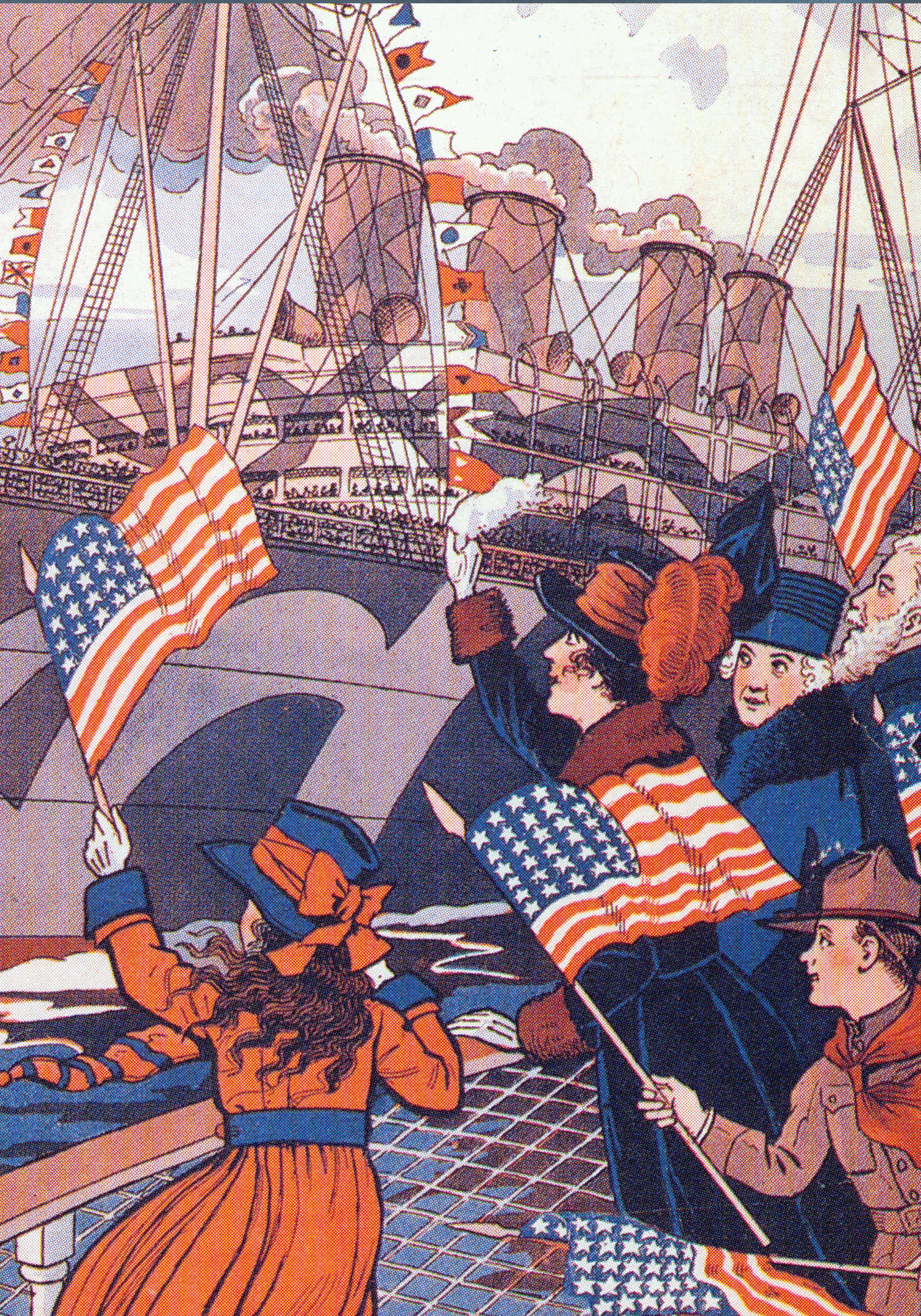


Assessing Razzle Dazzle



At 1100 on 11 November 1918, the guns fell silent all across the Western Front as the two sides agreed to an armistice. However, it would be several months before the truce became final and all patrolling U-boats received surrender orders: for U.S. Navy Sailors, the war wasn't over yet.



Americans pour into the streets, overjoyed to hear of the armistice on 11 November 1918. It would be celebrated year after year as "Armistice Day" until 1954, when Congress renamed it "Veterans' Day."



While the Navy was busy bringing home the troops, representatives of the victorious Allied nations met in Paris to decide the fate of Germany and the other defeated Central Powers. The conference would last through 1919.

By February of 1919, the Navy began to return to a peacetime routine, while its transports continued to bring the troops home. Freed from the constant grind of convoy duty and patrols, the Navy could finally take stock of its performance in its first war against submarines.



For the Navy, the end of the war brought a new mission: bringing home most of the 2 million Soldiers, Marines, and Airmen who had fought in France. The U.S. Navy did not relax its anti-submarine precautions until every German U-boat surrendered.



In 1913, the U.S. Navy approved a recommendation from its aviation section stating that international pilot training standards were not stringent enough to produce qualified carrier pilots. The Navy soon created its own training program to certify naval aviators.



American troops crowd the deck of a U.S. Navy warship that wears Razzle Dazzle camouflage, in 1918.

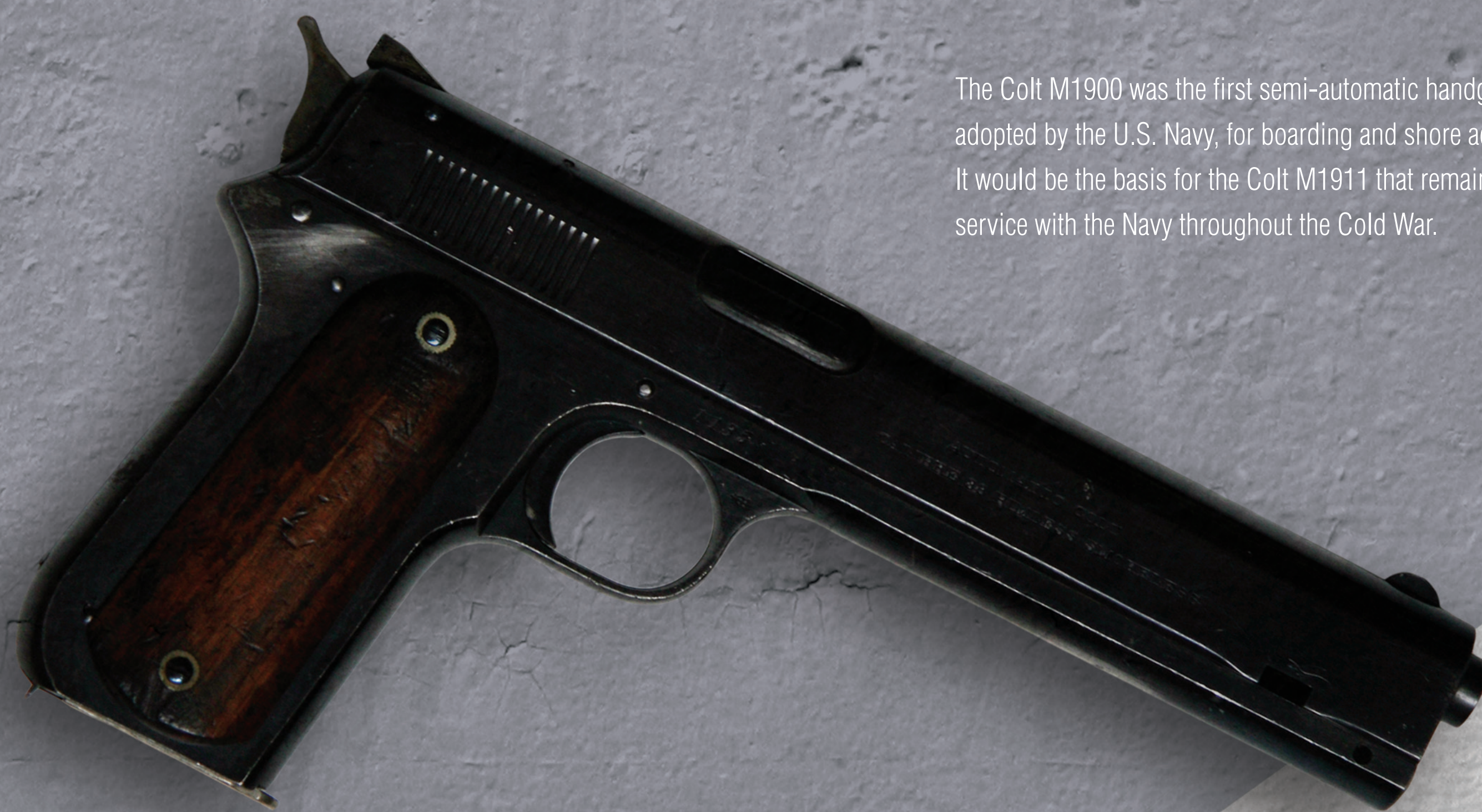
The variety of other anti-submarine measures used by the U.S. Navy — including convoys, airships, and destroyers — made it impossible to quantify camouflage's contribution to the Navy's overall success in neutralizing the U-boat threat. What remains, however, is the good opinion Razzle Dazzle earned from naval and maritime authorities during its trial by fire in 1918.

During the rapid post-war demobilization of 1919, the United States Navy was not able to conduct further tests to conclusively determine the effectiveness of Razzle Dazzle camouflage in protecting American ships from the German U-boat threat.

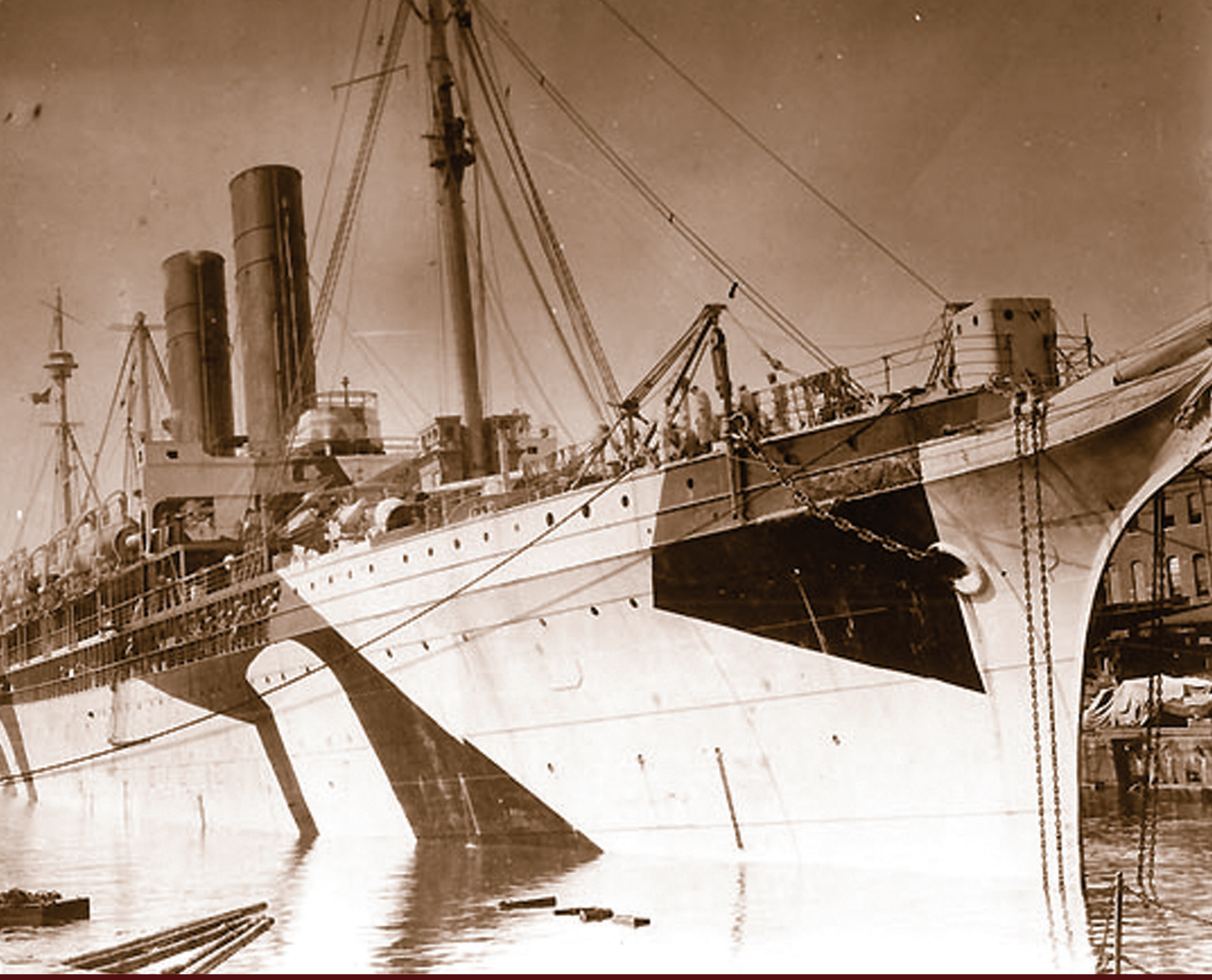
The only hard evidence of Razzle Dazzle's success came from the maritime insurance industry, which offered reduced premiums to merchants whose ships wore approved camouflage systems. However, the confidence of insurers in camouflage left out the bigger picture.



Dozens of U.S. Navy destroyers rest in mothballs at San Diego in 1922. Peacetime funding after 1918 did not allow the Navy to keep its wartime fleet in service.



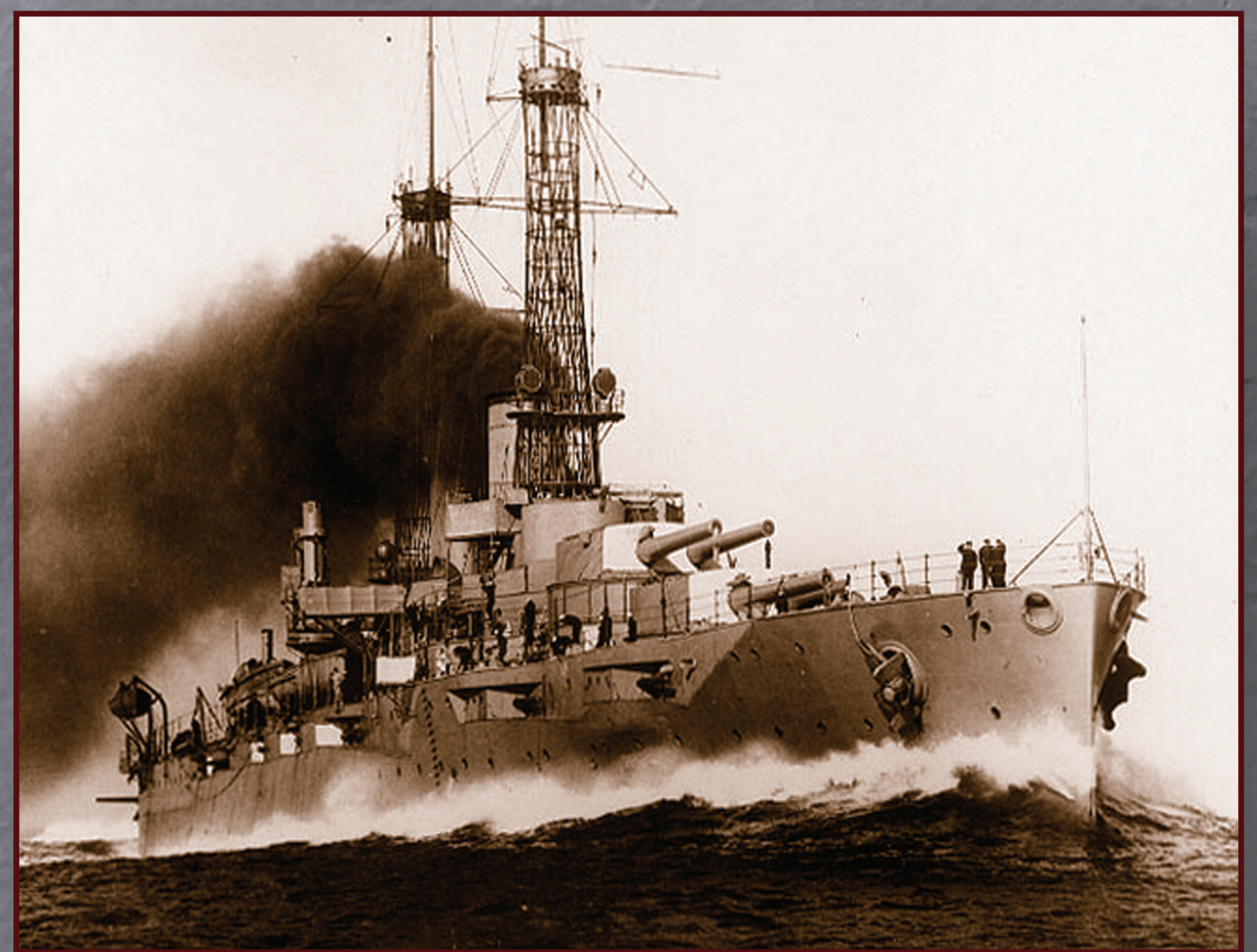
The Colt M1900 was the first semi-automatic handgun adopted by the U.S. Navy, for boarding and shore actions. It would be the basis for the Colt M1911 that remained in service with the Navy throughout the Cold War.



■ USS *Plattsburg*, a liner converted into a troopship, received her coat of Razzle Dazzle camouflage in 1918.

While the exact credit due to Razzle Dazzle camouflage may never be known, it is clear that the U.S. Navy's entry into World War I turned the tide decisively: shipping losses to U-boats declined from a high of more than 875,000 tons in April 1917 to just over 100,000 tons by November 1918, a decrease of almost 90 percent.

In the end, less than one percent of merchant ships wearing Razzle Dazzle camouflage were torpedoed during the war, none while under U.S. naval escort. The U.S. Navy lost only one warship to a U-boat during its involvement in the war — a testament to its ability to adapt to its tactics and technology in the face of new challenges.



■ USS *New York* led the American battle fleet in European waters during World War I, helping the British keep the German fleet trapped in port.



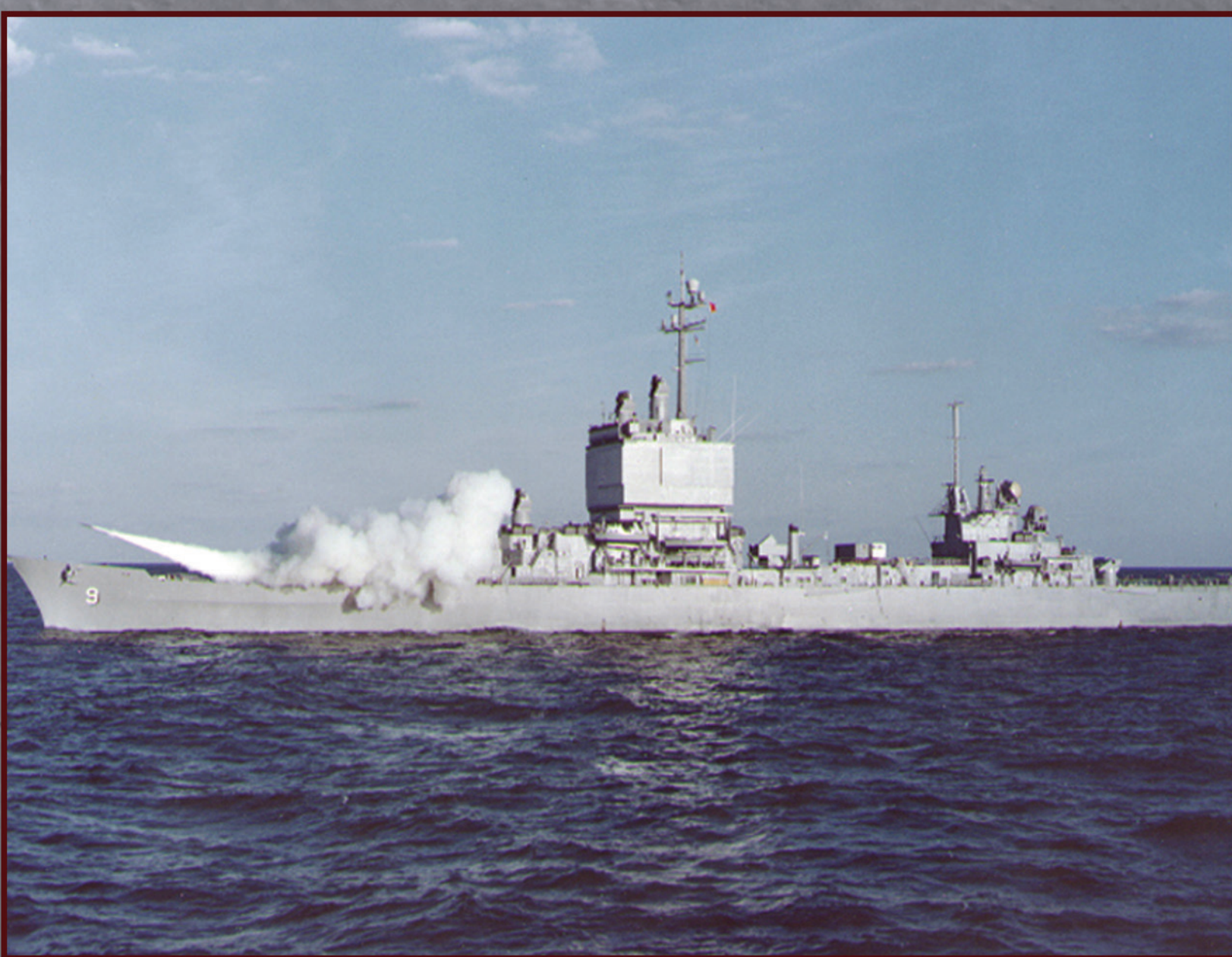
This ratchet was used to alert Sailors of poison gas in the event of a chemical weapon attack. In France, Sailors kept their gas masks close at hand, ready to don them at the first alarm.

The work of America's Razzle Dazzle pioneers was not forgotten after 1918. At the beginning of World War II, many navies' ships still wore distortion camouflage inspired by Razzle Dazzle during the previous war, to protect against both submarines and surface combatants.

After World War II, distortion camouflage gave way to low visibility systems, as optics improved. During the Cold War, electronic countermeasures — systems that confused or evaded enemy sensor technology — increasingly took over the role that visual camouflage previously filled, but did not entirely replace it.



■ USS *Duluth*, launched in 1943, wears a World War II-era Razzle Dazzle scheme.



■ USS *Long Beach*, wearing the now standard "Haze Gray" camouflage, tests new guided-missile weaponry in October 1961.

In the 21st century, advanced sensors and guided weapons permit attacks from beyond visual range, but today's warships still wear visual camouflage — indeed, one can hardly imagine an American warship today without its signature "Haze Gray" scheme.

A century of amazing technological developments has only proven again and again that the ideas of Thayer, Brush, and Wilkinson still have a place in military thought, and will remain applicable into the foreseeable future.



■ Today's U.S. Navy warships use every possible advantage to defeat enemy sensors and weapons, including visual camouflage.