John Philip Holland Biography

John Philip Holland

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Biography

John Philip Holland (1840-1914) was an Irish American inventor who succeeded in developing the submarine sufficiently to win it a place in the navies of the world.

John P. Holland was born in County Clare, Ireland, where, after going to school in his native town and in Limerick, he became a schoolteacher. In 1873 he emigrated to New York and the following year became a teacher in Paterson, N.J.

Holland had long been fascinated by the possibilities of the submarine. Attempts to build such boats had been made off and on since the 17th century, and in 1775 the American patriot David Bushnell had been the first to use a submarine to attack an enemy ship. In 1800 Robert Fulton built and tested the first all-metal submarine. Holland, a partisan of Irish independence, hoped to perfect the craft so that it could be used against the British navy. By 1870, after studying the failures of others, he was ready with plans for a craft of his own. He was without funds, however, and it was not until going to America that he was able to revive his plans.

In New Jersey, Holland found that the Fenian Society (a group of Irish republicans) was willing to support his experiments, and in 1878 he was able to launch his first boat, a 14-foot submarine. In 1881 he built a full-sized submarine, called the *Fenian Ram,* which contained many features of the modern submarine.

Holland knew that the submarine would have to win approval from the U.S. Navy before it could be perfected, and after 1888 he made frequent bids to build a ship for the U.S. government. After several were built without his direct supervision, in 1898 he was able to launch the *Holland,* a ship nearly 54 feet long and equipped with batteries for underwater cruising. It was purchased by the government in 1900, and six more were ordered. Holland built similar ships for the navies of Japan, Great Britain, and Russia but was unable to maintain control of his own company. Like many other inventors, he had to exchange control of the firm for working capital. His last years were spent in making aeronautical experiments and investigations.

Holland died on Aug. 12, 1914, within a few days of the outbreak of World War I, the war which proved the effectiveness of his weapon.