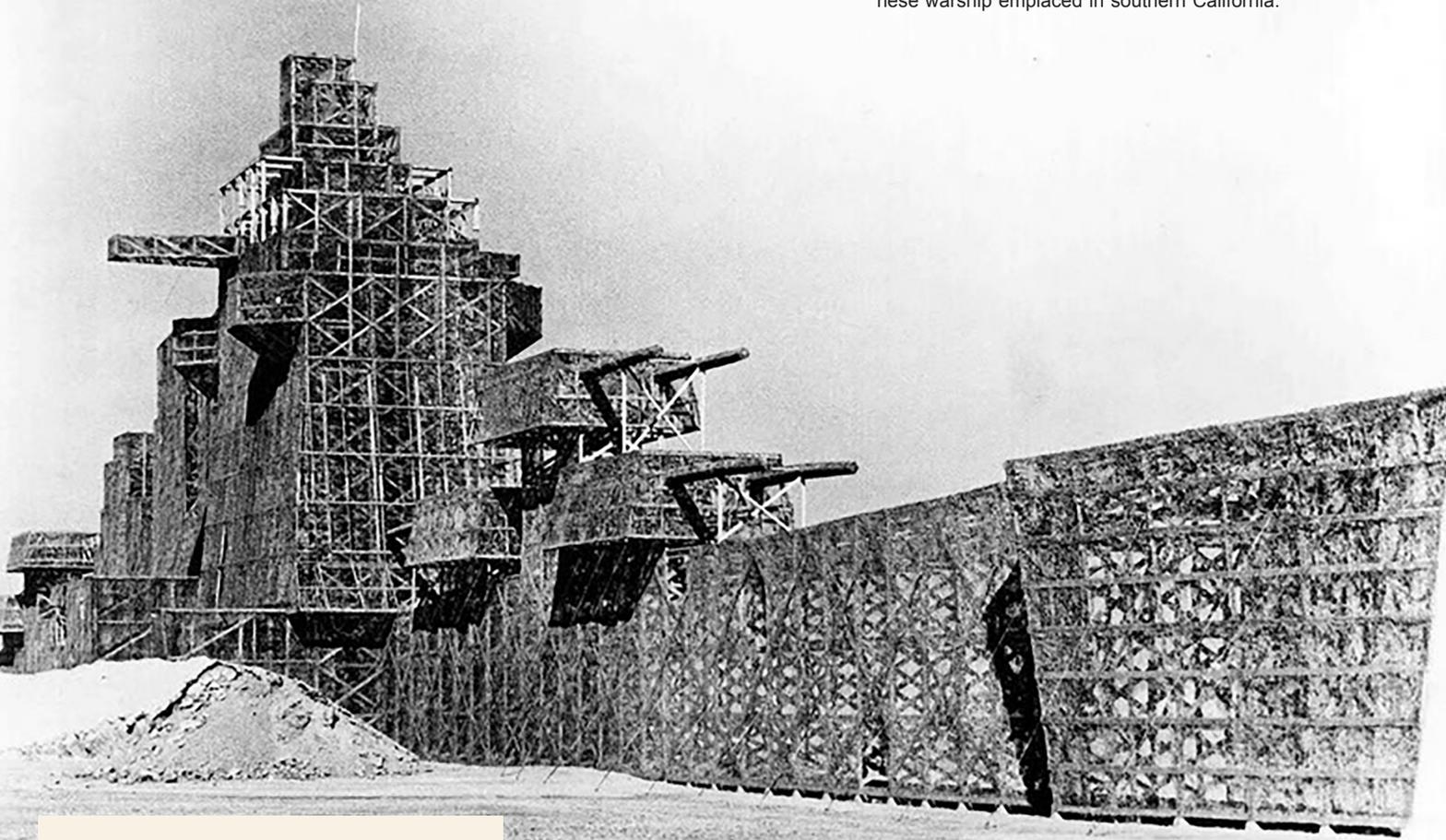


# Ship of the Desert

The Muroc Maru was a 650-foot-long mock Japanese warship emplaced in southern California.



The thing cost \$36,000 to build (or \$500,000 today). It had a framework made of four-by-four lumber and chicken wire, which was then covered with tar paper. When completed in March 1943, it was given the designation of "AAF Temporary Building (Target) T-799." To military pilots at Muroc AAF, Calif., though, it was the "Muroc Maru" and looked for all the world like a 650-foot-long Japanese *Atago*-class heavy cruiser. From 1943 to 1950, Army Air Forces used the target for bombing practice, strafing practice, and identification training. Muroc Maru was banked with sand and that, along with the shimmering effect of the desert, made it seem to be sailing through the desert. The mock warship was declared a flight hazard and dismantled in 1950.

A B-25 Mitchell bomber trains against the Muroc Maru.

