

BARRAGE

The RCA Museum News

THE RCA MUSEUM
CANADA'S NATIONAL ARTILLERY MUSEUM



June 2020

A Message on COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

With the COVID-19 outbreak, the military closed CFB Shilo to the public. Our staff have been working from home, making new content and getting ready to reopen. We look forward to telling the story of the Canadian Gunner once again. We would like to thank all our partners during this difficult time. Until the museum doors are open again, we encourage you to visit our website.

When we open, we will take the necessary steps to maintain a safe museum environment. Visitors can call in advance, but it is not mandatory. We will limit the number of visitors in the museum at one time. We will also not be giving guided tours. For questions and more information call 204-765-3000 ext. 3570 and leave a message. We thank you for your patience during this difficult time.



From top left to bottom right, RCA uniforms from 1902, 1918, 1945, and 1970.

Museum Connections

Many museum guests love military museums, but others need encouragement. From my experience, the displays that seem the most meaningful are often the smaller ones. The larger displays sell themselves without a lot of dialogue, but the smaller ones need labels to show their importance. Without this information, guests might walk away without knowing how these artifacts affected the past.

Guests are less likely to notice small artifacts, but these small artifacts create museum experiences. Note the display case below. By explaining the purpose of fuses and shells, guests may create an authentic appreciation for them.

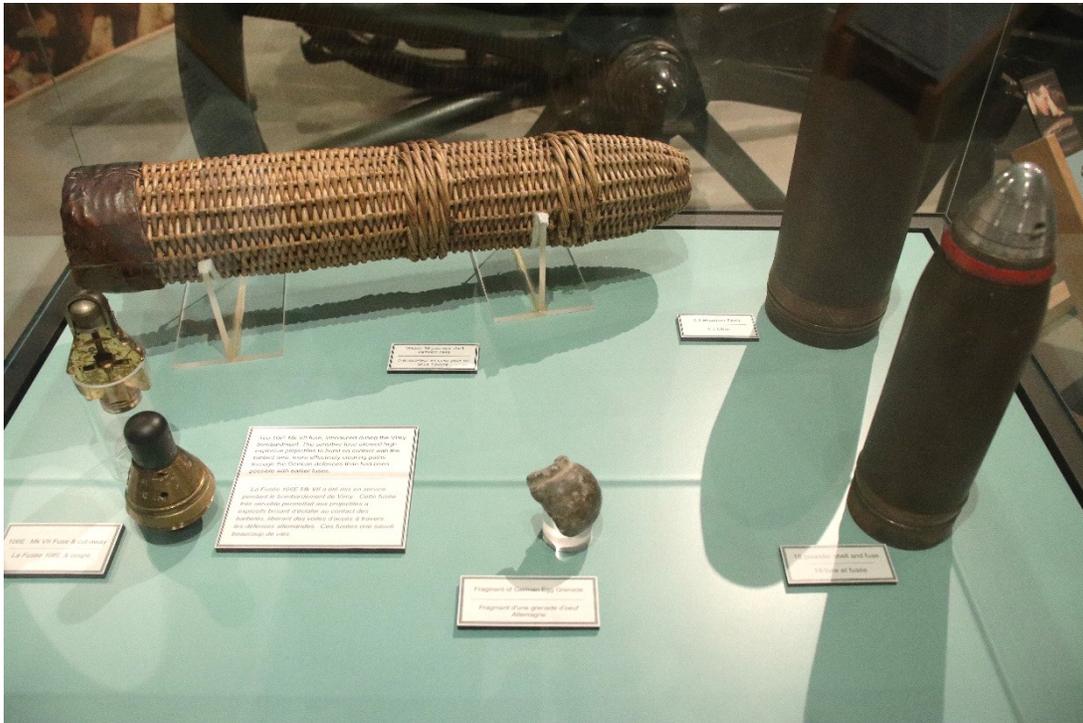


Photo of a WW1 projectile display at the RCA Museum.

Each object has an important purpose and storyline. The display case contains two WW1 artillery shells. Note the Wicker 18 Pounder shell carrying case, a German Egg Grenade fragment, and a 106E MK VII Fuse & cut-away. Canadian Gunners used the 106E MK VII fuse to great effect during the bombardment of Vimy Ridge in 1917. Upon contact with barbed wire, the fuse would detonate the explosives in the shell and clear a path for Canadian soldiers. This innovation helped win the Battle of Vimy Ridge and changed the course of history.

From my perspective, it helps to explain how fuses and shells operate, how Gunners load and fire them, and how they fly through the air and explode on enemy lines. Defining these points makes the artifact tangible and real. Going forward, guests can use this knowledge to connect the smaller museum objects with the larger ones. They may compare what they experienced at the museum with their understanding of history. When these connections occur, then we have done our job at the museum.

Major-General Sir G. A. French CMG (1841-1921)



As the museum director at the RCA Museum, I have profound respect for the Great Gunners of the Royal Regiment. I decided to write about MGen Sir G. A. French because biographies do not always receive the attention they deserve. All the Great Gunners, including MGen French, had exciting and remarkable lives.

The Great Gunner bios, which are available on the RCA Museum website, show how these men handled crises and advanced their military careers. They demonstrate progress over a lifetime. They all achieved a lot at a young age and used what they learned for the betterment of Canada. They provide valuable life lessons and are a source of great inspiration.

In 1841, George A. French was born in Ireland. He served with the Irish Constabulary and then entered military service. He received his commission in the Royal Artillery in 1860.

In 1862, in Upper Canada, he was the Adjutant Royal at Kingston. His superiors regarded him as an excellent officer. In 1871, he was the first commanding officer of A Battery in Kingston, Ontario. He was also the Inspector of Artillery and Warlike Stores. He's known for his attention to detail and proficiency leading his troops.

Less than two years later, in August 1873, he left A Battery and became the first Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police. He led with common sense and an even-handed interpretation of the law. It was his responsibility to bring law and order to the Canadian West. In 1874, he led the Great March, with 275 recruits, divided into six divisions, from Toronto, Ontario to Fort Edmonton, Alberta. These men travelled 1,400 km, an epic journey, across the prairies to reach their destination. It was a formidable task, and the results were mixed. After the march, due to political pressure, he resigned from the NWMP and returned to Imperial Service.

In 1883, Colonel French served as Commandant of the colonial forces in Queensland, Australia. In 1891, he retired. He came out of retirement to serve as Commandant of New South Wales, Australia, from 1896 to 1902. MGen French retired again in 1902. He died in England in 1921.

MGen French had a fascinating life. He never stayed in the same place very long. He made his mark in Canada and then moved on. He made the most out of challenging and demanding situations. This story shows that one man can make a difference. He rose above his faults and achieved something extraordinary. He helped Canada find its national identity during difficult and uncertain times. It is during uncertain times that society looks to its leaders for guidance.

MGen French helped lay the foundation for future generations of Canadian Gunners. This story provides insight into the past and allow us to explore what he achieved. The Royal Regiment is proud to have him as one of their own.

By Andrew Oakden

Fifty Years of Warfare and Technological Development

Canada experienced half a century of intermittent warfare from 1899 to 1953. During this period, on four occasions, Canada went to war. Canadians went to fight on the African Veldt in 1899. They went to Flanders Fields in 1915, the boot of Italy in 1943, and the rocky hills of Korea in 1950. Canada entered each of these conflicts largely unprepared for warfare, yet during these wars, they raised armies and acquired the necessary supplies and equipment to fight in prolonged combat.

Each conflict came with a unique set of circumstances. Each required the contribution of young Canadian men and women. Before the Boer War in 1899, Canada did not have a strong military. Canada did not have a large, established professional army, nor did it possess the equipment to fight in a prolonged military engagement. Before the outbreak of WW1, Canada was not ready for conflict. In the 1930s, during the heights of the pacifist, anti-war movement, Canada was slow to upgrade its military. After WW2, Canada was reluctant to assist the United States with the Korean War. Yet on each occasion, Canada responded, raising the necessary army and producing the required supplies to participate.

Back in 1867, Canada was, for the most part, a vassal state inside of the British Empire. It would take decades for this to change. Participation in international wars acted as a catalyst for nation-building. Canada entered each war with hesitation, yet came out of each conflict stronger as a nation. Young men always had the enthusiasm for warfare and enlistment, but politicians generally underestimated or misinterpreted the realities of modern warfare. One could say that each of these wars led to the next. Involvement in each acted as a stepping board for Canada. As the country developed, so too did the Canadian Military. By the 1950s, Canada had a professional and robust military capable of defending the nation from foreign aggression, which included a significant artillery component.

At the RCA Museum, we have remnants of warfare. We have examples of the guns deployed by the Canadian Artillery during all four significant conflicts from 1899 to 1953. We also have artillery covering the past 150 years. Over 150 years, the Canadian Artillery has seen drastic technological advancements. At the museum, we document many of these technological advancements in our artillery displays. The guns went from old smooth-bore, muzzle-loading, bronze cannons to modern, quick-firing, rifled, breech-loading, steel guns. They went from cannons with direct sites, cannonballs, and wooden carriages and trails, pulled by horses to artillery with direct and indirect sites, modern projectiles with fuses, and metal carriages and trails, pulled by trucks and tanks.

Back in 1871, the muzzle-loading cannons used solid shot or case shot cannonballs. The Gunners used technology that was hundreds of years old. After firing, the cannon would jolt back and require resetting because the gun had no mechanized recoil system. The cannons were dangerous to the enemy and the Gunners that operated them. The Gunners loaded ammunition from the muzzle of the barrel. The cannon required cleaning after each firing to ensure no live ember remained in the barrel, which could cause the next round to explode accidentally. The gun used a simple screw mechanism to raise or lower the barrels' angle of inclination. There was no gun shield to protect the Gunners from enemy small arms fire. Over 150 years, all of these features would be significantly improved.

During the half-century of intermittent warfare from 1899 to 1953, the Canadian Artillery underwent many technological advancements. Participation in the four wars propelled the development of the Canadian Artillery. With each war came new and more advanced artillery. The weapons systems they developed are remnants of those conflicts. Over 150 years, as the nation developed, so too did the guns for combat. The RCA Museum chronicles these technological developments starting from 1871.



Photo of Canadian 5.5 Inch Howitzers in 1942.



Photo of an officer from the 1st Canadian Medium Regt, 1943.

By Andrew Oakden

The Canadian Artillery During WW2

A total of 89,050 served in the Canadian Artillery during WW2. Over 57,000 served in Europe, Newfoundland, the Aleutians, and the Caribbean. The remaining 32,000 served in Canada. Those that remained in Canada served in anti-aircraft and coastal units. They also served in training schools and depots. The 6th, 7th, and 8th Divisional Artilleries stayed in Canada. In 1945, Canada formed another 6th Division for service in the Far East. It was still in training when the war ended with Japan.

Canada placed the 1st Canadian Army overseas. By 3 December 1939, the 1st Divisional Artillery started to assemble in Halifax. One week later, the first convoy departed for England. General A. G. L. McNaughton commanded the Army 1939 to 1943. In March 1944, Canada acquired a new commander, General H. D. G. Crerar. Both commanders were Canadian Gunners.

In Europe, Canada had five divisional artilleries, two corps artilleries and two Army Artillery groups. Each of these large units had multiple regiments attached. From 1943 to 1945, the RCA would play a significant part in the campaigns in Sicily, Italy, and Northwest Europe. The five divisional artilleries fought until the end of the war in Northwest Europe in May 1945. To the right, the 1st Medium Regiment, 3rd Battery, operating the 5.5 Inch Gun, West Down Ranges, England, June 1942.



By 1942, the Canadian Army organized the Artillery Regiments into three 8-gun batteries. The batteries were sub-divided into two 4-gun troops. The Army connected each regiment with an infantry or armour brigade. The regimental commander linked to the brigade headquarters, and the battery commander linked with the battalion commanders. The troop commanders worked in the forward observation posts and with the infantry in the field. Subalterns commanded the guns. In Northwest Europe, the infantry or armour divisions, included two or three regiments of Field Artillery, one of anti-tank, and one of anti-aircraft. The Field Regiments used the 25 Pounder, or self-propelled M7 Priest or Sexton. The anti-tank regiments used the 6 Pounder, 17 Pounder and SP 17 Pounder. The anti-aircraft regiments used the 40mm, quad 20mm, and 3.7-Inch AA guns. At the RCA Museum, we display these guns.

The Canadian Army organized the Heavy Artillery into Army Group Royal Artillery called AGRAs. They commanded AGRAs at the Corps Headquarters. Each AGRA included one Heavy Regiment, three Medium Regiments, and at least one Field Regiment. Heavy Regiments used the 8-Inch or 7.2-Inch Howitzers, or 155mm guns. The Medium Regiments used the 5.5-Inch Howitzers or the 4.5-Howitzers. The Field Regiments used the 25 Pounders or self-propelled guns. The Army used AGRAs for extra support, including counter-battery fire. At the RCA Museum, we display a 5.5-Inch Howitzer and 155mm gun in the Gun Park. We also have four 25 Pounders displayed around the base. To the right shows a Command Post with officers of a Canadian Medium Artillery unit directing fire in 1942, drawn by Second-Lieutenant W. A. Ogilvie.



After the fall of Poland, there came a lull in the fighting. Known as the "Phony War," this period lasted from October 1939 until April 1940. The 1st Field Regiment, RCHA, was the first to engage German forces in France in June 1940. They went to France to prevent the collapse of the Allied front. They almost left their guns behind. The British ordered all weapons and transport destroyed, but the Canadians under LCol J. H. Roberts returned with their guns. They were the only unit to protect their guns.

The Gunners settled into the routine of defending Britain from an expected invasion. Gunners formed light anti-aircraft batteries. An extended period of training began. During the Battle of Britain, Canadian Gunners provided an anti-aircraft defence. They also helped deal with the aftermath of bombing raids. On 19 August 1942, Canadian troops, including parts of the 2nd Divisional Artillery, participated in the Dieppe Raid, an Allied assault on the German-held port of Dieppe, France. Major-General J. H. Roberts led the raid. The 6,000-man force included almost 5,000 Canadians. The 270 Canadian Gunners provided anti-aircraft protection for the troops on the beaches. Despite heroic efforts, the operation failed.

The Army used wireless communications to stay in contact with the guns. The Canadian Artillery expanded its techniques for locating enemy guns. Methods included air observation, flash-spotting, and forward observers in concealed positions. They also used sound ranging from microphones to find enemy gun positions. Within minutes of the Forward Observation Officer (FOO) calling for Artillery support, hundreds of guns from different regiments could fire on a single target. At any given time, the commander had 48 to 72 guns at his disposal. During a major battle, the number of guns and mortars increased from 500 to 1000. The Canadian Army deployed this technique across Italy and Northwest Europe from 1943 to 1945.



Photo of the RCA in Italy, 1944.

The Canadians would have more success in Sicily, starting 10 July 1943, and on mainland Italy beginning on 3 September 1943. In 1943, portions of the 1st Divisional Artillery supported Canadian tanks and infantry in Sicily. The 1st also supported the invasion of mainland Italy. In December 1943, Canadians were instrumental in the Battle of Ortona. In August 1944, Canadians helped break the German defence across the Gothic Line. The 1st, along with parts of the mechanized 5th, helped liberate Italy from the German Army.

The Allies landed in Normandy, France on 6 June 1944. This date marks a turning point in the war; Hitler's Third Reich was beginning to crumble. On D-Day, the Canadian 3rd Division, with accompanying Artillery, landed on Juno Beach. Four regiments fired self-propelled M7 Priests, 105mm Howitzers from the decks of landing craft. The German forces fought hard and resisted Allied advances. The fighting was often bitter and always tricky. Canadians, along with Allies, would continue the breakout from the beachhead through the Falaise Gap, and the drive up the Channel Coast. Next came the push through Belgium to the Scheldt in late 1944. Finally, the liberation of the Netherlands, and the push through Hochwald and the Battle of Rhine. During these campaigns, the Canadians executed hundreds of barrages. They supported the 1st Canadian Army in many bitter conflicts against the Germans.

From 8 February 1945 to 11 March 1945, the 1st Canadian Army launched Operation Veritable (Battle of the Reichswald) in Germany. The battles were fierce and substantial. During the operation, the 1st Canadian Army attacked from Nijmegen. General Crerar led the attack against three reinforced enemy zones. These included fortified outposts miles apart, with trenches, strongpoints, and anti-tank ditches. The Germans also held fortified towns. During the battle, the Royal Regiment, composed of seven divisional artilleries and five AGRA's, bombarded all enemy positions. A total of 1,034 guns fired on enemy positions. Before the 2nd Canadian Corp advanced with ground troops, the Canadian Artillery fired more than 500,000 rounds or 400 to 700 rounds per gun. The Germans offered little resistance to the tremendous shelling.

By April 1945, the Canadian First Army had driven the Germans from Western Holland. By 25 April, the Americans and Russians met on the Elbe River. On 7 May 1945, Germany surrendered. The Pacific War ended three months later with the Japanese surrender on 14 August 1945. During six years of war, Canada had enlisted more than one million men and women in the armed forces. Of these, 45,834 gave their lives. Canada lost a total of 2,073 Gunners during the war, with 4,373 injured or wounded.

By Andrew Oakden

Airborne Gunners 1951-52

There are many stories about Airborne Gunners from 1942 onward. Canada has a notable history of Gunners serving in airborne units. In 1942, Canadian Gunners served in the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion as Infantry Paratroopers. They also served in the Devils Brigade (1st Special Service Force) as Elite Commandos under US command starting in 1942. It was not until 1944 that they took on Gunner roles in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Forward Observation Units of the Royal Artillery, UK. These units saw significant action in northwest Europe during WW2.

From 1949 to 1956, the Canadian Military had elite Airborne Gunner units, starting with B Light Battery, 1RCHA in Shilo, MB. The unit changed its name twice in seven years. On 9 December 1950, it turned to 1st Light Battery (Para), 1RCHA. On 31 December 1953, it changed to Z Battery (Para), 1RCHA.

In the archives, I found an old scrapbook containing photos of the Canadian Airborne from 1951 and 1952. The collection belonged to LCol. G. Norman Chambers, MBE, ED, CD. He was born in 1914 and enlisted in the militia in 1930. He served with the Canadian Army during WW2 with deployments in Italy and Northwest Europe. He commanded the 1st Light Battery (Para), 1RCHA starting in January 1951. He served in that capacity until mid-1952 when selected to attend the Senior Officers' School in the UK. In 1956, he became Deputy Director of the Artillery at Army Headquarters. In 1958, he commanded the 2nd Regiment, RCA, in Winnipeg. He passed away at the age of forty-six in 1960.

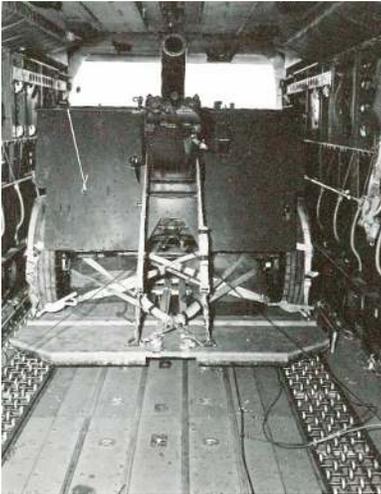


The RCA Museum is fortunate to have this scrapbook of Canadian Airborne Gunners from 1951 and 1952. He took many of these photos in Shilo, MB or Rivers, MB. The Canadian Military deployed the 1st Light Battery (Para) from Shilo. This battery trained in Rivers and Shilo, MB.



The photo above shows “qualified” Gunners from the 1st Light Battery (Para) dated 1951.

By Andrew Oakden



LCol Chambers included pictures of the Jump Course established in Rivers. It's a fascinating historical snapshot of Airborne Gunners from seventy years ago. Back in the early 1950s, their weaponry included: the 75mm Pack Howitzer and the 4.2 Inch Mortar. We have examples of both displayed in the museum. These elite Airborne Gunners used the Lee-Enfield No. 4 MK1 and 9mm Sten Machine Gun.

Joining the Airborne and acquiring certification through the Jump School helped advance a soldier's career. It was an elite achievement. Airborne Gunners trained as paratroopers in the air, then functioned as Gunners on the ground. They also dropped artillery from planes, including the 75mm Pack Howitzer, 4.2 Inch Mortar and the 25 Pounder Field Gun. Included are photos of

the 25 Pounder loaded on aircraft. Pushed out and flying with a parachute, and then landing either on the Shilo ranges or near Rivers. Note the photo of the 25 Pounder on the plane above.



The photo on the right shows a 25 Pounder after landing, with an extended wooden platform. It's worth noting that the 25 Pounder did not have a muzzle brake. It was probably an out of service Mark 1, 25 Pounder used for training purposes.



The photo above shows Airborne Gunners on exercise in Rivers. It shows smiling Gunners ready to go airborne. The picture on the right shows Gunners jumping from the plane during the Jump Course in 1951. I bet this was an exciting and memorable training exercise.

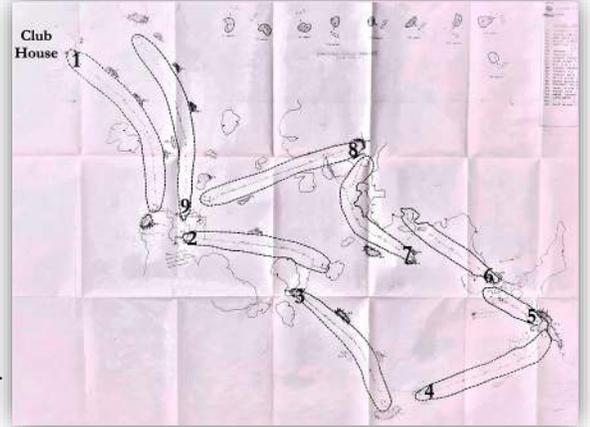


This album shows another side to the Canadian Gunner that does not receive a lot of attention. It's an excellent pictorial scrapbook of Airborne Gunners from seventy years ago. We need to do more to recognize and appreciate these courageous men.

The Early Days of Golf in Shilo

Did you know that through self-help projects, soldiers cleared the land on the Shilo Golf Course in the late 1950s? Back then, it cost one dollar to play the course, and an annual men's membership cost twenty-five dollars. A women's annual pass was fifteen dollars, and a junior's cost ten. A beer cost 30 cents, and liquor was 35 cents. In the museum archives, I found documents on the early history of the golf course, including a price list. At the bottom of the page: "this is almost a giveaway & we may [have] to raise the percentage of profit," signed KT. I could not identify the initials KT.

At the time, the golf course had been open for only a few years and needed a lot of attention. They used sand greens, rubber tee mats and played on nine holes. To the right is a map of the golf course from 1959. For golfers, it is a fascinating snapshot from 60 years ago during the early days of golf in Shilo. Did you know, on the current layout, the original nine represents holes 1, 2, 3, 4, 13, 14, 15, 17 and 18? They added the new holes to the east in the 1960s.



I found a project plan, entitled: "Development, Care, and Maintenance Program for Camp Shilo Golf Course," dated 16 October 1959. The forward came from Col. A. Perron, the Commander of Camp Shilo. He stated, "it is imperative [to push hard] the development plan." I am not sure if Col. Perron was a golfer, yet he helped get the plan approved and completed.

They made a priority list. The Base planned for new grass greens. The greens required 8 inches of topsoil, and the fairways, 1 or 2 inches of topsoil. They also had many other goals. The golf course needed irrigation throughout the course. Without irrigation, there was not enough water. Water made the course playable. They required 200 US gallons per minute for the nine-hole course, and double that amount for an 18-hole course. They needed irrigation equipment, including pipes, pumps, and diesel engines. They wanted seeds for the greens and fairways. They mentioned that sod would cost \$1,500 per grass green, and they could not afford it. Instead, they would use seed on golf greens, which was much cheaper. They recommended sod for the tee boxes and around the greens. The irrigation system was on a grid, and they needed the proper sprinklers and adaptors to run the system.

The course required a lot of general clearing of deadwood and brush. It required extensive physical labour to make it functional as a golf course. They also needed course maintenance equipment, such as light tractors, and fairway mowers. They wanted to add sand traps throughout the course, adding to its playability. The photos are also from the museum archives and date from this period.



The last upgrade included changing the course to 18 holes, moving forward once they had at least 400 memberships. They wrote of acquiring "adjacent suitable land' from the DND. Soldiers completed much of the physical work, including Gunners from the Royal Canadian School of Artillery. They called them "self-help projects" with support from all units on Base. For example, "the clearing of the areas around the 1st and 9th tees of underbrush and deadwood."

The plans called for cutting and planting trees, adding benches, and levelling the ground. They also removed roots, raked, and cleared the land for the new greens and tee boxes. I am sure the soldiers were kept busy with these tasks for many years. It is a good idea not to forget our history. The early days of the Shilo Golf Course are worth remembering.

By Andrew Oakden

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