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At this glacier in Kings Canyon National Park, hikers discovered the remains of a man believed to be a missing World War II airman.

Remains of WWII airman found atop glacier

The Associated Press

FRESNO — Hikers discovered the remains of a man believed to be a missing World War II airman resting on top of a Sierra Nevada glacier just yards away from the spot where a missing aviation cadet's body was found two years ago, authorities said Monday.

The second set of human remains were found in a high alpine region of Kings Canyon National Park on Wednesday, as little as 50 feet from where climbers spotted the ice-entombed body of Leo Mustonen in October 2005, park officials said.

Rangers located the second body exposed on a remote rock glacier between granite boulders, his undeployed parachute stenciled "US ARMY" inches away.

"It looks like his head was just resting on the rock," said Debbie Brenchley, the first ranger to see the remains on Friday after a pair of backpackers reported the find. "You can see he has a wool sweater on,



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

A parachute is wedged between rocks on a glacier in Kings Canyon National Park.

and a white collar and a ring on."

Icy winter storms and constant glacial movement had hampered park officials' efforts to find additional survivors of the Nov. 18,

1942, crash that killed Mustonen and three other young servicemen aboard a training flight over the Central Valley.

Last year's light snowfall left parts

of that area bare of ice, and the melting snowpack revealed the legless body among the rocks, rangers said. Peter Stekel, a Seattle-based writer working on a book about the failed flight, came across the skeleton as he and a friend were searching the granite peaks for the plane's engine, rangers said.

"We've scoured the area over the last few years," said J.D. Swed, the parks' chief ranger. "We're confident that there isn't anything else to be found there — for the moment."

The Fresno County Coroner's Office is overseeing the retrieval of the remains, which were scheduled to arrive in Fresno on Monday night.

Military anthropologists then plan to analyze the largely decomposed body, which they believe could be one of three men who were flying with Mustonen when their AT-7 navigational trainer plane disappeared after takeoff from a Sacramento airfield.