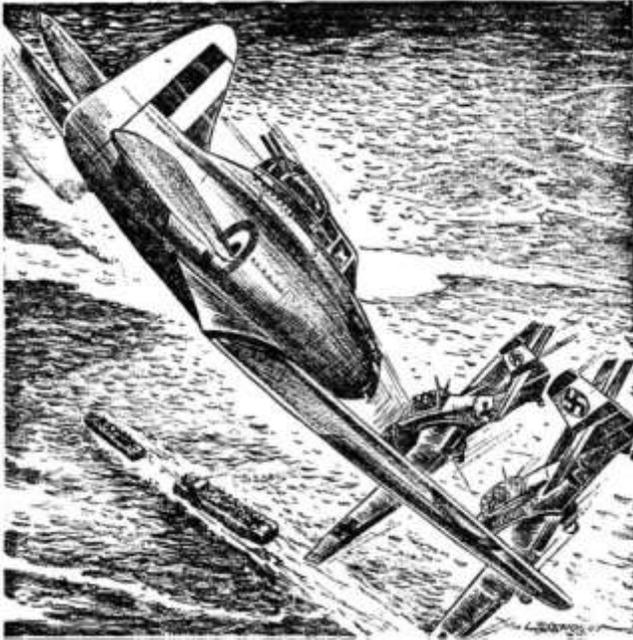


SKY DEVIL AND SON

BY HAROLD CRUICKSHANK



THE weather-bitten flight lieutenant with the dancing scar which ran from the left-hand corner of his mouth to the torn lobe of his ear, looked up sharply as the squadron commander entered.

“Tough show, sir?” the flight lieutenant asked.
“Humph!”

It was no wonder the men called this young hellion of 71 Squadron R.A.F Fighter Command, “Barker”, when his name actually, was Church.

“It’s that new gang of ruffians which came to us while you were on leave, Dawson,” the S.C. snapped. “I took them up for a polishing up breeze—your job—and they ran me ragged. Ran into a flight of Messerschmitts wet-nursing a couple of Dorniers off Dover. Hang it all, it was what you would call a set-up! A cinch, but they gummed the whole bloody shoot!”

“Get ‘em all back safely, sir?”

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT DAWSON’S query seemed to rub a pretty raw spot in Squadron Commander Church’s mind. He spun sharply, eyes blazing.

“All but one young blighter on his first real formation flight. A blistering young blighter from the Canadian schools—Empire Commonwealth Training scheme and all that. A redheaded young devil-may-care by the name of Dawe. Pilot officer William . . . Uh, what’s wrong, Dawson?”

Flight Lieutenant Bill Dawson had winced sharply. All but the flaming scar on his face was white, and his lips had almost vanished as if swallowed by some vital emotion. But he quickly recovered.

“I—I was just thinking, sir. The kid might be still in it. He might—”

The squadron commander shrugged as he lit a cigarette.

“Quite, Dawson. Quite. Probably get his tail singed. Have to bail out for the first time, and— and—”

Bill Dawson coughed sharply.

“Like me to take the Defiant up and scout around for him, sir?” he clipped.

“The Defiant? Oh, yes. I’d forgotten the new ship you’re testing. H’mmm . . . Well, all right, but the young bounder is likely out of petrol long before this. Has probably landed on some drome or other. But off you go. Remember, though, Dawson—the ‘no combat’ rule still goes for you.”

“Yes, sir.”

It was only a matter of minutes until Flight Lieutenant Dawson was settled in the forward cockpit of the trim Boulton-Paul Defiant. Forward cockpit, because there was pilot or gunner storage office space aft in this latest ship.

It was an idea of Dawson’s—an idea not so new, either, for it was an idea he had conceived in World War I when his name hadn’t been Dawson any more than it was now, but Captain Bill Dawe, more popularly known as the “Sky Devil.”

Topside, he set his nose skyward and in a few minutes was riding level at over twelve thousand feet. His hand quivered on the stick as he assumed his old fighting crouch with which, in nearly three years of sky combat in the First World War he

had met and defeated many of the cream of the Prussian Air Force.

But he was not thinking of those days now. He was thinking of this absentee, this young hellion who had not reported back from Operations. Pilot Officer William Dawe.

Bill Dawson shuddered. There could be only one Pilot Officer Dawe, surely—only one in all the world, his young son. Son of the Sky Devil!

Dawson had not seen his son for some years. Bush piloting through the wilds of the Northwest Territories had kept him absent from home; and during one of these long absences his wife had died. Young Bill had gone to the North to join his dad. There was the recollection of a trip the youngster made with his father on a trip to Aklavik.

The scar on the Sky Devil's face now twitched and danced sharply. For it was the scar that young Bill had admired most about his dad—that honorable scar of sky combat.

But the North had been no place for young Bill. His father had placed him with relatives in California. He had virtually given up the boy.

Now, for the second time in his adventuresome career, the battle flares were burning, and the Sky Devil was topside hunting a wayward fledgling combat pilot who meant more to him than anything, anybody else on earth.

Flight Lieutenant Bill Dawson had come into the Second World War through pull, and a bit of faking with age declaration. He was, when the chips were down, the 71st Squadron's most valuable officer. For it was into his care that all replacements were given for that last final polish in aerobatics and formation operations flights before going up in a scramble to match their stuttering Brownings and cannon against the chattering Madsens and cannon of the Messerschmitts.

Dawson gloried in his work, albeit he was sad when, from the ground he watched his young eagles take wing for their first operations flights. Many times in his lonely quarters he tolled off, in retrospective reflection, the names of the old Sky Devil's brood. Many times he longed for a new brood and a chance to take them across the Channel and bring them back with blood and glory to their credit.

But because of his age, he realized that he must toe the line and adhere strictly to orders and regulations. It would be a heartbreaker to get tossed out of the service he loved for some infraction of such regulations.

HE WAS over the Channel before he was fully conscious of it. Suddenly he caught the smoke of a convoy. But that was not all. He glimpsed a pair of Heinkels going in to bomb.

"Remember—the same rule stands. ... No combat!"

The S.C.'s words rapped Bill Dawson smartly. But, blast it all, there before his eyes was the rolling hull of a lagging tramp steamer which, it was quite clear to the Sky Devil, hadn't a chance against those Heinkels. In fact, Dawson doubted if he could reach them in time even if he did, just this once, ignore Squadron Leader Church's warning.

His mind was quickly made up. He fed the gas to his Merlin and roared all out. The foremost Heinkel was going into a dive, and Bill Dawson watched streams of tracer spear upward from a brace of deck machine-guns. Those merchant marine boys of the tramp's crew were going to fight it out.

"Nerviest sons in the whole War Service," the Sky Devil muttered.

He could almost see the first of the Nazi bombs leave their racks. He half closed his eyes, but opened them with a start when he witnessed three enormous gouts of spume geyser skywards to sta'bud of the ship. The Nazi bomber had missed. And now, there was smoke wisping back from the bomber's engine housing.

Smoke! She had been hit in a vital spot. It seemed incredible that, with all their pluck, those ship's machine-gunners could have made the hit, though Bill Dawson hoped this was the case.

It was not so, however. Out of a patch of cloud drift, a fast Hurricane fighter was slicing. A Hurricane!

She took a burst from a Heinkel, which almost made the Sky Devil wince. Cold sweat broke out on his body—cold, clammy sweat. For although he couldn't, as yet, read the insignia on that Hurricane, the odds were that it was being flown by his son—young Bill!

Never in all the wide battle experience of the Sky Devil had he run into a situation such as this. Never had he known fears for himself. But he was afraid now—afraid for Bill.

He cursed his Merlin, though she was doing well over three hundred per hour for him. Then a cloud parted and an inferno broke loose, as twin Satans, in the guise of fast-diving Messerschmitts lanced down on the lone Hurricane.

The Sky Devil identified the markings of the Hurricane. His heart began to pound. For a moment he feared he might black out, but suddenly he became the old fighting machine of the First World War. He crouched lower over his stick, weaving like a cobra ready to strike.

And suddenly he struck! It was a fierce all-out burst, which almost cut the Messerschmitt's cockpit hood clear from its moorings. The ship yawed off, but her pilot recovered.

Bill Dawson swore sharply, bitterly. He had done well enough to win a brief respite for his son. But in his first combat of this war he had missed, right when he'd had the back of the Nazi's head in his sight.

The second Messer now whirled up, half rolled and came up under the Defiant's belly. The move was so swift, so beautifully executed that Bill Dawson was shocked. This was action to the death and about two hundred miles per hour swifter than that of his last battle action.

THE Sky Devil collected his wits and faked a spin. In a flash the second Messerschmitt came in on him, her guns chipping pieces from the Defiant's fuselage. But the old battle grin was widening Dawson's mouth. The scar on his face was aflame, and into its dance of death. He suddenly backsticked and whirled her back, nose up and over in a wide loop, and when he reached the dive, the Nazi was doomed.

The scrap had seemed to last an age, but this phase of it was over in a few minutes. There was no time to glory in the sight of that flamer going down to a fiery-hissing end in the Channel, for the Heinkels were now converging on the merchantmen.

Sky Devil and son came in to attack together—both in a power dive. They had each automatically singled out a target they couldn't miss. They couldn't had it not been for that crippled

Messerschmitt which banked around and came slicing down to throw a murderous burst into young Bill's ship.

It chandelled miraculously over and was now in on the Sky Devil. He glimpsed it momentarily even as his thumb squeezed the trips controlling his after guns.

That was all over for the Messerschmitt. The Sky Devil went down in his power dive and came back in a frightful, screaming zoom under the belly of a Heinkel, and as he flashed up he let her have a full burst from his electrically controlled gun turret. She almost broke in half.

A sharp burst of lead from the second ship splattered glass and instrument chippings all over the Sky Devil. A piece or two clipped his face. But there was no more fight, no more bombing. The remaining sound ship and the crippled Heinkel sloughed off, headed toward the southeast.

The Sky Devil coned the sky for the Hurricane. Again he shook violently as, for a moment he failed to catch a glimpse of young Bill's ship. Then he saw her, low down, limping, staggering along with a broken rudder. Bill, the Sky Devil's son, was doomed either to bail out in Nazi Occupied territory, or to attempt a crash landing.

There was no alternative. Nothing the Sky Devil could do, for already the sky was being splashed with flak from shore batteries.

Bill Dawson climbed his ship to sixteen thousand, sneaking closer and closer in to the French coast. He kept his glasses clapped on young Bill's wallowing ship, and then he saw the chute silk plop out in a perfect mushroom. At least, his son was safe. Safe, but a prisoner of war in the hands of the most ruthless of all captors.

The Sky Devil knew this coast like a book. He pin-pricked position, close to Boulogne. Boulogne—there would be friends there, friends of the Sky Devil. Already his keen brain was at work.

"Keep your chin high, Sonny," he breathed. "They may beat you up a lot, but all isn't lost—yet."

With a snarl, and a hope that he could meet a flight of Nazi Luftwaffe fighters on the way home, the Sky Devil kicked his Defiant around to the northwest and let the Merlin have full throttle.

AN HOUR or so later, he walked nonchalantly into the squadron leader's office, with his report.

"Well, what news, if any, Dawson?" the S.C. clipped, his cold, steely eyes lancing right into the Sky Devil's.

"Bad news, sir. I glimpsed, and identified the Hurricane, but the pilot was probably wounded. Seemed to have no rudder control. Forced to bail out somewhere near—well, I couldn't quite get the location. Ground mist coming up."

"And that is all, Dawson?"

"That's my report, sir. Good night, sir."

Bill Dawson was almost at the door when the S.C. called him back.

"You wouldn't care to report more fully on the brush between a Boulton-Paul Defiant, a Hurricane and some Heinkels and Messerschmitts, would you, Dawson?"

They measured each other with swift, meaning glances. Bill Dawson knew he was in for it, but he would have to take whatever came. Orders were orders.

"No, sir. I have given you my report."

"Very well, Dawson. I shall have to discipline you. You're old enough and wise enough in our routine to know what will be expected of you. Court of Inquiry and—that."

"Right, sir. I shall be here. That is—well, I won't run out, but I would like a few hours off this evening, if you—"

"Be on hand in the morning, Dawson. That will be all."

Bill Dawson thanked him. Barker Church was a real man for all his bark. He was a man after the Sky Devil's own heart and measurement of a man's worth.

But now Bill Dawe, or Dawson, as he had attested, had work to do. He had old friends in all branches of the service. He thought instantly of Commando raids. He must become associated with one such raid. There was the chance—remote as it seemed from his particular corner at the moment—that he might yet stand a chance of contacting young Bill.

But what was sure and most definite, he was going to make a play to rescue Bill even if it meant breaking all orders. Even if it meant the last play in this, his second hitch, of World War service.

He strode over to the mess and got himself a cup of tea. Save in a case of emergency, or for medicinal purposes he never touched hard liquor. A cup of tea and a sandwich was plenty of supper.

He had an interview with a certain fighting brigadier—a gentleman who was slated to take over the next group of British Commandos. Brigadier-General "Steamboat" Cassidy, with whom the Sky Devil had cooperated in one of the grandest shows in the last War, up in the canal zone northeast of Dunkirk.

The Sky Devil thrilled at the very memory of that terrible 1918 night and its gloriously-achieved outcome which won for Bill the D.S.O. and Croix de Guerre, and for Steamboat Cassidy, the Victoria Cross.

YOUNG Bill Dawe was on the spot. He stood sorely before a florid-faced Nazi officer of the Occupation S.S. Troops. In the company was an officer of the Gestapo, and two of his short-cropped, burly, ruthless henchmen who had already gone to work on Pilot Officer Dawe.

Bill's face dripped blood. There was a dripping slash in his face almost from the lobe of his right ear down to the mouth corner—a hideous, gaping thing.

But the boy stood his ground, defiant, unyielding.

"You were in company with the new Boulton-Paul Defiant of your *verdammte* R.A.F.—*nicht wahr?*" the examining officer snarled. "You haf details of the make-up of this new aircraft. We want that. You will haf time to think it over, but not too much time. Next time, *Herr* Himmler's guards will perhaps not stick too strictly to orders."

"The devil with you and *Herr* Himmler and the whole bloody shooting match!" Young Bill swore.

He took a sharp step forward, but a savage crack in the mouth from the Gestapo officer stopped him in his tracks.

"*Verfluchte Kerl*," this henchman of Himmler snarled.

He motioned to one of the guards, but the military *Kommandant* intervened, and in German ordered the Gestapo to desist.

“Take him away,” he ordered. “Remember, we want him for further questioning at my pleasure. We will find a way to make him talk.”

Young Bill Dawe knew no more about a Defiant than he imagined most American or Canadian or British Isles kids knew. That was practically nothing. The Defiant was a hush-hush ship. The one he’d hooked up with had performed superbly, but perhaps the credit had been due to her pilot who had flown most miraculously.

But now he was being led out—back to the prison from which he had so recently been jerked. His face, his mouth, in fact his whole body ached. But he forced a grin of defiance as he passed the stolid little military *Kommandant*. He was in for a rough going-over, he knew, but—blast it all! It was a nasty, dirty war, and he supposed he had better retain his self-respect and sense of humor to the end.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL Cassidy looked up from a pile of documents on his desk as Flight Lieutenant Dawson was ushered into his quarters. A wide grin on Cassidy’s face was quickly withdrawn as he noticed the grave expression on his old friend’s face.

“You’re as busy as the devil, Cass,” Bill Dawson clipped. “Sorry to intrude.”

“Pipe down. Have a chair. Never too busy to chin over something with you, Bill. . . . Smoke?”

The general tossed over a pack of American smokes. Dawson selected a cigarette, lit it, inhaled and exhaled deeply, then scraped his chair up close to the desk.

“I’m in a spot, Cass. Court of Inquiry. . . .”

And then he went on to tell his yarn of the brush over the Channel.

“What in creation could I do, Cass? You’d have done the same, wouldn’t you?”

A thin smile toyed with the general’s mouth corners. But he made no immediate answer. He commenced thumbing a sheaf of official documents. All at once he looked up sharply, his eyes glistening.

“Here’s what I want. Bill,” he said. “Pierre Clauvette . . . Number Thirty-three. He—”

“Clauvette!” Bill Dawson sprang to his feet. “You don’t mean he’s still in the Secret Service? Not our old Pierre?”

“Precisely, and he’s working with us on our next Commando raid. I’m busy on that now. Dickens of a big job. We’re really going to test them out this time. People are bellowing for a Second Front—people who don’t quite understand. We in the Service have got to tap that coast and find out a few things and without the services of such men as Pierre, we’d have a tough job.”

“Are you in constant touch with Pierre, Cass?” Dawson asked.

“Certainly. He’s our Number One key man.”

“Then please contact him at once. Give him the details of young Bill’s approximate bail-out location. Have him hunt him up—somehow. Cass, I—I—”

“Okay—okay. Just take it calmly. Are you forgetting yourself, man? Forgetting the old nerve which pulled you and your hellion brood through many a tough spot in the last show? Have you forgotten our own Canal show?”

“No, I haven’t forgotten, Cass. But this is different. You wouldn’t understand—being an old bachelor. Here’s something else: I don’t intend to duck the coming Court of Inquiry. I’ll take my medicine. Guess I’ll be washed out, but first I want to be in on that Commando raid. I’ll have the back office of that Defiant rigged up with room for young Bill. I—”

“You’ll land in the dark. You’ll bust up a Gestapo headquarters, grab your hellion son, pack him into an improvised cubby-hole, take off—from heaven only knows where, shoot up a squadron of the Luftwaffe, and bring the prodigal son back to your home station all intact. Like sin you will!”

Brigadier Cassidy was now on his feet, pacing back and forth. Suddenly he swung sharply on Bill Dawson.

“Well, cutting out all the heroics, why not? With Pierre’s help, we could probably arrange, under the cover of our Commando shoot, a landing for you. But I’m afraid, brother, the rest will be up to you. You’ll be on your own, and the chances are, even if you do locate the kid, which I doubt, that neither of you’ll get back. But what does that matter?

“I don’t expect to return from the raid myself. But that doesn’t matter, so long as I—we . . . Aw, have a drink. No? Same old Bill. Well, buzz off

now, and . . . Say, be comforted by the fact that I'll ask Church for his squadron's cooperation in our adventure on Friday."

Bill Dawson's eyes glistened. His scar commenced to dance. Friday! That was the day after tomorrow.

Steamboat Cassidy was a grand guy. "Thanks, Cass," he clipped. "I've got some work to do on my Defiant—lots of time, pending the Court of Inquiry. If you can stall that a while, I'll be obliged. Cheerio!"

WHILE Flight Lieutenant Dawson worked on his Defiant, Squadron Leader Church watched him covertly. He could see that something deep was brewing in the mind of the training expert, but he was not sure what it could be.

The Sky Devil worked in secret with his riggers. Almost hourly he awaited word from Steamboat Cassidy. When it came, it caused him to grow hot and cold by turns. Cassidy had received word from Pierre Clauvette. Young Bill had been located, but shortly was to be sent deeper into occupied territory, to a notorious concentration camp.

The elder Bill moved out into the gathering twilight of this Thursday evening swearing softly to himself. Cassidy's message had been brief. All this war routine work seemed so slow.

And yet, when Dawson reflected, his chest bulged with admiration at the work done since Dunkirk—work and achievement little short of miraculous. Yet this evening, his patience was strained. He moved to his quarters tired, pretty low in spirit. . . .

He was dozing when an orderly ushered in none other than gangling Steamboat Cassidy in the flesh. Dawson sprang quickly to the alert. Sky motors were roaring at the hangars, roaring in all-out revving unison.

"Surprise, Bill," Cassidy clipped.

Dawson rubbed his eyes, for his friend was garbed in battle dress.

"Surprise, Cass? What the devil now?"

"We're pushing off. We—meaning I, you and a bunch of Navy and Air and Commando forces. We attack at one hour before dawn, Friday, instead of the previously planned Friday midnight raid."

"You mean I—officially—go into it?" the Sky Devil jerked out eagerly.

Cassidy shook his head.

"No. You go, but you steal out. Church is taking his squadron over. Take a few minutes and go over this map. "Here"—he pointed at a spot on the colored map—"is the location of an emergency field. It's short, but the best Pierre can do for you. Our bombers will be in action around this dummy field. They don't know why, but I do, and my chief does. It's to give you cover. Best I can do for you.

"Here"—again Cassidy pointed to a map location—"is the location of your son's prison camp. A small place, but fairly well guarded. That's all I can do. Our zero hour is at two-thirty-two hours. Take care of yourself, son. Let the squadron scramble before you take off, and—good luck!"

They shook hands with the steely fierceness of two staunch friends who never expected to see each other again. There were no more words. As Cassidy vanished into the gathering dusk, Bill Dawson's thin lips almost vanished and the scar on his cheek began its dance of death. . . .

COLD, clammy fingers of light were reaching into young Bill Dawe's cell. He shuddered involuntarily with a deep, broken sob such as a youngster might give after a whipping. His whole body ached from his beatings. The left side of his face was coldly numb. A rough German surgeon had stitched it for him, but it had hurt—plenty.

All at once he started. Footsteps clanked on the flagstones outside his cell. He firmed his nerve fibers, for he knew his ruthless guards were coming. But before the steel of the key clanked in the heavy lock, the whole zone seemed to shake like a jelly. Heavy crumps crashed around the camp.

Bill Dawe came to his feet, quivering with emotional excitement. The R.A.F. was in action! He chuckled hysterically, and his fists bunched into hard knots. In a lull, he heard a different type of explosion, that drum fire of Navy guns. Barrage fire!

"Commando raid!" he gasped.

There was a momentary lull in the entire concerto, one of those unaccountable lulls in battle.

Bill Dawe whirled sharply at the sound of thick voices outside his door. Then he caught the sounds of a scuffle. A shot punctuated all other sounds, and a thick, human gurgle before the monstrous explosiveness of H.E. again blasted the early dawn.

Came the rattle of a key. Bill Dawe, in his excitement, was prepared to make his last stand. He had heard that he was to be moved to that hole of Satan—C. Camp Number 313. He had no intention of going. He would fight it out to the death tonight, in a desperate attempt to escape.

The iron door was now swinging. Dawe poised himself to leap, when suddenly a voice called softly to him in English!

“Steady—hold it! Be quick. Take this gun and follow.”

Bill Dawe was dumbfounded as he reached for the automatic. The tall gangling shape in a Nazi coat had whirled from him and was already darting down the narrow corridor.

Pilot Officer Dawe collected his wits. He almost stumbled over the inert form of the guard. Now, though his legs almost buckled under him, he hurried along in the wake of that shadowy form.

This was escape! He could tell. Stranger things had happened in this pitiful land that once had been proud France. But there was no time for conjecture. There was commotion ahead.

He heard thick guttural German voices and the sound of thudding fists crashing against human muscle, bone and flesh.

He found his old reserve of fighting strength, a fighting force inherited from the father whom he had admired so much, but whom he had seen so little since that one eventful bush sky trip.

He lunged and struck sharply at a form which was bending slowly back of the form of his rescuer. His automatic came down with a terrific crash on the burly Nazi's temple.

His rescuer toppled back, recovered, and from a sitting position fired point-blank into the middle of a German Gestapo officer.

“Right! Now, Son. Hit for the open. Gate over to the right. Follow me. There's one of our Secret Service men there, outside, to take care of the guard. Watch your step! These Nazis are desperate. Our chances are pretty slim, because the place is a veritable machine-gun nest.”

ALMOST before the Sky Devil was finished with his caution a couple of machine-guns blasted. He winced and felt a searing pain in his left forearm.

A bevy of searchlights swept the field. But before their shafts could splash the scurrying Dawes, a monstrous eruption shook the entire zone.

The Sky Devil chuckled. Though that burst was far too close for comfort, it was grand to experience it and realize the support the R.A.F. was not only giving the Commando raiders, but the support he was getting.

They were nearing the gate when a pair of machine-gun muzzles swung. Bill Dawson yelled and dropped flat on his stomach, young Bill emulating his actions. The guns sputtered out as their gunners fell, draped across the pieces.

Now father and son were at the gate, from the shadows of which stepped the gaunt, bent form of Pierre Clauvette.

The gates swung out, and the elder Bill Dawe, no longer Dawson now, even in his own mind, flung his good arm about Pierre's shoulders. He felt the slender form sag in his grasp, and heard a bubbling sound from the old Secret Service man's mouth.

The Sky Devil let Pierre slide to the ground and dropped swiftly to make an examination.

“Dead!” he clipped. “The best man we had! And he—he did this for—us, Son!”

In the blinding glare of anti-aircraft fire, young Pilot Officer Dawe found himself gazing hard into the scarred face before him. Involuntarily his left hand moved up to the painful tear in his own cheek. But blackness now blotted out the fierce, though not unhandsome face before him.

The Sky Devil frisked Pierre Clauvette of any papers he possessed, laid him gently out, then beckoned to his son.

“The jig's nearly up, I think,” he clipped. “My Defiant's over there, against a line of Lombardy poplars. We'll have to sprint for it. One of Pierre's men is on hand to keep the Merlin ticking over, but . . . Listen! Motors! The Huns are using the dummy drome for refueling. Ready for a real scrap—Buddy?”

“Ready, sir. Let's go!”

Dawe was delayed only by the bright flare of shell and bomb fire. The Sky Devil advanced with much caution, hugging the fringe of underbrush against the poplars. But suddenly an inferno broke loose near his plane.

The Dawes broke into a trot. A Messerschmitt seared the field and took off, followed by the balance of its flight. But at the Defiant, throbbing on its temporary chocks, human forms were locked in battle.

Two Nazi guards swung as the escaping men darted from the undergrowth. Shots were exchanged and young Bill Dawe buckled at the right knee.

The fight that followed was one that taxed every ounce of the Sky Devil's strength. His son was not much help to him, and his own left arm handicapped him. But until his gun was dry and finally tossed away as useless after its barrel had crashed through the temple of the last of the guards, he fought as he had fought in 1918, when he had rescued his deputy flight leader from a camp similar to that where young Bill had been incarcerated.

WIPING blood and sweat from his face, he turned and then dragged his son to the ship's side.

"After office for you, Son! Jam your belly into that turret somehow and keep alive. I'll need you on those guns. We've got to run a pretty stiff gauntlet and might not come through. If we miss out, I want you to know it's been nice meeting you again, after all these—"

A fiendish flash of light illuminated the entire area and Pilot Officer Dawe gasped in sheer amazement. Not a foot from his eyes was the face which had always been his most poignant memory—the face of his Sky Devil dad.

"Dad—it's—you!"

His voice was almost a whisper. He felt a strong arm about his shoulders, and heard a sharp cough.

"Cut it now, Buddy, and hop aboard. We've been plenty lucky. Hop up. Leg's bad, eh? And that scar on your face. Bullet?"

"No. Nazi whip, or something. . . . Don't worry I'm glad you reminded me about the scar—Dad. I'm staying alive, awake. There's a spot of fighting to do before we get out of this. I'm going to pay off for this scar. Ugh-h-h—"

He broke off as he was helped up into that new back office. He almost swooned away with the pain in his leg. But he snapped back to alertness, his nerve fibers stiffening. He had a lot to keep alive for. He, in the after office had the job of protecting the tail of his fighting dad, the Sky Devil.

All the shoreline about Boulogne was ablaze, and as the Sky Devil looked down, he wondered if, in that horrible vortex, old Steamboat Cassidy had a chance.

But there was no time for such thoughts. He was getting a speaking-tube signal from the turret.

"Bandits off the starboard, topside, Dad. Swing her a point to port and dip her nose. I'll rake 'em a bit, until you decide what you want to do. . . . Over to you."

"Nice work, Billy. Keep awake and give 'em the works. I'll play 'em for a while. Have to watch out for surprise attack from that cloud formation ahead. Listening out."

C-r-ip-p-p!

Young Bill Dawe cut loose his guns and traversed them in a deadly squirt of death on a diving Messerschmitt. Slugs from the Madsens answered his fire and he felt some rip off the top of his turret hood.

Suddenly his dad shot the Defiant down in a terrific vertical, which almost blacked them both completely out. It was a couple of thousand feet before young Bill recovered. He blinked his eyes, but when fully open again he saw one of the planes he had blazed at go spinning down to the Channel. But below, in a horrible whorl of flame and smoke was the one his dad had dived on.

The Defiant came up in a tight zoom, and went into a swift half-roll. She chandelled, looped, twisted and cavorted like a lashing python. Never had Pilot Officer Dawe gone through such a demonstration of aerobatics—all done so swiftly he hadn't yet discovered the why-for of all this contortion. But now the Defiant was flat out at eighteen thousand feet, and her newly-assembled forward guns were squirting lethal streams of fire.

TWO Junkers bombers were the target, two evil shapes which were dipping already to trip open their bomb doors to spill their deadly sticks on the withdrawing Commandos below.

The Sky Devil went in to attack with utter abandon, but with that cool state of mind which had won for him many a stiff battle in days gone by.

One of the big bombers began to shudder. Flame spiraled from her portside engine housing. She was yawing and staggering when the Sky Devil struck down and let her have it in the face of her after gunfire.

She went down—down—to hiss herself into nothingness in the hungry maw of the rolling Channel.

The Sky Devil had had to overshoot the second ship, but young Bill was in there in the after office, now in a tight crouch at his guns. A bullet parted his hair, and another flicked the stitching in his cheek wound, causing the blood to flow again.

“Front office calling, Son. There’s a launch I’ve got to rescue below. I’ll go straight in under your bandit. Keep him under fire, then stand by for the devil of a last shoot. Listening out.”

The Defiant was going down in a mad dive of death. Forward, the Sky Devil had his eyes glued to his sight, through which he saw a diving Messer, and also a scudding launch zigzagging in a desperate effort to shake off its topside attackers.

The elder Bill Dawe wondered where were those Hurricanes of the 71st Squadron. He wondered if Steamboat Cassidy were aboard that launch. It was highly probable, for Cassidy went into battle action on Commando raids in just such a ship.

But now his Brownings were stuttering. A Nazi ship, attempting to zoom, came right smack into the full deadliness of the Sky Devil’s squirted fire. It fell back, and rolled over to go down.

Now, as the elder Bill Dawe anticipated, all Hades seemed to break loose. He found himself again grinning, in that fierce crouch of death, while the scar on his cheek went into that twitching dance which denoted that all his mental and nerve forces were active to the limit of their capabilities.

He rolled away from a diving attack, took a savage sideswiping blast from the guns of a Nazi fighter. There was no time to speak to young Bill, aft.

Coming out of a loop, the Sky Devil glimpsed the little ship now entering a zone smoke-screened

by a newly arrived corvette patrol. Pompoms were blazing from decks below.

“Blast them!” the Sky Devil growled. “They’re going to get us! They’re—”

Almost too late he dived his ship, as a shuddering crash almost ripped the Defiant from hub to tail assembly.

Bill Dawe quivered now. He could taste the blood from a head wound as it trickled alongside his scar and into his mouth.

“Calling you, Son. Give us a word. Getting pretty groggy. . . . Are you in—there? Over—”

“In—here! Yes—Dad. Lis-ten-ing—ou—”

That was all! The kid was hit, badly hit.

It was now the Sky Devil decided that he must stay alive, awake. He must make his ship hold out for just an hour. Just an hour!

SOMETHING went by him like a monstrous bat in the clouds. He started forward, squeezed his gun button. Another and another shape went by. And now, he saw them zooming—blurred shapes.

His vision was failing him, yet he could see them rounding topside, as if to attack. His thumb again squeezed the button, but there was no stuttering response. His Brownings were dry.

“Cold turkey!” he half groaned. “Cold—tur—”

“There, Dad! Do you see them? Are you getting me? The Seventy-first’s—Hurricanes! Over to you.”

“Thanks Billy. Yeah. I—I see them—almost . . . Hang tight . . . We’re going in. We’ll be up on the mat, but—I guess we can take it—huh? Listening—out.”

A soft throaty chuckle was all the response the Sky Devil got as he kicked his staggering, battered ship about and set her nose on a course for England.

The following morning, a quiet little mouse of a nurse entered Bill Dawe, Senior’s, ward in a country estate hospital.

“Got to move over, Flight Lieutenant Dawson. We’re rather crowded. We have to bring in a very irate young pilot officer. He’s very angry.”

“Angry?”

“That’s it. Angry because—because he didn’t get posted here with you before. Oh, hello, here comes the parade now.”

And as the orderlies wheeled in an extra hospital cot there strode in, with Squadron Leader

Church ahead of him, a limping, huge man form in battle dress—

“Cass!” the Sky Devil gasped. “They didn’t get you?”

“P’shaw, no. I wouldn’t let ‘em because—well because I knew you and this young hellion son of yours would need me to get you out of your jam. Eh, Church?”

Squadron Leader Church smiled thinly, but warmly. He stepped over and squeezed the Sky Devil’s shoulder gently.

“There’s still to be a Court of Inquiry, Dawe. But I’m going to try and switch it into a sort of—what do you call it across the Atlantic?—a Father and Son affair. Lord knows what I’m going to do with you both when you come out of this. I simply can’t stand for a repetition of what has just culminated in this—this amazing meeting—and yet I can’t separate you now. Well, cheerio for the moment. I’ll have to think up something. Meanwhile, thanks. . . Thanks a lot ol’—chap. ‘By!”

He and Cassidy withdrew and the Sky Devil turned toward his bandaged son.

Peeking out at him from the rim of a bandage a steely gray-blue eye flashed him a message, but the Sky Devil blinked hard and turned away.

Soon, perhaps in a few moments, he would turn again and say hello to his son—a chip off the old block if there ever was one. But this was one of those intimate little moments when even such a battle-seasoned veteran as the famed Sky Devil had to buckle down to a more claiming emotion.