

# The "NEW NAVY" of the 1880s

The A, B, C, Ds

When the Civil War ended the U.S. Navy had a fleet of seven hundred ships. In the post-war years the fleet was neglected and no modern warships were constructed. By 1881, the U.S. Navy was in poor material condition, obsolete, and third rate. A Naval Advisory board to the Secretary of the Navy reported in November 1881 that there were only 32 vessels in the fleet fit for service—none were modern and all the guns were obsolete smooth bore front-loading cannons.

The Naval Appropriations Act of 3 March 1883 authorized the construction of the four modern steel ships—the armored cruisers Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, and the gunboat Dolphin. They became known as the A, B, C, Ds of the Navy.

The four new ships were built in Chester, PA. The construction was initially slow while the armored steel was being manufactured. The Navy also lacked the capability to manufacture large rifled naval guns. Therefore, the steel forgings needed to manufacture 8-inch guns had to be imported from England. USS Dolphin was commissioned in 1885 followed by Atlanta in 1886, Boston in 1887, and Chicago in 1889. All four ships were designed with the ability rig sails on the mast as a backup propulsion system.

The Naval Act of 3 March 1885 authorized additional construction of the protected cruisers Charleston and Newark along with the gunboats Yorktown and Petrel. Charleston and Petrel were commissioned in 1886 followed by Newark and Yorktown in 1887. USS Charleston was the first new steel vessel built that abandoned sail power as a backup system.

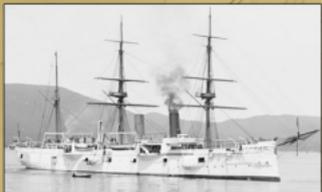
In 1889, the "Squadron of Evolution," consisting of Chicago, Atlanta, Boston, and Yorktown, was established and operated in the Atlantic and Mediterranean through the early 1890s.



USS Atlanta 1886-1912



USS Boston 1887-1946



USS Chicago 1889-1936



USS Dolphin 1885-1921



1888 USS Atlanta modern breech loading gun



1889 USS Boston starboard watch

1889 The Squadron of Evolution  
 USS Chicago, USS Yorktown, USS Atlanta, USS Boston.  
 Note the sails on the masts.

<http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/b8/boston-v.htm>  
<http://www.history.navy.mil/branches/org-9-4b.htm>  
<http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-b/boston5.htm>