

Obituaries

SQD.-LDR. H. A. MARSH, A.F.C., A.F.R.Ae.S.

ALAN MARSH was neither a ready-made nor a self-made man though his achievement in life pointed to both possibilities. He possessed natural insight and other aptitudes of a high order and, as those who knew him may well testify, unusual charm of personality. But it was his solid ability to triumph over adverse conditions that determined his eventual supremacy and leadership in his chosen field, and put the seal of final accomplishment upon what he did.

When Alan was a boy of Public School age, an arbitrary decision gave him a less promising start than he had reason to expect. As the '14-'18 War dragged on, he made up his mind to fly and was in due course accepted for training at a time when rivalry was intense. At that moment the War ended so that he found himself in the ruck of discarded personnel peeling potatoes at the cookhouse door. Suffice it to say that Alan Marsh found his way through that period of frustration, passed out of Halton in a trade, eventually trained as a pilot and saw service in Iraq as a Sergeant Pilot of the R.A.F. He also became an Instructor at the Central Flying School in a vintage period. He left the Service to take an Instructor's appointment at Hamble where Earl Mountbatten was one of many distinguished pupils whom he taught to fly.

At Hamble, Alan Marsh came in contact with the early Cierva experimental flying and obtained his first test experience which led to his joining the Cierva Autogiro Company in 1932. Thereafter, with a break of four years in the War, he did further experimental flying, became the Firm's Test Pilot, latterly its General Manager, until his tragic death in the Air Horse whose testing and flying had crowned a twenty years' record as the outstanding test pilot of rotary wing aircraft. Indeed, it would be fitting to place on record the long list of his ground and airborne tests throughout these years many of them in the U.S.A., from the smallest to the largest rotary wing machines. This might well include a technical assessment of his undoubted contribution to the art.

It was as the Chief Instructor and Manager of the Autogiro Flying School that Alan Marsh came even more into his own. This was the famous £30 to "A" Licence School for "ab initio" Autogiro flying training. In it, his cherished C.F.S. standards were brilliantly adapted, first to the C.19 and, later, to the less responsive C.30 types. The ages of his first "ab initio" pupils ranged from 16 to over 60 and included women, technical experts, engineers or mere enthusiasts; he also taught many accomplished fixed-wing pilots; it is true to say that he impressed them all with his austere, uncompromising adherence to the best principles of flying. He never departed from his own high standards and it was a rare privilege to see Alan, himself, carry out some delightful flying manoeuvre that introduced the slightest element of unnecessary risk.

It is difficult to recover the quality of those early Autogiro days, the School and the strange variety of people who gravitated around it. There was a strict regime to ensure the accurate handling of aircraft whose lift was largely independent of forward speed, there was the sense of sharing a new experience and, to blend and inform the whole occasion, Alan Marsh's masterly touch upon work and play alike. In the background, there was new work in progress; Cierva, himself, came and went; Alan became a Member of the Guild of Air Pilots and Navigators and the easy respect which he commanded was more and more concerned by wider recognition.

When Wing Commander R.A.C. Brie, his colleague at Cierva's, started the Rota Flight that turned into 529 Squadron, Alan Marsh had gone back to the R.A.F.



Photo by courtesy of "Flight."

as a test pilot at Farnborough in the Aerodynamic Flight. He took over and commanded the Squadron in due course. He had a firm and understanding way with some of his old (in both senses) pupils who came, wingless, to fly the C.30's at their war-time job. His manifest qualities as an organiser soon made themselves felt and some twenty obsolete aircraft were kept flying throughout the war years with a maintenance record as good as any in the Service. Many new pilots were trained, fitters and mechanics learned to accept the more devoted attitude that went with rotary wing aircraft, the old Autogiro traditions were kept alive under Service conditions and Alan Marsh earned from everyone, old friends and new, in the Squadron or the Station to which it was attached, as much affection and respect as it is possible to imagine.

With the advent of the practical helicopter and its adoption by the R.A.F., Alan Marsh converted to them and brought the same meticulous standards to their flying while he unobtrusively but profoundly took the measure of the new development. He never made any rash predictions about their commercial possibilities but, as the war ended he realised that a working basis for rotary wing aircraft had at last been reached. So it was that he assumed the natural leadership among pilots and technicians as the industry reverted to peace-time conditions. The Helicopter Association of Great Britain was founded to establish common ground within an art and industry that had been altogether too confined and jealous in its outlook. Alan would have been the first to disclaim any major credit for his personal contribution to the Association's uninterrupted success but now that he has gone there will be many to realise what powers and persuasions he exercised upon its functioning and development.

The Helicopter Association may well be considered Alan's monument. He touched greatness in his firm hold upon warring claims and conflicting policies. We had not quite realised that Alan Marsh was entering upon a further period of growth in personality but, at this sad moment, we may rest assured that we have enjoyed the company and guidance and wise experience of a full and excellent man, unique in the world of rotary wing activities.

T. V. WELSH.

SQD.-LDR. F. J. CABLE, A.F.C.

The good "JEEP" CABLE, as he was affectionately known to a host of friends on both sides of the Atlantic, came to the Autogiro Flying School in the early '30s as the best boy of his time in Cable and Wireless, to learn to fly and initiate an air delivery service for urgent messages. It was a publicity dream that left him high and dry, the proud possessor of an "A" Licence but with nowhere to go and nothing to go in. So he started at the bottom



Photo by courtesy of the
"Daily Graphic."

in the Cierva Company, and got his ground engineer's certificates and eventually became a fully-qualified "B" Licence Instructor when the pre-war C.A.G. scheme came into being and included Autogiro flying. When the war started, the Air Ministry chartered two or three of these aircraft for Radar co-operation and Cable went out with them as a civilian engineer. Soon, the Rota Flight of 60 Group was formed and he received his commission in the R.A.F. "Jeep" played a very great part in the life of the Flight and, afterwards, of 529 Squadron. His technical excellence on the ground and in the air was always taken for granted but he will be ever-remembered as a dearly loved genius of friendship and good company.

"Jeep" brought abundant character and other qualities with him when he first came under Alan Marsh's influence but he was essentially the product of Alan's teaching. They became a wonderful team and knew each other's mind to a nicety.

Their double loss is the more tragic and deplorable since the experience and wisdom that they shared in common and that has been lost with them is truly irreplaceable. They did not have a large amount of test flying in common in the pre-war period