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Italian man hopes to return watch of fallen American WWII soldier to relatives

By Jana Winter, Perry Chiamonte

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One man is hoping time is on his side as he seeks to return a watch that belonged to a WWII pilot whose plane went down in the mountains of Italy nearly 70 years ago.

Retiree Glauco Mencaroni, who lives in the central Italian region of Umbria, had heard ever since he was a child about a U.S. Douglas C-47 transport plane with six crewmen aboard that had crashed over nearby Monte Tezio, and he had always dreamed of locating the wreckage. With scant information and motivated by an admiration for the American soldiers who died helping his countrymen, he searched the area where surviving witnesses and local lore had put the plane crash.

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"I searched the site for two months to find the exact spot," Mencaroni told FoxNews.com through a translator. "Because was on the side of a mountain, it is a difficult place to reach. I went twice a week for about four months to the spot."

During his trips to the site, Mencaroni used a metal detector to hunt for wreckage from the plane, which went down in 1944. Six months ago, the detector signaled an interesting find - the cover of a military-issued Longines wristwatch. It was a thrilling, yet somber, event, he said.

"It was a bittersweet feeling," Mencaroni recalled. "On one hand, I was overwhelmed with the excitement of finding something I knew about since I was a kid. But I never imagined that I would find something. On the other hand, I was sad. This was a place where people lost their lives doing something heroic."

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Mencaroni eventually found the rest of the watch, which he now he hopes to return to relatives of Col. Raymond Alvin Nowotny, the pilot to whom the watch likely belonged.

"Maybe the news of the watch will reach a family member and someone will have an interest in recovering the pieces," he said. "That is our hope."

The watch and a flashlight were the only personal effects found at the wreckage site. Allied forces at the time had recovered the bodies of the servicemen killed in the crash, which left them and the plane severely burnt.

Mencaroni has committed much of his time and passion to discovering the wreckage and has even erected a cross at the site to mark the servicemen's ultimate sacrifice.

"The six Americans died while doing this," he said. "We must commemorate their lives."

Mencaroni, along with others will visit the site on Saturday to commemorate the 69th anniversary of the crash, which came after the American crew had air-dropped British troops near Lake Trasimeno, where they were sent to sabotage German war planes.

After making the drop, the plane was heading back to an air base in southern Italy when it encountered bad weather and went down.

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