Admiral Nimitz Historic Site National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies Oral History Program

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

Mr. Ray H. Kroft 77th Infantry Division Staff Sgt. Okinawa

August 7, 2003

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is August 7, 2003. I am interviewing Mr. Ray H. Kroft at his home at 13451 West County Road 275 North Medaryville, IN. 47957. His phone number is area code 219-843-8504. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific Wars, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ray I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today. Let me start by asking What is your birth date?

Mr. Kroft

May 1,1926.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Kroft

Right here at home.

Mr. Misenhimer

At this house?

Mr. Kroft

An older house.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right here in this town?

Mr. Kroft

But here right in this location?

| Near Medaryville, IN then? |
|--|
| Mr. Kroft |
| Yeah near Medaryville. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| Did you have brothers and sisters? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| I had one twin brother. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| Was he in the service? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| No he was called but he got Jaundice when he went down there to be tested and |
| that. And they sent him home. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| When did you finish school? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| I can't rememberuh? |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| 4142? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| I went to the eighth grade twice. I went to the second grade twice. I flunked both the |
| first year. And had to take them twice. He took the second grade twice. Then we |
| went up to eighth grade my brother flunked it so I took it over with him. Then that |
| was all. |

| Mr. Misenhimer |
|--|
| What did you do after that? Start farming? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| Yeah dad owned a farm. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| When did you go into the service? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| 44. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| Have you got a day and a month there? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| October the 2,1944. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| Which branch did you go into? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| Well I went in as a trainee at first. Then after it got over at the Canal I went in as a |
| replacement. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| You went into the Army? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| Yes Infantry. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| Were you drafted or did you volunteer? |

Mr. Kroft I was drafted. Mr. Misenhimer Where were you actually sworn in at? Mr. Kroft I think down in Indianapolis some place. Mr. Misenhimer **Camp Atterberry?** Mr. Kroft Yeah that sounds about like that. Mr. Misenhimer Where did you go from there? Mr. Kroft From there I went to a camp down in Texas. Mr. Misenhimer Camp Fannin near Tyler, in Texas? Mr. Kroft Yeah. Mr. Misenhimer And how did you travel down there? Mr. Kroft A train.

Mr. Kroft I guess it was like all of them. Just a trip. Mr. Misenhimer How long were you at Camp Rannin basic training? Mr. Kroft About four months at least. Mr. Misenhimer About sixteen weeks? Mr. Kroft Yeah that's close. Mr. Misenhimer And what all did your basic training consist of? Mr. Kroft Rifle firing and M1 and they had this carbine and fired it, too. Mr. Misenhimer Any machine guns? Mr. Kroft I think we did a couple squirts is all. But that was all. Mr. Misenhimer Any bayonet training? Mr. Kroft Oh yes we had that. We had mortar. Firing the mortars.

And how was that trip?

Mr. Misenhimer Did you do a lot of marching? Mr. Kroft Oh yes we done a lot of marching. Mr. Misenhimer Physical training? Mr. Kroft Oh yes a lot of that. Mr. Misenhimer Did you go through the infiltration course? Mr. Kroft Yes I went through that. Mr. Misenhimer Did you crawl under live ammunition? Mr. Kroft I think so. Mr. Misenhimer What did you live in there? Mr. Kroft Well there we were in mostly barracks until we'd go out to different locations that they had us to be at Camp Frannin. Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food there?

Mr. Kroft It was alright, not to bad. Mr. Misenhimer Anything particular that you recall about your time there? Mr. Kroft Well I went in with three fellows from San Pierre and one from Francesville. Mr. Misenhimer Did you all stay together? Mr. Kroft Yes more or less. Mr. Misenhimer Through basics? Mr. Kroft Yeah I think so. Mr. Misenhimer Anything comical that you can think that may of happened to you?

Mr. Kroft

I don't know. Not anything I can think of.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished there were did you go?

Mr. Kroft

We had so many days of delay on route, home, then to Fort Ord, Callifornia. And there we got on a ship to the Hawaiian Islands to take amphibious training.

Mr. Misenhimer So you left Texas. Did you get to go home then? Mr. Kroft Yeah I got to come home. Mr. Misenhimer Came home then and to Fort Ord. And how long of leave did you have at home. Or delay in route? Mr. Kroft About a week maybe at the most. Mr. Misenhimer That was the first time you had been home? Mr. Kroft Yeah Mr. Misenhimer When you got to Fort Ord, how long were you there? Mr. Kroft We were just there long enough to get organized and got on a ship to go to the Hawaiian Islands for our amphibious training. Mr. Misenhimer Do you recall what kind of ship you went on? Mr. Kroft No I don't. I couldn't tell you.

Was it pretty crowded/

Mr. Kroft

Oh yes it was crowded. It was all GI's and that thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anybody have trouble with sea sickness?

Mr. Kroft

Oh yes. That was the first thing we had. And we hadn't got out so far. Everybody got sea sick a little you know. Some a lot worse. I mean some they really got sick.

They was bed ridden. I mean they was bed ridden. They couldn't move.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got to Hawaii where did you land there?

Mr. Kroft

I can't think of the place it was...

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go to Honolulu, Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Kroft

Yeah we went to all that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get a chance to visit Honolulu?

Mr. Kroft

Oh yeah. We visited many different places. When you go to some of these places out in the Hawaiian Islands, yeah. You always have to march through the pineapple fields. They had signs all along there, do not pick pineapples you get so much of a

fine. You know. That was easy to overcome. All you had to do was kick one into the rank and pick it up and put it in your pack behind you and you just kept going.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there then?

Mr. Kroft

Oh it was.. I suppose a month I'd say.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did your amphibious training consist of?

Mr. Kroft

Get on a boat and come up to shore you know. Then the ramp goes down and you run off it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have to come down the cargo net on the side of the ship into the landing craft?

Mr. Kroft

I don't think so. I don't think we did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything particular you recall from that training?

Mr. Kroft

I don't know. You got your feet wet. Getting off the boat of course.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many times did you make that run in for practice?

Mr. Kroft

I think a couple times we done it. Mr. Misenhimer Where did you go from there? Mr. Kroft From there we went to Saipan. We got there with the island already secured. So then we just went on to Okinawa. Mr. Misenhimer Did you land in Saipan? Mr. Kroft No. Let's see I think we did land but we loaded up and went to Okinawa. It was already secured. Mr. Misenhimer Saipan? Mr. Kroft Yeah Mr. Misenhimer When did you join the 77th division? Mr. Kroft Well we got that when we went to Okinawa. Mr. Misenhimer You were just a replacements up till that point? Mr. Kroft Yes replacements for the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything you recall about Saipan?

Mr. Kroft

No not really.

Mr. Misenhimer

According to this newspaper article you have that on May 7, 1945 you joined the 307th Regiment, the Eighth Army, 77th which is called the Statue of Liberty division in Okinawa. And when you landed in Okinawa did you have to go in on those ships like that? These little boats? How did you land there?

Mr. Kroft

I don't remember. I don't think so. I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

The fighting actually started April 1, so you had been gone about a month when you landed there.

Mr. Kroft

Yeah

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the first thing that happened when you got there?

Mr. Kroft

Well we were told about....an escarpment on the island. It was an escarpment on the island. Just like a big wall through the land. We had to try to get over that. Big cargo nets and that trying to get over that. Cause they had a big mortar. We called buzz bomb or something like that. And what it was it looked like a nightstand

coming through the air. It was that big. Mr. Misenhimer That's what the Japanese had then right> Mr. Kroft Yeah that's what the Japanese had. But they kept that straight with the machine gun fire and that. Finally we got it conquered. We went around it or something. Then Okinawa had a lot of caves. That people had dug up on the sides of hills and that to crawl in. Mr. Misenhimer Were you in a rifle company? Mr. Kroft Yeah. Mr. Misenhimer Do you remember what company you were in? Mr. Kroft Company A. Mr. Misenhimer You were in the squad? Mr. Kroft Yes. Mr. Misenhimer Were you a BAR man or just a rifleman?

Mr. Kroft

Just a rifleman

Mr. Misenhimer

How ling had you been on the island before you attacked this escarpment?

Mr. Kroft

The Escarpment they had that before we got there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the first things you did then?

Mr. Kroft

Well we went on the line then. We dug in that's what I say they call the fox hole. I remember one fellow got shot. Got hit right there. I looked at my backpack and it had a bullet hole through it. One time I remember you could hear the bullets snap going right by you, going that close. You could hear them snap. Now that's getting close enough. And I survived the whole thing without a scratch.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you mentioned these big ash cans or whatever it was that the Japanese had, did one ever come close to you?

Mr. Kroft

No. Never did hear one of them. I guess they had those blowed out before we got u to it.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you dug in there where did you go next?

Mr. Kroft

After we secured the island of Okinawa we went to....

Mr. Misenhimer

No I mean Okinawa, what your first actual action there? What was your first battle

there?

Mr. Kroft

Well we gone through and chased them out or whatever.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think it mentions Shuri Castle here. Did you attack Shuri Castle?

Mr. Kroft

Shuri Castle yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And how was that?

Mr. Kroft

Just like the rest of them. Deadly.

Mr. Misenhimer

And very rough wasn't it?

Mr. Kroft

Yes. When we got Okinawa cleared we got transferred to the Philippines for recuperation. Truly the reason why I think we went there was the main rush on Japan. But then they dropped the A bomb and that took care of that. Still we went there for occupation duty. And I was there for a year.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now back on Okinawa, any other particular actions you remember? Any battles or anything?

Mr. Kroft

It was all just one big thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your outfit suffer quite a few casualties?

Mr. Kroft

Oh yes we had casualties.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about your squad or platoon?

Mr. Kroft

Well yes. Like I said that one fellow who got took down right in front of my hole there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did the Japanese ever do any banzai charges at you?

Mr. Kroft

No. Never had any. When we was going up to there you could hear them shooting and that. We got off the line then and dug in. We stayed there well it must have been three or four days if not longer. Maybe a week. Then we went up, I was a runner, we had to go up there and see how things were and come back and report it. The rest of them went on and they looked in these caves to see if anyone was in there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get involved in that?

Mr. Kroft

Yes I was in on that too.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any of the Japanese?

Mr. Kroft

I think once I seen one.

Mr. Misenhimer

I heard that they were so well hidden that most the time you didn't see them.

Mr. Kroft

No you didn't see them. If they were on the side of the hill you'd see one up there.

Mr. Misenhimer

On Okinawa, what would you consider your most frightening time on Okinawa?

Mr. Kroft

When we was going up there really because they were firing mortar shells at us and that. It was scary up there.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about your squad leader and platoon what did you think of them?

Mr. Kroft

They were nice. I forget our lieutenant's name. It's on my mind all the time but now

I can't think of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else on Okinawa?

Mr. Kroft

No I guess not. It was wet though. Everything was stuck in the mud. Pretty wet.

Mr. Misenhimer I've heard they have a lot of tombs there. Did you see any tombs where people are buried? Mr. Kroft I think maybe these holes and caves. I think they were buried in there I think. That's what I think. Yeah I think so. Mr. Misenhimer Were you a company runner the whole time? Mr. Kroft Yes the whole time I was there. Mr. Misenhimer So you would have to take messages here and there? Mr. Kroft Yeah. Mr. Misenhimer A lot of times you'd get exposed that way wouldn't you? Mr. Kroft Yeah. Well they had a radios too. Mr. Misenhimer How about the Navajo code talkers, did you ever hear of any of those? Mr. Kroft No.

I know maybe the Marines used them more than the Army. They'd take the American Indians and they would talk in their language. And that way the Japanese... Mr. Kroft And they couldn't hear it. They couldn't understand it. Mr. Misenhimer Right, but you didn't have any experience with those? Mr. Kroft No. Then we went to Japan. See we was at Japan. We was by a air port. They were taking pictures of Korea then. Mr. Misenhimer You went from Okinawa over to the Philippines? Mr. Kroft Yeah. Mr. Misenhimer Do you remember where on the Philippines? Mr. Kroft I forgot. Mr. Misenhimer Luzon Mr. Kroft

That name sounds familiar.

Was it near Manila?

Mr. Kroft

I don't think so.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there?

Mr. Kroft

We just more of less bivouacked there and got recuperated.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get replacements?

Mr. Kroft

Yes I think we did. No we didn't get them until we got to Japan. That's where I met my brother-in-law. He's from West Virginia. We got acquainted he would come around. One time we were back in the woods cutting wood and here come this pick up out there. And here it was him. He seen my sister and it wasn't too long after, couple three four months and they was married. But we lost him. Well him and his wife both. Their boys got this hively welding shop on 14 just off of 421. I go out there once in awhile to see what they're doing. Well I work for them too for awhile.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long were you in the Philippines? Were you in the Philippines when Japan surrendered then?

Mr. Kroft

Yes.

When they dropped the Atomic Bomb, how did you hear about that?

Mr. Kroft

Someway we heard about that.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what was your reaction? What did you think of that?

Mr. Kroft

I thought that was a pretty good thing. They finally gave up after that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there any celebration when Japan surrendered.

Mr. Kroft

Oh I don't think so.

Mr. Misenhimer

It says here that you landed with the first occupation troops in Japan.

Mr. Kroft

Not too far from Tokyo itself I don't think. You could drive and it wasn't too far from where we was at.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like going into Japan?

Mr. Kroft

Oh I don't know. We was stationed by a factory where they made these big guns.

Cause we went to it, me and a couple fellas. And they had this big barrel in a lathe,

turned the barrel out.

When you went in were you concerned that the Japanese people might not be friendly or might try to attack you?

Mr. Kroft

Yeah we was on the look out all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was some of the things you did in Japan?

Mr. Kroft

Oh we just went around different places. This one time I was likely to, you see they had got the Koreans over there working their factories. They wasn't paying them. They were gonna ship them back without paying them. I said "You got to pay these people first before they go back." I stated that to them. I don't know if it got through or not. That's what I told them though. They gotta be paid before they go back.

Mr. Misenhimer

You told the Japanese that?

Mr. Kroft

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a interpreter or someone to help you talk to them?

Mr. Kroft

Some of them could understand and knew what was going on then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you went in did you have your rifles with you when you landed there?

Mr. Kroft

Oh yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you carry them with you most of the time?

Mr. Kroft

No not really. Because I know we went from up there one island, I mean that one island. Then we went up to Hokaido Japanese island, that was a northern island. And it was cold up there. I mean it snowed two feet in one night. I mean she really snowed. We went up in a train, they had to have two train engines on with a snow

plow in front that open up. It took two days to get up there after we got landed on

the island. I think we went across in a boat I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah there's a water between the two islands right.

Mr. Kroft

It was cold up there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do up there?

Mr. Kroft

We just went to different places you know. That's why you have what's it called a weasel. A tracked thing. I think it's Studebaker that made them things.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think you're right.

Mr. Kroft

I think they made them. They got a track about that wide.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did the weasel have a cab on it?

Mr. Kroft

Yeah. It had a cab on it.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were protected from the weather in that?

Mr. Kroft

Yeah. It'd go right along. It'd just run on top. All that wide track that way. And it wasn't too heavy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you disarm any of the Japanese? Collect any of their weapons or anything like that?

Mr. Kroft

No we never did.

Mr. Misenhimer

I see one picture here of you standing by an airplane. What was this? A Japanese airplane?

Mr. Kroft

Well that's when we went over there by an airport. That's when they were flying over Korea photographing everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is this an American aircraft or Japanese?

Mr. Kroft

I couldn't tell you. I've got some pictures around here I don't know where they're at now where they were air craft wreckage. All kinds. They might be pushed up in a pile.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in Japan was there quite a bit of damage to the buildings and all of that?

Mr. Kroft

In places yes. Yes in places there were.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get into Tokyo at any time?

Mr. Kroft

Oh yeah. We got into Tokyo. We went up and down the streets.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand there had been a big fire raid on Tokyo. A lot of the buildings had been burnt down. Did you see any of that?

Mr. Kroft

When we were over there?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah what had happen during the war.

Mr. Kroft

Oh that could have been. Yeah there was a lot of buildings that you might say were demolished that way. Tore down and tore up one way or another. Different shells from bombing.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Kroft

I was a staff sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer

It say here that you were a truck driver. Is that right?

Mr. Kroft

I drove truck back then in a motor pool then.

Mr. Misenhimer

In Japan?

Mr. Kroft

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Served overseas in the PTO. Drove a two and a half ton truck hauling supplies and personnel. Did night and day driving on all types of roads in all kinds of weather.

Performed minor repairs on the vehicle.

Mr. Kroft

We had a international tractor I think it was an A. It was a high clearance one. Just got close together the wheels. So I thought if we set them out so they wouldn't be so dangerous and upset you know when they come by. Might give one a kick to break it loose after you have the bolts out. I kicked the valve stem. The end of our tractor. Of course then you couldn't get no tubes or anything over there. Oh I was so mad.

Mr. Misenhimer

No way to fix it huh?

Mr. Kroft

No way to fix it.

Mr. Misenhimer

I see here you had one month training as a squad leader.

Mr. Kroft

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were a sergeant at that point.

Mr. Kroft

Yeah

Mr. Misenhimer

What do you most remember about Japan?

Mr. Kroft

Oh I don't know, the way the people were I guess. They ate with sticks they didn't eat with a spoon and a fork. It's been so long.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did any of the families ever invite you to their house for meals or anything?

Mr. Kroft

No. I remember one time I think in Japan a lady gave me a shave. I was laying down on the bed or something. She shaved me laying down.

But the people were friendly enough in Japan?

Mr. Kroft

Yes they seemed to be.

Mr. Misenhimer

They weren't resentful or anything?

Mr. Kroft

Not too much so. But we didn't try them out or anything like that you know. Didn't want to get them aggravated or anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were usually with a group when you were around them is that right?

Mr. Kroft

Yes. We liked to got through there to see what they were doing you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Kroft

They're all here.

Mr. Misenhimer

Combat Infantry Man Badge, the 8th Asiatic-Pacific. Theatre Pacific Ribbon with one star, The good conduct medal, and the victory medal. That combat infantry man badge to me is one of the most prestigious. Anybody who has one of those I have a lot of respect for them. Did you get home with any souveniers?

Mr. Kroft

Well I think I brought a Japanese rifle home. Then I had a steel box about that big

of square no about that long. Well I'll go get it. I got my drill bits in it. My wood bits. It come from a Japanese tank.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh a Japanese tank.

Mr. Kroft

That wood box is out there in the shed yet that I sent it in.

Mr. Misenhimer

So a little metal toolbox I'd say about ten eleven inches long, four inches wide and two inches deep. Something like that. It has a plate on top with some Japanese writing which of course I can't read.

Mr. Kroft

I can't read it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do with the Japanese rifle that you had?

Mr. Kroft

I give it to my son-in-law. Had no use for it. Couldn't buy no ammunition for it so what good was it?

Mr. Misenhimer

Does he still have it then?

Mr. Kroft

I don't know where it's at. I have no idea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Kroft

I don't think so. Not that I can recall.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Kroft

No I don't think so.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about mail? Did you get mail when you were overseas?

Mr. Kroft

Oh yeah we got mail.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about Okinawa? Or the Philippines?

Mr. Kroft

Well Philippines I don't know if we got any there or not. Till I got settled in a place then we would get more. More mail.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were in Japan, did you get paid there?

Mr. Kroft

Oh yeah. We got paid.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of money did you get paid in?

Mr. Kroft

I think it was in Yen.

Mr. Misenhimer

In yen?

Mr. Kroft

Yeah I think it was in Japanese money.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you married when you went in or single?

Mr. Kroft

Oh no. I didn't get married until 53.... 54. It's been so long ago.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you came home, did you have any trouble adjusting back to civilian life?

Mr. Kroft

I don't think so. I got home, well I got off the train in Winamac. And I had a picture where my sister lived in Winamac. A long the river road. Go down this road here and right on the corner her house was. And it let me off there and my sister brought me home.

Mr. Misenhimer

It says you were separated on 23 November 1946.

Mr. Kroft

Yeah I know we did because we were building a silo for a neighbor over there

Chuck Dewalnice. And we were building the silo over there and I got in the pick up

and drove over there. He seen the truck in the window and what the heck who is

driving that truck up there?

| It could be that you came home on a leave then got the official papers later. |
|---|
| Mr. Kroft |
| Well that may be. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| That could have happened. |
| Mr. Kroft |
| When I got home I never went back. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| Did you stay in the reserves when you got home? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| No. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| What did you think of the officers you had over there, were they pretty good? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| I think they were yes. They wasn't mean or anything like that. They wouldn't holler |
| at you just to be hollering. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| Have you had any reunions at all? |
| Mr. Kroft |
| No. |
| Mr. Misenhimer |
| You haven't been to any of the reunions? |
| Mr. Kroft |

No. Mr. Misenhimer Did you ever see Ernie Pyle or anything? Mr. Kroft No I hadn't. Mr. Misenhimer He was killed there at Ieshima. About how long did that trip back take? Mr. Kroft About a week I guess. Mr. Misenhimer Now on your trip over to Hawaii or from Hawaii to Saipan, were you escorted by destroyers or anything? Mr. Kroft I don't think so. I was below deck and couldn't see. Mr. Misenhimer Did you get into any of the typhoons on the ships at any time? Mr. Kroft I don't think so. Not that I can recall. Mr. Misenhimer On that ship did you have hammocks or bunks? Mr. Kroft Bunks I think.

About how high?

Mr. Kroft

Two high I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

Two high then.

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