

How were Drones Invented and What Does the Future Hold? A Complete Timeline



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How were Drones Invented and What Does the Future Hold?

A Complete Timeline

With the recent advancements in technology, we usually tend to forget what got us here in the first place or might simply think certain things popped into existence in their final form.

That is also the story of drones, both commercial and military, which we will dive into in more detail in this article.

We are going to have a look at a short timeline history, which I put into more detail in my [history of drones article](#), as well as an infographic showing details of the main events in history that have shaped the current drone technology.

Let us first have a look at the history of radio-controlled drones.

1898 - Nikola Tesla Pilots the First RC Boat

One of the many moments showing the genius of Tesla was when he surprised everyone by doing in a New York pond what looked like a feat of magic at the time: controlling a small RC boat with a transmitter.

Some people were amazed, some were thinking it was just a small monkey inside controlling it, or even magic, but now we know that he pioneered radio-controlled technology.

What the genius of this man created at that time was the first radio-controlled craft. His invention consisted of a 4-foot-long miniature ship with 3 antennas on top, equipped with various levers that could be controlled and even lights that could be switched on or off from a distance, all feats never seen before.

1914 - First UAV for the UK Army

Britain's Aerial Target was the first military operated "drone", made with the purpose of being an aerial target. Shooting planes with pilots still in them proved to be quite dangerous, and the UK needed an edge with their pilot training. The development of a plane that could be operated from the ground, meant pilots could experience shooting real flying objects before they had to do it in a first hand experience during war.

1920 - The First Actual Quadcopter - Omnichen 2

While the previously-mentioned machine was radio controlled so you could call it a drone, this time we are looking at the first quadcopter, a flying device with 4 motors and one propeller on each. It managed to fly for a mere 360 meters, but even so it established a new world record for such a device, and later that year managed to fly for up to 1 km in range.

THE HISTORY OF DRONES



Operates a radio controlled boat for the first time (in a New York pond)

1898



NIKOLA TESLA



FIRST

1916

RC AIRCRAFT

Britain's "Aerial Target", an RC craft used for target practice.

*Invented by Etienne Omnichen
Called the Omnichen 2, flew
360m for a new world record!*

1920

**FIRST
QUAD
COPTER**



THE WORD DRONE



1935

The term 'drone' is inspired by the D.H. Queen Bee military RC Plane

First successful model RC plane was called the "Big Guff" built by 2 scientists - Good brothers.

1938

RC MODEL



MODERN MILITARY DRONES



1996

The famous 'Predator' US drone is created, and later used in Afghanistan missions.

UAV's are first used by corporations to inspect pipelines and spray pesticides on farms

2006



FIRST INDUSTRIAL USES

JEFF BEZOS



2013

Amazon CEO announces that the company considers using drones as a delivery method

DJI release their first commercial Quadcopter Phantom 1, with a gopro.

DJI Releases The Ph 3, The best selling consumer drone in that 2015.



PHANTOM 1

2013



DJI

2015



PHANTOM 3

2016

EHANG RELEASES WORLDS FIRST SELF DRIVING PASSENGER DRONE



DJI RELEASES A REVOLUTIONARY
FOLDABLE DRONE
CALLED THE MAVIC PRO

2016



2019

THE FAA REQUIRES **REGISTRATION**
FOR DRONES OVER 250 GRAMS
DJI RELEASES THE MAVIC MINI

DRONES ARE USED
IN THE **COVID**
PANDEMIC
FOR FIRST AID

2020



WHAT'S

[DRONESGATOR.COM](https://www.dronesgator.com)

NEXT

1938 - First Model RC Airplanes

While RC plane technology was developed for a while, only at this point it got small and cheap enough to be widely adopted by enthusiasts. The first RC plane competition was held in 1937 where the Good Brothers pioneered their plane called Big Guff which won that year's competition.

1996 - Modern Military drones - US Predator

When we think about modern military drones, the easiest to recognise is the one used for the first time in Afghanistan to search for Osama Bin Laden. Drone and airplane technology took a great leap during and after the second World War and now military drones can fly up to 740 kilometers away and for up to 2 days at a time.

2013 - DJI Phantom 1 is Released

The beginning of regular consumer drones as we know them today (simple camera quadcopters) was sprouted with the invention of the first drone from the Chinese company DJI. The drone could have a gopro attached to it and could be remotely operated, but the best thing about it was that it was ready to fly from the box and quite affordable for the time.

In the following few years, DJI has completely monopolized the consumer drone market with models like the Mavic Series, a foldable but capable camera drone or their agricultural drones.

2016 - First Passenger Drone Car from Ehang

While attempts to make a flying car have been made before, the first successful attempt was made in 2016, when a Chinese company called Ehang revealed their Drone Car prototype. It was able to carry a human for 23 minutes and it costs way less than a helicopter, making it the first potentially viable flying car.

The model has suffered some modifications with time, but with better battery optimization and higher flight times, this could actually replace some helicopters in the near future.

What is the current state of commercial drones?

While most progress in technology has been made in the military domain, the current consumer niche has expanded the most. Regular hobby grade drones are used for varied things some of which include:

- Cinematography - Aerial filming has become considerably cheaper by using camera drones compared to the use of helicopters in the past
- Agriculture - Spraying crops, analyzing the heatmaps of fields, and having an aerial view have considerably optimized agricultural pursuits in the past few years.
- Delivery - While there are some legal and privacy issues still at play that stop big e-commerce companies like Amazon from following their dream of drone delivery, it is still just a matter of time until it happens

How are military drones viewed by the public?

While regular consumer drones are helping development in many industries, military drones are also developing at a similar rate. People seemed more concerned about regular consumer drones spying on them or [drones listening in on their conversations](#) than the general use of military drones in warfare.

But what is the current public opinion on military drones?

A Gallup poll reported that [65 percent](#) of Americans agreed with the U.S to launch drone strikes against terrorists overseas. The majority of Americans at least seem to agree with the use of targeted drone strikes against terrorism.

Where are we headed?

In a world that is increasingly globalized, the regular consumer drone will be found more and more in domains including construction, inspections, policing, and more, making it a frequent sight which we will get used to.