



*La Jeune École*  
*Origin, Impact and Legacy*

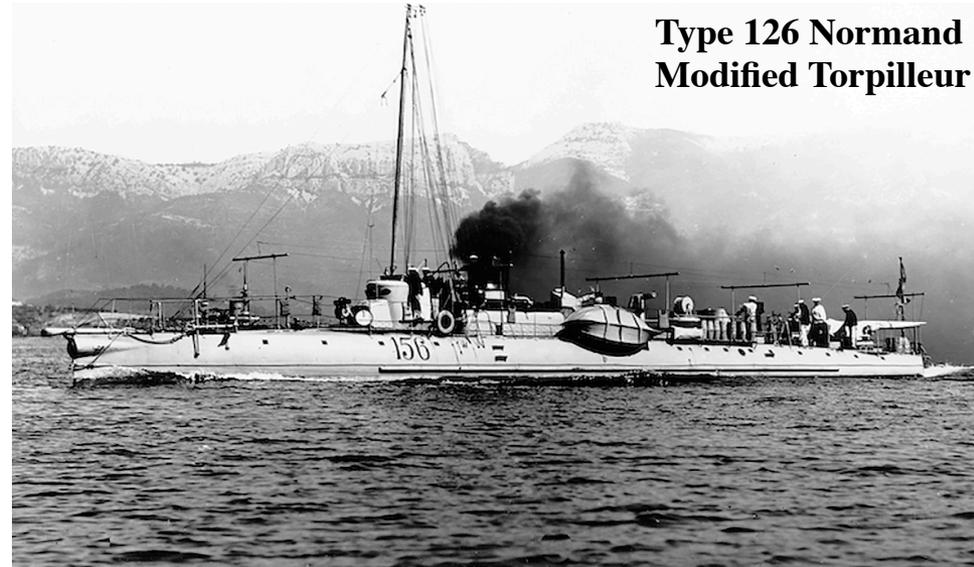
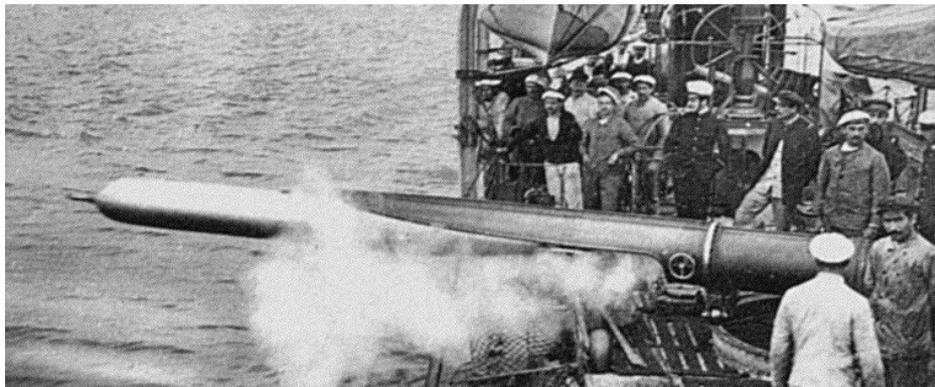
*Michael Harris*  
*Cold Wars 2017*

*Admiralty Trilogy Seminar*



# What was La Jeune École?

- ◆ **La Jeune École (The Young School) was a naval strategy adopted by France that changed the focus from a battleship-centric fleet to smaller ships armed with torpedoes intended to overwhelm larger warships.**
- ◆ **La Jeune École embraced the advances in new technologies for naval warfare and the political changes in occurring in society as well.**
  - **Fast cruisers for commerce raiding and colonial protection**
  - **Torpedoes**
    - **Torpedo Boats**
    - **Submarines**



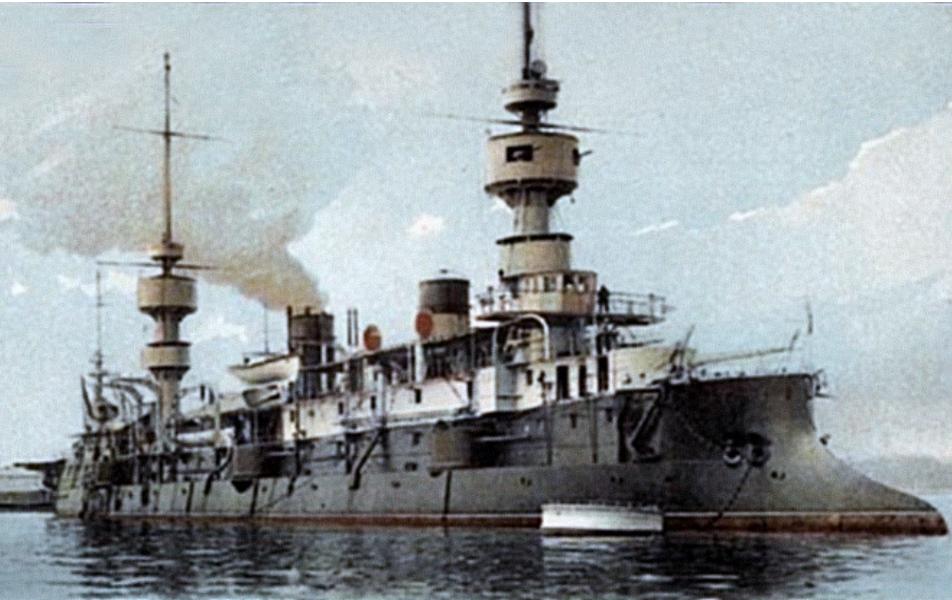
Type 126 Normand  
Modified Torpilleur



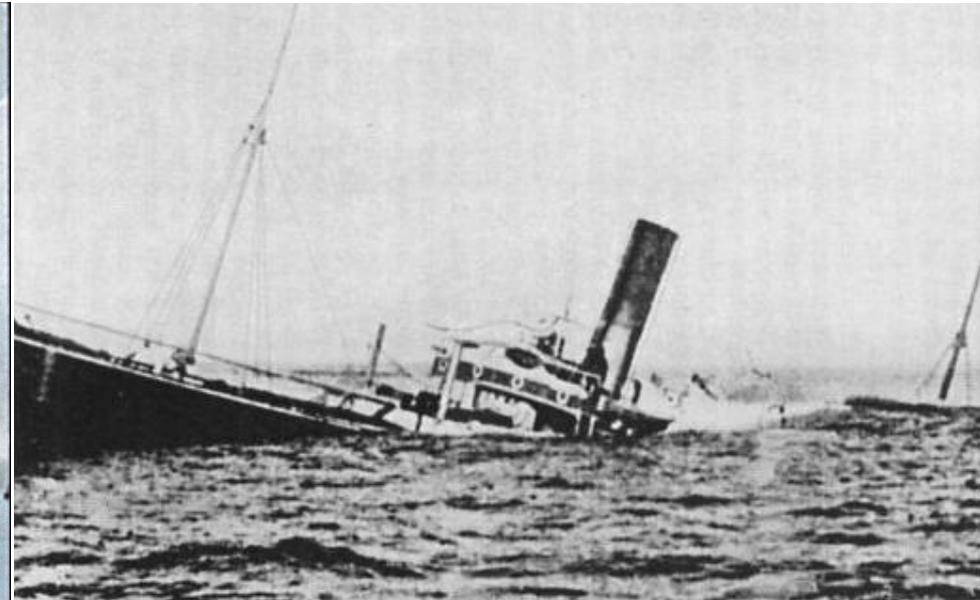
# What was La Jeune École (cont)?

- ◆ **La Jeune École challenged the existing mode of naval warfare, shifting from open ocean battles to targeting an enemy's commerce as the ultimate end goal for winning the war.**

*The Hunter*



*The Hunted*





# Why look at the Jeune École?

- ◆ **La Jeune École (The Young School) was perceived as a game changer during the era of “dawn of the battleship” – especially for navies weak in battleships.**
- ◆ **However, at home La Jeune École fostered both stagnation along with radical progress in the construction and strategy of the French Navy itself, fluctuating back and forth depending on the policy of the French Naval Minister.**
- ◆ **In other nations, La Jeune École fostered reactions to either defend against the new ideas or copy them due to similar naval circumstances.**
- ◆ **La Jeune École fostered technological developments that had influence long after the strategy itself had faded from prominence – both for surface ships and submarines.**

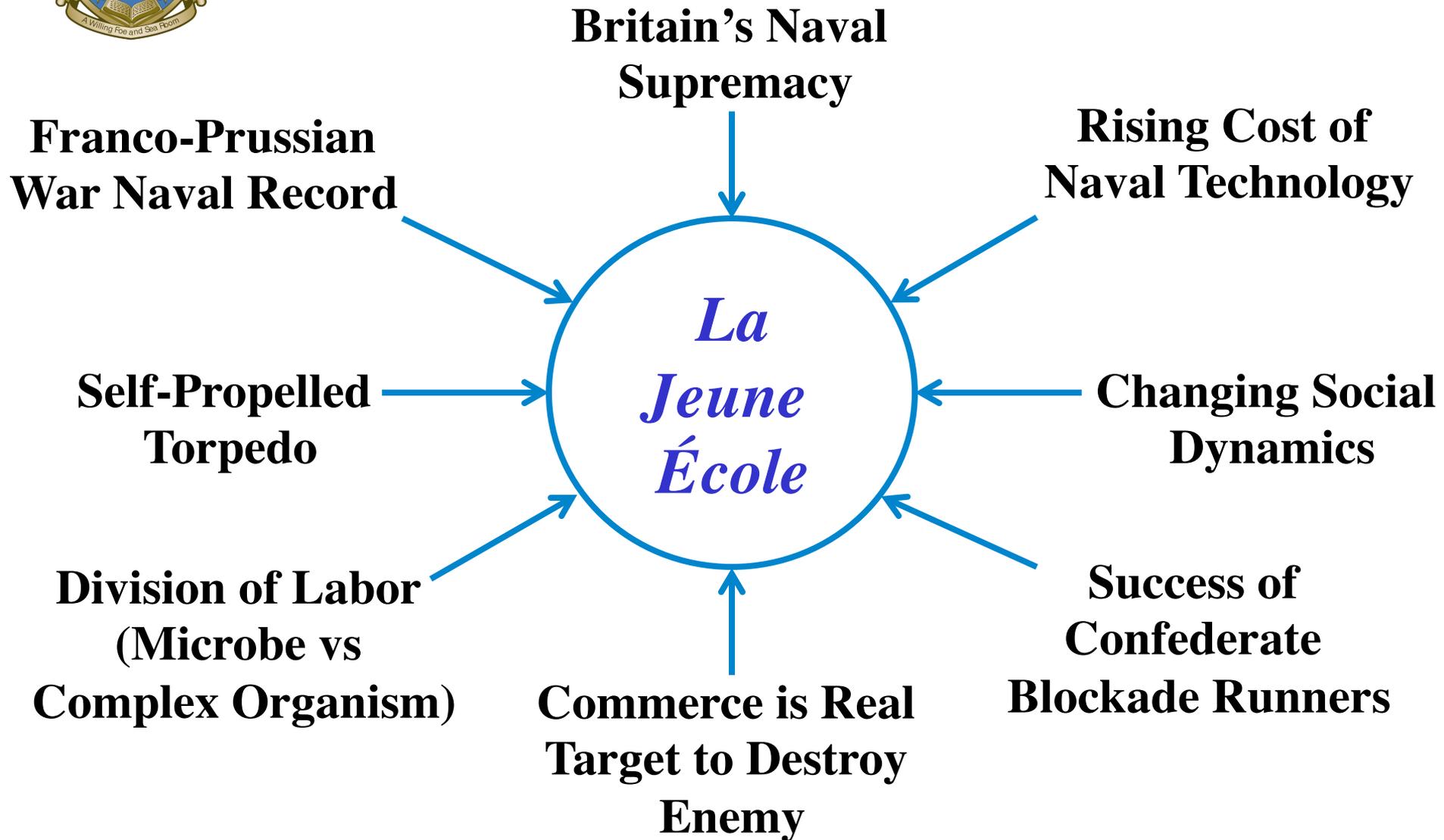


# How did La Jeune École get started?

- ◆ **Several factors led to the rise of La Jeune École and control of the French Naval Ministry starting in the mid-1880s:**
  - **Results of Franco-Prussian War – lack of naval impact in war versus Prussia and near economic ruin.**
  - **Dread of British Navy superiority and inability of French Navy to defeat it.**
  - **Romantic view of impact by Confederate blockade runners (CSS *Alabama*) during the American Civil War – fear inflicted on British commerce.**
  - **Prominence of ‘Republicanism’ and popularity of social sciences versus existing French hierarchy – viewed as ‘elitist’ and overly traditional .**
  - **Increased interest in expanding French colonial possessions and rise of officers with colonial experience – result of the ‘class’ conflict within French Officer Corps (old school imperial vs new school republican).**
  - **Changes in technology – the self-propelled torpedo.**
  - **Increased construction cost of new warships and supporting infrastructure.**



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◆ **Several factors led to the rise of La Jeune École and control of the French Naval Ministry beginning in mid-1880s (cont):**

- **Philosophical view regarding use of Navy to win the war – Commerce is the target to breaking will of an enemy population and government.**
- **Bloodless failed coup in 1877 left unsettled political atmosphere in Paris.**

◆ **Vice Admiral Aube became the leader of La Jeune École in 1886 when he became the Minister of the Navy**

- **From the colonial side of Navy, the less favored cadre**
- **Enthused about technology, but failed to understand it**
- **Had a ruthless view on how to wage a naval war**
- **Allied with a very effective journalist, Gabriel Charmes, principle advocate in press for La Jeune École, pushing the political nature of the changes to the Navy**



Vice Admiral Theophile Aube



# Support for La Jeune École

- ◆ **Support for La Jeune École came from different quarters because the strategy:**
  - **Was cheaper than building and supporting traditional battleship fleets**
  - **Was considered a more modern approach to naval warfare**
  - **Was less elitist, more republican – more secular than old Navy**
  - **Was built on the promise of new technology**
  - **Highlighted colonial possessions and expanding the number of coaling stations around the world to support the French Navy**
  - **Gave the French Navy a viable threat to challenge to the main enemy of French interests – the British Royal Navy**
  - **Provided counter to French Army in post-1870 budget debates**



# What was the La Jeune École Strategy?

- ◆ **La Jeune École Grand Strategy was made of three key elements:**
  - **Protect French Coast**
    - Torpedo boats vectored in to converge on enemy attacking or invading
    - Shore batteries/coastal defense battleship aided by torpedo boats
    - Railways would bring armies to drive invaders out
  - **Control the Western Mediterranean**
    - Although feared British navy, real enemy for next war was Italy
    - Turn Corsica and North Africa into French naval fortresses
  - **Destroy Enemy Commerce**
    - *Guerre de Course* – destroy enemy merchants at sea
    - Shore bombardment of industry and towns – create fear and break enemy will

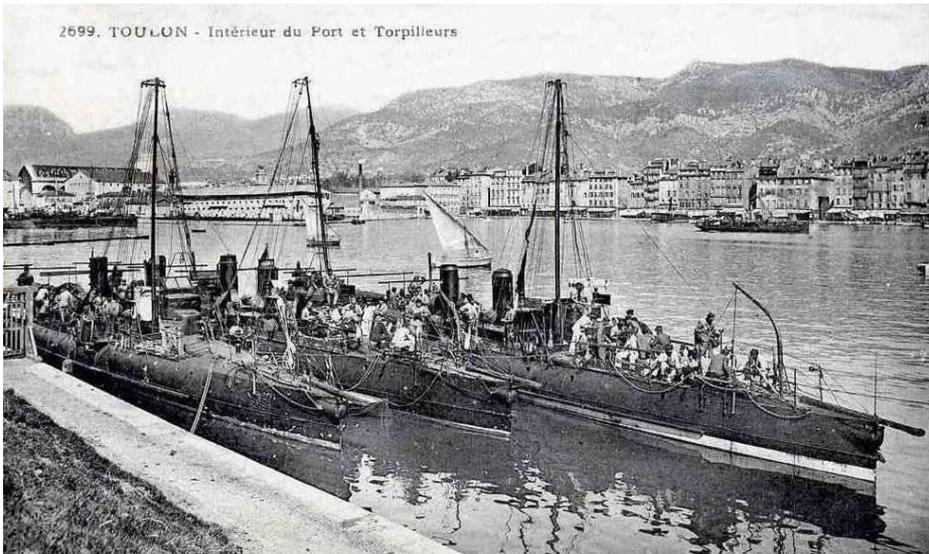


# The Fleet of La Jeune École

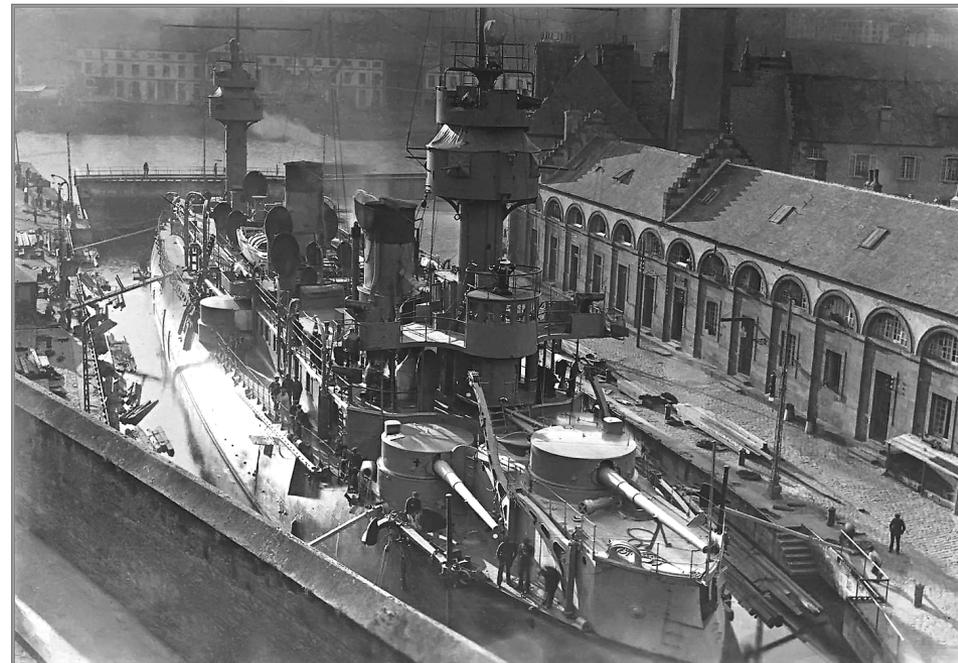
- ◆ Torpedoes
- ◆ Torpedo boats
- ◆ Smaller battleships
- ◆ Coastal defense ships
- ◆ Gunboats
- ◆ Submarines
- ◆ Fast cruisers

*Dupuy de Lôme* – one of the first of fast, long range cruisers, purposely designed for commerce raiding

2699. TOULON - Intérieur du Port et Torpilleurs



French TBs at one of many ports, ready to sortie when called upon to attack enemy battleships





# Insight into Vice Admiral Aube

- ◆ Aube like to quote a maxim from Frederick the Great about the real target of war . . . riches were the sinews of power and the object of war was *“to do the most damage possible to the enemy.”*
- ◆ To Aube, the goal was not the enemy battle fleet – it was his ships of commerce and centers of industry, especially those along the sea coasts.
- ◆ Aube had a brutal, Darwinian view on the conduct of war using the new torpedo boat . . . *“Therefore the torpedo will follow from afar, invisible, the liner it has met; and once night has fallen, perfectly silent and tranquilly it will send into the abyss liner, cargo, crew, passengers, and his soul will not only at rest but fully satisfied, the captain of the torpedo boat will continue his cruise.”*



# Why did La Jeune École fail?

- ◆ **Problems with delivering on the promises of La Jeune École**
  - **Torpedo boats were not seaworthy enough to fulfill role**
    - **Great for preventing close blockade of French ports, but incapable of open ocean operations as initially envisioned.**
  - **No ability for power projection or to respond to enemy threats abroad**
    - **Fashoda incident revealed French Navy totally unprepared for war and unable to resist British Navy over conflict in Africa.**
    - **La Jeune École talked a good game, but when France needed a ready Navy to resist England, it was not there.**
  - **Development of the torpedo boat destroyer largely neutralized the threat of the torpedo boat**
  - **Submarines were still technologically immature – not tactically viable**

**French torpedo boats were not able to handle rough seas of the open ocean**





# List of French Naval Ministers

◆ **Constant flux of Naval Ministers resulting in a lack of consistency in naval priorities, strategy and focus. 12 ministers in 23 years – each with different agendas.**

- 1886-1887 VADM Aube – **pro-Jeune Ecole**
- 1887-1888 M. Barbey – **anti-Jeune Ecole**
- 1888-1894 VADM Krantz – **anti-Jeune Ecole/traditionalist**
- 1894-1895 M. Faure – **pro-colonialist/Jeune Ecole**
- 1895-1896 M. Lockroy – **pro-Jeune Ecole (submarines)**
- 1896-1898 VADM Basnard – **pro-Jeune Ecole (small BBs)**
- 1898-1899 M. Lockroy – **pro-Jeune Ecole (Fashoda)**
- 1899-1902 M. Lanessan – **pro-colonialist/Jeune Ecole**
- 1902-1905 M. Pelletan – **pro-Jeune Ecole**
- 1905-1908 M. Thomson – **anti-Jeune Ecole/traditionalist**
- 1908-1909 M. Picard – **pro-Jeune Ecole**
- 1909-1911 VADM Boue de Lapeyrere – **anti-Jeune Ecole**



# Why did La Jeune École fail? (cont)

- ◆ **Popular rise of Mahan's concept of Sea Power (1890) contradicted La Jeune École's key tenets.**
- ◆ **Results of Russo-Japanese War largely vindicated Mahan and ran counter to predictions of La Jeune École – guns, not torpedoes, were the deciding factor.**
  - **Reinforced the outcome of the Spanish-American War (1898)**
- ◆ **Change in world balance – Britain was no longer the primary menace, Germany and Triple Alliance (Germany, Italy, Austria) had become the key threat, undermining the basis for La Jeune École.**
- ◆ **A stable Parliament finally provided stability in the naval budget for ship construction.**



# What was impact of La Jeune École?

- ◆ **Lack of consistency in development and construction of French warships – ‘a navy of samples’ – crippled French naval power.**
- ◆ **Development and proliferation of the torpedo boat.**
- ◆ **Development of the submarine.**
- ◆ **Advances in anti-torpedo defenses**
  - **Torpedo nets (effective only in port).**
  - **Rapid fire guns.**
  - **Electric search lights and shipboard generators to power them.**
  - **Some improvements in watertight compartmentation (anti flooding).**
- ◆ **Perception that speed was a defense and faster ships were needed.**
- ◆ **Development of the torpedo boat destroyer . . . eventually just ‘destroyer’ which replaced the torpedo boat.**
- ◆ **Development of the fast, well armed and long range cruiser.**



# Summary

- ◆ **La Jeune École changed the direction of naval warfare development for decades with the emphasis on the use of technology (torpedoes and torpedo boats) to overcome superiority of an enemy in capital ships.**
- ◆ **La Jeune École gave rise to changing the perceived objective of war at sea by shifting the target of warfare from navy on navy to navy on commerce to break an enemy's populous vice the enemy's navy.**
- ◆ **La Jeune École spawned the idea that massed attack of smaller warships could overcome larger warships with advanced weapons.**
- ◆ **La Jeune École concluded that the day of the close blockade was over, torpedoes and fast, small ships presented too great a threat.**



# Questions



TORPILLEUR VEDETTE A 1894