

U.S. Navy Torpedo Boats

April 1890



1899 ca. USS *Morris* launches a torpedo during an exercise

USS *Alarm* 1874-1898



USS *Cushing* 1890-1920 Torpedo Boat #1



USS *Porter* 1897-1912 Torpedo Boat #6



USS *Morris* 1898-1924 Torpedo Boat #14

Modern torpedo boats were developed in the last quarter of the 19th century. Prior to the 1875, torpedo boats were armed with a torpedo attached to a protruding spar. In order to be effective, the boat had to come in close contact with the target and explode the torpedo. The first U.S. Navy steam-powered torpedo boat was the USS *Alarm*. Built in 1874, *Alarm* was armed with a torpedo attached to a spar.

The first modern self-propelled torpedo was developed in 1867 by British engineer Thomas Whitehead. Fast boats capable of launching Whitehead torpedoes were developed in the last quarter of the 19th century as coastal defense vessels. The first ship sunk by a self-propelled Whitehead torpedo occurred in 1877 during the Russo-Turkish War when a Turkish ship was sunk.

In 1888, LCDR John Howell, USN developed the first U.S. Navy self-propelled torpedo. The first modern U.S. Navy torpedo boat was the 116-ton, USS *Cushing*, Torpedo Boat #1, commissioned on 22 April 1890. By 1892, *Cushing*-class boats were armed with Howell torpedoes fired from a deck-mounted tube located on the stern.

In the following years the U.S. Navy improved the design of torpedo boats. By 1900, the torpedo launching system was moved below the waterline which was not compatible with the Howell torpedo. As a result, the Whitehead torpedo was adopted for use by the U.S. Navy. The torpedo boat threat to capital warships led to the development of *torpedo destroyer boats*--more commonly known today as Destroyers.

<http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/events/spanam/ships/torp-bt.htm>