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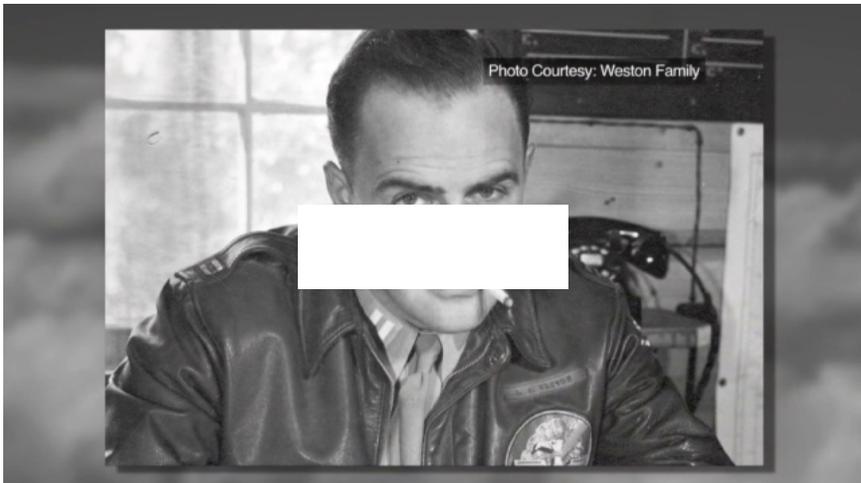
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Witnesses, survivors rally to recognize WWII pilot's heroic act

By Bob Crowley, CNN
November 6, 2010 9:00 a.m. EDT



Hero pilot honored 65 years later

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Maj. Doak Weston piloted a B-25 as it went down north of Boston, Massachusetts

He stayed with the plane until it crashed, avoiding buildings and allowing his crew to bail

Witnesses and survivors rallied to have Weston's sacrifice honored

A ceremony was held at the crash site, 65 years to the day after the crash

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Saugus, Massachusetts (CNN) -- The image is still vivid after 65 years. Bob Attubato and his fellow sixth-grade classmates rushed to the window just in time to see a crippled twin-engine bomber trailing smoke and flames over their school.

"Suddenly, we heard this unearthly sound coming over the school," Attubato recalled. "It just reverberated through the building."

As the class stood there and watched, the plane's wing and engine broke off and it disappeared from view. A loud explosion followed.

Attubato later learned that the pilot, Army Air Force Maj. Doak Weston stayed with the B-25 until it crashed on a nearby golf course, giving his five-man crew time to bail out and missing nearby homes.

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World War II
Melrose (Massachusetts)

The event faded with time, but Attubato never forgot that day. He and others campaigned to honor the heroic pilot.

One of these was Dave Paquin, whose father was one of the surviving crew members. Sgt. Frederic Paquin parachuted from the burning plane that day, landing in a tree. Dave Paquin said his father used to joke about that being the only tree he climbed down that he never climbed up.

Paquin's father died 15 years ago, but he still feels a debt of gratitude to Weston.

"My father owes his life to him," he said.

Recently, the mayor of Melrose, Massachusetts -- where Weston's plane crashed on the golf course -- agreed to honor the pilot's heroism.

"In Massachusetts, we have many great historic events and some for whatever reason just get passed by," Melrose Mayor Robert Dolan said.

"I just couldn't imagine that this individual doesn't have some remembrance for what he has done."

On September 24, 2010 -- 65 years to the day of the accident -- the city held a ceremony on the eighth tee at the Mt. Hood Golf Club in Melrose, overlooking the site of the crash.

Aside from the occasional golf cart passing by, it is a quiet, peaceful spot. At the conclusion of the service, Dolan lifted a sheet off a small stone engraved with the names of Weston and the crew he saved.

Helping him to unveil the monument was Michael Weston, who was only 3 when his father died. He was overwhelmed by the city's gratitude.

"I'm just very impressed," he said. "It's just made me very happy."

Weston traveled with his family from California to attend the service. Until coming to Melrose, he said, they never had a full appreciation of what Doak Weston had done or what his sacrifice meant to this community.

Weston graciously accepted the thanks given to him by the veterans and residents who lined up after the service to shake his hand. He said he knows their gratefulness is really directed at his father.

They want to honor the memory of a man who gave his life for others. Michael Weston has the same feelings towards the father he never really knew.

"There are lots of people who follow that instinct to do the right thing for their fellow man," he said. "That's what he stood for to me."

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