

The Big Bend Military Heritage Trail

AN EDUCATIONAL TOUR HIGHLIGHTING THE MILITARY HISTORY OF
FLORIDA'S BIG BEND AS TOLD BY VETERANS



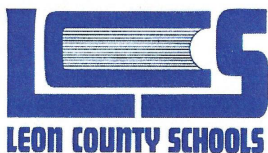
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October 21, 2022

AMVETS Post 1776

P.O. Box 16225

Tallahassee, FL 32317

To Whom It May Concern:

The Big Bend Military Heritage Trail Tour is an excellent opportunity for our high school students to be afforded an exceptional and high- quality educational experience in increasing their exposure to the rich military history of our region. As a veteran and U.S. History teacher, I am so grateful that our students are taught the importance of the sacrifices so many individuals from our local community have made in protecting our country.

We certainly appreciate our partnership with the Big Bend Military Heritage Trail Tour. It is truly our obligation as good citizens and educators to ensure that those who served our country in such a noble and selfless way are never forgotten.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Rocky Hanna'.

Rocky Hanna

Superintendent

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Building the Future Together

Syllabus for Big Bend Military Heritage Trail

Purpose: Educating the youth of the Big Bend Area about the military history and efforts of the U.S. Armed Forces during WWII, Korea and Vietnam through on-site visits to monuments, museums and parks which project both visual and physical examples of that history.

Targeted Audience: Youth ages 13 through 17 from various schools and youth programs. Examples would be Boys and Girl Scouts, Jr. ROTC, as well as churches and youth outreach programs.

Oral history: At each stop along the trail there will be a veteran docent (lecturer, teacher) to describe the historic facts regarding the background, history and purpose for that particular monument or museum.

The first stop of this tour will be the Tallahassee National Cemetery. The Tallahassee National Cemetery is one of nine National Cemeteries in Florida and one of 150 plus National cemeteries in the country. The Veterans Administration's National Cemetery Administration oversees all National Cemeteries and is working to offer veterans, their spouses and any dependent children a final resting place with perpetual care memorializing their dedication and service to our country.

The second stop will be the Capital City 911 Memorial: This memorial is located in front of the Red Cross Building on Easterwood Drive, one block from the National Guard Armory. This memorial is dedicated the 2977 men and women that were victims of the beginning of our War on Terror.

The third stop will be to the Korean War Memorial at Cascade Park. The Korean War began 25 June 1950 and ended in a truce on 27 July 1953. It began when North Korea invaded South Korea, crossing the 38th parallel, the border between North and South Korea. The **United Nations**, with the United States as the principal force, came to the aid of South Korea. China came to the aid of North Korea, and the Soviet Union gave some assistance. The Florida Korean War Memorial was designed by Shawn Bliss and dedicated in 1999. Its centerpiece is a large, broken circle that symbolizes the "Circle of Life." The portion of the circle broken from the top sits to the left and is inscribed with the names of Floridians who died in the Korean War. This monument was funded and erected after Korean War Veterans petitioned the State for grants, as well as raising private funds. It holds a special place in our history as the **"forgotten war"**. It was erected after the Vietnam Monument. A docent will describe the scenario leading up to the U.N. decision to commit American troops to that conflict and the final truce at the original border between South and North Korea.

The fourth stop will be The Wall of Remembrance located in front of The Old Bloxham School. A memorial dedicated May 23, 2013 memorialized casualties and heroes from our Mid East conflicts called our Post Vietnam War casualties for its Persian Gulf and war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The fifth stop will be the Vietnam Memorial: This memorial is located on Monroe Street across from the Old Capitol, in Tallahassee. It is two granite columns with the American flag suspended between them. On the columns are engraved the names of 1,942 Vietnam War dead and 83 men listed as missing in action from Florida.

Simple and powerful in its appearance, this monument is a lasting remembrance and tribute to the sacrifices of that conflict. This stop is a solemn statement to the costs that war brings. Added to this Vietnam Memorial is a new seven feet tall stainless-steel Bracelet in memory of the POWS and the MIAS that have never returned home.

The sixth stop will be at the Florida WWII Memorial on S. Brounough St. A docent will be there to tell of the herculean effort that America put forth to win this war, the largest in the history of mankind.

Florida's contribution in men, women and material will be described. The number of military bases prior to hostilities will be compared with the final number at the end of the war. The importance of Florida's climate, open areas, jungle like interior, extensive seashores will show why it was perfect for training purposes. (In the future we hope to include a visit to a Dale Mabry Aviation Museum that will commemorate the aviation training conducted here in the Tallahassee area.)

The seventh and final stop in our tour in the Tallahassee area will begin at the **Vietnam "Hooch"**, that houses the Vietnam Veterans of America Big Bend Chapter 96 at Lake Ella.

Adjacent to the Hooch, is the American Legion Hall for American Legion Sauls-Bridges Post #13. Just around the corner from the Huey Helicopter gunship used in Vietnam on the Hooch property, you will find a small monument representing a "Borne" given to the American Legion Post #13 from Brou France. The original use of the Borne was that of being a kilometer marker on the route that General Patton took when liberating France.

This will complete the first tour. A second tour will encompass Camp Gordon Johnston in Carrabelle and the 3 Soldiers Park in Apalachicola. A narrative description of these sites follows on the back of this booklet. A Third tour is possible for groups wishing to visit the Ernest I "Boots" Thomas Memorial in Monticello.



TALLAHASSEE NATIONAL CEMETERY

The National Cemetery Administration

In 1862, in the midst of the Civil War, President Lincoln signed into law the establishment of national cemeteries“ for the soldiers who die in the service of the country.” Fourteen cemeteries were originally established pursuant to this legislation

Tallahassee National Cemetery

The relatively new 250 acre national cemetery in Tallahassee, Florida, will serve the burial needs of more than 83,000 veterans, their spouses and dependent children in the cemetery’s service area over the next 100 years. The Department of Veterans Affairs purchased the land in Leon County in August 2012 for \$6.8 million. The new cemetery property is bounded by Apalachee Parkway on the north and Old St. Augustine Road on the south.

The Tallahassee National Cemetery initially provided for 6,000 gravesites accommodating both casket and cremain interments. In addition to gravesites, the cemetery includes other features such as an administration building, a maintenance building, a flag pole assembly area, a memorial walkway, committal shelters, and a public information center with electronic gravesite locator and restrooms. Other infrastructure features include paved roads, landscaping, utilities, and irrigation. Other planned memorials will include veteran service organization dedications and memorials placed along the memorial walkway already established for that purpose. A Bell Tower and Carillon was dedicated in July 2021, a memorial donated by AMVETS Tallahassee Post 1776.

The Tallahassee National Cemetery has an incorporated private non profit Support Committee that provides support to the cemetery by helping sponsor special events in conjunction with the many Veteran Service Organizations in the Tallahassee area. The support committee provides special subcommittees directly supporting the cemetery through their Big Bend Honor Guard, that conducts military honors on request of veteran families, and a landscape and beautification subcommittee that has already provided thousands of dollars in purchased plants.



CAPITAL CITY 9-11 MEMORIAL

The events of September 11, 2001, shocked the world and changed the way the United States acted. Over the following years, memorials, ceremonies and tributes were held and built around the US marking that day.

In Tallahassee, memorials were held, and on the 10-year anniversary an 11foot steel beam from the south tower of the World Trade Center was acquired to make a memorial in Florida's Capital City.

Over time, the memories were forgotten, and the memorial never got any headway. Finally, after a 12 year upward climb, Team Guardian Inc lead by Mike Terhune broke ground and completed this much needed memorial.

The Capital City 9/11 Memorial is set up as a giant sun dial with the steel beam set as the gnomon. It shadows down over the pentagon base, shadowing down on time stamps of the day, from the start at 08:46 to the collapse of tower 7.

Around the beam are information boards telling the story of that day, from the flights to the overall numeric cost.

To one side is a tower of the fallen, with every name, 2977 names of those who died on that day, and beside it, buried in a time capsule is fire foam taken from the beam that has dust, debris and victim DNA.

After Sept 11, 2001, the US entered the War on Terror and many Tallahassee residents deployed in this fight. A tribute to those who died during that fight is off to one side.

The Capital City 9/11 Memorial is a solemn tribute to those lost and will tell the future generations to Never Forget.



KOREA

The Forgotten War

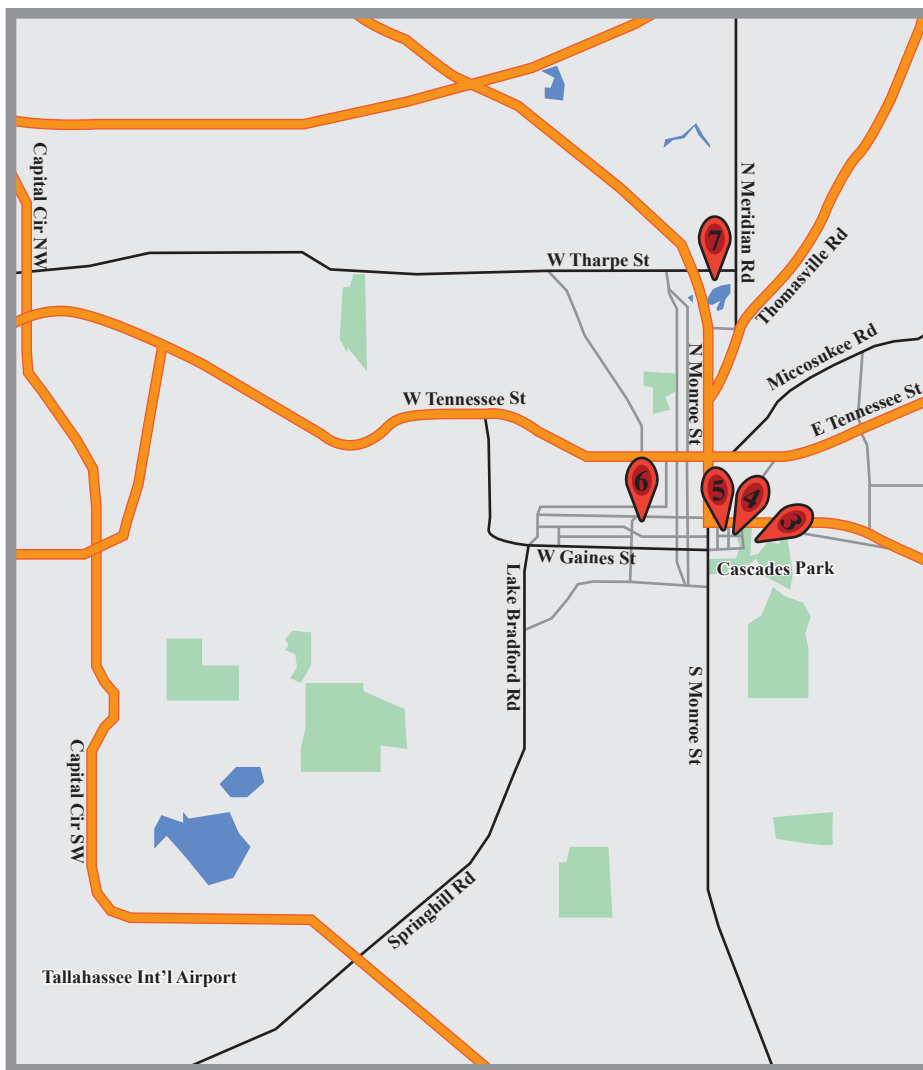
Origin and Causes

In 1910, Japan put Korea under Japanese rule and was still ruling Korea when World War II ended. When Japan surrendered, the United States and the USSR agreed to split Korea into two temporary occupation zones with USSR occupying the North and the USA occupying the South. This was, at first, to be for a short time.

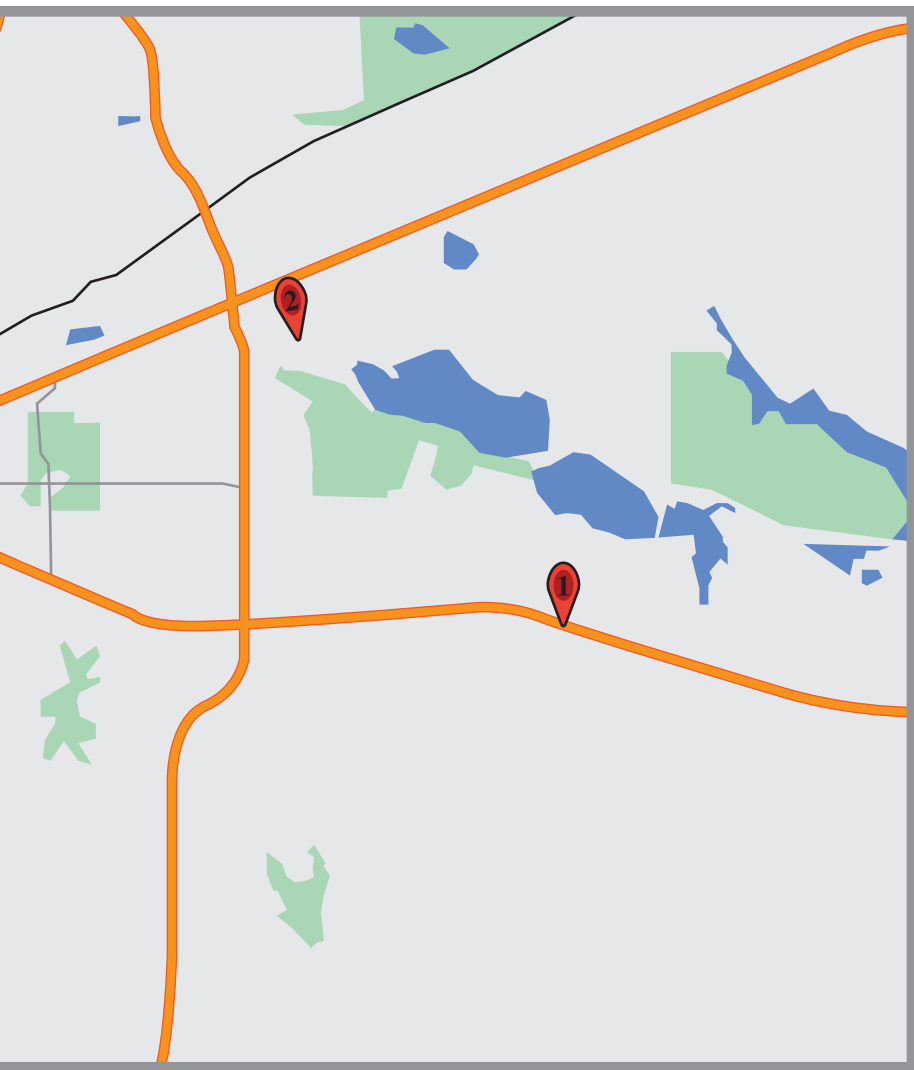
At the Moscow Conference of the Council of Foreign Ministers in December 1945, the United States and USSR agreed on Korea having a provisional government (a temporary government set up quickly before a real government is ready). This became difficult because of the growing Cold War.

The Cold War was an important cause in the Korean War. Relations between the two occupying powers were bad and when China became Communist in October 1949, the President of the USA, Harry Truman, was very worried that other countries around China may also become Communist, such as Japan. The American Army was about one twelfth the size of the previous five years and Joseph Stalin had recently lost a Cold War dispute over the Berlin Blockade and subsequent airlift.

“Fatherland Liberation War”, June 25, 1950 – July 27, 1953) was a war between North Korea (with the support of China and the Soviet Union) and South Korea (with the principal support of the United States). The war began on June 25th when North Korea invaded South Korea following a series of clashes along the border. The United Nations, with the United States as the principal force, came to the aid of South Korea. Technically the War did not end in 1953, an armistice was agreed to and the fighting ceased and both sides face each other at the 38th Parallel and maintain a strong military presence there even today. Since the armistice of 1953, South Korea, as a democracy, has become a prosperous nation with a high GDP with trade partners throughout the world while North Korea is still a family/military dictatorship.



1. **Tallahassee National Cemetery**
5015 Apalachee Parkway, Tallahassee FL
2. **911 Memorial**
Easterwood Drive in front of Red Cross Building, Tallahassee FL
3. **Korean War Memorial**
Cascades Park, Downtown, Tallahassee FL
4. **Wall of Remembrance**
727 S. Calhoun St., Tallahassee FL

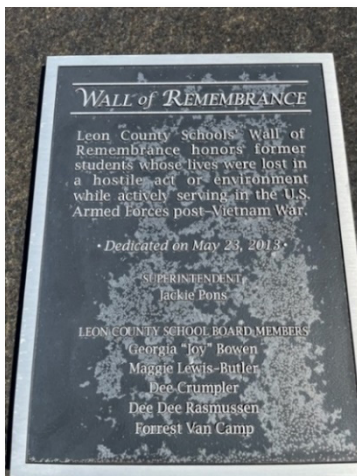


5. **Vietnam Memorial**
Intersection of N. Monroe & Apalachee Parkway, Tallahassee FL
6. **World War II Memorial**
500 S. Bronough St., Tallahassee, FL
7. **French Borne**
At the Hootch - 229 Lake Ella, Tallahassee FL



Post-Vietnam Veteran Causalities Memorial

This Memorial for Post-Vietnam Casualties is only a block or two down the street from our Vietnam Memorial on South Gadsden Street. This memorial fills in quite a void. There are no independent memorials/monuments for our Persian Gulf War veterans or for the War on Terrorism veterans that served in Iraq or Afghanistan after the Persian Gulf War. This memorial, dedicated by the School Board of Leon County and emphatically states, “Leon County Schools’ Wall of Remembrance honors former students whose lives were lost in a hostile act or environment while actively serving in the U.S. Armed Forces post-Vietnam War. Dedicated on May 23, 2013. ...” This memorial is located at 727 S. Calhoun Street, Tallahassee, Florida.





Vietnam!

The conflict was a direct result of the First Indochina War (1946-1954) between France, which claimed Vietnam as a colony, and the communist forces then known as Viet Minh.

People ask:

Why were we in the Vietnam War? The North Vietnamese government and the Viet Cong were fighting to reunify Vietnam.... The U.S. government viewed its involvement in the war as a way to prevent a communist takeover of South Vietnam. This was part of the domino theory of a wider containment policy, with the stated aim of stopping the spread of communism.

Which countries were involved in the Vietnam War?

South Vietnam was backed by anti-communist countries and members of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) which included the United States, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, New Zealand, Thailand, Khmer Republic (later overthrown by Khmer Rouge), Kingdom of Laos and the Republic of China (Taiwan).

How long did the war last?

The Vietnam War (also known as Second Indochina War or American War in Southeast Asia) lasted from 1955 – 1975. It was fought between North Vietnam and South Vietnam... It was fought as a guerrilla war against the anti-communist forces in the South.

Is Vietnam a free country today?

It became a unified country once more in 1975 when the armed forces of the Communist north seized the south. Vietnam, a one-party Communist state, has one of south-east Asia's fastest-growing economies and has become a trading partner with the United States



WORLD WAR II

September 1, 1939 – September 2, 1945

Summary of World War II: The carnage of World War II was unprecedented and brought the world closest to the term “total warfare.” On average 27,000 people were killed each day between September 1, 1939, until the formal surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945. Western technological advances had turned upon itself, bringing about the most destructive war in human history. The primary combatants were the Axis nations of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Imperial Japan against the Allied nations, of Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Seven days after the suicide of Adolf Hitler, Germany unconditionally surrendered on May 7, 1945. The Japanese would go on to fight for nearly four more months until their surrender on September 2, which was brought on by the U.S. dropping atomic bombs on the Japanese towns of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. This was done because of an estimate that if the Allied armies were to invade Japan there could be as many as 1 million more lives lost.

The USA and USSR emerged from World War II as global superpowers. After which, one-time allies became engaged in what was to be called the Cold War, which dominated world politics for the latter half of the 20th century. World War II was the most destructive war in all of history. Its exact cost in human lives is unknown, but casualties in World War II are estimated to exceed 60 million military and civilian people killed. Nations suffering the highest losses, military and civilian, in descending order, were the Soviet Union at 13 million combatants and 7 million civilians; the Germans lost approximately 3.6 million civilians and 3.2 million soldiers; the Japanese estimated at 2 million civilians and 1 million military deaths; the British and commonwealth deaths were calculated at 484,482, with 291,557 battle deaths and 113,842 non-hostile deaths from accident and disease. The United States suffered the fewest casualties among the major nations, over 400,000 military and 12,000 civilian. This is not a complete list and doesn't account for the approximately 6 million Jews that were killed.

The Bourne pictured above, bottom right, was presented to our American Legion Post #13 from Brou France. The original use of the Borne was that of being a kilometer marker on the route that General Patton took when liberating France. After WWII it was decided to place a marker every kilometer starting at Omaha Beach and ending in Bastogne Belgium.



Sgt. Ernest I "Boots" Thomas Memorial.



Sgt. Boots Thomas



Henry Lowery at Monument

Sgt. Ernest I. "Boots" Thomas Memorial

Ernest Ivy "Boots" Thomas (March 10, 1924 – March 3, 1945) was a United States Marine Corps platoon sergeant who was killed in action during the battle of Iwo Jima during World War II. He was awarded the Navy Cross for extraordinary heroism while fighting for and at the base of Mount Suribachi. Two days later he was a member of the patrol that captured the top of Mount Suribachi where he helped raise the first U.S. Flag on Iwo Jima on February 23, 1945. Eight days later he was killed by a Japanese Sniper. Sgt. Ernest I. "Boots" Thomas Jr. is honored to be the namesake of our local VA Clinic as the "Sergeant Ernest I. Boots" Thomas VA Clinic". He is also honored with his memorial and monument on Hwy 90 just West of the City of Monticello, Florida. Dedicated February 22, 1981.

A childhood friend, Dr. Jim Sledge, remembered that Boots passed his physical with flying colors, but he was colorblind. So, in two or three weeks he went to another enlistment office and tried there but failed again. After a few times he got an idea. He went down to another enlistment office and took the book and opened it up to read the numbers. The book had a bunch of dots on every page, reds and greens, and if you're not colorblind you'll see '26' in the dots. But if you're colorblind, then all of it looks the same. So Boots took the test and he said "I can't tell what it is" and the guy would say, "Twenty Six". Then he'd turn the page. He couldn't see that one either, or the guy would say, "Thirty-one." And Boots would say "I don't see it."

Well then, he went off for two weeks and came back, and they gave him the same book. So, when he opened it, he said, "Twenty-six, Thirty-one!" He had memorized the whole book while they had flipped the pages.

A second or third tour of the Jefferson and Franklin County areas will be planned at the *convenience of the groups attending the first tour.*

This second tour will be planned to follow up on this initial tour and will include a trip to the **Camp Gordon Johnston WWII Museum** located at Carrabelle Beach, the site where Amphibious Training was conducted during WWII. Camp Gordon Johnston opened in September 1941 as Camp Carrabelle and was later named after Colonel Gordon Johnston, a well decorated soldier who served in the Spanish–American War in Cuba with the Rough Riders, in the Philippine Insurrection and in World War I.

The camp at 165,000 acres (670 km²) served as an amphibious training base housing around 10,000 troops at one time and rotating between 24,000 and 30,000 soldiers from 1941 through 1946. The nearby islands of Dog Island and St. George Island were used as landing points for exercises. This museum contains a large number of photographs, artifacts and video interviews of the veterans who trained here. This was the largest amphibious training center in Florida.

Then on to Apalachicola where we will visit **The Three Soldiers Park** which is a replica of the statue located at the Vietnam remembrance wall located in the nation's capital in Washington D.C. The Three Soldiers, detailed statue, was unveiled and dedicated July 12, 2008, as an unending expression of our gratitude to the living, fallen, and missing veterans of the Vietnam War and all of our nation's wars.

The **Three Soldiers Statue** is part of The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington D.C. (1982 - 1984). Along with The Wall, this monument serves as a symbol of our nation's honor and recognition of the men and women who served in the Vietnam War. This monumental figurative work of soldiers speaks to what renowned sculptor Frederick Hart called "their true heroism that lies in the bonds of loyalty". It is a visual reference for the ages of their courage and devotion to their country. **Lunch** will follow in a place to be determined in Apalachicola. **Transportation:** A bus or van will be required, as well as all legal waivers. Insurance will also be required.

A third tour can be planned for the Ernest I 'Boot' Thomas memorial in Monticello.

Transportation: A bus or van would be required as will legal waivers and insurance.

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