CAMBODIA has been socially and economically crippled through the deployment of landmines as a weapon of terror by the forces that have scarred the country’s recent history. The air-dropped submunitions used by the USA and mine-laying by Vietnamese, Khmer Rouge and government troops have contaminated much of Cambodia’s most fertile land. In a country where 85% of the population is dependent upon agriculture or related activities, such a contamination represents a massive restriction of Cambodia’s economic base. However, through the Cambodian Mine Action Centre, and the non-governmental organisations that work alongside it, the Cambodian people are tackling this legacy of conflict for themselves.

The Mines Advisory Group (MAG) has been working in Cambodia for over 5 years. MAG’s teams work to help poor rural populations affected by mines and other unexploded ordnance (UXO). MAG undertakes the technical tasks of explosive ordnance disposal, minefield survey, demarcation and mine clearance in conjunction with data gathering and community mine awareness. MAG employs over 330 Cambodian staff and has a Cambodian management at all levels of local operation.

It is hoped that the case-studies in this document will cast light on some of the complexities of the problems caused by landmines. Furthermore, it is hoped that these studies will give an understanding of the breadth of thinking and skills that MAG employs to tackle these problems effectively.
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Phnom Penh
MAG Cambodia, Head Office

Battambang
8 Demining Teams
2 Mine awareness Teams
1 Data-gathering Team.

Kompong Thom
1 Demining Team
1 EOD Team
1 Limited Clearance Team
1 Mine Awareness Team
1 Data-gathering Team

Banteay Meanchey
2 Mine Awareness Teams
1 Data-gathering Team

Pursat and Siem Reap
2 Data-gathering Teams
1 Mine Awareness Team

Kompong Speu
1 Mine Action Team
(multi-disciplinary)

MAG CAMBODIA STAFF:
234 Demining staff
48 Mine Awareness & Data-gathering
49 Support Staff
9 Expatriate staff
TOTAL: 340

PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT:

The programme was established in October 1992, in Battambang Province. During 1995 and 1996, MAG pioneered the recruitment of women and amputee deminers. MAG currently has 44 women and 48 amputee deminers.

MAG has developed its Cambodian management with local regional coordinators appointed to oversee the running of all field activities.

The size of clearance teams is gradually being reduced as the clearance strategies move towards smaller tasks and greater flexibility of response.

MAG has established an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Team in Kompong Thom as well as a Limited Clearance Team (LCT) which carries out smaller tasks at the request of the community. MAG's EOD capacity is now being expanded.

In partnership with UNICEF, MAG has modified its Mine Awareness education programme curriculum. It has been
MADE more participative and more relevant and adaptable to particular problems faced by communities.

In Kompong Speu, MAG has established a Mine Action Team (MAT). This is a small multidisciplinary team that integrates survey, demarcation, clearance and community mine awareness personnel. MAG's first MATs were developed in Angola and proved an extremely effective means of engaging local communities in the solution of landmine and UXO problems.

**FACTS AND FIGURES:**

**LANDMINE AND UXO ACCIDENT DATA 1997**

MAG has a network of data-gatherers in the provinces where the organisation works. The information that is gathered is an important resource for understanding the impact of landmines and other unexploded ordnance (mortars, shells, bombs) on the Cambodian people.

According to the Cambodian Mine Action Centre, approximately 3600km² of land in Cambodia is suspected of being mined. Although some suspected areas will be found not to contain mines, the fear of landmines results in desperately needed land being neglected. When considering the impact of landmines on communities, the number of landmines in an area is not as important as the belief that the area is dangerous.

MAG recorded 1247 landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) victims in 1997 - of these, 610 were civilians. This is 48% lower than the number of accidents recorded in 1996.

Children make up 39% of the civilian victims of landmines and unexploded ordnance reported in 1997.

19% of landmine and UXO victims died as a result of their accidents.

Nearly 44% of children's accidents involved UXO rather than landmines. Only 21% of civilian adults' accidents involved UXO rather than landmines.

In 1997, 44% of the total landmine and UXO victims were 'passive casualties'. In other words, they were injured as a consequence of somebody else's accident, not as a result of their own actions. For children, this rate is even higher with 56% of child victims being injured because of somebody else's actions. This higher rate amongst children is probably related to the capacity of ordnance to injure a large number of people in a single accident. It suggests groups of children being injured by UXO.

The local-level accident data that MAG gathers plays an important role in the prioritisation of tasks and the targeting of resources.

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**Civilian victims of landmines and UXO:**

Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Siem Reap, Kompong Thom and Pursat Provinces, 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UXO</th>
<th>Landmines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- MAG Operations Bases
KEY ISSUES:

- Economic and social impact of landmines.
- How MAG clears landmines.
- Benefits to the local population.

Returning Community Resources

Mine clearance around temple ruins, Tapon.
Tapon minefield is in Baseth village near to Battambang town. The minefield currently denies the local villagers access to their Pagoda and burial grounds as well as a large banana plantation. The site has a long religious history and the carved stone remains of an earlier temple litter the ground. Much of the stone from this older temple was broken up in the 1980s to make bridges around Battambang town. The ground is very uneven, scarred by an old military trench and thick with vegetation. MAG’s work at this site illustrates some of the basic principles of humanitarian mine clearance - the restoration of community resources through locally appropriate methods.

One of the victims of Tapon minefield is Meksal, an 18 year old monk. He was clearing vegetation near to the Pagoda when he stood on a mine. It was Meksal’s accident that prompted the chief monk to contact MAG. MAG prioritised the site due to the impact of the mines on the most important community resources and on their close proximity to the local population.

The Pagoda and burial grounds are of great importance to the religious life of the village and the commune. People come from nearby villages to make offerings at the Pagoda and to mark the celebrations of the Buddhist calendar.

The banana plantation adjacent to the Pagoda is one of the village’s most valuable economic resources. A bunch of good bananas can sell for 3000 riel, nearly $2. Furthermore, the stems and leaves can also be used. Bananas can provide a much more lucrative use of land than rice cultivation. The trees are fully grown and will continue to bear fruit for many years.

Forty-four MAG deminers work in pairs between the tall straight trunks. One of the pair uses a mine detector to locate metal in the ground. Metal that is detected is then carefully unearthed by the second member of the pair. If it is scrap metal it is removed from the area. If it is a mine, its location is marked and it is left in place to be destroyed. The pairs can work effectively even in the difficult terrain of Tapon minefield. This method, known as ‘manual mine clearance’, is the only method that provides thoroughly searched land that MAG can return to the local community with confidence. The minefield is clearly marked with posts, tape and mine-signs so that it is easy to distinguish the dangerous land from the land that is now safe.

MAG’s method is labour intensive. By providing skills and employment for the staff working on this site, MAG is helping local people and the local economy. Managerial as well as technical skills are transferred. The wages a deminer earns bring cash into the local economy and usually help to support an extended family.

As landmine clearance has expanded internationally, efforts have been made to develop new technologies that can carry out the work more quickly. There are many environments, however, in which technologies such as mechanical clearance machines cannot be used. The importance of the banana trees to the community, makes manual clearance the only appropriate response in Baseth village.

MAG is investigating the use of dogs to sniff out explosives and has recently received funding to conduct trials in Angola. Vegetation cutters that can speed up mine clearance are also being evaluated. These additions would supplement the work of the manual clearance teams - there is currently no technology that will replace them.

In a year when the rice harvest has been low due to a lack of rain, the bananas of the plantation are a vital source of income for Baseth villagers. Access to the Pagoda will restore the traditional focus of the community’s religious life. Through MAG’s work, resources are being returned intact and the land is being made safe for the villagers and the monks.

Left: “Meksal became a monk to study scriptures. He had been a monk for just a few months when he stepped on a mine. He is lucky. Buddhism does not allow anyone who has lost a limb to become a monk. He will probably be a monk for many years because as a layman without a leg he will find it very difficult to find work or money” - Meksal’s grandmother.
KEY ISSUES:

- Social forces and the landmine threat.
- Mine awareness – reducing the risk.
- Economic activity and risk taking.
- Land rights and social instability.
TAHEN

The population of Tahun are building a village in a minefield. Undergrowth is being cleared for agriculture, the forest scoured for food and wood. This is a community expanding into its environment. Cattle roam everywhere, sometimes pursued by distressed children minding them for their owners. A drunken old soldier wielding an axe is pushed over the minefield marking tape and into the undergrowth by his young comrade. A child hoes the ground with an adze, striking from above his head to break the hard packed earth. There are people cooking, weaving rattan and chasing pigs. The minefield marking signs and tape, stretched for some 200m along the road, contain scenes of community reconstruction and expansion. Ma Vanna, MAG team supervisor, explains why these people are moving back to Tahun:

"People are taking these risks because of the need for land— for houses and agriculture. They are coming back home after a living for so long with nothing. Many people are coming back because they are afraid that their land will be taken by others if they do not move onto it now."

This is a growing community for whom the threat from landmines is to be borne in preference to their former lives as 'internally displaced people'— refugees within their own country. Life by the side of a road, possessing no land or resources and dependent on food-aid, has been abandoned in favour of a perilous return home. Prompted by improved security and stability in Bavel district, people began coming back in November 1997. Families of locally stationed troops came back first, followed by other relatives and villagers who had fled fighting in the area in the late 1980s. Others are too afraid to return. Those that have, say that they saw no
Most landmine victims know that they are on mined land at the time of their accidents. They are forced to accept the risks due to massive economic pressure.

choice. It is a chance to regain their land or establish a new house, to cultivate vegetables, grow rice, to live a normal, rural Cambodian life. The risks being taken here are the risks of people whose needs are not confined to survival but encompass aspirations and hopes for the future.

The urgency to return is prompted by the uncertainty of land-rights in the area. People are afraid that if they do not move now then their land will be stolen by others. These fears have greatly increased the momentum of repatriation — they have pushed people to take greater risks with landmines.

There have been no mine-accidents since people started moving back 2 months ago. The dry season has left the ground baked hard. This stops pressure being transferred to the mines and initiating them. MAG’s deminers water the ground when they need to unearth mines or metal located by the detector. Everyone is afraid that the onset of wet-season will bring a crisis as the mines become easier to trigger.

There is also a danger that MAG will be unable to gain access to the village as rain makes the roads impassable to vehicles. Access is already very difficult — narrow, weak, wooden bridges struggle to support heavy traffic and the steeply undulating roads threaten to ground larger vehicles.

The situation in Tahen is a stark reminder that despite the publicity landmines have received and the number of agencies tackling humanitarian problems in Cambodia, there are still people whose desperate circumstances are pushing them into ever more dangerous relationships with mines. New emergencies are developing — not because new mines have been laid in this area (although this continues to be a problem in some parts of the country) but because social forces are pushing and pulling people into an increasingly critical relationship with existing minefields. The problems of landmine contamination are not static.

MAG is working to avoid a humanitarian disaster in Tahen. A flexible structure and adequate funding mean that MAG can respond to the dramatic need that has developed very quickly here. However, the village presents an extremely difficult working environment. Ma Vanna, MAG team supervisor acknowledges this:

"There are a lot of problems working so close to the community. It could be very dangerous for them and for MAG's staff. I talked to the district authorities — to try to stop people moving in. We have managed to arrange for some areas to be kept clear of people so that they can be demined safely. The mine awareness teams from MAG have also stressed to these people that they must control their cattle — loose animals can cause accidents."

Landmine clearance isn’t the only way in which MAG can assist the local people. MAG’s mine awareness staff work to ensure that villagers understand the danger that they are in and avoid unnecessary risks:

"Even though they are living in a minefield many people still have terrible misconceptions about landmines. Some villagers said that they thought some areas were safe because mines had exploded there — they thought that this meant there were no more mines!

The villagers see the value of mine awareness lessons, especially for their children. The most recent accident here involved a young boy who lost both hands when he picked up a mortar fuse. He should have been told that this was a dangerous thing to do. Even for people living on mined land, there are dangers that greater awareness of mines and UXO can help to avoid."
Above: Children prodding fruit from a tree in an area known to be mined.
CHISANG

MAG began work in Chisang village, 54km from Battambang along Route 10, in October 1997. There are a large number of internally displaced people waiting to return to the land but, at present, it is incapable of effectively supporting a population. There is little land for houses and no areas for crop plantation. Chisang is a World Vision-International-Cambodia rehabilitation project. The construction of two new wells in the village has stopped the need for people to go through a mined area in order to reach their water supply. However, the villagers still regularly enter mined land to fetch animals, gather wood and to collect other resources.

Some people are so desperate for land that they have built their houses in the minefield.

Chhang Kam (below) moved, with his wife and children, to Chisang from Bang Ampil camp. He owns some land near to Chisang but it is mined and nobody else is living there. He is staying on his sister’s land at Chisang – it is still inside the minefield. Determined to make sure his own land is not taken by other people, he has moved closer to the area, despite the risks. It is because of the uncertainty of land rights elsewhere that Chhang Kam is taking risks in Chisang.

Chhang Kam lost his leg to a landmine at the end of 1997 near Sudau. Living in the minefield, he does not have land to farm. Instead he collects bamboo and rattan from the forest. He weaves the rattan into mats and travels by ‘moto’ taxi to Bang Ampil where he sells them to a broker. He can sell a mat for 150 Thai Baht in Bang Ampil but these will be sold by the broker in Battambang for up to 300 Baht.

The poor and landless inhabitants of the Route 10 corridor have long provided a pool of cheap labour for entrepreneurs. Without land or direct access to the mar-
ket they have little choice but to enter the network of traders and brokers.

Sok Som lives in the cleared land next to the minefield. The land had been allocated to her in 1997 and she decided to move in when she heard that it had been demined — she wanted to set up her own home. She lives in the house with her two children whilst her husband is deployed elsewhere as a soldier. Until she has more land to farm, Sok Som also weaves mats. She is employed by a broker — he supplies the rattan and pays 3000 riel for one mat. A mat might be the product of 15 days work. She says that many other people are part of the same system and that because the rattan is brought to her she does not have to take risks with the minefield.

At Chisang village, MAG has learned a valuable technique from World Vision. MAG’s data-gathering staff have taken the thumb-print of all those people to whom the land has been allocated. This thumb-print provides the security that, when cleared, land will not be stolen from the people to whom it now belongs. A ceremonial hand-over process, with commune, district and province leaders as guests of honour, will ensure that the community and local political leaders are all witness to the new population’s rights to the land.

If humanitarian mine action is to be conducted effectively, it is essential to establish, at the onset, who will benefit from the work. Ensuring that these people are the beneficiaries can often be more difficult. The thumb-print system gives people confidence that their land will not be stolen from them. It also reduces the number of people who rush to the area before clearance is completed so as to stake their claim to the land. This allows MAG to work safely in the area and it reduces the number of people exposed to the landmine threat. It can only be effective, however, with the support of local political leaders. A good system for the management of land rights can save lives.
Responding to

Right: Destroying bomblets near Sreyov village. Sandbags, the position of the bomblets next to a bank of earth, and the placing of the explosives, serve to direct the blast and fragmentation of the demolition away from nearby houses and property. Local people are cleared from the area and a radio warning is issued before controlled demolitions are undertaken.
In addition to the threat of anti-personnel mines in Cambodia, there is also a threat from other forms of unexploded ordnance (UXO). Unexploded rockets, mortars and ammunition can all be dangerous if touched or moved. MAG, along with all the demining agencies in Cambodia, is doing what it can to combat the threat of UXO. Between October 1994 and October 1997, in the course of normal operations, MAG destroyed 1,500 items in Kompong Thom province alone. In November of 1997, MAG set up its own Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team to work in Kompong Thom. MAG has also trained personnel from other agencies to deal with UXO.

Two years ago, whilst looking after a neighbour’s cows, Ren Buntham (pictured left) and three friends went into an abandoned military base near his home. He found a fuse from a mortar and, thinking he could sell it to the local blacksmith, he picked it up. The explosion wounded the three other young boys, tore off Buntham’s right hand and blinded him in one eye.

Ren Buntham’s story is a very common one. The data MAG gathered in 1997 indicates that 40% of UXO accidents involve children. Tampering and playing with mines and UXO is the most common way in which children cause accidents. MAG’s Awareness Teams emphasise the danger of these practices and urge children to beware:

Stop! My friend is playing with UXO, I know this is dangerous.

Think! I should tell them to stop but he might not listen to me.

Choose! I don’t want to be hurt so I will tell them to stop.

Act! I tell them to stop and if they don’t listen I will run away to tell an adult.

Messages such as these give children a way of thinking about danger rather than just a list of things not to do. Hand actions accompany the script to give a visual reinforcement of the messages (see front and back cover pictures).

**BOMBLETS**

Particularly around Kompong Thom, there is a danger from American bomblets – ‘bomblets’ as they are more commonly known in Cambodia. According to MAG’s records, approximately half of the UXO-related accidents in Kompong Thom province are caused by US bomblets. There are a range of different bomblets, usually about the size of a tennis ball, consisting of a metal casing around an explosive charge. When detonated, the casing is designed to break up and the metal fragments cut through the surrounding area at ballistic speeds. ‘Bomblets’ are the lethal contents of air-dropped cluster-bombs – many hundreds of bomblets are packed into a larger casing that splits open as it falls. As the bomblets strike the ground a wide-area is shredded by scorching metal. The fragments cut through ‘soft-skinned targets’ – people, unarmoured vehicles and light buildings. Such cluster bombs were a principal weapon in the United States’ air war in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Children suffer disproportionately high rates of death and injury from bomblets because they often mistake them for balls to pick-up, throw around or strike.

In Srayov village to the south of Kompong Thom, a cluster bomb dropped by the USA in the early 1970s failed to open early enough to properly distribute its load. The bomblets are sprayed through the soil around a crater that marks the impact of the ‘cluster bomb unit’. The bomb was probably dropped at too low an altitude and had only partially opened when it hit the ground. The BLU 6/3/B has a ‘spin and impact’ fusing system, requiring the bomblet to revolve in the air before it will detonate on striking the ground. The result of the failed delivery is that the bombs were not properly armed and hence they lie unexploded in the soil and on the surface of the ground.

The BLU 6/3/B is an ‘anti-personnel anti-material’ bomblet – it is effective against the ‘soft-skinned targets’ mentioned above. It was still in use during the Gulf War. So far, MAG has destroyed 80 such bomblets around this crater whilst working occasionally at the site over a two week period. There are 650 BLU 6/3/Bs in a single cluster bomb unit. After every demolition that MAG has carried out, more bomblets appear, revealed to the EOD team as the crater eats into the ordnance infested earth.

Whilst landmines can be readily identified as weapons that cause excessive suffering to civilian populations, the impact of many other modern weapons should not go unnoticed. Ground fighting and aerial bombardment have left a lethal debris that augments the threat of landmines for Cambodian communities.

**KEY ISSUES:**

- Beyond landmines – the debris of war.
- Children at risk.
- The legacy of cluster bombs.
KEY ISSUES:
- The plight of landmine survivors.
- Amputee and mine-widow deminers.

Making a Living

Improved security around Siem Reap has encouraged greater tourism in the area – focussed on the awe-inspiring temple and city complexes of Angkor, the heart of the ancient Khmer empire. Planes fly in from Phnom Penh and Bangkok, and the wealth of tourists attracts traders in cold-drinks, guidebooks and post-cards. The tourist money also makes Angkor an important location for those who must beg for their living.

In Cambodia, approximately 1 in 236 people have lost limbs, many as a result of landmine accidents. Reduced social status and limited employment opportunities mean that many amputees must beg in order to survive.

By late afternoon, the causeway of Angkor Wat hosts a strip of people (photo, right). Others sit quietly in the cool corridor rooms of the gate-house. They are a varied assembly. Two men form an energetic duo on drum and violin: one sits with his single leg underneath him whilst the other beats out a rhythm with the stump of his wrist. Further on, a blind man with a scarred face and missing hand plays a flute whilst his young son collects and guards the money. There are single legged young women and a former soldier who has lost both legs above the knee. They are a disparate group sharing common scars and a common dependence on the passing tourists.

Jab begs from visitors at the entrance to the Bayon temple (photo overleaf). On the floor, she chews betel-nut and collects money in a woven rattan box. She is virtually immobile. Her grandson brings her to the temple in the morning, wheeling her from the nearby village of Angkor Brows. He returns to collect her at the end of the day. In the meantime she twists on her exposed stumps, to face and plead with the passers-by.

The poor condition of her stumps leaves her in constant pain and she cannot sleep. Her left stump is raw and slightly bloodied around a protrusion of bone. Beyond her subsistence needs Jab collects money for injections at the hospital, for pain killers.

Jab’s companions at the Bayon are the nuns. They take donations for josticks and prayers, attracting attention with claps and coughs – they are popular with the tourists. As an amputee, Jab cannot become a nun.
Above: Landmine survivor begging at Angkor Wat.
The desperation she expresses is common amongst landmine survivors who find themselves socially and economically alienated within their society. In addition to referring landmine survivors to agencies who offer medical, rehabilitation and reintegration services, MAG also employs amputees as deminers. MAG’s amputee deminers all have single leg, below knee amputations and special metal-free prostheses produced by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Such employment provides skills and wages for a sector of the population who often struggle to support themselves or their families. Likewise, MAG trains and employs women deminers who have lost their husbands to landmines and been left as their family’s sole breadwinner.

Left: Mom Sophy lost her leg when she stood on a landmine in 1992. A year later her husband, a soldier fighting the Khmer Rouge, died after a landmine accident. Sophy has been fully trained as a deminer.

Below: Now 71, Jab stood on a mine 17 years ago whilst harvesting rice in a paddy field. She has lost both of her legs above the knee. “Since 1981 I have wanted to die.”
Conclusion

In 1998 impoverished Cambodians are building houses and starting new lives in marked and un-marked minefields. They are returning home despite the mines, frightened that their land will be taken by others if they do not seize this opportunity.

Such occurrences leave little doubt that the problems caused by landmines are intimately tied to broader social forces. Desperate shortage of land, the chronic poverty of the displaced people, and the instability of land rights in rural areas are all factors pushing individuals and families ever closer to landmines. It is disheartening to realise that it is positive developments towards stability and security, pulling people back to their homelands, that are bringing these problems to the fore. From these social forces new emergencies are developing. They are emergencies that demand greater flexibility and community responsiveness from agencies capable of reacting quickly to the needs of the population. MAG is developing smaller, more mobile teams, that will be well suited to dealing with pressing problems that many Cambodian communities are now facing.

As international efforts to eradicate landmines gain greater momentum, the problems now unfolding in Cambodia are particularly pertinent. They highlight the dynamic nature of the landmine threat and the need for a range of complementary responses to the problem. They also emphasise the need for understanding of the social and economic context of landmine contamination so as to target resources most effectively.

MAG is working alongside CMAC, the Cambodian national demining institution, as part of a co-ordinated response to landmine contamination. By providing a flexible, community responsive approach to the problems landmines are causing, MAG’s work is complementary to the larger-scale tasks that CMAC undertakes. As national demining structures develop elsewhere in the world, this form of complementary partnership is likely to become a common relationship between national bodies and specialist NGOs. It is a relationship that can provide the breadth of approach needed to tackle the problem effectively as well as ensuring the maintenance of high standards amongst all of the organisations involved.

MAG also works in partnership with other development agencies to provide a comprehensive package of assistance to target communities.

MAG needs funding that will allow it to respond to the real needs of mine affected populations. For further information about funding MAG’s work in Cambodia, please contact MAG at the addresses overleaf.

MAG would like to thank the donors who are funding this work, notably:

- Anti-Landmijn Stichting
- The British Department for International Development
- The European Union
- World Vision International - Cambodia
- UNICEF
- Church World Services
- Lutheran World Service
- and the many other institutions and individuals who have supported us.

Sadly, in May 1998, MAG received confirmation of the death of Chris Howes and Houn Hourth – colleagues who were kidnapped in Cambodia in March 1996.

Evidence that Chris and Houn Hourth were murdered by the Khmer Rouge was presented by staff from Scotland Yard. They had conducted a difficult investigation in a thorough and professional manner.

Chris and Houn Hourth are remembered fondly by those who worked with them. Their fate strengthens further our commitment to communities crippled by landmines and the debris of war.

We extend our sincerest condolences to their families.

All photographs by Sean Sutton © MAG.
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