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Applied Tactics, November, 1887

Stephen B. Luce
U.S. Navy

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Applied Tactics November 1887

Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce
US Navy

Part 1st

Thursday, the 10th, was selected for the second series of manoeuvres at Newport, R.I., and at daylight the squadron, consisting of the *Richmond*, *Atlanta*, *Ossipee*, *Galena* and *Dolphin*, left their anchorage in the harbor and steamed out to the lightship. The batteries of Fort Adams were manned by 8 o'clock in expectation of the attack. The available guns were two 15-inch in barbette, centre pintle carriages, and ten 10-inch Rodmans in case-mates. The carriages of the 15-inch guns being of an antiquated pattern, and the method of elevation and depression slow and clumsy, it was thought better to direct the guns upon a certain number of points whose distances were accurately known, than to attempt to train the guns upon ships in motion. Beginning at 3,000 yards, which was about the distance at which the ships would appear after rounding Castle Hill, ten points were taken at distances averaging 250 yards. These distances were carefully estimated by Capt. R.P. Strong, 4th Artillery, from the U.S. Coast Survey map, and the elevation calculated with necessary allowance for height of gun above the water. Each gun was then pointed successively at all of the ten points, and the position and elevation at each point marked with chalk on the traverse circle. This method would insure as much accuracy as was possible with such guns. The guns were then pointed at the 3,000 yard limit, while all hands were alert to catch the first sight of the top masts over the edge of the hill. A few minutes after 9 a.m. the *Richmond* came in view, leading the squadron. As her stem came in line with the muzzle of the nearest gun, the friction primer was dropped in and the gun fired, followed almost immediately by the second gun.

Reprinted from S.B. Luce, *Squadron Evolutions*, New York: E.H. Hart, 1887.

The guns were then traversed back to the parapet for reloading, and so smartly was this done that the first gun was able to return to the first position and catch the second vessel in the fleet. Both guns were then pointed at the next distance, and their operation was repeated until the squadron was at point blank range; twenty shots in all being fired from the two guns.

On the supposition that this gun can be fired with reasonable accuracy the *Richmond* would have been struck at least six times and the second vessel in the fleet about as many, as most of the sources of error were eliminated by this system of pointing and by the slow steaming of the fleet. With wooden vessels this might be said to have fairly disposed of two ships, taking the *Alabama* and *Kearsarge* duel with a lighter gun as the criterion. On the other hand, from the standpoint of the fleet, it is only just to admit that after the ships approached near enough to make the machine guns effective it would have been absolutely impossible to serve barbette guns. After running the gauntlet of the two fifteen inch, the fleet had then to encounter the fire of the casemate guns at easy point blank range, and this fire could have been maintained in spite of the machine guns. Two ships, the *Ossipee* and the *Galena*, struck torpedoes and were ruled out.

Striking the balance of probabilities with due allowance for the vastly superior range and accuracy of the new rifle guns on ship board, it may be fairly assumed that a portion of the fleet got by, though badly crippled, in the absence of heavy defensive armor. Considering the strength of the garrison, guns have rarely been more rapidly and efficiently served. If twice the number of cartridges had been loaded, the fifteen inch guns could have resumed their fire after the passage of the fort and followed the ships nearly to their anchorage. The passage of the fort by the ships, terminated the first phase of this novel and interesting game of Kriegspiel.

Part 2nd

The land attack commenced after half-past twelve. The place selected for landing was the beach at Coddington Cove, a shallow indentation in the coast line. Nearly parallel to the shore, about a quarter of a mile distant, was an embankment on which the Old Colony road ran. This afforded such admirable cover from the fire of the fleet as to make a landing practically impossible were this bank held in force. For that reason it was assumed that both the attack and defence had reasonable hope of being able to seize it. As a matter of fact the attack did land two guns on the extreme left of their line where the embankment disappeared in the plain and where they could be entirely concealed from view behind a stone wall.

The defence held a cut which was a continuation of the embankment on the other side, a sharp curve hiding them from the attack until the bridge over the cut was passed. The opposing forces were about equal. The defence was made

up of the artillery battalion from Fort Adams, commanded by Captain Field, 4th Art., one battalion of marines, under Lieut. Russell, U.S.M.C., one battalion of blue jackets, under Lieut. A.B. Speyers, of the *Galena*, and Cushing's light battery; total 396 men. All under command of Capt. Frank G. Smith, 4th Art. U.S. Army.

The apprentices from the *New Hampshire* were drawn up on Coasters Harbor Island, with Gatling guns as a flank defence. The attack consisted of two battalions of blue jackets, under Commander Berry and Lieut. Comdr. Lyons, two Gatling guns, under Lieut. Logan, and two 3-inch rifles. All under Comdr. Wilde, of the *Dolphin*. Total, 396 men.

At 12 o'clock the signal for landing was thrown out from the flagship, and the boats were soon seen pulling rapidly toward the beach, at the same time the guns from the fleet opened fire and swept the approaches. After landing, a skirmish line was deployed under the crest of the bank. The right wing of the attack (Lyons) passed up the slope between the old fort on the top of the hill, and the thick grove of trees surrounding the Bates House, which was by common consent eliminated from the field. The left wing (Berry) pushed rapidly forward to the embankment, and, throwing a skirmish line across it, evidently aimed at turning the position of the defence in rear of the woods and along the cut. On the left, Speyers' battalion fell back, as a part of the plan was to draw the attack on until they would be under an enfilading fire from the force on Coasters Harbor Island, whose existence was unknown to them.

But while intentionally giving way on the left it was evident that Berry's advance must be checked, otherwise the whole position would be turned. Accordingly, Cushing's battery was ordered up to silence the guns and drive back the skirmish line. The battery came up at a gallop, unlimbering with a rapidity which spoke volumes for the ability of Capt. John Eagan, who in his four years' tour has made it undoubtedly the best drilled battery in the United States. As soon as the range was obtained, the position behind the stone wall was clearly untenable, and the guns should have been withdrawn shortly. They continued to fire through the greater part of the action. Considering the guns hors de combat, Smith ordered the advance of the artillery battalion down the cut, while the Marines, who had been deployed to cover Cushing's battery, were swung down toward the embankment. Strong's company, forming the advance of the artillery battalion, were deployed across the cut and in the field on the right covering the head of the artillery column.

At this point occurred one of those funny contretemps to which the mock battle is always liable. On the left of the cut was a high board-fence concealing the ground beyond it entirely from view. It had been the intention of the defence, after the left wing of the enemy had begun to give way, to form line across the fence and sweep with their fire the ground which the enemy retreating toward their boats would have to cross. Through some misapprehension of the time, the blue jackets of the attack, finding nothing in

front of them, had advanced to the fence, and the first intimation of this dangerous proximity of a foe to their unprotected flank, was conveyed to the artillery by the apparition of a bearded face surmounted by a naval cap, from under which proceeded a voice which exclaimed in most realistic and telephonic tones—hello!

The situation was certainly staggering and the first impulse was to do what was the only thing left to be done, fall back in the cut and drop every man who showed his head over the fence, but Captain Smith, with the imperturbability of his character, copper fastened by large experience of real war, calmly ordered the battalion to cross the fence and disregard the enemy, who, if inclined to protest against this action, were to be summarily disposed of by the information that they had no business to be there, that they were in a word, slightly previous. It is greatly to their credit that they accepted the situation with the best possible grace and having by their enterprise gained a brilliant advantage, relinquished it.

The battalion accordingly faced to the left, Strong's company having been assembled, and advancing about 20 yards, deployed and lying down opened fire upon the retreating enemy who now began to stream across the embankment, seeing that by the simultaneous enveloping movement of the marines and the advance of the artillery, they were in danger of being cut off. While fortune thus favored the defence on their right, on the left the advance of Lyon's battalion had exposed them to a hot fire from the island, which not only enfiladed them but actually took them in reverses. At this moment, while unable to advance further without silencing this new fire, they became aware of the disaster on their left and the only wise course left was to fall back while still intact and cover as they best could the somewhat broken retreat of their left wing.

The ships at this juncture were precluded from lending much assistance by the danger of injuring their own men, but were able to check to some extent the pursuit. As the enemy fell back over the hill in the centre and along the foot of it from their left, the artillery battalion pushed forward, trusting to the enemy's crossing their front to cover them from any damaging fire from the fleet. Cushing being informed that they were retiring in confusion brought up his battery to the top of the hill in the centre, as the enemy hastened down the slope to the water. This action was severely criticised the next day at the War College discussion, most of the Navy officers, maintaining strongly, that under the fire of heavy guns and machine guns from the fleet, he would infallibly have been unhorsed if not annihilated. It was undoubtedly his duty as a dashing soldier to come up with the battery when the enemy were retiring under such circumstances, at least until he found some good and sufficient reason to halt. Unquestionably the position upon the crest was untenable, but a little to the left and rear was a dip behind which his limbers would have been almost safe, while the guns just clearing

the crest might have been worked for some minutes at least.

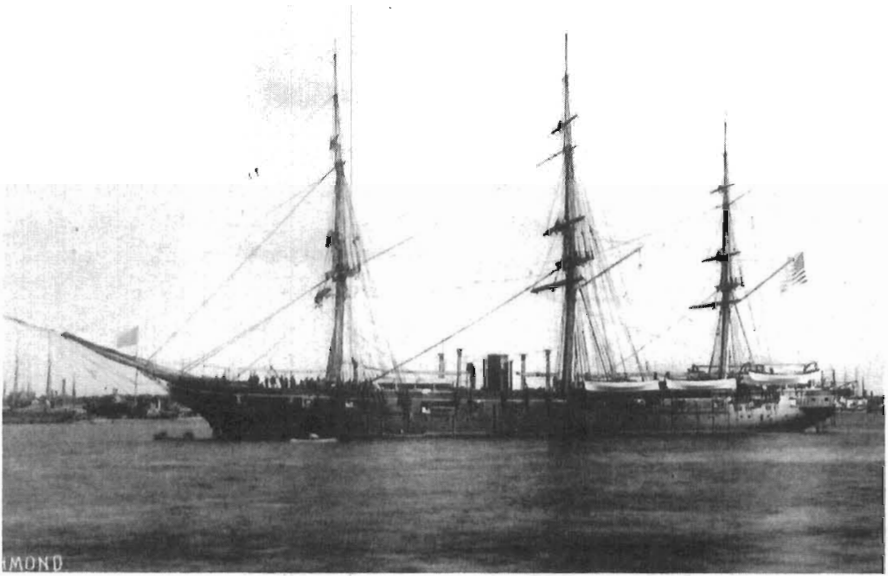
The amount of it all is that even the enormous increase of the deadly qualities of weapons cannot eradicate the personal equation. In future years, as in past, while cover and shelter and favorable ground and all similar considerations must be systematically taken into account, there will always be

Albemarles, Cushings and Custers, who will take desperate chances, and who, according to the result, will either be declared to have "died as the fool dieth," or raised by popular acclamation to the pantheon of heroes.

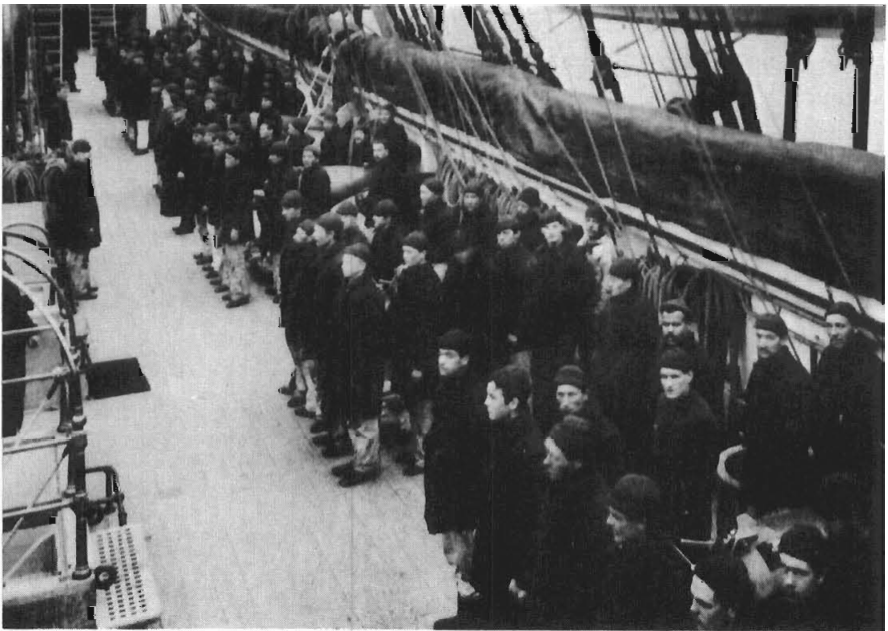
The Light Battery is the great attraction to the Newport sightseer, and it has well earned its brilliant reputation. The marines, who had been doing most excellent and efficient work (as they always do) upon the right of the defence, driving in the enemy's flank, now advanced across the embankment and came to the assistance of the artillery battalion, and with this movement the operations were practically over, as it was not deemed advisable to attempt further pursuit, the slope toward the water being thoroughly swept by the guns of the fleet from the moment that the retreating forces reached the beach.

The umpires were: Chief, Major Livermore, U.S.A., who was the principal projector of the plan, assisted by the advice and experience of Commanders Chester and Goodrich, of the Navy, and Captains Smith and Cushing, of the 4th Artillery. Assistant umpires: Capt. Roder, 4th Artillery, for the defence, and Lieut. McCarty Little, U.S.N., Lieut. Anderson, 4th Art. and Lieut. Bliss, 1st Artillery, for the attack. The plan was much more comprehensive than the last one, both in numbers and extent of ground occupied.

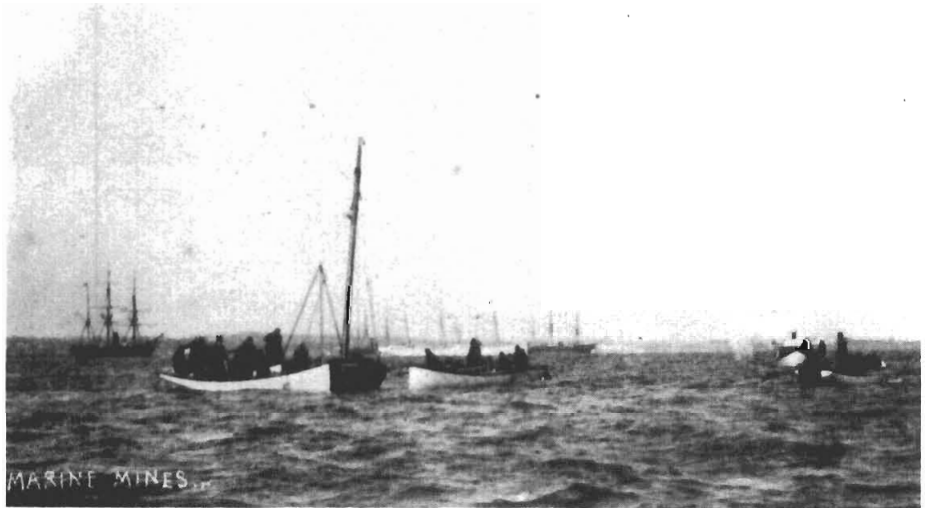
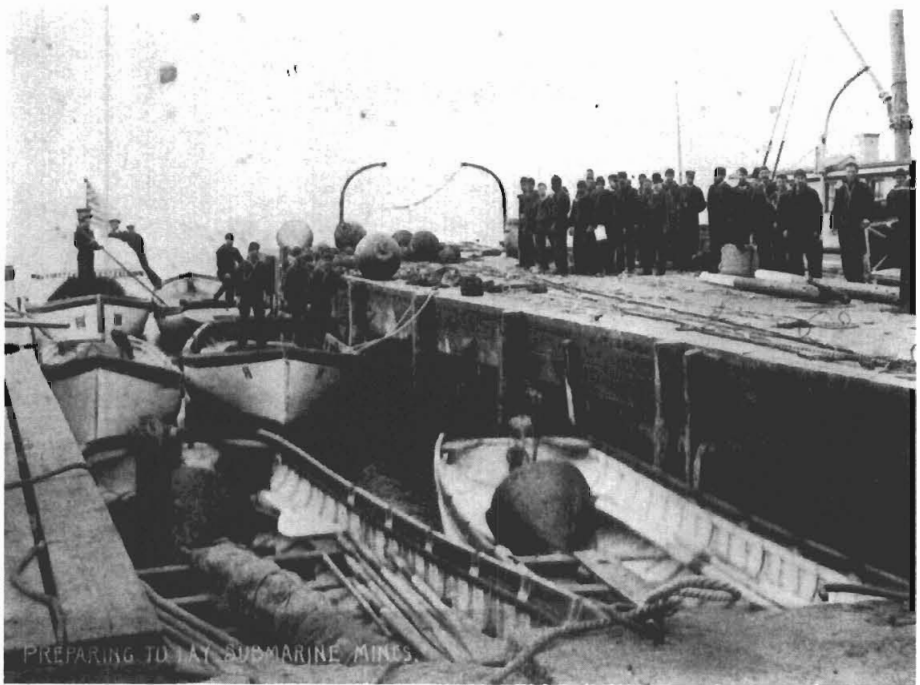
The weak point in it was the necessity of leaving out the immensely strong position afforded by the dense woods of the Bates place as a defensive centre, while still availing itself of the cover of the woods. The passage of the fort was both interesting, beautiful and instructive, and the general conduct of the day successful. The zeal and intelligence of the Navy officers is beyond all praise, and if a slight relaxation of discipline on shore was noticeable it is to be remembered that Jack was out of his element and upon one which he always associates with the idea of liberty and frolic. The artillery battalion skirmished with careful attention to realistic details, which made an admirable picture of war. The companies were ably commanded by Capt. Strong, Lieuts. Alexander, Cottrell and Robinson.



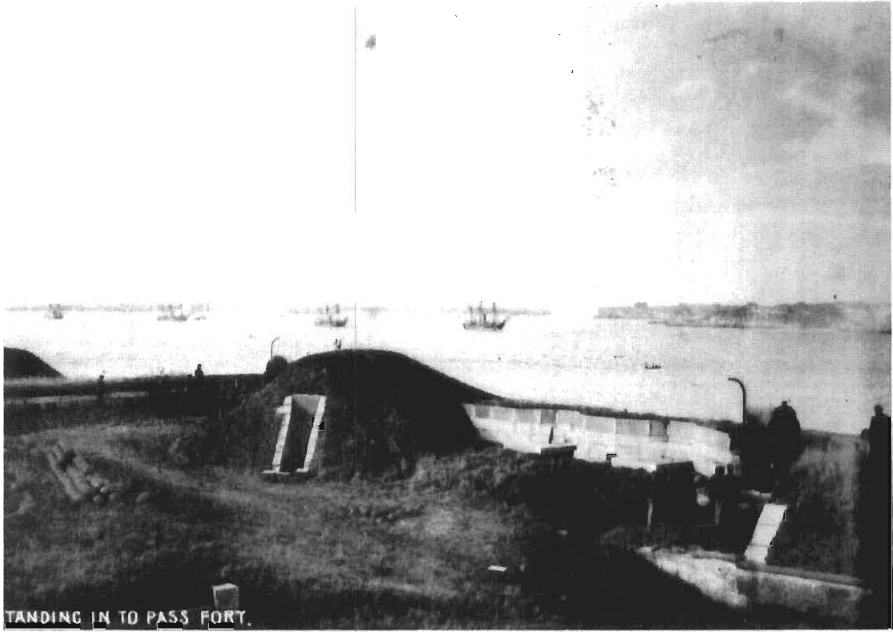
The flagship of the North Atlantic squadron in 1887, the 2,700-ton steam sloop USS *Richmond*. This wooden-hulled ship, then in her 27th year of service, had seen hard service with Farragut during the Civil War. Her armament consisted of muzzle loaders, and she was full rigged. The sails gave her strategic mobility, the steam engine tactical mobility. She cruised actively until 1893.



The men who served the ship muster on the *Richmond's* gun deck. Old and young, they were professional mariners, as much at home in a merchant ship as in a warship. Not many of them were native-born, or even citizens.



Defenders first prepare to lay mines in the channel and then do it. It was a slow process as the pulling boats were loaded, rowed out to the right position and then, one at a time the mines were plucked out of the boat and planted. Just as during the Civil War, the mines were called "torpedoes"; just as during the Civil War, they were effective: two ships of the five ship squadron "struck torpedoes and were ruled out." But that made mine warfare no more a matter of serious interest to the Navy of 1887 than it is in 1984.



As the gunners at Fort Adams wait, the attacking ships enter the channel: first the *Richmond*, then the *Ossipee*, then the *Dolphin* (painted white and almost invisible) with the *Galena* and *Atlanta* bringing up the rear. Three of the five were steam sloops typified by the *Richmond*.



Fire! One of the fort's two 15-inch muzzle loaders shoots at the leading ship. This weapon and another just like it got off 20 shots at about 250 yards, and then the fort's 10-inch guns got their chance to shoot.



The ships shoot back. The *Richmond*, Admiral Luce's flag at the mizzen truck, returns fire, while smoke from the *Ossipee*'s guns drifts astern. Note that even though the wind was astern, the sails were tightly furled. Steam power was fighting power.

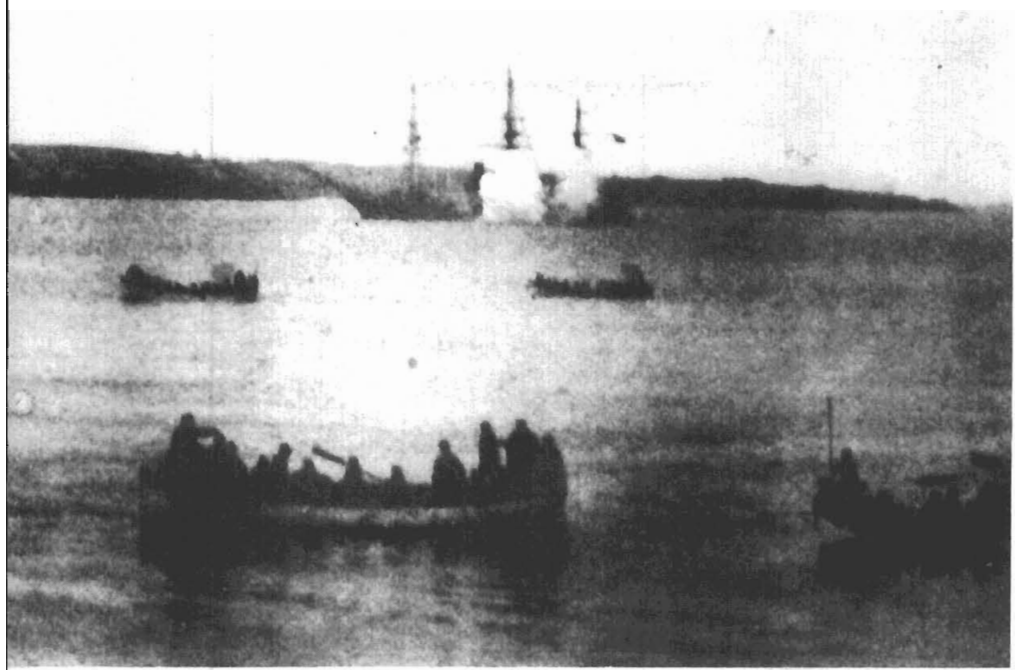


Luce's most powerful ship, the steel protected cruiser *Atlanta*. She and the dispatch boat *Dolphin* were the first ships of the "New Navy" begun in 1883. Commissioned in 1886, the *Atlanta* displaced 3,189 tons. She was armed with two 8-inch, six 6-inch, and a number of smaller weapons. Her speed was 15 knots.



While the ships provide fire support, the landing force approaches the beach and prepares to

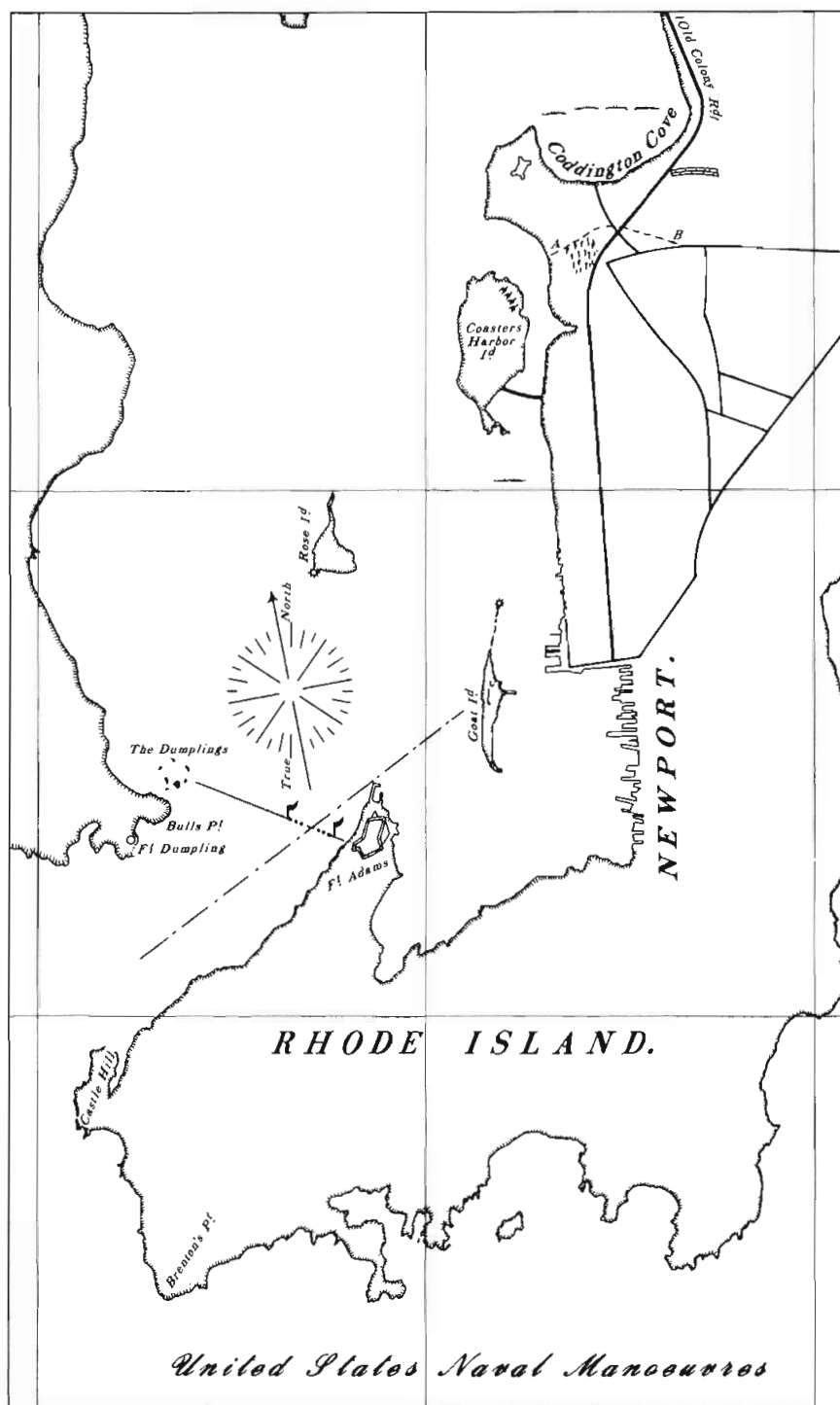




disembark at Coddington Cove



of bluejackets, armed with rifles and light artillery, puts ashore on Coasters Harbor Island.
the island's landscape is barren.





A close up of the landing force at Coasters Harbor Island. The boat keepers seem trying to keep from broaching while the men ashore watch without great evident concern. A few of the latter make their way up the embankment.



Bluejackets with field artillery (occasion unknown, but notice the white uniforms with blue hats and the strong breeze) haul their weapons into position.



Finally, after being repulsed by the defenders, the landing force reembarks under cover of fire from the ships. Steam launches, which would be of great value in circumstances such as these, are clearly in evidence in these two views, though not in any of the others.