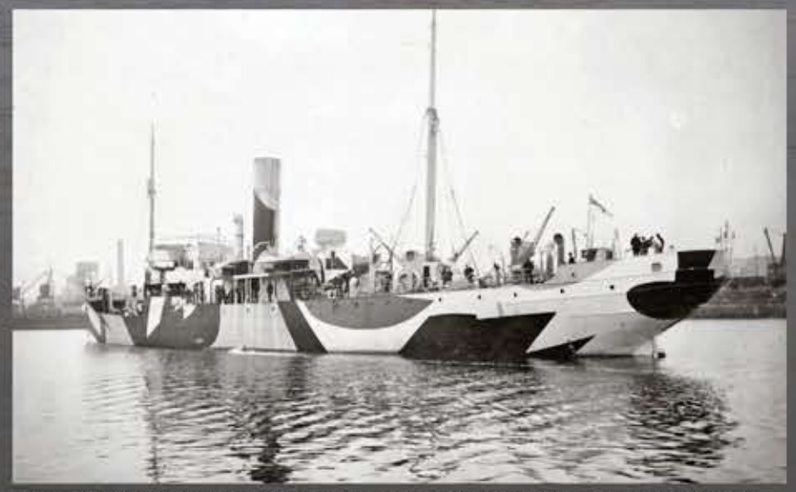
To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Great War, the Imperial War Museum selected four ships to receive dazzle camouflage. *President* was one of the ships and a German artist (the irony is certainly not lost) was selected to create this completely inaccurate representation of a Great War dazzle scheme.

DEATH OF A Q-SHIP

WITH LITTLE FORETHOUGHT, THE LAST SURVIVING GREAT WAR Q-SHIP IN BRITAIN HAS BEEN SENT TO THE SCRAPPER. IT WAS ONE OF THREE SHIPS FROM THAT WAR STILL IN EXISTENCE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM. NOW THERE ARE JUST TWO

BY MARCUS KHRONE



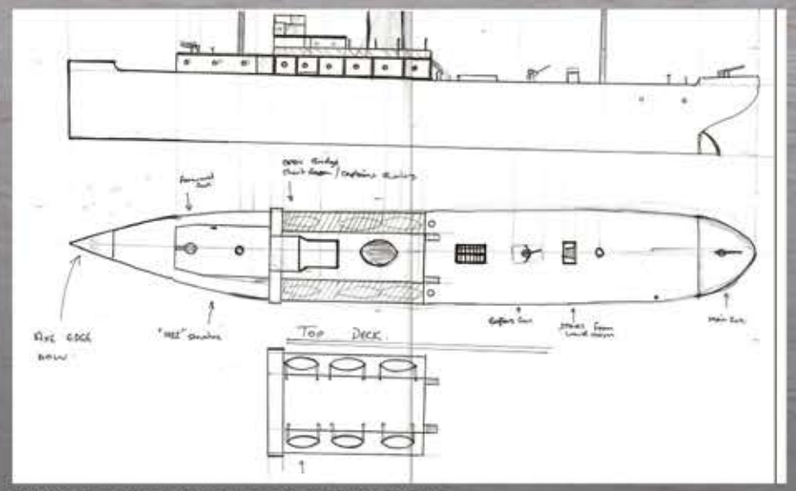
HMS *Saxifrage* shortly after completion in its original dazzle camouflage scheme. The difference between the original accurate scheme and the German artist's "interpretation" is obvious.

HMS *President* was built as an *Anchusa*-type *Flower*-class sloop and this Class was constructed between 1916 and 1918. She was originally built as HMS *Saxifrage* and her name was changed in 1922. Built as submarine hunters, the ships were disguised to appear as merchant vessels but they carried concealed 4-inch and 12-pounder weapons. During the Great War, German U-Boats would usually dive at the first sighting of an opposing warship. Accordingly, merchantmen were modified with hidden guns and this led to the construction of specialized naval vessels that would have the same mission. These were given the generalized name of Q-Ships.

The Q in Q-Ship was said to stand or Queenstown in Ireland because that is where Haulbowline Dockyard in Cork Harbor carried out the conversions of mercantile steamers into armed decoy ships. It is also said that the Q stood for "Queer," as in odd. The general idea for a Q-Ship stemmed from the classic *ruse de guerre* of "sailing under false colors." As a long-standing element of naval tactics, warships can legally disguise themselves in various ways in transit so long as the proper flags are hoisted before firing commences.

It was thought that a U-Boat commander would not want to waste an expensive torpedo on a small coastal merchantman so he would bring his submarine to the surface and engage the enemy ship with his deck guns. Then, the Q-Ship would reveal its hidden weapons and began blasting away at the submarine when it was at its most vulnerable. Such examples of ships used against commerce raiders date back to HMS *Kingfisher* of the 1670s.

In 1915, during the First Battle of the Atlantic, Britain was in dire need of a countermeasure against the increasingly effective U-Boats that were harassing its sea lanes. Convoys, which had proved effective in earlier times, were rejected by the resource-strapped Admiralty and the independent



Drawing showing the simple lines of the Q-Ship.

HMS *Saxifrage* alongside a jetty shortly after completion.