



## "DAMN THE TORPEDOES!"

### "Full speed ahead!"

Admiral David G. Farragut  
Mobile Bay, Alabama  
August 5, 1864

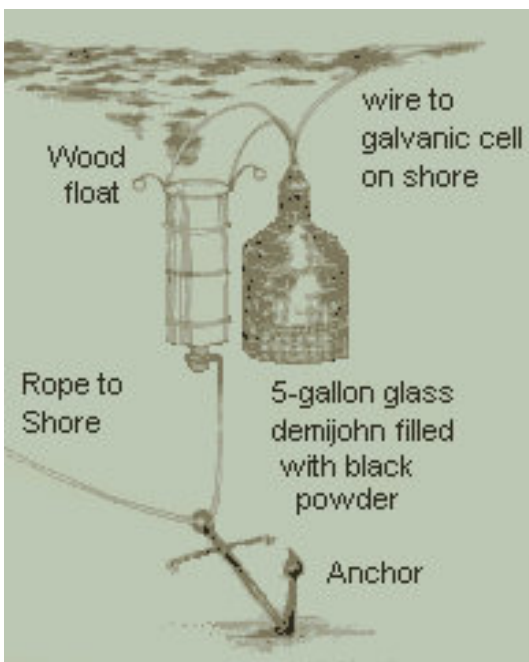


Rains keg torpedo. This example of the most widely used mine, on land or sea, was found in August, 1863, near Charleston.

### Infernal Machines

11:55 AM December 12, 1862, a new chapter in naval warfare was written. For the first time an armed warship was sunk by a mine. The mine, an inexpensive but clever device, was probably nothing more than a five gallon jug filled with gunpowder anchored in the Yazoo River. Insulated wires ran from the mine to shore, where a soldier watched and waited. As the *USS CAIRO* moved through the muddy waters of the Yazoo River, the Confederate soldier hit a plunger completing the circuit on a galvanic battery. The electrical impulse raced through the wires and detonated the mine. What was it like on the gunboat when the explosion ripped through her bow? Through the words of the youngest crew member, fifteen year old George Yost, we can see that historic moment.

### It Only Took 12 Minutes...



*"...just as we were training on the battery we were struck by a torpedo, which exploded under our starboard bow, a few feet from the center and some 35 or 40 feet from the bow proper just under our provision store room, which crushed in the bottom of the boat so that the water rushed in like the roar of Niagara. In five minutes the Hold was full of water and the forward part of the gunboat was flooded... One of our heaviest bow guns had been dismantled by the force of the explosion injuring three men."*

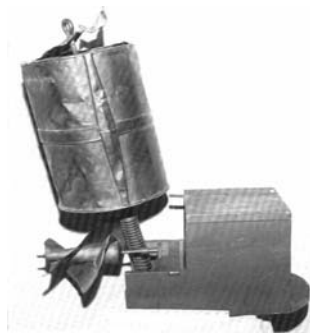
*"Executive Officer Hiram K. Hazlett and the writer were the last two persons to leave the sinking vessel which we did by jumping into the "dingey" which was manned by two sailors, and awaited us at the stern... We moved off just in time to escape being swallowed up in the seething caldron of foaming water... Nothing of the CAIRO could be seen 12 minutes after the first explosion, excepting the smoke stacks, and the flag staff from which still floated the flag above the troubled waters."*

The type of torpedo that sank the U.S.S. CAIRO.  
(From a sketch in the "Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies.")

## Confederate Torpedoes



Fretwell-Singer torpedo. The plunger was activated when an iron weight was knocked from the top of the air chamber.



Current torpedo, designed to float against enemy ships. The propeller, turned by the current, released a spring-driven plunger.



Floating tin torpedo.



Friction torpedo activated by an operator ashore who pulled a lanyard.



Horological torpedo captured in the St. John's River, February, 1864.

Faced with a small navy and a scarcity of warships, the Confederacy was forced to rely on a few heavily-armored rams and ingenious "infernal machines" for inland water and coastal defense.

The "infernal machines" were called torpedoes in the 1860's; today we know them as mines. The variety of Civil War torpedoes was almost endless. Most were anchored in stationary positions, or carried into action on long poles or spars by warships. The torpedoes could be detonated by friction devices, and some were even electrically detonated.

The infernal machines were not taken seriously by the Union Navy until the morning of December 12, 1862. The sinking of the *CAIRO* changed their perceptions. During the remainder of the Civil War, Confederate torpedoes were responsible for the destruction of numerous Union vessels. They were inexpensive to produce, but were deadly. The Union Navy had learned to fear and respect the "infernal machines."

## UNION VESSELS SUNK BY CONFEDERATE TORPEDOES

Date	Vessel	Location	Date	Vessel	Location
Dec 12, 1862	CAIRO Gunboat	Yazoo River, Mississippi	Dec 7, 1864	NARCISSUS Tug	Mobile Bay, Alabama
July 13, 1863	BARON DE KALB Gunboat	Yazoo River, Mississippi	Dec 9, 1864	OTSEGO Gunboat	Roanoke River, North Carolina
Feb 17, 1863	HOUSATONIC Sloop of War	Charleston, South Carolina	Jan 15, 1865	PATAPSCO Gunboat	Charleston, South Carolina
Apr 1, 1864	MAPLE LEAF Army Transport	St. John's River, Florida	Mar 1, 1865	HARVEST MOON Gunboat	Georgetown, South Carolina
Apr 15, 1864	EASTPORT Gunboat	Red River, Louisiana	Mar 4, 1865	THORNE Army Transport	Cape Fear River, North Carolina
Apr 16, 1864	GENERAL HUNT Army Transport	St. John's River, Florida	Mar 12, 1865	ALTHEA Gunboat	Blakely River, Alabama
May 9, 1864	H.A. WEED Army Transport	St. John's River, Florida	Mar 28, 1865	MILWAUKEE Monitor	Blakely River, Alabama
June 19, 1864	ALICE PRICE Army Transport	St. John's River, Florida	Mar 29, 1865	OSAGE Monitor	Blakely River, Alabama
Aug 5, 1864	TECUMSEH Monitor	Mobile Bay, Alabama	Apr 1, 1865	RODOLPH Gunboat	Blakely River, Alabama
Aug 9, 1864	Ammunition Transport	City Point, Virginia	Apr 14, 1865	SCIOTA Gunboat	Mobile Bay, Alabama
Aug 9, 1864	LEWIS Supply Ship	City Point, Virginia	Apr 14, 1865	CINCINNATI'S LAUNCH	Blakely River, Alabama
Nov 27, 1864	GREYHOUND Army Transport	James River, Virginia	May 12, 1865	R.B. HAMILTON Army Transport	Mobile Bay, Alabama