



December
2021

**281ST ASSAULT HELICOPTER
COMPANY ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER**

No. 79

Presidents Message by Jeff Murray

HOWDY - We had one great reunion in Savannah. The turnout was large, the venue and programs outstanding, and of course seeing everyone again made for a super time. As your new president I asked for input on future reunions and any changes people feel we need to consider for the organization as a whole. Email or call me and I promise to get back to you. (contact info at bottom of last page)

Our next event is in New Orleans from 18 to 22 September 2022 at the Higgins Hotel. Check their website out, it is one fantastic hotel. NOLA has dozens of fantastic restaurants, it's not all Bourbon Street. If you've never had chargrilled oysters, here's your chance. Your reunion committee is trying to scale back the scope of the reunions, as they're a lot of work and a lot of us are getting older, so simpler is better. And speaking of getting older, please, please submit some type of story for the next 281st book. It doesn't have to be a war story, it's not supposed to be a book about personal heroic exploits, it's a book about experiences. Don't worry about your (lack of) writing ability, Will will fix it (pun intended). It's for your kids, I know and you know they will appreciate it.

From the Past President Wes Schuster
The 3 A's (An Amazing Association)

When Tubby Brudvig called me in 1986, I never imagined it would become part of my life for years into the future. We had our first reunion in early October of that year. The venue was at Scott AFB where we visited the 281st before they retired our colors. Five people pulled it together Tubby, Joe Blitizke, Dean Roesner, Charles Althouse and me.

We had a total of 30 attendees, 20 were Intruders. You can read about it and our early days on 281st.com. Go to the members section and look at the top of the page where we have our first 4 newsletters.

Fast forward and this is our 79th newsletter since 1998 and somewhere around 23 reunions. How has that happened? Through the team effort of many Intruders over the years. It is really part of our DNA. We pulled together in Vietnam. We supported one another every day there and we continue to do so today. Our association grew and more hands stepped forward to ensure our comradery would endure.

While I thought there was a lot of work to plan our recent reunion in Savannah, what struck me is how many people really make us such a viable organization. I don't know where to start but here is just a list in no particular order to acknowledge their part in our reunion.



3-160th Night Stalkers

Lt Col Merkle, Maj Jefferson, Maj Burton, Maj Cortez, Cpt D'Antonio and all his men in Company A, CW4 Smith, Sgt Bofflin, and many,

many more. A couple of comments I will remember were “We take our memorial service very seriously, too” and “You guys were crazy”. I guess I should have given them a “Gods Own Lunatics” tee shirt.

Executive Board

Jeff Murray, Bain Black, Fred Beck and Dave Mitchell



Committee Members & Assistants

PX: Jay, Jason, Doris Hays, Cheryl Becker

Hospitality: Mike & Wanda Duclos

Newsletter: Dean Roesner

Internet Administrator: Brent Gourley

Awards: Frank Becker

Remembrance: Jack Mayhew

Editor: Will McCollum

Reunion Speakers: Don Budlong & Jim “Beatle” Bailey

Scholarship: Jim Baker, Walt Pikul, Jim Torbert, Marilyn Payne, Joe Bilitzke, Joan Baker, Cheryl Backer, Mike Duclos, Jack Interstein, Karen Forcht, Jack Mayhew, and Veronica Mondrinos.

Memorial Program: Joan Baker

Ladies Brunch: Karen Suddreth, Joan Baker

Photographer: David Hartung

Quilters: Susan Houston, Becky Riley, Sharon Lake Chaplin: Jim Torbert

Registration, computer assistant, Jill of all trades: Dawn Schuster

My apologies if I missed anyone.

For those of you who couldn't attend, you missed a good one. We had 118 attendees. The venues at Hunter Army Airfield and the Mighty Eighth Museum were top notch. The DeSoto hotel was in the center of the historic section of Savannah with some point of interest on every block. A truly beautiful

city. The meals were great and the hotel staff very accommodating. Our guest speakers Don Budlong and Beatle Bailey received standing ovations. The Memorial Service in the hanger was powerful as was the Missing Man Ceremony. Special thanks go to Jim Torbert, Jim Baker, Dean Roesner and Jeff Murray for their excellent presentation on the 281st to the 160th and the audience on the 281st in Vietnam. The reunion was highlighted by the award of this year's Intruder of the Year, to our Newsletter Editor, Dean Roesner. Congratulations, Dean!

Congratulations to all who attended! See you all September 18-22, 2022, in New Orleans.



Intruder of the year Dean Roesner (left) receiving the plaque from Wes Schuster

ATTENTION IF YOU ONLY RECEIVE THIS NEWSLETTER BY REGULAR MAIL

This is the last time we will send out printed copies of the newsletter by regular mail unless you respond to this notice. If you do not notify Jeff, Fred, or Dean (contact info at the end of this newsletter) before the end of March, you will not receive a printed copy in the regular mail for April. Starting with the April 2022 edition, newsletters will only be sent by email unless we are notified. If you can possibly get the newsletter by email, it will save the association money and effort. So, please send your, or a friends, or a relatives email address to one of the above mentioned members to receive the email newsletter. Or, as an option, you can always have someone with a computer go to the 281st association website and print out newsletters from it, as all newsletters ever published are kept there.

New book by Will McCollum and Jack Mayhew

So far everything is coming together, with some great stories. I think this book is going to be one of our best. I still can use more stories from our guys. Here are a few of the titles that I have as of this date:

Mother's Day Flying with Zorro

The Ice Cream flight

Cobra

Good, and Also Lucky

Sir, Listen to Me

Freedom Bird is Hit

Devoured by an F-100 (Almost)

Last Rat Packer

Last Bandit

They Buried the Wrong Guy

And about 30 more which are so interesting. Our guys do not know how much everyone enjoys reading about all this. My proofreaders have told me that every story reads like they are there in the action. If our guys will send me their stories, I will do my best to make them look good. Looks like the title will be "**The Greatest Respect**" as, over the years, that is what I hear from the Pilots and Crew members as they had such great respect for each other, and still do.

LIEUTENANT HOLT by Jeff Murray Pilot 68-69

So it's late in the summer of '69 and I'm lounging in the Wolf pack tent when a Huey lands and out steps 1LT Jim Holt who introduces himself as my new assistant platoon leader. So I show him around, pointing out the pilot's tents, the crew tents, the maintenance tents, and then I say "Let's go hit the mess tent, it's lunchtime." I noticed he's a bit older and has a combat patch, he tells me this is his 3rd tour. We walk in the mess tent and immediately he and the mess sergeant begin to hug. "I guess you know each other" I say. "Yep" says the mess sergeant, "on his last tour LT Holt was SGT Holt the detachment medic and he circumcised me." "Was alcohol involved?" I asked, at which time the mess sergeant said a very loud "Probably" then proceeded to show off SGT Holt's handiwork while everyone was trying to eat. That cleared out the tables. Never a dull moment during 281st Delta deployments.

THE 281st -- A DEN OF THIEVES?

As previously mentioned in the July 2020 newsletter, Lobo, the slick (D model) gunship was an illegal, but

revered, addition to the TOE equipment of the 281st by nefarious and creative individuals.

Other stories of a similar nature have surfaced and are related below. The named story tellers below, categorically deny all knowledge of, and contribution to the actual events described in the following stories.

Jack Mayhew

Here is where the extra C model came from. In 66, Lou Lerda had the job of building a Maintenance system that would support the hard-charging, ever-moving 281st. To do this, he needed to scrounge parts from other units. Being an expert in that field and having contacts all over the country, this was easy for him. He only had one problem; it was almost impossible to get Ops to give him a helicopter. Being a product of E Company, 1st AD, he did the next best thing. He built a B model UH-1 from the scrap pile and his friends. He used it to good purpose until a 1st Brigade inspector made a visit and discovered it. By then, all B models had been turned in for C's & D's. The inspector instructed Lou to turn his B model in. Being one to follow instructions (if he liked them), he flew it to Saigon, turned it in, and was issued a new C model, which became the maintenance chopper, never to be discussed or seen in the area when higher-up number crunchers were around. When Lou went home, there was a transfer of scrounging skills and it was passed down until the unit closed. When the doors closed, another king of scrounging had the keys to the hen house. Sgt. Gary Stagman served several tours with the company and ranked right up there with Lou. When he closed the unit, there was a flood of empty Conex containers on both sides of the airfield. I have no knowledge as to how they accounted for the extra Gun Ship.

Jeff Murray

All we had was Ken Miller who scrounged about 50 M-1 carbines and handed them out to anyone who wanted one. Ellie Lynn was the CO who made us turn them all in I think. When Major Miller arrived he not only closed down the villa, he made everyone wear military holsters instead of the Howdy Doody lookalikes some guys wore. He was also Ken Smith's best friend.

Jim Torbert

When I arrived in Nov of 68, Abbott and Untalan were the maintenance pilots. They took me all over the city, introduced me to a whole bunch of SF guys, and taught me a little about trading. The maintenance

helicopter was always available for trips, almost all the time used to get somebody down to Cam Ran Bay. Ted Untalan always wanted me to fly to Bangkok with him to get a bunch of stuff from his friends. I always was able to talk him out of trying that.

There are rules and there are laws: The rules are made by men who think that they know how to fly your airplane better than you. The laws (of physics) were ordained by God. You can, and sometimes should, suspend the rules, but you can never suspend the laws.

THE 281st WAS DIFFERENT THAN A REGULAR ARMY UNIT! SEE BELOW



Sp. 5 Dean Roesner being driven around Nha Trang by his personal driver **Cpt. Ted Dolloff** and protected by his personal bodyguards **Cpt. Richie Hamlin** and **Lt. Dave Dosker** in the back! Dec. 68

FLYING VIP'S by Wes Schuster, Pilot 68-69

This past summer there were a number of comments exchanged on our Headquarters net about various VIP's and celebrities some of us had flown. Obviously, they were memorable occasions and a nice break from our more tactical flights. Mine happened in Germany.

I was attached to the 36th Field Artillery Group at a little class 3 airfield. We had two rotary wing and one fix winged pilots assigned to the Babenhausen airfield. We had a change of command shortly after I arrived, and a new Brigade colonel wanted to visit his battalions right away. Our former commander

traveled everywhere in his staff car. I was soon to learn our new commander, Col. Joe Cronin, liked to fly. Our airfield commander assigned me the duty to fly Col. Cronin to his first battalion visit. It was a windy blustery day with low clouds and strong showers. On the flight out Col. Cronin was silent. We landed in the middle of the parade ground with the troops in formation ready for review. Col Cronin liked to be noticed on arrival and what better way to do it than by his helicopter. On the return flight we were bouncing around pretty good in our OH-13. As I was dodging some of the cloud bursts, I got one question. Where are we? Fortunately, I had a map strapped on my right knee. I pointed to a village on the bend of a river and then to the same village on the map. It remained very quiet for the duration of the flight. Once we landed, I apologized for the rough flight due to the weather. Col. Cronin said that he understood and furthermore that I was now his pilot. For the next few months whenever he had to travel and there was a landing spot, we flew. Fortunately, I had gone to IP school for OH-58's. I would fly the OH -13 up to Hanau and borrow a OH-58 for the day to fly Col. Cronin in a more comfortable style. As you know, flying together is much like driving with someone in a car. You are in a captive environment and conversation will ensue. So, over the months together Col. Cronin and I became friendly. Later in the year Dawn and I were to be married. Since Dawn's father had passed away years earlier, I asked Col Cronin if he would do the honors of giving her away. Graciously he accepted. He then stated he would have every officer in the artillery group at our wedding if we so desired (visions of a stash of wedding presents). Furthermore, we could use any motorized artillery piece for our wedding entourage. Somehow, I couldn't envision my bride riding on an artillery piece. So, I declined both offers. We did have a fine military wedding with sabers borrowed from a British regiment. One memory I haven't forgotten is how nervous Col Cronin was. You see he didn't have grown children. He and his wife had just adopted two German children somewhat late in life. He was on General Westmoreland's staff and was in his 30th year of his career. He lived and breathed the military. Marching a bride down the aisle was not natural for him. So, while Col Cronin was not a celebrity or famous person, he was very big in our lives 50 years ago.

TAIL ROTOR STRETCH by Paul Maledy, CE 67-69

The below is from a series of emails between Intruders on the Chat and HQ forums.

All this talk of useless Huey information given out, reminds me of the time I gave out some to my AC for the day. We had just gotten back to Nha Trang from flying all day and my Aircraft Commander that day was Dan "Ace" Miller. I was walking the main rotor blade around to tie it down and he was standing by the tail rotor and watching it go around. When I tied the blade down, the tail rotor blade was pointing straight down. He slowly walked under it and said "it would have just missed his head if running". Well I could not let that go by, so I told him "no, it would have put a permanent part in his skull". He said "how so", and I told him that "at full RPM tail rotor blades stretch about a quarter of an inch". He said he did not know that. I told him it was taught to us in maintenance school. He asked about the main rotor blades and I told him that since they did not turn as fast and were beefier, they did not stretch. He left and I had a chuckle, then I forgot about it. Next morning as I'm getting the ship ready for flight, I see him coming, and from the revetment behind me he yells "Maledy, I want to talk to you". It sounded serious and I said "Sir, what is the problem?" He says "you made me look like a fool at the Officers Club last night" and I had no idea what he was talking about as I had forgotten about yesterday's comments. Then he says that he was talking to some of the pilots last night about his new found knowledge of tail rotor blade stretch and he said they about laughed him out of the club. All I could say was that is what they told us in school. After he stormed off, the pilot on my ship, who was doing the pre-flight inspection, told me "that was a good one" as he had been at the Officers Club last night.

FLYING NAKED by Jeff Murray Pilot 68-69

It's September 1969 and I'm sitting in our temporary compound outside a Special Forces camp at Mai Loc, a few miles west of Quang Tri, South Vietnam, when a mortar lands somewhere near the wire. I beat feet for the nearest bunker and land in a hole next to my platoon leader who asks "Why are you here?"

"Taking cover" was my educated reply.

"You're the standby pilot" he replies. "Oh." So I beat feet for the aircraft, a UH-1C gunship assigned to my unit, the 281st Assault Helicopter Company. We were up there supporting Project Delta as they

recon'd far northern I Corps. The problem is I am in my underwear and flip-flops, my recently washed Nomex flight suit is hanging on a tent rope somewhere not near me. Not to worry though, I arrive at the aircraft, jump in and here comes the crew. A co-pilot dressed appropriately, a gunner without a shirt and a crew chief draped in a towel and flip-flops himself, as he came from the outdoor shower. We launched, we found nothing to shoot at but we had to go to Quang Tri to refuel. Following protocol I jumped out and manned the portable fire extinguisher while the crew chief and gunner refueled us, it was a bit different looking as the crew chief's towel stayed inside the aircraft so it wouldn't blow off and maybe foul a control or two.

While standing there doing my duty as fire guard someone walked up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around and there stood a Marine Major in starched fatigues and shiny boots carrying a clipboard. "What do you think you are doing?" I believe I remember him asking.

Well, I was almost 11 months into my tour and feeling short but he was a Major and I was a lowly Warrant Officer 1 dressed in OD green boxer shorts and a matching t-shirt with my helmet on and my visor down so in my best military manner I answered him: "We're putting fuel in the helicopter sir." I thought that was a proper answer and it must have been because he stared at me for a few seconds and did a rather smart about face and walked off. And as he walked away, I heard him mutter "F-ing Army." I think that was a compliment!



"Let me guess - You want to be a helicopter pilot?"

REUNION COMMITTEE by Bain Black, Chair

Hello Again Intruders, as I write this submittal for the upcoming newsletter, I must start by mentioning our dear brother, Jay Hayes. He continues to fight COVID as we would expect Jay to fight. He, Doris,

and the family remain in our daily thoughts and prayers.

It was great to see all our reunion attendees in Savannah. For those who could not make it, we had a wonderful time. Old southern cities have plenty of charm and wonderful food!!

The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR)(ABN) greeted us with open arms. They gave us a tour of the flight line and showed us what SOG aircraft look like today. Wow, they have great equipment and training. Both Intruders and Night Stalkers talked about special operations aviation, comparing our mission with today's. We all left with a better appreciation of one another's challenges and hazards. I'm proud to know the 160th considers the 281st their legacy unit.

Before we departed the hangar at Hunter Army Airfield, we closed with our memorial service for the 53 Intruders who did not return from RVN. May they Rest In Peace!!

Planning is well under way for our next reunion to be held in **NEW ORLEANS, September 18-22.**

Mark your calendars now. Our activities will be centered around the National World War II Museum and the beautiful Higgins Hotel.

We have some special events scheduled at the Museum. I will be joined by several Intruders in February to put the final touches on our reunion plans. Expect a registration form to arrive in the next newsletter in April. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to the Intruder Family! Signing off now, again with Jay Hayes in mind.

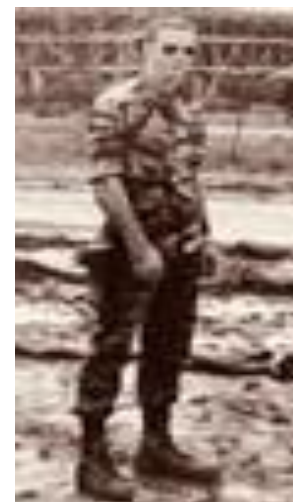


Intruders all! – Savannah, GA – 2021

DOUG STOWE by Dean Roesner, CE, 68-69

In November of 68, we were at An Hoa for a Delta. On one mission, we had come onto a sloped ridge (one of a series of finger ridges that ran down to a river) that was clear enough of trees to allow us to get

the uphill (left skid) down, although there was elephant grass about 4 to 5 feet high. The LRRP team was being chased by the enemy and had been directed to the PZ by the FAC. We came in from the north to the ridge which ran east/west. The bad guys were on the south face of the ridge and the team had just made it to the top as we hovered in. As soon as the team was onboard, we rose up a few feet and the nose dipped. At that point I knew we were going forward right over the bad guys, so I opened up with the M60 (I was a gunner on the right side) and started cutting grass about a foot below its top so that if any of them poked their heads up they would be dead before they could shoot. I was cutting grass back and forth to the front and down slope to the right as we started forward, and swinging the gun all the way to the front stop, which meant the barrel was in the door way and my bullets and tracers were going right past the Peter Pilot. As we cleared the ridge, we made a very steep right turn and went down through the next gulley in a dive gaining airspeed. All this time I'm shooting forward at 45 degrees and sweeping the gun up and down as fast as I can to try and discourage anyone in the gulley from getting off accurate shots at us. So the Peter Pilot was really getting an earful from the gun almost right outside of his window. As we cleared the trees at the bottom of the gulley, I swung the gun to the rear and continued pounding the clearing, I kept filling it with lead after we were over a mile away and climbing, I was literally lobbing the tracers into it, with the thought that next time, they will think twice about chasing a team and shooting at a chopper. We picked up two rounds, one through the windscreen that sent Plexiglas into the AC's face (Steve Mathews) and the other through the tail stinger. All total I fired 1900 rounds with one pull of the trigger (I had replaced the 600 round can with a minigun can which held 2000 rounds). Due to the steepness of the diving turn, the CE never got off a shot. For years, I always wondered who the PP was, all I remembered was that he was very new, and had the bullet hit the AC, I doubted he would have had the experience to grab the controls in time to miss the



trees at the bottom of the gully. Well, at a reunion I found out the PP was Doug Stowe, and he said that my supposition was probably correct as that was his very first combat mission, and afterward he decided that if they were all like that, he probably wouldn't survive his tour. Thankfully, they weren't all like that, and we both survived our tours.

INCIDENTS I REMEMBER - While flying back from Da Nang to our FOB at An Hoa for a Delta Operation, we are single ship at altitude. There is a very large cloud bank immediately to our north that is solid white for several hundred feet above and below our altitude. We are about a quarter mile away from it and in the clear. My gun is folded but my foot is on the mic switch and I'm gazing out at the clouds and ground. Suddenly an F-4 pops out of the cloud bank barely below our level. Before I can even punch the switch to alert the pilots, he is under us (by only 100 feet) and gone from my view. I still told the pilots about it and I'm sure the CE was very surprised to see it appear between his feet as it departed, but it shows how fast things can happen. If he had been at our level, I doubt he could have missed us, there simply wasn't enough distance or time to change course. I can still see his helmeted face looking up at me through the top of his canopy as he passed under us. I bet he can still see my face too, I think mine was just a helmet with two very large eyes.



Sara Harold - granddaughter of Gerald (Smiley) Johnston, who is attending the University of Florida to study Biology - award in honor of CW3 Jim Ray Cavender.

Isabella Kuminka - great niece of Jim Baker, who is attending Virginia Tech University to study Aerospace Engineering- award in honor of CW3 George Thomas Condrey III.

Maxwell Schuster - grandson of Wes Schuster, who is attending Embry-Riddle University to study Meteorology - award in honor of CW3 James Leslie Dayton.

Applications are now being accepted for students entering college or an approved technical/trade school in the fall of 2022. Eligibility for a 281st Scholarship is extended to any direct descendent of a former 281st member or their spouse including those from attached or affiliated units. Forms for submitting an application plus requirements can be found on the 281st website. The deadline for receiving those applications is June 15, 2022. Remember, your donations are the lifeblood of the Fund. These Scholarships are only for our members and their families, and are a great way to extend support to our own. Plus, we are a "Memorial Scholarship Fund" developed to honor the memory of the 10 Intruders who were lost in Vietnam and did not return, and a Scholarship Award serves as a lasting Memorial to those men. Information about how to make a donation is also on the website, or you can contact me directly. Someone handed me a very generous cash donation at this past reunion in Savannah, and it was very much appreciated. I hope everyone has a Merry Christmas or happy holiday season. Stay safe and stay healthy.

A hometown tribute to Don Torrini, Bandit Pilot 67-68

His own poster, along with other service member posters, fastened on light poles around the town library. BTW, Don was put in for the Medal of Honor, but typically, it was downgraded to a Silver Star, probably by REMF's (Rear Echelon Military Fools).



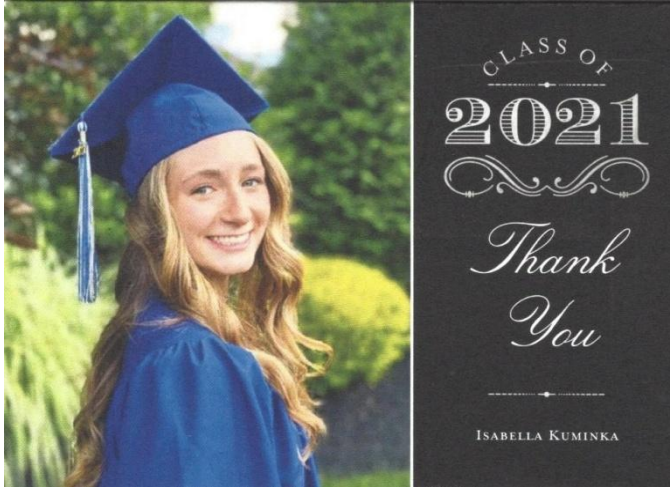
GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Congratulations to Jim "Beetle" and Martha Bailey on their 50th wedding anniversary, November 24, 2021

SCHOLARSHIP FUND by Jim Baker, Chair

Your Fund is quite active these days. Eight students are currently receiving financial support from you. The Scholarship Committee met via Zoom on July 28 to review the five students on Scholarship at that time, and to consider three new applications. Those three were approved and joined the program beginning this fall. Approved were:

The below is from a new scholarship recipient, the great niece of Jim Baker, Rat Pack 68-69. From Mickleton, NJ, her major is Aerospace Engineering.



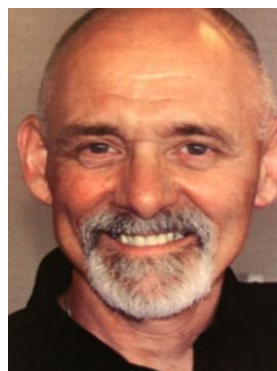
To the 281st scholarship committee: Words cannot express how grateful and honored I am to be this year's scholarship recipient. The memory and sacrifice of all who served our country in Vietnam, especially CW3 George Thomas Condrey III, make this award even more meaningful. I am eager to start my Freshman year at Virginia Tech; this scholarship is a tremendous help as my college career begins! Thank you, Isabella Kuminka.



OBITUARIES

Gary Omdahl

Served in 1st Platoon
(Rat Pack) as a Pilot.
11/66 to 11/67



7/6/45 to 3/28/21

Russell Greg Isaacs

Served in the 145th and
281st as a Door Gunner.
65 to 66



2/9/42 to 1/22/20

Rav P. "Jack" Felton

Served in the 145th and
281st as a Crew Chief.
6/65 to 6/66



8/22/42 to 8/16/21

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