

# SLUG SENSE

*Pilot Sam Bowen Carried a  
Chip on His Shoulder  
Whenever Jim Ryan  
Was Around!*

By  
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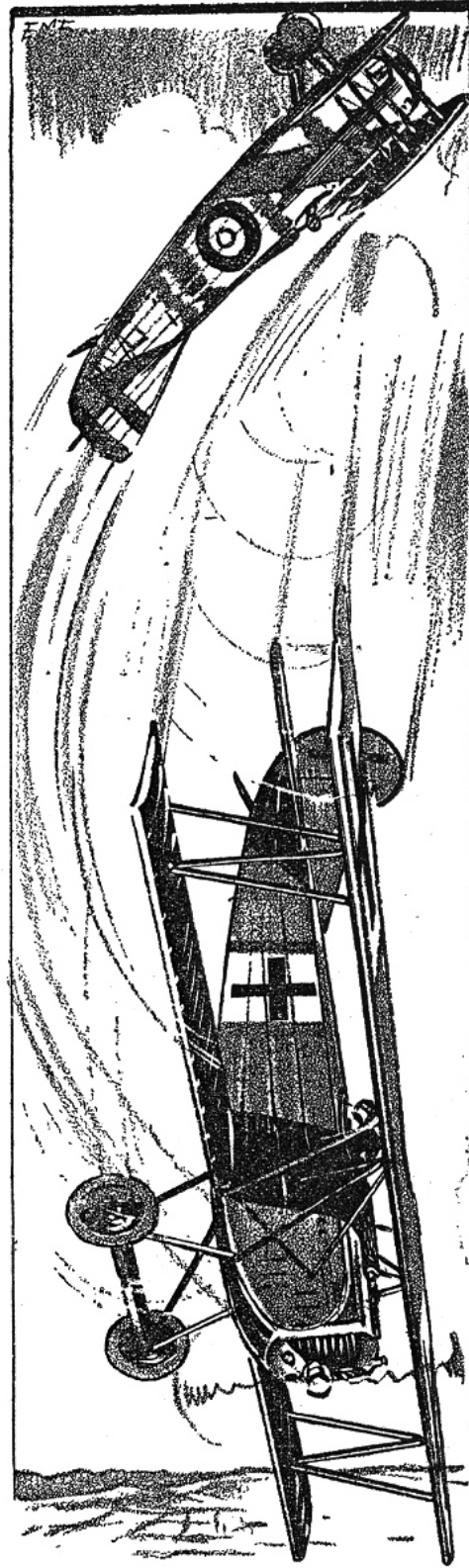
“**N**ow remember, men,” the C. O. warned viciously, “there is to be no more breaking formation on these patrols!”

He glared at the eight pilots standing in the cold grey of dawn outside his Nissen hut. His keen, hard, war-tired eyes lingered a moment upon the stolid, beefy figure of Lieutenant Sam Bowen. It was as though the C. O.’s words were aimed at Bowen alone.

The eight pilots nodded, but said nothing. Bowen’s stoney stare shifted slightly and paused, clung an instant upon the rugged, angular face of Lieutenant James Ryan. There was, in that brief, hard glance, a challenge.

Jim Ryan looked straight at the C. O., and ignored Bowen completely.

“You birds,” the C. O. stated as a sort of grim afterthought, “have your own problems. I realize that. You’ve got your motors to worry about, your ammunition to check over. And you probably worry about your guns jamming, too. I used to worry about those things myself. But there’s one thing I will not tolerate, one thing that no flying outfit can tolerate—”



*The Fokker fell off into a deadly spin*

He paused and looked squarely at Bowen.

A voice spoke up, a mild, firm voice.

"I think, sir, we understand," Jim Ryan said simply.

"*You* do, Ryan," the C. O. agreed curtly. "I'm sure of that. But you others, get this!" His words came out now like the crackle of machinegun fire.

"No flying outfit can tolerate personal grievances carried into the air! And this outfit, particularly, won't stand for such kid stuff! If you get mad at each other, come to me about it, or fight it out on the ground! God knows, you're supposed to be fighters! Now get to hell out there and make that patrol!"

It was a long speech for the C. O., clipped and terse as it was. But there was reason for it.

First, the German patrols were keeping their formations, getting out larger and larger unit patrols. The day of the lone ace was gone. This had become a mass war, and mass alone would win.

The second reason was deeper, less pleasant to contemplate. Personal battles had sometimes been carried into the air, and resulted in deadly air duels between Spad and Spad. There had been some of this lately, and the root of it lay in the hate of Bowen for Ryan, a hate that seemed to be without justification.

In a semi-drunken brawl, when Bowen had first appeared in the squadron, Ryan had refused to celebrate his arrival by drinking with him, and had refused flatly to fight about it afterwards. The fact that Ryan did not drink at all was forgotten in the fact that he had not fought, that he had shrugged indifferently and walked out.

That had been the beginning, the opening wedge to hate, a trivial matter that grew. Other things had added to this first seeming insult. Ryan had gotten a week's leave, Bowen had not. Ryan had been

given a new Spad, Bowen had to keep flying his old one. Ryan had been made a Flight Commander by the C. O., and Bowen was still just another man in a pursuit patrol formation.

Twice, Bowen had challenged Ryan to a fight on the ground, and been ignored. Twice Bowen had challenged Ryan to a fight in the air, and Ryan acted as though he had never received the invitation to battle.

But now there could be no avoiding what was to happen. For Bowen had written a note to Ryan this time, and signed it—challenging Ryan to a man-to-man duel. He had pinned the note upon the top blanket of Ryan's bunk, where others would see it before Ryan. And he had watched to see that others did stop and read that challenge, including Jim Ryan himself.

**S**AM BOWEN grinned as he climbed into his cockpit and strapped himself in. He took extra care to see that his Hiss had the right hum, that his twin Vickers were oiled, loaded, that the extra drums of ammunition were in place, ready for instant use.

Eight Spads, at Ryan's signal, wobbled out onto the field.

Then, in the lightening gloom of dawn, those eight ships took on sudden life as their wheels freed themselves from the earth.

They crossed the lines at twelve thousand feet, still climbing, and five miles beyond in German territory they leveled out at fifteen thousand feet and turned left on the course of their patrol.

Ryan signaled for more altitude, and seven ships nosed up again.

But breaking formation, according to the instructions in his challenging note, Bowen began a long, throttled slant downward. It was at this point that Ryan

might have followed him, and did not.

Bowen swore under the cowling as he ducked his head and tried to get a light on a cigarette. The smoke in his lungs turned to a choking glob of suffocation! Spandau tracers were coming at him from ten Fokkers which had dived through the nearest cloud and were hammering hell at him! Ten against one!

Bowen stared about wildly, searching the sky for help, for a sight of the Spad flight he had just left. He saw the second cloud through which they had disappeared. But there were no Spads.

His fingers clenched on his Bowden trips. His twin Vickers chattered, vibrated as he warmed them.

He banked, gunned full throttle, swirled in a tight vertical, orienting himself. He whipped at the nearest Hun, saw his tracers rake the Boche's tail as the German eluded him. Streaks of Spandau tracer and lead slugged into his fuselage, coming from both sides, catching him in a deadly cross-fire.

He ripped out of his bank, dove, jammed up in a loop and half-rolled out at the top in an Immelmann as a trailing bullet hit him.

Red, sticky, warm blood trickled down his arm, down his back, down his chest. Death seemed to ride the cockpit with him.

He dove once more, shot up in another loop, caught a Hun in his ring-sight and watched grimly as he held the aim. His tracers slashed straight into the Boche's cockpit!

The German pilot's arms swept up into sight over his head. The Fokker flung itself sidewise to its course of flight, fell off into a deadly spin, trailing smoke and flame. Bowen came down out of his loop with wires and motor screaming.

Three Fokkers howled in at him simultaneously.

He spun away in a frantic zoom! This was the end for him!

And as though from nowhere at all seven Spads bearing his own *cocarde* on their fuselages pounded down into the fight!

A second and third slug poured into Bowen's body. Dizziness became like a black blanket as he fought to keep his senses. He weaved the control stick and rudder bar automatically as he slashed and shot through the milling dog-fight.

Then a vague sense of level flight and a steadily droning motor gave him spasmodic flashes of reality. He felt himself sliding down with the Hisso throttled. He felt the bump arid grating of his wheels and tail skid touching ground. He started to stand up—and passed out cold!

**T**HE C. O. was standing over his hospital bed. Ryan was there too, and several other pilots whom he recognized. They were eyeing him gravely, yet in Ryan's eye was a slight twinkle.

"You'll be back with us in about two weeks," the C. O. said to him.

"I hope you came back with a bit of sense, because you're a good fighter. You held off ten Fokkers for almost five minutes, single-handed. But you're a damned fool—"

"Thanks, sir," Bowen said with a quirk of his lips. "It was damned decent that the flight came back to help me out."

"Help you hell!" one of the pilots said grimly. "We came back, six of us, to blow you out of the sky for picking on Ryan. And Ryan came with us to see we didn't! If you want to fight him—"

Sam Bowen held out his one good hand, toward Jim Ryan.

"Shake, Jim," he said. "I'll stick to fighting Germans!"