

# “Winter Line’s’ Outskirts Now in Hands of Yank Infantry,” December 21, 1943, p1

*Stars and Stripes*

## 'Winter Line's' Outskirts Now In Hands Of Yank Infantry

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(*Stars and Stripes* Staff Writer)

WITH THE FIFTH ARMY, Dec. 20—The outskirts of the German “winter line” in Italy were in American hands today. In terms of towns captured, yesterday’s communique announced that the village of San Pietro, north of Highway 6, had been taken by American infantry troops. Today fierce fighting was reported near San Vittore, about two miles north of San Pietro and of Highway 6.

While communiqes were directing their attention on the vital highway leading to Cassino and eventually to Rome, and military staff members were estimating the remaining distance to Cassino at six miles, Allied troops both north and south of the highway to Rome were fighting their battle of high hills. In this battle, the names of towns are incidental

to the fighting and the towns themselves are falling only when the high points surrounding them are made untenable to the Germans.

In one division sector north of the road to Rome is Mt. Pantano, part of which was occupied by Allied infantrymen after six days of bitter fighting. German counter-attacks during this six-day period were constant and stubborn. They were beaten off with heavy casualties on both sides.

In another mountain mass south of Pantano, an Allied infantry unit battled for nine days to take a high point south of the hill town of Mastro Giovanna. Seven days of this battle against the well-prepared German defenses,

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**YANKS HOLD LINE'S OUTSKIRTS**  
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which included rock-reinforced dugouts and interlocking machine gun fire, resulted in a stalemate for both sides. At the end of this time, the battalion commander found one weak spot in the enemy's defense and directed one of his companies to attack it. Two days later, the Germans were forced to evacuate the entire defense of this sector.

Both battles, in which American troops have gained their objectives after days of plugging and heart-breaking losses, represented little distance in immediate terms. But these actions, coupled with others like them, have resulted in the beginning of the first German withdrawal along the front in several weeks.

The frontlines in Italy today showed a marked contrast to their condition of a week ago. Patrols from many battalions probed more than ten miles ahead in many places without meeting resistance, although other patrols meet counter-fire shortly after leaving their outposts. It was perhaps too early to tell if the resisting German forces represented a strong defense or were merely delaying parties, designed to stay the Allied attack until the new German defense line was ready to receive it. During the day, German artillery continued to pound Allied artillery positions and where Allied patrols met German outposts, the fighting was bitter.

In the hills which the 5th Army forces have taken, the German intention to peg their "winter line" south of Cassino was seen time after time in the deeply-entrenched foxholes, many of them ten feet deep and reinforced with rock and timber, and in the caves blasted out of the rock-bound peaks. Italian civilians in several frontline towns have reported that they were required to help build these entrenchments for the Germans over a month and a half ago. These entrenchments have stood up against some of the heaviest American artillery and aerial blastings.

But now, as the weather cleared this week, 5th Army infantry forces have pushed their way into these German defenses, outflanked many of them and forced local retreats. The extent of these retreats today appeared to point to a new German "winter line" several miles to the north.

If the German local withdrawals pointed to a new defense line, frontline commanders did not place their hopes too high. As one of them remarked:

"You drive them out of this hill, and there's one ahead. You drive them out of that one and there's always one more. As long as they supply the hills, we'll have a fight on our hands."