

Abruzzo's Avalanche: After a Week of Search Efforts

Kayla Pantano (January 27, 2017)



The weeklong search for possible survivors at the Hotel Rigopiano has concluded with the amount of victims totaling to 29 out of the 40 onsite at the time of the disaster.

The final death toll from Abruzzo's [devastating avalanche](#) [2], which crushed the Hotel Rigopiano with 120,000 tons of snow on January 18 at a speed of 60 mph, stands at 29. After a week of search efforts amidst sub-zero temperatures and ongoing snowfall, the final bodies of a man and a woman were pulled out of the rubble on early Thursday.

Stefano Feniello, 28, was one of the victims whose body was recovered. Alessandro Riccetti, the hotel's 33-year-old receptionist, was also identified among the dead, though it is unclear when his body was found.

The first victim workers discovered was chief waiter, Alessandro Giancaterino, who worked a double shift on the day of the unforeseen catastrophe to spare a colleague from traveling in the snow, which was ten feet deep in some places.

"He was a great hard worker. He was very professional," said his brother, Massimiliano Giancaterino. "This is the memory that I want to keep of my brother, beyond obviously the private ones that I keep



in my heart.”

Prosecutors say that post mortem examinations on the first six victims revealed that most died as a result of physical trauma from the structure collapsing with some showing signs of hypothermia and asphyxiation.

The Survivors

Out of the 40 who were at the resort, 11 people survived, including two who were not inside at the time of the avalanche. The other nine were pulled out of the ruins on Friday.

Guest Giampaolo Parete was one of the two who escaped when he went to his car to get something. After 40 some hours of torturous waiting, workers rescued the first survivor: his eight-year-old son, Gianfilippo. The boy's mother, Adriana, was pulled out next, who feared for her six-year-old daughter still trapped inside. The little girl was later saved and the family was reunited at a hospital in the coastal town of Pescara.

Worker Fabio Salzetta was also at his car when tragedy struck.

Student Giorgia Galassi and her fiance, Vincenzo Forti, who owns a pizzeria in Pisa, are two more of the survivors. They revealed that they ate ice to stay alive for 58 hours but adrenaline is what kept them going. Galassi praised her boyfriend who hummed to keep everyone calm. "He supported us, everyone, not just me," she shared.

During their wait for help, they spoke with Francesca Bronzi, who was also spared, on the other side of a beam. Bronzi was wearing a watch and helped the couple keep track of time. Unfortunately, Bronzi's boyfriend, Stefano Feniello, did not have a similar fate. After being falsely reported as among the first group of five going to the hospital alive, which naturally destroyed his father, he was announced as dead. The couple was celebrating his 28th birthday on their first vacation together.

All four children checked in were saved. However, nine-year-old Edoardo Di Carlo and seven-year-old Samuel Di Michelangelo were left orphans. Along with six-year-old Ludovica Parete, the three were playing in the billiards room when the avalanche trapped them. Together they endured two days and nights of freezing temperatures without food or water. They were able to survive because the room did not cave in, but Edoardo's bravery also played a part. He kept the other children in good spirits as he hugged and reassured them throughout, singing songs from Ludovica's favorite film, Frozen. Edoardo's older brothers, aged 17 and 19, will now take care of him. As for Samuel, his uncle who was with him at the hospital is believed to be taking custody.

Many of the survivors had symptoms of hypothermia and dehydration, but were otherwise in good health. Hospital director Rossano Di Luzio said that only one required surgery—for an upper arm compression injury.

The Investigation

Rescuers did not reach the site until several hours after the fact because of the many roadblocks from the heavy snowfall that covered Central Italy three days prior. The first rescue team traveled four miles by cross-country skis in a two-hour journey.

Prime Minister Paulo Gentiloni acknowledged delays in the initial rescue effort after local officials did not take reports of the avalanche seriously enough. However, he told parliament on Wednesday that it wasn't the time to find scapegoats.

Despite his view, a criminal investigation is still under way. Many reports suggest that the local prefect's office at Pescara ignored calls for help from Parete and Salzetta, who escaped the disaster.

Chief prosecutor Cristina Tedeschini believes that considering the long search effort, the delay in rescuer's arrival may not have had a significant effect.



The Earthquakes

The avalanche occurred only hours after [four strong earthquakes](#) [3] struck snow-covered Central Italy. The quakes had their epicenters in the city of [L'Aquila](#) [4], Abruzzo, and were felt as far away as Rome, Lazio, and throughout the coast of [Marche](#) [5].

The area experienced similar devastation five months ago when three quakes in and around the towns of [Amatrice](#) [6] and [Accumoli](#) [6] killed nearly 300 people.

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