

WWII airman's remains found

BY MARC BENJAMIN
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FRESNO, Calif. — Kings Canyon National Park officials confirmed Monday that they've retrieved the remains of a World War II-era serviceman on the Mount Mendel glacier, about 100 feet from where the remains of another airman were found two years ago.

The body was found Wednesday by a Seattle-area author who was doing research on a book about the airman found in 2005, National Park

Service officials said Monday.

Peter Stekel was hiking in the backcountry when he found the body. He started hiking out Thursday and arrived at a ranger station on Friday. Rangers flew to the area Saturday to confirm the find, and again Sunday to begin preparing to remove the remains.

J.D. Swed, chief ranger of Kings Canyon-Sequoia National Parks, said there are indications the remains could be from the same plane as the one that carried Leo Mustonen, 22, of

Brainerd, Minn. His remains were discovered by hikers in October 2005. But Swed said they will have to wait for positive ID to know for sure.

Park ranger Debbie Brenchley said the airman's parachute was still folded up and the pull cord was on his chest.

Mustonen was one of four military aviators in an AT-7 training flight from Mather Field in Sacramento that strayed off course on Nov. 18, 1942. A blizzard is believed to have caused the crash.