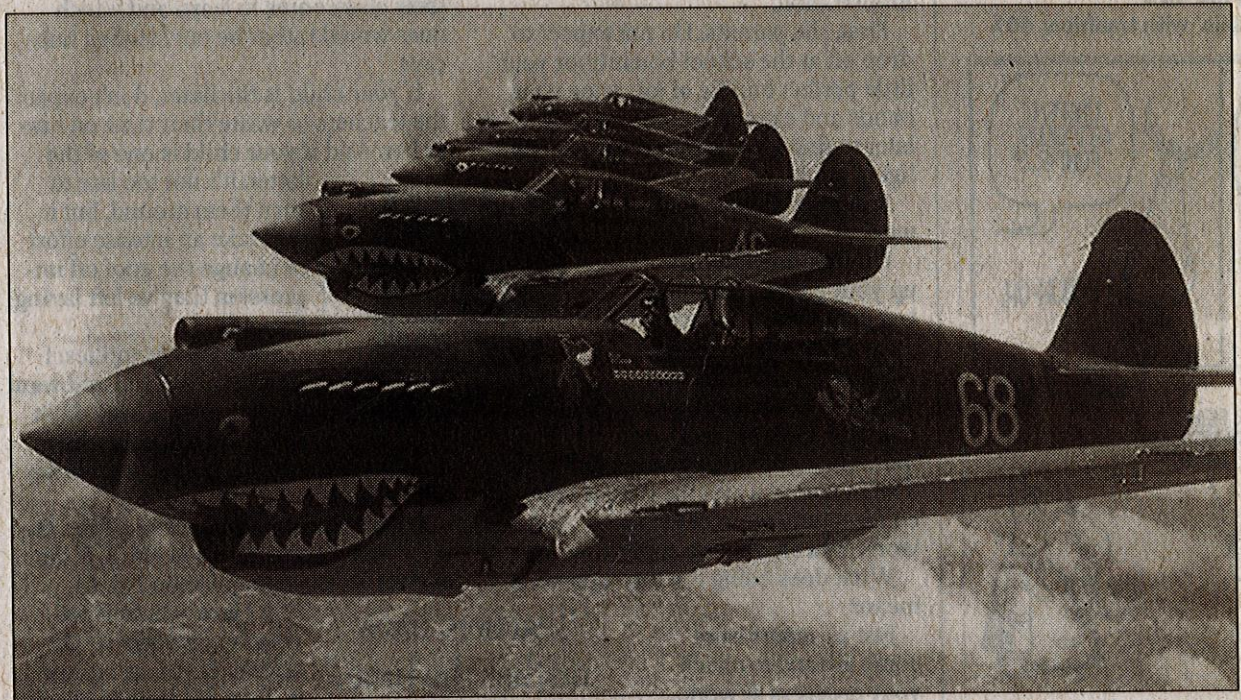


## PERSPECTIVE

# The foundation of the Warner Robins High School tradition



The P-40 Warhawk. Similar planes were flown by the Screamin' Demons in World War II

"Pastor Donald Crosby of Kingdom Builders Church of Jesus Christ has been collecting petition signatures from those who agree that the school his son will soon attend should dump the horned, pitchfork-wielding mascot. He says a pitchfork-wielding mascot sends the wrong message to teens."

The Telegraph  
July 28

## Controversy over mascot provides history lesson

By YVONNE E. NORRIS  
Special to The Telegraph

Warner Robins, instead of Robins Field.

Everything in this town during the early years, as well as today, had the fingerprint of the Army depot on it. From police to community development, the base commander, Col. Charles E. Thomas, helped form the city. Thomas did not even allow "Honky Tonks" within the city limits.

When the contract for Warner Robins High School was awarded, the school colors of red and white, as well as the mascot, the demon, already were chosen. The class of 1946 moved into the new high school in the spring of 1946 and graduated May 22, 1946.

The class of 1947 was the first class to attend a full year in the building and started the first school yearbook, *The Pioneer*. Warner Robins High School fielded boys and girls basketball teams that very first year as well, named the Demons.



According to Varsity.com, "The purpose of a mascot is to symbolize school and community spirit used to enhance the tradition and emotions of its audience through exaggeration, characterization and entertainment."

For many years, Warner Robins High School demon mascot has been a source of discomfort for some people. Not from what the opponent's side of the field, but from what local people perceive.

It has been voiced numerous times that the mascot of Warner Robins High School needs to be changed from the Demons to something less satanic.

Schools and teams choose their mascots to be something that will strike fear into the hearts of their opponents. Granted, that has not always been the case.

If one were to visit the Georgia High School Football Historians website, one would find a few teams that have less than ominous mascots. A mascot that comes to mind locally is the Lanier Poets of Macon.

An investigation into the origins of the Warner Robins High School mascot revealed many interesting facts about the city and the vital role the U.S. Army played in the development of a sleepy community of the early 1940s. After all, why a demon would be chosen as the mascot of a high school team located in the Deep South, below the "Bible Belt," is a question worth answering.

## The beginnings

In the fall of 1941, the Army selected the tiny town of Wellston to build a much needed Army depot. The depot was going to become quite the boon to Middle Georgia.

The depot officially opened in 1943, ahead of schedule, to serve the war effort by repairing battle-damaged aircraft and avionics systems.

The Middle Georgia area also trained American and foreign aviators during this period. The government supplied the monetary resources and most of the planes, while the community leaders provided the land as well as the labor.

The government financed the design and building of the town; thus the reason for Commercial Circle. The name of the town changed from Wellston to Warner Robins in 1942 to allow the base to be completely named after Gen. Augustine



## New school system created

Due to the rapid influx of workers to the depot, the community reached astounding numbers in a very short time period. Many workers coming to the depot were from all over the United States and the school system was not equipped to handle the rapid growth.

Government buses transported children to school in Bonaire. The government funded the building of the Charles E. Thomas III School to educate all 11 grades of the base's children. When the school opened, there were far too many students for the capacity of the building.

It was deemed that children in grades one through seven would attend the new school and the remainder of the children would have to attend school in the "barracks on the hill" while other school buildings were constructed instead of continuing to bus the children to Bonaire.

The eighth grade children were deemed strong enough to carry buckets of coal for the barracks' heaters during the winter.

With a new contract in place to build two new schools, C.B. Watson and Warner Robins High School, as well as an addition to Thomas School, construction commenced. The new schools had to be built way out from the city on what is now Davis Drive.

## Warner Robins High School

## Selecting a mascot

Looking at the history of Robins Field in the early years, and with most things in the town named in relation to the Army depot and/or its military leaders, it seemed only appropriate that if the school was named after the base, the school mascot should have something to do with the depot as well. Why not adopt a mascot after an aircraft squadron affiliated with the base?

Further investigation revealed that Robins Field was tasked with repairing battle-damaged fighters and bombers from squadrons originally based in states adjacent to Georgia.

There were many airfields located throughout Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Alabama, Florida and North Carolina all with a multitude of aircraft. Among those types of aircraft was the Curtiss P-40 Warhawk.

## Choosing the Screamin' Demons

It is documented that Robins did repair P-40 aircraft and witnesses remember watching P-40s involved in mock dogfights over Robins during this period.

It also was found that the 7th Fighter Squadron, which flew the P-40 Warhawk and the P-38 Lightning, was activated during World War II and based out of West Palm Beach, Fla. This in the area of responsibility of Robins Field.

The 7th fighter squadron was deployed to the South Pacific during the war. While based in Darwin, Australia, a squadron mascot was discovered and chosen that complemented the squadron's name.

Its mascot, named after a mythical Aboriginal character, struck fear in all who were unfortunate to lay eyes upon it. The name of this beast is the "Bunyap" or "Bunyip" — better known as the — "Screamin' Demons."

What a wonderful way to enhance the traditions and emotions of our community. Stemming from a patriotic community born from an Army depot and continuing today, Warner Robins High School is steeped in tradition. So much so that we have coined a phrase, "Tradition never graduates."

*Yvonne E. Norris is a resident of Warner Robins.*