

Chapter 5

Change of Fortune

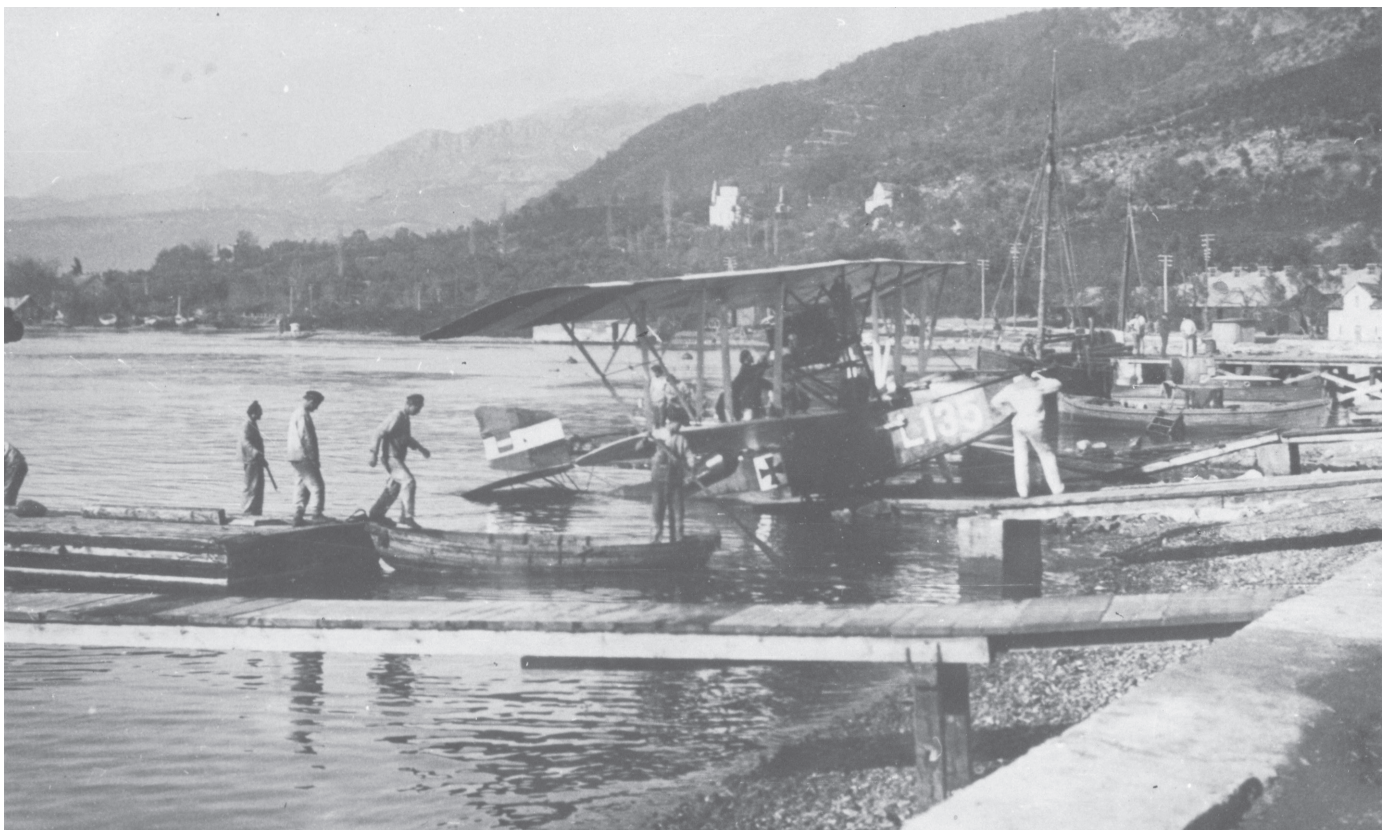
Battle of Attrition

As admiralties of both warring sides analyzed reports from the recent clashes, aviators in Kumbor and Durazzo returned to their everyday duties. Another complex long-range operation was launched from Durazzo on 26 May. Escorted by K154 of Lschlt Hell and EF Stb Masch Wart Engel, and K152 of Frglt von Klimburg and EF Stb Masch Wart Schramek, Frglt Walter Zelezny and Fhr idRes d MK Wart Josef Dörfler went with K153 to photograph allied naval forces on Corfu island in the Ionian Sea:

"The weather was very nice, but still we encountered head-on wind both during the outbound and

return flight. We flew away from Valona in a wide bow at a distance of some 40 kilometres and passed Otranto barrage unnoticed by the trawlers. We assumed that we were not reported at the Corfu. On south-eastern course we approached the beautiful island. At the altitude of 3.200 meters, with the sun high in our back, we took the north-eastern approach. Our escorts stayed back, to await for us north of the island.

Unnoticed we came over the allied fleet and unhurriedly Dörfler made his pictures of the 'fat ships' and the barricades. All was still quiet and peacefully silent, and it appeared, as if the ships 'raised the resting flags and had the midday sleep'. This ceremonial rest was broken, when suddenly a French FBA flying boat appeared 300 meters below



Ground crews of Seeflugstation Kumbor pull Lohner Tl L135 out of sea. Signs of wear caused by constant combat and natural factors are visible on the aircraft.

(Boris Ciglić)



Hansa-Brandenburg CC A17 zooms over Kumbor in summer 1917. This particular machine was one of just six sleek, but tricky and dangerous to fly, CC fighters which survived until the type was definitely withdrawn from service in early October 1918.

(Mario Raguž)

us, and still it hadn't seen us. I pointed out this machine to Dörfler, who quickly stowed the camera and took over the machinegun. I placed myself with K153 left above the FBA flying boat and Dörfler opened fire from distance of some 30 meters. It went tack, tack, tack... and then it was the end of firing. We had again a jam, which could not be fixed during the flight, this spared many enemies from being shot down. We came so close, that I could recognize the features of the Frenchmen. Coming out of the blue, he was very amazed and confused, whilst I, angry because of the machinegun mishap, grabbed the Flare gun, stood from my seat and threateningly aimed at him. Then I fired a signal flare. The effect was surprising, there was a bright glow and lots of smoke. I was amazed myself by the fireworks, my enemy must have been pretty scared, or he thought of some modern weapon, as he went in steep spirals down to his ships.

Dörfler and I watched at each other and laughed, but were glad, that the Frenchmen broke off the engagement as we were defenseless.

This spectacle must have been noticed from the ships, as they began with their heavy, but poorly aimed defense fire. They obviously had no experience, because we were their first visit from the air. More dangerous was the flying station with single-seat fighters at Santi Quaranta, which I did not drop from my sight. After a short while two Nieuport single-seaters took off. However they flew in

wrong direction over the sea, without noticing us, whilst we flew away to north over the land. We thanked their clumsiness for our unmolested return flight, whilst the jam spared the crew of the FBA from being shot down.

North of Corfu we united with K154 and K152 and flew again in a wide bow around Valona to Durazzo, where we landed after a flight of five hours and 40 minutes.

I had mere 20 litres of petrol left in my tanks.

This was my longest reconnaissance flight."

Recce mission of same complexity was executed in the morning of 7 June: Lschlt Konjović and Frglt Sewera in K224, Frglt Nardelli and Lschlt Friedrich Horn in K223 and Lschlt Lerch and EF Stb Masch Wart Broser in K222 went all the way over Adriatic and across the Italian heel to Taranto and back to Kumbor. The undertaking did not end without trouble, K222 was damaged as it overturned on landing and had to be shipped to Pola for repairs. At the same time, K154 with Lschlt d Res Alojz Poljanec and EF St Masch Wart Praurer, K153 with Frglt János Plachner and EF Stb Masch Wart Lenti, and K152 with Frglt Ottokar Holoubek and Lt idRes d MK Max Weissmann, were dispatched on armed reconnaissance over Brindisi. K154 separated from the group and once they reached the coast, came upon DE 5, a small airship for anti-submarine surveillance, and attacked it, putting more than 30 holes in it. Italian officer on board, sottotenente



Unidentified Fregattenleutnante serving within the Seeflugstation Kumbor, sporting a motley variety of summer uniforms, the man on the left even combining two different sets (work coat and official summer trousers).

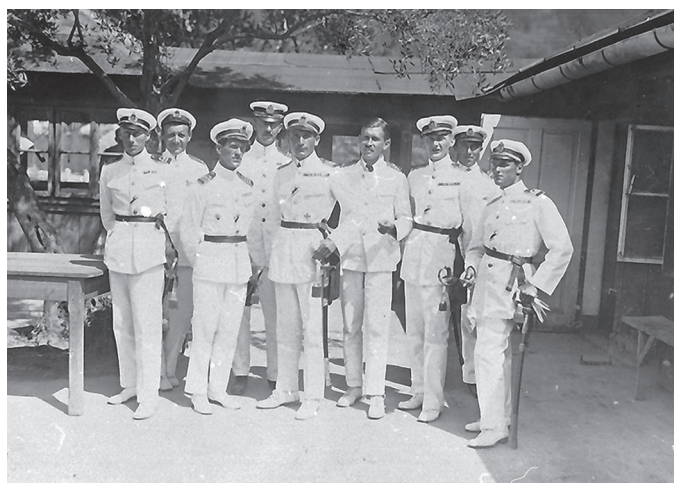
(Sammlung Schupita)

di vascello Catalano Gonzaga fought back gallantly with his Mauser pistol and eventually returned to base with his craft, but it was the arrival of 2° nocchiere Aldo Gianelli and tenente di vascello Carlo Daviso di Charvensod in Macchi L.3 3440, and tenente di vascello Pierozzi and cannoniere Ercole Bellingeri in FBA Type H nō.5 of 255ª Squadriglia that saved the day. Seeing the silhouette of the approaching Macchi, Austro-Hungarian airmen probably failed to recognize it until it was too late. The Italian crew pressed the attack from close range, joined by the FBA, which attacked from above. After the fourth attack thick smoke poured from the engine of the K154, but return fire mortally wounded 2° nocchiere Gianelli. Uncontrolled, Macchi struck the hull of the enemy aircraft with its upper right wing and fell into the sea. FBA crew fired coup de grace into the doomed Albatros Weichmann at point blank range, after which it plummeted into the Adriatic. Daviso di Charvens was the sole survivor from both aircraft; he was picked unharmed by the FBA.

Broken engine forced Lschlt Konjović and his two crewmen to force-land with an UFAG Brandenburg in the harbour of Ragusa Vecchia at 9.30 on 12 June. The plane was quickly repaired and 45 minutes later it flew back to Bocche.

Seeflugstation Kumbor lost another plane and crew on 24 June when six seaplanes went to anti-submarine patrol in front of Cape Ostro: L96 crashed in Bocche di Cattaro upon return, killing EF Stb Masch Wart Schramek and Matr Patkos.

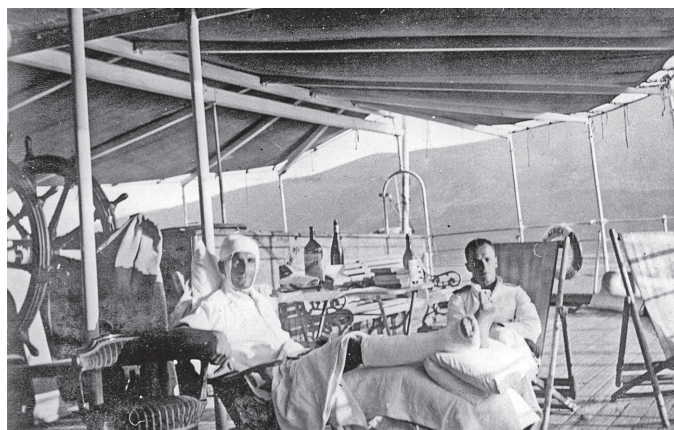
Whilst ferrying Hansa-Brandenburg CC A23 from Pola to Durazzo on 7 July, Lschlt Konjović force-landed at sea near Dulcigno (today Ulcinj) with



Officers of Seeflugstation Kumbor in ceremonial uniforms at their base in the summer of 1917 (from left): Frglt Reman, Frglt Plachner, Lschlt Hell, unknown, Lschlt Konjović, unknown Lschlt, unknown Frglt, Frglt von Klimburg and Frglt Nardelli.

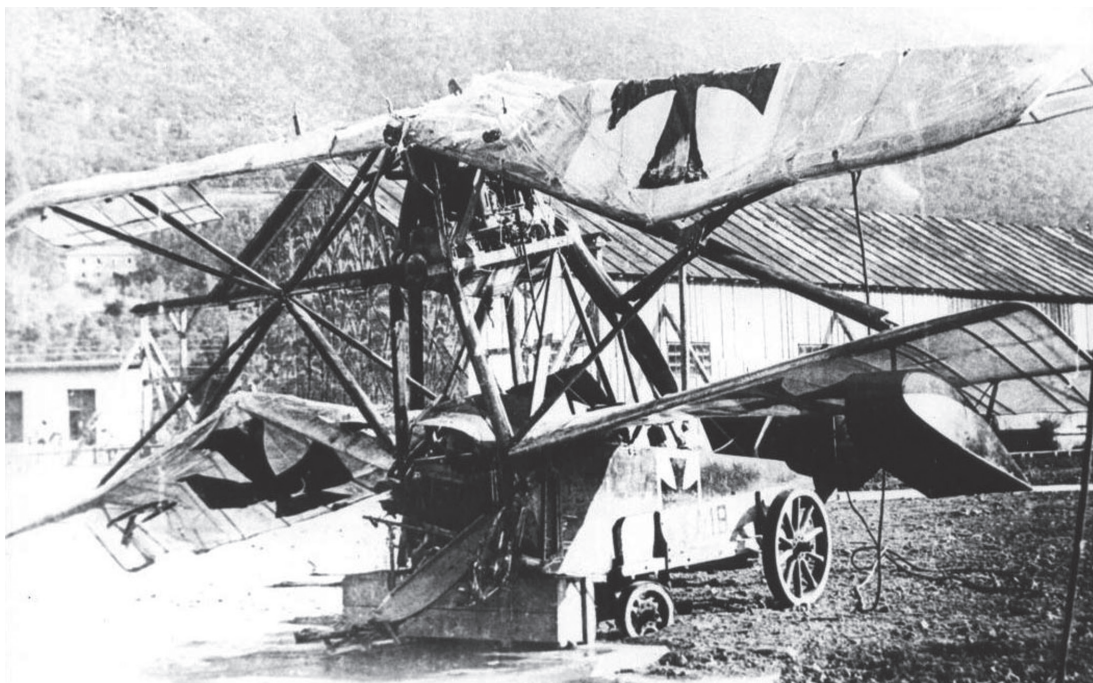
(Sammlung Schupita)

dead engine. The seaplane reached its destination in tow. The same pilot had another mishap with the nimble fighter on 31 July in Kumbor, but this time with more serious consequences: whilst landing in darkness, his A19 struck a buoy at full speed and somersaulted. Konjović was launched from the shattered cockpit and ended up in water unconsciousness, his head smashed, ankle broken and bruised ribs. By a pure chance the whole event occurred less than 100 meters away from an fisherman, who quickly reached



Lschlt Dimitrije "Mita" Konjović at hospital ship Afrika in Bocche, healing the wounds from the flying accident on 31 July 1917. After the Battle for the Otranto Straits, he was nominated for the Order of Leopold of the Knight Rank by the head of Kreuzerflotillekommando KAdm Alexander Hansa. However, the decoration never came from the office of the fleet commander VAdm Maksimilijan Njegovan, as Konjović put it, due to "the many bottom dogs around him, always envious and resentful".

(Bernd Tötschinger)



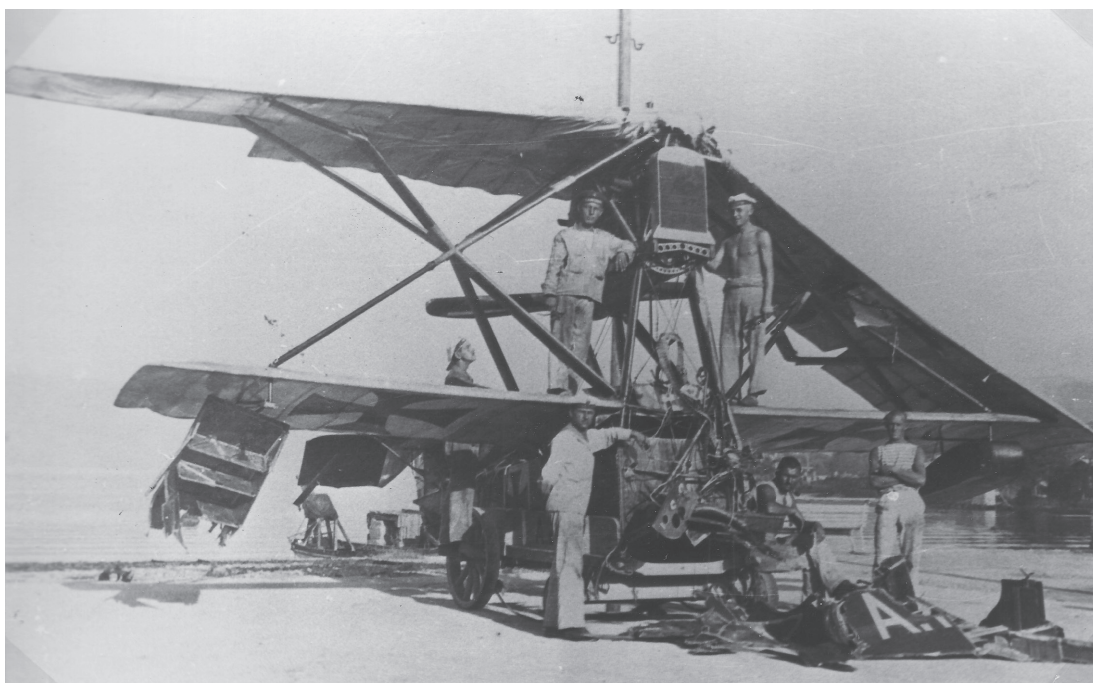
Wreck of Hansa-Brandenburg CC A19 after a landing accident on 31 July 1917.
(Sammlung Schupita)

him and pulled him out to the dry, saving him from drowning. The plane was a write-off and Konjović spent over two months recuperating. Five days later Frglt Holoubek and EF Stb Masch Wart Schreinczer in K207 and Fl Qu Meist Haschke in A21 went from Durazzo to engage enemy aircraft reported to be in the area. Fl Qu Meist Haschke claimed a seaplane 10 nautical miles west of Vojusa estuary. Italian units which operated in that area reported air combat with two enemy fighters but suffered no losses.

In two flying accidents on 10 August the unit lost K224 as it crashed on landing, whilst K231 was damaged during a test flight; both crews remained unhurt. The day thereafter K222 failed to return from

a reconnaissance sortie over Brindisi, after being brought down by anti-aircraft artillery. Fhr idRes d MK Emil Engel and Matr Kniewallner crash-landed with their aircraft into the harbour and ended up in captivity.

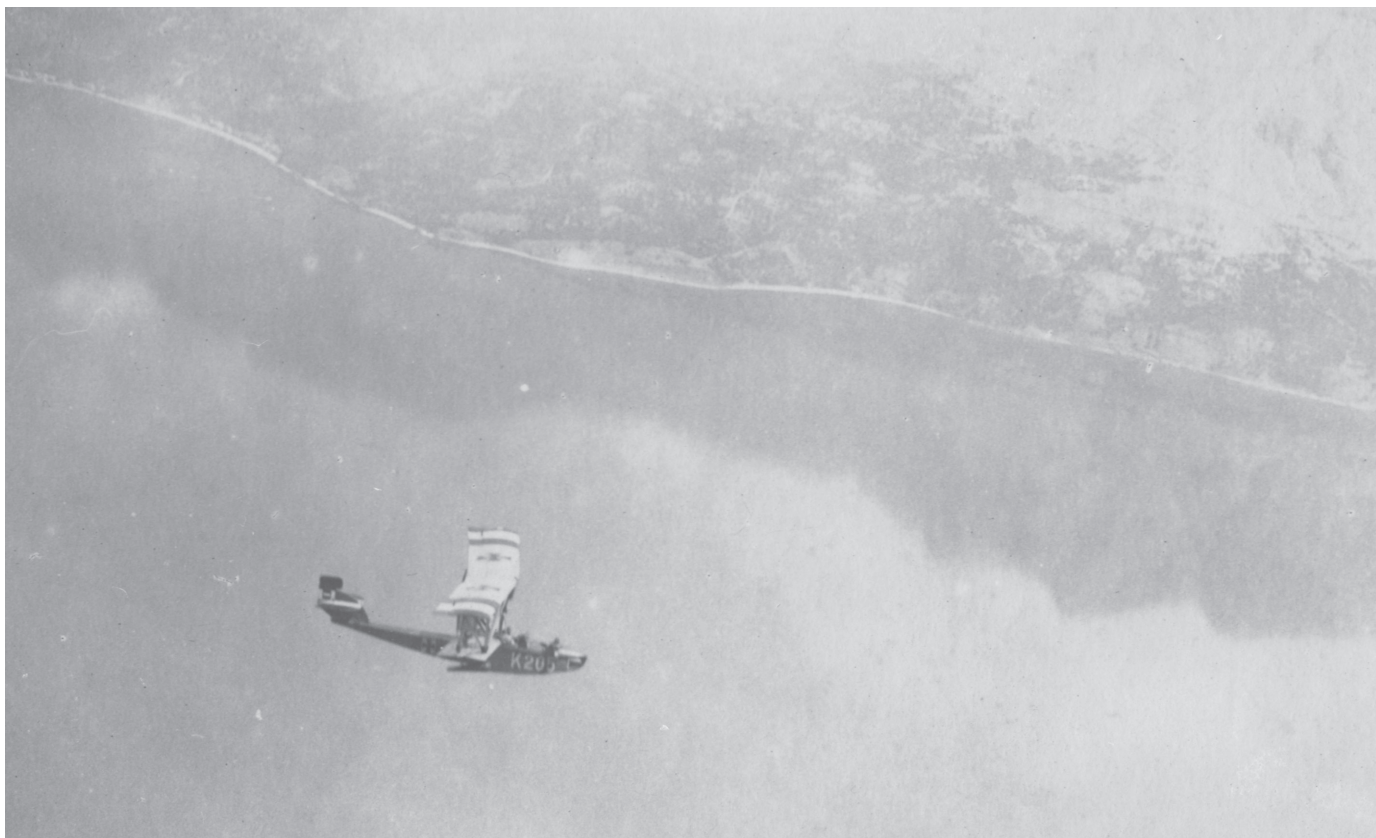
In that period the first examples of the latest type of a bomber flying boat, the Hansa-Brandenburg W.13, arrived in Bocche. Another design of Ernst Heinkel, it was driven by mighty 350 PS Daimler Ba. 21.000, the most powerful aircraft engine of the Great War. Unfortunately, it proved to be the plane's Achilles heel as it hadn't been fully developed, suffered from many design flaws and was complicated to manufacture. Depending on production series, the



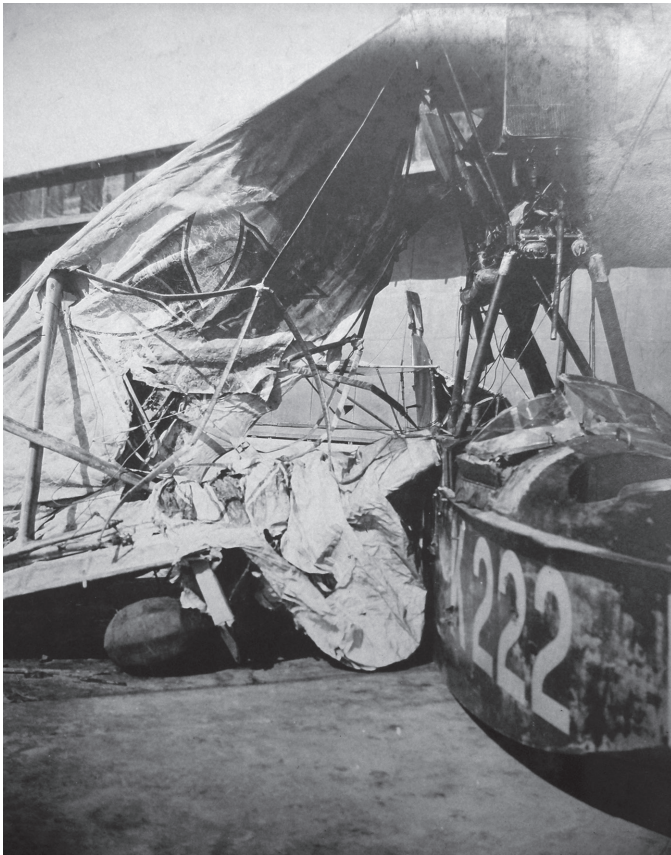
The cockpit area of A19 has been completely shattered and Lschlt Dimitrije Konjović survived, although seriously wounded, just by a chance.
(Bernd Tötschinger)



UFAG Brandenburgs K205 and K206 in flight over Southern Dalmatia in the summer of 1917.
(Mario Raguž)



Frglt Dragutin Reman at the controls of K205 over Montenegrin coast. Croat pilot was flying almost exclusively on this aircraft for most of the spring and summer of 1917.
(Mario Raguž)



Remnants of UFAG Brandenburg K222 brought out at apron of Stazione Idrovolanti di Brindisi, after it was shot down on 11 August 1917.

(Paolo Varriale)

new aircraft could carry from 330 to 600 kg of bombs, climbed to 1.000 meters in 12 to 14 minutes and had a top speed of 145 to 160 km/h. Four different producers manufactured 130 airframes in five batches: Hansa-Brandenburg (German branch) K305 to K319 and K320 to K364, UFAG K365 to K422, Phönix K425 to K430, K432 and K433, and Oeffag K431 and K434. Not all of them entered the service due to lack of available engines.

During August, a forward flying base was established in Gravosa (today Gruž), a suburb of Ragusa, and put under command of Seeflugstation Kumbor. Flugstützpunkt Gravosa would not become fully operational until the end of the war. It did not play significant role in the operations, as it served only as a supply junction for ship escort, submarine and mine searching and coastal reconnaissance of the area between Bocche and Curzola island. On the other hand, the importance of Kumbor and Durazzo grew even more, that month the record 48 flying boats were reported on rooster of Lschlt Konjović. However, opposing them were far more superior Entente forces in the zone of Otranto Straits, approximately three times in size, and accordingly to the situation, Austro-Hungarian naval airmen in Southern Adriatic (the

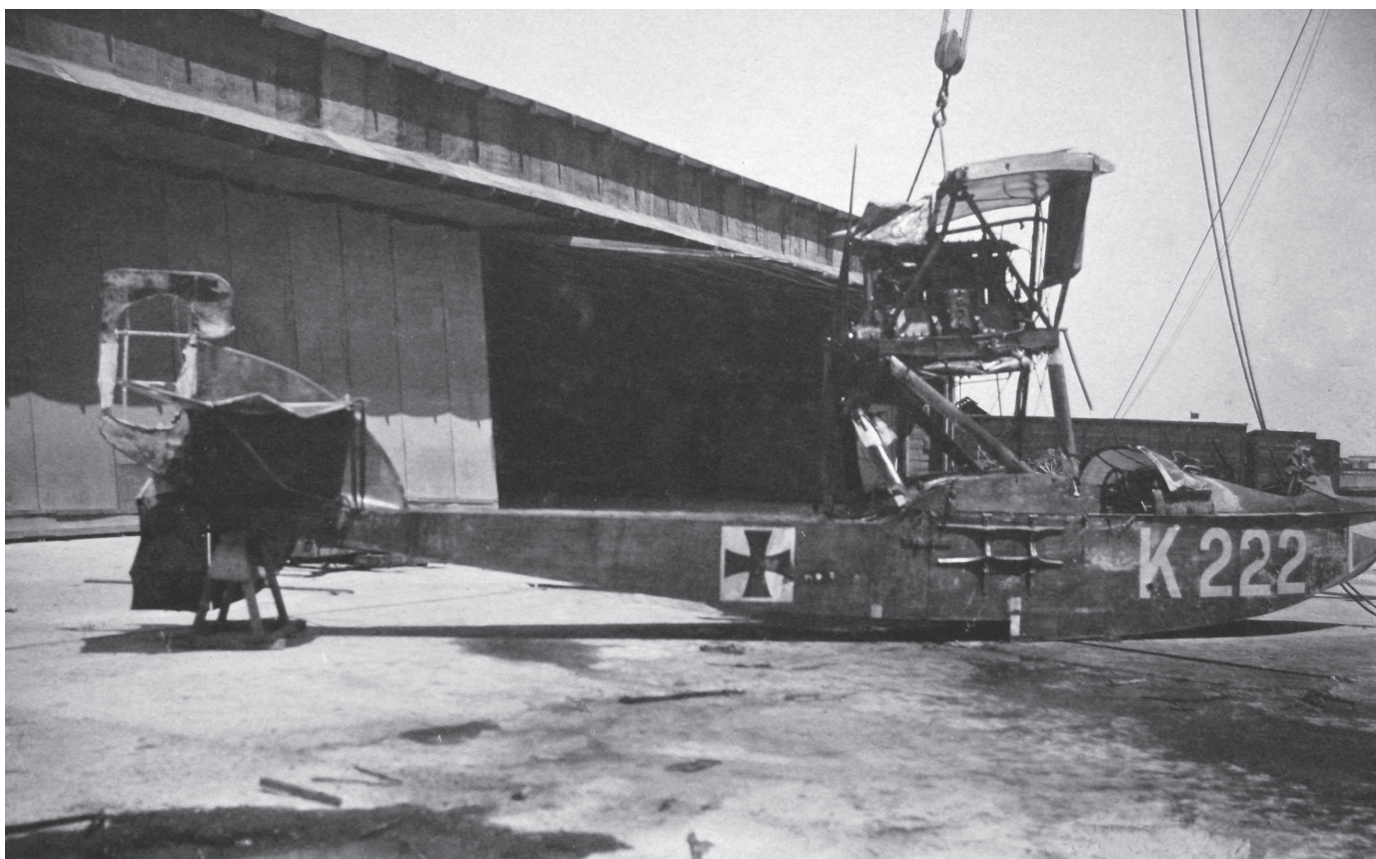
same also happened in the North) gradually turned into defensive. After all, problems with new seaplane types, production of engines and insufficient number of trained pilots on one side, and influx of Allied reinforcements on the other, brought the decisive shift to the Allied side in power over Adriatic airspace.

Five UFAG Brandenburgs attacked Otranto on 22 September, dropping a ton of bombs on naval aviation base and a nearby airfield. When returning, Frglt Walter Haberl and Lt idRes d MK Weissmann force-landed with K206 near Cape Rodoni; the aircraft was towed to Durazzo by the destroyer SMS Csikós. Then, on 27 September a black day came for Bocche aviators: out of seven crews dispatched from Durazzo to bomb Brindisi, three failed to return. Italian report of the attack noted the damage and loss of only one of these:

“At about 20 hours the anti-aircraft alarm was given to the naval base in Brindisi. A squadron of eight to ten enemy seaplanes was discovered at high altitude before reaching the base and was immediately welcomed by intense fire of anti-aircraft batteries of the air defense and from the ships, which fired an area barrage. In spite of this the seaplanes were able to arrive over the base thanks to the poor visibility caused by the moonlight evening and the high altitude, dropping several bombs, their number not yet established, many of which fell into the sea and others were found unexploded, among them two incendiary bombs and one of 150 kg.

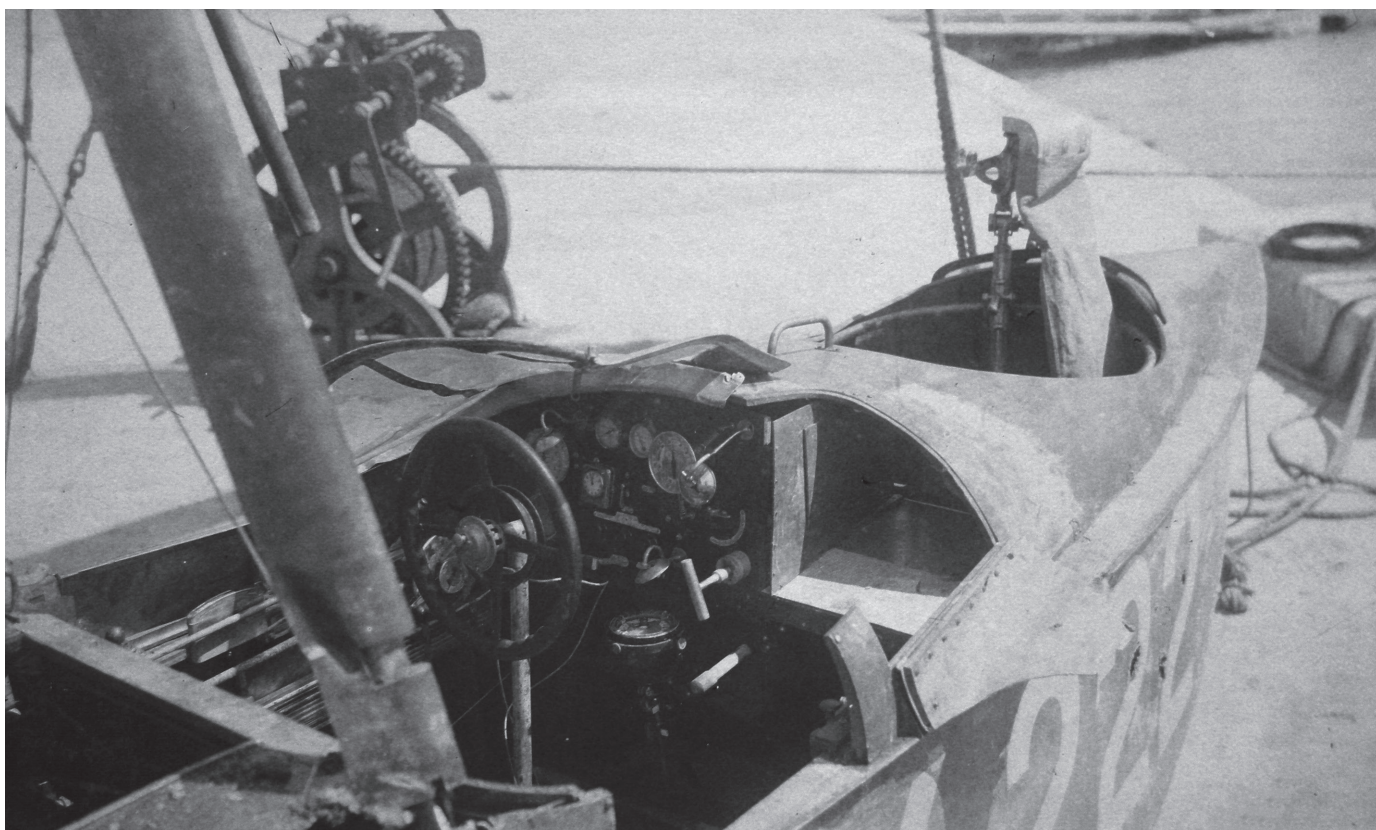
The damage caused by the explosion of bombs can be summarized: no bomb in the town, anti-aircraft battery N. 1 hit with no damage to the guns, two dead and two wounded. A house, used as machinegun pit by Royal Army, was hit and destroyed, injuring 13 soldiers. A bomb, falling on a steam boat just a few meters from (cruiser – a.c.) ‘RN Pisa’, sunk the boat causing the death of a fireman and injuring a sailor. Simultaneously the explosion produced a small dent on the hull of ‘Pisa’ in a length of 6 meters, corresponding to 6 frames, causing the infiltration of water in an amount estimated at 30 tons per hour. Immediately the tug ‘Egadi’ provided the drainage, but it is estimated that the vessel must enter into a dry dock. Also on ‘Pisa’ regrettably there was one dead and one wounded due to shrapnel from anti-aircraft shells. The floating dock suffered minor damage because of concussion produced by the explosion of five bombs in its vicinity as well, which caused light un-riveting to the dunnage.

An enemy seaplane, apparently hit by anti-aircraft fire, glided to the sea about 10 miles from Brindisi and was picked up in the morning by a torpedo boat on patrol service, it captured the airmen and towed the aircraft to the port. The attack began at 20.00 and lasted until 21.30, it was performed in successive waves. The shots fired by the batteries of anti-aircraft defense amounted to 2753,



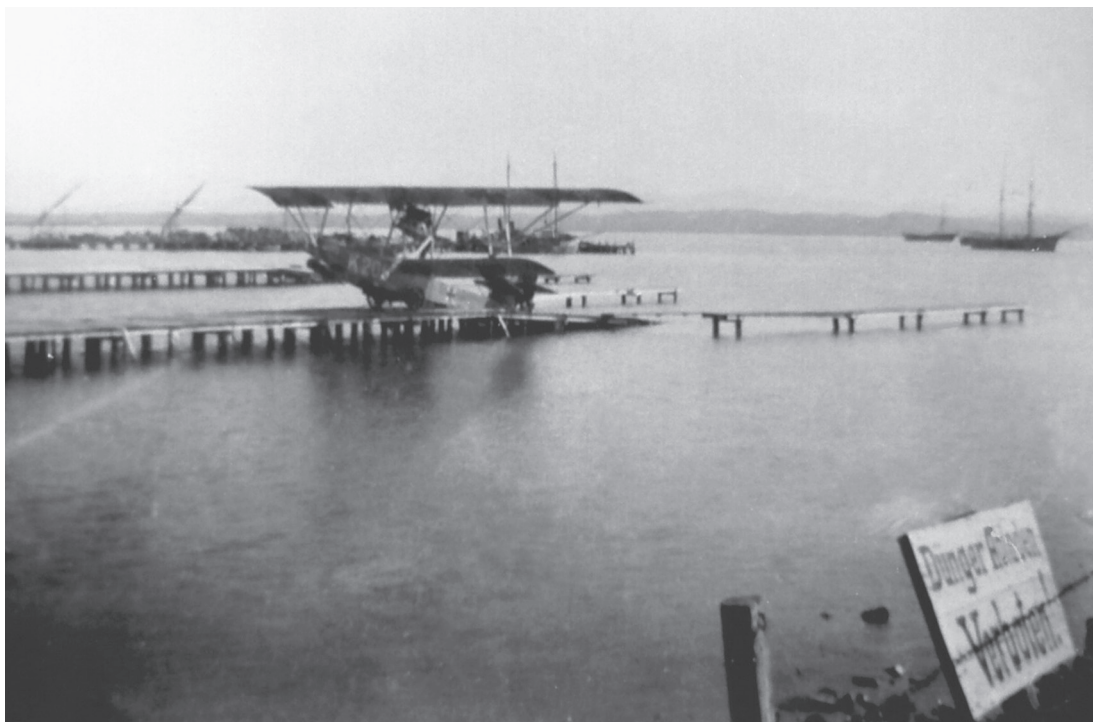
Wreck of K222 with its wings removed and rudder treated by souvenir hunters.

(Paolo Varriale)



Interesting detail of the cockpit of K222. Schwarzlose M.07/12 machinegun has been removed from its stand in the front seat.

(Paolo Varriale)



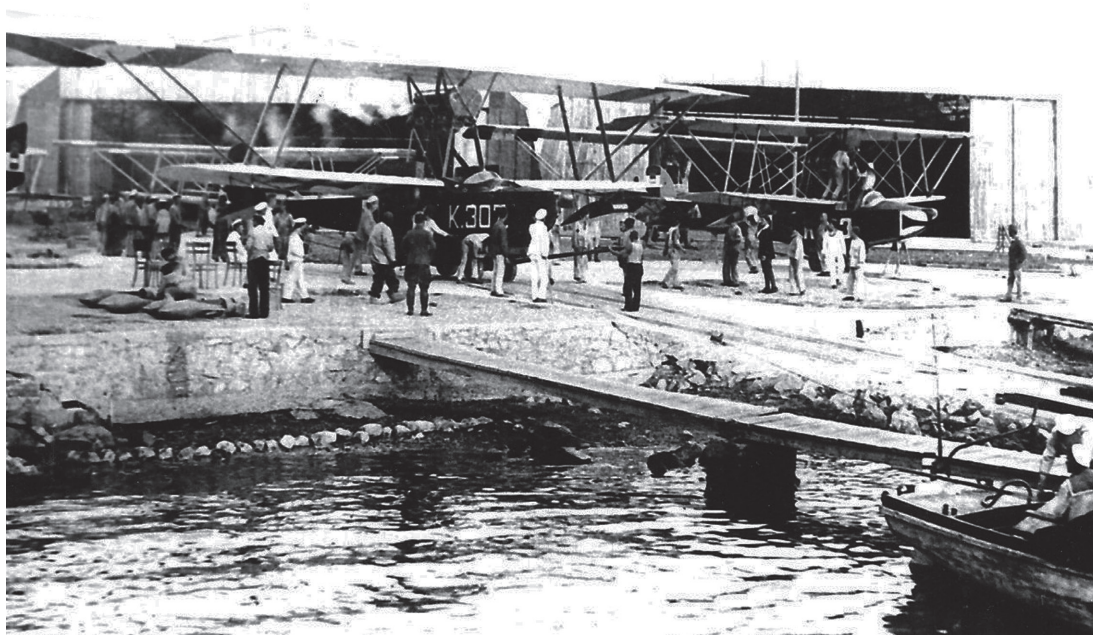
UFAG Brandenburg K206 resting at the slipway in Durazzo.
(Boris Ciglić)

about 600 were fired from ships. The first reports said that seaplanes had also dropped bombs on Lecce-Ostuni-Villanova, but further communications didn't confirm such an attack."

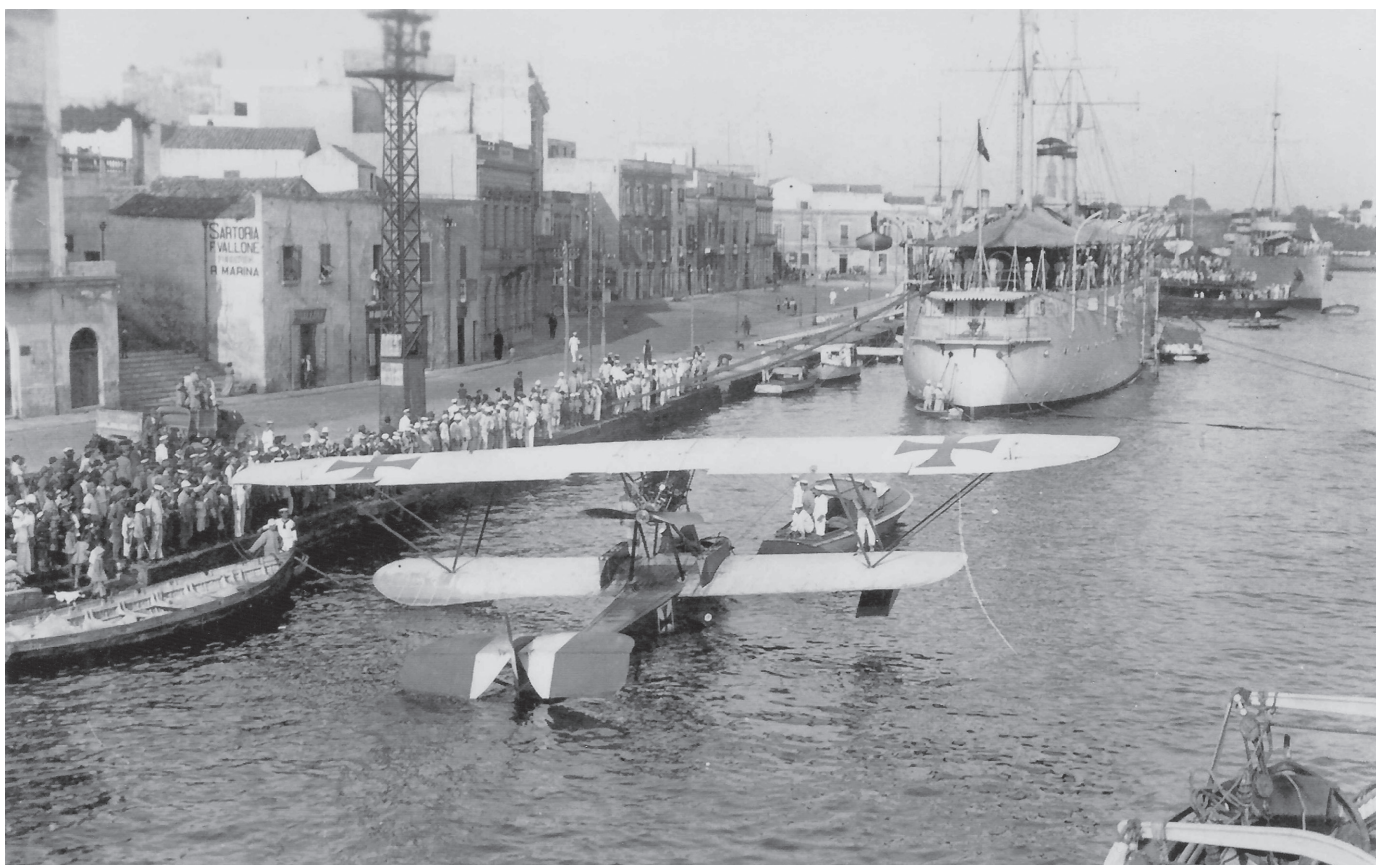
The captured airmen were Lschlt Emanuel Lerch and Fhr idRes d MK Béla Lenti in Hansa-Brandenburg W.13 K307, which force-landed due to cracked water jacket. In the morning of 3 October Regia Marina torpedo boat 14 OS found the body of Frglt Maximilian Sewera, and that same evening tug RD 10 found the remnants of Fhr idRes d MK Karl Strizik, his observer in Oeffag Weichmann K193. On 2 November an 185 PS Daimler Ba. 18.000 engine washed ashore at Meleda. It was thought that it

might have been from the UFAG Brandenburg K223, but this could not be established with full certainty. No trace of EF Stb E Wart Rudolf Traxelmayr and Lt idRes d MK Jenő Czenz was ever found. What brought down these two flying boats remains unknown, but collision over sea in a darkness might have been the cause.

During a ferry flight from Pola to Kumbor on 28 September, Oeffag Weichmann K424 prototype force landed near Trstenik on Curzola; it was towed to the island by torpedo boat SM Tb 73F. Another Hansa-Brandenburg CC was lost in Kumbor on 3 October as A23 capsized during take-off; Frglt Reman remained unhurt.

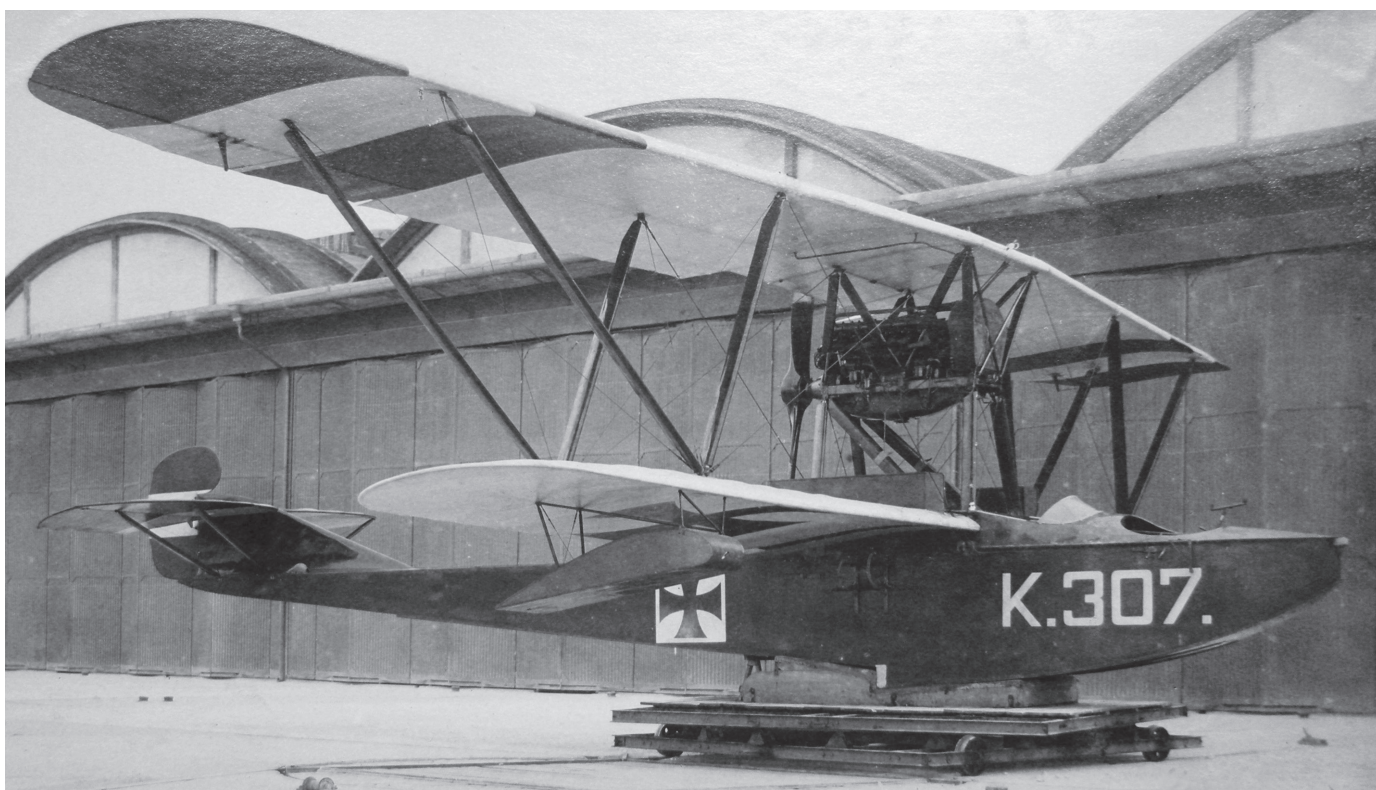


Hansa Brandenburg W.13 K307 and an Albatros Weichmann are made ready for action. K307 was delivered to Kumbor on 20 September and lost just a week later.
(George Haddow / Albatros Collection)



Curios spectators glance at K307 which was brought to Brindisi harbour, after a forced landing at sea due to cracked water jacket on 27 September 1917.

(Paolo Varriale)



K307 on a stand at Stazione Idrovolanti di Brindisi. Its crew, Frglt Emanuel Lerch and Fhr idRes d MK Béla Lenti became prisoners of war.

(Paolo Varriale)



Proud airmen posing with Hansa Brandenburg W.13 K306 in Kumbor. The size of the aircraft and its 350 PS Daimler Ba. 21.000 engine is evident. White dots in its individual code identify this aircraft as being produced in Germany.

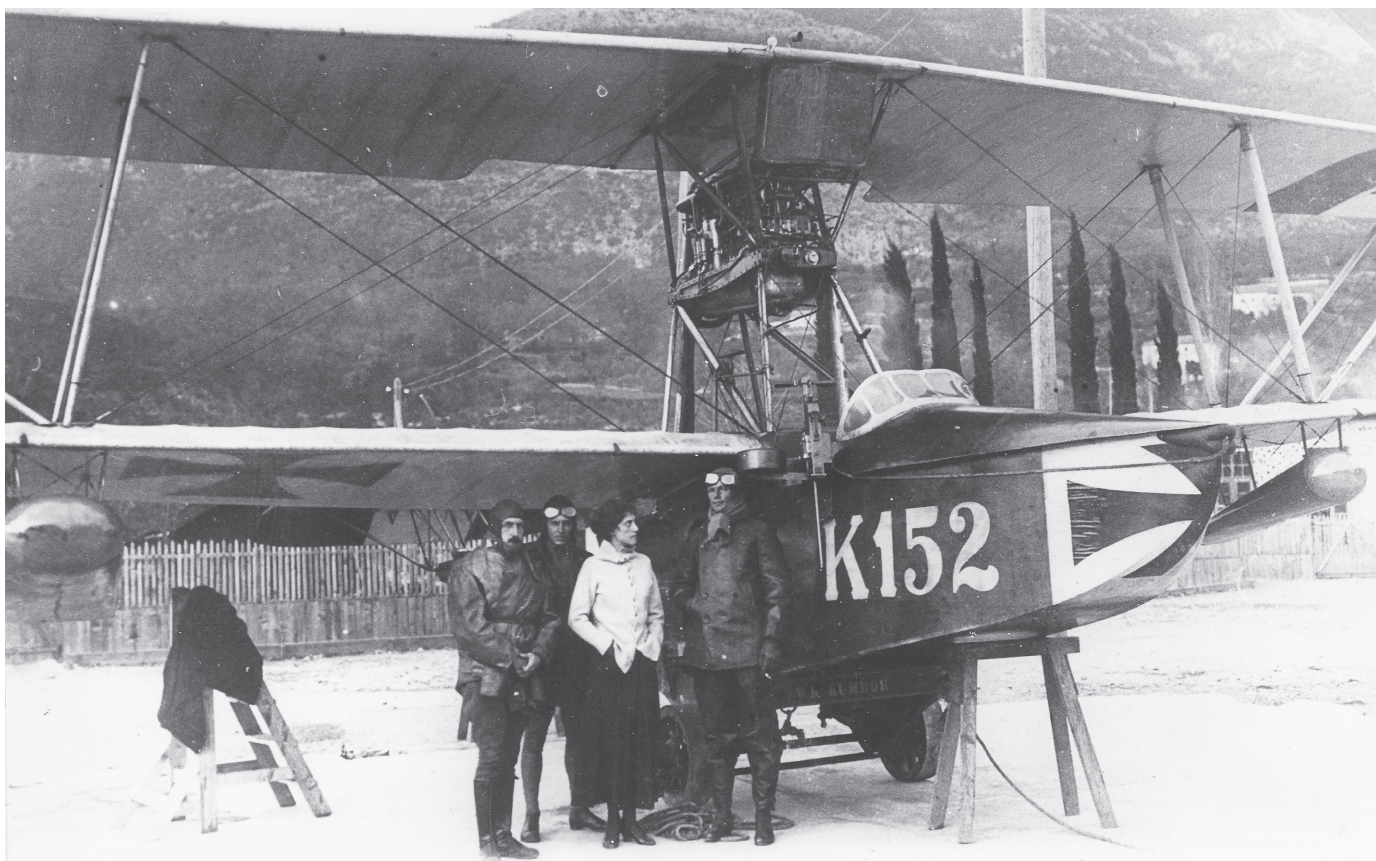
(Mario Raguž)

After sporadic assaults in 1916, Durazzo was subjected to attacks of Entente aircraft on regular basis from the spring of 1917 on, but Bocche and its shipping and installations remained unhindered. First air assault on Bocche was launched in early hours of 5 October by 12 Caproni Ca.3 bombers of Distaccamento A.R. (Detachment A.R. – initials are of its commander Armando Armani) from Gioia del Colle. A total of 96 bombs of different calibre were dropped from altitude of 3.000 meters, setting on fire some storages in Gjenovic and fuel depot in Kumbor. Famous poet and Italian nationalist Gabriele D'Annunzio took part in the attack aboard Ca.3 4160.

In late hours of 18 October light cruiser SMS Helgoland and destroyers SMS Tátra, SMS Csepel, SMS Lika and SMS Triglav set sail from Bocche di Cattaro in direction of Otranto barrage. Seeflugstation Kumbor supported the raid with eight sorties in the following morning. Two FBA Type H flying boats of 255^a Squadriglia from Brindisi came upon ships and patrolling K205 and K206 near Albanian coast. They engaged K206 of Frglt Holoubek and EF Stb Masch Wart Schreinczer, which in turn set on fire flying boat with number 4 on the hull. Austro-Hungarian airmen claimed the seaplane was shot down, although

the Italian crew managed to extinguish the fire and get back to Brindisi. Frglt Haberl and EF Stb Masch Wart Broser engaged French submarine Coulomb with two 50 kg bombs, but failed to inflict any damage to it. Second pair in the air were Frglt Zelezny and Fhr idRes d MK József Polinák in K217 and Fl Meist Gyula Benkő and Frglt Sándor Lupinszki in K194. They attacked Italian task force composed of light scouts RN Pepe and RN Poerio and three destroyers, which came from Brindisi in direction of attackers. L132 of Fl Qu Meist Anton Grabowiecki and Lt idRes d MK Anton Toich and L135 of Fl Meist Hans Rixinger and Lt idRes d MK Weissmann patrolled in the area of Cape Menders (today Mendra), as Lschlt Konjović and Fl Gast Lautner in K231 and Frglt Nardelli and EF Stb Masch Wart Kohlhauser in K178 sighted enemy ships at 9.45. They immediately radioed their position to their own naval units, which eventually decided to cancel the operation and turn back.

When returning from a combat sortie on 27 October, Frglt Ottokar Holoubek flipped over with A42 whilst alighting at rough seas in front of Durazzo. The fighter was completely wrecked, but the pilot escaped without serious injuries.



Female visitor in Kumbor with heavily-dressed crew of Albatros Weichmann K152 before a U-boat surveillance sortie on 7 December 1917. This plane was struck off charge due to wear and detrition in October 1918 after a long service.

(K.u.K. Kriegsmarine Archiv, Wien)

In late October 1917, combined Austro-Hungarian and German forces launched an offensive on Italian front. The operation, which would be known as The Twelfth Battle for Isonzo or The Battle for Caporetto was a huge success, the attackers advanced more than 100 kilometers into Italian mainland, over 10.000 Italian soldiers were killed, 30.000 wounded and 265.000 captured, and large quantities of weapons were either seized or destroyed. On psychological plan, to break the Italian censorship of catastrophic news from the battlefields in hinterland, a series of propaganda leaflet-dropping sorties was launched, but with instructions that only volunteers should carry such missions, as the Italian High Command allegedly threatened to punish with death squad any crew caught conducting them. In the afternoon of 4 November, four crews were assembled with Konjović at the lead. He ordered that K231 had to be prepared for a start at 6.00 next morning, its machinegun removed and bow filled with 25.000 leaflets:

"Wind strength 5-6, it poured in streams, below the clouds, which lied at just 600 meters, a strong gust. In order to avoid it, I decided to break through the clouds and continue above them - after a quite long climb, we see first sun rays only at 1.600 meters. Finally, with controls on

western course, above the sunlit endless glacier, there was a perfect flying weather - we flew at height of 1.700 meters. Course Manfredonia.

Suddenly and completely unexpected, an explosion was heard with simultaneous shaking of the whole aircraft - I thought instinctively of a wing fracture, however dared not to look right or left, but staring forward, I decided to go down and pressed on the depth controls, but without effect. So: propeller explosion, which cut an steering cable, and thanks god no wing fracture, what I - more by corner of my eye than watching, ascertained with joy.

But it was no time to be delighted in viewing of two pairs of intact wings, as our plane became more and more unstable; deprived of propeller effect and incapable of glide, our bird held in the air only as a result of inertia, with rapidly decreasing speed.

Quick as a flash I grabbed my observer at the neck with my right arm, I lifted him a little and showed him with eyes direction where he should move, whereafter he formally passed into the front space, to the leaflets.

And look! The effect was already there, as the level indicator showed the inclination of almost 5 degree; firmly holding the 270 degree course, we soon ducked into the cloud layer, which however has been here somewhat narrower; already at 800 meters altitude we saw the sea



Oeffag-built Weichmann K195 takes off from Bocche. Several Tátra-class destroyers can be seen anchored in Gjenovic. This flying boat would be destroyed in a take-off accident in Kumbor on 24 May 1918.
(Mario Raguž)



Seeflugstation Kumbor and Kumbor Narrow captured from the air.
(Mario Raguž)

surface, again rough and moving; east-northeast wind, strength 4-5, occasional rain showers.

It was 7.10 as we went to land; as I considered the airplane non maneuverable, I didn't allow myself any maneuvering, and went, almost with astern wind, against the next, in front of me crosswise rolling wave crest. The horizon, seen from such a low height, looked like snow-white stripe.

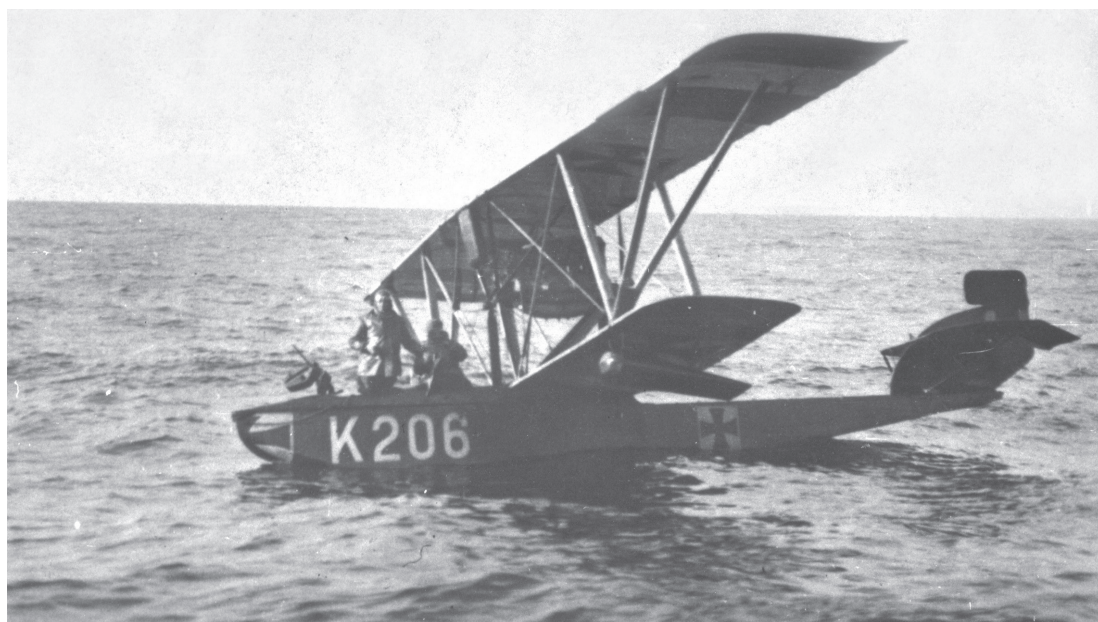
Luckily the height controls functioned and enabled our aircraft to effectuate the first touch with the wave in horizontal position. The high speed, however, caused such a strong impact with the wave crest, that the plane, after a leap of some 100 meters, again reached an wave, to jump again and finally, to meet its end after a third salto: this last impact broke the bottom of our seaplane, whereupon a total flooding with simultaneous capsizing followed and dragged me as well – freed and surfaced, I looked at our wreck and with discomfort noted that the front part of the flying boat, together with my observer, is simply missing.

Holding on tangible parts of the capsized flying boat, I incessantly peeked after my missing observer; there, one had often to take a deep breath and endure the wave passing above him; this rising and sinking of waves was to blame, for me not being able to discover my observer straight away.

Some 50 meters in leeward of our wreck, firmly holding the broken and therefrom launched bowsprit, my young observer followed, eventually, my advice communicated by shouting and signs, to swim over to me. He made this, against the wind and flow taken swimming tour, in about 15 minutes.

Now, reunited, I reckoned the time and fixed our position; of course all of this from memory, therefore estimate, as we had no more aid. Our sinking might have occurred at exactly 7.15, and at the moment, when we found ourselves, pretty much, 160 kilometres west of Cape Ostro."

Final moments of K206, after it alighted at sea with broken cooler on 9 December 1917, approximately 30 nautical miles off of Vieste. Fl Meist Hans Rixinger and Lt idRes d MK Antal Csonka are waiting to be picked up by SMS Tátra, which took the flying boat into tow, but it quickly capsized and sunk.
(Mario Raguž)



By a stroke of good luck, Lschlt Konjović and Lt idRes d MK Max Weissmann were spotted at 15.15 by Fl Meist Rudolf Brauner and Fhr idRes d MK Josef Dörfler in K207, the only crew which accomplished the mission that day (both Frglt Nardelli and Lt idRes d MK Csonka in K177 and Fhr idRes František Bakala and EF Stb Masch Wart Franz Kohlhauser in K178 aborted). Five hours later they were rescued by torpedo boat SM Tb 93F, which also picked up the Austro Daimler AD 6 engine from the floating wreck.

Two more UFAG Brandenburgs were lost on 9 December as they returned from leaflet-dropping over route Manfredonia – Vieste. Frglt Holoubek and Fhr idRes d MK Dörfler in K205 and Fl Meist Rixinger and Lt idRes d MK Csonka in K206 came down at sea, some 30 nautical miles east of Vieste. The first crew was picked by SMS Csepel and the second by SMS Tátra whilst the aircraft had to be scuttled.

Frglt János Plachner and Fhr idRes d MK Walter Unger in K177 and Fl Meist Rixinger and Lt idRes d MK Jenő Ertsey in K179 went to reconnoiter Valona harbour on 15 January. As they were on a backward journey, K179 had to force-land near Cape Laghi and as it did so, it ran aground. The aircraft was eventually towed to Durazzo for repair. The same day saw a loss of Hansa-Brandenburg W.18 A55, detached at Durazzo, as its engine cut during a fighter patrol over Vojusa estuary. Frglt Reman remained unharmed in a crash-landing in the Kravasta lagoon.

The W.18 was the newest fighter seaplane in inventory of k.u.k. Kommando der Seefliegerkorps. A derivate of Hansa-Brandenburg CC, it could be powered by either 200 PS Hiero Ba. 33.000 or 230 PS Hiero Ba. 34.000 engine. It was armed with two 8 mm machineguns, climbed to 2.000 meters in nine minutes, had a flight duration of two and a half hours and



Veteran Lohner Tl L131 in a new camouflage at Flugstützpunkt Gravosa during a break from a mine search sortie in early 1918. This seaplane was lost in flying accident in Ragusa Vecchia harbour on 18 June 1918, taking the life of observer Frglt Sándor Hollósy. Pilot Fl Meist Hans Rixinger escaped with minor injuries.
(Mario Raguž)

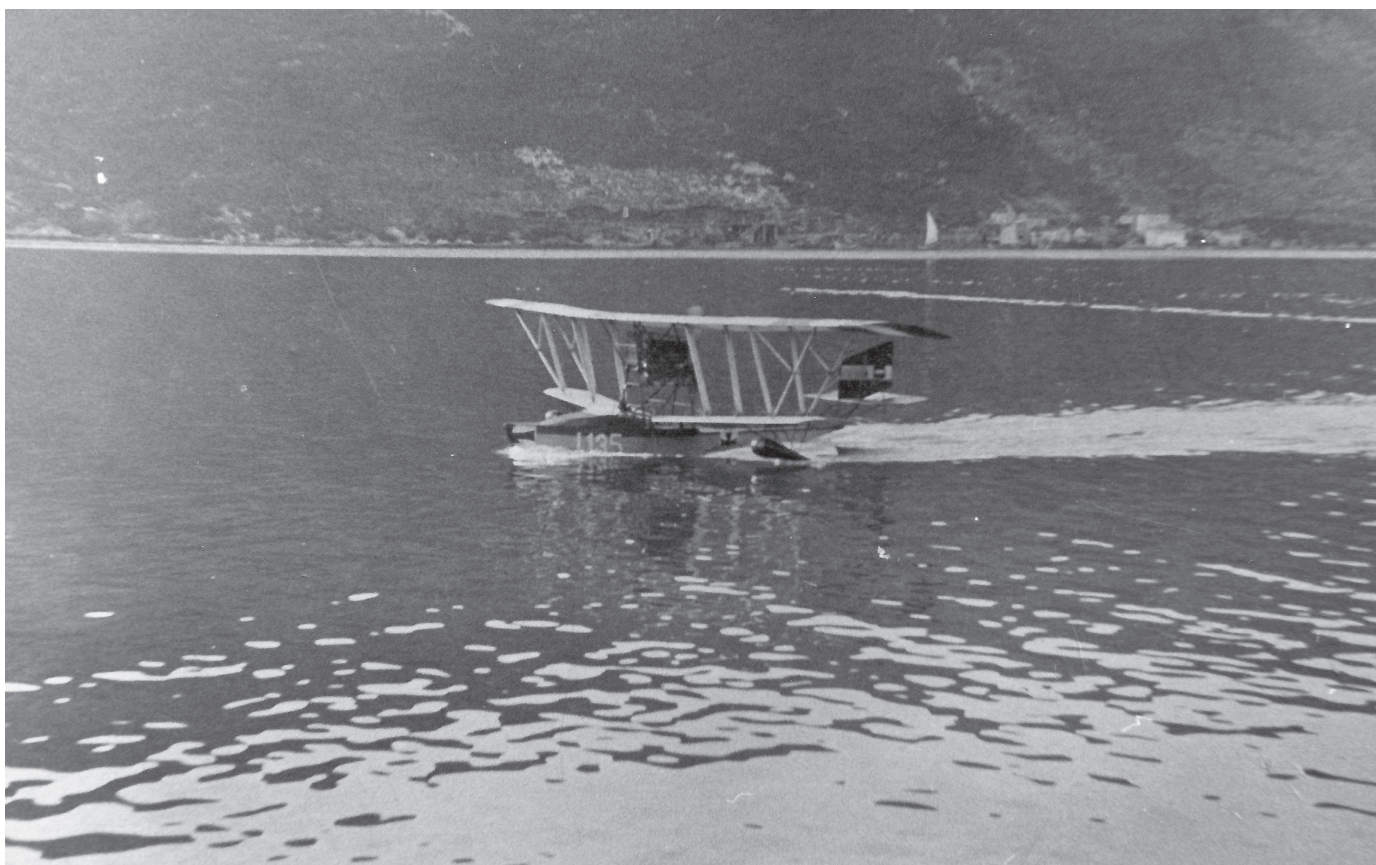
a top speed of 163 to 175 km/h – depending on the engine built in. A total of 47 examples were pressed into service (A50 to A96). The new fighter, however, preserved the sensitive character of the CC and could be tamed only by the most experienced pilots.

The Bocche Mutiny

At the beginning of February 1918 Bocche di Cattaro was a scene of massive turmoil, which eventually made it as famous as splendour of its nature. Dissatisfaction of the Austro-Hungarian seamen was boiling for some time along the Adriatic coast. Poor rations, bad treatment by the officers, dull routine, overwhelming desire for peace, national sentiment of the Slavic elements and political soul-searching infested by Russian revolution were among the main reasons which lead to the insurrection. Of course, different stories that circulated around, some of which implicated officers from Seeflugstation Kumbor (from one that they took red cross nurses and girlfriends on joy rides to the ones that they used their flying boats for journeys to renowned brothel in Ragusa on regular basis), only

helped the outburst of anger. The mutiny erupted on armed cruiser SMS Sankt Georg and torpedo boat tender SMS Gäa at midday of 1 February 1918 and within hours spread over some 40 warships in the bay, supported by more than 3.000 sailors.

Two hours after the mutiny began, several ground crews of Seeflugstation Kumbor hesitated to conduct their duties. When acting commander Lschlt Walter Hell, who replaced the absent Lschlt Konjović, arrived at the scene, four men refused to obey orders, as one of them, Bm Maat dRes Mate Kirac put it *"majority of the people entitles us to do so"* and threatened *"if there is no peace, Seeflugstation will be demolished and destroyed and its seaplanes set on fire"*. Unimpressed, Hell ordered them imprisoned. Still, when an armed rebel patrol arrived from Gjenovic some time later, they were freed. The situation deteriorated even more in the evening as some 200 armed rebels from SMS Sankt Georg and Gäa came to the base, broke into the armoury and distributed weapons and ammunition among those that joined them. A while later, another gang of 40 men arrived at the scene, disarmed and confined Hell and his staff. Matr Oskar Geyer claimed that Sailors Committee from SMS Gäa has put him in charge of the station and cursed at the officers *"You*



L135 slides away from Kumbor station in "Bonazza". Its appearance has changed since its introduction into service: it carries a two tone camouflage on the hull, but contrary to L131, separation line on the hull is higher and individual code remained white.

(Robert Stach via Grant Moulton)

*shitheads, we never expected that you won't support us.
From now on I'm the commander!"*

By the following midday, the rebellion grew to more than 4.000 men in its ranks. However, after the shots from coastal batteries at Lice struck the old battle cruiser SMS Kronprinz Erzherzog Rudolf, as it steamed from anchor at Rose to join main rebel forces in Gjenovic, many questioned their beliefs and lost heart. Bm Maat Franz Rasch, radical leftist from Bohemia and de facto leader of the mutiny recognized that rebellion needed a military plan. Unable to prepare it themselves, he persuaded Sailors Committee to invite his acquaintance from naval air station – Rasch served in nearby Beleuchtungsabteilung (Lighting Detachment) in Kumbor – a young observer, Sfr idRes Antun Sesan, to take the military lead over the rebellion.

Sesan, a Croat from the isle of Lopud near Ragusa, had strong South Slavic national feelings and hatred for Austria-Hungary. He accepted the call, becoming the only officer to openly affiliate himself with the mutineers and tried to wake the ranks by firing anti-monarchy speeches in Croat and Italian, but this just helped in distancing the Austrians and Hungarians from the once common cause. Eventually, he ordered battle stations and readiness for imminent

movement of all ships, but his hearted devotion for collective desertion to Italy found no support. In the morning of 3 February, realizing the mutiny was collapsing, Sesan went to Kumbor and asked his former colleagues to bomb fortress complex at Cape Ostro and open the way for shipping to get out of Bocche, but to no avail. Eventually, minutes before the last rebel ships surrendered, and possibly after being warned that his arrestment is imminent by certain Matr Dalmin (who was actually sent from SMS Gää to Kumbor to arrest him), he boarded K207 together with two Poles, pilot Fl Qu Meist Anton Grabowiecki, and Elektromaat Gustav Stonawski, one of the mutiny leaders from SMS Sankt Georg, and escaped to Italy. Defectors believed that Entente Powers will take some action against Bocche as soon as they learn about the situation there. Energetic, ambitious but childishly naive Sesan was soon deeply disappointed, as recalled in his report written one year after the events:

"On 3 February I arrived with a seaplane to Mattinata, where I immediately informed in short the local police station why I came and that I wanted to get in touch with the district commander as soon as possible. That same afternoon I was taken to Manfredonia and presented to capitano della teritoriale Odo, to whom I told everything

what happened and what is happening in Bocche di Cattaro and why I came there, and asked him to get me in touch with authorities in Brindisi, Taranto or Rome immediately. Unfortunately, I found no understanding from this man, as he wasn't at all familiar with either internal political nor military affairs of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, afraid of committing any mistake just locked me and my two NCO's, placing us under guard of 12 soldiers.

Two days later, two Italian naval aviation officers from Brindisi came to see me, and we compiled a report about the events in Bocche di Cattaro and why did I come to Italy. Two days later they flew away with my aircraft to Brindisi.

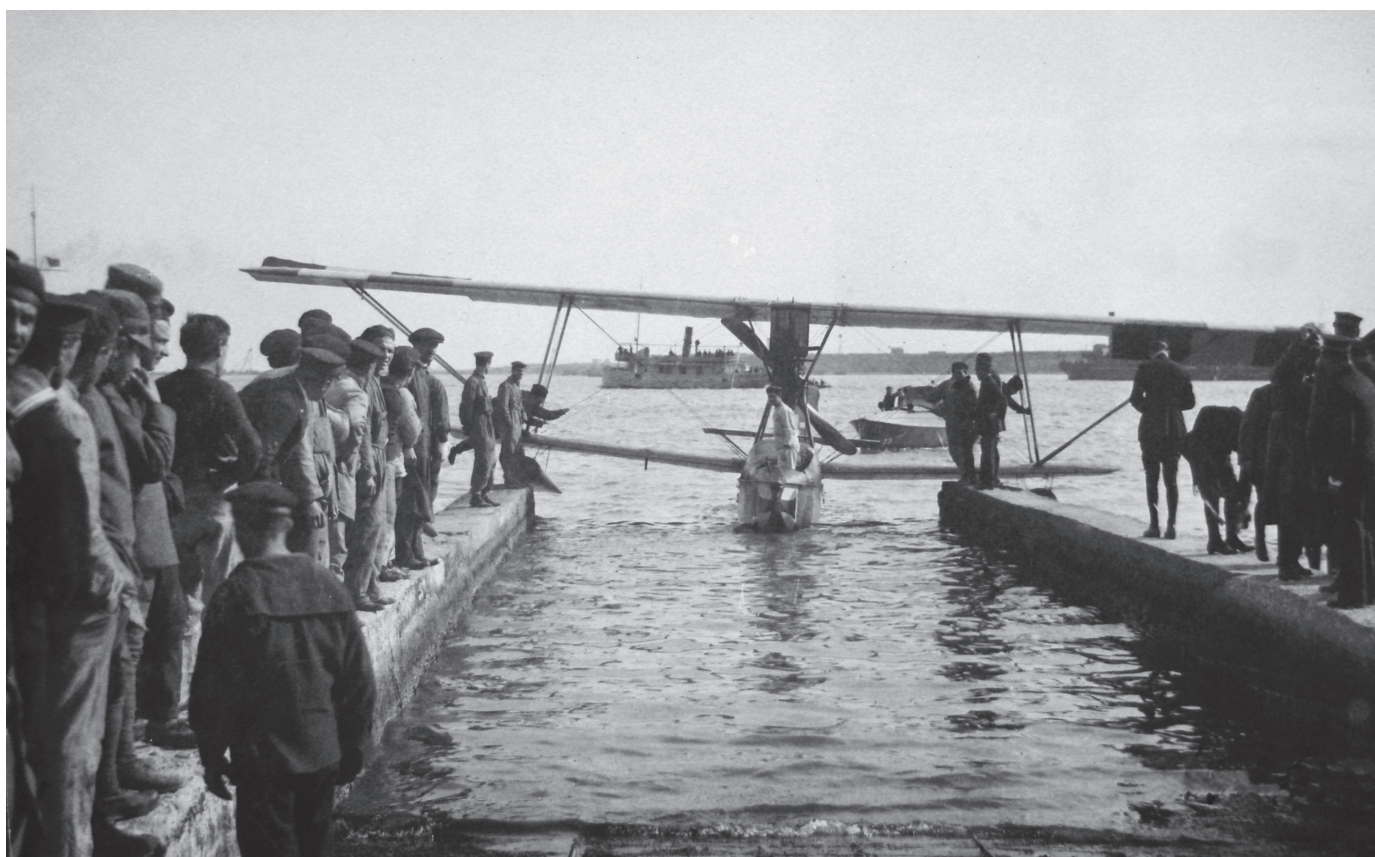
On 7 February I was taken to Brindisi under military escort and confined in the cabin of warship (Italian cruiser – a.c.) 'Varese'. Ship's captain called me and wanted to get informed about stuff that interested him personally. I interrupted him and told him that I came to Italy for matters more important, that something had to be done and that I stand at their disposal with all of my knowledge about the Austrian Navy, in which I served by then for four and half years and which I knew well. I told them to ask me questions, because I did not know what they knew and what would interest them most at the

moment. I got the reply to elaborate on any subject I wish. I accepted the task and worked but without any understanding of the Italians.

On 11 February admiral and commander of all shipping in Brindisi came to 'Varese' and called for me. From the conversation I understood that they took no action against Bocche di Cattaro, even more, they didn't even dispatch a single seaplane to reconnoitre the positions in the Bocche di Cattaro that I told them about. On that occasion I learned that I will be sent to Rome, where I'm going to stay. I quickly arrived in Rome and was placed into the 'Macao' barracks together with my NCO's, in an humid room, which was previously used as a prison for Italian soldiers.

At my protest against such a conduct, I was transferred into another room which wasn't much better than the first one.

There, in Rome, I again asked Italians (as I did in Brindisi) to be allowed to speak to representatives of the mission of the Serbian Kingdom, which I considered the representative of the Yugoslav people, but my plea was rejected with explanation 'this is high politics and therefore it cannot be afforded'. On other hand, my Polish NCO's were visited by their representative Zamorsky."



7 February 1918: curious Italian seamen look at K207 which just arrived from a deserted beach near Manfredonia to Stazione Idrovolanti di Brindisi at the hands of tenente di vascello Orazio Pierozzi. Pierozzi, who finished the war with seven victories, fought many battles with airmen from Seeflugstation Kumbor. He was shot down by Frglt von Klimburg and EF Stb Masch Wart Schramek on 15 May 1917, but on the other hand on 7 June 1917 he participated in downing of Lschlt d Res Poljanec and EF St Masch Wart Praurer. (Paolo Varriale)



Booty K207 of the defectors Fl Qu Meist Anton Grabowiecki, Sfr idRes Antun Sesan and Elektromaat Gustav Stonawski at Stazione Idrovolanti di Brindisi. After the war, Sesan returned to his native island of Lopud, near Ragusa, where he built the famous Grand Hotel in the thirties. On 21 November 1942 a group of 257 Jews which escaped from Independent State of Croatia to Italian occupation zone was interned at Lopud. Sesan provided them with food and shelter in his hotel and gave his best to ease their suffering, until they were deported to a concentration camp on Rab island on 27 May 1943. After the war, many survivors organized themselves and regularly visited Lopud to show their gratitude to Sesan for his humanity. He died at the island on 22 March 1969.

(Paolo Varriale)

Eventually Grabowiecki and Stonawski were released. Sesan asked to be sent to Salonika Front to join Serbian troops but instead ended up in POW camp at Nocera Umbra in June. He was released from captivity on 6 December 1918.

The lack of idea, coordination and communication among the mutineers on one, and determination of the k.u.k. Armee Ober Kommando to crush the rebellion at any price on another side, led to the end of the mutiny. When three battleships and 15 smaller craft arrived at full steam from Pola in the morning of 3 February, loyal officers and seamen regained control over all the vessels in Bocche. Swift and ruthless court-martial was organized for ringleaders. Franz Rasch and three others were sentenced to death and shot in the village of Skaljari (today Škaljari) on 11 February, four men received long sentences. A total of some 600 men were arrested and on 1 September charges were brought against 386 of them. Seven were from Seeflugstation Kumbor: Mate Kirac, Oskar Geyer, František Malý, Ludvík Příbyl, Scholze, Grössl

and Šakić. Eventually, end of the war brought freedom for all of them.

On Defense

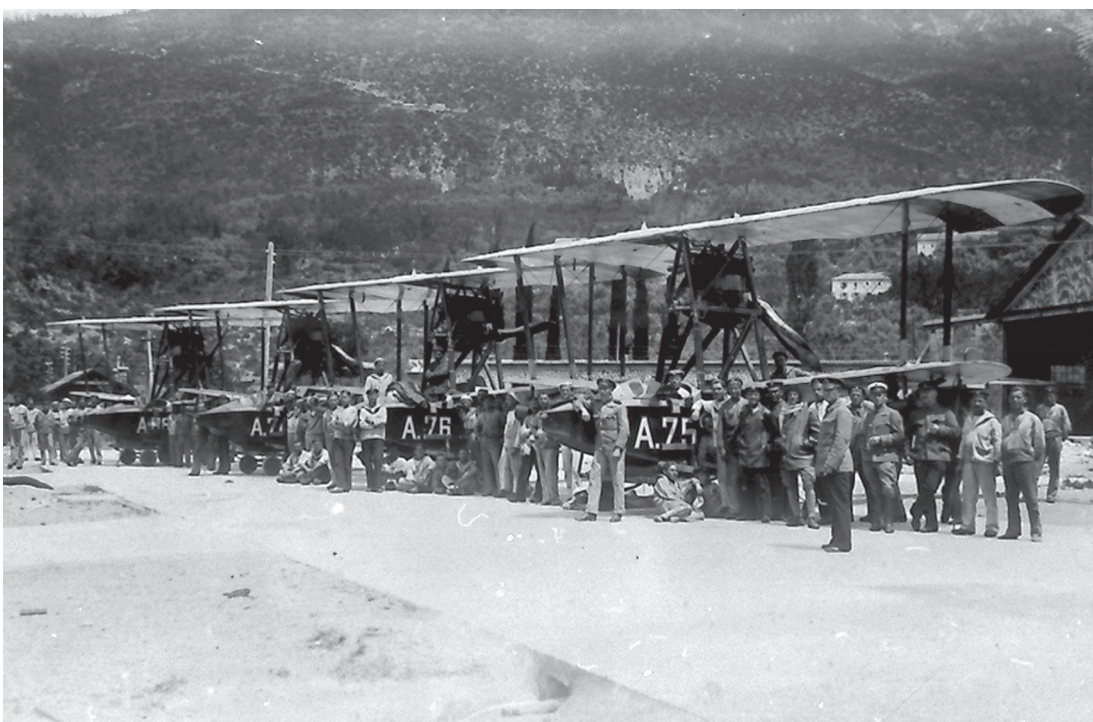
Airmen of the Seeflugstation Kumbor continued with usual tasks of submarine and mine searching, long-range reconnaissance, shipping escort, bombing and fighter patrols, and occasional leaflet-dropping. In the morning of 21 February, A53 of Fl Qu Meist Haschke and K183 of FrglT Plachner and Lt idRes d MK Ertsey rose to intercept a pair of FBA Type H and a Macchi M.5 7084 of 258^a Squadriglia which were on a photo reconnaissance mission over Durazzo. Guardia-marina Alfredo Carrera submitted the following report:

"At 8.45 I take-off from the bay of Valona; I catch up with other aircraft over Saseno and arrive over Durazzo in formation with them.

I am at 4.000 meters over the bay of Durazzo, altitude reached in order to take photographs. I begin a run

Airmen of Seeflugstation Kumbor proudly pose in front of their Hansa-Brandenburg W.18 fighters. A75 would be lost in take-off accident in Durazzo on 3 July 1918. A76 and A74 survived the war and served in Naval Aviation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. A88 was seized by Italians after the end of hostilities and scrapped.

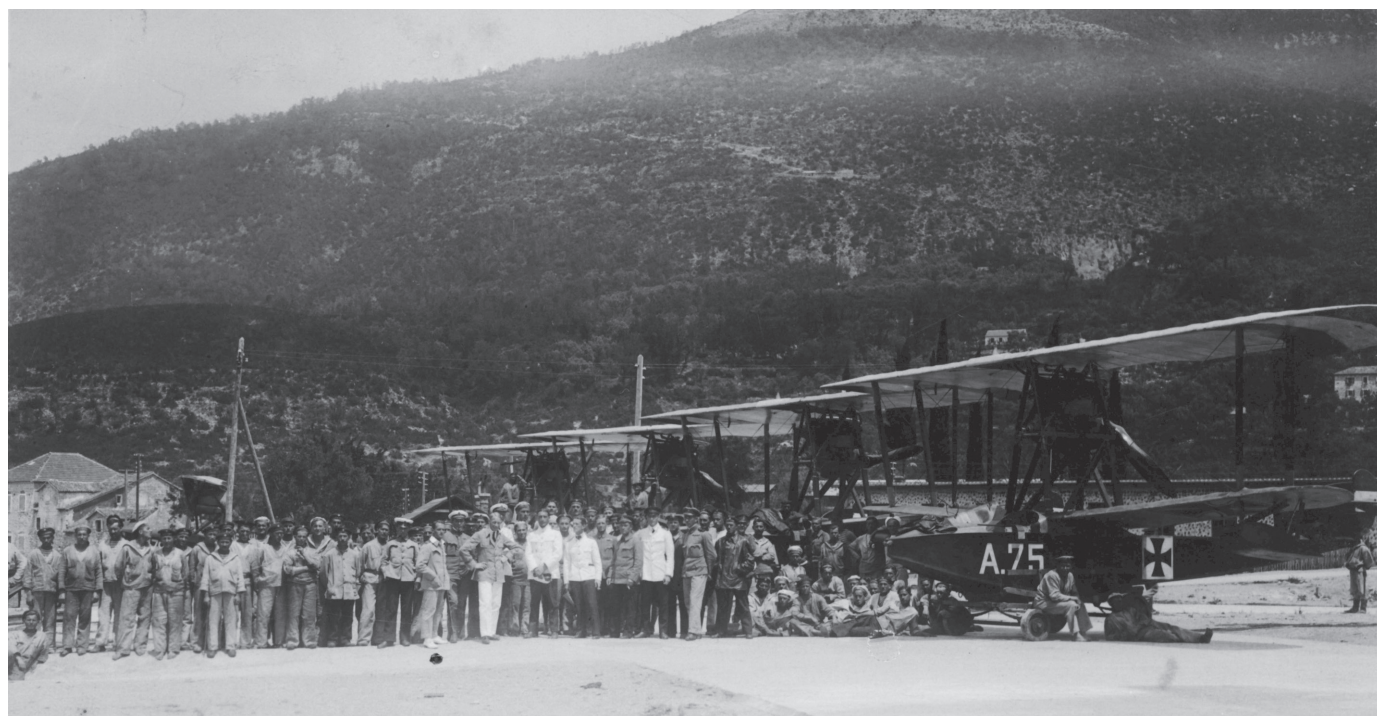
(Sammlung Schupita)



and take eight plates. The anti-aircraft artillery is lively, often I find myself surrounded by a volley of shots, but I'm not hit. In the meantime, I look at the course of other two planes, which I have to escort, and when I realize they are turning back, I escape from the bay as well.

At this point a very strong vibration of the aircraft gives me the feeling of being hit, I suppose by a grenade,

which struck the plane and blew away part of the lower left wing with the float. I correct this damage with a manoeuvre, reduce revs and glide to rejoin the two FBA's, when a second shot at 3000 meters strikes my tanks and stops the engine. Gasoline rushes into the hull and I'm forced to glide to the sea. I leave the coastline and go toward the high seas in a gentle glide, as far as it is possible with the damaged



Commander Lschlt Dimitrije Konjović (in the middle, with crossed hands in white tunic and dark trousers) joins his men for a remembrance photo. Konjović was born on 31 December 1888 in Órszállás village (today Stanišić) near Zombor. His elder brother Petar became one of the greatest Serbian composers, and his cousin Milan counts among most prominent Serbian painters. He died in Belgrade on 5 January 1982.

(Sammlung Schupita)



Kumbor, March 1918: Fl Qu Meist Reinhold Haschke poses in front of A89 and 50- and 20 kg bombs. Haschke was in a group of 20 men sent to a pilot course at Fuhlsbüttel, Germany, in August 1915, as Schulflugstation Cosada lacked the capacity to train enough airmen. With four claims, he was the most successful fighter pilot of the Seeflugstation Kumbor, but also the most decorated non-commissioned officer of the k.u.k. Kriegsmarine. (Bernd Tötschinger)

airframe, alighting on the water about 4 nautical miles from Cape Durazzo. The sea is rough, fresh wind blows from the northeast, but in spite of this I'm able to do a good landing without damage to the aircraft.

It's 10 o'clock, due to the missing external float on the left wing I lie down on the right wing to maintain the balance of the aircraft and wait. The aircraft is slowly sinking, as water pours in from holes in the hull caused by the strike.

Shortly thereafter the two FBA's pass over, without seeing me; at 10.45 an K (K' type flying boat - a.c.) arrives, I couldn't distinguish its number, it glides and fires, machine gun burst hits several parts of my airplane. Among other things, a bullet hits my jacket and fur without doing any harm to me personally.

Until 12.30 I drift at sea without seeing anything new, but immediately thereafter a K bearing the number 158 (sic) arrives over me, it flies around and the observer gestures to me to wait, and I assume that some search party must be after me; in fact, I see a wisp of smoke at the horizon. From this moment on, the circling K indicates my direction to the searcher, which I recognize as a big armed tug. Expecting to fall into Austrian hands, I destroy all on-board instruments, unload the guns and throw maga-

zines into the sea, damage the magnetos and carburetors of the engine, and cast the camera. The tug is nearing, I think to 400 or 500 meters, but at this moment I hear the sound of aircraft engines and see two Italian airplanes that cruise towards me. One of the planes comes down in spirals, the other resolutely attacks the Austrian K, which quickly turns back.

The tug stops, fires several shots at flying aircraft and at me as it reverses course, then it sails off at full speed towards Durazzo.

As the tug leaves, FBA nō.4 touches down near me. Considering the high seas, it alights very well, it comes to me with skilful manoeuvring and takes me in: on my suggestion the pilot D'Andrea tries to take-off. The very rough sea prevents our repeated attempts to move, so we are obliged to remain in the water with the severely damaged aircraft.

The front part of the hull is broken and takes water, the right wing has no float: I send the engineer Buzzoni on the wing to maintain the balance, and together with the pilot D'Andrea go on to lighten the aircraft, draining the water which is rising in the interior of the boat with drawers.



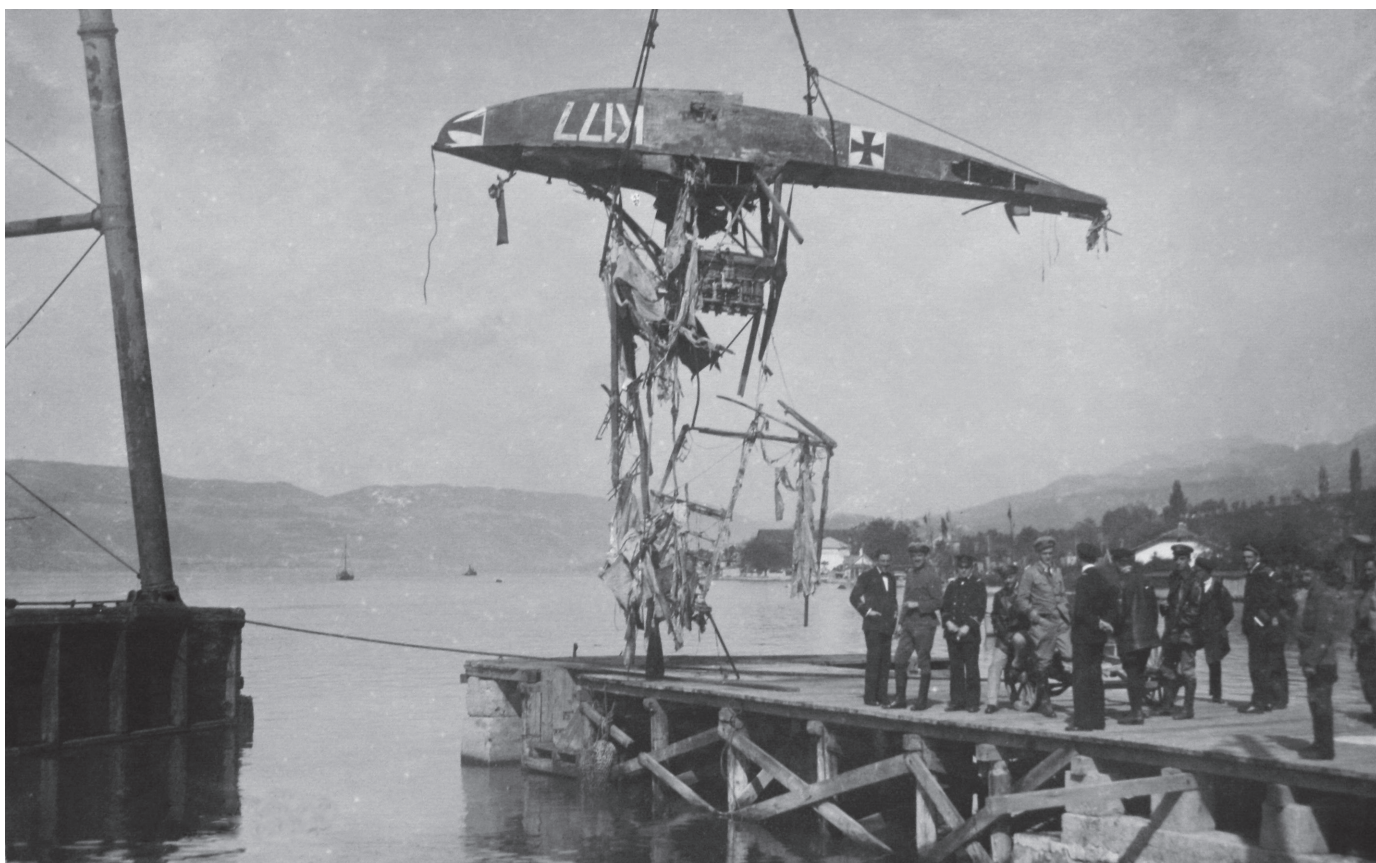
Four Hansa-Brandenburg W.13 flying boats on the slipway and two friends posing at the apron at Flugstützpunkt Durazzo in the spring of 1918.

(Jan Zahálka)



Hansa Brandenburg W.13 K425, built by Phönix, seen docked next to an torpedo boat in the Bay of Teodo.

(Boris Ciglić)



Curious spectators observe the remnants of K177 as they are unloaded in Kumbor. This plane was lost on 8 April 1918, as it force-landed in heavy seas west of Durazzo and collapsed. Frglt Johann Plachner and Lt idRes d MK Jenő Ertsey were evacuated by friendly vessel and suffered no injuries. Flying boat was found buoyant on 21 April and brought to shore.

(Boris Ciglić)

Finally, at 15.30 the torpedo boat 6 PN commanded by capitano di corvetta De Angelis arrives, it launches a boat into the sea and welcomes us on board. At my suggestion the commander of the 6 PN rams and sinks both aircraft, then we return to Saseno."

What really happened is a bit confusing. Fl Qu Meist Haschke, piloting A53, did claim one of the attackers, and guardiamarina Carrera might have missed to observe his attack. However, 2^o nocchiere Ottavio D'Alessio and guardiamarina Roberto Caruel in FBA nō.2 reported a 15 minute inconclusive battle with an "Kapa" flying boat in area between Cape Laghi and Skumba estuary. Since the crew of K183 broke-off the engagement because of the jammed machine guns, it is almost certain that A53 strafed M.5 7084. It is not known who found the wreck and directed the tug towards it in the afternoon, but it could not have been Albatros Weichmann K158, as this flying boat has been destroyed in flying accident back in November 1917. The Italian search party left Valona at 11.55 and as FBA 5659 nō.4 of 2^o capo cannoniere Giuseppe D'Andrea and motorista Alfredo Buzzoni strafed the tug and alighted next to a 7084, it was FBA nō.1 of tenente di vascello Giorgio Fiastrì,

258^a Squadriglia commander, and motorista Cesare Torregiani which drove the "Kapa" away, as well as another enemy seaplane half an hour later. Eventually, nō.1 left the scene and at 14.45 found 6 PN some eight nautical miles north of Vojusa estuary, and dropped a message with location of the castaways.

In late hours of 7 April German airship L-59 caught fire and fell into the sea in the Otranto Straits. K177 and K183 were dispatched from Durazzo on the following morning to look for survivors. The first seaplane developed engine problems, alighted at rough seas 25 nautical miles west of Durazzo and capsized two hours later. Frglt Plachner and Lt idRes d MK Ertsey were picked up by a tender IV. Next day K310 with Frglt Ottokar Holoubek and Frglt idRes Heribert Freiherr Krafft von Crailsheim and K312 with EF Stb Masch Wart Broser and Fl Meist Rudolf Brauner attacked three enemy torpedo boats found 70 nautical miles west of Cape Ostro, dropping 21 bombs on them without apparent result. As they turned back, K310 had to alight at sea some 60 nautical miles short of Bocche; torpedo boats SM Tb 61T and SM Tb 82F arrived on the scene and the latter took the seaplane in tow.