



201 TOURIST CENTER DRIVE, PO BOX 368, HAVELOCK, NC 28532

# **AVIATION CONNECTIONS: NEWSLETTER**

Summer 2020

Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation

June 2020

WWW.ECAVIATIONHERITAGE.COM

#### Partnership Created with Craven Community College and ECAHF



On March 5, 2020, Craven Community College and the Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation (ECAHF) partnered to continue the middle school engineering camp which has previously been conducted by NC State faculty in Havelock. These two organizations will continue to receive support from NAVAIR and NC State as they build on the tradition of high-quality activities to inspire the youth of Eastern North Carolina.

The inaugural session of camp is planned for the summer of 2021.



# NC STATE UNIVERSITY







The 10th Annual Family Fly-In and Movie Night originally scheduled for May 29, 2020 was cancelled due to COVID-19 as we were all sheltering in place.

A huge "Thank you" to the men and women who agreed to share their expertise in the area of science, technology, engineering, or math. Please plan to participate next year in this event.

Also, thank you to the sponsors who agreed to help ECAHF again this year with their donations. These include Food Lion - MLK Blvd, Black's Tire, Navy Federal Credit Union, and WCTI-12.



# **Mark Your Calendars!**

The 2021 ECAHF Gala is scheduled for

February 26, 2021

You don't want to miss this exciting evening of entertainment and great food while supporting a terrific cause. All proceeds from the Gala are to help promote the goals of ECAHF. This fundraiser allows the Foundation to sponsor events throughout the year which help to accomplish the goal of inspiring young learners to pursue new and exciting career pathways through STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Please plan to join us in February!

### **Robert J. Fetzer's Military Service During WWII**

#### **Chapter Two**

By Barry Fetzer, ECAHF Historian



This article for the Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation Newsletter continues last issue's story of Robert Fetzer's path from small town Bedford, Ohio boy to WWII soldier, Army Air Corps weather forecaster, and *Sferics* (short for "Atmospherics") operator.

Following recruit training in Goldsboro, NC at Seymour Johnson Field and at Keesler Field in Mississippi (1943) and training as a *Sferics* operator at Fort Monmouth, NJ (see postscript about Fort Monmouth at the end of this sketch), my father, Robert Fetzer, was sent to the University of Wisconsin (1943-44) for a year of pre-meteorological training.



Dad's check-in photo as a pre-meteorological student, 54<sup>th</sup> Army Air Forces Technical Training Detachment (AAF TTD), University of Wisconsin 1943 (Above photos credit: Fetzer Family)

While at the University of Wisconsin, Robert served at Truax Field named in honor of Wisconsin native Lieutenant Thomas L. Truax, who was killed in a P-40 training accident in November 1941. Originally known as "Madison Army Airfield", during the War Truax Field was the site of the Eastern Technical Training Center, a major school for training radio operators and mechanics, later expanded to radar and control tower operations and other communication fields for the Army Airways Communication Service.



Robert Fetzer photographed studying the "Theory of heat transmission" in his dorm room at the University of Wisconsin. He wrote a caption under this photo: "Next: butting my head against the wall." But he did have time—apparently—for other, possibly less professional thinking, if not pursuits. A photo of the U of W's girl's dorm in his photo album was accompanied by the caption: "This girl's dorm is off-limits but we can't keep our eyes off it."



Robert Fetzer at the sign board for his Army Air Forces unit at the University of Wisconsin, 1943 (Above photos credit: Fetzer Family)

From a letter home to his Mom, he wrote that after graduation from the premeteorology program at the University of Wisconsin, a "change of priorities" sent him to Richmond (Virginia) Army Air Base for weather observer school. From Richmond, he was ordered to Bermuda where testing of the *Sferics* apparatus against hurricanes was accomplished. Once the apparatus was successfully tested, Robert Fetzer transitioned through the Greensboro (NC) Overseas Replacement Depot and was hop-scotched by B-17's and C-47 Skytrains (the passenger variant being the C-53 Skytrooper or DC-3) to North Africa via the Azores (following the allied victory over German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Nazi forces in northern Africa) where he was billeted in Morocco (Casablanca), Tunisia, and Cairo, Egypt. He was then flown to Bombay, India, over the Burma Hump to Karachi, (then India…now Pakistan) and finally to eastern China, his assigned destination for *Sferics* operations.

Given those horrendous flight connections he had to China, Dad didn't like flying much later in his life. Not so with me. As a consequence of his WWII experiences, I have few complaints about my petty inconveniences when flying.



Robert Fetzer during physical training at Richmond Army Air Base, 1944



Robert Fetzer's Greensboro, NC Overseas Replacement Depot Booklet, 1945. Note his name blacked out, possibly required for security purposes. (Above photos credit: Fetzer Family)

RESTRICTED

HEADQUARTERS, 74TH AAF BASE UNIT (25TH WEATHER REGION) LYNBROOK, LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK

23 September 1944

SPECIAL ORDERS )

NO. 223 )

#### EXTRACT

6. The following-mamed EM (MOS 784), 74th AAF Base Unit, DS Wea Equip Methods Sec, ESL, Spring Lake, NJ, are trid in gr to 66th AAF Base Unit, (Wea Techn Unit) Asheville, NC with sta at Hq 8th Wea Sq, Grenier Fld, Manchester, NH, and WP by mil ap or rail immediately fr present sta to sta at Grenier Fld, thence to Presque Isle, Me. EM WP fr Presque Isle, Me by mil ap to \* \* \* for a period of temp dy of one hundred twenty (120) days \* \* \* :

Cpl Grant Griffith, 11107452 (In chg) Ffc William H Curley, Jr, 1119571 Cpl Frank E Martin, 12102602 Pfc Robert J Fetzer, 35059097 Pfc William A Aronow, 33584912 Pfc William A Sanderson, 33428229 Pfc Robert F Schnabel, 35657991

S/R and allied papers will accompany EM. Upon completion of temp dy, EM will ret proper sta, Grenier Fld. Temp APO No. 4221, c/o Postmaster, New York, NY, will be used as mailing address. In accordance with AR 35-4520, FD will pay es EM in advance the prescribed monetary alws in lieu of rat a/r \$1.00 per meal for three (3) meals fr Spring Lake to Orenier Fld to Presque Isle. In lieu of subs a flat per diem of \$7.00 is atzd ea EM while T by air in accordance with existing law and regulations. TO will furm T. TDN. 501-31 F 431-02, 03 212/ 50425. Auth: Radiogram, Hq AAF, 16 Sept 4A and THX, Hq Wea Wg, Asheville, NC, 23 Sept 4A. Eff date of change on M/R, 27 Sept 44.

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Robert Fetzer's orders to Bermuda (he kept them for over 60 years amongst all the other papers we discovered in the hay loft of Mom and Dad's Richfield, Ohio barn after his death). Note the "Restricted" classification of the orders and the asterisks at the end of the first paragraph used to hide the actual location of his service with "37 Charlie", his *Sferics* testing unit in Bermuda, a year before the end of WWII. (Photo credit: Fetzer Family)



Robert Fetzer in Hamilton, Bermuda, his "pisscutter" cap tilted cockily to the side



*"37Charlie"* (Robert Fetzer's Bermuda *Sferics* testing outfit, Robert top row/second from left). Like many deployed military, even today, the guys had a stray, mongrel dog they adopted (center, bottom), named *37Charlie*, *Charlie* for short. (Above photos credit: Fetzer Family)



Robert Fetzer in the Sind Desert, India (sand wall in background), enroute to China. (Photo credit: Fetzer Family)

Robert was assigned to a *Sferics* Unit with the 14<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force (of the Flying Tigers fame) and stationed in what he called Changting, China (possibly the city now called Chongqin.) One might see how US soldiers could butcher the Chinese pronunciation of Chongqin (as it is now spelled in English) to "Changting", and the city is in a mountainous area giving the *Sferics* apparatus clear reception from the East China Sea. Chongqin was the WWII provisional capital and Nationalist Chinese-controlled city of China where US troops could operate relatively risk-free, although (*according to Wikipedia*), "From November 1937 to May 1946, it was Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's provisional capital [so] the Japanese Air Force heavily bombed it." So while Chongqin is a possibility, the exact location in China where Robert served is still a mystery.



Flying Tigers Curtis P-40 War Hawk (Photo credit: Wikipedia)

Had it been nighttime (it wasn't...the world's first atomic bomb used against an enemy was detonated over Hiroshima at 0815 in the morning, Japan Standard Time) and if Robert had been looking to the east from Changting at the exact moment the atomic bomb detonated above Hiroshima, he might have seen the flash of that massive airborne (approximately 2000 feet over the city) explosion that killed (estimated) 64,000-200,000 people in one, fell swoop.



Poor quality photo of Robert Fetzer captioned "At a weather station in Changting", China where he operated a *Sferics* Station. Many of the photos from this period of Robert's service are of poor quality, understandable in war-time China. (Photo credit: Fetzer Family)

As a *Sferics* Operator, Dad's job was to track the formation and path of typhoons through receiving the transmissions of very low frequency (VLF) lighting strikes inside the storms. The storms could be tracked with the *Sferics* receiver even though a typhoon was hundreds of miles away, well over the visual horizon. This is because VLF radio waves commonly reflect off a layer of charged particles (electrons) in the ionosphere redirecting the signal back toward the surface of the earth. *Sferics* operators' mission was to help war planners with setting the dates for *Operation Downfall*, the final assault on the Japanese home islands, dates that had to be planned around the potential for a typhoon to disrupt—even devastate—the amphibious assaults on Japan. But instead of *Operation Downfall*, a mission that would have resulted in untold numbers of deaths to both assaulting allied troops and Japanese citizens (estimates range from 5-20 million total killed), *Operation Centerboard I*—the atomic bombing of Hiroshima—was ordered by President Truman. As it turned out, *Sferics* was not needed to win the War as history had taught war planners it might be.

After the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, WWII ended rather quickly. The atomic bomb "Little Boy" was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and the atomic bomb "Fat Boy" on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. Only six days later on August 15<sup>th</sup>, the Japanese announced its unconditional surrender to the Allied Forces, signing the Instrument of Surrender aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* the following month.



The Flying Tigers, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron-262 (Photo credit: Fetzer Family)

It is a bit of serendipity that I commanded a reinforced USMC aircraft squadron, HMM-262 *The Flying Tigers*—namesake of famous 14<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force *Flying Tigers*—stationed in Okinawa, Japan in the mid-90's, deploying twice aboard the USS Belleau Wood (LHA-3) (not the same USS Belleau Wood damaged in the typhoon mentioned above and pictured in my first column on this topic). I visited several places in China including Beijing (or Peiping, the name of the capital city under the old Chinese to English translation rules when Dad visited in 1945), walking in some of the same footsteps as my father had 50 years earlier.

Spending the fall in China and then the Christmas season of 1945 and the first part of the new year of 1946 in transit from China to the Philippines and then home, Robert Fetzer was flown from Changting to Canton, China and then Shanghai. He was granted leave in Shanghai and traveled by plane to Peiping, the capital city of China. He visited the ancient walled capital city, the *Forbidden City*, while in Peiping, just as I did 50 years later.

Robert Fetzer returned to Shanghai from his leave and was embarked on a troop ship named the USS *General Leroy Eltinge* (AP-154). He steamed across the East China Sea on the USS *General Eltinge* to Manila Bay, Philippines where additional US troops bound for home were loaded. After weeks of transit across the Pacific Ocean with fellow returning home troops, almost 4000 of his "closest friends", Robert Fetzer made port in the United States after a long year away from home in Seattle, Washington on January 26, 1946. While he could not have known it, the day he landed back in the good, ol' US of A was 40 years *to the day* prior to his first grandson being born.



USS General Leroy Eltinge (Photo credit: Wikipedia)

Robert brought from China more than memories—including war trophies that today would include some not permitted to be returned to the US (a Japanese officer's "Samurai" sword and a Japanese soldier's helmet and bolt-action rifle and ammunition; Nationalist Chinese and a Japanese soldier's "Rising Sun" flags; Buddha statuettes; Chinese ladies silk clothing; and Chinese money)—he brought back stories that included one of finding a rat tail in his soup in China. Did he really find a rat tail in his soup or was that an embellishment? We don't know for certain but the story sure made an impression on us kids.

When his children, as kids often do, turned up their noses at one kind of food or another, he would relate the "rat tail in his soup" story, ask that they remember how lucky we Americans were, and implored, "The kids in China are starving and would give their right arm...they'd give their *eye teeth!* (he would exclaim) to have what's on your plates. So quitchurbitchin!"



Nationalist Chinese Flag "liberated" by Robert Fetzer while in China during WWII (Photo credit: Fetzer Family)

In addition to memories, war trophies and trinkets, Robert brought back music. He sang songs learned in the Army to his children—songs still remembered by his children today—including "Ding How-Boo How".

Ding-How-Boo How was a song that had no meaning to Robert's children until I traveled to China during my assignment in the mid 1990's with the US Marines in Okinawa, Japan. While in China, I asked the Chinese guide to translate the "Ding-How" song that my Dad had sung. I sang it to her. The guide stated that the song was likely a song sung by a mother to her young child to teach the child Mandarin Chinese words. My mom, however, suspected the song was really a risqué soldier's song with sex-laced lyrics and asked him not to sing it to his kids. But sing it he did. The Chinese guide said the first stanza translated to, "Good" (Ding How), "Bad" (Boo How), "Thank you" (Sheahsheah—not the "She-sha-knee" as Dad pronounced it). The other words were not translatable by our Chinese guide. The exact words (spelled phonetically) of the Ding How song Robert sang to his children were,

Ding How, Boo How She-sha-knee, Mama Foo Foo Too. Mayo Chin-o Mayo Chow, Mayo Goonya Ding Boo How. Mayo Goonya Ding Boo How, Mama Foo Foo Too. Mayo Chin-o Mayo Chow, Mayo Goonya, Ding Boo How.

Robert also often sang (loosely to the bugle tune of "Assembly") the following song to get us out of bed, "You're in the Army now, you're not behind the plow, you'll never get rich by digging a ditch, you're in the Army now."

My kids heard both of these songs—and several others that are less politically correct—during their youth too. Many Fetzer family traditions were formed around Robert's Army and Chinese war-time songs, memories, and stories.

Robert also brought a little Chinese mysticism home with him. He was into yoga (in the morning as we raced downstairs we'd often find him standing on his head in the living room), homeopathic medicine and self-doctoring, meditation, and deep breathing. A 1957 book found amongst his papers after his death is entitled, "Mental Telepathy, Explained". Another, "The Kung Fu Exercise Book", advertises on its cover, "Now at last—health secrets of ancient China to give you a radiant health, renewed energy, and a deep sense of inner harmony." He liked—he respected—the Chinese and much of their way of life, reminiscing often with his kids about the advantages of living minimally and purely...the benefits one accrues, he said, when one has possessions that amount simply to only a "bamboo mat for a bed and a rice bowl and chopsticks for eating". While he had a "thing" for paper and hoarded it, he really cared less about other kinds of possessions, a trait learned from his frugal upbringing and honed during the time he served in China. But while didn't care for things he made certain his family had everything (and more) they needed.

Disembarking from the troop ship USS *General Leroy Eltinge* in Seattle, Robert Fetzer was temporarily billeted at Fort Lewis, Washington, awaiting orders and transportation (along with thousands of other servicemen attempting to get home) east. From Fort Lewis, he was granted leave to his home in Bedford, Ohio for a 2-week WWII Victory furlough. Following this celebratory leave, he was transported by train to Tinker Field, Oklahoma to await orders to his discharge center.

From Tinker Field, he reported to Camp Atterbury, Indiana where he went through the discharge processes and was released from active duty in the Army Air Corps as a Corporal, US Army Air Corps, in March of 1946. He served in the Army Air Corps, and then the US Air Force, reserves for a few years promoted to sergeant—before being fully released from his military obligations.

Dad eventually graduated from the Ohio State University (BS, Mechanical Engineering) and married my Mom in 1950, finishing up his law degree at night. Mom and Dad fixed up an old summer cabin in the oak woods in Willowick, Ohio as their first home. They ultimately moved next door into a new home, one of those cookie-cutter, post-War, GI Bill-built homes that created suburbia after WWII.



Barry Fetzer (center) and his sister and eldest brother in front of the cookie-cutter post WWII Willowick, Ohio home in which they grew up. (Photo credit: Fetzer Family)

I came along three years later in 1953, shortly followed by my two brothers and kid sister. Until Mom and Dad got a second car, Dad caught the bus at the corner of our street every morning to his law practice in Cleveland. We kids would run to meet him in the late afternoon as he stepped off the bus at the corner of Thomas Street and East 302<sup>nd</sup> Street. We led an idyllic life in northern Ohio in the 1950's, 60's and 70's, made that way because of sacrifices of members of the "Greatest Generation"—like my Dad and so many others—who helped secure our liberties for us and succeeding generations.

Dad didn't speak of his military service in any detail until I pressed him on the details later in his life and then sorted through his hoard of paperwork after he

died. And what I found was that his service had very interesting ties to significant events of WWII, ties I could not have imagined had I not taken this journey though his WWII service with him. And they were ties that made Dad deeply appreciative and grateful for his life as an American.



Robert, Barry, and his Mom Alice Fetzer in Richfield, Ohio, 2014. Robert was 90 years old. (Photo credit: Fetzer Family)

While in his military service Dad, thankfully, never witnessed or participated in the kind of horrible, hand-to-hand combat that others of his generation experienced during WWII nor did he, blessedly, suffer physical wounds. Still, the things that he saw...his military experiences...had to have changed him. How could they not change him, a small town Bedford, Ohio boy who became world-traveled—and therefore worldly—where a farm-town boy found in China a sense of that "inner harmony" he practiced and meditated on for the rest of his life.



Robert Fetzer's WWII military insignia found amongst his things upon his death. (Photo credit: Fetzer Family)

#### **Photos of Robert's Service during WWII**

(Photos credit: Fetzer Family)



Robert saw many things during his war-time travels, things that would forever change his view of the world and therefore his life, including this Karachi beggar photographed while he was hop-scotched to China.



Above: Arriving in China. Robert on the left of the Jeep in front of the C-47 Skytrain that got him there. Somehow my Dad avoided the censors and the wartime restrictions on taking

photographs (or having photos taken of him) and he took the time to caption hundreds of them in his many photo albums found amongst his things after his death.



There were several photos in his albums of Robert serving (somewhat informally in shorts and a T-shirt) on guard duty for his *Sferics* Unit.



A pretty, young lady "Miss Wong" in some way curried Robert's favor while he was over in China. Dad never spoke of her, instead, carrying her memory internally to his grave, along with a dozen or so other ladies, the photographs of whom were found amongst the boxes of papers, photo albums and scrap books he left behind after his death. Pictures of his most favored lady who he met in high school and continued a relationship with throughout WWII and his college days...those of my Mom...outnumbered all the other ladies' photos he kept all those years.



Above: Panoramic view of Changting, China where Robert operated the *Sferics* system until the end of WWII



Robert even took a photo of his Changting barracks room, the space not appearing to really be up to US Army standards. But then again, neither were the shorts and T-shirts on guard duty. He did have a little more...but not much more...than a bamboo mat and a rice bowl.



Robert to the right in a T-shirt on a Changting street



Robert Fetzer's *Sferics* Unit pictured at War's end in Changting, China, August 1945. Robert is pictured in his favored, white T-shirt front row, second from left. He continued to communicate with several of his *Sferics* service mates after the War for a year or two. But life, as it is destined to do, moved on and after his marriage...and kids...there is no evidence from what he left behind of any further communication with those with whom he served during the War.



Some of Robert's fellow *Sferics* operators pictured aboard the USS Eltinge, moored outside Manila Bay, Philippines in December 1945, four months after the War's end.



One of the many of Dad's documents saved from being burned by my brothers and me as we sorted through his hoard of paperwork after his death. Yes, Robert had even rat-holed (I'm glad he did) the "Souvenir Edition" of the USS Eltinge ship's newsletter that he read during his month long transit from Shanghai to Seattle in 1946. It's hard to imagine the excitement he and shipmates must of have felt as the packed troop ship came into view of *America the Beautiful*.

# **Postscript**

In New Jersey just to the northeast of the current Joint Base (JB) MDL (formally  $\underline{M}$ cDill Air Force Base, Fort  $\underline{D}$ ix, and Naval Station  $\underline{L}$ akehurst, now all three combined into JB MDL) is the former site of Fort Monmouth where Robert received his *Sferics* training during WWII.

"In 1938 the US Army's first radio-based aircraft detection and ranging system (later called radar) was developed on post. A production model of this equipment detected the oncoming Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor, but the warning it provided was discounted (which allowed the Japanese to execute their surprise attack almost unopposed). At its peak during World War II, Fort Monmouth had billeting space for 1,559 officers and 19,786 enlisted personnel." (Derived from Wikipedia)



The Rosenbergs under arrest for treason. Note Julius handcuffed...his wife Ethel not. (Photo credit: The Smithsonian Institute)

Dad was just a tiny, single cog amongst the massive "machine" formed by those 20,000-some enlisted personnel during his *Sferics* training at Fort Monmouth. The secrecy of his *Sferics* machine and its mission to forecast "divine winds" might have been maintained. Other secrets were not.

An interesting side note to Robert's WWII service—and another one of those connections he might have had to important historical events I mentioned in the first part of this sketch—is that during his *Sferics* training at Fort Monmouth he might very possibly have walked by..."Julius Rosenberg [who] worked as a radar inspector at the Fort in 1942-43. It is from Fort Monmouth that Rosenberg

was accused of stealing proximity fuse plans and passing them on to the Soviet Union. Rosenberg was ultimately convicted of espionage and treason along with his wife in 1951. They were executed in 1953 in the Sing Sing correctional facility in Ossining, New York. "Documents released by Russia after the Cold War showed that Julius Rosenberg was, indeed, a spy." (Derived from Wikipedia)

Robert's secret duties during WWII were to help the allied leadership make strategic decisions on the place and time for the final assault and ultimate downfall of the Japanese Empire, decisions necessarily required because of a study of history. And they were decisions based on an exciting history that included Mongol hordes, typhoons, destroyed fleets, saved empires, and Kamikazes willing to sacrifice their lives—right or wrong—for their beliefs.



Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, 1951 (Photo credit: The Smithsonian Institute)

But they were also decisions never (blessedly) implemented because of another decision by the President of the United States to, instead, save possibly millions of lives by ushering the world into the nuclear age and use atomic weapons to end the War. Yet, another (as it turned out) strategic and ill-fated decision (by the Rosenbergs) to share secrets of those atomic weapons with the Soviet Union, led to another war—the Cold War—and a risky and perilous atomic arms race that still today could kill many millions more than those saved by President Truman 75 years ago.

Typhoons, cyclones, and hurricanes...well, we can't eliminate or prevent them...they will still rage at us unmercifully and at will. And Kamikazes? Yes we, too, still have to deal with the "divine" (at least in their own minds) winds of suicide bombers. Prayerfully, though, never again will the destructive gales of atomic weapons pummel our world.

In many ways, we live in a great, raging, tumultuous circle of life, don't we?



The Circle of Life (Image credit: Public Domain)

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# July 20-24, 2020

# **Summer Elementary**

# **Engineering Camp**

Due to the public health risks of COVID-19, the City of Havelock made the difficult decision to cancel all summer camp programs for 2020. This includes the ECAHF Engineering Camp. This decision was made to protect the safety of campers, their families, camp staff and volunteers. We look forward to seeing everyone next summer.



#### **New Link on ECAHF Website**

A new link titled "STEM Activities" was added to the menu bar recently. This page has various STEM activities for our youth. In addition, coloring pages and photos of aircraft can be printed. Check it out at



#### Please Join ECAHF Each Year

ECAHF needs your support to share the story of the advancement of military aircraft and those who have made it possible in eastern North Carolina. Your membership helps to provide resources to encourage students to acquire science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills through interactive exhibits and programs.

Together, our joint forces will recognize our neighbors' roles in advancing military aviation since 1942 when MCAS-Cherry Point was commissioned. In addition, your membership will help influence a new generation of aviation enthusiasts and skilled workers for the future. Be a part of this challenging and exciting mission.

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