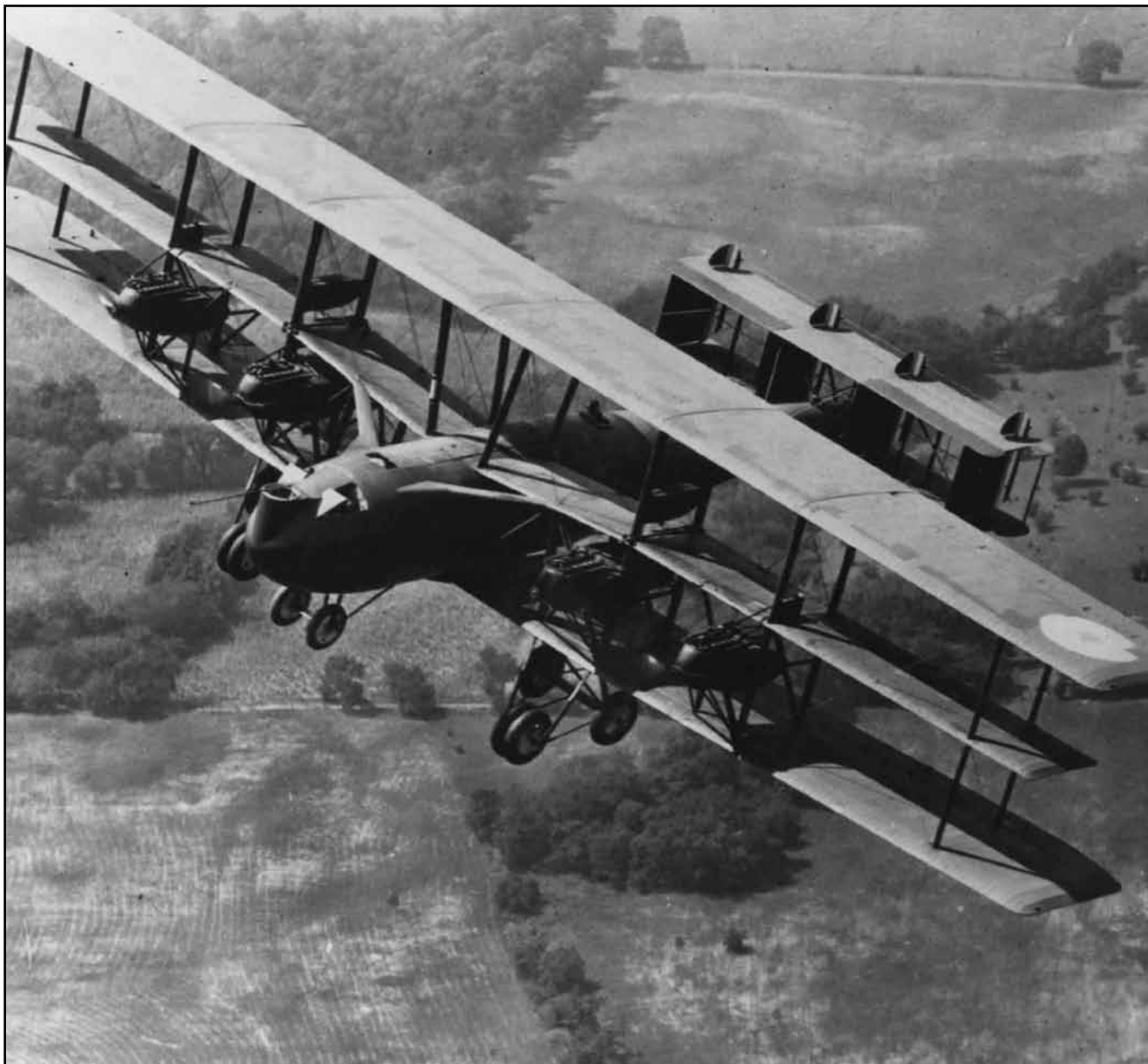


The First Big Bomber



It was supposed to be the greatest bomber of its time, yet the XNBL-1, or "Magnificent Leviathan," brainchild of Brig. Gen. "Billy" Mitchell, was obsolete before its first flight in 1923. Mitchell asked aircraft engineer Walter Barling to design a bomber that could carry bombs large enough to sink a battleship. When Congress finally learned of the Barling bomber, about eight months after Mitchell demonstrated bomber

capability using existing aircraft to sink the German battleship Ostfriesland and three smaller warships in 1921, its reaction was negative. Lawmakers objected to its enormous size, which early critics claimed limited it to just two airfields, as well as staggering cost overruns. Built with surplus World War I 400-hp Liberty engines, it was also grossly underpowered, but Congress refused to fund newer engines. Despite

innovations in construction and throttle controls, plus establishment of a weight/altitude record, the single prototype was dismantled in 1927 and finally burned.