

# The Sky Devil's Son

By Harold F. Cruickshank

*A flying hellion was the fledgling son of the old Sky Devil, a man in his own right but with a problem to solve that demanded more than flaming victories over master pilots of the Hun.*

LIEUTENANT DAN MARSH, standing in the swaying basket of a kite balloon, started. His keen ears had caught the thrum of engines and props. A flight of planes was scudding east towards the enemy lines.

"A flight from the Sky Devil's squadron again, sir," jerked Marsh's companion, a balloon sergeant. "Hot old devil that major, sir. You—lookout! God! What d'you think of that?"

The sergeant and Marsh had instinctively ducked as a long-range German shell screamed through the air beneath them, to smash a fearful gout of flame and clay from a field nearby.

"Those are the guns which we are here to spot—the very battery which we haven't been able to place, Sergeant. Blast the Sky Devil's flight. Had I been watching my front I'd have spotted that heavy's flash. Now, let's settle down to business...."

But Dan Marsh's eyes continued to follow the flight of a swiftly speeding Nieuport, a plane which broke across from the main flight to come zooming up over the balloon.

For the briefest period of a split second, the eyes of the lieutenant and those of the flight major met. Then, without a sign of salutation, the pilot turned his bus and gave her the gun.

Marsh's teeth snapped together with an audible click, and his hands knotted up into hard, gleaming fists.

"Not what you'd call a very sociable old duck, that, sir," snapped the sergeant. "Most of them pilots waves, in passin'. But that ol' Sky Devil, he's a crust—a man driver; a man hater. An' you didn't seem so fussy about flaggin' him a salute, sir. Is there—have you two met?"

"Sergeant Frame," hissed Marsh. "If you pipe another word I'll throw you overside." Then

noting Frame's confusion he added: "Sorry, ol' man, but—well, listen, Sarge. That pilot is my dad."

"Your father! Strike me dippy! He ain't very old, sir."

"No. Around forty-eight or so. Faked a bit on his age to get him by. We had a split, Sarge. It was over a girl. You know how we young bucks will play? Well, dad's sort of old fashioned—sincere and all that; while I—well, I wasn't. Take more after mother, I reckon. However, hell was raised over my affair with the girl, and because dad could not, or would not understand, mother and I, we—"

Marsh snapped his glasses to his eyes and swept the enemy territory—to his front.

"Did you hear another plane, Sergeant?" he called, still searching the eastern horizon.

"Can't say I did, sir, but—Gawd! Here comes another heavy...."

"H'mmm—closer, that one, Sergeant," snapped Marsh. "Where did she split?"

"God's truth, sir, I do believe he's registering the truck outfit. Nice mess if he hits the winch with us up here."

"Where did that one burst?"

"Two hundred yards west of the truck—short of the other one, but splendid alignment, sir. I—here comes another, sir. She's—"

*Ze-e-e-o-o-o!* Like a rampant siren, another heavy screamed over. Dan Marsh jerked a pencil to his field map, a thin smile playing with the corners of his mouth, his brows well arched.

"Call below, Sergeant. I have that battery. Quick! Give them this: D-9 F 6.7. Put us through to our six-inch guns. It'll take that size to do any good. Got it? Fine!"

The sergeant put the call through to the ground signaler.

Frame had more than a sneaking regard for Lieutenant Dan Marsh—a splendid young Yankee, who had come to British balloons some weeks before, and Frame knew how to measure his men. To him, and he wasn't far out, Dan Marsh was a white man, with guts. He was a fighter with a real level head.

So, he was the Sky Devil's Son! Son of that major whose name was known from one end of the front to the other!

Frame looked up. Marsh was still sweeping the ground, forward, at the enemy positions. Suddenly he shifted angle and brought his glasses up to cover a patch of drift cloud well above and forward of the swinging sausage.

"See anything new, sir?"

"H'mmm—no, Sarge, but I keep thinking I hear a plane. Must be imagination—another factor I inherited from my mother. She was a beauty, Sarge—an actress and we hit off swell together. Haven't you heard a hum like a plane's motor?"

"No, sir. Must be fancy, I reckon. But, you was talkin' about the family, sir. Go on, I—"

BUT Lieutenant Marsh made no immediate reply. His face was drawn in an expression of concern.

"Our six-inchers are damned slow in getting into action, Sergeant," he suddenly rasped. "Give them another buzz below. Ask them what the hell's gone wrong."

"Right, sir." Frame snapped a crisp message below, then straightened to face his officer.

"I hope you didn't think I was forward, askin' you to go on with your family story, sir," he gulped. "You're different from our officers, y'see. A guy like me wouldn't dare to talk much to 'em. Sorry, sir."

"It's okay, Sergeant. Why shouldn't we talk? Hell! Here we are in the same basket—two human beings, built of flesh and blood. But, there isn't much more to tell. You noticed how the major breezed by, without a sign. That's how he is always. If I were to visit him he'd raise hell. He's a hellcat. Once, I was with Ten Squadron—his squadron. Rather than have me sent down he got me transferred to balloons. But—for all his iron,

Sarge, mother and I thought the world of him. If anything happened to that old Sky Devil I'd—"

"Steady, sir. Glasses a point south of east. Is that plane one of ours?"

Marsh snapped the glasses to his eyes.

"An Albatros, Sergeant. I knew I was hearing a plane. He's heading this way, I can see it all now, by God! Been cruising back and forth along that drift cloud bank. Spotting for that super battery. God! Look! He's burning up Nineteen kite. Got him cold! I hope those chaps get away. Yes, there they go. One chute out O.K.; but the other—look, Sergeant. He's dropping like a stone!"

Marsh turned, and their eyes met. One chute had failed to open.

"I'd better have them lower away, sir," jerked the non com. But Marsh caught his arm.

"Wait, Sergeant. I can't leave before I have spotted our six-inch shot. What the devil has tied up artillery? Here we've got this super battery that's been raising the devil with our back railheads for weeks. We've got them cold, and we can't get our guns into action. Phone down, and ask them what's wrong."

Frame again called into the mouthpiece.

"They're in touch with artillery now, sir. Say the enemy is after the ammo dump at the back of our section. That accounts for the strafe we've just watched."

"He's not above picking up the balloon section by the way, either," Marsh added, his face now a serious mask, as he continued to watch the plane—a streak of red which shot across his line of vision.

"Get your chute adjusted. Sergeant," he snapped. "That red devil's coming. Over you go."

"But, sir—what about you? I—"

"Don't you understand English? Over you go. Not another word," thundered a now different Marsh. "I'll stay and check our six-inch fire."

The sergeant snapped shut the fittings of his chute and threw a leg overside.

"I'm sorry, sir," he jerked. "Wish to God you'd come on down, though. It doesn't seem right this—Gee! Lookit, that Boche pilot has just fired a flare."

Almost immediately a long whine was heard, and then a tearing crash below. Less than eighty yards from the winch truck a fearful explosion blasted earth and rock skywards.

“Over you go, Sarge,” snapped Marsh. “Best of luck!”

The sergeant waved an arm and hopped over. Down—like a plummet he fell, and Marsh’s lips tightened until a puff of white silk registered a perfect opening.

“One of the best,” he breathed. “I couldn’t sacrifice a man like Frame.”

Suddenly a geyser of smoke and flame ahead marked the opening shot of the British six-inch. Marsh turned and barked into the phone.

“Good shooting,” he called. “I’ll give you exact range in a second.”

At the second burst Marsh heaved a proud sigh. The British gunners had executed a perfect bracket.

“Lay them dead between the bracket,” he called into the phone. “Deflection right and left...carry on; and stand by to lower away. German plane coming in fast now. Hold her—I said hold her until I give you the—”

He sprang for the basket rim. The Boche was less than a mile distant, now obviously streaking towards the balloon.

Major Marsh’s patrol was finished. He had dismissed his flight, and was now streaking north by east on a solo venture. He too had been getting digs from Wing about this super German battery. He desired to spot these heavies.

Suddenly, he glimpsed a tremendous eruption off his starboard side, forward, and a set of earthworks went blasting skywards. His lips tightened. In a flash he realized that the British heavies had found an important target, and were threshing a suspected area. And then, as if to confirm his suspicions, a long lean gun barrel jerked up its snout and leaped fiendishly, vomiting flame.

“That’s it!” jerked the Sky Devil “Our six-inchers are right on them—those super guns. Got ‘em! Must be that—balloon outfit. That young devil’s some use after—”

As he muttered, the Sky Devil instinctively turned his sharp gaze to the west. He started as he glimpsed the speck which marked the flight of the German Albatros.

“God!” he breathed. “Bearing right in on 13 balloon—Dan’s balloon, and that young fool still up in the basket. Why doesn’t he jump? No

disgrace to leap out of that basket in a chute. I’d hate to have to do it at any time.”

WITH a snarl, Marsh kicked left rudder hard, then pulled his throttle wide, his nose headed for the west—for the balloon, which still hung at over three thousand feet.

Bullets from German ground guns splashed through the Sky Devil’s fabric, and an Archie opened up a murderous fire. But the major paid little heed to them. The German Albatros was diving in on the sausage and Dan was still in the basket.

In the swaying balloon basket Dan Marsh was jerking frantically on the straps of his chute, whose straps were cut. The German had dived, and as he dived his Spandaus opened in a short, terrible duet. Bullets cut through the basket—a hellish thing to do.

Dan Marsh gasped. He realized that his chute was hopeless, until he could fix it; and there seemed little chance of his being allowed to do that with this red devil hovering around him.

A white flare broke from the German plane. Dan saw, also, the trailing aerial wire of a wireless set. It flashed to him that this pilot was signaling back to his long range guns. He had definite range on the ammunition dump and the balloon. God! They would make a clean-up!

And then came the whine of a heavy, and a mad splash of flame, below, just off the truck.

Dan sprang to the phone.

“Ho, below,” he called. “I can’t help it. This devil has cut my chute straps. Yes, cut through my basket. My only chance is to get it fixed. Lower away—steadily. He may fire her any minute and I don’t want to be too low when I jump....”

The Boche zoomed, and as he passed the basket Dan caught a flash of the leer in the man’s face.

“Playing me like a cat plays a bloody mouse,” he hissed. “Damn these lousy grubs. A man hasn’t a chance. Give me a plane, an engine—some action—a chance!”

He worked feverishly at the broken strapping, jerking a knot together savagely with his teeth, cursing the army, the air service, through his set lips. Then he cursed Sky Devil Marsh, the man who had got him sent down from Number Ten down to the balloon section.

He felt the basket jerk violently. A heavy had whined over, although he scarcely heard its flight above the roar of the German plane.

He stood frozen against the basket rim, until his eyes found the phone. With trembling hand he lifted the mouthpiece to his lips.

“Ho—below. What’s—that you. Frame? What—What! You say he got a hit on a corner of the truck. Winch gone? Then I’m stranded!”

The phone clattered from his fingers. He was out of luck, unless his chute could be made to hold. The winch was hit—jammed!

The Albatros roared down, to streak by the basket, and Marsh’s hand closed over the butt of his automatic as he caught the mocking wave of the pilot’s arm.

“Blast you, you rotten swine,” he snarled. “I’ll—I’ll give it to you next time you cross my sights. I’ll—”

Dan broke off short. The Boche had suddenly changed his tactics. He was climbing around the top of the kite....

MAJOR MARSH came in like a silver streak—like a bolt from some fusing comet, his guns roaring wide open.

“Dad!” Dan gulped. Then his voice clogged in his throat. The Albatros had banked around, and her Spandaus crackled in a deathly song, mingling with the chatter of the major’s Vickers.

The silver Nieu streaked through space. Dan watched it, breathlessly, yearningly; and then, suddenly, he found that his fingers had made another knot in the chute straps. He came to life—to action!

Came the whine of another German shell. Dan gasped. The British six-inchers had failed to locate this German heavy. Dan shot a glance overside, then started back.

“God! They got a dead hit on the truck—got the crew....” The balloon suddenly lurched, almost swapping ends; then, to Dan’s horror, he realized that she was free—rising, and dragging a full length of cable. Once, he had seen a balloon break loose in a storm, and he shuddered at the thought of his present predicament.

Now his fingers worked frenziedly. He fumbled, then split a harsh oath from his tightly drawn lips.

“Steady down, you fool. Another hitch or two and you have her.”

He was now looking down—down—through popping eyes. He was rising rapidly, rising skywards in a runaway kite. And then he jerked his head up at the throaty roar of the two planes. Vickers and Spandaus exchanged a murderous fire. The German ace had an advantage, though. He had height. But, he seemed intent on finishing off his prey in the basket, for now he came hurtling through space, towards the balloon.

Major Marsh Immelmanned with a grace of movement and quickness of mind action that brought a thrill to Dan. From the Nieuport’s nose a sheet of flame slashed the sky. The German’s body slumped forward and then a tell-tale wisp of smoke coiled back from his engine area.

“Dad—good ol’ dad,” broke from Dan’s parched throat.

Then he wheeled sharply, as he felt a pronounced tug on the basket. In his mad, screaming flight to save his son’s life, the Sky Devil had run afoul the dragging cable. God! He had ripped half a wing off. He was skidding down—down to a certain crash!

Lieutenant Marsh’s eyes closed. Then he started and hitched on his chute. The knots had been tied.

Now, his mind was on his father, the man who had undoubtedly saved his life. With a muttered supplication he shot himself overside, out into space. Like a plummet he dropped, then jerked feebly on the ring. One—two—God! Was there no hope!

Then a sharp tug on his harness. The chute had opened. It was holding. Dan closed his eyes. He slipped away into unconsciousness.

A broken leg at landing brought him back to a state of semi-consciousness. He had crashed badly in a tree, but the pain was quickly soothed as he crumpled in a swoon.

WEEKS slipped by before Dan Marsh was able to walk, even with the aid of a stick. He had refused to leave France, because he knew that the Sky Devil, his dad, still remained.

Dan was anxious to be back forward—to be near Number Ten. The youngster’s cracked leg was healing well, and he gave it every chance for complete recovery.

He felt that he could soon leave now.

Seated in the grounds of a field hospital, he suddenly started as he glimpsed a familiar figure walking towards him. It was a flying officer. Instantly he recognized Captain Barry, the medical officer of Number Ten Squadron.

“Dan,” the surgeon darted forward, hand outstretched. “God, but I’m glad I found you. I’ve chased all over. They told me Number three, and I finally find you at Number nine. Moved recently, eh?”

“Yep, Barry, ol’ chap. A day’s march—a step nearer the front line. Expect to get my release here in a few days. But how’s dad?” Dan’s brows shot up, questioningly.

“He’s not so bad, generally, son, but the old Sky Devil will gradually lose his sight. He—”

“What! You don’t mean dad’ll go blind!”

“Nothing can save him, Dan,” was the calm reply. “Nothing under the sun. He got a nasty swipe across the eyes by a length of wiring. You heard, of course, that he got a bar to his D.S.O. for that rescue stunt! But that won’t help his sight any. Now, pull yourself together. You’ve got to help out. Major Marsh refuses to listen to me when I tell him he’s done. He wants to stay with Number Ten. Says his eyes are okay. He can see a little, but it’s only his long experience with equipment and so forth which helps him distinguish objects.”

“Good God, Barry! He should be sent home, or, at least to England. What are you thinking of? Is he at Number Ten now?”

“Yes. I have him under my care, Dan. I know I should write him out, but I can’t do it, son. We can’t take him from Number Ten. It would kill him. His whole soul is wrapped up in the squadron; and, under his iron-like hide he is soft towards every member.

“Blast me! When you left Number Ten he stood and watched you until you became a mere speck. I watched him, and the tears were streaming down his cheeks, Dan. I damned near got my head bitten off when I offered a word of comfort. He cursed me for a nit-wit, blasted me to all the fourteen corners of hades. You know, Dan, a lot of bluster to cover up his true feelings. There’s a man, a real, honest-to-God white man, and I’m hoping that you’ll swallow any pride you might have, any antipathy towards him and—”

“Yes, what, Barry? Go on. What d’you want?” jerked the lieutenant.

“We all want you to come back to Number Ten and look after this old sky warrior. We’ve got to keep him with us, Dan. I wouldn’t send him out, now. Not if it cost me my rank. He’s got to stay. But, we’ve got to cover him up. He’ll have to go up in a two-seater machine, once in a while; and—you’re the best pilot we ever knew, Dan. See what I’m getting at?”

For a moment there was silence. Dan Marsh was stirred. He was speechless, as a wave of emotion swept through his big frame. It was a pity that Major Marsh had not understood; or, if he had understood, that he had let a stubborn pride come between them. Dan’s heart kicked savagely with strong feeling for his dad. He must go back. But what would the Sky Devil think of this!

“Have you talked with dad on my return to Ten, Barry?” he asked.

“Yes, and no, Dan. I mentioned you, and he swore like a trooper. Said you were a locoed boob to stow yourself up in that basket so long. Claimed he would never have hit that cable if it hadn’t been for your delay in getting overside. But there wasn’t the old fire in his voice, Dan. Once, when he had a visitor, a major from Canuck Cavalry, I heard him shooting off about you. And, say, I’m not going to tell you what he said, in as many words, but to Sky Devil Marsh, you’re the only skyman in France who knows how to handle a battle plane, or a set of guns. I found out the major’s reason for bumping you out of Number Ten. It wasn’t over the fact of you washing out those two Camels, Dan. It was because he thought you’d be safer up with those kites!”

Dan Marsh sprang to his feet, hurting his strapped limb as he did so.

“You don’t mean that, Barry? Why, dad blazed hell out of me. Called me a nincompoop, kiwi blunderer. I believed he was genuinely sore. Great God! All the time he thinks I’m a real skyman, huh?”

“Exactly! He acknowledges you as the Sky Devil’s Son, Dan. How about returning, keeping Number Ten on the map and holding the major in France?”

“I’ll come, Barry. But, what about my transfer? Will H.Q. sanction it?”

“H.Q. has already done so, Dan,” said the surgeon, with a grin. “You see, our adjutant made application for you some two weeks ago. By rights, you actually belong to Number Ten right now. Of course we haven’t spilt the good news to your father, yet; but that will come when the time is ripe. I’ll see what I can do to speeding your dismissal from this hospital. You’re fed up here, eh?”

“To the teeth, Barry. The sooner, the quicker. God! So I’m to be the Sky Devil’s Son?”

DAN MARSH turned and limped away along a path which led across the sand dunes, to the sea. He wanted to be alone, to think, where the murmuring surf acted like a tonic on a troubled mind. He was going back to his dad—to the proud old iron-hearted Sky Devil, whose record as a skyman was second to none.

For a moment the young skyman trembled as he felt the weight of his approaching responsibilities surge in to crush him. Then, with a start, his broad shoulders squared and his hands rolled up into knotted fists.

“I’ll see him through, Betty,” he breathed, looking out to sea. Dan Marsh was speaking to his mother whom he had known by her stage name, Betty. The beautiful, vivacious Mrs. Marsh had gone down to an untimely death in a torpedoed American ship two years previously, on her way to England and Red Cross work.

Out of the murmuring of roaming billows, Dan seemed to hear her respond. With a shrug, he turned and limped back to a big marquee, where he roared to an orderly. He wanted extra treatment for this healing leg—massage, exercise. He wanted action.

A pretty American nurse chuckled and nudged a surgeon at her side.

“If we hold that young Yank here another week we’ll be doing wonders,” she said. “I’ll bet you a pair of—whatever you name—he’ll be up and breaking his neck inside of ten days.”

“Name them now, sister. You win,” grinned the doctor. “I’ve got instructions to release him next Wednesday. Know who he is?”

“No! I wish I did. He’s fearfully handsome. Who—”

“The Sky Devil’s son, sister. Son of that old hellcat from Number Ten Squadron. The man

who’s been giving Richthofen a run for sky honors.”

The girl tossed a mass of auburn curls and turned.

“Perhaps there is something I can do,” she breathed, moving towards Marsh. “I’d—”

“You’d be wasting your time, nurse,” chuckled the surgeon. “And don’t blush. Not even you could hold that boy now. He’s slated for the sky trails. Better wait till they pick him up and run him back here. He’ll maybe need you then for, if I don’t miss my guess, he’s going where hell’s adrift—going to take over from the Sky Devil, and that means action.”

Dan Marsh looked up, caught the eyes of the girl but quickly lowered his gaze.

“Step on it, orderly,” he snapped. “Put some more ginger into your strokes. Hell! I want to get out of here—got to get out. But if I have to look at that ginger-headed Yank nurse much longer, damned if I won’t start to goldbrick. That’s better. God! I believe I feel a tingle. There’s a hundred francs in it for you if I’m out of here in a week.”

“You’ll be out an’ it won’t cost you no money, sir,” panted the orderly. “This leg’s almost normal. See the change in color? We’ll have you fit again, don’t worry. But, if it was me, beggin’ yer pardon, sir, an’ a pretty Dinah like that nurse was to—uh, well, if I got half what them eyes has been givin’ you, I’d swing the bloody lead for the duration. Not arf I wouldn’t Gawd! Ain’t she a dream woman...?”

But Dan Marsh was looking down at his leg, watching the patch where normally flowing blood suffused the discolored flesh. It was coming back. He’d be fit again; and that’s all that mattered to him. It would not be long until he took his place behind the chattering guns of a fighting ship. The Sky Devil’s son was coming into his heritage.

“WELL! You’re back again, eh?”

“Yes, dad.”

They faced each other across the Sky Devil’s desk—father and son.

Dan Marsh felt a lump in his throat as he watched the eyes of his dad blink, as they had never blinked before. Gone was the old glitter of steel, or the dancing barbed lights which had seemed to leap right out at one. Major Marsh sat

back and put up a big bluff, through almost sightless eyes.

“What flight have they assigned you to?” snapped the major.

“None, yet, sir. I believe it is to rest with you. I’m a—a spare, at your service. Any orders for today?”

“How’s your leg?”

“Fit as ever, sir.”

The major leaned forward in his chair. “They railroaded you back here to help cover up this damnable trouble to my eyes, Dan. I know. I may be going physically blind, but I’m very wide awake. I know why you’re here. But I’m still running Number Ten. You’ll take your orders from me, and there’ll be no heroics. I can see far more than I’m given credit for. I want you to understand that you’re here as an ordinary pilot. I don’t want any wet nurse hangin’ around me. Great God! I’ll go up and show you all how to fly.”

The major was on his feet, his bulky frame trembling, his iron fists gleaming white through their hair and tan.

“Have two Nieuports ready for three o’clock. I’ll take you up and see if you still have the feel at the controls.”

“But, Dad, you can’t fly alone!”

“Don’t dad me! Do as you’re ordered, or get to hell back to your wallowing sausages. I’ll show you whether or not I can fly alone. When I fall down on the job will be time enough to admit defeat. Damnation! What—”

“When you fall down, dad,” interposed the lieutenant, “you’ll fall mighty hard. You mustn’t go up alone. It’s sheer folly.”

“You have your orders, Mr. Marsh,” was the crisp retort. “Those Nieuports will be at the deadline by three o’clock. You’ll pilot one, and I take the other. Now go. Get out!”

Dan shrugged, saluted smartly, and turned on his heel.

AS THE door closed on his son. Major Marsh opened a desk drawer and fished out a set of heavy-lensed glasses. He fitted them to his eyes, adjusted a set of flying goggles over them, then strode to a mirror.

“Nobody’ll get wise,” he breathed. “Nobody knows, but Barry, and he won’t give me away. By

God I I can get by with these lamps for a time; long enough to give Dan a chance. He must get whipped up to a point where he can take over Number Ten, and then being blind won’t come so damned hard.”

The major grunted and, at a knock on his door, whipped off the goggles and spectacles. Barry entered, and stood watching his chief from beneath lowered brows.

“You’re going up?” he jerked.

“Yes, I must, Barry. I’ve got to whip him into shape. Must get him his captaincy, but—he’ll only get it on the merit of his sky work. When he’s fit to take over. I’ll—well, I’ll be as blind as a damned stable bat. The specs seem O.K., Barry. Objects are quite clear. I could see clear across the tarmac with them.”

But Barry merely shrugged and shook his head. He couldn’t stir up any enthusiasm, much as he’d have given a right hand to help his chief.

“They’ll be all right for short periods, sir,” he said. “But—they can’t help you long. Sorry to have to tell you this, but I know. The eye was a pet study of mine and I have my specialist’s degree.”

“Well, don’t let’s go nuts over it, Barry. Let’s have a drink.”

Major Marsh held his glass before his blinking eyes and his thin lips moved.

“A toast, Barry: The Sky Devil’s Son!”

Captain Barry drank, emptying his glass at a gulp, then he turned and hurried from the billet.

At precisely three o’clock Dan Marsh lifted his head from the cockpit of a throbbing Nieuport. A tall figure was moving towards another Nieuport, Major Marsh, whose flying goggles were already adjusted.

Dan was stirred by a strong quiver of misgiving, as he watched his father stumble around a wing tip, then clutch at a strut for support. He was amazed when the major moved clear and walked firmly up to his plane.

“All set?” came in a deep, gruff voice.

“All set, sir. Where are we going?” Dan jerked. “Any particular place or is this just a test flight?”

“We’re going east of Vimy,” snapped the major. “There are some Boche rail-heads Wing has wanted for some time. We haven’t been able to get within a mile of them. Important places too.

Let me see your map. Or, better still, find this position.”

The major craftily avoided any close contact with Dan’s map, but gave out a number of positions, which Dan was able to find and mark.

“I’ll lead off,” he said. “Remember—we’re not coming back without location of those positions. Cruise, humph! There’s a war on, sir. Once we have those positions for Wing, well—Number Ten Squadron will climb still a few notches higher.” The major broke off short with a grunt.

“Get ready,” he snapped.

Dan opened his engine a notch wider, then eased her down to a steady *thrum-m-m-m*. The Sky Devil was aboard and the roar of his motor seemed like a challenge to all skymen. His left arm waved and mechanics jerked the chocks free. Then, like an arrow unleashed, his Nieu shot from the deadline. With a sigh Dan Marsh gave the signal and his ship, too, streaked across the tarmac.

They were up! The major’s ship climbing fast, steadily. Below, eager faces were turned skywards, as the two silver birds came around in a left bank. Soon they were lost in the distant haze of an afternoon sun; and Captain Barry strode off to the hospital hut.

“A glorious old devil!” he muttered. “A wonderful, damned old foot. Good luck to him.”

Dan Marsh was glad to again be at the controls of a plane. His keen eyes searched the sky on every hand for signs of enemy craft.

Suddenly an Archie coughed a hollow, sinister tone of warning. Its shell, a burst of black, uncoiled before the spinning prop of the leading Nieuport.

Major Marsh kept on at an even keel, then put his ship into a spin. Dan gasped. Scarcely had the forward Nieuport dropped than a savage Archie burst split the sky wide open. Another second and Major Marsh would have been blown to atoms.

Now a veritable barrage cut loose and both ships maneuvered with all the skill their pilots possessed. Dan Marsh never took his eyes from his dad’s bus. Never had he seen such stunt flying as the Sky Devil demonstrated as they ran the fearful gauntlet of the H.E. barrage.

THEN the major commenced to climb. His nose was set for a patch of floating drift cloud—a

mere puff of white hanging lazily in the blue. Dan went up, trying to figure out the major’s move. He could see no advantage in finding that patch of white. For the moment they had thrown the anti-aircraft gunners off range; and now was the moment to streak through and get the positions Wing was so eager for.

Suddenly, from the fringe of the cloud bank a black speck shot into view. Dan gasped, and gunned his ship. The black speck had changed to a streaking red devil—a fast Albatros. It was plummeting down on the nose of Major Marsh’s Nieuport,

“That proves the rotten condition of his eyes,” Dan groaned, rapping out a warning burst on his Lewis. “He’s cold meat, if I don’t lure that Boche away from him.” He kicked right rudder hard. His ship went over in a roll, then commenced to spin earthwards, loosely, like a falling leaf.

Like a falcon, the Boche pilot glimpsed the hurtling plane beneath him. Face set, fingers taut on the gun controls he shifted stick left, then down, and plummeted earthwards in a power dive.

Dan felt the *frpp* of hard bullets rip through his fabric. He continued to spin, heart plunging like a trip-hammer. Then, as though prompted by some finer instinct, he pulled his ship out flat. A quick glance over his shoulder gave him a view of the Boche. The red devil had overshot, but was coming up in a zoom.

The Yank banked around off the other’s sights, then dived, coming up and over in an Immelmann turn. But, as he flattened out, he realized that he was facing one of Germany’s best—a fighter of the caliber of the famous Red Baron. This was no ordinary sky rider, but a devil, whose Spandaus sneezed sheets of deathly lead.

They maneuvered about each other, like wary eagles. The Boche then gunned his ship and streaked through the air, zooming hard past Dan’s nose. A short burst of ten rounds belched from the snouts of twin Spandaus, and Marsh felt a chip from his cowling go whirring past his head.

Before he had much opportunity to slip off, the Boche had come around in a tight bank. Their whirring props were almost in line. Eyes gleaming through their goggles, the rival pilots’ fingers tripped their triggers. Dan Marsh had only one gun—a crackling Lewis, but he knew it like a book. As he came in, the Boche rocked his plane,

in an endeavor to minimize the other's aim, his own guns dancing their flaming dance of death.

A hundred feet separated them. Dan shoved down on his stick. A short dive and again he Immelmanned. And, this time, when he leveled off, there was no mistake. His nose was dead behind and slightly above the Albatros' tail.

The German flung his ship into a spin, steadied her into a dive, watching for an opening to zoom. But the sibilant swish of Lewis bullets past his head kept him down. The Yank had outmaneuvered him, and was pressing his advantage. Dan Marsh was wise to the fact that an Albatros was nose heavy. He would hold her in that fatal power dive until his Lewis had put her out.

From above, a grin splitting his hard-set mouth, Major Marsh strained his injured eyes to the utmost. Like a parent eagle, he volplaned down until his Nieu cruised not more than two hundred feet above the streaking ships below.

"The best bit of sky work I've seen in a long time," he snapped. "Just what I wanted. God! I wanted Dan to show me what he could do—while these eyes of mine held out. He'll get the Red Baron next. He's a match for 'em all. A—"

The major broke off his soliloquy to squint eastwards. Were those specs, or blurs ahead, Allied planes, or fancy? He damned his eyes; slipped a finger up under the goggles and specs and rubbed them. For a brief second his tortured orbs seemed to clear. He gasped, as an oncoming plane banked in the sunlight, revealing two large black Maltese crosses.

"Boches, by the gods!" he snapped. "They're coming in to the rescue of their chief. Dan—Dan—" He yelled overside, but his voice was flung back, by the mocking roar of his engine.

A low groan escaped him. He had led Dan into this hell—led him in purposely, to pit him against the great Von Heidtz, the famous flying count who deputized for the Red Baron. When Major Marsh had left the tarmac of Number Ten, he hadn't been concerned with rear German positions; he was going out to meet the famed Boche flier, to have Dan meet him. In the event of any untoward circumstance, he had intended, with the last of his strained sight, to dive to his son's rescue.

He shot a glance overside. Why in God's name wasn't Dan firing? He had the Boche cold, but his gun was silent. With a snort of disgust, the major shoved his Nieu into a dive and went screaming down like a plummet.

Above, and slightly to one side of Dan's ship, he leveled off and waved an arm overside. Dan's fingers were struggling with his gun, and then it dawned on the major that the boy's gun was jammed. Had the Boche been able to pull up sharp out of that killing dive, Dan's meat was cooked.

The major came over and dived again, his own fingers ready at the controls of his Lewis, but—in a flash Dan caught his move. He waved him away, and in that same instant his Lewis commenced to stutter.

A burst of twenty rounds found its hellish mark. The German's frame slumped in the cockpit; and, as Dan back-sticked hard, the Albatros commenced to spin, a tell-tale spiral of smoke coiling up from her engine.

SUDDENLY, tracer streaked the air. Dan gasped. He kicked his bus into a left skid, as a streaking Fokker roared past his wingspread. And then—as he zoomed, he glimpsed his father's Nieu go flashing up into the sun. He saw the flash of red from the Nieu's Lewis. The Sky Devil was riding dead for the belly of the second Fokker, his lead striking murderously.

As he climbed for advantage, Dan adjusted a new pan of ammo. The top Fokker had shaken off the menacing fire of Major Marsh's gun; and now—the Sky Devil was banking around. With a gasp Dan realized that his father's sight must have suddenly given out, for the upper Nieuport was diving on himself.

Tracer—the tracer from one of his own guns, was cutting past his head. A low groan escaped him—a groan that was meant more in sympathy for his dad, who didn't realize what he was doing.

Now he was directly in the line of fire. There was only one thing for it: A spin—a falling leaf drop. His right wing tip went over, as a roaring Nieuport went flashing by, and then, Dan's ship commenced to flop, in apparent helplessness. Major Marsh came around. Through dimmed vision, he glimpsed the blur of Dan's falling plane, and shoved down on his stick. He streaked earthwards for the kill, but suddenly his fogged

eyes saw nothing but a dancing haze—a maze of blue sea.

Dan had slipped out from under and was now gunning to get atop his dad's plane. Two Fokkers came in and the chatter of four Spandaus was like a merciless chant of death.

But the young Yank pilot was now desperate. He was between the murderous Fokkers, and his helpless father. His Lewis slashed at the belly of a Fokker. The black-crossed ship yawed, staggered, then seemed to crack up.

Below, from the earthworks of the British infantry positions, men watched the skyfight breathlessly. They watched the silver of Dan's Nieuport as it flashed against the blue main.

A splash of black-red in the sky! The Fokker heeled over, seemed to hang in mid-air a moment, then commenced her spiral of death.

Dan Marsh licked his parched lips as he brought his Nieuport around. His eyes ranged the sky for a glimpse of his dad, or the other German machine, but they were not anywhere at his immediate level.

Suddenly he caught, through the corner of an eye, as he looked down, two planes, whipping in tight maneuvers around each other, and, for a moment, Dan's heart seemed to stop.

Flames from the German's Spandaus were streaking across the sky, seemingly dead into the Nieuport.

An odd cry escaping him, the young Yank went down—down. Wind tore through his wires and struts like a horde of screeching fiends. Before his eyes was a picture that shook him from head to foot—his almost blind dad battling bravely to the last, against one of Germany's foremost aces.

*Crr-r-rrp! Cr-r-r-rrp!* Dan's Lewis warmed up, as he shot through space. How much longer his Nieuport could be expected to bear up under the severe tests, was a question that never occurred to Dan. His mind was filled with but one overwhelming thought, and he continued to dive with utter abandon—wide open.

With a whine his Nieuport plummeted to the battle zone, above the maneuvering planes. Dan leveled off. He snatched at a flare pistol and fired a white splash across his dad's dimmed vision. And then the youngster's face paled, turned ashen. The major's body seemed slumped forward,

helplessly, his left arm hanging limp over the port side of the cockpit.

A blinding fury swept Dan's frame. Red lights danced before his eyes, and he bit off a snarled oath. He kicked his Nieu around, then dived squarely at the Boche. It seemed to those who watched from below that a collision was unavoidable. Dan's nose seemed headed dead for the rear of the Fokker's cockpit, his gun dancing on her mount.

The Boche slipped off, attempted a spin, but almost crashed into the Yank, who had overshot. Dan continued on down, then, as tracer swept between his planes, he back-sticked hard, coming up in a furious zoom.

He had played his last card well, for as his nose was almost at stalling point, the belly of the Fokker streaked by. Dan's Lewis chattered itself dry into the German's vitals.

Dan pulled his ship all flat, then banked around above the flaming wreck of his enemy. For the last brief second or so, he had forgotten about his father's plight. Now—his whole being trembled. He was almost afraid to search the skies; afraid to look overside.

Dan suddenly glimpsed the Nieuport through a haze of gun smoke below. It was spiraling down. With locked controls, the Sky Devil was going down from his last battle. He would crash, fortunately on Allied soil, or in No-man's land.

Again Dan Marsh threw his Nieu into a dive. A clean section of British highway showed up, a distinct ribbon in marked contrast to the surrounding, blasted area. Dan held his nose for the road. He must get down, although—it seemed unlikely that the major would ever recover from his crash.

DAN'S wheels hit the hard plank road. A tire burst, and the Yank almost ground looped. Men scurried to his assistance, but—the Nieu floundered and bumped to a fairly safe halt. Like a streak Dan whipped around in the cockpit. At that moment his father's Nieuport hit the edge of an artillery emplacement. Her wings folded up. With a shudder, Dan closed his eyes and slipped into a helpless heap in the cockpit.

It was dusk, when Dan strode down the steps of a forward dugout. A runner had come for him. Major Marsh was lying in the care of an infantry

medical officer. They, the infantry, had pulled him clear, seconds before his smashed Nieuport had burst into flames. He was delirious, calling, roaring for Dan—for Betty.

A hypo of morphia had quieted the Sky Devil by the time Dan got to his side. And now, as Dan bent low, a pair of sightless eyes looked up, unseeingly, into his.

“Dad—can you see me? Dad—it’s Dan.”

A hand fumbled around until Dan gripped it.

“It’s you, Dan, Good. I wondered how we’d made out. It seems like my back is getting cold, son. Must have hurt it quite a bit. Now, listen, Dan, I may not see this through.”

“Aw, come now, Dad, don’t talk that way. Why, you’re going to make the grade. The M.O. claims you’ll pull around all right, in a few weeks. Nothing broken, ol’ timer. They’ll have the ambulance tender here from Number Ten in a little while.”

“He’ll sleep for a while, sir,” said the M.O. “Blind, eh? Too bad, for his other trouble can be cleared up. I’ve heard a lot about him—seen him in action on this front more than once. Our boys fairly worship him; and now—damnation! his eyes are gone. It’s one of the tough tricks of fate, Lieutenant. And, by God! It’s something that can’t be explained.”

It was nearly noon of the following day, before Barry would permit Dan Marsh to see his dad again. Dan found the major lying prone on a cot chatting to a staff major from Wing, and Captain Barry.

At the sound of Dan’s footsteps, the Sky Devil’s head turned. His eyes were now concealed by smoked glasses.

“That you, Dan?” he called, in a voice that had lost its old timbre.

“Dad! You’re better. I told you you’d make it. God! I’m glad you’ll pull around. Feel not too rotten?”

“H’mmm—I feel like a perfect locoed fool, mainly, son. I—uh, blast it! My physical hurts are the least of my worries. I reckon I didn’t quite understand you and Betty.”

Captain Barry drew the staff major to a far corner of the room, and engaged him in conversation, for which Dan shot him a look of gratitude.

“Are you still here, Dan?” called the major, reaching around with his right hand.

“Still here. Dad. Now, let’s talk about something cheerful. Let’s plan a bit about what we’ll do when this is all over. You can live with me, or I’ll move up to Palms Crescent and—”

“Humph! Listen, Dan. I admire you for wanting to change the subject, but I’ve got to unload what’s in my chest. I reckon we never did see things eye to eye, but that was different in the old days. I was foolish enough to believe that you and Betty plotted against me. Guess I was an old fool. However, that’s past; and I want to talk of the present and future. Get me a drink, son, and sneak a little Scotch into the water!”

REFRESHED, the Sky Devil commenced to talk. “You don’t know why I sent you from Number Ten, Dan,” he jerked, in something very close to his old tone of voice. “Well, I was afraid, son, afraid that you might wash out on me. You look so much like Betty, Dan, that I sort of weakened every time I looked at you getting ready for a flight. But when they said they were bringing you back I was determined to fit you out to take my place here, as Squadron Commander of Number Ten. Yesterday I deliberately took you up to meet the Flying Count—Von Heidtz, whom I was dated to meet myself.”

“You don’t mean that was Von Heidtz I washed out, Dad!”

“Yes, son, but you might have let him slip at that. What happened when you ceased fire there? It might have been fatal for us both. Was it your gun?”

“A jam, Dad. God! My Lewis went cold on me. I thought I was sure out of the picture, when you came swooping down. You were right on the job, though. So I cleaned out Von Heidtz, Dad.”

“In as neat a fight as I ever saw, Dan. Blast my eyes! They gave out completely after that. Terrible pain hit me, and I fogged out. Dan, the old Sky Devil has shot his bolt. They’ll be taking me out of France to some home for the blind. I’m passing along feeling not too bad, son. Today—you saw that plane I knocked down? That was my fortieth! Knocked her clean into a falling leaf, Dan, and I hope you saw her crash. I’d like confirmation on that—my last sky act.”

A hot tear rolled down Dan's cheek, and he squeezed his father's hand.

"Yes," he gulped. "I watched her crash. Dad. She hit in just inside the German lines. I'll write that up for you in my report."

"It would kill him if he knew that the plane he saw spinning was mine," he breathed to himself. "Poor old dad—an iron man, out for the count!"

"Barry, Saunders," Major Marsh suddenly called. "Come over here and take these orders. I want recognition for Lieutenant Marsh's work yesterday—full recognition. Blast the medals and mentions in dispatches. He is to receive his captaincy, and will take command of Number Ten. Is that clear, gentlemen?"

"Perfectly, Major," said Staff-major, Saunders. "It is what Wing sent me down for. They're all keyed up over the downing of Von Heidtz. Anything else, Major?"

"No—oh yes, Saunders. Stick Barry's name up for a D.S.O. Or, a bar to his M.C. By gad! I'm sorry, Barry. I almost forgot you. Now, send in all ranks, please. I want 'em here—Flight Commanders, pilots, non-coms and ground men."

In less than five minutes, the entire personnel of Ten Squadron trooped into the Hospital hut, and Major Marsh struggled to get himself propped up to an elbow.

"Gentlemen of Number Ten," he called. "I'm going away from the forward zone. Your old martinet, the Sky Devil, is no more, but I'm leaving you a younger, better commander. He is the Sky Devil's son."

There was a second's silence. The commander of A Flight stepped forward and congratulated Dan. Others followed suit. Mechanics broke out in a loud cheer, a cheer which brought tears to the sightless eyes of Major Marsh.

A convulsive shudder shook Dan's frame. He turned and moved out on the heels of the staff. He found Barry and pulled him to one side.

"Barry, for God's sake," he called. "Those eyes. You don't think there's a grain of hope at all?"

"There is, Dan. I haven't even told him, though, in case I might be wrong. That sudden pain he felt! I think it might be the very flicker of light I had hoped for. Listen: I'm due for leave. I shall take him right to London and get Falconer, the greatest eye specialist in Europe, on the job.

Don't hope too strongly Dan, but there is a big chance. Now, run along and get tight. Go chat with your men—your men, son. I'll bet they'll about tear you apart. I sounded them all out this morning, and—well, go find out for yourself. I'm due for a sleep."

And, as Dan Marsh strode on to the mechanics' quarters Captain Barry watched him through admiring eyes.

"A priceless pair of Yanks," he breathed. "First the Sky Devil and now the Sky Devil's Son. Number Ten is due for a wonderful period of success. By gad! I've half a mind to get tight!"