



# MUFFLED HISSOS

by RALPH OPPENHEIM

*Lieutenant Solo Williams Flies Over the German Lines on the Most Perilous Mission of His Sky-Fighting Career!*

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LIEUT. "SOLO" WILLIAMS strained his goggled eyes to peer into the black night. His big, muscular body was tensed in the tiny cockpit of his night-flying Spad, his helmeted head craning from beneath the mass of fur collar which warded off the chill night blast of the roaring slipstream. With a big, gauntleted hand he reached for the end of his billowing neck-scarf, used it to wipe the thin frost from his goggles. He peered through the cleaned glasses anew, trying to penetrate the murk ahead.

But it was so dark that he could scarcely see to the muzzles of his own forward Vickers. On either side of him the wings of his ship seemed to melt into nothingness, and he could not see their tips. Above him, opaque clouds obscured moon and stars, and below the earth lay almost invisible in a shroud of murky blackness.

ONLY because he had seen the twisting, fiery line of the battle-front recede beneath him minutes ago did Solo Williams know he was within Hun skies. Only because of the instruments under the furtive glow of the hooded dashboard lights, did he know he was flying northeast, at an altitude, of five thousand feet.

The Spad was a furtive, winged thing, a ghostly bird of the night which slipped stealthily through blackness. Almost noiselessly it flew, for the powerful two-hundred-and-twenty horsepower Hispano-Suiza engine had been specially muffled, muffled by baffle-plates in the long exhaust stacks.

A thick, soft purr of deadened cylinders, the whir of the screwing propeller, were the only sounds which came from the shadowy plane. It meant a sacrifice of speed, this muffling—but that was better than rousing the sleeping enemies in the murk below.

The muffled engine was not all that slowed the Spad's normal speed. The ghostly, furtive ship was also handicapped by the unusual load it carried. Racked beneath its underbelly was a bracket of grim steel missives—pear-shaped things full of incendiary lydlite and T.N.T.

Grimly, Lieutenant Solo Williams was flying through the night to deliver these missives to their proper address, an address which he himself did not yet know—but must know within the next minutes. The thought made him strain his eyes once more over the cockpit cowl, this time downward. Nothing—just darkness down there. He cursed, beneath the soft throb of his muffled engine.

"I hope he's there—that bird," he was saying. "I wish I didn't have to depend on him. Suppose he muffs it or something. Suppose—"

He broke off, thrusting such conjectures from his mind. If H-4 muffed it, there would be failure, sure and swift. Solo Williams was used to working alone. Though he was one of the most sociable fellows in the 25th Pursuit Squadron, his official drome, his sociability vanished the moment his wings took him into the sky. In the sky he could not be hampered by formation flying or teamwork. He had to smash through in his own, individual way—a reckless, hell-bending way which no others could follow.

But tonight, for the first time in his reckless career, Solo Williams had to work with a partner—a man he had never met and never would actually meet in person!

SOMEWHERE in the blackness below and ahead, provided Williams had kept his bearings, that partner must be waiting even now, waiting on the ground, garbed as a German dispatch rider, standing by a high-speed motorcycle with a special-lensed acetylene lamp attached to it.

"He's one of our very best Intelligence operatives, Williams," the stern, keen-eyed colonel of Wing Intelligence had told Solo Williams, a few days ago, when the big pilot stood before his desk at Chaumont. "H-4 won't fail us. He'll do his part. The rest will depend on you!"

The colonel's voice came sternly then, every word a hammer-blow:

"It's our only hope of stopping von Gruening's Gothas, and we've got to stop them, Williams!" His fist slammed on the desk-top. "They must be wiped out! You know what they've been doing."

Williams knew well what those Gothas had been doing; knew how, just before dawn, night after night, those twin-engined monsters, led by the ace of Boche raiders, swooped over towns and cities and slaughtered helpless non-combatants with their deadly tons of bombs.

THERE was a whole crew of them, and each of those Gothas was a virtual fortress of the air in itself, carrying a crew of five and machine-guns which could pepper the air in all directions. Against them the best Allied scouts had proven harmless as insects, had attacked them only to be doomed by the withering storm of fire which came from all sides of each Gotha.

“Since we can’t get them in the air, our only hope is to wipe them out in their nest,” the Wing colonel explained tensely. “They’ve got to be caught there on the ground before they take off for one of their devilish raids. But we’d have no chance of sending a regular bombing squadron over to that nest. It’s too well guarded—as you can see by this map.”

He dabbed his finger at the chart on his desk.

“Three gigantic anti-aircraft batteries are situated like the points of a triangle around the Gotha nest, and they can stop anything that approaches from any direction. A squadron would be spotted and picked up by sound-detectors before it could get near the objective, and it would be wiped out. That’s why we dare to send only one plane, hoping to slip it through. One plane can carry enough bombs to do the job, provided a hit is made on the bomb-storeroom of the Gotha drome. I’ve marked it here.”

Williams nodded slowly, his eyes clear, unflinching.

“I’ll get through all right, you needn’t worry about that,” he said. “But—” a frown creased his broad forehead— “I still don’t see why this H-4 fellow figures in. On a moonlit night I’d surely be able to find my way to that nest and—”

“And get yourself blasted out of the sky by one of those three antiaircraft batteries!” the colonel finished, grimly. “No, Williams, even with all your skill in dodging anti-aircrafts, you couldn’t get through there on any clear night. We’re going to wait for a night without moon or stars, which H-4 himself will designate. He has conveyed the whole plan to us by secret wireless messages.”

AND Solo Williams had to concede that the plan was simplicity in itself, and that it looked quite feasible. Williams was to cross the lines on a direct northeast route from Toul. H-4 was to be waiting with motorcycle and special lamp on a road in Bocheland, close enough to the lines for Williams not to miss the light.

The motorcycle would then race towards the Gotha nest, leading Williams to a point half a mile from the Boche drome. That would be as far as H-4 could go, for even as a German dispatch rider he would not be permitted closer.

But the final half-mile Williams would be able to navigate himself. The spy would flash him the signal, Williams would swoop straight down, and at this point he should be able to distinguish, even in the blackness, the Gotha drome. The tarmac would make a lighter

patch in the darkness. He should be able to pick out the storeroom building from the diagrams he had, and do his work.

“And provided you have got that far without rousing the anti-aircrafts,” the colonel said, “you should be able to make a quick getaway with your lightened crate—break through before they can spot you. Their sound detectors won’t be able to locate your muffled engine, and you can get back by compass. Of course,” he added, with grim frankness, “there is no use denying the fact that there’s a risk, a dangerous risk. A lot will depend on your skill—and luck!”

“And on H-4’s,” Solo Williams had put in, with equal grimness.

Memorizing all the arrangements and taking the map the colonel gave him, Williams had returned to his own drome. The night-flying Spad with the special muffled engine, as well as the highly concentrated bombs, had arrived there, and each succeeding evening Williams had prepared the ship, ready to take off at a moment’s notice.

Three nights had passed, all of them turning out clear and starry. Tonight, also, had first showed itself with moon and stars, and Williams, thinking this would not be the night to go, had joined the rest of his squadron in the 25th’s messhall where a binge was in progress. He had been playing cards with three squadron-mates when the rushed dispatch had come. The message was terse, hurried:

*Take off and follow previous instructions immediately upon receipt of this. H-4 is waiting.*

It was signed by the colonel of Wing Intelligence.

“KEEP a place for me if the game goes into the small hours,” Solo Williams had hastily told the pilots at the table. And he had left the warmth and comradeship of the messhall, to go out into a night which had turned as black as pitch and chill as death during the last few hours.

And now, having followed the prearranged northeast course from Toul, he was flying his muffled Spad over Hunland, straining his eyes to peer down through the void, watching for the motorcycle light.

Suddenly his body went rigid in the cockpit. For there, almost directly below and ahead, was a tiny pin-point of white light which sent a furtive penciling ray up into the darkness.

THE signal light! Quickly, every muscle tense, Solo Williams pushed his joy-stick forward, cut his throttle

until the muffled engine was scarcely a throb in his own ears, and felt his cockpit tilt forward. He was piquing downwards towards that light. The pin-point grew a little larger, clearer, but the blackness around it still remained opaque.

Now Williams had his plane directly above the light—still well up in the black sky above. For a split second the Yank pilot hesitated, for he knew that if there was any mistake, his next move would bring about instant and sure betrayal.

He breathed a sigh which was a tacit prayer, reached for a switch on his dashboard, snapped it—on, off, on, off.

And beneath the left lower wing of the bomb-laden Spad, a tiny light flashed accordingly. Three long flashes, and three short—the signal.

Tensely then, snapping off the switch, Williams leaned over the cowl, watching the light on the ground. And quick relief and assurance came to him.

The light on the ground duplicated the three long and three short flashes. H-4 had kept his rendezvous.

And in the next instant, the pinpoint light below turned downwards from the black sky—all the way downwards until it spread in an oblong patch on what Solo Williams knew must be the road down there. The oblong patch of light was moving then, which meant that the spy must have mounted the motorcycle and was driving it full speed to lead the way.

Solo Williams promptly straightened his Spad. Williams cut the throttle down to three-quarters, and followed that oblong of light.

As he followed up in the dark sky, he wondered what H-4 was like anyway, what manner of person he was. He tried to visualize him—in a German dispatch rider's uniform, riding a swift motorcycle. But actually he could see nothing but that oblong of moving light. And he knew that H-4 couldn't see his ship at all up here in the darkness, and probably couldn't hear the muffled purr of it over his own motorcycle engine.

THE strange, furtive journey led deeper and deeper into Boche land. Already, Solo Williams' nerves were drawn taut as bowstrings, his heart was a sledgehammer of icy tenseness. His eyes ached from the strain of concentrating on that moving light below.

Though H-4 was making all the speed he could, the pace seemed snail-like to Solo Williams. He knew that there were still miles and miles to go before this perilous, stealthy journey could be completed before—

A sudden surprised exclamation broke from his lips, and then, hastily, he was cutting his throttle, slowing his Spad. For suddenly, abruptly, the oblong of light below had stopped moving, had come to a standstill. Solo Williams banked to turn back.

What was wrong? He knew that in this space of time H-4 couldn't have led him as far as the agreed half-mile spot from the Gotha nest, yet H-4 had stopped.

With a sudden sweep, the light below once more turned upwards—was stabbing into the sky. It was blinking! Flashing off—on—off! At first Williams, wheeling in slow circles now, couldn't understand. Then he noticed that the flashes came at longer and shorter intervals. Dots and dashes!

His mind called up swift memory of his Morse code training from Issoudon. He concentrated on that blinking light, and as he watched and translated the flashes, his blood went cold.

*"Road ahead blocked,"* he spelled out. *"Boche are wise to me, evidently have waiting trap. Will try to elude by going opposite direction. Do not answer with any light; they will spot you. In case I am caught, fly due north six miles this point—should take you to Gotha nest. H-4."*

With stunned horror, Williams felt the words burn into his brain. Then the flashes stopped—the light went out altogether. Solo Williams instinctively marked the spot where it had been—looked at his compass. Six miles north, H-4 had said. But what about H-4? Was he going to get caught? Doubtless now his motorcycle was sneaking down the road in the opposite direction, in total darkness.

At that instant the whole road below became vividly illumined! Looking down from his Spad, he saw the light of several flashes and torches—saw tiny, running figures with coalscuttle helmets and gleaming, bayoneted rifles, Boche running from two directions. And in the center of it all a motorcycle with a bent figure astride it, a figure even now trying to speed ahead.

H-4 WAS surrounded! Boche had been lurking in both directions, had ambushed him! For a moment Solo Williams forgot all caution, felt an uncontrollable impulse to dive his Spad down and try to rescue the Intelligence man. But even before he could obey this impulse—

*Crack! Crack!* Over his muffled Hisso engine, Solo Williams heard the shrill reports, saw the little flame-

tongues spitting from Mausers below. In the dancing lights, he saw the motorcycle slew crazily. It skidded to the side of the road, to crash into a tree, and the figure of H-4, riddled with Boche lead, was flung to the road. It lay where it had fallen. Like a pack of carrion wolves, the Boche swarmed to the body.

H-4, Yank Intelligence man, had died in action, died trying valiantly to perform his duty. Grief and rage misted Solo Williams' goggled eyes. The grim greyhounds of the Wilhelmstrasse—Germany's dread counter-espionage organization—must have tracked down H-4.

But the brave Intelligence operative had not died without first giving Solo Williams the rest of the route to von Gruening's drome. And, by God—the Yank ace's teeth clenched fiercely—he'd find that drome, vague though the directions were!

Even now, marking the spot below, Williams was figuring a due north course, starting to pull up, to swing around, watching his compass needle in its trembling, oscillating movement towards the N.

*Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat-tat!*

THE terrific, staccato clatter of Spandaus almost burst his eardrums as they shattered the muffled drone of his Hisso engine. Suddenly, he saw the livid fire-lines of smoking tracer penciling the night around him, heard the impact of bullets through the metal and wood parts of his ship. Frantically, out of sheer instinct, he pulled up, was trying to jerk his Spad to the defense.

Winged shadows were flitting around him, having appeared magically out of the blackness. Night-flying Fokkers! Three of them—and they were on him like blood-thirsty vultures of the night.

Like H-4, he had been spotted! These night-flying Boche must have seen H-4's last signal flashes from the ground. Their keen, night-experienced eyes had spotted the Spad. And now they were lunging at that Spad with deadly ferocity, peppering it with nickel cupro-steel!

*Rat-ta-tat-tat! Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!*

Williams heard the slugs drilling his wings, racking through his fuselage, dancing off the cockpit cowl in front of his face!

The Yank had mechanically switched off his instrument lights, but he knew the Boche were too close to let him go now. They had him hemmed in, were determined to send him to hell!

IN A sudden fury of defiance, he bent to his controls, was fighting back now—fighting as only a cornered man can fight. His fingers were on the Bowden stick-triggers, pressing them. His Vickers were vibrating, cascading streams of fiery tracers through the blackness. And he was cursing the retarding influence of his muffled engine and his load of bombs. God, if only he had more power, more speed!

*Rat-ta-tat-tat!* Like a ghostly, fire-spitting monster, one of the Fokkers lunged at him from one side, and he felt the broadside fusillade of bullets ripping a hole through his ship. With a berserk oath, he stood on the rudder, slewed his Spad in the inky darkness. His Vickers were squirting tracers like a hose, and the hose swung abruptly on the Fokker. For a full instant the cascading tracers were smashing right into that Boche plane.

In the blackness Williams caught a glimpse of a buckling fuselage, a sheering wing—as the Fokker slid off down into space. Seconds later, from some part of the black earth, a column of livid flame proclaimed the Boche's landing.

Solo Williams had scored!

But now the other two Boche, enraged by the fall of their comrade, closed in on the Spad with venomous fury, guns blazing. Solo Williams felt his whole Spad shiver like a mortal thing with the terrific impact of slugs that smashed at it, ripped at it from both sides.

Cursing, he flung his throttle-lever open to the widest notch. The muffled Hisso began to make queer, coughing noises of protest, straining against the baffle-plates in the exhausts.

STRAINING, the Spad reared precipitously; it was pivoting up into a full loop. One of the Boche pilots, quicker than his companion, saw the maneuver—was following furiously, curving up after the Spad. The nose of the Spad reached the vertical, flopped over to the opposite side—and Williams felt his body strain against the safety-belt upside down, despite the centrifugal force.

Like a streaking bullet, his crate came down from the loop; came down right behind the slower of the two Germans, who had remained below.

Out of the darkness that German ship loomed before Solo Williams—dim tail-fins and wings. The Yank went for those tail-fins with both Vickers hammering out a threnody of death, spitting their twin streams.

But at the same instant, a fresh rain of Spandau

bullets tore into his Spad from behind. The second Boche—the man who had followed Williams around in the loop—was now coming down on his tail. *Rat-ta-tat-tat! Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat-tat!*

Williams could literally feel the Spandau slugs marching up the cowl behind him, coming closer to his cockpit. But he also knew his own slugs were marching up the cockpit of the Fokker in front of him. It was a race now, and Williams knew it. He must strike a mortal wound on that Fokker in front before the one in back found the Spad's vitals.

His teeth gritted, and he bent to his guns, straining his eyes to aim in the darkness as he had never aimed before. The German behind him was still shooting burst after burst; the Spandau slugs were marching up the camel-back of the Spad, closer to the cockpit with every split-second shot!

Desperately, Williams was lowering the nose of his Spad a trifle, correcting his aim. In a last effort he pressed his triggers, firing a long burst.

And the aim was true! The ghostly Fokker-shape in front of him veered, flew crazily, like a drunken bird. And then it went plummeting down like a stone through the night.

At the same instant, even as the Spandau bullets from the other German started to crackle about his ears, Solo Williams again strained his engine, spurted ahead, skid-turned to one side with lightning speed, and then crossed controls and hung his Spad in a shivering stall.

The Fokker which had been on his tail was carried right past him before the surprised German could slow its momentum. And before the Boche could recover, Williams whipped towards him like a springing tiger out of the darkness—and again his Vickers screamed fire. The Fokker took the burst broadside, and it literally broke in half, tumbling the vague figure of its pilot into space as it hurtled down—a mass of wreckage!

BREATHLESS, panting from the effort of the fray, Solo Williams redressed his Spad in a sky once more empty and black.

Now to follow H-4's last direction, and find the Gotha nest! Solo Williams glanced down over his cockpit cowl. The earth below was utterly black—he could see nothing of the road H-4 had been following.

With a sudden cold wave of despair, he realized that, during the dogfight, his Spad as well as the Fokkers had drifted away from the road. Now he had no idea of the direction in which the fight had drifted.

He was lost. He had no idea in which direction von Gruening's Gotha nest lay!

A GROAN which was almost a sob broke from Solo Williams' throat. His mission had failed utterly. Failure—that's all that had come of trying to work with a partner. Poor H-4 had lost his life—and all for nothing! The only thing Solo Williams could do now was fly west by his compass until he got back to the Allied lines, where he'd have to report failure. Von Gruening's devilish work, raiding non-combatant cities. They—

*BANG! B-L-L-ANG! B-r-r-rooo-OOOM!*

The two ear-splitting detonations, blending into one protracted, yammering roar, made him think for one horrible instant that his Spad had suddenly blown itself to smithereens! With wild alarm he saw livid fire streaming from the exhaust stacks on either side of him, felt the whole ship vibrating like a rattle. And then he knew, knew and understood.

The mufflers had blown out!

The strain he had put on the Hisso engine during the dog-fight had taken its toll. The baffle-plates must have been weakened in their places, and now they had given way!

Even when he was cutting the throttle, his Spad was yammering with a wide-open roar loud enough to rouse the very dead, yammering while telltale fire streamed unleashed from the stacks.

Madly, out of sheer instinct, Solo Williams zoomed. But the dark earth below suddenly came to vivid life—as all hell itself seemed to awaken from sleep and break loose!

A score of giant eyes blinked down there, and from them dazzling white beams stabbed into the sky. Then a host of anti-aircraft guns cut loose, coughing up brackets of shells and shrapnel! The black sky was suddenly hideously illumined.

Frantically, the Yank was sideslipping, zigzagging, trying to get out of the growing inferno of ground-fire. Like some helpless moth, his Spad flitted among the mighty searchlights, the bursting shells.

With every ounce of flying skill, Solo Williams was trying to head his ship westward by the dim-lit compass, trying to break through towards the Allied lines. And for a moment he thought, with a flood of wild hope, that he would succeed. As he forced his Spad on, the anti-aircraft shells suddenly began to recede behind him. But then—

*B-rooom! Boom! Boom!* A fresh battery opened its

livid jaws and spat shrapnel and flame directly ahead of him. This time the barrage was a solid wall, through which passage was utterly impossible. To go on would only mean to be blown to atoms! In a near frenzy, the Yank slewed his lurching Spad southward, trying still to head towards the lines on a diagonal angle.

AND then still a third battery opened on him, and he knew that he was doomed! He was trapped—trapped between three separate batteries which were filling the sky with their deadly spew, smashing at his Spad from three directions.

Death could be only a matter of time! Sooner or later one of those shells must find their mark, and blow Solo Williams to oblivion! There was no escape! Looking down, he could see the three different blazing batteries, forming three points of a triangle, forming—

And then, even in that hectic death-rain of shrapnel, a rush of memory swept through Solo Williams' brain. The Gotha nest of von Gruening! The Wing colonel had said that it was surrounded by a triangle of anti-aircraft batteries, three of them! And that all this was marked on the map he had given Williams, the map which the pilot had stuffed under his teddy-bear, and which he now pulled out with one hand.

One hand guiding the stick, feet Still slewed at the rudder bar, his other hand was opening the map against his body, then flattening it to the dashboard under the hooded lights.

YES, it was marked plainly! The three points of a triangle. And inside the triangle, not in the center but a little towards one side was the spot marked: "Von Gruening drome."

A wild, reckless gleam came into the goggled eyes of Solo Williams. He was trapped but maybe he could turn the treacherous Archies into use before they got him! The very batteries which doomed him would also show him the way to his original goal—the goal he had considered lost!

His head jerked over the cowl, peered down. Looking down through the sea of bursting, fiery shells, he was comparing the real triangle of Archies on the ground with the triangle on the map. And he was judging the spot of blackness below which should correspond with the map-marked position of von Gruening's Gotha nest!

He gauged that spot like a high-diver gauges the infinitesimal tank below. Then his stick was all the way

forward to the fire-wall, his body hunched forward, and he was shrieking down like a comet, trailing flame from his exhaust stacks!

Down, down, he went smashing, while the Archies outdid themselves to follow him, and the spidery searchlight legs crawled down across the sky after him. But there was no stopping Solo Williams now! Once more he had become the lone ace who could smash through any obstacle!

Another moment, and his straining eyes saw the dark bulk which was the earth looming directly below him—coming up in a rush, looming!

A shout of wild exultation ripped from Solo Williams' throat. For there, almost right beneath him, he could make out a shadowy, oblong patch, lighter than the surrounding blackness. A tarmac! And as he plunged on, he could see dim, beetlelike hangars, buildings!

He had found the Gotha nest! With his fighting blood surging through every pulse, Solo Williams jerked back the stick. Roaring, his Spad was flattening from its dive, swooping towards that dim tarmac! Now he was so close to it that the anti-aircraft shells were no longer menacing him, for they dared not fire directly over the bomb-laden drome.

But from the drome itself came a fresh menace. A whole score of ground machine-guns cut loose in staccato unison. Bullets whined up at the Spad, drilling it, ripping and smashing at it. But Solo Williams ignored the machine-gun fire, and was going through, his crate a roaring, winged thing with streaming red flame coming from its exhausts.

HE WAS swooping over the Boche airdrome, his keen eyes searching for the building which must be the storeroom for the bombs. But before he could locate the storeroom he saw something else that brought a gritted curse from his lips. Out of the dark mouths of the beetle-shaped hangars, moved giant wing shapes! The Gothas were being wheeled out—in fact, they were coming out under their own power, as their exhaust sparks told Solo Williams. Their mighty twin Mercedes engines had been started in the hangars, and now they were trying to make a take-off before the mad Yank in the roaring Spad could blow them up in their nest! And if they got into the air, Solo Williams would have little chance of combatting them—they were flying fortresses, those ships!

EVEN now one of those dark, winged shapes had pointed into the wind, was skimming faster than the

rest, gathering take-off speed. And then, cursing, Solo Williams kicked his rudder, slewed the Spad half-around, and was hurtling down like a winged fury over the tarmac, his twin guns blasting a swath of fire before him!

Machine-guns answered him, not only from the ground-mounts but also from the flanking Parabellums of the Gotha. The vicious fusillade of bullets whistled in his ears, but he only cursed and went on down through them. And in the next instant his Spad was swooping right for the one Gotha that was almost taking off, and down upon that Gotha he sent two hailing streams of tracers.

The huge Gotha slewed like a wounded, clumsy monster. One immense wing tilted over—and the big ship overturned in a heap of wreckage, smashing itself to twisted junk. Like a bat out of hell itself, the roaring, exhaust-streaming Spad was flying back and forth over the rest of the Gothas then, strafing them for all he was worth.

But some of them were getting away, slipping beneath him. It was then that Solo Williams' desperate eyes spotted a dim, rectangular building which stood apart from the hangars. A surge of savage joy swept him. It was the building which housed the immense store of high-explosive bombs for the Gothas' nightly raids!

Solo Williams whipped his Spad up from the tarmac, zoomed briefly for altitude, and then he was thundering down, hell-bent, straight and true for that rectangular building!

This time he was met by a storm of machine-gun fire which almost blasted his Spad off its very course. The Boche had a concentrated ring of guns around that building, were trying frantically to protect the place!

But Solo Williams held his course stubbornly. With bullets crackling all around him, he was guiding his plane over that rectangular building. The roof of it was looming towards him, breathlessly, in the darkness. All in a split second he gauged distance, judged time. Then—

His hand seized the bomb-toggles of the Spad, jerked them once, twice—again and again!

The Spad leaped upwards as its full cargo of bombs left the racks, went spinning through space like pears showering from a tree.

*B-rooom! B-rooom! B-R-R-OOO-OOM!*

DEAFENING though the detonations of the Spad's bombs were, they were dwarfed completely by

the single, reverberating explosion which followed them! The very night was split asunder as that whole rectangular building erupted in a monstrous, devastating upheaval of flame, smoke, and debris!

Williams' Spad, even though he had zoomed the lightened ship speedily upwards, tossed and pitched from the frightful concussion. And below him he saw the Boche airdrome reduced to a shambles—the exploding storeroom had blasted the whole field to atoms, leaving a gaping, smouldering stretch of ripped earth, on which lay the twisted remnants of Gothas and their crews.

Solo Williams had done his job!

But in the very next instant it was impressed upon the lone Yank that it was his last job! For as he instinctively started heading his zooming crate westward, towards the Allied lines, his ears heard again the hellish cough of anti-aircraft shells—he saw the livid, heart-shaped bursts breaking around him!

Then he remembered that the three surrounding anti-aircraft batteries still hemmed him in on all sides—would shoot him to hell before he could possibly get through! Furiously, the Yank tried to climb his lightened Spad up, hoping to outrange them in altitude. But it was impossible. They could go higher than any Spad, those Archie shells!

A sudden exclamation of surprise broke from Solo Williams then. For he noticed now that directly to the west, the anti-aircraft fire was subsiding. The shells were not bursting there now! And the reason became instantly apparent!

There, moving westward through the dark sky, was the monstrous, winged shape of a single Gotha!

One of those Gothas from the nest had managed to take off before Solo Williams had blown up the storeroom! He could see the white, phosphorescent insignia gleaming in the darkness from the Gotha's fuselage. A weird, chilling insignia—that of a leering skull!

VON GRUENING'S own crate! The Boche ace of night raiders and his crew were in that Gotha. And they were headed westward, which meant they were bent on another diabolical raid against non-combatants!

Automatically Williams started to hurl his Spad towards that dark Gotha. But even as he went towards it, a new thought struck him, and again his eyes gleamed. He had used the anti-aircraft batteries to get to von Gruening's drome. And now he would try

to use von Gruening's Gotha to get out of the anti-aircrafts.

Already he was out of the zone of bursting shells, was sweeping behind the monster Gotha, sweeping close to those twin tails so that the big ship would shield him from the anti-aircrafts.

*Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat! Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!*

Like vicious, winking eyes, the Parabellum aft guns of the Gotha suddenly blazed back at the Spad! Von Gruening's men had seen the Yank crate, were peppering back at it! Fiercely, even as the bullets zipped into his crate, Solo Williams zigzagged, half-rolled, but still remained behind the Gotha.

DOGGEDLY he clung to it, holding his own fire, for if he fired the Gotha might change its course. Now, von Gruening was going straight on for the Allied lines, doubtless thinking the Spad behind had jammed guns or was otherwise harmless. The rear gunner kept blazing back at the following Spad, but Solo Williams held on stubbornly, dodging the fire as best he could.

Then, to Williams' savage joy, he realized that they were through the anti-aircraft area; they were past the furthestmost western battery!

Solo Williams hesitated no longer then. With a fighting gleam in his goggled eyes, he hurled his Spad right for the Gotha, and cut loose with both Vickers!

*Rat-ta-tat-tat! Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!* His first bursts whizzed for the rear gunner of the Boche ship—and the rear gun of the Gotha fell suddenly silent. But at the same instant, the giant bomber tilted its great wings, and wheeled like a monstrous enraged bird.

*Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat! Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!* The whole side of that Gotha literally seemed to spit jagged streaks of flame! And Solo Williams saw now why these ships had proved so invulnerable in the air. Even with the rear gunner put out of the way, the rest of the Gotha crew were directing a mighty storm of fire at the Spad.

With bullets ripping through his crate, Solo Williams side-slipped out of that vicious fusillade. He pushed his joy stick forward, dived for momentum. And then, again he was behind the Gotha's huge twin tails, corning up from beneath and behind them.

*Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat-tat!* From the belly of the Gotha, a fresh machine-gun, aimed through a tunnel in the fuselage, spat lead at the up-coming Spad. But Solo Williams, jockeying his crate with expert skill, kept zooming until he was too close to the Gotha's underside for that gun to range him further.

And again the Yank's Vickers blazed in two

cascading streams! Up through the belly of the Gotha his tracers went tearing, ripping!

And then, frantically, Solo Williams side-slipped—as the monstrous Gotha stalled, was hurtling downwards in a spin. Flame whipped lividly from one of the twin engines, licked greedily down the giant fuselage, until the whole gigantic ship was enveloped.

IN THE flames, Solo Williams saw a figure standing up in the pilot's cockpit—and guessed that the figure must be von Gruening himself. Von Gruening, crazed by the flames, stepping over the cockpit, to hurl himself into black space—even as the plunging, flaming Gotha exploded in a mighty upheaval of its own bombs, and blew to bits!

Von Gruening and his Gothas were wiped out. No longer would they bring slaughter to helpless non-combatant towns!

Solo Williams, exhausted but feeling a sense of a job well done, flew home by his compass without further adventure.

HALF an hour later, in the Operations office of his own drome, he phoned Wing Intelligence and spoke to an eager, waiting colonel.

"The job's done, sir," Solo Williams said simply. "But," his tone was grim then, "the Boche got H-4.!"

There was a pause at the other end of the wire; as if the colonel were steeling himself to accept this last news coolly, unemotionally. For his voice, when it next came, was perfectly steady.

"Too bad," he said. "But I'm glad the show came off. H-4's plan worked as scheduled, didn't it?"

Solo Williams hesitated. It had been in his mind to offer the night's happening as proof that he, Solo Williams, always worked best alone. But now he thought of H-4, who died in the brave performance of his duty, H-4, whose record would look so much better if his last job was marked down as successful.

"Yes, Colonel, everything came off without a hitch," Solo Williams said, calmly. "H-4 led me right to the spot—it was only after that that he was caught!"

He hung up, after hearing a sigh of satisfaction from the colonel—and he went into the messhall, where the binge was still going full swing.