

The History of Sonar

By Mary Bellis

Sonar is a system that uses transmitted and reflected underwater objects or measure the distances underwater. It has been used for submarine and mine detection, depth detection, commercial fishing, diving safety and communication at sea. The Sonar device will send out a subsurface sound wave and then listens for returning echoes, the sound data is relayed to the human operators by a loudspeaker or by being displayed on a monitor.

Lewis Nixon invented the very first Sonar type listening device in 1906, as a way of detecting icebergs. Interest in Sonar was increased during World War I when there was a need to be able to detect submarines. The first Sonar devices were passive listening devices-no signals were sent out. By 1918, both Britain and the U.S. had built active systems, in active Sonar signals are both sent out and then received back. Acoustic communication systems are Sonar devices where there is both a sound wave projector and receiver on both sides of the signal path. The invention of the acoustic transducer and efficient acoustic projectors made more advanced forms of Sonar possible.

The word Sonar is an American term first used in World War II, it is an acronym for **SO**und, **NA**avigation and **R**anging. The British also call Sonar, ASDICS, which stands for Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee. Later developments of Sonar included the echo sounder, or depth detector, rapid-scanning Sonar, side-scan Sonar and WPESS (within-pulse electronic-sector-scanning) Sonar.

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