

George “Randy” McCraw

[Lettering] Murray L. Martin

WW II Ventura and B-17 fuselage artists



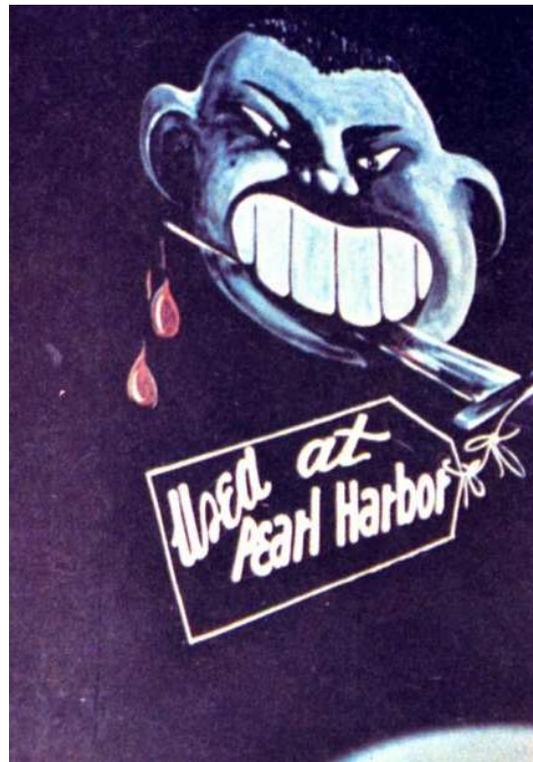
Randy painting on Ventura fuselage in June 1942



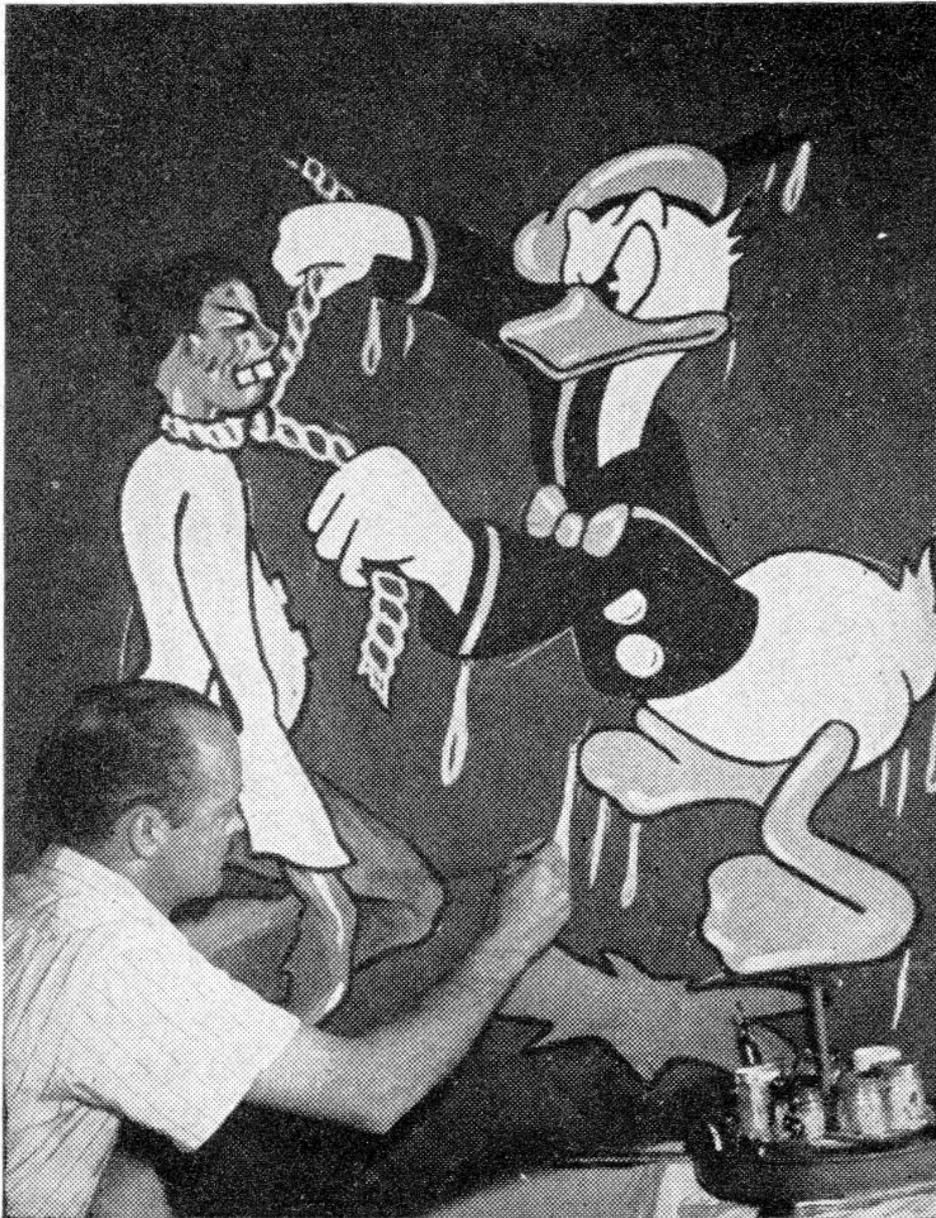
Walt Disney official design for Vega "Hudson" Bomber 1940

With the Disney Studios located just down the street from the Lockheed – Vega plant, the Disney characters painted by Randy McCraw were always mistaken for official Disney art. The Disney artists did complete two official insignia designs for Lockheed. *The first one created in 1940, featured the early Hudson bomber which served in the Royal Air Force and the Royal Canadian Air Force during the start of WWII.*

George “Randy” McCraw was a sandy haired unassuming worker in Paint Shop Dept. 39 of the Vega Aircraft company at Burbank, California. Randy had been assigned to paint the USAAF white stars, with inner red circle, on the fuselage of the new production Ventura aircraft. In early April 1942, Randy had finished painting the large Army white star on a Ventura, then to show his contempt for the little “yella fellas”, he painted the face of an ugly Japanese in the center of the U. S. star. He then picked up a large brush and blotched out the Jap face with gooey red paint. After taking a few deep breaths of satisfaction, he looked around and noticed his artistic actions had drawn a group of fellow workers to the base of his ladder. A few days later, Randy scrapped the paint blotching idea and selected a clean section of Ventura fuselage where he went to work on his first actual painting. The image featured a steel cold blue Japanese head with a bloody dagger clenched between his large front teeth. The caption read – “Used at Pearl Harbor.”

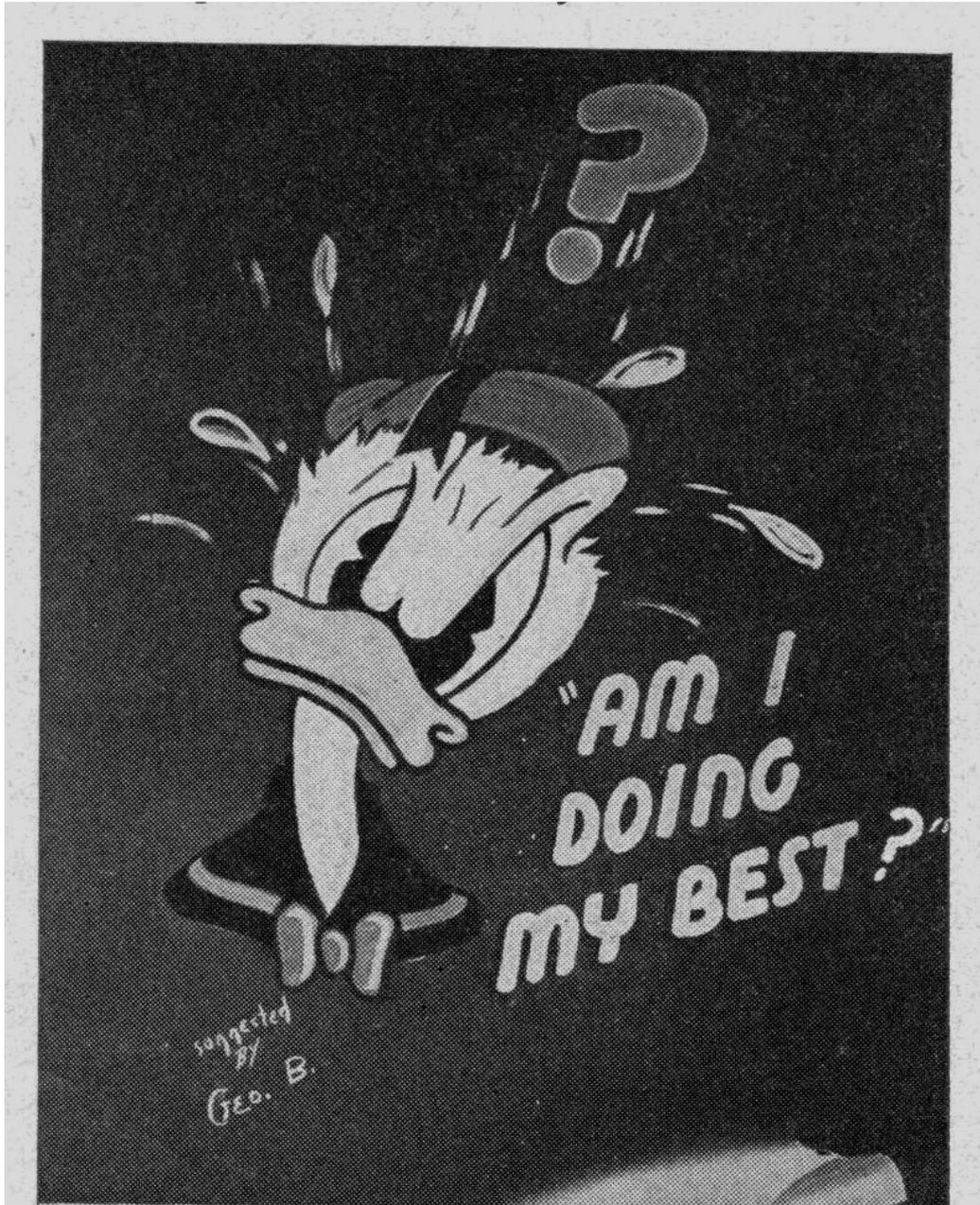


Randy was surprised to find a group of approving faces who congratulated him on such a swell job. One among the group was his supervisor Gil Hawley, Foreman of Department 25. Taking Randy aside, Gil suggested he paint more of the drawings, and to assist with ideas, new suggestion boxes would be set up in various sections of the Vega plant. Three weeks later Randy had over 100 suggestions a day pouring in and his approved drawings became a full time job. To assist him, graveyard worker Murray L. Martin began to paint the little remarks that came with each art work. For the many Walt Disney created characters painted, special permission was given to Randy and the Vega Company by Walt himself. Each of the Ventura paintings left the plant for parts unknown, which included U.S. Navy, Royal Air Force, Royal Australian Air Force, Royal New Zealand Air Force and the Royal Canadian Air Force.



THE VEGA AIRCASTER

Randy at work in April 1942, which appeared in the local Vega newsmagazine "Vega Aircaster".



Note - the abbreviated name of the Vega worker who suggested the art is painted beside the finished fuselage painting by Randy McCraw. He gave full credit to each fellow employee who submitted the original idea in the suggest box.



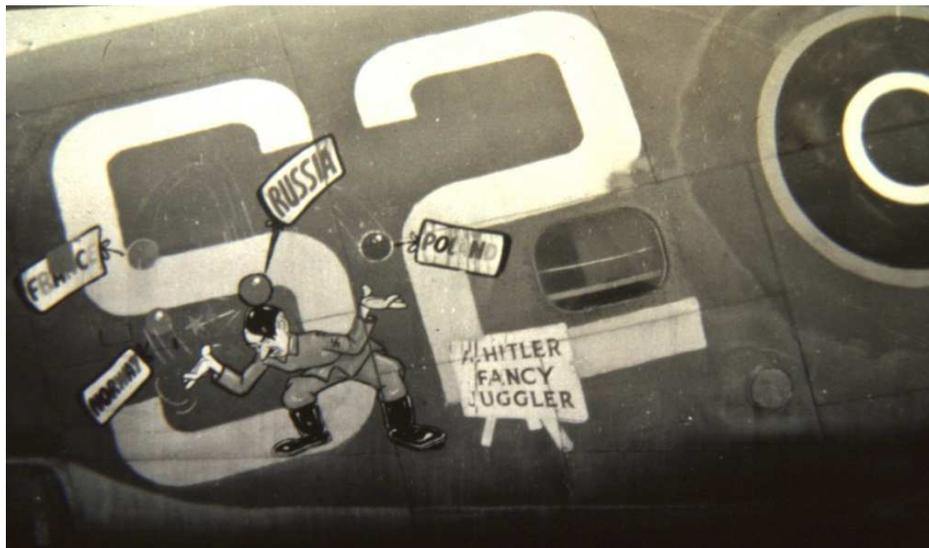
From 18 August 1943 until 12 November 1943, No. 149 [Sea Wolf] Squadron RCAF flew under U.S. Alaska Command, "Y" Wing, at Annette Island. Many of their Ventura aircraft carried McCraw nose art and fuselage art. The Canadian crews in fact believed it was from Walt Disney, which was a good boost for moral. No. 149 squadron was formed 26 October 1942, at Patricia Bay, B.C. and began to receive new Ventura aircraft in June 1943. The ferry pilots submitted a request to Walt Disney studios for the RCAF squadron crest, with name "Sea Wolf". The unofficial Disney design arrived in July 1943 and remained until the squadron was disbanded 15 March 1944.

The above photo on Annette Island in August 1943 was taken by RCAF pilot Ernie Thompson and records some of the Randy McCraw Mickey Mouse nose art. It is very clear this came from the 1940 movie "Fantasia" where Disney combined classical music with animation. Mickey Mouse is about to conduct a symphony, possibly the film's opening arrangement of Bach's "Toccat and Fugue?"

In this amazing twist of fate both Disney and McCraw supplied RCAF WW II squadron nose art.



Simonsen replica of official Walt Disney No. 149 squadron insignia, on file at Disney archives in Burbank, Calif., dated 19 July 1943.



This RCAF bound Ventura received special McCraw art directed at Hitler. Due to the fact the US national star has been replaced by the roundel, Randy understood this aircraft was bound for the RAF and directed his art towards Hitler. Note how the Canadians carefully applied the new code letters without over-painting the original art, something the Americans did not do.



Most of the early Ventura American art was directed against the Japanese

In April 1942, the demand for the Boeing built B-17 Flying Fortress could not keep up with construction and it became evident that other manufacturers were needed to build the quantities of bombers desired by the U.S. Army Air Force. The Burbank Vega plant was invited to join into the production of the four engine bomber. For the Vega/Burbank workers, Disney artists created a new Lockheed insignia designed to show the workers were bringing more American bomb power to the war effort.

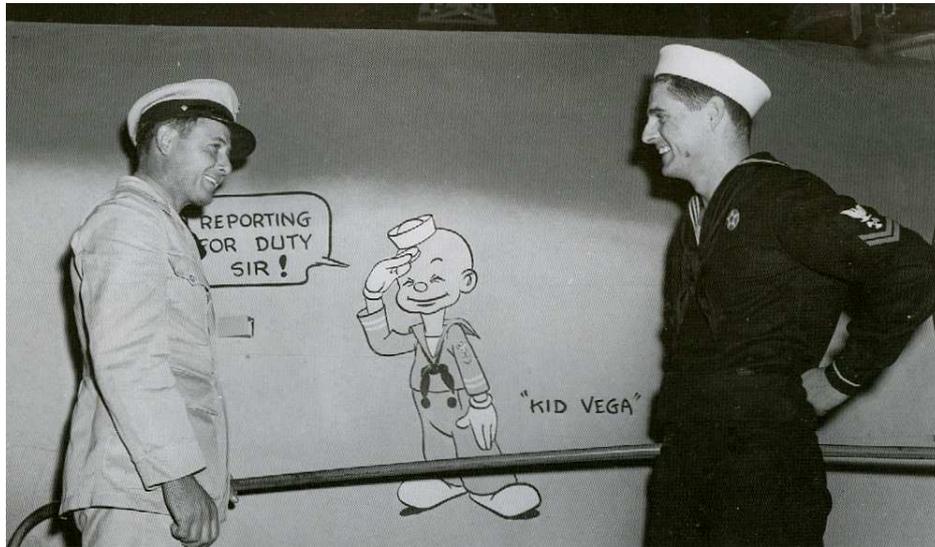


[Walt Disney design artists for Vega B-17 Insignia](#)

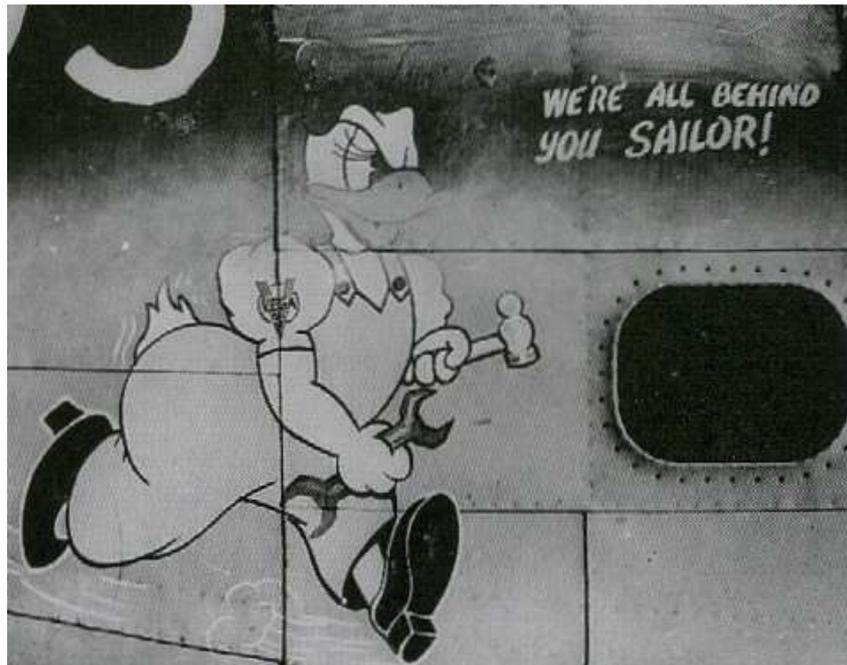


During this same time frame, Randy McCraw saw a new request showing up in the daily suggestion box. The character painted on the Ventura fuselage is directly traceable to the Vega employees and now they wanted to be identified as a group. One letter read – “Vega needs a mascot, some animal, bird, or insect, which would represent us workers.” Randy played with this idea in a few of his paintings.

Suggestions for a new Vega mascot poured in and at least two different Vega worker mascots appeared.



The "Kid Vega" was directed towards the U.S. Navy where most of the Ventura aircraft would fly.



The little female duck worker clearly showed the Vega crest on her shoulder.



The WW II Vega Insignia

On 4 May 1942, the very first B-17F-1-VE [serial 42-5705] left the Vega Terminal in Burbank and it proudly carried a new male Vega worker mascot. The Vega insignia appears on tool box and worker number on coveralls.



Vega promotion photo for first production B-17F

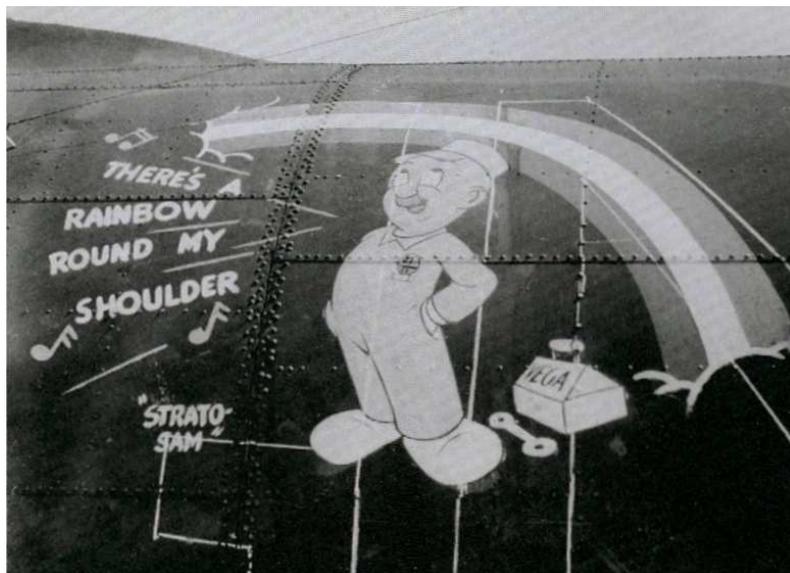
The Vega factory workers had all grown beards during the construction of the very first Flying Fortress. One worker points to the new mascot a Vega worker with tool box.



FROM NEW B-17 PRODUCTION LINE

First Boeing B-17 "Flying Fortress" to come off the production lines at Vega Aircraft Corporation takes to the air months ahead of schedule. Vega is building B-17's under pooled facilities agreement in which it joined Douglas and Boeing to boost output of the big bombers.

This Vega magazine ad shows the very first production B-17F received the Vega worker art on both sides of fuselage in front of national US star. The next worker fuselage art became the new mascot for the workers and took the image of Elmer Fudd, however Mickey still appeared.



The new Elmer Fudd style worker character was named "Strato-Sam" and always carried a tool box with large lettering VEGA, and Vega Dept. number also appeared on his coveralls. Due to the art being painted on the B-17 fuselage many of the paintings were lost when over painted by large code letters. This B-17F arrived with the 303rd Bomb Group where the outline for code letters GN [427 B.S.] are being applied. In many cases the original fuselage art was just painted over and lost.



Some Vega built B-17F's received Randy McCraw Disney characters same as the Ventura aircraft. In June 1943, all American aircraft received a major revision to the national star insignia. Officially ordered on 28 June, all aircraft received rectangle white bars on each side of the white star, with a red surround to the complete insignia. This new revised red covered up the foot and ammo belt of Mickey Mouse.

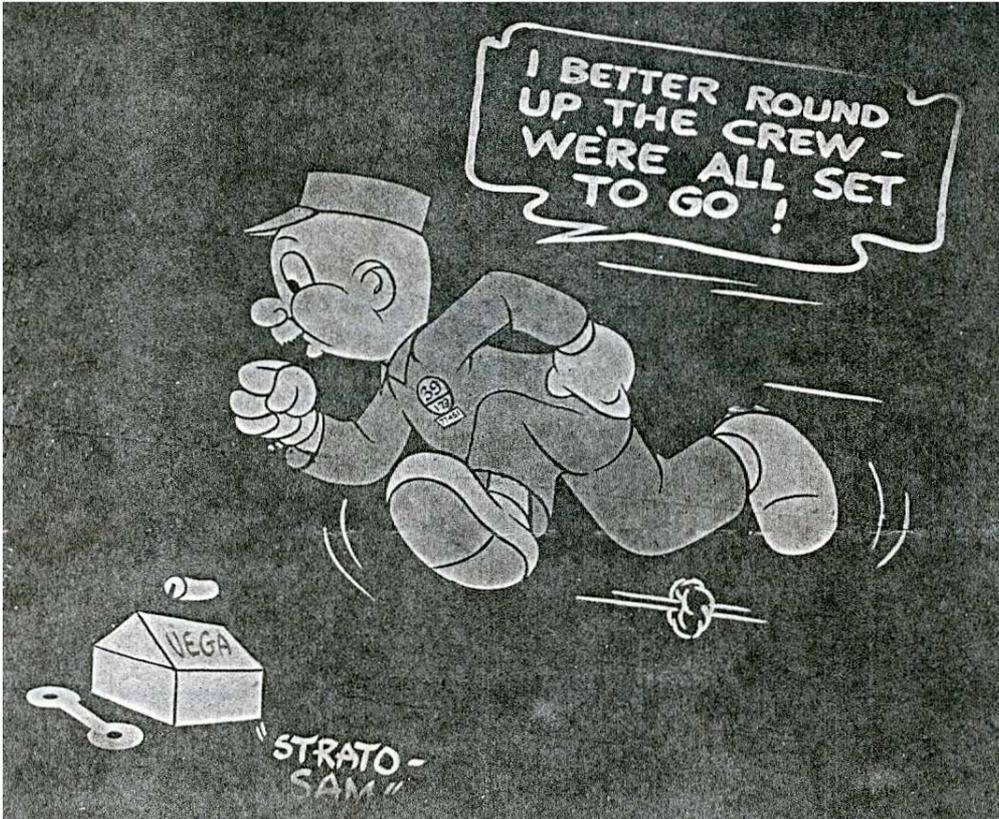


Another covered Strato-Sam art due to new bars and red outline



"Strato - Sam" even dressed up like an Easter Bunny for one suggested art work. Believed to be from 303rd Bomb Group, 8th Air Force in England





Randy recorded the Vega badge department number [39 paint] and under, the plant section number [173] then he gave credit to the worker who suggested the art with his or her number [77451].



Ray Bowden photo – England

This art appeared on B-17F serial 42-3092, 381st Bomb Group, 533rd B.S. Carried nose art name "Nip-N-Tuck", shot down 17 August 1943.

Author - It would be nice to see one surviving B-17 painted with the art of "Strato-Sam"?

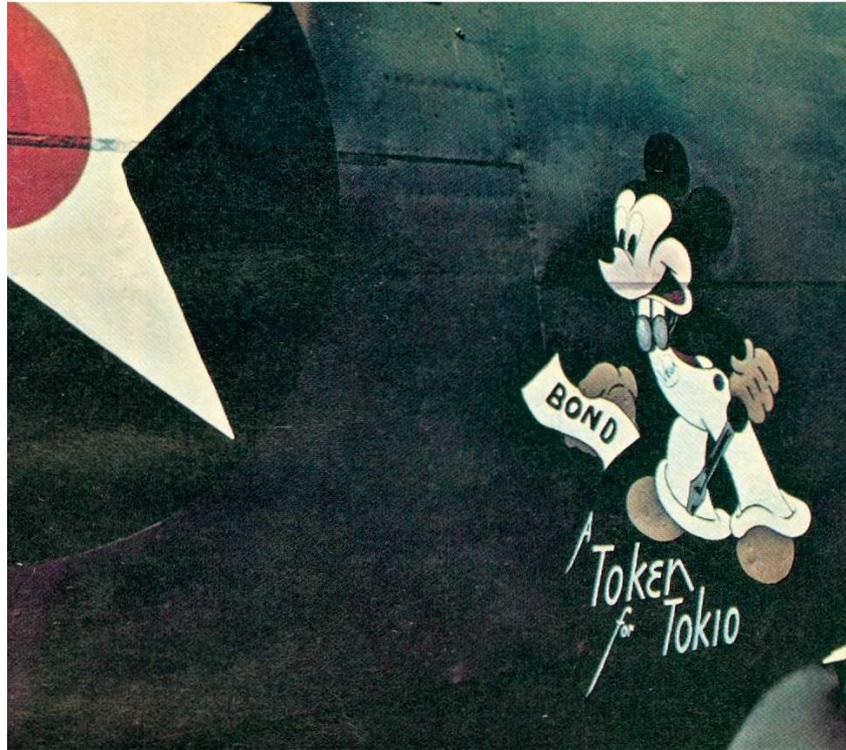


Photo by John Sheppard

This ex-USAAF Lockheed RB-34 Ventura [41-38117] became serial NZ4600 and flew with the Royal New Zealand Air Force. Today it resides in Auckland's Museum of Transport and Tech. Painted in original colors it also contains the replica art by Randy McCraw.



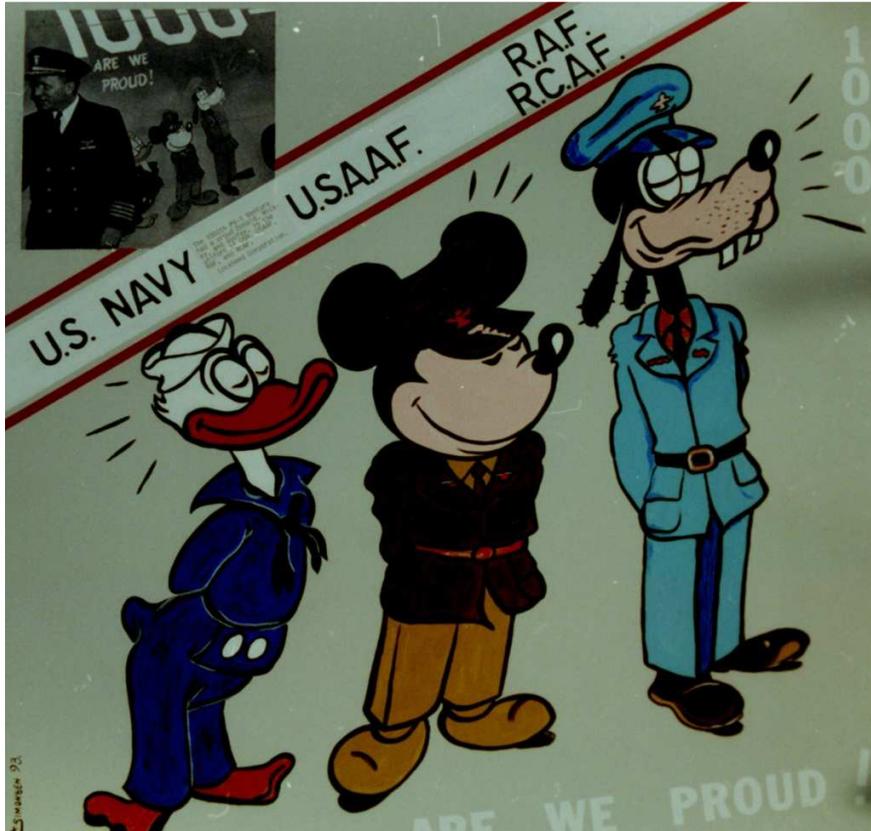
Two members of Royal New Zealand Air Force look at Randy McCraw art



This Randy McCraw art can be dated. On 15 May 1942, an order from the U.S. Chief of Staff eliminated the center red circle in the American national white star.



The 1000th built Ventura featured Donald Duck for US Navy, Mickey Mouse for USAAF and Goofy for the RCAF.



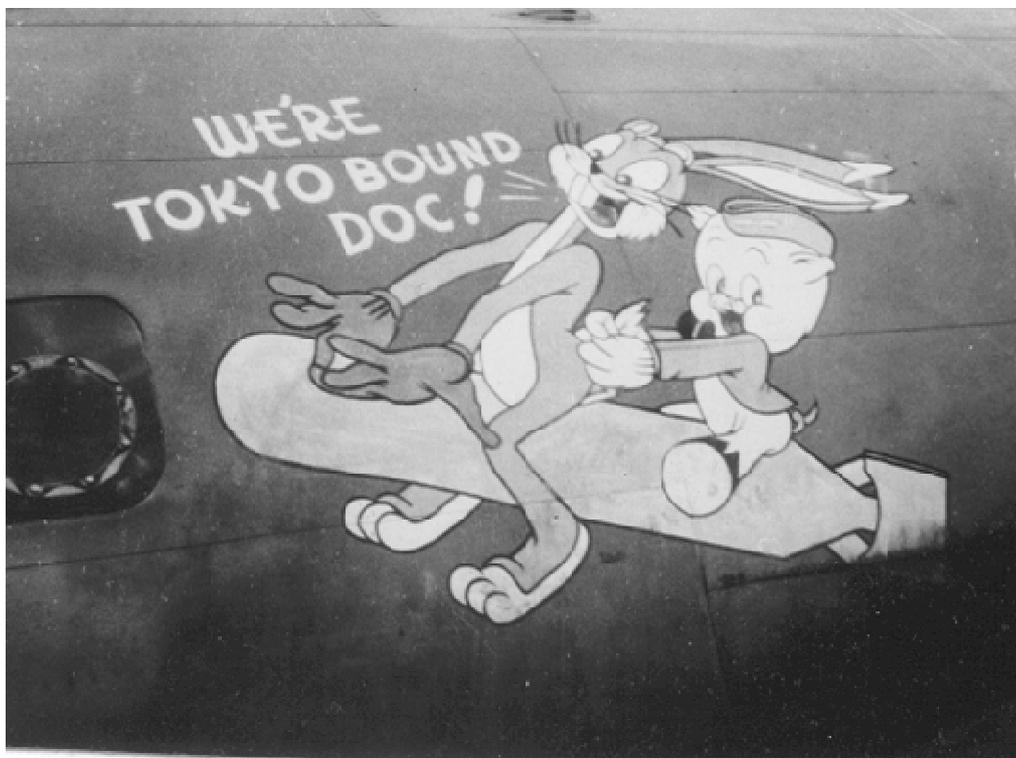
Simonsen 1996 painting for Tony Jarvis, Edmonton, Alberta.

Although Mickey Mouse had been the most famous star at Walt Disney studios, he was replaced by Donald Duck in early 1940, and the beginning of WWII. Character analysis played an important part in the Disney design team of artists who created over 1,200 military insignia from 1940 to 45. Mickey was the clean living, bashful around girls, small-town guy who never took a belligerent stance, and simply could not appear in war like poses. Donald Duck became the Disney war hero, cocky, show-off; get in your face, which turns to red face anger if he is crossed. Donald not only took over the lead in Disney war films, he appeared in the most military insignia, with 216 appearances. Birds came second appearing 196 times, with Pluto third, 45 insignia. Mickey came in fourth appearing in 35 images, most in support of American home front activities. Dumbo surprised coming in sixth, appearing in 28 insignia.

Today the complete 1,200 plus military collection is housed in the Walt Disney Archives in Burbank, Calif. and not open for public viewing.

Note - for every Walt Disney military design created at Burbank, another ten nose art creations were painted on the War front. The effect of Disney in WW II was huge and still not given the full credit it deserves.

Even Bugs Bunny and Porky Pig made an appearance thanks to Randy.



Bill Horton photo Nova Scotia 1944

While other Disney characters topped Mickey [Pluto came 4th] in the military insignia role, artist Randy McCraw balanced the appearance act when Mickey Mouse was featured on most of his Vega Ventura fuselage art. It is clear to see Mickey was his number one character and he gave him more exposure than his own creator Walt Disney.

Randy McCraw became the 'ghost' Walt Disney and until now has never been given credit for his WW II work. How many of his unpublished art photos remain lost in the United States today?

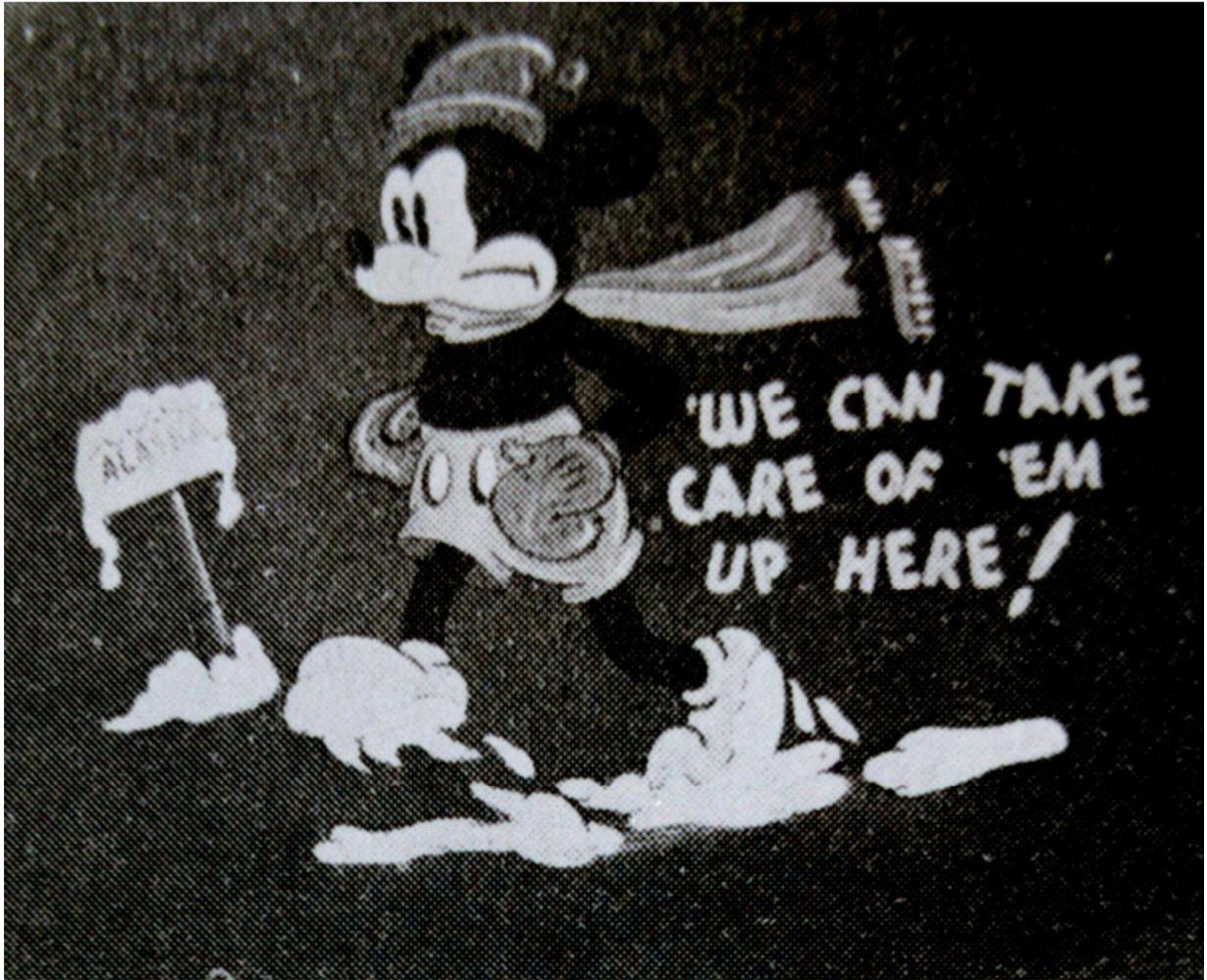


Torby, Newfoundland in 1943, Tony Jarvis.









Directed at Ventura's in Alaska



Same style of art directed at Alaska. Photo taken at Stanley, Nova Scotia, RCAF Ventura in 1944.