

After 17 Hours, Buried Skier Lives

Contributed by Erik Lambert
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The unidentified skier's family reported him missing on Saturday afternoon. That evening, a rescue team located the avalanche debris. They suspended search efforts overnight, however, and found no trace of the man until a helicopter spotted movement on the snow surface the next morning. Rescuers unearthed him, buried 20 inches below the snow surface, and brought him to hospital.

The extreme duration of the non-fatal burial is extraordinarily rare, if not unprecedented. Swiss police spokesman Jean-Marie Bornet said: "I've never heard of such a case before. It's already very difficult to survive more than 45 minutes beneath an avalanche."

The skier likely was buried in an air pocket, which decreases chances of asphyxia. "It is thought that victims who survive after 35 minutes must have some sort of air pocket," writes avalanche specialist Bruce Tremper in *Staying Alive in Avalanche Terrain*. An air pocket allows the "final 27 percent of victims [those not dead in under 35 minutes] to survive to 100 to 120 minutes, after which the numbers sink to near zero."

"He's a very lucky man," Bornet said.

Sources: huffingtonpost.com, news.yahoo.com, *Staying Alive in Avalanche Terrain*