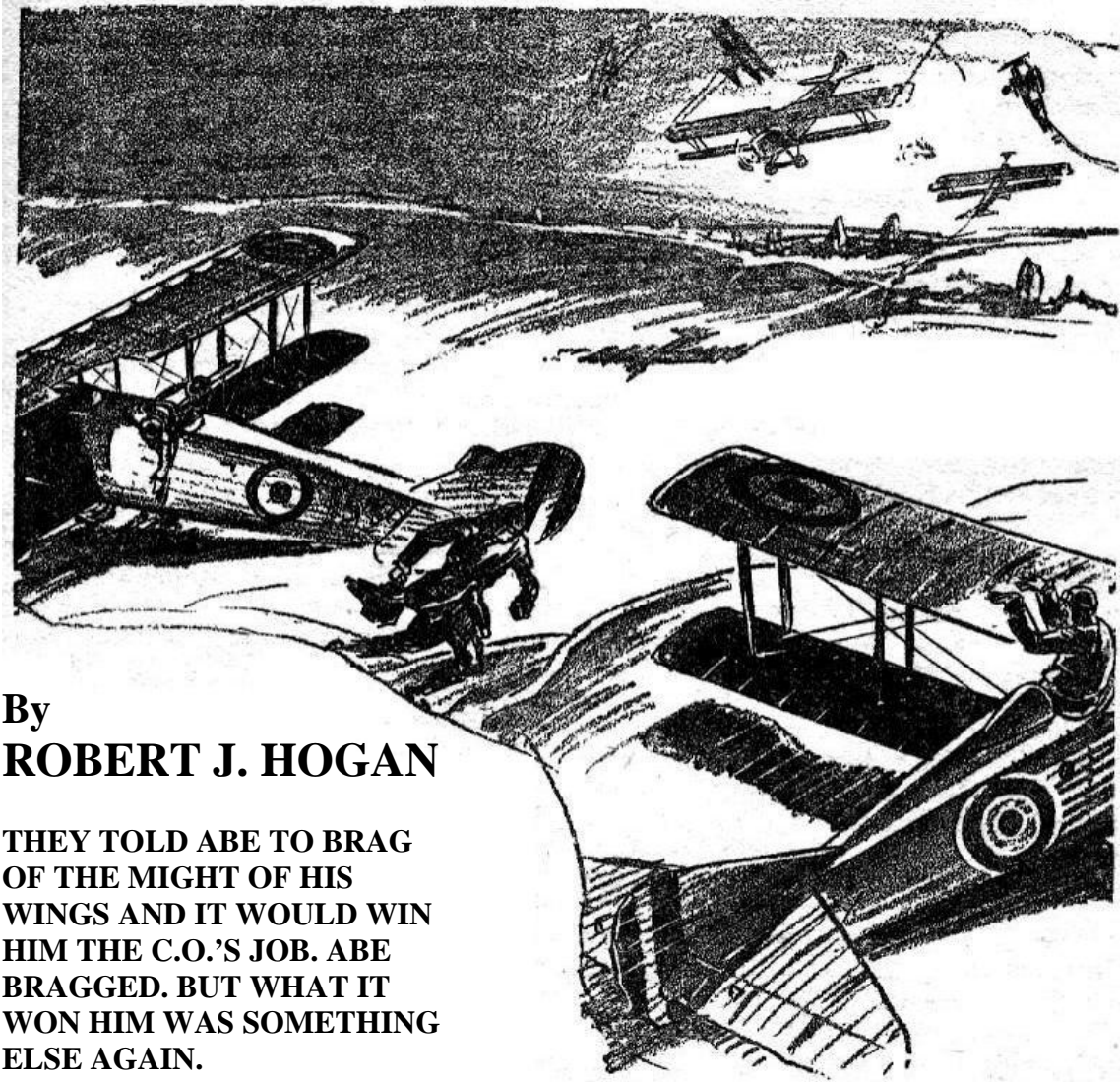


EXCESS BRAGGAGE



By
ROBERT J. HOGAN

THEY TOLD ABE TO BRAG OF THE MIGHT OF HIS WINGS AND IT WOULD WIN HIM THE C.O.'S JOB. ABE BRAGGED. BUT WHAT IT WON HIM WAS SOMETHING ELSE AGAIN.

Mid a hail of Spandau slugs, Bull was running to Abe's Spad.

AT THE time that First Class Private Abraham Ginsberg finished his advanced flight training and became Second Lieutenant Abraham Ginsberg, Yank air had been catching merry hell from Jerry over the Le Tore sector.

That was why some green replacements were being rushed to the veteran 26th pursuit squadron. The new 64th bombardment squadron at an

adjoining field was getting them as well.

On that day, Abe Ginsberg was very proud. He wasn't very tall, but he made the most of his stature as he squared his narrow shoulders before the assignment list. His small feet and spindling legs were encased in the best pair of cut-rate boots careful money could buy. The new whipcord officer's uniform hung loosely about him, not a perfect fit, but what of it? Hadn't Abe saved almost a hundred francs

on that suit after an hour's haggling?

Before his proudly grinning eyes his own name screamed at him from the assignment list:

Second Lieutenant Abraham Ginsberg, assigned to 26th Pursuit.

And directly below:

Second Lieutenant Bullock Maddox, assigned to 64th Bombardment.

Abe Ginsberg had been picked for the 26th for a reason. He had turned out to be a good Spad pilot. He had an eye like a diamond expert and could shoot like a hungry duck hunter. When it came to navigation he was just fair, but he prided himself on being better in that subject than big Bull Maddox, his tormentor, who stood beside him crowding him considerably as they stared at the list together.

Abe tilted his face up almost two feet to meet the glaring eyes of Bull Maddox. Abe was triumphant at last.

"So after all is said and done, ain't it Abe Ginsberg who gets pursuit while a big practical jokair, like Bull Maddox, gets only truck driving of bombers?" he chirped. "And only a few months ago wasn't it my friend, Bull Maddox says, 'de government's nuts to think they could make a pilot and an officer from a guy like Abe Ginsberg,' ain't it?"

"Yeah?" snarled Maddox with his usual timely wisecrack, "And nuts to you, fella."

Abe Ginsberg chuckled as he saw Maddox's broad back fill the doorway to overflowing and leave it empty again. It wasn't until that afternoon that Abe Ginsberg heard Bull Maddox's booming voice again. And Bull was still on the beef plenty.

"It's only luck that Ginsberg got pursuit," Maddox was snarling in protest. "What a break for that guy if he knew what I know about the outfit he's going

to."

Abe tensed just outside the door of the mess and listened.

"That guy could be the new squadron commander of the 26th if he knew how. They're all rookies up there, even the C.O. All he's got to do is shoot off his mouth about his record and hand out a good line and they'd make him skipper without even taking the air. Wish I had this chance instead of being shoved into the 64th where they're all experienced."

"There's a bunch of mechanics on the flood over at Mouveau right now, I hear. Getting tight as boiled owls. If I was in Ginsberg's shoes I could go over there and tell them I used to fly lone patrols over the St. Mihiel sector. I'd make 'em believe that I had this German ace, Baron Von Litz, so scared, he'd run out of the air every time he saw me. What a break! Spill it to those drunken greaseballs and it'd be back to the kiwi C.O. of the 26th before I got there. He'd fall sure, but don't any of you birds tell Ginsberg."

That was the moment that Abe Ginsberg made his presence known to Bull. He breezed in like an onion odor on someone else's breath.

"I didn't think you was such a friend of mine, Bull," he chirped. "Thanks for the tip-off. Vot ideas you're giving and for nottink. Dank you."

A coffee cup sizzled through the air straight for Abe Ginsberg's curly head. But the quickness of Abe's movement deceived the coffee cup and contents as well. Abe dove for the door with a laugh that shook Bull Maddox's half-made system like a sputter-bike annoying a neurotic patient.

AT ONCE Abe applied for a pass and got it. He made a hasty round of the giggle fountains in Mouveau and found what he sought. Men in overalls, grease-

smear'd and dirty, were ranged along Madame Serafon's bar. A roll of franc notes came in sight.

"You guys come from the 26th, ain't it?" Abe queried to make sure. He got their nods and turned to Madame Serafon. "Drinks for de bunch," he announced. "Fellas, I got to celebrate. I'm beink sent to de 26th myself. Ginsboig's de name. Just call me Abe."

Orders streamed over the bar. Men in various stages of intoxication gathered about Abe with interest.

"And when I get to your field, I'll show you mechanics what a regular ace does and how to fight in de air."

Some gulped, others gasped for breath. There came a smothered stifling of laughter about to burst forth.

"I'll bet you were hell where you came from Ace," one ventured.

"Belief me," Abe nodded. "From brave men they changed overnight into a lunatic asylum. I remember de baron Von Litz used to run every time he'd see me comink."

"Von Litz?" chirped another. There was an exchange of winks that Abe didn't get. "He's sure out of luck now," he said with well feigned sorrow. "I'll bet if he knew you were coming he'd turn green. He's right across the line from us in the LeTore sector."

Abe blinked and clutched the bar for an instant.

"Tell us about the fight you had with Von Litz," another encouraged.

Abe gulped a drink for strength and assistance to an already vivid imagination.

"Sure, I'll tell. I ain't proud like some of de rest of de famous aces. But which time?" He thought. "Oh, yes. Was in the St. Mihiel sector. One day I was comink back from knocking down a couple of sausages for breakfast—" he chuckled, "but we didn't have pancakes vid 'em that

morning, except some of de landings of green pilots. So cruising around at ten thousand, I look down and——"

"Hey, wait!" piped one, smothering a laugh. "This is going to be good. Hey!" he called to others in the room. "Come over and hear this."

They gathered round and Abe was introduced. There were Private Weller and Greaseball Charlie Knox and others.

"Go on," said the one who had stopped him.

Abe straightened, gulped his drink, sighed with some regret as more were poured and his francs vanished.

"Well, I was cruising around at maybe ten thousand and I look down and what did I see?"

"What?" from another.

"Don't ask. I'll tell you. Fokkers was swarming around so tick I couldn't count that high in French. I'm comink down to have a look and would you believe it?"

"No!" from up the bar. Abe didn't seem to hear. "I get close and I make out dot devil, Von Litz, and all his little imps in Fokkers, flyink like anything. And what did Abe Ginsberg, son of Solomon Ginsberg, do then? I'll tell you."

SOLOMON, King or head of the Ginsberg family, was never arrayed like Abe Ginsberg later that afternoon. He was very dizzy, hiccoughing spasmodically, but very proud and with a grin of confidence frozen on his face, when he arrived at his assignment.

Down the tarmac in the swaying sidecar, he rode. His shiny wings gleamed in the sun. With considerable disappointment, Abe was wondering where the reception committee was. He had laid it on thick enough at Madame Serafon's to bring out the post band.

The corners of Major Lacy's lips were twitching suspiciously when Abe

presented himself to his new C.O. Abe slid his papers across the desk with the salute a major rated.

“Course,” Abe asserted, a bit dizzily, “there’s mistakes in my records. Got lost. It was at St. Mihiel I got famous, Major. Maybe you’d have a job for me to show you. Belief me, I had dot dope, Von Litz, scared green.”

Lacy looked up, trying not to laugh.

“You know Von Litz then?”

“Know him?” cried Abe. “Listen, I wouldn’t fool you, Major. Like brodders, we were, in St. Mihiel. Ha-ha. Like brodders fighting.”

Major Lacy suddenly found reason to bury his face in his handkerchief. He coughed and blew considerably.

“You got a cold?” Abe inquired abrupt-up with concern.

Major Lacy shook his head. “No,” he choked. “Go on.” He rose and turned his back, staring out of the window.

“Well, about this Von Litz guy,” Abe went on. “Once, comink back from bagging a couple of sausages, I was cruising around about ten thousand, so I looked down, and belief me, dere underneath was a swarm of ships. Well, like curiosity killed a kitten I’m comink down for a look. And like mad hornets, or maybe bumble bees, they was flying around one of our important observation ships. So what did I do? I’ll tell you.”

Major Lacy’s shoulders heaved with inward struggle.

“I have an important job for you the first thing,” he said without turning. “Tomorrow at dawn you go out after Von Litz. I know about where you’re apt to find him. You’ll fly a compass course at my direction. Orders will be waiting for you at hangar number nine at dawn.”

Abe Ginsberg went to mess in high spirits, but he was due for a crash without even taking off. As he came through the

door of the 26th mess, a loud, familiar voice greeted him.

“Well, as I live and breathe,” cried the one who had egged Abe on at the bar hours before, “if it isn’t terrible Abe Ginsberg, himself in person. Didn’t take a crack at Von Litz on the way over in the sidecar, did you, Abe?”

A roar of laughter went up. Abe blinked and stared. They were all there, but the mechanics’ overalls had vanished. Instead, he was facing a group of veteran pilots. There was Lieutenant Weller with tarnished wings. And there too was greaseball Charlie Knox. Knox wore a captain’s bars and in addition a D.F.C.

Abe looked sick. His hands went to his head.

“Oi, colored people in de wood pile,” he blinked, “What is this, a game, maybe? But only a few hours ago you was all mechan—”

“Pipe down,” hissed Charlie Knox. “Lacy might be around.”

“Lacy?” frowned Abe. “So what has Lacy got to do with it?”

“Plenty,” hurried Knox. “Listen. A big push is coming off any minute in LeTore sector. Lacy didn’t want a bunch of drunken pilots on his hands when the orders came through to shove off. He gave orders not to leave the field, so we dressed up like greaseballs and sneaked over for a drink.”

“You—you mean,” gasped Abe, “that you wasn’t mechanics?”

“Sure,” laughed Benson, who had been the spokesman at the bar. “It was a swell joke all around and we liked your liquor. You’re a great liar and when you get this guy Von Litz, it’ll be our turn to treat.”

“Is that so? Well, listen. Major Lacy didn’t tink so. He’s sending me tomorrow at dawn even to get Von Litz. Tink that one over. Now maybe you want to laugh.”

They didn’t. The laughter subsided.

The men began eating, with puzzled frowns. Weller and Knox sat next to each other.

"Listen," hissed Knox, "I thought you said you told the major about this guy and tipped him off to have some fun."

"I did," whispered Weller, "Left a note on his desk."

"You don't suppose Lacy believed him after that?" Knox came back seriously. "Why that guy'll be Spandau fodder sure."

THERE seemed nothing to be done however. Abe Ginsberg was on the tarmac at dawn. With his first sight of his warming Spad he became as excited as a small boy with his first red express wagon. He swaggered up with the importance of a bantam rooster among a flock of barred rocks. His orders were waiting.

Hold an altitude of fifteen thousand feet unless you sight the enemy.

"Oi, is that upstairs!" grinned Abe and read on.

Fly 94 degrees for twenty minutes. Turn to 187 degrees and hold for fifty minutes. Turn 344 degrees and fly straight.

"Huh? And I wonder what comes next," Abe pondered. "Well, maybe Von Litz." He scratched his head. "Maybe was I better in navigation, I'd know where I'm going, ain't it?"

Like a bucket lowered in a dry well, Abe settled in the Spad cockpit. As he turned the ship and roared into the air he didn't see Major Lacy, clad in pajamas, grinning through his room window with the expression of a laughing hyena.

Twenty minutes along 94. His eyes flashed from the sky and earth to his wrist watch. Twenty minutes passed. He glanced at his orders and turned to 187. He could make out the ground very dimly. He

hunted for a map in the case. It was empty. He shrugged and droned on. Not a ship was in the sky about him.

"I'll bet maybe Von Litz is scared to come out, even," he ventured.

Fifty minutes passed and he swung until the compass needle turned lazily to 344, then he flew straight again.

Almost immediately after his turn he sighted something and jerked upright. Another ship was far below, but too far away to make out identification marks of any kind. Abe cocked the Spad over in a vertical and squinted over the cockpit pad.

"I'd bet dollars to pretzels dot's Von Litz," he breathed, "Didn't the major send me this way so I should meet him? And ain't I here?"

Instantly, Abe stuck the nose of his Spad down and let her scream. The thrill of a homely debutante at her coming-out party was nothing compared to the sensation that prickled up and down Abe Ginsberg's small spine as he thumbed his Vickers trigger for a warming burst. His hands trembled a little from the excitement of it, but his lips were set in a firm, straight line. He'd show these scoffers. He'd burned his bridges behind.

His eyes narrowed as he came nearer the other ship. He could see it plainly and the fact that there were no identification marks of any kind perplexed him for a moment. Suddenly he brightened.

"Fooling, hey, Von Litz? Comink over without identifications so maybe you shouldn't be recognized? I'll show who's foolish!"

With that the nose of the Spad pointed for the other ship. Vickers snorted and bucked like mad. Tracers slashed close to the other crate. It leaped and flashed over. The pilot was waving frantically from his cockpit.

"Bluffair! Bluffair!" Abe raved. "Tryink to make me think it ain't so, hey?"

I'll show you."

Down and around and under and over Abe Ginsberg wrestled with the other crate. At every opportunity, he slashed out with Vickers lead. The pilot continued to wave, but didn't fire.

"Why don't you shoot?" challenged Abe in a high-pitched voice drowned by the roar of his Hisso. "Why shouldn't you fight it out like a man instead of asking me to pull punches, even?"

The other crate snarled out and down in a long dive. Abe rushed on after him, riding his tail.

Suddenly, the Hisso in Abe Ginsberg's lap sputtered, picked up and died. Abe started bolt upright and stared at the gas gauge.

"Oi, empty it says," he moaned. "And another minute, maybe two, and dot dope and his ship would be damaged goods. And now I get a chance at Von Litz and just when I got him, out goes de gas. Oi! Like drowning in a vat of beer. And not a gas pump in sight."

Hopelessly, he glided down. Far to the west he had seen a large city. It passed from his view as he went down. Level fields lay below him. Desperately, he picked one and brought the Spad in gingerly.

From a nearby farmhouse came running an elderly man and woman. They were in a high state of excitement and spouted something that Abe couldn't get as they ran toward him.

"You couldn't tell a guy where he is, maybe?"

They sputtered back at him.

"Veil, I ain't down in Germany, anyhow. Sounds like French," he ventured. He tried another tack. "De ship is out of gas, catch on?" They looked blank and shook their heads. "Gas," shouted Abe as though a higher key and louder sound would make them understand

better. He pointed frantically to the tank with one hand and made pouring gestures with the other.

The old man's face beamed and he nodded.

"*Mais oui,*" he chattered. "*Qui, Qui. Toute de suite.*"

The old man trotted toward the house. As he set a pail before a pump and started to work the handle, Abe blinked, then ran after him waving his hands in frantic remonstrance.

"Oi! Not water I want. Do I look like I need a bath? I want to fly. I tought at first you had a gasoline well on de place. Gasoline. I want to fly. Catch on? Fly! Gasoline, ain't it?"

Abe's words were accompanied by wild gyrations of his arms. They made likeness of a bird in flight. The old man seemed then to get more of an idea. He nodded and held up his hands. "Ah, crazy Americain. Oui, oui, certainement."

HE WENT quickly into the house and came out again carrying a five-gallon can. Abe smelled of it suspiciously, then was running and staggering with it to his gas tank. The Frenchman sputtered some explanation as to how he had come by the gasoline. Abe neither understood nor was he interested. He simply poured.

The motor started again with a little priming. He took the air and set the compass on 344 again, wondering just where he was going. A bit later he found out. He recognized his own field directly under him and came in a little puzzled.

Major Lacy and others of the 26th were waiting for him. A little sheepishly, Abe monkeyed his way out of the cockpit.

"Get Von Litz?" inquired Lacy, trying to seem casual.

"Not quite, but I darn near did." Abe confessed proudly. "If it hadn't been for running out of gas I would have. I put a lot

of holes in de wings of his ship that he won't forget, maybe." Major Lacy and the rest laughed. The boy was giving them the song and dance again.

"Von Litz can't come around without identifications on his ship and fool a Ginsberg," Abe rattled on. "I'll tell you sometink. You should see him run when I start shootink. Like anything, he runs. I run too. Out of gas, damn de luck. If I hadn't made a frog farmer believe I wanted to fly instead of swim I would have been there yet, probably."

Lacy was still laughing. So were the rest.

"Where was all this?" he asked.

"How should I know just flying by compass. Was a big town to de west from me, I seen it. I didn't get close enough to read any street signs."

"Paris," said Lacy between chuckles. "That was Paris you saw. I planned the whole thing as a joke to teach you a lesson. You flew a triangular compass and came home just as I expected, but just why you ran out of gas is more than I can understand. You had just gas enough to make the trip. Didn't dare put more in the tank for fear you'd land somewhere in Germany."

Abe gulped. "But I'm tellink you I was fighting Von Litz in a ship without identifications. Belief me. Listen. I was—"

He was cut short by the arrival of an orderly announcing to Major Lacy that he was wanted on the phone at once.

Lacy left for his office. Others stormed about Abe. They probed him with questions and laughed before he had a chance to answer. There was much laughter, terminated by the angry and speedy return of Major Lacy. .

"Listen you!" Lacy bellowed. "What's this about you trying to shoot down a crate near Paris? G.H.Q. is burning up. You're in a tight spot, Ginsberg. Tighter than the

bung in a beer keg. Start talking."

"Like I been tryink to get de chance to say it," he hurried, "I come to a ship without markinks. You said you'd send me where I could find Von Litz, ain't it? So I say, dot's Von Litz. And I let him have it, even."

"Yeah? Well, it wasn't Von Litz," rasped Lacy. "That was a new experimental pursuit plane Major Armstrong, the famous ace, was testing. You shot it full of holes."

Abe whitened, but he stuck to his guns.

"The joke then you thought you played on me ain't altogether away from you. Belief me, was it Armstrong in de cockpit, he looks close enough to be Von Litz's twin brodder, I'm telling you, sir."

"Listen, you damn little four-flusher," rasped Lacy, "when G.H.Q. gets through with you there'll be a court-martial and maybe a firing squad waiting for you—or at the least you'll be busted to a mechanic. You're grounded from now on. I'm waiting right now for orders to place you under arrest."

UP TO noon mess there were no orders for arrest. Abe shuddered as Lacy entered the mess, but Lacy didn't even look at him.

"Men," he boomed, "the big drive is on. Orders we've been waiting for have come. Lieutenant Maddox, a famous observation pilot of the 64th, will take off at two this afternoon on one of the most important missions of the war. He'll photograph every foot of ground on the enemy side of the LeTore sector. Every pilot, except you, Ginsberg, will meet Maddox and his D.H. over the Meuse, south of LeTore, and convoy him into enemy territory. That's all."

Amid the babble of excitement, Abe sat alone and cursed one Bullock Maddox for getting him into this jam in the first

place.

“Damn dot guy!” he cursed. “Him that got me into this mess first, ain’t it? By tellink me about lying to the 26th. To get even what wouldn’t I give? If I only had the poppa’s lawyer here now maybe he could think of something, maybe.”

Ships warmed on the line. Abe Ginsberg stood dejectedly in the shade of a hangar like a lost lap dog in the middle of a desert. All ships were on the line. Even the one he himself had flown at dawn. There was Charlie Knox’s orange Spad with special Hisso. It was famous along the front. Famous and hated by the enemy. Abe looked at it hungrily.

Charlie Knox was walking down the line toward his plane. Suddenly a Hisso screamed out in a warning blast. Abe leaped after Knox, shouting a warning. Some careless mechanic had left out the blocks from in front of the wheels of that Spad. It shot forward, straight for Charlie Knox. Knox turned, tried to dodge away from that whirling prop, but he was almost too late. He fell headlong before the onrushing plane. Just as the prop passed over him, his body turned slightly. His left arm leaped out and down to the ground limply. . . .

Men raced to the scene. Knox wasn’t unconscious. He got to his feet unsteadily. Blood streamed from his broken, slashed arm. Knox cursed, whitened and slumped to the tarmac again to be picked up a moment later by an ambulance.

Something clicked in Abe’s brain as the ambulance drew away. Knox couldn’t go. Now was Abe’s chance. Of course Lacy wouldn’t give him permission to take Knox’s plane. Well, he was fit to have everything done to him the law allowed anyway. Nothing to lose.

Like a flash he was in Charlie Knox’s cockpit. The orange Spad whirled out across the field, with men staring and

shouting. A moment later Spads hurled in pursuit.

Abe glanced over his shoulder once and grinned, then his lips tightened. He turned north and picked up the Meuse. He stared about for the D.H. of Maddox that should be there. If he could only find him and show him up in the air, the dirty braggart.

A moment later he spotted Bull Maddox and gained on his camera crate. He was way off his course for the pictures. Abe could tell that by the Meuse River. He dove down, pulled alongside and, by excited sign language, pointed the right way to the territory to the goggle-eyed Bull.

Fokkers swarmed about them as Bull turned in the right direction. Yellow tracers slashed about them in a sulphurous haze.

Abe sat hunched over his stick, trembling with excitement, and flew with the desperation of a man who had boasted of his swimming, about to drown. He glanced at the camera crate. Showing up Maddox he was, and protecting him, it seemed. Fokkers veered away from the D.H. to hurl at Abe Ginsberg, only to find he wasn’t there.

One Fokker went down, a mass of twisted flame. Another folded up like a bankrupt carnival and plunged. On and on went that D.H., with the observer as busy as the proverbial one-winged paperhanger, taking pictures and whirling to his Lewis guns. Maddox was mapping the country in lines. The other Spads hurled and snarled down in the fight.

Abe glanced about for one who might be Von Litz. He saw one Fokker giving signals to others. It wasn’t his conception of the great ace. He’d heard that all Jerry aces flew crimson Fokkers, This one was checkered in marking. There wasn’t a crimson ship in the sky.

Abe kicked into vertical and howled for the checkered crate.

"A bargain, with nothink to lose," he chanted.

The Jerry pilot saw him coming. Headed straight for him and the orange crate. Abe tore in, pressing his trigger. Nothing happened. No time now. He hurled on. Von Litz, for Von Litz it was, held his fire until Abe should swerve.

Abe didn't swerve. He gritted his teeth, closed his eyes, and held the controls stationary.

CRUMPH! Abe felt the shock of the contact. He opened one eye cautiously. He might be on his way to heaven or hell. He stared around. Below and behind, a checkered Fokker with wings folded back was tearing for hell. Cautiously, Abe peered over the side, raising himself up far enough to see the landing gear. His right tire looked like a hunk of soft rubber on the wheel. He knew then. Von Litz hadn't swerved soon enough. His own right wheel had snapped the top wing of the Fokker.

Abe searched about for Bull Maddox with a shudder at what had happened. He shuddered again as he found Bull. He was going down far behind the German lines. His prop was dead as a mummy. The observer was slumped from sight in the rear cockpit.

Abe whirled and tore down to the spot where Bull was landing. Fokkers and Spads tangled above. The D.H. had come into the field. Holding the weight of the Spad on the left wheel, Abe jockeyed for landing beside the D.H. He made it.

Frantically, Maddox dove into the rear cockpit and came out again, almost instantly, carrying the limp form of the observer in his arms. He laid him on the ground and plunged into the back cockpit again. This time he came out with several

thin, black packages. The plates.

"The observer is dead, ain't it?" Abe ventured.

"Yeah," Maddox panted, "shot through the head."

The Spad got under way. The right wheel creaked and groaned, but held, and under the protection of the other convoying Spads, it took the air and turned for home.

Major Lacy, haggard, worn, was waiting. They were the first to land. The right wheel crumpled just as the speed died, but except for a sharp ground loop, the orange Spad was safe. Lacy stared at the bullet-riddled ship and at Maddox sliding off the wing.

"This," Abe tried to grin as he slid out of the cockpit, "is my old friend, Bull Maddox. He got me into this, but it ain't his fault."

Lacy's mouth dropped open. His eyes shifted from Maddox to the plates he still held under one arm.

"Good Lord! You mean you brought back the pictures, like that?"

"Pictures?" stammered Abe. "Oh, sure. Ain't it all right? Should I get da blame for that, too? But de rest, I'm tellink you, it was a put up job."

Major Lacy didn't hear the last. He had snatched the plates and had rushed them in person to the photographic department.

"Shut up!" snapped Maddox. "You'll give it all away."

"And why not, I'm asking?" chirped Abe. "Listen. You give me advice to brag. You played another practical joke on me and—"

"Like hell I did!" roared Bull. "I was sincere about what you overheard in the mess, only I got things twisted. It was the 64th that was made up of inexperienced men. And I bragged my head off to them and got the dirtiest job at the front. If you

hadn't come along and showed me my navigation was haywire, I'd probably be taking pictures of Berlin by now. Why, you crazy little runt, you're a holy terror in the air. And to think I used to make cracks about you never making the grade. Cripe, the way you took after Von Litz was—"

Abe Ginsberg's anger left him like the air from a blown tire.

"Nice words, Bull," he grinned sadly, "but it don't matter no more. I'm tellink you, I'm in jam up to my neck, even."

Lacy was hurrying back, beaming.

"Splendid work, men," he smiled. "And you two have flown together before, eh?"

"Sure have, sir," boomed Bull. "And this guy Ginsberg is a wonder."

"Maybe yes, maybe no," ventured Abe, a little embarrassed now. "But it don't matter, not with me beink shot for puttink little holes in testing ships, ain't it?"

"Oh, that," Lacy remarked casually. "I almost forgot to tell you, Ginsberg. Unknowingly, perhaps, you have done the Allies a great service. They decided that if as fine a pilot as Armstrong could have his new ship shot as full of holes by as inexperienced a pilot as I told them you were, it would be suicide to send anyone over the front in that new ship. They've given it up on the strength of it and you're freed from any charges in the matter."

"Huh?" blurted Abe, hardly daring to believe. "You don't tell me. Listen, Major. Could I depend on that for sleeping poiposes?"

Lacy laughed and nodded. Others had landed. Weller and Benson and others

came up asking about Knox. He was comfortable, it seemed, with nothing worse than a broken arm.

"Say, Major," piped Weller, "here's the real hero of the day. This guy Ginsberg is a bearcat, what I mean, and we all thought he was just a plain liar. He flew Knox's ship, and Von Litz and his crowd ganged up on him. They must have sworn to knock old Charlie out of the air, and in concentrating on Ginsberg, they left the D.H. partly alone to do her stuff. Ginsberg gets two Jerries in the mess and then his guns jam. But he takes after Von Litz just the same." He pointed to the crumpled wheel of the orange Spad. "Crashed Von Litz's center section with that wheel, Major, and sent him down and then lived to pick Maddox here and his plates out of Germany."

Lacy stared proudly at Abe.

"Of course, but there'll be a medal—perhaps two—in this for you, Ginsberg. Start at the beginning and tell me everything."

Abe Ginsberg took a long breath.

"Well, I'll tell you," he began. "I was cruising around LeTore at maybe ten thousand. So looked down and see so many ships I could hardly count that high in French, even maybe English. And like curiosity killed a mouse catcher, I'm goink down to have a look, and belief me, it was Von Litz and his devils, flyink like anything after the important observation and camera ship of my friend, Bull Maddox, where he was going to take pictures. So what should I do? I'll tell you."

And he did.