

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING DIVISION  
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MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: The Reconnaissance Raid on Fais Island.

SCOPE: A historical monograph covering the actions of  
Co I, 321st Infantry (Reinf) in its capture of  
Fais Island, Western Carolines, during the period  
1-4 January 1945.

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41-139

THE RECONNAISSANCE RAID  
ON  
FAIS ISLAND

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## THE RECONNAISSANCE RAID ON FAIS ISLAND

In keeping with present military doctrine involving amphibious landings on hostile shores, the term "reconnaissance raid" has been included in the title. The capture of Fais Island in the Western Carolines falls into the classification of a raid because it was an assault expedition involving a relatively small force, designed to land, accomplish a mission, and retire within a limited time. It was a reconnaissance in that the mission assigned was a reconnaissance.

### I. PLANNING PHASE

The concept of the operation against Fais Island envisioned the employment of an Army task force to reconnoiter the island with a view toward locating and destroying enemy facilities thereon, actual or potential, in order to deny its use to the enemy as an observation point or base of operations. Upon completion of the mission, all personnel and equipment were to be withdrawn from the island and returned to their proper stations.<sup>1</sup>

The mission of effecting the reconnaissance was assigned

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1. Operation Plan 4-44, Hq COMWESCARSUBAREA, 24 Dec. 1944.

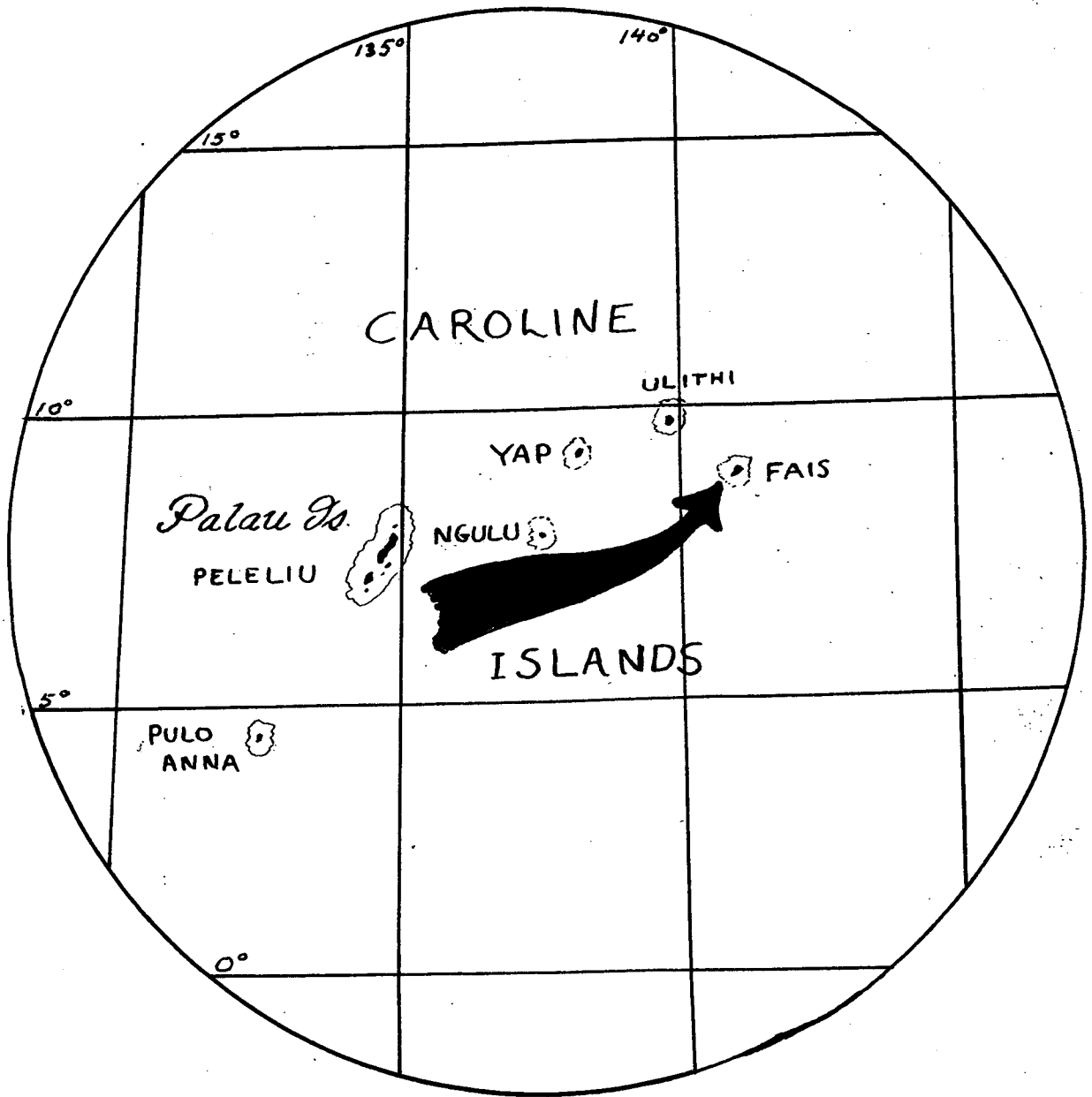


Fig. 1

to the 81st Infantry Division, Ground Defense Force in the Southern Palau Islands, by the Commander Western Carolines Sub Area at Ulithi. Naval and air support for the landing were to be furnished by naval forces in the Western Carolines area.

As a result of a conference between the Commander Western Carolines Sub Area and the Commanding General 81st Infantry Division, the Assistant Division Commander, 81st Infantry Division was designated officer in charge of operations at the objective area. Such troops and equipment as considered necessary for the operation by the Assistant Division Commander were to be furnished by the 81st Infantry Division.<sup>2</sup> The movement to and from the objective was to be under the control of the Navy. Naval plans contemplated lifting the Army task force at Peleliu and the assignment of fire support ships for the operation from the Naval force based in the Ulithi area. Air support was to be furnished by the Ulithi Atoll Commander.

In order to supplement the existing information regarding Fais Island and prepare plans for Air and Naval support, the Assistant Division Commander visited Ulithi Atoll on 22 December 1944. In addition to accomplishing the foregoing, the Assistant Division Commander established contact with the Ulithi Atoll natives who had formerly lived on Fais Island, and made arrangements whereby certain of these would accompany a detachment of

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2. Ltr. Hq. 81 Infantry Division, 22 December 1944.

the 483 AAA (AW) Bn., Ulithi Atoll defense troops, on a mission of establishing contact with the Fais Island native population prior to the scheduled landing of the main task force.

The 483 AAA Bn. detachment, accompanied by three former inhabitants of Fais Island, were to approach the island by LCI under the cover of darkness. The natives were to swim ashore, contact the native king, and return to the LCI before dawn. This plan was calculated to avoid unnecessary harm to the Fais Island natives by instructing them to assemble in an area away from the landing beaches in order to avoid interference with our troops and, at the same time, procure information from the natives relative to the strength and disposition of enemy forces on the island. This detachment was to leave Ulithi on or about 24 December 1944 and was instructed to furnish a report of its activities and findings to the Task Force Commander prior to the scheduled time of the landing, tentatively set for 0800, 1 January 1945.

Elements of the task force proper, departing from Peleliu, were to assemble at a designated rendezvous area off Fais Island by 0600, 1 January 1945. From this area the entire force was to proceed to the southwestern part of the island where landings were to be effected.

The main plan of operations was based on the supposition that Japanese resistance, if any, would be centered around known Japanese defenses on the western side of the island. To overcome

this resistance quickly and prevent the withdrawal of enemy forces to the interior of the island, simultaneous landings by three rifle platoons were to be effected on three beaches along the southwestern shore. (See Figure 2.) The platoon on the left was to proceed directly to the area where it was anticipated the enemy would be. The remaining two platoons on the right were to advance to the north and northwest to block an attempt by the enemy to withdraw to the east. Further operations ashore were to depend on developments in the situation.<sup>3</sup>

Naval and air support for the landings were planned on the supposition that the Fais Island natives could be contacted and instructed to assemble in the eastern part of the island. The support was to consist of a pre-landing bombardment and strafing of the beaches by ships and planes; thereafter, with call missions as directed by the Task Force Commander. In the event that the natives could not be contacted, naval and air support for the landings were to be dispensed with on order of the Task Force Commander.

The Army component of the task force constituted for the Fais Operation consisted of the following units of the 81st Infantry Division (Reinf):

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3. FO No. 1, TU 94.5.10, 25 December 1944.

# FAIS ISLAND

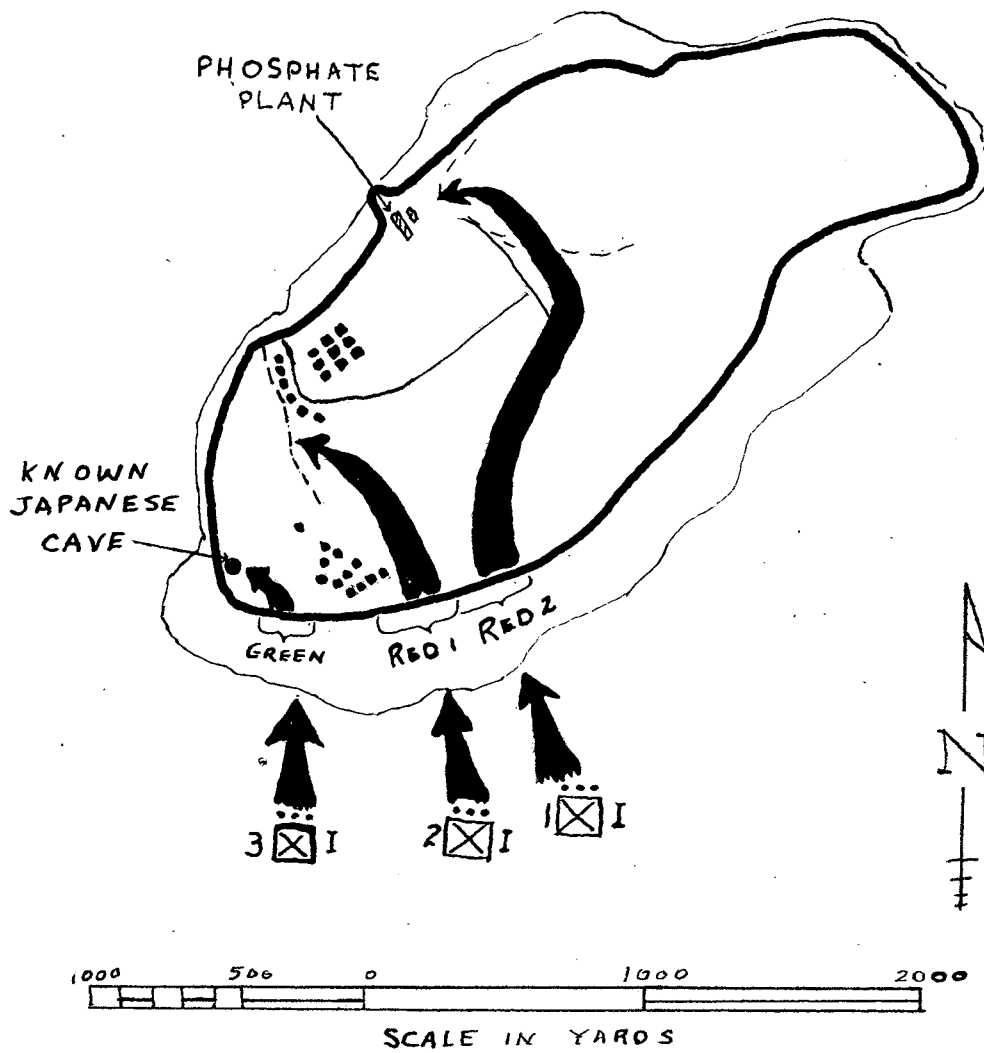


Fig. 2



TU 94.5.10, Brig Gen Marcus B. Bell, Comdg.

Task Force Santa<sup>4</sup>

Co I, 321st Inf  
1 Sec 81mm Mortars, Co M 321st Inf  
1 Comm Sec, 3rd Bn 321st Inf  
1 Med Det, 3rd Bn 321st Inf  
1 Sqd 3rd Plat, Co A 306 Engr (C) Bn  
Det 726, Amph Tractor Bn (6 LVT4s)  
Det Co D, 776 Amph Tank Bn (3 LVTA5s)  
Det 481, Amph Truck Co (2 DUKWs)

The Navy component of the task force consisted of the following vessels:

TU 94.5.9, Lt Comdr J. F. McFadden, Commanding

LCI 77	. . . . .	Ulithi
LCI 81	. . . . .	Ulithi
LCI 725	. . . . .	Ulithi
IST 225	. . . . .	Peleliu
DE 256	. . . . .	Peleliu

Naval aircraft assigned to support the operation and furnished by ATCOM Ulithi consisted of 6 TBFs, 4 VMFs, and 1 Dumbo PBV-5A.

II. EMBARKATION; MOVEMENT TO OBJECTIVE AREA

The Detachment 483 AAA (AW) Bn, accompanied by the Ulithi natives, embarked on LCI 77 at Ulithi and proceeded to Fais Island, arriving there on 24 December. It joined the remainder of the Task Force in the designated rendezvous area at 0515, 1 Jan. 1945.

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4. FO No 30, Hq 81 Inf Div, 26 December 1944.

Task Force Santa was embarked on LST 225 at Peleliu during the morning of 28 December and departed for Fais Island at 1200, same date, escorted by the DE 256. The convoy reached the rendezvous area off Fais at 0400, 1 January 1945.

### III. NARRATIVE OF OPERATIONS.

1 January 1945

At 0400, 1 January the Task Force Commander received a message from the 483rd AAA Detachment to the effect that the natives had dispersed and taken cover throughout the island and could not be assembled. As a consequence, naval and air support for the landing was cancelled. The plan of operation was altered to provide for a limited initial advance to a covering line just north of the native village where assault troops would remain until all natives were assembled.

Transfer of all personnel of Task Force Santa to LST 225 was completed by 0800. Two native guides were assigned to each assault platoon and one native guide remained with the Task Force Commander. The convoy arrived in the transport area off Fais Island at 0830. Debarkation of troops began immediately thereafter. Each reinforced assault platoon was embarked in 2 LVTs and was supported by 1 LVT(A). By 0900 debarkation was completed and landing craft crossed the line of departure. At 0935 landing craft reached the beaches and troops moved immediately to the

designated covering line. No enemy opposition was encountered.

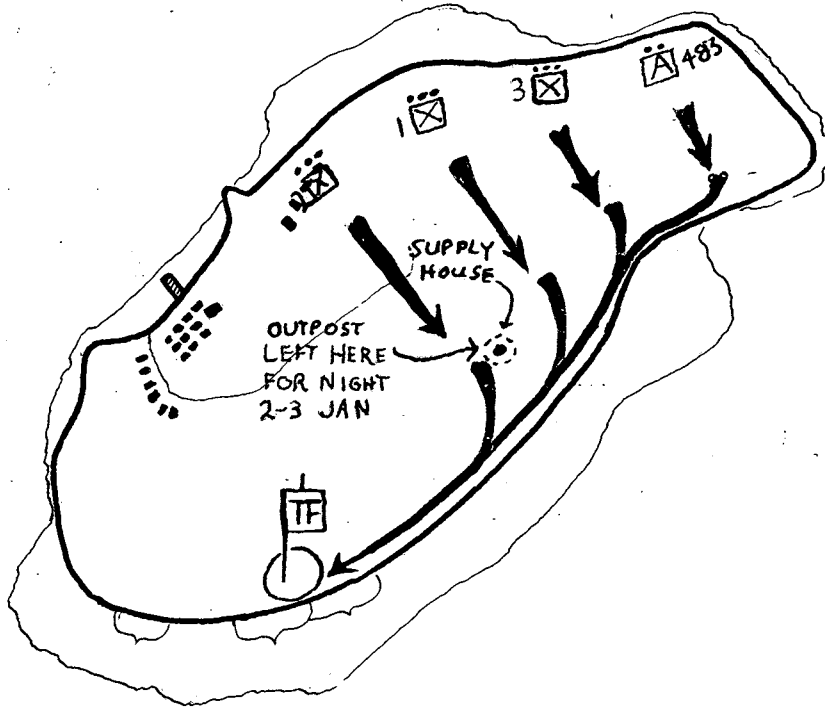
Shortly after the landing, the native king was contacted in the village and instructions were issued to him to assemble all his subjects without delay in the vicinity of the village council house on the beach. At 1015 the king reported that all natives were assembled and accounted for. Orders were then issued for the continuation of the reconnaissance as planned.

The 3rd Platoon, Co. "I" moved directly to its objective in the western portion of the island, but found the cave unoccupied. The entire area was searched, but no evidence was found of recent Japanese occupation.

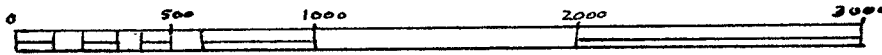
The 1st and 2nd Platoons moved northward across the center of the island and then turned west. A complete search was made of the phosphate plant, radio station, post office, and all other buildings, but no enemy was encountered. A storehouse about 1,000 yards east of the native village showed some signs of recent Japanese occupation. It contained considerable quantities of rice, canned salmon, dried fruit, clothing, and personal effects.

At 1630, the three platoons of Co. "I" joined forces on the western shore of the island. At 1700 the company was reformed and moved to the beachhead where perimeter defense installations had been prepared by the AAA detachment. Troops spent the night within the perimeter. Defense positions were manned by the AAA and the 2nd Platoon, Co. "I".

# FAIS



AFTERNOON  
2 JANUARY 1945



SCALE IN YARDS

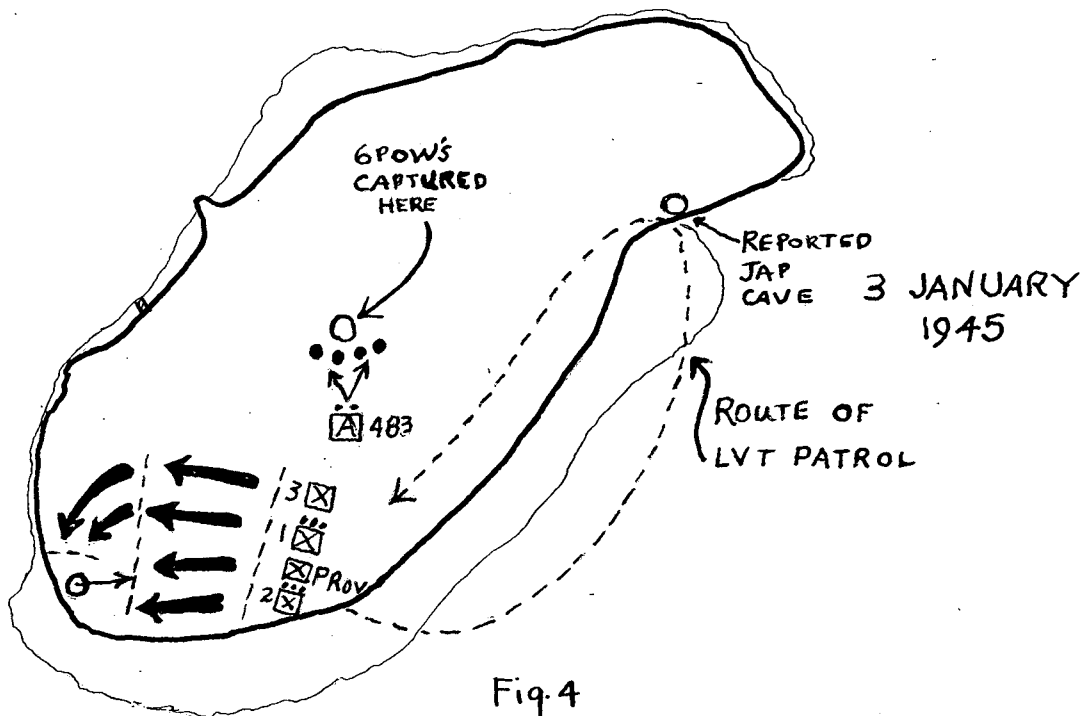
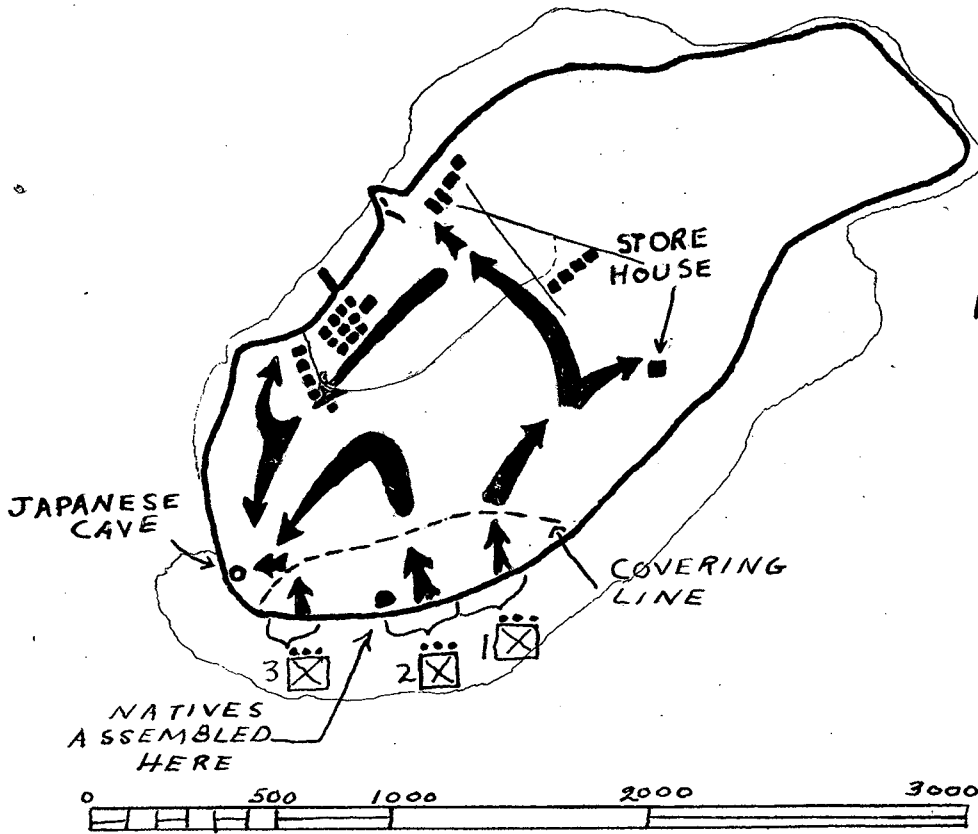
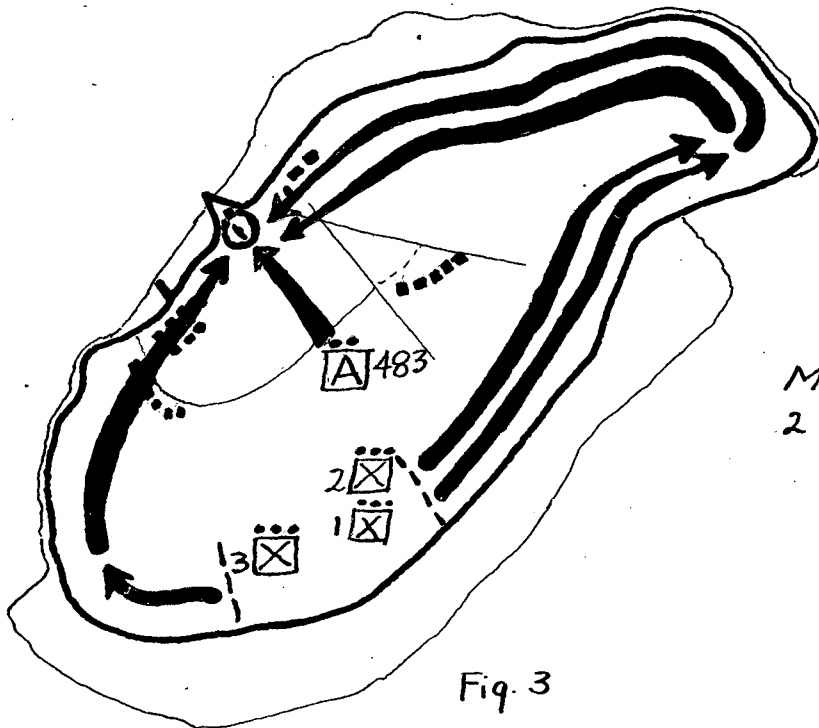


Fig. 4

# FAIS



1 JANUARY  
1945



MORNING  
2 JANUARY

Fig. 3

Between 1500 and 1800, planes reconnoitered the water area around the island for a distance of 30 miles. There was the possibility that the enemy had escaped from the island by small boat. However, the results were negative.

2 January 1945

A thorough reconnaissance of the eastern half of the island was made on 2 January. During the morning the 1st and 2nd platoons, moving abreast of each other in skirmish line formation, started from the beachhead area and advanced around the eastern half of the island to the phosphate plant on the north coast. The 3rd platoon reconnoitered the area it had covered on the previous day and at noon joined the other two platoons at the phosphate plant.

Indications of recent Japanese occupation were found near the supply building which had been searched on the previous day. A Japanese alarm clock which was still running and the fresh remains of a coconut and papaya meal were found in the vicinity, but no Japanese were encountered.

During the afternoon another search was made of the eastern half of the island. A skirmish line was formed of the three platoons of Co. "I" and the AAA detachment from the phosphate plant to the northeast tip of the island. On signal, this line moved across to the southern shore, but no Japanese were found. An outpost of one officer and six enlisted men were left

at the supply building to be on the alert for returning Japanese. The remaining troops returned to the beachhead for the night.

Throughout the day, LCIs maintained surveillance around the entire island.

### 3 January 1945

At 0600, 3 January, a patrol composed of one officer and six enlisted men of the AAA detachment and a native guide moved by LVT to reconnoiter previously unobserved caves which were reported to be on the southeast shore of the island. The patrol conducted a thorough search, then returned to the overland to the beachhead. No enemy were found.

At 0830, the three platoons of Co. "I" and a provisional platoon composed of the mortar section and the engineer squad were formed in a skirmish line extending from the beach to about 350 yards inland. The plan was to swing the line completely around the island and search every foot of ground in which the enemy might be hiding. The seemingly fruitless search ended at 0930. Grazing machine gun and well-aimed rifle fire hit the left flank of the company as it advanced through a level, well-trimmed coconut grove. The enemy was occupying and defending the prepared cave position that had been so well searched on previous days. Our losses from the initial burst were 3 killed, 2 seriously wounded, and 3 slightly wounded. Troops closed in on the position.

in semi-circular fashion. Two amphibian tanks were brought into position and they opened fire on the strong-point with their 75mm howitzers. At 1015, our troops assaulted the enemy position and brought all resistance to an end. Fifteen Japanese were killed. Planes which had been alerted immediately after the Japanese had opened fire were not used during the action.

At approximately 1035, six Japanese civilians surrendered to a patrol of the detachment 483 AAA Bn. near the center of the island. From these prisoners it was learned that the Japanese detachment on Fais Island consisted of fifteen naval personnel armed with rifles and one light machine gun. The prisoners were taken to the scene of the morning's action in order to identify and bury the dead.

During the afternoon, the Task Force Engineers destroyed the radio station after removing all valuable equipment. Two other buildings of potential value to the enemy were destroyed.

#### IV. RE-EMBARKATION; RETURN TO STATION

The Flag of the United States of America was raised in a formal ceremony held at 1600. The Task Force Commander proclaimed Fais Island a possession of the United States in the name of the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas. Instructions relative to the significance of our seizure of the island was transmitted to the people of Fais Island through the King and his council of



chieftains.

Re-embarkation of troops and equipment commenced at 1730 and was completed at 2200. Considerable difficulty was encountered due to the running of an extremely rough sea offshore; and due to the fact that darkness fell about 1800. Coral reefs prevented the LST from approaching closer than 800 yards to the beach, hence the trips by LVT and DUKW from the beach to the LST were hazardous. An even more difficult job, under the circumstances, was the loading of the amtracks and amtanks aboard the rolling and tossing LST. One LVT and one LVTA was lost during the course of this operation. Fortunately, all personnel who were aboard the swamped vehicles were rescued. LST 225 arrived at Peleliu on 6 January 1945. Personnel and equipment were unloaded prior to dark and returned to their parent units.

#### V. RESULTS OF OPERATION

Personnel losses to the enemy as a result of the operations by Task Force Santa consisted of 15 killed and 6 prisoners of war. The prisoners were delivered to the custody of the Ulithi Atoll Commander.

Material damage to the enemy consisted of the loss of a radio station; a boat basin well equipped with stores, boat repair equipment, and a number of small boats; and the extensive properties of the South Seas Development Corporation, including

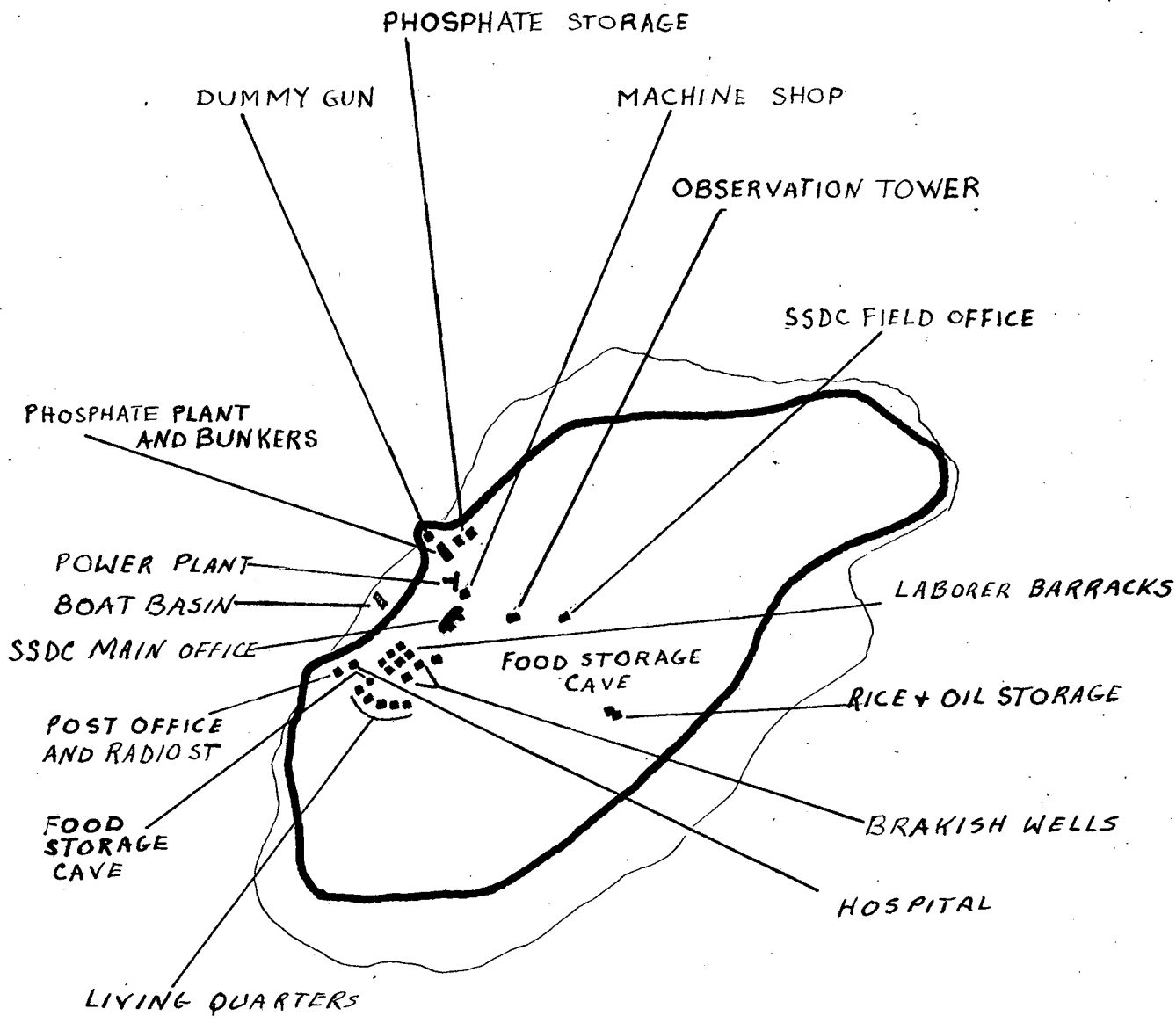


Fig. 5

40,000 tons of refined phosphate ore.

All salvable radio equipment was removed from the radio station prior to its destruction and later placed in the custody of the Ulithi Atoll Commander. Items of intelligence value, such as records belonging to the radio station, post office, and South Seas Development Corporation were forwarded to JICPOA.

A survey was made of the vast amount of supplies and equipment found and left on the island. Included were food and fuel stores, electrical and mechanical equipment, tools, construction materials, and a large number of miscellaneous items. Results of the survey were furnished to the Commander Western Carolines Sub Area.

#### VI. LESSONS

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

(1) A few casualties are practically inevitable in a "bush-beating", "hide and seek" operation in a confined area against a shrewd, fanatical enemy; but, they can be minimized by extreme vigilance and alertness, especially on the part of the lead scouts.

(2) When planning a small amphibious raid of this type, the possibility of landing a small, well-armed force in secrecy under the cover of darkness should be seriously considered.

The definite advantages of surprise upon an enemy caught unawares very often outweigh the advantages of a daylight assault.

(3) In the absence of land tanks, amphibious tanks can and should be used in the close support of infantry during limited operations not too distant from the beaches.

(4) Even under most ideal conditions, the loading of amtracks and amtanks aboard an LST at sea is a most difficult task. Such an undertaking should definitely be avoided in darkness and in rough sea, except in cases where absolutely necessary.

It should be remembered above all that careful planning, good staff work, and sound tactics will produce victory at a cost far smaller than is usually realized.

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