



# THE KID FROM HELL

by STEVE FISHER

*Bill Baxter was tired of being a stooge for the famous Mart Morrel, a guy who specialized in glory and let the War take care of itself—whose head was swollen twice as large as the Army's best balloon! Still nobody doubted Morrel's nerve or the fact that he could fly—it's just that Baxter was well convinced that wind bags must come down!*

**W**HILE GREEN WINGS of ascending doom were shrieking at him like twin rockets from hell, Bill Baxter stiffened in the cockpit, and jerked a gloved hand back on his Vickers. Lead and fire spurted from his gun muzzles, but

Spandaus tracers were already chewing away the canvas crate from beneath him.

Two Fokkers attacking him at the same time—more than he could handle! Grimly, the Yank jerked his ship downward, and rolled crazily against the wind. His Vickers kept chattering at one of the green ships, but

even as he fired, he could see the other pressing down upon him. There was no way out. It was a lousy way to have to die!

*Brrrrrrt . . . Brrrrrrt . . .*

Bill looked up—his thin lips uttered a cry of joy. The Spad with the glittering white wings was hurtling toward the scene, Vickers ripping into the second Boche. Baxter almost laughed as his groaning ship reeled up beneath the belly of the first Fokker.

*Brrrrrrt . . . Brrrrrrt . . .*

The Boche pilot nosed down at him. Bill wheeled his ship out of the way. His prop was roaring 'round, and slipstream was rushing back into his face. But even in his own mad struggle he could see the white Spad cutting down the other Boche. Mart Morrel piloted that ship, and there wasn't a better ace in the Allied skies! Bill caught a fleeting glance of Morrel's white helmet, his broad, set face.

In the next instant he had straightened his own Spad and saw the Fokker he was battling a little beneath him. The German was moving uneasily in the cockpit, trying to send Spandaus fire upward.

Bill Baxter banked neatly against the wind, twisted toward the Fokker.

*Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrt . . .*

He laughed harshly as the Fokker suddenly started dropping out of the sky. In a moment, flames had encased it. The doomed ship fell screaming through the tense, noon-day sky.

When he turned again toward Mart Morrel, Bill saw the American ace riding the second green Fokker as though it were a helpless mouse in his clutches. Mart was laughing while his Vickers spat little steel nails of hell into the back of the Boche. In a moment it was all over.

Mart Morrel headed his white Spad into the heavens, climbed rapidly for altitude, then waved his hand at Bill. Bill nodded, and the pair of them started winging back toward the 25th American drome, from whence they had started two hours ago. The four D.H.'s which had started with them were spread in a burning wreckage somewhere on No Man's Land.

Morrel's plane was the first to swoop down and skid neatly over the 25th's smooth tarmac. Bill followed a moment later. A mechanic ran over to the ship as Bill cut the motors and climbed out. He ran over to where Morrel was standing, a message of thanks on the tip of his tongue. But before he arrived he saw the huge, good-looking pilot whip off his white helmet and turn toward him grinning.

"Well, Bill," he said, "I see I saved your life again."

Bill Baxter stopped, looked at his friend. "Yeah, you did," he replied, "I—"

Mart Morrel lit a cigaret. "It's all in knowing how to fly, my lad. I'll teach you the tricks someday."

They started walking toward the C.O.'s shack, and Bill became suddenly sullen. Morrel always took the kick out of everything. He was good all right, but he knew it, and he never let you forget it. Bill and Mart had come up through the pool together, and ever since the beginning, Bill could remember Morrel's cocky boasting. Wasn't he the famous Mart Morrel of stunt pilot fame before the War? Hadn't he been a football star at Harvard? There seemed to be no end to Morrel's achievements and it was no different in the war. He knocked Fokkers out of the sky with ridiculous ease. He was made captain, while Bill was still struggling as a first lieutenant.

Morrel had bushy yellow hair, a tan, handsome face and flashing teeth. His eyes were wide-set, steel-gray in color. His mouth and jaw were firm. Reckless and confident, he had painted his Spad a pure white, so that the Germans could spot him. He taunted the Boche, then shot them down with a grim laugh on his lips.

"I was in a pretty tough spot," Bill said, at last.

"I've been in tougher ones," Morrel said, glancing over at him. "To change the subject, it's pretty tough losing our four ships like that, isn't it?"

Bill shook his head. "It's going to be tougher," he said steadily, "trying to explain to the Old Man why we didn't get those pictures of K sector. No pictures, no drive tonight. Here we come back—the remains of the squadron that failed!"

Morrel tossed away his cigaret and frowned. "Well, damn it, we had a lousy assignment! I'd like to see the major try and get those pictures! They've got Fokkers in the sky patrolling the sector—Fokkers as thick as flies on a rotting corpse. We did well, and if he wants to pop off about it, I'll tell him a few things!"

A deep voice growled: "You'll tell who a few things?"

BILL BAXTER looked up into the dark, scowling face of Major Edwards. The C.O. had not shaved for two days, and red whiskers stood out on his face. His eyes were burning black in their sockets. His hands were on his hips.

Morrel was taken by surprise. "Why, ah, just talking, sir, I——"

"Come in," the major said. Then turning, he strode back into his shack. Bill and Morrel followed him

silently. The C.O. sat down behind a scarred mahogany desk, poured himself a drink, then gulped it down. He leaned forward, face creased by worry, his eyes holding a haunted, searching look.

“Did you lose all the D.H.’s?”

“That’s what I was going to tell you about—” Morrel began.

“Yes, sir,” Bill spoke up, “we couldn’t save them. They have Fokkers guarding the sky overhead. We were ripped to pieces—were lucky to get back. That is, Mart and I were lucky to get back. The other fellows—the D.H.’s with the cameras——”

Major Edwards’ face grew red; his labored breathing rasped in Bill’s ears.

“A helluva fine show,” he grumbled, “I send my two best aces and four damn good pilots with ‘em, to get pictures of K sector and——” He poured another drink, held it in his trembling fingers. His voice lowered. “Do you boys happen to know that G.H.Q. ordered us to get those pictures? That the drive we are making tonight will be extremely dangerous without them? G.H.Q. isn’t interested in excuses—they’re interested in results!”

“Yes?” Mart Morrel snapped hotly, “well, if they were there——”

“Damn it,” Edwards fumed, “there’s always a way to do everything. Naturally if you went blundering over there intending to circle around and let the D.H.’s take pictures and come back, you got into a scrap that cost us plenty. You and your tricks, Captain Morrel. I suppose you had a grand time. But remember that eight Americans are dead for your grand time, and our objective is farther away than ever. I’ll have to tell G.H.Q. we failed. Some other drome—some drome without stunt pilots—flea brains——”

“Hold on,” Morrel broke in, “you aren’t talking to me like that. If you think——”

“If you had used your head for something besides barrel rolls and top spins,” the major shouted, rising, “we’d have those pictures now!”

Morrel glanced at the floor. He twisted his white helmet in his hand.

Bill had stood silent during the oration. His brownish face was set, and his gleaming black eyes as hard as ebony. His hair was combed hack on his head and it glistened in the light from the window. He spoke now, and spoke quickly:

“Before you call G.H.Q. sir,” he said, “I have a plan. Let me go over alone and make one more try for those pictures.”

Morrel stared at Bill, his eyes blinking. The major turned on Bill, his face tight.

“What plan?”

“Well, you see, sir——”

“Hey, I have it!” Morrel said quickly, breaking in. “Bill has a gadget where he can fit a camera outside his cockpit and can get pictures flying the Spad. Instead of having us try and guard any more D.H.’s that lumber over for the shots, why not let Bill and me go? He’ll lag behind—keep high and out of sight. I’ll draw attention with my white plane, torment the squadron of patrol Fokkers and while they’re chasing me——”

“That’s it!” Major Edwards said, “while they’re after you, Lieutenant Baxter can sweep over and get the pictures! You’re sure this device will hold a camera properly on a Spad?”

“Surer than hell,” Morrel said. “Geez, with my ability to elude the Huns—hell, we’ll tie ‘em into knots! I’ll make the job a cinch for Bill!”

Bill Baxter glared at the blonde ace. His own plan was automatically dismissed for the idea Morrel had. It was always that way. Morrel the hero. Morrel the trickiest pilot in the sky. Morrel braving the perils. Bill was burning with a sudden hatred. God, if only once he could show that blonde ace up——!

He stood back though, while the major and Morrel ran hurriedly over the new plans. Edwards had forgotten his anger. His voice was eager. In a few minutes they were finished and the C.O. looked up, his unshaven face anxious.

“You’ve got to come through this time—it’s our last chance. I’ll hold off G.H.Q. so that no other ships will be riding over to wreck your decoy idea. But that means by the time you’re finished in K sector it’ll be dark, and if you don’t succeed——”

“Don’t worry, we’ll succeed,” Morrel said confidently.

“Thanks for including me in that,” Bill said with sarcasm.

Morrel laughed and slapped him on the back. “Don’t worry, pal—some day you’ll learn to twist your Spad into ungodly contortions, then you’ll be as famous as your uncle Mart. It’s all in the tricks. I’ll take care of the Fokkers—draw ‘em away. You get the pictures.”

Bill sighed. “If you were as good as you think you are, Mart, we’d end the war tomorrow by threatening to send you after the Kaiser.”

BILL BAXTER stood quietly leaning against the door of the drome while mechanics wheeled the flashy white Spad out onto the tarmac. He saw Mart Morrel stride

over to it, and he saw also, the younger pilots eyeing him with hero-worship in their eyes. Morrel pulled on his helmet, then climbed into the ship. The mechanics pushed Bill's plane onto the tarmac. Still silently brooding, Bill left the door of the drome and walked over to his ship. The kids didn't crowd around him, bubbling with their wild enthusiasm; they were still watching Morrel.

Bill placed the camera inside the cockpit and climbed in. The mechanic twirled the prop. They established contact. Bill sat there racing the motors, his eyes on the white Spad in front of him. Presently the ship moved forward, raced over the tarmac and lifted gently into the air. Bill followed like a faithful little dog, running his ship off the end of the field and taking the sky after Morrel.

He watched sullenly as the ground slipped away from beneath him, Patches of brown and green whittled by like a moving picture reel as his canvas wings lifted higher and higher into the heavens in the wake of the white ship. His taut guy wires hummed, the prop whirled like a wind-mill gone mad, and the motors were drumming an even *throb-throb* that was like music to his ears. Presently the earth was but a hazy carpet far below him, and fleecy clouds were passing just above the nose of his ship.

Droning toward Bocheland, the ship pulling him through the sky lanes like an unleashed comet, Bill Baxter watched the instrument panels and eyed the compass. He calculated in his mind how many minutes it would take them to wing safely over the puff-ball Archies from No Man's Land and sail into the territory surrounding the precious K sector which the Allied forces wished to know more about before daring to make an advance.

The flapping wings seemed to rise and fall, lifting the ship up and down. Bill kept watching the back of Morrel's head in the white Spad in front of him. When they had flown several minutes, Morrel turned in the cockpit, signaled with his arms.

Bill waved back. His black eyes narrowed as he drove his ship humming toward the moon. He nosed through the clouds, kept climbing, climbing. The wind whipped like a breath of shivering ice around him. Bill wrapped his jacket tighter and adjusted his goggles. Upward, still farther upward, he went. Looking down he caught a fleeting glimpse between two light clouds, as Morrel's ship skirted forward, a thousand feet below. In a moment the Yank would be plunging down to draw the attention of the Boche patrol.

Bill's droning ship swept clear of the clouds. He saw Morrel below him—now a tiny speck glinting in the afternoon sun. He saw that speck swoop down, and in a few minutes, it was retreating like a white bat from hell, and on its tail were seven or eight other tiny dots. They were Fokkers! Morrel was in his glory—twirling, turning, out-racing the Fokkers, and drawing them away. . .

Bill's lips tightened, his face became a little white. He fixed the camera beside him, then began plunging down in a breath-taking nose dive. The canvas on his wings tore and flapped, and shrieked in the wind. His pumping motor beat a red hot tattoo, throbbed under the terrific strain; his prop cut through the wind, slashed away the thin air. The ground was coming closer and closer to him.

Bill swirled suddenly in a straight line, then brought his throbbing Spad level. He stared behind, saw Morrel a long distance away, still playing with the Fokkers. Once again, Bill dropped towards the earth.

He arranged his camera and clicked a picture. Then he began dropping closer, until suddenly, his eyes caught sight of three Fokkers on a tarmac far below—taking off and lifting into the air. Morrel had not been successful in drawing away all of the Fokkers!

Bill Baxter was frantic. He snapped the camera once more, and swooped even lower. There was no use turning to run back now; he had to get those pictures. The pounding, noisy crate carried him within a thousand feet of the ground, just above a gigantic drome. It was painted various colors, and so well camouflaged that it was difficult to see.

Bill swept over the top of it, but three Fokkers were racing toward him now. He careened his ship forward, dipped even closer to the ground. He stared down, saw huge ground guns mounted in a single line as far as he could see! So this was one of the secrets of K sector? If the infantry advanced, unaware that these guns were here—Bill Baxter shuddered, but even as he did so, he snapped two more pictures.

*Brrrrrrrrt ....*

He turned to see a Fokker already at his tail, chewing into the assembly. The Boche was grim in the cockpit. Bill lifted his groaning Spad for altitude; the German followed him right on up.

*Brrrrrrrrt . . . Brrrt*

Another Fokker was cutting across his left wing, ripping the canvas to shreds. Bill turned toward it angrily. A curse leaped from his lips as his gloved hand reached the handle of his Vickers. The Boche was right in line.

*Brrrrrrrrrrt. . .*

Screaming tracer slugs tore the front of the Fokker, and the ship nosed down, went into a giddy, tumbling descent toward the earth! Bill lifted his torn wings, tried to climb again. But the Boche on his tail was still there, and shooting now with more deliberate hatred at the man who had downed his comrade.

BILL was about to wheel his ship about and fight it out, when the third Fokker came sliding across in front of him. His gloved hand pulled back on the Vickers. The yellow-blue fire tore from the muzzles, a grimly straight line of holes ripped across the side of the Fokker. But the ship was not seriously damaged; it began turning against the wind.

*Brrrrrrrrrrt. . .*

The damned Fokker behind him! Lead broke into the bunting behind the cockpit. Bill slid his body down. A slug ripped open his jacket; another tore away part of the flesh from his right shoulder. Bill's hand jerked at the stick. He felt a sudden loss of the controls. The Fokker behind him had paralyzed it!

*Brrt . . Brrrt . . Brrrt. . .*

And now, short murderous spasms of fire were barking from the Fokker in front of him. Bill was pinned between the two of them. He could no longer guide his ship. It was dropping evenly, but dropping toward the earth. If he could make it glide down. . .

He pointed the Vickers up, then jerked on the handles. The tracers steamed across the space between himself and the ship before him. The Boche pilot waved sneeringly. Bill, his lips tight, turned the Vickers on the German's head.

*Brrrt. . .*

Laughing wildly, he saw the Boche weave back and forth, saw crimson ooze from the side of his face. And then the Fokker went into a mad spin. Bill had accounted for two of the ships, but he could no longer control his own, and he was coasting toward the earth. The Fokker at his tail was following him down, the deathly Spandaus guns now silent. He intended taking Bill a prisoner.

The Yank leaned out the side of the cockpit and jerked in the camera which was rigged on a special apparatus. He removed the plates and jammed them up beneath his jacket. Then, in the next moment, the ground was coming up before Bill's eyes. He tried to level the ship off, but he had no control; the Spad hit the earth with a thud, bounced up, then crashed over on her nose. A flame darted from the engine.

Bill struggled beneath the heavy structure. He clawed the ground, crawled wildly from the burning ship. He was two or three feet out from it when the Boche landed, hopped from his plane and began taking pot shots at the fallen Yank. The zipping bullets from the Hun's Luger ate away earth an inch from Bill's face. He hugged the ground.

*Tac!*

Another shot swerved dangerously close, buried itself in the ground. Bill Baxter writhed as though he had been hit, then straightened out, prone. He could feel the licking flame of the ship behind him. A moment of eternity passed. The German shoved his Luger into its holster and climbed back into his ship.

Bill struggled forward. The Boche's eyes were turned the other way now, and the Fokker made a grim shadow against the setting sun. Bill was breathing hard. He crawled along, the plates still safe under his jacket. Suddenly he leaped to his feet, ran like the wind toward the Fokker. The German ship started moving forward over the ground. The motor was roaring like a thundering organ and drowned out any sound Bill might have made.

He leaped, grabbed hold of the Fokker's bluish body. In the next split-second the ship began to take off. It lifted, came down, then lifted again, and began soaring into the sky. Bill clung to the framing behind the cockpit. The Boche pilot wasn't three feet from him. Bill Baxter knew that he had to get back. To remain on the ground meant certain capture in K sector, and if he were captured, the pictures would never arrive. The chance he was taking now was a desperate one—but one that *had* to be taken. His glazed eyes swept downward, saw the unreeling ground below the Fokker's wings. Wind ripped about his clothing, clutched at him like an invisible monster, trying to rip him from his hold.

Bill's finger broke the canvas, and entwined the wooden framing. He tried to crawl forward, but he was afraid of throwing the ship so far off balance that the Hun would turn about and shoot him—whisk him off like a fly.

Higher and higher they rose into the sky. It was getting colder each minute, and the ground was getting farther away. Bill inched forward, his hands still clinging to the ship. His belly was flat on the Fokker's body. His eyes took in the back of the German pilot's neck.

Suddenly, with the plane's prop whirling, the motors throbbing madly, Bill Baxter wormed forward

with fierce determination. The ship tipped a little. Bill's heart leaped into his mouth. The Boche turned about. His lips curled.

"Dog!" he screamed against the wind, "American dog—" he unloosed his Luger, pointed it back.

The ship began moving up and down like a lost kite. Bill pulled himself forward frantically, desperately. His thin lips moved.

"It's you or me, Jerry——"

The Boche twisted back, fired. But he missed by a foot, because the ship was rocking crazily in the wind. He turned a moment to level it. Bill was on him. He squeezed into the cockpit, slammed his left elbow against the side of the German's head.

The Boche brought his gun up again. Bill clutched at it. The Fokker drove squarely into a whirling nose dive. The Hun dropped the gun, grabbed for the stick. While he was trying to bring the ship out of it, Bill took possession of the Luger, He reversed it in his hand.

"The Kaiser loses this time!" he bellowed.

In that second the Hun saw him. "No, *Gott*—" his eyes were rolling.

The ship had come out of the spin but it was dangerously close to the earth and jogging dizzily one way, and then the other against the wind currents.

Bill brought the gun butt down. It dented the German's head and blood spilled out in a wild gush. Bill lifted the Hun, dumped him over the side of the cockpit. He grabbed the stick then, worked it back and forth, and straightened the Fokker. Presently he began climbing for altitude. He turned the nose back toward the Allied lines.

HIS EYES peered over the scopes, into the horizon. A cool smile touched his lips, and one hand patted the plates beneath his jacket.

"Got them," he said softly.

The Boche plane's motor bore along evenly. It was hard for Bill to realize that this self same plane, and those self same Spandaus slugs which were before him now, had been chewing at his Spad's tail, had forced him down. He felt entirely comfortable. If an Allied plane came into the sky and challenged him he had but to stand up and signal. Better hurry, though, he thought, it was getting darker each minute.

The sun had already disappeared over the horizon.

Presently he was winging high over the clouds, and out of reach of the Archies. He saw a German patrol of Fokkers sail by far beneath him. There were four or

five planes. Then suddenly he knew the truth—they were returning from having chased Mart Morrel.

In spite of Morrel's boasting nature he knew that the Yank ace had been up against a plenty tough situation. He hoped that Morrel had come through all right. He had at least accounted for several Fokkers, from the looks of those passing him.

The singing motors of the Fokker drummed on through the flight, and Bill was just beginning to anticipate the flares from the 25th, when he saw a dark objed hurtling through the sky lanes at him. The pilot hurled a flare. It lit up, revealed the black-cross wings of the Fokker Bill flew. But at the same time it showed Bill the white texture of the canvas around the Spad—it was Morrel!

He started to stand up, to signal, so overjoyed was he to see the Yank alive, when——

*Brrrrrrrrt...*

Red fire danced into the night and sent messengers of leaden doom whirling toward the Fokker. Bill twisted in the cockpit, tried to arrange a flare so that he could signal his friend. And then, of a sudden, an idea came to him. His eyes became slits, his face whitened. This was his one chance to met Morrel on an even basis!

He wouldn't put enough fire into the Spad to badly damage it, nor wreck the white-winged demon the ace drove. He would not harm Morrel. But if he could return fire—evade him—then slip down to the 25th while Morrel was still searching the sky for him—

*Brrrrt . . . Brrrt . . . Brrrt.*

Mart Morrel was slinging Vickers lead at him without mercy. Morrel had evidently thought Bill was downed. He was perhaps trying to avenge him.

Bill winged his Fokker upward, but as he did so, he gave Morrel a chance at his belly. The tracers tore across it, but most of them missed. The night was a bad time to fight. Bill whirled the Fokker 'round, aimed it at the figure of the Spad and started hurtling forward.

*Brrrrrrrrrt. . .*

"Take that Mart, and that—" He jerked back the Spandaus handles again. The tracers were imbedding themselves in the after part of Morrel's Spad. They nicked across the rudder, made the superstructure look like a sieve.

Morrel was infuriated. He jerked his ship around like the daring professional flyer he was. In a style that marked him, the Yank ace drove at Bill. Baxter had to lift the Fokker in a desperate jerk to avoid collision.

But he turned it about before Morrel was able to come back at him.

*Brrrrrrrrt. . .*

The white Spad jogged up crazily, began falling against the wind. But in the next minute Morrel had it straightened.

*Brrrrrrrrt. . .*

Lead sailed across the Fokker's left wing, tore part of it away. Canvas began blowing in the wind, whipping back and forth. The motors ground heavily under the pressure that Bill put to them. He swung the crate around; saw Morrel coming at him again, trying to make him jerk away to again avoid collision.

What if a pilot refused to move? Would Morrel really crash? Bill suddenly knew that Morrel wouldn't—he loved his skin too much! He knew, in this case, what a Boche pilot couldn't know. Instead of frantically lifting his Fokker or nosing it down, he remained on the same level.

The white Spad was almost upon him, roaring like a charging lion, its prop cutting the wind, and its motors white hot. Had Bill misjudged? Would they crash? The nose of the Spad seemed but a matter of feet.

Then suddenly the Spad reared into the air, it sailed over the Fokker—over it, but so close that the two ships almost scraped as they passed. Morrel was far to the other side when Bill saw him again. He was turning to come back, but the movement of his ship was not so cock-sure now. He seemed suddenly very wary.

Bill laughed. "So you're licked, huh, Mart?" he yelled against the wind.

He turned the Fokker deliberately then and began charging toward the Spad as Morrel had charged against him, making him believe he would crash. Morrel's Vickers belched a short moment, then Morrel swung his ship away.

Bill laughed again, but instead of turning about, he kept going. He pressed the Fokker to top speed and guided it in the direction of the 25th drome. By the time Morrel realized what he was doing, he would be too far behind to hurt him.

Bill Baxter kept rocking back and forth in the cockpit and laughing. So he had out-flown the great Mart Morrel!

It seemed no time until he was heading into the blinding search lights of the 25th and sliding across the smooth tarmac. Men raced out to the ship, revolvers drawn. Bill hopped out, and they recognized him. At the same time someone yelled that another plane was coming down. Bill grabbed the mechanic.

"Wheel this into the drome," he rasped, "but don't say anything to Morrel about a Fokker being here!"

"Yes sir," the mechanic snapped.

Bill Baxter ran forward until he reached the C.O.'s shack. Major Edwards had heard the planes coming in and he was standing at the door.

"Something to tell you, sir," Bill said, "let's go inside."

Back in the small room Bill showed the Commanding Officer the plates, then he quickly explained what had happened, how he had fought with Morrel and had gotten away from him. He had just finished the recitation when Mart Morrel came swinging into the shack.

"Bill!" he yelled, "I thought they'd gotten you!"

"And I thought they'd gotten you," Bill Baxter said.

"Naw, they were easier than I thought they'd be," the blonde captain said airily. "I just out flew them, stayed out of their way. There was a Fokker I met just before I came in though——"

"You downed it?" Edwards asked.

Mart Morrel frowned and shook his head. "It was some crack German ace. Geez, he actually had me going a couple times. And then he got clean away from me! First ship I ever let slip out of my hands!"

Bill Baxter laughed happily and started for the door. He turned about and said to the major: "Break it gently, sir, the shock will probably floor him. German ace!" He stepped out into the night air and headed toward the canteen, still laughing.