

Death at Cattaro



Running figures appeared on the deck

During a Night of Hell, the Hawk of the Mediterranean Strikes at Hidden Death!

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WITH motor throttled down the little seaplane swung in slow circles above the haze of cirrus clouds. Far below, the blue of the Ionian Sea lay calm under the afternoon sun. In the north, Cape Santa Maria di Leuca showed dimly, like a tack in the heel of Italy.

Bill Markham's eyes were keen behind his goggles as he searched the sea floor. Still only the felluca-sailing boat—showed

on the water. Well, he couldn't expect to snare a sub with this trick the very second day. Two or three more, maybe—

And then he cursed softly and a half smile crossed his face. For Bill Markham, the man who was a legend from Suez to the waters of Gibraltar—the man whom the Allies called the Hawk of the Mediterranean and the Germans knew as the Black Bat of Hell—that man was again on the hunt. And like the bird for which he

was named, he hunted with deadly skill.

Eyes mere slits in his bronzed face, Markham watched intently a streak of white water there against the blue— The damn fool was comin' up, and wadin' right into it!

Still Bill Markham waited, wheeling the dull grey seaplane in wide circles above the shield of clouds. Finally the sub was on the surface. Ant-like figures crawled its length, began bringing the 4.1 deck guns into action.

Then the Hawk struck. The big prop drove a hole through the haze of clouds and the nose of the seaplane was boring down in a power dive. Wind shrieked, struts moaned and wires sang, and the blue floor of the sea rose sharply into his face. Down, down, down! The motor was a steady cataract of sound; the wind was a torrent of violence.

THEY heard him, now; they saw him! Running figures began to cover the deck of the U-boat.

Markham eased the stick back as he watched them. Up from that wild dive came the nose of the sturdy seaplane. Barely five hundred feet above the sea the Hawk leveled off.

Then Markham tripped the bomb lever, was over the boat, was whipping around in a tight bank. The crash of the explosion reached him above the thunder of his motor.

When he came back more slowly, looked down, he knew another bomb was not needed. The sub's deck was a mess of twisted steel and broken bodies where the sea was already pouring in. Bill Markham banked again, nosed down toward the felucca.

He took the water in flying spray, headed straight for the port side of the sailing vessel. Switches cut, the seaplane drifted in as the side of the felucca gaped

outward, dropped down to form a sloping runway. Two great brown figures gripped the pontoons as the plane swung in. Markham climbed from the cockpit, greeted his two Arab mechs quietly.

"The Sidi fights like the eagles of El Kantara," said the big Ibrahim in sibilant Arabic.

Selim's face was one great smile. "Bismillah, yes!" he agreed.

Leaving them to get the seaplane securely housed and hidden within the hull of the boat, Markham went up on deck, got binoculars from his cabin and searched the surface of the sea. The sub was gone, but there was still something on the surface of the water—there was a man out there, struggling feebly to keep afloat.

"Selim, come at once! We take the dinghy out!" His Arabic was swift now, peremptory, as he yelled below.

Hurriedly he helped the big Arab launch the small boat. Selim rowed hard, but the man was no longer struggling when they reached him. The Arab slid an experienced hand beneath the German's tunic as they hauled him aboard.

"The man is dead even now, Sidi," he said.

The Hawk made no reply. The man was an officer of the U-boat, possibly its commander. Swiftly, Markham's long fingers loosened the tunic, explored its pockets, drew out a packet of papers.

Selim was already rowing back to the felucca. He would know how to sew the German's body in canvas, weight it for burial. Markham was giving all his attention to the papers. He took them to his cabin, pausing in his study of them only long enough to light a cigarette and inhale luxuriously.

When he finished reading he had already made a characteristically swift decision. He had learned something important from the officer's papers, but

not enough. The only way to learn the rest was to go and find out—

The U-boat had been on the way to Cattaro. Markham had found that in the papers—found, too, that it was only one of many subs which were gathering at the great Austrian naval base for some special reason.

“The fellow was travelin’ under urgent orders,” the Hawk mused. “And to Cattaro, the Gibraltar of the Adriatic. I reckon I’ll have to go up there tonight.”

His decision made, Markham followed it with immediate action. A concentration of U-boats at impregnable Cattaro might mean anything. It was typical of Bill Markham that he lost no time guessing at it—typical of him that he was going directly there to find out for himself.

The sun was dropping toward the western sea as he stepped out onto the deck. A couple of hours now and it would be dark enough to start. He tossed his cigarette over the side and went below to the plane.

Time passed quickly as he worked with the two Arabs, getting the little seaplane ready. Main and auxiliary gas tanks were filled, four of the special bombs hung securely in their racks, the great Isotta-Fraschini motor was tuned to perfect pitch.

Those were Markham’s only preparations. Beneath his coveralls he could feel the bulk of the Colt automatic in its shoulder holster as he reached for helmet and goggles. That suit of dirty coveralls made him look for all the world like any ordinary greaseball.

“You remain here,” he said to the Arabs, “and keep this vessel safe. I shall return—” his grin was wide “—when you see me!”

“May Allah go with thee!” murmured Ibrahim and Selim together.

The sea was dark when they lowered

the side of the felucca and slid the plane out. The motor caught at once, and Markham swung out and into the wind.

A race with flying spray, then the trim seaplane shook the water from her and climbed into the darkness. Lightly she swung around, sturdily she picked up speed as Markham opened the throttle and set his course northeast by north through the night.

Not a star showed in the black cover of the sky. There was only the monotonous thunder of the engine to interrupt Bill Markham’s swiftly moving thoughts as the plane roared on. He was remembering now his last trip into Cattaro, when he had rescued the British Intelligence agent known as KL-1. He had landed his seaplane then in a small cove just up the coast. That would, he decided, be the place to go tonight.

HE HAD gotten out that other time by the skin of his teeth. Would he get out tonight?

Instead, he searched the darkness ahead for lights, took on more altitude to deaden the sound of his motor. And then the Lake of Scutari showed vaguely against the blackness that was Montenegro far below. The great wooded mass of Monte Lovcen, the Black Mountain from which the country gets its name, thrust itself darkly up out of the lesser dark of the night, as if guarding the terrain.

Markham passed above and to the east of the mountain, passed far above Cetinje, where Austrian lights blazed in the captured palace of the Montenegrin king. Still he climbed, climbed until his face was stiff with cold. More lights twinkled ahead—Cattaro!

Markham cut his switches, nosed the seaplane over on a long slant. Through the wide silence now was only the wind in the wings. The scattered lights of Cattaro were

back of him—back of him were the great headlands which guarded the Boka Kotorska where the three mouths of the landlocked harbor joined the sea.

Still he held his long dive, the wind the only sound of his passage. Down and down and down until the steely darkness of the sea was rising to meet him. Then Markham banked the plane and headed for the more solid blackness of the shore.

In the deceptive darkness the pontoons slapped the water twice before they took hold. The seaplane glided in from its own momentum. Markham held a strong mooring line as he climbed to the edge of the cockpit. This was the place. It was only two miles into Cattaro, and—

WITHOUT warning a brilliant light blazed in his face. He could see nothing—but he could hear plenty. Guttural voices shouted orders. There were splashes and sounds of men wading. Then Austrian hands gripped the pontoons, swung the plane into shore.

Markham saw the searchlight which held him in its glare, saw the troops along the shore, saw the Austrian seaplanes row on row. And seeing them, he realized that he had dropped right into the middle of the thing he had come to look for! He was trapped!

Bill Markham's mind was turning over like a perfectly tuned motor as he climbed from the cockpit. There was but one thing to do, and that was foolish to the point of futility. But he did it.

Once on shore, he didn't wait for the inevitable questions. Two strides took him to the group of Austrian officers.

"Have you a car here?" It was a brusque demand made in guttural, flawless German. "I dared not land in the harbor with that Italian plane but I must see the *Herr Kommandant* at Cattaro at once. I come from Brindisi."

His sudden appearance out of the night had been amazing enough, but now his demand brought an additional shock. Bewilderment spread over the faces of the Austrians. The Hawk was watching them keenly, lost no time in pressing his advantage.

"The car, *Herr Kapitan!* There is great urgency for the message I bring!" he rasped.

The group lost its stiffness, moved. The Austrian captain to whom Markham had spoken glanced at his wrist-watch.

"A car is here, back on the road," he said uncertainly. "*Herr Kapitan* Mueller will accompany you to Headquarters."

They moved upward from the water, reached the road. A big car with a man in uniform at the wheel was there. The Hawk concealed his elation.

"See that the plane is made secure," he said. "I shall need it very soon for my return."

Then he was in the car, sitting in the half light of the tonneau with the Austrian captain and they were heading for Cattaro, the inner stronghold of Austrian power.

Every minute that passed cut down his chances of escape. Still Bill Markham did nothing. But his racing thoughts were faster than the speed of the car. It was evident that the massed seaplanes in the harbor were ready to take off for a surprise raid of some sort. But when, where? And what did the concentration of U-boats have to do with it?

Could he shoot this Austrian captain, get away long enough to get his information, get back to his plane, and escape? He knew he couldn't. There was only one way, and that was the way he was heading—with his neck in a noose even now!

Brakes were screaming as the big car took the steep, sharp turns down to the town. The Austrian captain sat in the far

corner watchfully.

A sentry opened the door as they stopped before a great lighted doorway. The same man led them down a wide hallway to a closed door. *Herr Kapitan* Mueller walked several paces back of the Hawk.

They entered and Bill Markham's eyes took in the whole room with one swift glance. Shades were drawn at the two long windows, four officers stood in a knot before a long table and back of that table sat a large man with close-cropped, iron-grey hair. That man spoke harshly.

"What, *Herr Kapitan* Mueller, brings about this intrusion?"

The Hawk had no trouble following the Austrian's stiff salute, his rigid attention stand. But he beat the *Kapitan* to the opening words.

"It is I who have caused the intrusion, *Herr Kommandant*," Markham said in German. "I have just arrived from Brindisi."

One of the Hawk's own bombs set off in the room could have caused no more excitement than his words. The *Kommandant* was on his feet, the muscles of his thick neck twitching.

"Brindisi! They know of our plans?" he said.

Two and two were rapidly adding up to six in Markham's mind. His life depended upon his choice of words now.

"They know," he said. "How, I do not understand. But the naval base at Brindisi has been heavily reenforced only today. They are ready for even the strongest attack, *Herr Kommandant!*"

The *Kommandant's* face was apoplectic with rage; the knot of officers all talked at once.

Markham's poker face held him in good stead now, as he realized that he had guessed right. The Austrians were planning an attack on Brindisi! The Italian

naval station there with its swift destroyers and seaplanes, was the cork which kept the Austrians practically sealed within the bottle of the Adriatic. If they wiped out Brindisi, hell would pop the length of the Mediterranean!

Markham had guessed right—but would his knowledge do him any good? Could he prevent that raid?

THE HAWK'S cool voice broke into the hubbub of guttural German around the big table.

"I am supposed to be a mechanic with the Italian seaplanes. *Herr Kommandant*," he said. "I have learned that they are prepared for this attack. But I have also learned that the reenforcements are not permanent. The squadrons of planes and ships are needed elsewhere. A week from tonight they will not be there. That is the item for your attack!"

The *Kommandant's* manner changed suddenly. His eyes under their bushy eyebrows were intent upon Markham.

"I do not like the tone of your words," he snapped. "Our attack upon Brindisi has been carefully planned. It shall be carried out as we planned. And you, whoever you are, shall remain here until that attack is completed and your identity can be established."

He turned to the group of officers.

"*Herr Kapitan* Schurze, convey my compliments to the commodore of the *Unterseeboot* flotilla in the harbor, and order him to leave at once for his appointed designation off Brindisi. You, *Herr Kapitan* Mueller, will return at once to the squadron of seaplanes, with word that they are to start—" he glanced at his wrist-watch "—exactly two hours from this time."

"But *Herr Kommandant!*" The Hawk's voice was still cool, though he felt the noose tightening around his throat.

Had he said too much?

"I will be suspected unless I am back before morning. I must return at once!"

They were all eyeing him now, and tenseness was crowding the big room. One of the officers stepped forward, studying Markham deliberately.

The Hawk lit a cigarette with slow carefulness.

The officer walked toward him, still staring. Too late Markham read recognition in the fellow's eyes.

"*Herr Kommandant*, I know this man! He is no German secret agent! He is a British spy! He thought he killed me in a place known as the Cafe of the Peacock, in Alexandria! This man is he whom they call the—"

The big Colt jumped in Bill Markham's hand, and the roar of the shot in that closed room drowned the officer's last word. The Hawk was at the door even as the Austrian's body slumped to the floor.

The officer stood momentarily transfixed by the sudden turn of events. Markham's voice was like an icicle through that hot, heavy silence.

"Don't move!" he said, and the Colt gave emphasis to the words.

His eyes did not leave the group before him, but his ears caught the sound of running feet in the hall outside. The sentries were coming! Now his neck was in a noose!

The Hawk felt along the door with his left hand, found and removed the large key. His eyes did not waver from the Austrian officers as he stepped to one side, jerked the door open. Two sentries charged pell-mell into the room.

Like a whiplash in motion Markham was around the door, had slammed it shut behind him. The men inside found their voices as he twisted the key in the lock.

Shouts, curses and orders rose In a

confusion of sounds from the room he had just left. The Hawk started for the street. Then upstairs other shouts arose, and running feet went heavily across the floor. From outside a sudden strident bugle note split the night. The telephone on the *Kommandant's* table! They would cut him off completely!

BENEATH the lights outside the doorway, the Hawk could see the big staff car. He had gambled on that! But he had gambled on taking the chauffeur by surprise. Now the fellow was standing there on the sidewalk, a Luger in his hand, waiting—

The Luger spat flame even as Markham dropped to the floor of the hall. He was not quick enough. A bullet smashed into his right shoulder with a shock like the kick of a mule. But his Colt was speaking back even as he fell. The chauffeur fell forward on his face.

The Hawk was on his feet, his long legs carrying him to the car. He could start the car on the downgrade.

He was under the wheel, was releasing the brakes when the first soldiers rounded the corner. He shouted at them in German as they came up the street. "Quick! To the *Herr Kommandant's* office, you fools!"

The car started as they passed. Markham swung it across the street, over the curb, made the turn and roared back up the hill past the lighted doorway and the motionless form of the Austrian chauffeur.

And now hell and all its fury, chaos and all of its confusion and babel with all its sounds were breaking out behind him. Bugles were blown, sirens screamed, hoarse shouts were raised, and shot after shot whined with thin deadliness up the slope of the road.

The big car took the first steep curve wildly, and the Hawk throttled down. The wheel was stiff, hard to handle and the

first numbness in his shoulder was giving way to sharp pain. God help him if he met anyone coming down this road now! The tires were sliding, screaming at every turn in the twisting, switchback road.

While his eyes watched the road and his hands obeyed his eyes, Markham's mind was leaping ahead to the place he had left the plane. If there was a telephone there he was lost! Then he knew he was lost anyway. No amount of bluff could get him by this time without the *Herr Kapitän* Mueller, without the chauffeur, and with a bullet hole through his shoulder. It would have to be the Colt and a desperate rush to the little seaplane!

The car was roaring up the last straight slope which led to the top. Behind him the Hawk heard other motors roaring, saw other headlights cutting the night like swords. He stepped on the gas, took the long downward stretch to the sea again at ever increasing speed. The road flashed by under him like a length of ribbon wound on a reel. A mile was gone, he was nearing the place of the plane—

It was the searchlight which saved him. So they had been warned to watch for him! The searchlight lighted up the hasty barricade across the road, lighted up, too, the line of Tedesco soldiers on each side, ready to take him.

Markham slowed up with protesting brakes as he searched the shoreline for his seaplane. Three hundred yards ahead, the barricade and the soldiers waited. It was only one hundred yards when he finally saw his ship.

Abruptly he cut the car off the road to the left, plowed down the rocky bank, shifted to second gear and stepped on the gas. The big car shivered and bumped over the rough slope, its wheels bit into packed sand, and straight and hard it plunged for the dark sea.

The Hawk was gripping the wheel hard, his feet braced against the floorboards. Briefly, as one in a dream, he heard the shouts from the road. Then the car was clearing the last few yards, was in the air, was crashing sickeningly down through tons of icy water.

He couldn't see the soldiers race to the sea edge to watch and wonder at the bubbles which rose to the center of the widening circles of little waves. He couldn't hear the amazed shouts, the grinding of brakes as the pursuing cars came to a stop and men tumbled down the slope to the water.

BILL MARKHAM couldn't see any of that, and he couldn't hear anything at all. He was under water, swimming as strongly as possible, with a badly wounded shoulder. An intuitive sense of direction and a healthy pair of lungs were taking him away from that place where the Austrians were gathered on the shore. His big chest was aching, his head was splitting, but still he stayed under, still he swam with long strokes.

Fifty yards away from the sunken car he eased his face into the air to gulp greedily. The crowd was growing on the shore behind him but there was no one near the plane! He went down again, swam with renewed enthusiasm. Once more he had come up for air before he felt the familiar pontoons against his fingers, but he was there!

It wasn't so simple climbing with that shoulder which now was a throbbing nightmare of pain. He made it with agonizing slowness—but he made it. A knife from a pocket of his dripping coveralls made short work of the mooring lines. Now for the big moment! When he swung that long prop, the motor would have to catch!

He realized how weak he really was when he tried turning the prop. It wouldn't go at first. Then he swung it again. Coolly he stepped back to the cockpit. With his long arm he reached the switches without climbing. And then, as he grasped the prop again, he was suddenly aware that the drifting plane was carrying him right down to the cluster of men on the shore! Any minute they'd see him!

EVEN as his arm swept downward with the prop, he knew he had been seen. As the prop came down a ragged shout rang out along the shore. The big motor coughed a weak answer, died. Markham's mouth was a hard line as he stepped in to seize the prop once more. Ice water was running in his veins now.

Through the awakening thunder of the motor came the whine of bullets as the Austrians fired wildly. Markham leaped for the cockpit, gritted his teeth as he bumped that wounded shoulder.

An Austrian's head appeared above the cockpit edge as Markham's face reached that height. The Hawk's amazement almost caused him to fall backward. But the Austrian was even more bewildered. Posted in the plane as an extra guard, the man had gone to sleep, had been awakened by the sudden sound of the motor.

He went back to sleep at once, before he had a chance to do anything, as Markham brought the butt of the Colt down hard on the man's head, climbed awkwardly over him and into the cockpit.

The unorganized shooting from the shore continued, but the Hawk's hand was on the throttle now, his feet on the rudder bar, and the little seaplane was picking up speed as it headed into the wind. An occasional bullet crashed through canvas. Then out the white road of the

searchlight's beam went the plane, up into the dark sky swiftly.

Markham felt for his safety belt, realized the body of the Austrian was on top of it. With difficulty, as the plane climbed, he dragged the belt from under the man's body, snapped it about himself. There wasn't time to heave the fellow out. Yanking the goggles down from his forehead, he turned every thought to the plane.

Not one man in a thousand would have done what Bill Markham did then. He had found what he came for. He had escaped somehow from the wrestle with death. But he swung the plane in a tight bank and headed back toward the Austrian shore!

The searchlight was lacing the blackness. In front of it a group of Austrian seaplanes was already swarming with men to give chase. The Hawk was over them on swift grey wings, and the bomb that dropped from that low altitude could not miss those closely ranked planes.

The havoc was terrible. Markham gave it a hurried glance as he poked the nose of the plane into higher air. There wouldn't, he thought grimly, be any air raid on Brindisi this night!

But there were still the subs—and the subs were to start immediately, had perhaps already put to sea!

Climbing steeply into the southeast, Bill Markham opened the throttle wide. Below, to his left, the road along which he had raced was a string of fiery beads, where cars sped to and from Cattaro.

The rocky headlands of the Boka Kotorska were looming ahead. He cut the switches and nosed the sturdy seaplane down toward the lights of the harbor. He saw the subs then, as the wind rose to a thin scream in the wires. They were on the surface, already moving out to sea!

Stiffly the Hawk moved that aching right arm to the bomb lever; still he held his rushing dive. He was coming in from behind them, swooping right down above them as he eased the stick back and cut the switches on. The motor picked up beautifully as the seaplane leveled off.

Another hundred yards—

The Luger was jabbed viciously into his side, the guttural words in his face were sudden and harsh:

“Keep going down, *Schweinhund*, and land in the harbor!”

The Austrian guard had come to! Damn! The man must have a hard head!

It was typical of Markham that the two thoughts were simultaneous. Other thoughts came fast, however. Instinctively he knew the man would shoot to kill, even if it meant the death of both of them. He knew he was completely at the fellow's mercy.

He knew he was trapped so he did three things abruptly—all at the same time. A quick glance down showed him the subs almost beneath the nose of the plane. He flicked his stiff right arm backward, releasing the bomb lever even as his elbow smashed into the Luger at his side. With the same motion, his left hand jerked the stick back hard, and his whole body surged forward against the safety belt.

It all happened at once—the muffled report of the Luger in his coveralls, the searing flame as the bullet grazed his back, the sickening splitting of metal as the bomb landed among the subs below.

But the little plane was standing on its tail and its big prop was biting chunks out of the dark ceiling and the Hawk's long fingers were forcing that deadly automatic back and back.

The Austrian had brutish strength. Handicapped by his stiff arm and shoulder, cramped in the close quarters, Markham

had all he could do to handle the plane.

SLOWLY the Austrian was forcing that fatal muzzle around. Inch by perilous inch it moved, and the sweat was standing out on the Hawk's face as he fought it.

It was horrible! It was ghastly! Two men, their bodies jammed together in that narrow cockpit, their breaths hot in each other's faces, forced every muscle into straining agony to move that menacing gun. It was primitive, caveman battle in a fantastically modern setting—caveman struggle to the death in a seaplane in the night, while below, the dark waters of Cattaro swallowed the tangled wreckage of an Austrian sub and waited hungrily for more victims.

Markham's lips were set hard as he realized his wounded shoulder was giving way under the maniacal strength of the Austrian. Suddenly the plane fell off sickeningly on one wing. Markham caught a flash of lights and water as the plane rolled over—they were going down out of control!

The roll threw Markham's body above that of the Austrian. Markham had his weight against the Luger now, even as he seized the stick with his knees and fought it back. He felt the man's stubborn wrists give way, saw again the flashing lights and the water. Then strongly the seaplane responded to stick and rudder, began to climb from the very brink of disaster.

The Luger was immovable between them, but it was not pointing at him now. Like a snake striking, the Hawk moved his left fist twelve inches upward. The blow snapped the Austrian's head back cruelly. It was Markham's chance, and he took it instantly. He put the seaplane into a loop, held the stick back fiercely with his knees as the Austrian shook his head and threw his weight against the automatic.

Up went the nose of the little

seaplane—up and up and over. The Hawk felt the safety belt tighten, felt the Austrian's strained body sag away. Suddenly the man moved both hands from the Luger, clutched desperately at Markham. For the first time in all that bitter struggle, Markham was aware of the man's stark fear.

Markham dropped the Luger over his head and out. The Austrian's body was half out of the upside-down cockpit. He was kicking, clutching, fear bubbling horribly in his throat. The Hawk wrenched those gripping fingers from his body, shoved.

The cockpit was suddenly no longer cramped, and Markham was very tired and very limp. The nose of the plane was

coming down. He eased up on the stick instinctively.

Only then was he aware of the searchlights which arrowed up from the harbor. Only then was he aware of the anti-aircraft guns from below and the subs there on the water.

The two remaining bombs went hurtling down as Markham leveled off. He didn't look back as the shattering impact of their twin explosions tore the night.

Out like a streaking grey bullet went the seaplane. Markham gave her full throttle as she climbed into the dark south. His felucca was down there, and faithful Ibrahim and Selim, and a cigarette and a stiff drink—and sleep, maybe, to forget this night of hell.