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ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE WESTERN NAVAL FLOTILLA.

REMARKS

OF

HON. JAMES W. GRIMES,  
OF IOWA.

DELIVERED IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, MARCH 15, 1862

The Senate having under consideration, as in Committee of the Whole, the joint resolution (S. No. 64) expressive of the thanks of Congress to Captain A. H. Foote, of the United States Navy, and to the officers and men under his command in the western flotilla, Mr. GRIMES said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: I conceive it to be my duty, and it certainly is a great pleasure to me, to call the special attention of the Senate to the achievements of the newly-created naval flotilla on our western waters, and to the gallant part borne by its officers and men against armed rebels in Kentucky and Tennessee. Surely no one could more properly be proud of the deeds of our *Army* in that quarter than a Senator from Iowa. Yet, I know that whatever adds to the glory of our Navy in the recent conflicts in the West, adds also to the glory of the Army, and that the two branches of the service have been and are so conjoined that no rivalry ought to exist between them, except a virtuous emulation in the performance of patriotic duty. No examples can be found in the history of any country of more important results, attained in an equal time, in an untried field of naval enterprise, than those we have lately witnessed on the Ohio, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Cumberland rivers; and I feel assured that the successes which have thus far been achieved, will be surpassed by the same forces whenever they can find an enemy with whom to cope between Cairo and New Orleans.

On the 16th day of May last, Commander John Rodgers was ordered by the Secretary of the Navy to proceed to Cincinnati, and to purchase or commence the construction of several gunboats for service on the western rivers. Under his auspices the three boats, Taylor, Lexington, and Conestoga, were purchased and fitted up for war purposes. They were put in commission, and reached Cairo, after some delay arising from the low stage of water in the Ohio river, on the 12th of August, Commander Rodgers taking charge of the Taylor, and assigning Commander Stempel to the Lexington, and Lieutenant Phelps to the Conestoga. The Taylor carried seven guns, of large calibre, the Lexington six, and the Conestoga four. Here was the beginning of the western flotilla. We all remember the unfavorable criticisms indulged in when these three stern-wheel steamers, with oak casings, arrived at that military post. Some said they would be shaken to pieces by the recoil of their own guns; others that they would be speedily sunk by the shore guns of the rebels; while not a few were alarmed by visions of Hellin's ram butting them to pieces with impunity. From the day they reached their destination to the present no rebel craft has shown itself ten miles above Columbus, and no rebel force, of *any* description, has harbored on the two rivers in a proximity which could be deemed threat-

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ening to their navigation, or to the two cities of St. Louis and Cairo. A few experimental trips dispelled all doubts of their efficiency; and when the people became assured that they would do the work they were intended for, all fears of a rebel incursion into any of the northwestern States, other than Missouri, were also dispelled. A band of Jefferson Thompson's robbers did, indeed, make a demonstration of crossing the Mississippi river, in August last, from the town of Commerce, Missouri; but at the first intimation that the gunboats were coming, they fled, with what booty they could lay their hands on, pillaged impartially from friends and foes on the Missouri shore. The boon of security to the people of the northwestern States is a debt due, in no small degree, to those wooden gunboats; for, however numerous and brave our armies, it would have been impossible, with them alone, to have guarded all points on our river line. Thus, our people were not only protected from danger of invasion, but they were enabled to give all their time and energies to preparations for those offensive movements which have reclaimed so much important territory from the domination of the enemy.

On the 23d of September, Commander Rodgers was detached from service in the West, and Captain A. H. Foote was ordered to take command as flag officer. Since that time the following boats, with iron-clad bows, have been built or prepared for service, and added to the flotilla under his command: St. Louis, thirteen guns, Lieutenant Paulding; Carondelet, thirteen guns, Commander Walke; Pittsburg, thirteen guns, Lieutenant Thompson; Louisville, thirteen guns, Commander Dove; Cincinnati, thirteen guns, Commander Stembel; Essex, five guns, Commander Porter; Mound City, thirteen guns.

The first engagement of the gunboats with the enemy took place on the 9th of September, at Lucas's Bend, in the Mississippi river, a short distance above, and in full view of, the rebel stronghold at Columbus. In that engagement the Lexington, Commander Stembel, and the Conestoga, Lieutenant Phelps, silenced two shore batteries, dispersed a large body of rebel cavalry, and so disabled the rebel gunboat Yankee that she has not been heard of since.

On the 29th of October, the Conestoga, Lieutenant Phelps, proceeded, with three companies of Illinois volunteers, sixty-two miles up the Tennessee river to Eddyville, Kentucky, where they jointly attacked and routed a rebel encampment, bringing away their horses, arms, camp equipage, and negro slaves.

There could hardly have been an occasion where the presence of an efficient naval support was more necessary than at the battle of Belmont, fought on the 7th day of November last; and there has been no conflict during the war where this support, when finally called into requisition, was more effectively and opportunely rendered. Nothing but the well directed fire of grape and causter from the guns of the Taylor and Lexington saved our land forces from being utterly cut to pieces while retiring on board their transports. Every effort of the enemy to bring his artillery to bear on our column was defeated by the storm of iron which assailed him from the boats. His pieces were dismounted and his horses and men swept down as fast as they were placed in position.

A great deal has been said about the origin of the proposition to take possession of the Tennessee river. The credit of originating the idea of a campaign in that direction has been claimed first for one and then for another military commander. I desire that impartial justice may be done to every man; and acting upon the intention to do justice, I must be permitted to say, that so far as I can learn, the project of turning the enemy's flanks by penetrating the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers originated with Commodore Foote. The great rise of water in those rivers was providential, and with the quick eye of military genius he saw at once the advantage that it might secure to our arms. Accordingly he sent to General Halleck, at St. Louis, the following dispatch:

CAIRO, January 29, 1862.

General Grant and myself are of opinion that Fort Henry and the Tennessee river can be carried with four iron-clad gunboats and troops, and be permanently occupied. Have we your authority to move for that purpose when ready?

A. H. FOOTE.

To this dispatch no reply was vouchsafed, but an order was subsequently sent to General Grant to proceed up the Tennessee river with his troops under convoy of the armed flotilla, and attack Fort Henry, directing General Grant to show to Commodore Foote his orders to this effect. Commodore Foote was at once ready for the expedition, and advised the Department to that effect, in the following dispatch:

UNITED STATES GUNBOAT CONESTOGA,  
PADUCAH, February 3, 1862.

SIR: I have the honor to inform you that I left Cairo yesterday with this vessel, having ordered the armored gunboats Essex, Carondelet, Cincinnati, and St. Louis to precede me to Paducah, and arrived here last evening.

To-day I purpose ascending the Tennessee river with the four new armored boats and the old gunboats Taylor, Conestoga, and Lexington, in convoy of the troops under General Grant, for the purpose of conjointly attacking and occupying Fort Henry and the railroad bridge connecting Bowling Green with Columbus. The transports have not yet arrived, although expected last night from Cairo, which causes detention, while in the mean time, unfortunately, the river is falling. I am ready with the seven gunboats to act offensively whenever the Army is in condition to advance, and have every confidence, under God, that we shall be able to silence the guns at Fort Henry and its surroundings, notwithstanding I have been obliged, for want of men, to take from the five boats remaining at Cairo all the men except a sufficient number to man one gunboat for the protection of that important post.

I have left commander Kutty, as senior officer, in charge of the guns and mortar boats at Cairo, ordering him, with the assistance of Fleet Captain Penneck, to use every effort in obtaining men and forwarding the early equipment of the mortar boats. It is peculiarly unfortunate that we have not been able to obtain men for the flotilla as they only are wanting to enable me to have, at this moment, eleven full-manned, instead of seven partially-manned gunboats ready for efficient operations at any point. The volunteers from the Army to go in the gunboats exceed the number of men required; but the derangement of companies and regiments in permitting them to leave, is the reason assigned for not more than fifty of the number having been thus far transferred to the flotilla.

I enclose a copy of my orders to the commanders of the gunboats, in anticipation of the attack on Fort Henry; also a copy of orders to Lieutenant Commanding Phelps, who will have more especial charge of the old gunboats, and operate in a less exposed position than the armored boats.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

A. H. FOOTE, *Flag Officer,*  
*Commanding Naval Forces on the Western Waters.*

HON GIDEON WELLES,  
*Secretary of the Navy, Washington, D. C.*

P. S.—Several transports with troops have just arrived.

A. H. F.

I proceed up the Tennessee early in the morning, and will there make the Cincinnati my flag ship.

A. H. F.

On the preceding day he had issued the following order to Lieutenant Phelps:

[Special Orders, No. 8.]

UNITED STATES GUNBOAT TAYLOR,  
PADUCAH, February 2, 1862.

Lieutenant Commanding Phelps will, as soon as the fort shall have surrendered, and upon signal from the flag ship, proceed with the Conestoga, Taylor, and Lexington, up the river to where the railroad bridge crosses, and if the army shall not already have got possession, he will destroy so much of the track as will entirely prevent its use by the rebels.

He will then proceed as far up the river as the stage of the water will admit, and capture the enemy's gunboats and other vessels which might prove available to the enemy.

A. H. FOOTE, *Flag Officer,*  
*Commanding Naval Forces on the Western Waters.*

The fleet, consisting of the iron-clad boats Essex, Carondelet, Cincinnati, and St. Louis, and the three wooden boats Taylor, Lexington, and Conestoga proceeded to Fort Henry and reduced it in one hour and twenty minutes, Commodore Foote being, as is his wont, in the fore front of the battle. It appears from the order to Lieutenant Phelps, (which that gallant officer promptly executed,) that Commodore Foote knew before leaving Paducah that he should take Fort Henry, no matter what might be the force or the resistance he should meet there. He was thoroughly inspired with the great idea of victory. The contingency of failure did not enter into his calculations. He, therefore, addressed himself to plans for reaping the fruits of victory, rather than to plans for repairing the consequences of defeat. It will be observed from the foregoing letter to the Secretary of the Navy, written before the battle of Fort Henry, that

the efficiency of the flotilla was much impaired by the want of seamen, or by a neglect in some quarter to have those transferred from the military service who had been selected for that purpose.

After reducing Fort Henry and sweeping the Tennessee river as far up as Florence, Alabama, Commodore Foote returned to Cairo to prepare the mortar boats for operations against Fort Donelson. He was aware of the formidable character of the rebel works at Donelson, and he desired a delay of a few days to complete the mortar boats, by which he believed the garrison, however extensive, could be shelled out without much loss of life on our side. General Halleck believed an immediate attack to be a military necessity. In this, I doubt not, he was right, and I only refer to it to show that the crippled condition of the fleet and the heavy loss of life on our side are not to be attributed to rashness or bad management on the part of the flag officer. Of the gallant attack on Fort Donelson no one need be reminded. Subjected, as our vessels were, to a long-continued and hot fire from three rebel batteries at four hundred yards' distance, they continued the fight for one hour and thirty minutes, and not until the wheel of one and the tiller ropes of another of his boats were shot away did the well-managed guns of the Commodore cease to scatter death and consternation among the foes of his country. Although wounded himself, and his gunboats crippled, yet with the glory of the gallant combat on his brow, he indulged in no repinings for his personal misfortunes or laudation of his successes; but, like a true Christian hero, he thought only of his men. In a letter written the morning after the battle to a friend, he said:

"While I hope ever to rely on Him who controls all things, and to say from the heart, 'Not unto us, but unto Thee, O Lord, belong the glory,' yet I feel sadly at the result of our attack on Fort Donelson. To see the brave officers and men who say they will go wherever I lead them fall by my side, makes me feel sad to lead them to almost certain death."

But he obeyed what was believed to be the military necessity of the situation.

The Senator from Massachusetts nearest me (Mr. WILSON) has, this morning, kindly furnished me a letter from a trustworthy friend of his who has from the beginning been with the army of the West, from which I am permitted to read the following extracts:

"When Fort Henry surrendered, the gate was opened by which the rebellion will be finally and utterly crushed. In a few days Commodore Foote will open the Mississippi, provided he is not hampered, and also provided he is properly supported by Government. He has done a great work for his country—a work which, I am sorry to say, has not been properly appreciated. He has improvised a navy with almost insurmountable obstacles against him. I see it stated in the papers that the gunboats did but little service at Donelson, which is a monstrous mistake. They silenced nearly all the enemy's guns, and had not the wheel of one boat and the tiller ropes of another been shot away, in fifteen minutes more the batteries would have been flanked and the entire rebel army exposed to the broadsides of the fleet. He would have mowed them down like grass."

"As it was, he made the work of the army in the fight of Saturday much easier than it otherwise would have been. Several of the Mississippi officers (prisoners) informed me that the shells of the gunboats had a demoralizing effect upon their men. The Memphis Appeal says it dispirited them."

"I have had a fair opportunity to observe the operations of both army and navy, and I can say with emphasis that there are no more self-denying, patriotic, hard-working, faithful men than the flag officer and his captains, Stempel, Pennock, Phelps, and others." "I make these statements from my own sense of justice and honor, and not from any man's prompting or request."

The next movement of Commodore Foote, with his flotilla, was to take possession of Clarksville, where he arrived on the 19th day of February, and issued his proclamation to the inhabitants three days before the arrival of the land forces, though that fact for some unexplained cause, nowhere appears in the official reports of the military commander of the department.

On the 21st of February, 1862, Commodore Foote telegraphed to General Cullum, the chief of General Halleck's staff, then at Cairo as follows:

PADUCAH, February 21, 1862.

General CULLUM, Cairo:

General Grant and myself consider this a good time to move on Nashville: six mortar boats and two iron-clad steamers can precede the troops and shell the forts. We were about moving for this purpose when General Grant, to my astonishment, received a telegram from General Halleck, "not to let the gunboats go higher than Clarksville;" no telegram sent to me.

The Cumberland is in a good stage of water, and General Grant and I believe that we can take Nashville. Please ask General Halleck if we shall do it. We will talk per telegraph—Captain Phelps representing me in the office, as I am still on crutches.  
A. H. FOOTE, *Flag Officer.*

It may be that there was some great military reason why General Grant was directed "not to let the gunboats go higher than Clarksville," but up to this time it is wholly unappreciable by the public. Had they been permitted to go, as was proposed by Commodore Foote, Nashville would undoubtedly have capitulated some days earlier than it did, and an immense amount of rebel stores been captured, which were destroyed or removed before the army reached there, the value of which has been estimated at \$2,000,000, and he would probably have intercepted a part of the rebel General Johnston's army.

I ought not to omit to mention the gallant attack by a part of the western flotilla, under Lieutenant Gwin, upon the enemy at Pittsburg on the Tennessee river, where fifteen hundred rebel infantry and cavalry were completely routed, with a loss of twenty killed and one hundred wounded.

The next fact of importance in the campaign at the West, and indeed the most important of all was the evacuation of Columbus. Why was this stronghold, which cost so much labor and money, abandoned without firing a shot? It is not for me to underrate the advantages of position secured by the valor of our troops at Fort Donelson; yet I undertake to say, from the knowledge I have been able to obtain of the defenses at Columbus, that there was nothing in the mere fact of the capture of Donelson and Nashville, and exclusive of our command of the river, which need have caused the evacuation, except after a long and bloody siege. From the letter of a correspondent writing on the spot, I obtain the information that the forts at Columbus—

"Were so located and constructed as to be almost impregnable to an assault by storm. The capture of one by no means involved the capture of the balance. A fresh assault must be made in each instance. At the main fort, and many of the earth works, stockades, crossed the trenches, exposing the assaulting party to a storm of bullets from riflemen firing through loop holes. Every ravine and ditch was thoroughly protected, and the various approaches of the river commanded for a long distance in every direction. It is sufficient to say, that an unusually strong natural position was seized upon, and so improved by rare engineering skill, that the equal of the Columbus fortifications, in extent and perfection of detail combined, can hardly be found in the United States."

Another correspondent, describing the fortifications after the evacuation, says:

"The fortifications were strong—perhaps stronger than any others in the South—but they were injudiciously constructed, and could not have stood an hour's bombardment by the gunboats and mortar fleet. The water battery stood out in such relief from the bluff that a well directed mortar shell would have buried it under a hundred tons of earth from above. There were no casemates to protect the artillery from the galling fire of seven gunboats; and how long could men, unsheltered, have stood a continuous hail from twenty-one guns, throwing eight-inch shell?"

It is well understood that Commodore Foote was opposed to giving the rebels an opportunity to leave Columbus. He felt sure of his ability, with his gun and mortar boats, to shell them into a speedy surrender, but was compelled to give way to the counsels of military commanders.

When we couple the strategic position acquired by our occupation of the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers with the completion of the mortar boats and the absolute command of the river given us by the armored gunboats, there remains no mystery about the evacuation of Columbus. The two arms of the public service are equally entitled to the credit of frightening the rebels from their strongest position on the Mississippi river, if not the strongest in their whole military jurisdiction.

Yesterday the intelligence reached us that the western flotilla, composed of ten gunboats and ten mortar boats had started for new scenes of conflict and to achieve, I doubt not, new and yet greater triumphs. The country is assured that whatever can be accomplished by gallantry and nautical experience will be performed by Commodore Foote and the brave officers and men under his command. We await the announcement of new victories.

I have thought it proper, Mr. President, as a western Senator, in some degree charged with the examination of naval affairs by this body, to bear this testi-

mony to the worth of that branch of the public service in the western campaign, and to the noble deeds of the flag officer in that command. No one can over-estimate their services to the country, and to the Northwest in particular; and in the name of that great section and of the whole country I thank them one and all, officers and men.

But I would avail myself of this occasion to accomplish another purpose. I am anxious that the people of this entire country may feel that the exploits of the Navy wherever performed are their exploits, that its glory is their glory, and that while they are taxing themselves to support it, they are supporting the right arm of the national defence. I desire the citizen of the most remote frontier to feel that he is equally protected and equally honored by the brave deeds of our naval officers with the citizen of the Atlantic coast. I wish the men of Iowa and Minnesota to know that they are as effectually defended in their liberties at home and in their honor abroad, by the achievements of Du Pont and Goldsborough and Stringham and Foote on the water, as they can be by any victories won by our armies on the land.

Mr. President, ours must be a great maritime nation. Heaven has ordained that it should be such, and we could not make it otherwise if we would. We have a coast, both on the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, which, with its numerous indentations, is many thousand miles in extent, occupied by a hardy, nautical population, and flanked on either side by soils and climates that furnish the most valuable productions of the globe, and which must be supplied to other nations. On the north we have a succession of great lakes already bearing upon their bosoms a registered commercial tonnage of nearly half a million, and navigated by a race of daring, industrious, northern seamen. Unlike any other maritime nation, ours is traversed by navigable rivers, thousands of miles in length, floating an inland commerce unequalled by that of any country in the world, except, possibly, that of China, and capable of navigation by armed vessels of great capacity. With a country of such extent, a soil and climate furnishing such productions, and a population along our ocean, gulf, bay, lake, and river coasts, accustomed to navigation, who does not see that ours must, from the very necessities of our geographical position, and the conformation of our continent, become a great commercial people? Our products must be borne to remote nations in our own ships, navigated by our own seamen, and protected wherever they go by our own vessels of war.

I know not with whom originated the phrase "the Navy is the right arm of the public defence;" but I know that a truer sentiment was never uttered. In my opinion it will always be in this country the most efficient and far the least dangerous arm of the public service by which to maintain the national integrity and defend the national honor. History teaches us that every nation that has depended upon a navy for protection has been comparatively free by the side of those which placed their reliance upon armies. I need not go back to antiquity to prove this. I point to Holland and England in modern times. The former, while she continued to be the greatest naval Power on earth, was the freest Government on earth, and only began to be shorn of her liberties and of her territory when she neglected to maintain her fleets. England, the most liberal of all Governments save our own, is in no small degree indebted for her present position to the fact that she maintains only a small military force in the British islands, and relies upon her wooden walls as a means of attack and defence. She puts no faith in large standing armies, and will not until her people shall be prepared to surrender their freedom. With her garrisoned possessions encircling the globe, her entire military establishment does not exceed one hundred and twenty thousand men. France, Austria, Russia, Prussia maintain large standing armies on their soil; and in those countries the liberty of the people is measured by the will of the sovereign. The freedom they en-



joy is the gratuity of emperors and kings; the servitude they endure is enforced by the presence of standing armies.

I do not believe that anybody but the public enemy has had anything to fear from the numerous and well appointed armies we have raised; yet no one of us is prepared to say that, with an army much longer isolated from home scenes and home ideas, concentrated in large bodies, and taught the duty of implicit obedience to their superiors, danger to our free institutions might not arise. No such danger can arise from the existence of a navy, however large, or however commanded. Seamen are cosmopolitans. Always employed, and generally aloof, they never become, as armies sometimes do, as dangerous to friends in time of peace as to enemies in time of war.

I might go on and show that, situated as all of our large cities are, upon arms of the sea or upon navigable rivers, the Navy might be made more efficient in suppressing domestic insurrections, as well as in repelling foreign invasion, than the Army. I might show, too, that, notwithstanding much that has been said by professed statisticians, the support of a navy is less expensive, in comparison with the service it renders to a maritime nation, than that of an army. But I shall not detain the Senate by attempting to enter upon such an exposition at this time.

As I said at the outset, Mr. President, my purpose in rising to address the Senate at this time was to call the attention of the country to the successful operations of the western flotilla; but I cannot refrain from alluding, for one moment, before I close, to the successes of our Navy elsewhere in this war. The whole southeastern Atlantic coast has been swept by the fleet of the gallant Dupont, and is now effectually held by both an inside and an outside blockade. The enemy have been driven from the waters of North Carolina by Goldsborough, their whole navy in that quarter destroyed, and their coast towns occupied. Such progress has been made in the Gulf of Mexico, that I venture to predict that, in a few days at furthest, intelligence will reach us that the forts at the mouth of the Mississippi river have been captured, and that Farragut and Porter are now, or soon will be, in possession of New Orleans. But the startling events that have recently occurred in Hampton Roads attract, as they ought, the attention of all. It would be well for us to reflect upon what those events have clearly demonstrated. They are:

First, that in modern naval warfare, wooden sailing vessels are perfectly harmless and helpless.

Second, that the strongest stone fortifications can be no obstruction to the entrance of iron-clad vessels-of-war into our harbors; and that one or two such vessels, unopposed by vessels of a similar character, can hold any commercial city on the continent at their mercy.

Third, that we can now commence the creation of a proper navy, upon a footing of comparative equality with all the naval powers of the world.

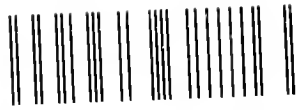
Mr. President, no man sympathizes with the relatives and friends of the gallant dead who perished on the Congress and Cumberland more deeply than I do. Perhaps, however, their loss was necessary to teach us our true path of duty to the country. Let us not suffer more valuable lives to be periled upon such worthless vessels; and while we deplore the loss of so many brave men, let us rejoice that so many more are left to the service who are willing to do and die for their country. Especially let us give thanks for the brilliant example of courage, seamanship, and patriotism furnished to the country and to the world by that matchless officer Lieutenant John L. Worden, and the officers and men under his command on board the Monitor. In that unexampled engagement of Sunday last, after a terribly suffocating and dangerous passage from New York, without having slept, with an undrilled crew, and handling an untried experiment, Lieutenant Worden and his crew performed prodigies of

skill and valor that will render all on board the Monitor immortal. They will be immortal not for their valor alone. Who shall undertake to estimate the influence that battle will exert upon all of the maritime Powers of the earth? Who shall undertake to tell the number of homes to which the news of its successful result carried quiet on that eventful evening, which had been for hours disturbed by the most distracting fears? Is it too much to say that it rescued our commerce and our commercial cities from ravage, and in one hour completely revolutionized all systems of naval architecture and naval warfare? Captain Edlsson, too, may well be proud of the place his name will henceforth occupy in the history of nautical science, and we may well be proud that the country of our birth is the country of his adoption.

But, Mr. President, while I would thus honor the gallant living, I would bear my tribute of affectionate respect for the memory of the heroic dead who fell in the engagement in Hampton Roads. Let the remembrance of that brave young officer, whose obsequies are now being performed in another part of this city, who, when his vessel was sinking beneath his feet, replied to a summons to surrender, that he would never give up the flag entrusted to his keeping, and the next moment met death with composure, be cherished by his countrymen. The name of Smith, already illustrious in the annals of the American Navy, will be added to the bright galaxy of those who have freely laid down their lives at the call of their country.

Mr. President, the nation has cause to be proud of the Navy; let it be honored and maintained.





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