

# Checking out the Fighter Pilots

By Dave Hutchens, Pilot 532nd Bomb Squadron

In the fall of 1943 the 381st Bomb Group became very short of pilots, Losses were high and most of the pilots from the original group were gone. Most shot down and in prison camps.

In order to stay operational many of our copilots were checked out as first pilots and given a crew. So now we needed copilots, higher headquarters solved this problem, at least temporarily, by sending us a number of fighter pilots who were in England but still waiting for their aircraft.

In the 532nd I got the job of checking out these fighter " jocks " in the B-17. This was not exactly a pleasant experience. To start with they were a " ticked-off " bunch of boys who had been through single engine training and were not ready for four engines and a big old slow bomber. I tried to convince them that their main job was to get this B-17 back on the ground if the first pilot got hurt and couldn't do the job. The landing didn't have to be pretty but safe enough to walk away from and don't depend on a go-around . Get it on the ground - even if you have to pull the wheels up. Now we were ready to start shooting landings.

I was ready for about anything but not their landing bounce and recovery technique. These fellows had been flying single engine nose wheel aircraft. Their recovery on a landing bounce was to shove the stick forward and nail the nose wheel back on the landing strip. Well this didn't work so well in a B-17 with a tail wheel, especially if you bounced about 50 feet in the air. I had some exciting times but survived and was almost glad to go back to flying combat.

Submitted by Dave Hutchens