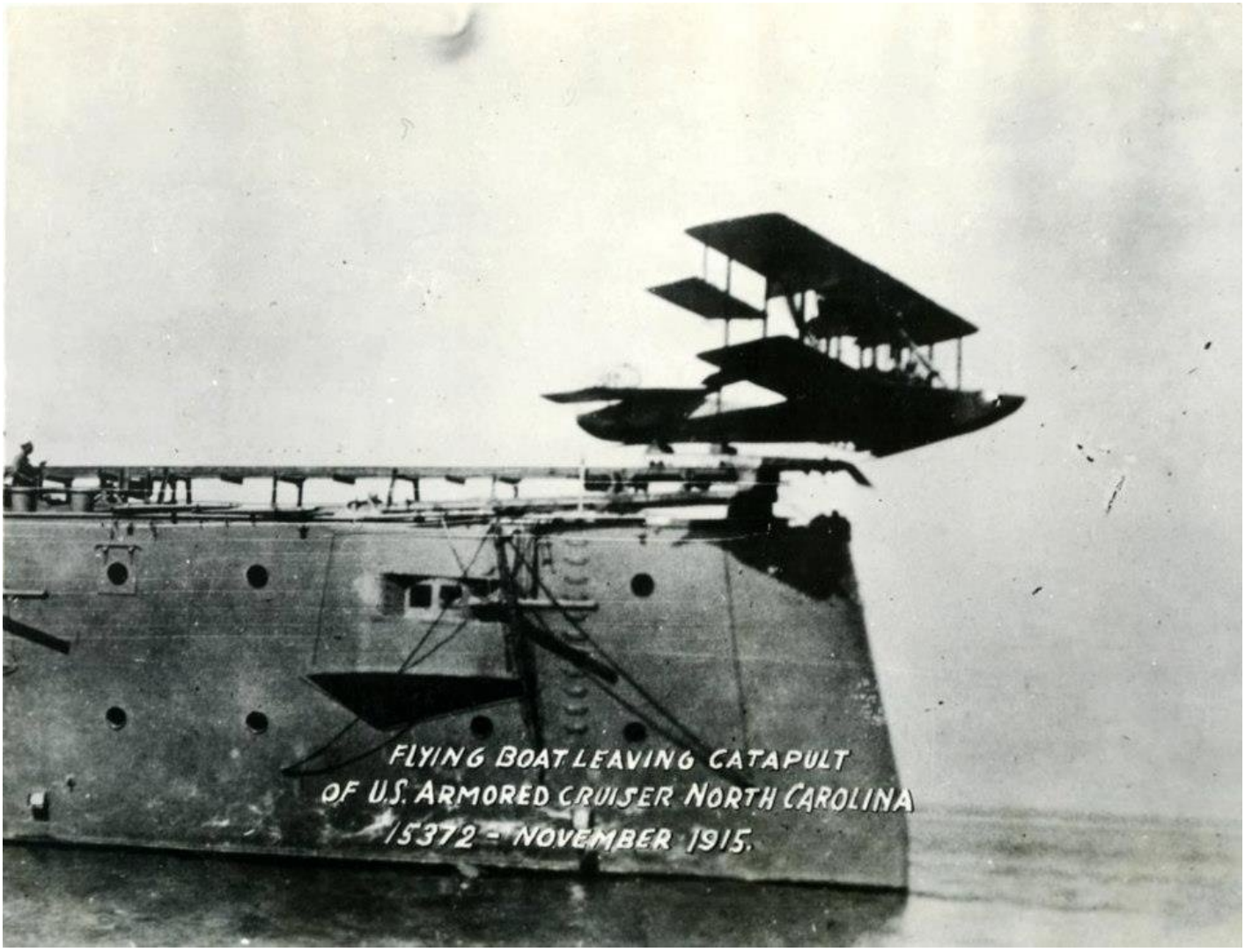
IT'S BEEN 100 YEARS SINCE ONE OF THE BIGGEST GAME-CHANGERS IN MILITARY AVIATION HISTORY

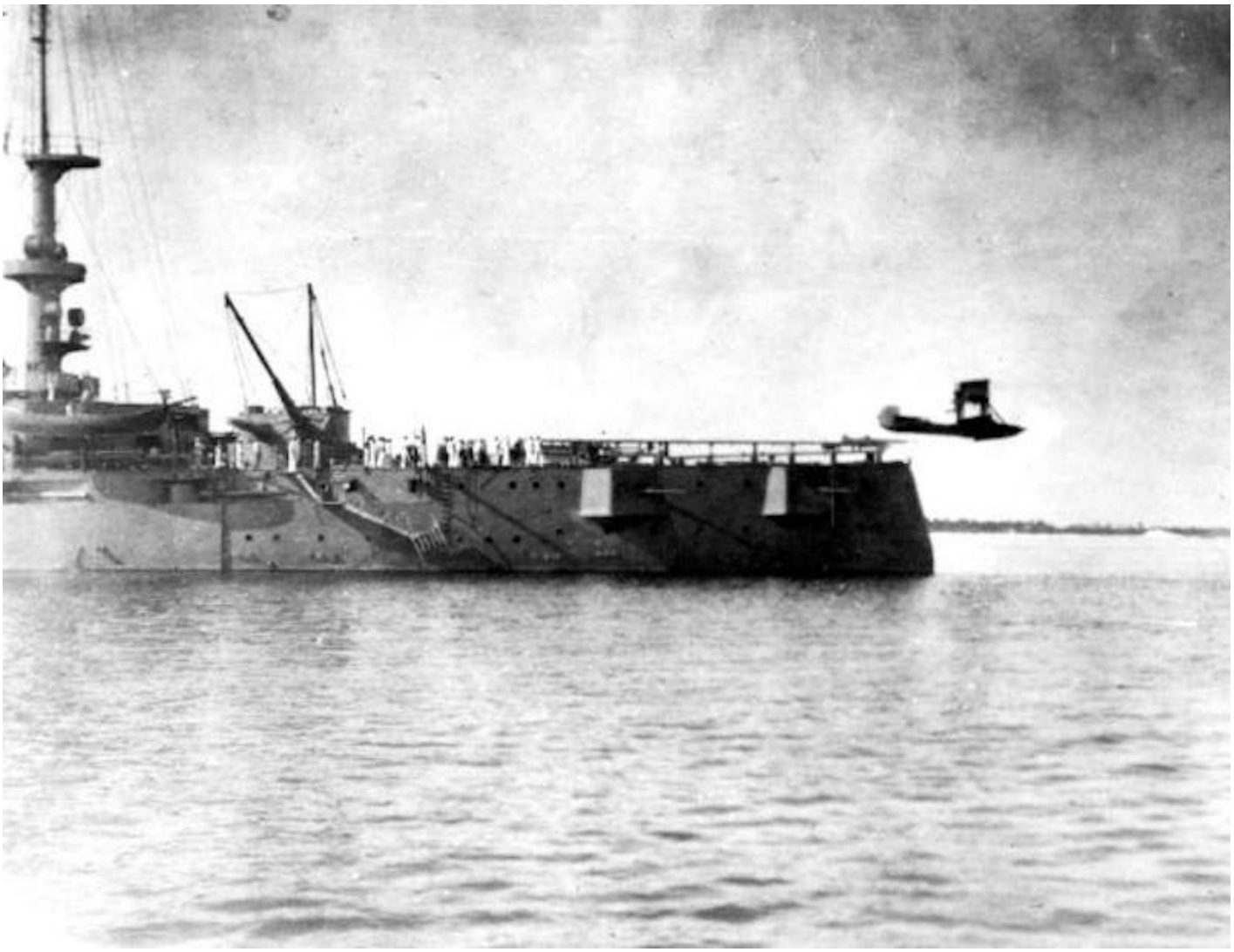
News / Airlines



On November 5, 1915, a plane was launched from a ship by catapult for the first time in history.

And, despite the prevaling ideas at the time that naval aviation was an outlandish endeavor, the flight was a success.

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*Naval History & Heritage Command*Curtiss AB-2 (C-2) Aircraft being catapulted from USS North Carolina (ACR-12) on 5 November 1915.

The pilot for that historic flight was Henry C. Mustin, a naval aviator who helped to found the Naval Aeronautic Station at Pensacola, Florida in 1913. Mustin, using an early catapult system, managed to launch himself successfully from the armored cruiser USS North Carolina at the naval station.

By today's aircraft carrier standards, the USS North Carolina was a tiny ship. Of course, it was not built as a carrier, but the size differential between the North Carolina and today's carriers still shows how far things have come in the last 100 years. The North Carolina had a total displacement of 14,500 tons, compared to the 100,020 tons of a present-day USS Nimitz-class supercarrier.

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*Naval History & Heritage Command*Lieutenant Commander Henry C. Mustin

Unlike modern carriers, which have built-in flight decks and launch systems, the launching platform built atop the North Carolina was an ad hoc endeavor. At the time, launching a plane from a ship while underway had not been attempted. The questions of whether the plane would fly, or whether it would be possible to safely abort takeoff, were still big unknowns.

After that risky start in 1915 US aircraft carrier abilities quickly advanced. By 1922, the US operated the USS Langley, an aircraft carrier that could carry 30 planes.

Today's Nimitz supercarriers can carry upwards of 62 aircraft. Still, despite their size and capacity, the Nimitz still owes one of its major functions — the use of catapults to launch planes at high enough speeds for flight from a short runway at sea — to Mustin's original takeoff from the USS North Carolina.

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