



## HISTORY BEHIND THE RAIDERS

What's in a nickname? Plenty if you know the history behind the Northwest Florida State College school mascot -- "Raiders."

It began more than 65 years ago in a secrecy-shrouded mission on an isolated airfield in the Florida panhandle. It would culminate when a band of daring fliers dubbed "Doolittle's Raiders" soared off the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Hornet and bombed Japan for the first time in World War II.

The little-known airstrip was Eglin Field, now Eglin Air Force Base. The leader of the Raiders was then Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle, who led the squadron of B-25s on the daring raid -- a feat for which he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

The significance of the mission, many believe, was a turning point in the war, said retired Lt. Gen. Kelly Burke, a Raiders fan. The raid was an unprecedented feat requiring extraordinary courage and airmanship and has been commemorated in numerous ways, including films such as "Pearl Harbor".

To heighten knowledge of the legacy and heritage behind the Raiders name at the college, Burke donated a painting to the college, which commemorates the flight of Doolittle's Raiders. The painting, entitled, "The Giant Begins to Stir" bears the original signature of a surviving crewman from each of the 16 participating aircraft, including Doolittle. The painting hangs in the administration building on the Niceville

campus. The college also owns copy of Lt. General James H. Doolittle's autobiography which is signed by Doolittle.

In the college's first year of operation in 1964, then Okaloosa-Walton Junior College set about to choose a school mascot. Numerous names were suggested by students and staff, but many of these had already been chosen by opposing teams in the Florida Junior College system or were the mascots of local high schools. One day, Lanny Heath, OWJC charter faculty member, was driving by a monument to Gen. Doolittle in Valparaiso, Florida. He decided to suggest that the college use the name "Raiders" in honor of the heroic airmen who trained at Eglin for their famous World War II raid on Tokyo. The college at that time was located in Valparaiso. The student body chose the name "Raiders". OWJC students voted on the mascot names and the ballots were collected in a shoebox with a slit on top.

A proud name and a proud tradition. Northwest Florida State College is honored to use the name Raiders and pay tribute to the heroes of the past who have shaped our future today.