

# Bomber Tales

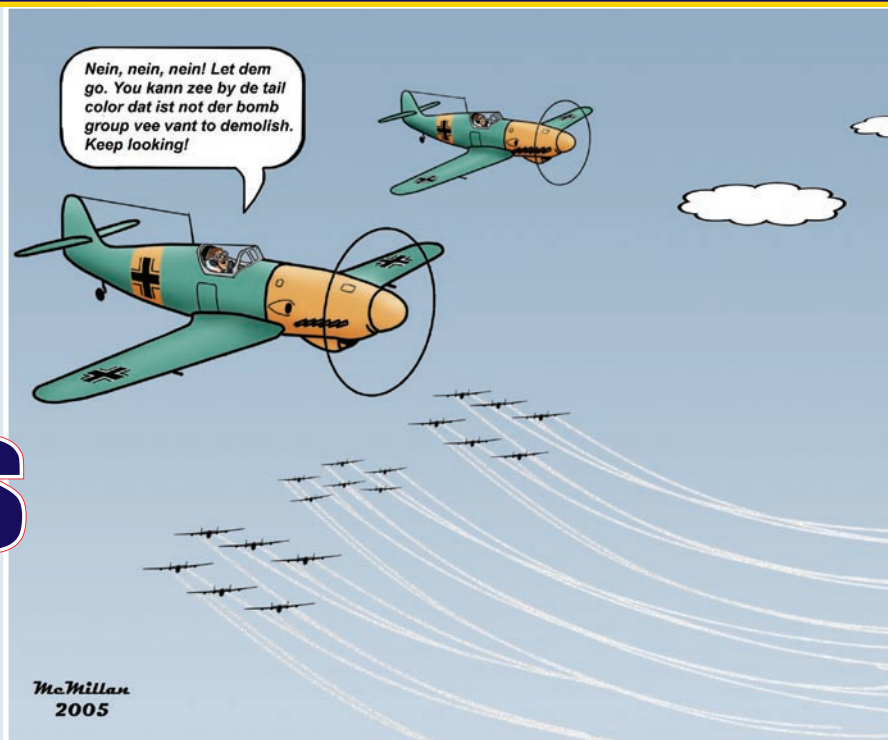
## A Good Yarn

*By Roger A. Freeman*

Scuttlebutt and Shooting the Breeze were features of barrack life in all conflicts, none more so than with the air forces of World War II. Inevitably exaggeration and false rumour were prominent and resulted in tales that have resounded down the years and lost none of their potency in the hangar flying session so beloved of veterans. One that has become aviation folklore concerns the battered bomber that lowered its landing gear in an act of surrender to attacking fighters. When the victors flew alongside to guide their prize down to a landing the bomber gunners opened up with machine guns and shot the enemy fighters down. This dastard treachery caused the enemy fighter unit to thereafter go looking specifically for bombers carrying the identifying markings of the unit to which the double-crossing bomber belonged.

One can hear the story told about a B-24 outfit in the South Pacific, a B-24 group in Italy, a B-26 group of the Ninth Air Force and, most often about a couple of "hard luck" B-24 and B-17 groups in England. A prime candidate is the Bloody Hundredth, sobriquet of the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group that supposedly suffered heavier losses than any other B-17 group. Good yarn it may be, but the truth is that the tale is nonsense.

In the first instance no ex-Luftwaffe fighter pilot consulted, including the great Adolf Galland, gave any



credence to a bomber surrendering in such circumstances. Wheels often dropped down on bombers due to battle damage and any fighter pilot would be extremely wary of approaching a B-17 or B-24 in such circumstances. Even if the incident did happen the assertion that the Luftwaffe unit involved went hunting for bombers with a particular marking is ridiculous. Fighters were usually vectored to a bomber formation and the task was to attack and get away as quickly as possible. The rate of closure was so great that only a fleeting glimpse of the target's paintwork was had, concentration being on aim. No way did any Luftwaffe fighter outfit fly around bomber formations trying to pick out specific markings. The assertion causes great amusement with Luftwaffe veterans.

As for the Bloody Hundredth, it did suffer grievous losses on several occasions that led to its familiar label. However, there were other bomb groups in the Eighth Air Force with a higher total for their whole period of combat. There is an element of relief in believing that someone else is taking a harder beating than you are, and this is why rumour regarding the Hundredth was fostered and spread among the other groups. In history the line between fame and infamy is fine and there is no doubt that when it comes to identifying an individual bomb group of World War II the most well known now is the Hundredth.