



# COVENTRY

by LT. FRANK JOHNSON

*His wingmates couldn't stand Jason Orth's opinion of himself—But he certainly knew his stuff in the air!*

**M**AJOR KELLY of the Ninth Pursuit Squadron, near the Argonne, looked up as a shadow fell across the stack of papers on his desk.

The young officer who stood there quietly regarding him must be one of the replacements he expected. Well, he looked all right. They all looked all right, for uniforms made even punks look like soldiers. What really counted was what they could do in a fight. That was the test. So Kelly allowed a shade of doubt to show on his face.

“Well?” he said.

“I’m Jason Orth, sir,” said the newcomer, “ready to do my stuff for the Ninth, reporting for duty. What have you got for me to do—and make it hard, see?”

This was certainly a new way to report. Kelly wasn’t sure that he liked it. Juniors were supposed to show a proper respect for their seniors.

This young man seemed to be sticking his neck out.

“Think well of yourself, don’t you?” said Kelly coldly.

His eyes popped open with amazement when Orth answered.

“Damned right I do! And why not? I think I’m one of the best little flyers on the whole Western Front. I don’t think there’s a German flying I can’t knock the pants offa if I get a chance.”

Kelly’s lips twisted wryly.

“Yeah,” he said, “that’s just the trouble. The Heinies won’t give you a chance, and while you’re sticking around waiting for one, they knock the pants off you!”

“Off me?” said Orth. “Not off me. Not off ‘Silent’ Orth.”

“Silent Orth? How in the name of the Devil and Tom Walker did you get a nickname like that?”

“BECAUSE I never talk unless I got something to say. Because I keep my mouth shut at all times. I’m a doer instead of a talker. Because I can whip my weight in wildcats without bragging about it. Because I listen instead of giving advice. Because, while I know I’m one of the best flyers hereabouts, I don’t lord it over my wingmates.”

“I get it,” said Kelly softly, “you got the name because you never have anything to say.”

“That’s it. Because I’m a doer—”

“You told me that already. I might say here and now that I’m from Missouri, Orth—or should I say Silent? We’re on a tough sector here. Baron Schmidt, across the lines, isn’t interested in chin music—either. He says it with guns.”

“So do I. I’m one of the best—”

“I know. Well, you’ll have a chance to prove it. Captain Prince’s flight takes off in fifteen minutes. You may report to him, and if you’re half as good as you say you are, you may have a chance to get back to the home field alive, or at least alive enough to get to the hospital.”

“But Major, you make it sound as though I were bragging, and that’s one thing I never—”

“I know. Beat it.”

Silent Orth looked every inch the soldier as he faced about and left the presence of his superior. He was just under six feet in height, fitted his uniform as though he had been poured into it, and had calm gray eyes. Kelly looked after him—and chuckled. But there was an undertone of grimness in his chuckle.

“Silent Orth. I wonder what he’d be like if he ever started talking. Or do you suppose he was just spoofing me?” The major wasn’t talking to anyone in particular, so there was no answer.

He went to the door and looked out. Half a dozen Spads were ticking over on the apron. Orth was talking to Captain Prince. The others of the flight were gathered around, listening.

KELLY saw Prince wave Orth to a Spad—while his new wingmates stared after the newcomer and then at one another. Kelly didn’t have to be there to see them look at one another and shake their heads. They too would be expecting something of Orth—or nothing. He could almost see them shape their lips in the nickname, “Silent.”

Kelly went back to his desk.

At the deadline Captain Prince, after he had caught his breath, stepped to Orth’s machine. Orth cut the gun to idle and stuck his head over the side of the pit.

Prince shouted at him.

“Keep a weather eye out for Schmidt himself. He flies an Albatross with a blue tail, and he’s hell on guys who get separated from their flight. You wouldn’t have a ghost of a show against him. He’s been the bane of existence for us for weeks.” Captain Prince’s eyes almost popped out of his head when Orth answered calmly, shouting so that the others could hear.

“I’ll get him for you, Skipper!”

Prince was still shaking his head when the flight lifted off the field.

IN HIS own pit, which swayed a little as he circled for altitude to make the rendezvous, Lieutenant Orth’s

face was stern. He meant, seriously, to take a crack at Baron Schmidt. He hadn't been joking.

There was nothing wrong with Orth whatever, except that he liked to talk. He had a passion for the truth. He thought he was good and didn't see what harm there was in mentioning the fact. Hell, if somebody else in the outfit turned out to be as good or better, Orth would be the first, to admit it. If anybody had told Orth his name didn't fit him, he would have been surprised to death.

It seemed to him that he never, really, had a chance to get a word in edgewise when people were talking. Somebody was always interrupting, so that he had to interrupt in his turn to have his say.

Well, maybe they'd be ready to listen after he had done his stuff. In many ways this war was fun. Folks out to treat it as a lark. That's what Silent Orth did, and he never had nerves, like other guys.

The six Spads rendezvoused at eight thousand feet. Orth flew to the left rear of the V. This was new terrain to him, and he studied the ground on the trip over so that, in the event that he should be the only member of the flight to return—and therefore guideless—he would be able to find his way home. His lips moved as he corrected for updrafts and downdrafts of air caused by archie explosions.

"I wonder," he thought, "if this guy Schmidt is as tough as they seem to think, or are my new friends giving me a hayride?"

Motors were let out. The Spads were six flashes of speed heading into Germany. Down below the snake traces of the trenches were long straggly unsightly scars reaching into the north and south to the horizon, where they were not hidden by the shellblasted woods.

A pretty sight, especially from up here, where one couldn't see the blood and grime and the agony. In a plane there might be agony, too, but only the guy who suffered it really saw it close at hand. One fought alone, no matter how many flew with one.

He came to himself to see Captain Prince wagging his wings. His keen eyes began to search the horizon. Nothing was in sight. He looked again. Captain Prince was looking up.

SILENT ORTH stared into the morning sun—and saw faint flecks of light aloft, the reflection of the sun's rays upon the wings of many planes. It looked as though half the planes in Germany were trying to hide in the sun while they dived down on the Second Flight of the Ninth.

Orth stiffened in his seat. As the Germans came

closer, and Prince pretended that they had not yet been discovered, waiting for them to come within effectual range, Orth tried to see the markings on the tails of the enemy. He thought he saw one with a blue tail. Then it seemed to him that all of them had blue tails.

He looked for the streamer of command, and found it—and a grim smile came to rest on his face. "If I prove it," said Silent Orth to Silent Orth, "they'll believe me, I'll bet."

And then the Allied flight suddenly broke asunder as though riven apart by an explosion. Orth was caught flatfooted, all by himself. The others, at the exact moment when the Germans were diving straight into the center of the formation, swung out of it and were circling about as the Germans dived through. They had been waiting for just that.

THE Germans would require time to pull out—and for that brief series of split seconds the Yankees were in the position of advantage—all except Silent Orth. Bullets splattered his wings and his dash. Madly he rolled out of line of sights of the plane which had blasted him—right into the line of sights of another one. The damned sky was full of planes!

But Orth thought swiftly. How could a guy miss so many ships? That was the trouble; most flyers thought of the number of bullets being fired at them, never stopping to think that all the flyers increased the size of the target offered by the enemy.

Silent Orth went to work.

On the point of rolling out, which he knew would mean that he'd have to roll out again for somebody else right away, Orth caught a plane squarely in his ring-sight, and his hands leaped to the trips with the speed of serpents striking.

BULLETS snarled through his propeller arc. He saw his tracers go straight into the side of an Albatross cockpit. He saw the pilot jump and jerk in his pit. He yawed to the left, splattered the enemy motor.

It always seemed to Orth that one wasted time, following an enemy down to make sure he was dead, when one could make just as sure by firing his motor. Proof followed his thought when black smoke and orange flames burst from under the Albatross motor housing—and the Albatross started down, while the rest of the German flight, on the point of pulling out of its shrieking, concerted dive, banked wildly right and left to escape the mad wings of the pilot Orth had just sent West.

And their banking to right and left gave the Ninth opportunity—so that they fell on the wavering Germans like the Hammer of Thor, many times multiplied. Orth grinned his appreciation as two Albatrosses went down almost on the tail of the one he had just smashed.

“That’s teamwork,” he decided. “I’ll have to call the skipper’s attention to it when I get back—just in case Prince forgets to tell him. Now, v/here the hell is Schmidt?”

He didn’t have to look for Schmidt, for the wily German commander had seen exactly what Orth had done and its result. This fool who had been caught flatfooted had, by the sheerest stroke of fool luck, caused the good baron the loss of three Albatrosses.

So he smashed down on Orth’s tail—and Orth, as bullets cracked past his ears, looked back to see death aiming at his back. Through the arc of the German’s propeller he saw a broad face set in a hard mask—and beyond the face the end of a command streamer being whipped this way and that in the German’s slipstream.

Orth grinned, feeling fortunate that he was still able to grin. He started to roll to the right. He had the roll half finished when he cut it instead and allowed his plane to sideslip at full speed, so that for a moment it dropped like a stone.

Then by a quick manipulation, he corkscrewed around, yanked his nose up and tried for the belly of the German. His Vickers chattered savagely. An Albatross started out of the mêlée with its wings shredded—and a dead hand at the stick. He had hurled a mighty burst straight into the seat of the German’s pants.

But that German wasn’t Baron Schmidt, for the baron was back on Orth’s tail. Orth zoomed. He wasn’t sure he could count the man he hadn’t intended to kill, but he’d explain to Prince exactly how it had happened and maybe he’d get credit anyhow. Provided he got back, though Orth still had no doubts.

HE SUDDENLY dived, then yanked the stick back into his belly. His Spad rose with a mighty rush that seemed to pin Orth to his seat as a fly is pinned to a windowpane by a forefinger.

He looked back. Schmidt was still clinging to his tail.

Orth didn’t have time to see what anybody else was doing. He was too busy. That Schmidt, now, wasn’t so dusty, at that. Orth did everything he knew to escape the fellow—and it suddenly occurred to him to look over the side.

Schmidt had driven him to within one hundred feet of the ground—and it was German territory. Orth lost his temper. He went wild for several seconds. He got Schmidt off his tail for the space of a heartbeat, and then swung about to look for him.

Schmidt must have been sore himself, for he was coming head-on to meet Orth, as though to settle the whole argument with a head-on collision.

“Foolish,” muttered Orth. “Maybe he don’t realize what that would do to him!”

But Orth wasn’t backing off. He started his Vickers to going. Bullets fed straight into the German’s propeller. Orth saw Schmidt suddenly lean forward to cut his switch. The Albatross was a blur on the instant, and Orth knew it was shaking itself to pieces.

Schmidt looked over the side. There was a small clearing below—entirely too small. But Schmidt couldn’t choose now—so he went down.

Orth didn’t have time to send bullets into his motor, so Schmidt, while Orth circled for the motor shot, landed among the stumps. His wings sheared off. His trucks struck a stump. He stopped with great suddenness. He was out of his pit and running—and Orth was kicking up dust at his feet with Vickers lead just as he reached the woods.

Orth sighed with disappointment, pulled his stick back into his stomach, noted that his wings were in bad shape, what with slatting fabric that threatened any moment to blow away, and gnawed and bitten struts, and that he’d be lucky to get home.

However, his wingmates needed him, so he had to go back.

BUT the fall of Schmidt had done something to the Germans. It had filled them with anger, for one thing, so that when Orth came spiraling back up the sky, four Albatrosses dived on him like avalanches. His wingmates dived after them.

Orth gritted his teeth, held his ship in a steady climb, and let his Vickers scream and rant, until he recalled that he might shoot down some of his friends. Then he stopped firing, but went on up—while bullets cracked past his ears.

He sighed a vast sigh when the rest of the Ninth cracked down on the four who were trying for him. The four slanted out of the fight.

Orth saw fists shaken at him as the Germans cut for home—and made a mental note to tell Captain Prince, when they got back, that he should have followed up his advantage—that an angry enemy was an enemy

who could be beaten with little trouble because he didn't think. Prince didn't seem to notice that.

ORTH frowned his puzzlement. Oh, well, he'd got two ships right and had given Schmidt something to think about. So when Prince waved him into formation, he fell into place and rode home.

On the tarmac he stepped from his crate. There was a wide grin on his face as he approached his wingmates, all grouped about Captain Prince. Now was as good a time as any to call Prince's attention to various little oversights he had made during the fight just finished.

"Listen, Captain, we sure gave 'em hell this morning, didn't we? But there was one thing I noticed about your conduct of the fight."

Prince's face was utterly grin.

"Now *you* listen, Orth!" he snapped. "Whenever you're ordered to go over with a flight, you go, see? Where the devil were you this morning? You were supposed to make rendezvous with us at eight thousand. What happened to you after the take-off?"

Orth gasped. His eyes were very wide. He studied the accusing faces of his wingmates.

"Where was I?" he demanded. "Where was I? While you guys were taking advantage of the diversion I caused by allowing the Germans to concentrate on me, I was shooting Baron Schmidt out of the sky, that's what I was doing—"

Even as he talked his eyes flickered over the calm set faces of his wingmates. The accusation did not leave them. Their eyes were hard. Orth suddenly felt guilty without understanding exactly why. For some strange reason these fellows had all had an attack of blindness; not a one of them, including the skipper, had seen a thing he had done!

"I knocked down Schmidt," he gulped. "I busted his propeller. He landed in the woods. I wasn't able to get him personally, but—"

"Listen," said Prince harshly, "that sort of story doesn't go down with us. You took off, all right, but you didn't join the flight afterwards. And as for knocking down Schmidt, that's the old malarkey. Schmidt wasn't with the flight this morning! Now go to the major and make out your combat report, and you'd better walk slowly on the way, to give yourself time to think up something."

BEWILDERED, angry, wondering if by some strange necromancy he had dreamed everything that had

happened during the morning, Orth strode across the tarmac toward Headquarters. He didn't look back. He didn't hear what Prince said, in a low voice, to the rest of the flight.

"If that doesn't hold him, nothing will. We'll have to make him live up to his name, gents, or kill the blighter!"

Orth stepped into Headquarters and spoke to Major Kelly. He told him exactly what had happened. Kelly shook his head in disbelief. Orth sat down to make out his report, Carefully he worded the report which gave him credit for two Albatrosses which he hadn't mentioned, but which he was sure the others must have seen him knock down.

But he didn't make any claim for Schmidt—and if anyone had asked him why, he wouldn't have been able to say!

He was just leaving Headquarters when the roaring of a Fokker sounded over the field. A message was dropped. An orderly, after the chattering of bracketed Lewises had died down, brought the message to Major Kelly.

It said:

*"If the gentleman who forced me down this morning will meet me in the same place within an hour, perhaps the ending will be more to the satisfaction of each of us. Schmidt."*

MAJOR KELLY read the message aloud to the assembled Ninth. Then he raised his eyes and looked at his men.

"Which of you did it?" he said.

"I did, sir," said Orth eagerly. "I've been telling these guys about it. They said—"

Captain Prince stepped forward quietly.

"I'm the man Schmidt refers to, sir," he said. "I'll take off in a few minutes if the Major doesn't mind my accepting the challenge."

"But I tell you I—" began Silent Orth.

Nobody paid him the slightest heed until Major Kelly, on the point of entering Headquarters, turned to Orth.

"I just read your combat report, Orth," he said. "You didn't say anything about downing Major Schmidt, nor is Captain Prince one to make false claims. I'd advise you to shut up before you talk yourself into a court-martial."

Captain Prince faced about and started across the tarmac to the apron. The orderly had already passed the word along and grease-balls had dragged the

captain's crate to the edge of the apron. The others had been dollied into the hangars, except that of Silent Orth, which had been so filled with bullet holes that it had been left out until repairs could be made.

The Ninth faded away from around Orth as though he hadn't been there. The accusation and disbelief was still in their faces, which showed when they looked at Orth, which they tried not to do. The whole outfit seemed to hate him.

Orth hesitated. He'd have this matter out with Captain Prince. He whirled and ran after the flight commander. Prince strode right past his own Spad on the deadline, and spoke to the sergeant in charge of Orth's crate.

"How long will it take you to get my crate patched up so it will fly?"

The greaseballs did not look up. If Prince winked at the sergeant Orth didn't see the wink—and the sergeant had a good poker face. He spoke right up.

"IT'LL take fifteen minutes, sir," he said. "You certainly got shot up this morning, sir. Ten of these bullets at the very least came within two inches of your backbone."

"I know it, Sergeant. That Baron Schmidt is one of the toughest guys I ever forced down."

And, piling injury onto insult, Captain Prince was calmly inspecting the Spad in which Orth had that morning knocked down two Albatrosses and destroyed their pilots, to say nothing of what he had done to Schmidt.

Couldn't Prince and the others admit now that Schmidt had been in the fight this morning? Prince had said Schmidt wasn't there, yet now he was calmly taking credit for having knocked him down!

What sort of an outfit was this, anyhow, to steal a guy's credit for knocking down one of the best flyers on any Front?

Orth's lips were set in a firm straight line as he put his hand on Prince's shoulder and spun him around. He shoved his face close to that of Prince and said:

"Listen, Captain, you can't job me out of my just desserts. You know blamed well I got Schmidt this morning—"

"Yeah?" said Prince. "Then how come he drops notes on our field? If you'd got him he couldn't do that, could he?"

"But if you got him he couldn't either, could he?"

Prince suddenly blinked, turned to the sergeant.

"Funny," he said, "I feel awful queer. I thought for a moment I was talking to Silent Orth. Then I rub my

eyes and he's gone. Was he really here? Did you see him, too?"

TO WHICH the sergeant gravely replied: "I haven't seen him, sir, since he took off this morning. Maybe if I got you a cup of coffee, you'd feel better, sir."

"Never mind. When I get up in the breeze I'll probably feel better." Orth stepped back, seething. His hands opened and closed at his sides. If he socked Prince, which he greatly desired to do, he would get a court-martial sure. Prince circled the ship again, making sure that all bullet holes were plugged—then, all but touching Orth, climbed into the pit, had the chocks yanked, and smashed down the field for the takeoff.

Orth looked after him with words of amazement dribbling from his lips. The sergeant started to walk straight toward him. Orth stood still. The sergeant walked right against him. A look of amazement crossed his face.

"Lord, that's funny," Orth heard him say. "I'd have sworn I bumped into something, but there ain't nothin' there. Maybe me an' the skipper et somethin'—"

The sergeant had caromed off Orth. Now he pushed his hand at arm's length ahead of him, tentatively, and Orth heard him say:

"Yeah, funny. If I touch something here I can't see, I'll know I belong in the booby hatch."

IT SURE was queer. Orth turned away suddenly. His eyes lighted on the skipper's crate, which had scarcely a mark on it to show that Prince had taken it through a desperate fight. Orth climbed into the pit, yelled at the greaseballs to pull the prop through. Nobody apparently heard him.

He became angry. He shouted until he felt foolish. Then he got out and cranked his own, yanked the chocks, stepped back into the pit.

Captain Prince was a mere speck on the horizon to the east. Orth smashed down the field, yanked the skipper's Spad off. He knew by the way she handled that it was probably the trimmest, finest Spad with the Ninth. It would be a pleasure to fight Schmidt in a crate like this.

Why then, had Prince not taken it? Orth even went so far as to pinch himself to make sure that he wasn't dead and having graveyard nightmares.

Two hundred feet above the ground he hurled himself toward Germany like a bat out of Hell. He went with his motor bellowing like all the bulls of

Bashan. Bullets were hurled at him as he crossed the lines. Machine-guns and rifles blasted away at his wings. Holes appeared. But Orth, intent on accepting a challenge which he knew positively had been meant for him in spite of what anybody else thought, never even looked down.

By the Lord Harry, Captain Prince wouldn't cheat him out of his chance to make Baron Schmidt eat his words! And afterwards the members of the Ninth would eat a few words themselves.

TWO kilometers behind the German lines he saw a single Albatross come flashing out of Germany. That would be Baron Schmidt. Captain Prince had already reached the place of rendezvous and was circling lazily, waiting for Schmidt's arrival. Orth leaned forward as though thus to increase the speed of his Spad. Nearer and nearer Prince and the German came to each other.

Would Orth be in time?

It scarcely seemed so. And Orth was worried. No matter what Prince pretended, that crate he was flying, Orth's own, wasn't in shape for the sort of fight it would have to go through against Baron Schmidt.

Orth was right under Prince when the German swept into the attack. Wildly he yanked his stick back into his belly and started climbing. He concentrated on getting between Prince and Schmidt. Give him a few precious seconds and he would keep Prince from making a fool of himself in the smashed crate Orth had brought back from the morning's meleé.

Orth saw the gap between Prince and Schmidt narrow with alarming speed. In a few seconds—if he were to be allowed that many—he could nose Prince out and take his rightful place as Schmidt's adversary.

Prince was swinging around to get into position when Orth let loose a wild burst, aimed directly at Schmidt's cockpit. He knew he was still too far away to be effective, but he had to do something. Schmidt, naturally, thought that he had been double-crossed, that two men had accepted the challenge, determined to get him by fair means or foul.

So Schmidt hesitated a bit to look the situation over—and Silent Orth rose to their level, squatted down between Prince and Schmidt, turned the nose of his Spad on the German and calmly went to work. Now Prince was in a quandary.

Orth had opened the show. If he stepped in now Schmidt would regard them both with contempt for ganging up on him in the face of a routine challenge.

So Prince did the only thing possible: he banked away. Orth looked after the skipper.

"I hope he goes upstairs to watch," he told himself.

THEN Orth settled down to business. There wasn't much he didn't know about sky fighting. He'd learned all the theories and discarded them for the manner of birds, who really knew how to fly. Orth, by utilizing the winds of the high places, could rise to several hundred feet above the normal ceiling of any ship. To him it was a mere matter of common sense and observation.

Everything struck him that way. His trouble was that he tried to explain matters to people who didn't care to listen.

Well, after this Captain Prince would listen, for Orth would prove to him that he knew his business.

Schmidt, having decided on the newcomer as his logical opponent, whether or not he was the actual person whom the German skipper had challenged, settled down to business in his turn. With a graceful, speedy turn, he sat on Orth's tail.

Orth stood on his left wing to escape him, cutting the tightest circle with Prince's Spad he had ever cut with any ship. The tail surfaces of Schmidt's Albatross just barely kept out of range.

But if he could spurt ahead a little, just enough to get the very tips of Schmidt's tail surfaces in his sights—

But it seemed that he would never do it.

SCHMIDT seemed to be creeping up on him. If he dared drop his wing a bit more, cutting the diameter of the circle—but that would cause the weight of the plane to be supported only by the side of the fuselage and the power of the motor, when it needed all its airfoil to remain aloft. If he dropped it, and the plane slid by even so much as a foot, he would be slowed down just that much, giving Schmidt his chance.

Orth held his breath. He was neither losing or gaining. Should he take a chance? He clamped his knees about the stick. His hands were on his trips. He would drop his wing just a split second, fire at the same time, then catch her up before she started to lose that precious foot or two of altitude.

He concentrated on his ring-sights. He yanked with his knees. His Vickers flamed just a fraction of a second before. He yanked back with his knees, cutting his Vickers at the same time—

And a great shout of satisfaction—which even Orth didn't hear because it was driven back down his neck

by his own slipstream—burst from the lips of Silent Orth. For bits of fabric were slatting from Schmidt's tail surfaces.

Orth scanned the sky quickly, to see whether Captain Prince had seen. He swore softly. Captain Prince, supremely indifferent to him, was lazily going home. Orth would have bet that Prince didn't even look back.

All this time Orth had held his ship in the tight circle. Again he forgot everything except Schmidt. The Albatross was wobbling. Again the tail surfaces came into Orth's ring-sights. Again his Vickers blasted away—and this time the bullets went into the tail surfaces fully a foot forward of their trailing edges. Orth screamed again—and studied the flying of his enemy. The Albatross wobbled again. The camel-back began to crawl into his ring-sights. He held the stick with his knees.

THE camel-back began crawling past his ring-sights, faster and faster. His Vickers never ceased their chattering. Bullets were eating their way forward, reaching inexorably toward the German's cockpit. Orth saw that the face of the German was white with thought of impending doom.

Orth was grim, hard. His Vickers kept on chattering. Now bullet holes were eating into the camel-back directly behind the great German—who realized that he had been trapped by split seconds and fractions of inches.

Now, if he tried to duck out, he was surely doomed. To merely swerve would bring his cockpit in line.

And to continue as he was, with enemy bullets constantly eating away his ship, meant exactly the same thing. So Schmidt bowed to the inevitable—and ducked out. He yawed right and left. He put his nose down and dived for the ground—and for a moment of triumph Orth half stood in his pit, leaning forward, to pounce like an eagle onto the Albatross of Baron Schmidt.

Now he saw the broad back of the German squarely in his ring-sights. He let go with everything he had. He saw a red handkerchief suddenly spread across the gray back of the German—but he let his Vickers continue their chattering. The Albatross bucked and jumped.

THEN the Albatross started down under full gun, while Orth watched Schmidt slide down into his pit and vanish. Then, taking every possible care, judging exactly where the vulnerable motor was, Silent Orth

sent a stream of bullets eating through the camel-back, the length of the fuselage, through the cockpit where death rode, and into the motor—and black smoke and orange flames, which in their turn erased the smoke, told of the brilliant efficacy of his bullets.

He watched the Albatross crash in. He watched it from two hundred feet. Nothing came out of the burning wreckage—and there wasn't a solitary soul anywhere, not even a German flyer, to see what he had done. Oh, well, he'd tell his wing-mates himself.

He flew back. He didn't know that even as he circled the field for a landing, telephones were jangling the news to Major Kelly. He didn't know that Prince had just made a strange report to the major.

"It was the only way I could think of to make the guy use a crate in which he would have a chance with Schmidt. If I had told him to use my crate he'd have been insulted. But if he ever finds out that he played right into my hands—and got his man, we'll never hear the last of it. Silent Orth, if you please! He'll be a great guy when we've broken him to harness! We can't overlook the fact that he knocked down three men today—for Schmidt hadn't a chance against him. I was so sure of that I didn't even wait. But if we listen to Orth tell it, his own wingmates will murder him—and we really need the buzzard!"

"Coventry" lasted for Orth the rest of that day. The sergeant took it upon himself to explain, with such tact as sergeants possess, why Orth's wingmates behaved the way they did. Orth said he'd keep his mouth shut after this. He was fully resolved to do that, until he entered the mess-shack that evening to hear Captain Prince loudly explaining how he had knocked down Baron Schmidt! Silent Orth could stand no more. He rose to his feet.

"Listen," he said, "I'm sick of this. You buzzards all know that I got Schmidt, twice in one day, the last time for keeps. I got him because I know more about—"

HIS wingmates began to hammer on the table with tin spoons, knives, forks. The concerted sound of their hammering rose to a high crescendo. Orth's voice rose to drown out their razzing sound—and won. Finally the hammering stopped, and George Purdue, the wit of the squadron, spoke softly when Orth, surprised at the cessation of bedlam, and conscious of the resultant loudness of his own voice, held his breath for a moment—spoke up:

"Maybe, gents," he said softly. "If we hammered our mess gear into plowshares, and had a steel table,

we could pound loud enough to drown this guy out. Lacking that, what'll we do?"

"I know," said Major Kelly softly. "Hereafter we'll allow Orth to fly alone. Maybe he'll talk the Germans to death!"

Silent Orth listened for a moment. Then his face lighted up.

"I could try even that, sir," he said. "Of course I'd have to land on their fields—but maybe in doing it, with my superior flying, I would have chances to knock off a few German ships—"

But, somewhat hopelessly, the hammering of mess gear had started again. Silent Orth sat down.