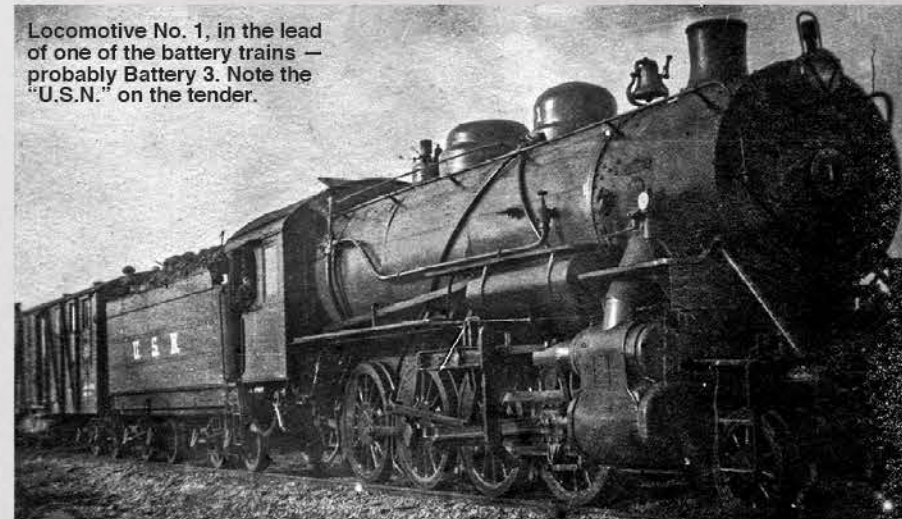


# WHEN THE NAVY RAN A RAILROAD

Forgotten today, during the Great War the US Navy developed and deployed a fearsome weapon mounted on a railway carriage!

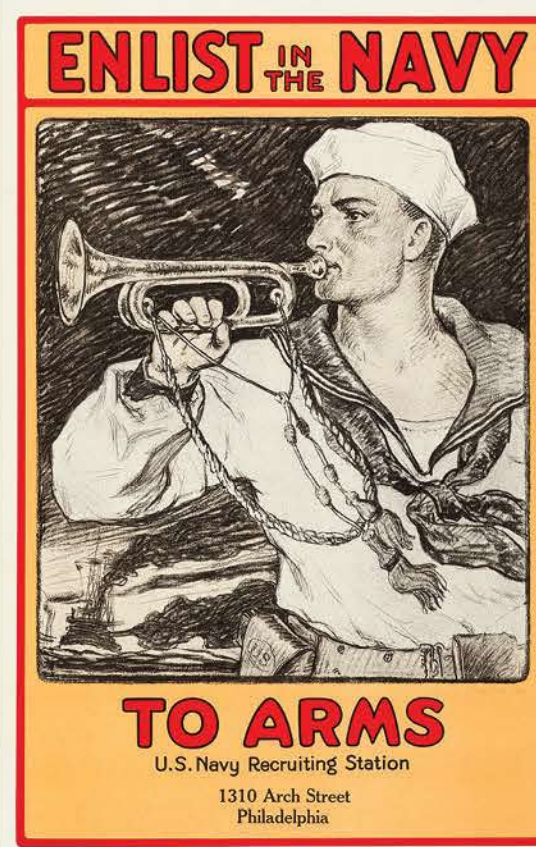
BY GREGORY BEREITER

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND AND THE ALPHA ARCHIVE



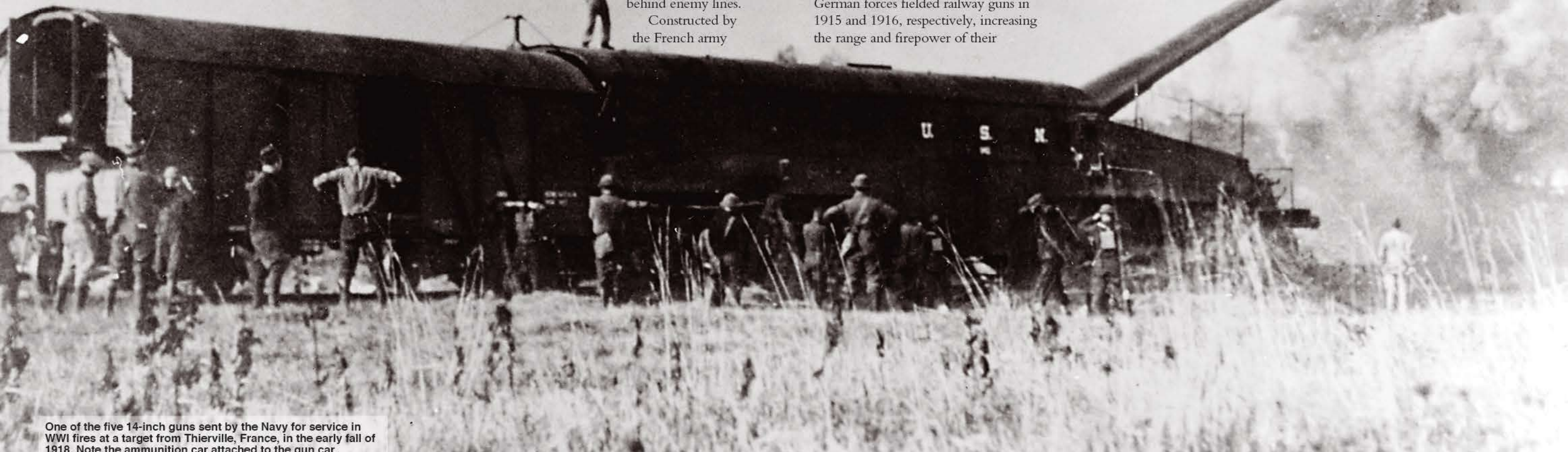
Locomotive No. 1, in the lead of one of the battery trains — probably Battery 3. Note the “U.S.N.” on the tender.

Artillery dominated the battlefields of Europe throughout World War One. Advances in artillery technology and design in the later 19th Century had created a new generation of guns and howitzers with enhanced range and accuracy. At the outbreak of the war, however, none of the armies possessed railway guns, the idea for which was relatively new. As the fighting on the Western Front solidified in the fall of 1914, military leaders realized the importance of mobile, long-range, heavy artillery for striking targets deep behind enemy lines. Constructed by the French army



Although the US Navy produced a wide variety of WWI patriotic and propaganda posters, there was never one aimed directly at the Navy's railway guns.

late in 1914, the first railway guns of the war were makeshift designs created by mounting older coastal defense guns and naval warship guns onto commercial railway wagons. British and German forces fielded railway guns in 1915 and 1916, respectively, increasing the range and firepower of their



One of the five 14-inch guns sent by the Navy for service in WWI fires at a target from Thierville, France, in the early fall of 1918. Note the ammunition car attached to the gun car.