



*When Ginsberg bet, he bet to win, but he didn't know that winning would take him to the hidden drome, nor how he would get back.*

**GINSBERG'S  
WAR**

# GINSBERG FLYS ALONE

by ROBERT J. HOGAN

**D**AWN WAS JUST BREAKING like a fresh egg. Moist and golden. A few moments before there had been a grin of triumph frozen on the thin, dark face of Abe Ginsberg as he sat in his Spad cockpit and spotted what he sought.

But now the smile had dwindled to a sickly expression of frantic hope and desperation—and for three good reasons. Each reason being a mottled Fokker that screamed at the lone plane and slashed yellow tracer ribbons about the Ginsberg Spad until it began to take on the appearance of a New Year's Eve celebration.

“Oi,” wailed Abe Ginsberg as he tried at one time to duck two of his three hopeful murderers and get a shot at the third. *Tac-tac-tac!*

“*Schlemiel*. Good-for-nothing. Missed him. Oi.”  
*Tac-tac-tac!*

Abe had yanked over into a loop. At the top he'd just half rolled and was slamming out. Two of the three Fokkers followed his every move with uncanny precision. The other Fokker had just ducked that last blast of Abe's by inches.

“Am I foolish?” Abe moaned, straining at the controls. “Wouldn't believe these three Heinies could fly like the gang said. So I have to come out as soon as I get back and find out. And am I finding out? Don't laugh.”

*Tac-tac-tac!*

*Tac-tac-tac!*

“And that for you, catch on? Nope. Too smart, eh? Oi, if I should ever have the luck to get out of this alive—”

*Tac-tac-tac! Blam!*

The Hisso in Abe's lap stopped with a shudder and a jerk. Abe blinked at the still prop. He jerked the stick, sent the nose heading for the Yank lines and shuddered.

“It wouldn't be long now. Maybe I make the lines, but—”

*Tac-tac-tac!*

Spandau slugs slashed before him. A sign to turn back into Germany. Abe hesitated. Spandaus rattled again. Abe turned slowly, reluctantly. Turned back toward Germany. No-Man's-Land stared up at him from directly below.

“I head back for my own lines and they shouldn't even give me time for a last prayer,” Abe choked. “Oi, and the old man thought he was in trouble when he found out he'd opened up his new store in a fire-proof building. Oi, was he In luck compared to I'm right now!”

*Wam!* Steel slashed past Abe Ginsberg, slunk in the cockpit. The instrument board vanished. Hot oil spurting up in his face lot an instant.

Frantically, he tore at his eyes to clear them. He felt the Spad spinning, spinning. Didn't seem to care. His eyes were burning like fire. Down, down his Spad tore for No-Man's-Land. Abe clutching at his eyes to clear them. Fokkers racing down behind him with guns trained, watching for any trick.

Abe managed to see through the tears. He blinked and stared about him. Ahead, the earth spun like a giant disc. Behind, Fokkers circled.

“I pull out and they make me land in Germany,” he groaned. “I keep goink and maybe land in Hell. Germany or Hell. Don't make so much difference.”

THE three German pilots held their fire but continued to follow him down. Abe acted on a sudden idea. He let himself grow limp. He slumped over the stick, being careful to hold the stick still back into his stomach and hold rudder to keep the spin.

For two more thousand feet he spun that way. He was getting as dizzy as blond triplets, but he hung on. The roar of the Mercedes engines above diminished. His hopes rose. The Fokkers were leaving. They had decided he was done for.

Another thousand feet and he chanced a glance backward. The three well camouflaged Fokkers had turned and were heading back toward the little field near the front that Abe had spotted as their place of secret residence.

Already Abe had straightened his spin. The Spad slithered out with a groan and flattened into a glide two hundred feet above No-Man's-Land.

Natural instinct prompted Abe Ginsberg's next move. He turned in his seat, raised his free hand to his face, thumb extended, and touched his nose with the aforementioned thumb, wiggling the fingers in relieved delight.

The three Fokkers continued their way back into their hidden field. Abe turned and stared into No-Man's-Land. His relief was only shortlived. Below, the earth was marked with tangles of barbed wire and blasted shell holes.

Desperately, Abe glanced toward the Yank lines. Too far away to make with his small altitude. He turned that way to come as close as possible.

The instant that he turned, ground machine guns that he now made out in shell holes on the enemy side of the entanglement began rattling up at him. But they were well out of range. They served, however, to warn Abe of the nearness of the enemy guns.

As he kicked the rudder to throw the ground gunners off even chance aim and lucky shots he tried to find a place to land. He groaned.

“Ain't a place fit to crack up in, even.”

His eye caught sight of a narrow ridge between four shell holes. He wriggled to a firmer position in his seat. His hand flipped the catch of his safety belt. Snapped it open.

Again he looked toward the Yank lines. At least a hundred yards away from that ridge. He couldn't hope

to get closer. The Spad glided down with the wind screaming through its wires. It wavered. Dropped to the ridge.

THERE came a groan, a creaking sound and then a crash. The earth was soft and wet. The landing gear folded back. The dead prop stuck in the ground. Broke. The Spad tail came up and it lashed over in the air.

Abe Ginsberg felt himself flying through the air, but without wings. Far, far out from that cockpit he catapulted. Straight for a great shell hole that yawned ahead. Out and out he shot and then down in a gentle arc.

Over and over he rolled as he traveled through the air. Once he got his breath enough to mutter, "Oi," and again, "yi, yi."

Abe suddenly felt that someone had played him dirt and turned out the lights. Still he knew he was conscious. He could feel and smell and taste. The last two were the strongest.

He sputtered and gasped and choked. His lips said something concerning rotten odors. He struggled to his feet, clawing at his eyes. He was slipping and sliding up a greasy bank.

His sight came back abruptly and he peered over a muddy rise of ground before him.

*Tac-tac-tac! Ping-ping!*

Being fully conscious now, Abe ducked without waiting to find out just what was going on. He slipped as he ducked and rolled down the greasy bank again. This time his eyes were open. He could see very plainly. He had landed in a muddy, slimy shell hole. He had landed face downward in the mud. He stared now at the hole he had made and marveled.

"Somebody would tell me I got out of that without a steam shovel, I wouldn't believe it. No foolin'."

He took stock of himself. His uniform was hardly visible. Mud covered everything except his eyes and nose and mouth. He groaned.

"What a swell comedian for making the gang laugh back at the Twenty-sixth mess," he muttered. "Already I'm telling them Heinie ain't got it somebody to fight so good as they say these three Jerry pilots. And I come back from finding out looking like a hog from a mud bath. Oi."

He took stock of his position. He crept to the edge of the shell hole and peered over. Again came that rattle from the German side of the barbed wire, and flaming steel pinged over his head.

Abe ducked. He sat in the mud, holding his head and looking very sick indeed. He glanced at his wrist watch. Wiped the mud from the face and groaned. He guessed it would be fourteen hours or more before darkness would hide his return from the shell hole to the Yank lines a hundred yards south.

The hours began to crawl by. His lips got dry. He licked them. Now and then he stared down at his mud-smear uniform and shook his head. "Oi, wouldn't the gang laugh? Maybe I would some day learn to not shoot my mouth off so much—I hope."

His teeth clenched with that settled. The past was past.

"Will they laugh?" he choked after another hour had passed. "A couple of kabitzers like Weller and Benson. Wait till they see me. Oi, I'm sick."

THE pit of his stomach seemed puckered by vacuum as the hours went by. His tongue began to swell. Hot sun poured down into the stinking shell hole. Made it a hell. Now and then shells burst all around and shook the ground under him. Once mud splattered in a spray as a shell struck and blasted a little way off.

The mud caked and dried on Abe's clothing, on his boots. Something flopped thick and loose on his left breast. He glanced down at it with a sickly grin. Began picking the caked mud from a flat piece of metal. Then there emerged a Croix de Guerre. A weak grin spread over his face.

"You been through some hell since you was pinned on there three days ago, ain't it?" he muttered.

He glanced up stiffly as the throbbing drone of Hissos cut through the rumble of distant gun fire. In spite of the hours in the mad and his thirst and his hunger, a thrill passed through him at sight of five Spads heading north. Five Spads and then five more in another formation behind. Ten Spads in all.

He watched them steadily. Slowly, a smile crossed his small, dark face, blotched with mud.

"The gang," he said. "Weller is leading 'B' flight and Benson leading 'C' flight. Charlie Knox' flight is busted up for now Charlie's got it a busted arm."

He settled back in his shell hole and stared upward with the eager anticipation of a fight fan in a ring side seat the night of a good card. He leaned forward an instant later when three mottled, camouflaged Fokkers stormed over the edge of an afternoon cloud and screamed down on the lead flight; Weller's flight.

It seemed to Abe that Benson's flight shot ahead

faster when they saw those three Fokkers. He couldn't be sure. Perhaps his imagination. But they were late to the first fight.

With surprising speed, the three Fokkers dove on the first five Spads. They came in a strange, half spin dive. The Spads of Weller's flight hesitated for an instant. An instant too late. They were too far away for Abe to see any signal given by Weller, but he must have signaled for a loop. There must have been some misunderstanding. Perhaps because more than half of his flight were replacements that had come up the night before.

But whatever the cause, the maneuver was a split second too late. There seemed to be perfect planning and timing behind that downward lunge of those three Fokkers.

It was all over in a split second. Three Fokkers. Each picked a Spad. Spandaus rattled. Rattled in short bursts. And a moment later Abe Ginsberg was on his feet, forgetting his thirst and hunger and yelling his head off. Yelling curses and advice and threats.

But in spite of his shouts three Spads came hurtling down for earth and the hell that it held for them. One Spad was in flames.

Instantly, before Weller could turn and take aim, the three Fokkers had whirled and were climbing. Climbing for Benson's flight.

Weller and the lone remaining member of his flight were racing on the tails of the three Fokkers as they climbed. Benson's flight and the Fokkers met. Weller and the other Spad pilot hurled in. There was a short tangle of ships. A fierce rattling of machine guns. A snarling of motors and then, one by one, four Spads hurled out of the tangle and raced down to the same fate as the other three had suffered.

Abe gasped. He seemed speechless. His throat felt full. There was a puzzled expression on his face.

The three Fokkers broke out and raced away. Weller and Benson and one other Spad pilot turned and roared after them. But the Fokkers gained. Left them and the angry chattering Vickers guns behind. The Spads turned back finally and droned on toward their field. Abe's field.

Abe lay in that shell hole, pondering. He shrugged finally.

"No kiddink," he said finally. "Those Heinies sure can fly and fight. A show like they put on just now. And this morning alone I'm with them and all I get is a mud bath."

NIGHT settled down. He shrugged. "Well, anyway, Weller and Benson ain't got it so much to kid me about now without I could kid back if it wasn't for such good boys being killed."

With the darkness and the letting up of some of the fire from the German lines, Abe crept from his shell hole. He didn't make that hundred yards across No-Man's-Land in ten flat, but he didn't waste any time in reaching the Yank lines and tumbling over into the front trench.

Hunger was making Abe Ginsberg forget everything but food. When he reached the field, riding in a jolty side car, he headed directly for the mess.

Pilots were sad-faced—silent, those who were left. Charlie Knox tried to brighten things as Abe came in the door. He blinked, grinned and sang out: "Well, if it isn't Ginsberg! How come, Abe? Come on in and fill up and tell us about it."

Abe hurried to a chair, began filling a plate and started to talk all at the same time.

"This mornink," he began, "I was goink over to see what the dope—"

A roar of mirthless laughter cut in from the throat of Weller at another table.

"Well, if it ain't the conquering hero himself. All covered with mud and slime. I see you got those three Heinies in their special camouflaged Fokkers. Only they came to life again."

Weller was trying to be funny. Trying to sound untroubled. But there was only bitterness in his voice.

Abe gulped meat and potatoes and bread. He said nothing. He was too hungry. Charlie Knox cut in on his eating.

"For the second time, Abe," he demanded, "where you been all day? We had you down on the black list. I was just about to tip up your chaif tonight when you barged in."

"Got my motor," Abe mumbled as he ate. "Been in a shell hole all day. Crashed in No-Man's-Land."

"That's a hell of a place to be," Weller snapped. "When we needed all the pilots we can get against these three Jerry aces. Bet you had a swell nap out there while the rest of us—"

Weller didn't seem to get that sentence finished.

"While the rest of you was acting like damn fools, lettink Jerry surprise you when you knew they was there," Abe cut in. "I was lying in my shell hole lookink on." Abe's eyes narrowed. "And maybe, Weller, you ain't so far wrong after all. Maybe things would been different was Charlie there and me, too. Me and

Charlie Knox might have helped save some of the seven good boys, maybe.”

Weller was on his feet instantly. He lunged across toward little Abe Ginsberg. He snatched him by the front of his shirt and jerked him to his feet.

“Listen,” he bellowed, “if you’re trying to give me the razzberry for what happened this afternoon, I’ll hammer you to a pulp, you little—”

CHARLIE KNOX, his arm in a sling from a prop accident, rushed between the two. He pushed Weller back with his good hand.

“Pipe down, Weller,” he ordered. “You asked for this from Abe and he gave it to you. Now get control of yourself. Personally I think Abe made a lot better showing with those three new planes on the front than you did today.”

“Yeah?” snarled Weller. “You think he did, eh? Well, listen. Ginsberg goes out early this morning to prove that these three Jerry pilots aren’t such air wonders as we told him they were. And what does he get? He gets shot down and spends the day in a shell hold. Swell showing, I’ll say.”

“So you think that’s all, huh?” Abe demanded. “Listen. Ever since you guys first sighted that three Fokker flight that you couldn’t knock down you been tryin’ to find out where they stayed so close to the front. Well, I found out this mornink, I’m tellink you.”

“You found out where they land and take off?” Charlie Knox cried excitedly.

Abe nodded. “I’m tellink you. Listen. Up near the front just north of Ferens. A little field with a ruined brick buildmk on the side. You can see it plain from the air. The bricks are spread out over the ground. I spotted the last one takink off this morning.”

“We’ll have them bombed by the 64th,” Charlie said.

Abe nodded slowly. “Sure. But don’t forget I told you where it was. And I got another hunch.” He turned slowly to look Weller squarely in the eye. “Maybe, Weller,” he said, “you’d like to make a little bet on odds that I can’t bring down those three Fokkers on Allied ground— alone.”

Weller looked from Abe to Charlie Knox in astonishment.

“The—the guy’s nuts,” Weller exploded.

Charlie grinned and glanced down at a fistful of franc notes in Abe Ginsberg’s small brown hand.

“Maybe nuts,” Charlie admitted, “but that looks like real dough and easy. What odds, Abe?”

Abe hesitated. “Maybe ten to one on a hard proposition like that?” he ventured.

“Five to one,” Weller snappad back.

“Okay,” Abe agreed. “I got a thousand francs here in the hand. You could raise maybe five thousand to cover.”

“If I lose this bet,” Weller rasped, “I’ll be willing to sign over my pay for the next ten years if necessary.”

“A bargain,” Abe nodded. He turned and drew Charlie Knox out with him. Together they went to Captain Knox’s office. Abe was grinning.

“Maybe this won’t work,” he ventured, “but with a little help I wouldn’t have so much trouble.”

Charlie Knox frowned at him in perplexity. Smiled.

“What in the devil possessed you to make a fool bet like that, Abe?” he demanded.

Abe chuckled. “Because I think it would work.”

“You mean you think you can bring down all three of those camouflaged Fokkers?” Knox demanded.

Abe nodded. “I wouldn’t be at all astonished, myself. I got a hunch while I was tellink you where the field is. But we got to get Bull Maddox to go over and bomb that field tonight.”

Knox shrugged, shook his head as though to sweep the fog from his brain and gave Abe free rein.

There was the calling of Bull Maddox, Abe’s friend of the Sixty-fourth bombardment squadron at a field near by. Orders were given to Bull to run a long, continuous bombing raid on the small field where Abe had sighted the three Fokkers. That was to take place an hour before dawn.

Abe studied maps then. He worked over his maps until past ten o’clock and then turned in with orders to call him at two in the morning.

A SPAD warmed on the line at his orders when he rose from his cot. A full moon had risen and hung overhead. A test of the motor, an examination of the guns and Abe sent the Spad roaring down the field and into the north air.

Again his map. He checked over places below. He climbed higher and higher. The moon showed him the earth fairly plainly. Far ahead he spotted the German lines from the pricks of flame, and beyond that he made out what he sought. A small field near that field where the Fokkers were hidden.

At an altitude of five thousand feet, he eased back the throttle of his Hisso. A minute later, as the Spad glided down he cut the switch. Nothing now but the wind whirring through the wires and rigging of the plane.

A fishtail over trees and then a soft carumph and the wheels were rolling. The Spad slowed. Abe tensed in the cockpit, listening for the slightest sign that he had been heard. No sound came to him except the rumbling of the guns near the front. He clutched his automatic as he climbed from the cockpit. He glanced at the Spad. It was out in plain view. Laboriously, he heaved on the tail and hauled it under the protection of some partly blasted trees.

He glanced at his watch. An hour before Bull Maddox and his bombing raid would come off. Plenty of time.

Abe got his bearings and struck off cautiously across country in a straight line for the field of the camouflaged Fokkers. The moon was lowering as he walked. It left the earth in total darkness less than a half hour later.

Abe reached the edge of the camouflaged Fokker field and flattened in some brush. Through the darkness he made out the three Fokkers standing under some partly shelled trees with tails close to that mass of brick from the crumpled wall of the old building.

He grinned. "Flying bricks," he muttered to himself. "Ain't that goin' to be somethin'? Maybe I should see my lawyer about gettink a patent on the idea."

He saw mechanics working about the ships. Made out one mechanic apiece. The pilots must make their quarters in that part of the building that still remained standing.

He glanced at the luminous dial of his watch. Not long now. At almost the same instant he heard the throbbing sound of Liberty motors from far to the south. Bull was on time.

Abe tensed. He saw the mechanics about the planes stop and listen. What would they do now? Would the pilots come out and try to drive the bombers away? If so, he was sunk.

Apparently the pilots did come out. There was much shouting and ordering. Abe's ears tingled. Heard something about *Verdamp* flares. Hadn't arrived. His heart leaped. Things working out. Without flares or searchlights there was little use of the three Fokkers leaving the ground.

*Blam! Blam!*

The first two of the many bombs blasted earth high in the air on the other side of the half-wrecked brick building from where Abe was hiding. He heard wild shouts. Saw the men run across the field. The woods and the open would be the safest place. No time to get the Fokkers warmed and under way now.

*Blam!*

Another bomb burst closer to the house. Abe lay well sheltered between two stones. The whole thing had been planned in that general way. Three bombs near the house. That would be all. The last of the pilots and mechanics fled with that third explosion.

Abe hurried out of his hiding place. He ran for the three Fokkers and that tumbled mass of broken bricks.

*Blam! Blam!*

One by one, at long intervals, bombs dropped from the circling D.H. bombers overhead. Abe reached the pile of bricks. Every German of the small group at the field had taken refuge in the shattered woods across the field.

But strangely enough, bombs began to drop there now instead of about the building.

ABE worked like a madman. He ran from the brick pile with bricks in his hands and arms. All he could carry. He reached the cockpit of the first Fokker. He dropped the bricks inside blindly in the dark. He felt for the space behind the seat. Instantly, he realized the secret of the German pilots who seemed to lead charmed lives. Their cockpits were armored. His hands came in contact with fairly thick steel plate.

Desperately, he felt for an opening. The steel plate behind the seat moved out to give access to the rear of the Fokker fuselage. Abe piled his bricks there on the braces behind the bucket seat.

*Blam! Blam!*

Bombs continued to burst at short enough intervals to hold the interest of the whole personnel at the field. And Abe worked feverishly during that time, lugging bricks and packing them into the fuselage of each Fokker, behind the seat.

*Blam!*

One bomb burst alone. He stowed away his last armful of bricks. Grinned broadly. The D.H.'s were circling low as a sign that their bombs were all gone. The darkest part of the night had come while Abe worked. Now a shadow of gray in the west hinted dawn. Abe trotted for the edge of the field.

"That last bomb was as good as the quitting time whistle," he chuckled as he ran. "For a guess I'd say maybe there was two, three hundred pounds of bricks in the backs of those Fokkers, maybe more." He stretched his arms; "From the feelink of the wings it might be maybe a ton. Oi, do the arms ache?"

He was trotting across country through the growing light for the place where he had left his own Spad. He was grinning. Grinning with satisfaction.

“Maybe,” he guessed, “three Fokkers won’t be so frisky, maybe, this time, I’m bettink.”

He reached the field where he had left his ship. On a road a half mile away he could see activity starting with the growing of light. He slipped over the fence into the field and swung the prop. The Hiss caught, snorted and died. A shout came from the far end of the field. A chill prickled along Abe’s spine. He whirled the prop again. Nothing happened. He was panting hard. Much work, throwing that prop over, for one of his size.

The Hiss caught and idled just as a bullet screamed past his head. Abe was under the lower wing and scrambling into the cockpit like a scared monkey. No time for warming. He slapped the gun open. The Hiss roared. The Spad leaped ahead straight for two running figures coming across the field.

Up came the tail. The Spad reeled dizzily. Vickers guns spoke. The three sprawled and the Spad left the ground. Pinks and salmon and gray colors streaked the east. Abe turned his Spad for the other field and hurled down low. He grinned as he came in sight of it. Already one Fokker was rolling heavily over the ground for the take-off. The two followed. “What a bunch of lumber wagons I made out of those crates,” Abe chuckled as he bore down. “Turnink Fokkers into Mack trucks. So now I should be a magician, even.”

Indeed the Fokkers weren’t quite as they had been. Something seemed to be holding them down now. Something like a magnet that would let them rise a little. The first Fokker nearly crashed the tree at the end of the field, but it got into the air. The other two followed. By now the pilots knew something was wrong.

ABE stuck the nose of his Spad down and tramped on the trigger button. Vickers snarled out behind white tracer fluff. The first Fokker tried to pull up and over. The pilot gave it up before he was fully started. He turned a white scared face up to Abe.

Another burst came from Abe’s Vickers. Abe

pointed south. The leader turned. The other two Fokkers followed, at his mercy. To land would mean their certain death. And they could not maneuver enough to fight in the air.

Down over the front they roared. Like three wolves with a lone little black sheep chasing them for cover. Once over the line the leader tried to turn back, a last, desperate move. A dozen Vickers slugs slashed through his right wing and clanged against the steel plate behind his back. Another foot and they would be thudding into his skull. He turned south again.

Sleepy-eyed mechanics and pilots rushed on the field of the Twenty-sixth as the three camouflaged Fokkers were forced down to land while Abe circled above. One Fokker got down whole. The other two gave way with the heavy load, the fuselages breaking in the middle and the bricks spilling out on the ground.

Weller was the most astonished of the bunch. He simply stared, pop-eyed. Abe grinned at him.

“So to teach you a lesson so you wouldn’t never bet on a sure thing,” Abe said, “I won the bet. Bull Maddox is comink over pretty soon, Maybe no flyink today, now, hey, Charlie?”

Charlie Knox, in command, shook his head. “Not necessary with these three birds captured,” he agreed.

“So we should celebrate,” Abe concluded. “You buy the drinks, Weller, and we call it square, hey? Besides, I ain’t in the mortgage business on life times.”

“Sure,” Charlie Knox was saying. “Swell all around. But how come all this?”

Abe laughed. “Bricks for ballast in a Fokker ain’t so good,” he said, “so with bricks in the ships I could drive them home. And damn good German pilots in armored cockpits makes a swell combination for fightink business, believe me.”

Charlie Knox broke into a laugh as he spotted the mass of spilled bricks from the two crashed fuselages.

“Yeah,” he said, “but not half as swell a combination as Ginsberg and a thousand of brick.” He shook with laughter. “Boy, that’s a honey! A guy named Ginsberg fighting with bricks.”