

169 AIRLIFT SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

304 Fighter Squadron constituted, 16 Jul 1942

Activated, 23 Jul 1942

Inactivated, 1 May 1944

Reconstituted and redesignated 169 Fighter Squadron and allotted to IL NG, 24 May 1946

169 Fighter Squadron (SE) extended federal recognition, 21 Jun 1947

Redesignated 169 Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 1 Jul 1952

Redesignated 169 Fighter-Bomber Squadron, 1 Dec 1952

Redesignated 169 Fighter Interceptor Squadron, 1 Jul 1955

Redesignated 169 Tactical Fighter Squadron, 10 Nov 1958

Redesignated 169 Tactical Air Support Squadron, 16 May 1969

Redesignated 169 Fighter Squadron, 15 Mar 1992

Redesignated 169 Airlift Squadron

STATIONS

Morris Field, NC

Pinellas County Airport, FL

Peoria, IL

ASSIGNMENTS

337 Fighter Group

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Mission Aircraft

P-39

P-43

P-40
P-51
F-51, 1951
T-28, 1956
F-84, 1958
U-3 1969-1970
O-2, 1970
OA-37, 1979
F-16, 1992
C-130, 1995

Support Aircraft

AT-11 1947-1947
T-6 1947-1956
A/B-26 1947-1952
VC/C-47 1949-1972
T-33 1955-1969
C-131 1975-1989
C-26 1989-1995

COMMANDERS

Maj Stewart W. Robb, #1944
LTC Ralph M. Pickering 1946-1947
Maj Arthur F. Szold 1947-1951
Maj Harold C. Norman 1951-1956
Maj Harold E. Haskett 1956-1959
Maj Arthur J. Schertz 1959-1962
Maj George H. Mason

HONORS

Service Streamers

American Theater

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM



304 Fighter Squadron emblem



169th FIGHTER-BOMBER SQUADRON



The Indian head is symbolic of the Illini Indians that once inhabited the prairies of Illinois and reflects the Squadron's history with the Illinois (Peoria) Air National Guard. The Indian translation of the word "Peoria" is "A prairie fire running wild" thereby portraying the swiftness of the Squadron's attack. The horns portray the horns of a buffalo and denote the ferociousness of the Squadron's attack. The Helmet & goggles are indicative of a pilot's headgear. The feather denotes flight. The mission of the Air National Guard in the protection of the homeland is denoted by the outer circle and the homeland is represented by the inner circle.

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Operational training unit, 1942-1943; replacement training unit, 1943-1944

What is now the 169 Airlift Squadron (AS) originated during World War II as the 304th Fighter

Squadron (FS), which was activated on July 23, 1942. The 304th FS was assigned to the 337th Fighter Group (FG) at the Pinellas (FL) County Airport, and served as an operational training unit equipped with the P-39 and the P-40. The 304th FS was disbanded on May 1, 1944. On May 24, 1946, it was reconstituted, redesignated the 169 FS, and allocated to the Air National Guard (ANG).

Led by Lt Col Ralph Pickering, the 169 FS held its first drill in December of 1946, and it received federal recognition on June 21, 1947. By the end of the first year, the unit consisted of 40 officers and 215 airmen. The original base consisted of a shale runway and a single hangar for eight F-51, four AT-6, and a B-26 tow target plane. The first annual training was held at Chicago Municipal Airport (now known as Midway), with flying done at Douglas Field (now known as O'Hare). In 1952, the 169 FS was redesignated the 169 Fighter Interceptor Squadron (FIS) and then the 169 Fighter Bomber Squadron (FBS).

When the 169 received its Federal recognition on 21 June 1947, there were 15 Officers and 47 Airmen assigned to it, with air operations directed in a vacant contractor's shack at Peoria's Municipal Airport. The squadron's first aircraft were 8 F-51 four AT-6, and one B-26 tow target plane.

The squadron celebrated its first anniversary on 21 June 1948 by dedicating a new \$150,000 hangar. Forty Officers and 215 Airmen made up the ceremonial formation, and three more F-51's and one more B-26 were added to the unit's inventory.

At this time the 169 Squadron was attached to the Chicago based 126th Bombardment Wing, and conducted its first summer Field Training in August, 1948 at the Peoria Airport.

In July, 1949, the squadron was assigned to the 133rd Fighter Group of Missouri's ANG 71st Fighter Wing. Summer Field Training in 1949 and 1950 were accomplished at Camp Williams, (Volk Field) Wisconsin, with the 71st Fighter Wing and the 133rd Group.

In early 1951, a team from the 169 Fighter Squadron, led by Major Harold C. Norman, participated in the first Air National Guard Gunnery Meet at Eglin AFB, Florida, and on 1 June, 1951, Major Norman assumed Command of the squadron, replacing Lt Col Arthur F. Szold, the unit's second commander since 1948, and conducted its Field Training in August, as a separate squadron, at Grayling Army Air Field, Michigan.

On 1 July 1952, the unit designation was changed to the 169 fighter Interceptor Squadron and again Field Training was held at the Grayling Army Air Field, Michigan in August, On 1 December of the same year, the squadron was re-designated again as the 169 Fighter Bomber Squadron, A major construction program was completed in 1953 which greatly improved the Air Guard base facilities at the airport, and the squadron was augmented with Maintenance, Supply, Motor Vehicle, Communications, Air Police, Food Service, Installations and Medical elements.

The squadron accomplished its 1953 Field Training at Camp Williams (Volk Field), Wisconsin in

conjunction with the 170th Fighter Bomber Squadron from Springfield, and the 264th Air Force Communications Squadron and the 878th Engineers from Chicago.

During the Korean Conflict, the squadron was alerted and kept in readiness for active duty at its Peoria base, but was not mobilized as a unit. Many of its members, , did serve with other units at that time.

By 1953, a large construction project had expanded the base facilities, and in 1954 the 169 FBS obtained the copyright for The Chief, a Walt Disney cartoon character, to display as their emblem. In 1958, the squadron received its first F-84F, and the unit flew the first ANG air-to-air refueling mission in 1961. The 169 FBS received its first federal activation in 1961 for the Berlin Crisis.

In June 1954, the squadron accomplished its Field Training with the 126th Fighter Bomber Wing at the Collins ANG Base, Alpena, Michigan, and later the same year, a team, consisting of Lt Col Harold Norman and Lt George Mason, participated in another Air National Guard gunnery meet at Gowen Field, Idaho, winning first place with the highest team score ever fired at an Air National Guard gunnery exercise.

In 1955, the squadron participated in three operations: "MINUTEMAN", "STOPWATCH", and "CRACKER JACK".

In January 1956, Major Harold E. Haskett replaced Lt Col Norman as Commander of the 169. (Col Norman assumed command of the 126th Fighter Interceptor Group in Chicago).

During 1956, the squadron turned in its P-51s and received T-28s and one T-33 in anticipation of forthcoming advanced jet fighters upon completion of runways extension at the airport.

In March 1958, the unit was designated as the 169 Fighter interceptor Squadron, receiving its jet manning document in April and its first F-84F in which the squadron's pilots began transitioning in during Field Training at Collins yield, Alpena, Michigan.

In August 1958, the 169 was assigned to the 131st Tactical Fighter Wing of Missouri's ANG, and re-designated as the 169 righter Bomber Squadron. In the summer of 1959, the unit carried its Field Training with the 131st Wing at Camp Williams (Volk Field) Wisconsin, and again in 1960.

1959, the 169 Squadron was chosen by Tactical Air Command present a fire power demonstration at Fort Bragg, North Carolina (July), and again at Fort Sill, Oklahoma in January 1960. Twenty-four members and six F-84F's of the squadron participated in the demonstration. Field Training in 1961 was again fished with the 131st Tactical Fighter Wing at Camp Williams, WI.



Upon completion of its 1961 Field Training at Volk Field, Wisconsin, two F-84Fs of the 169 Squadron, piloted by Lt Colonel Norman and Captain Kochman, became the first Air National Guard receiver aircraft to participate in the first all-time Air National Guard air-to-air refueling by the newly acquired KC-97G tankers of the 126th Air Refueling Wing from Chicago-O'Hare.

On 1 September 1961, the 169 Squadron was alerted for activation, following the Berlin Crisis, and on 1 October the unit was mobilized as part of the 131st Wing from Missouri's Air National Guard.

From 1 Oct to 20 August 1962, when it was released from active duty, the 169 Squadron underwent an accelerated training program and participated in many operational exercises including: Operation "RED HILLS" at Fort Campbell, Kentucky; operation "IRON DRAGON" at England AFB, Louisiana, and many others.

After the short tour of active duty, fifty percent of the enlisted men did not re-enlist, and the Squadron lost 13 of its pilots, who chose to remain on active duty with other units, thereby creating a personnel shortage.

On 15 October 1962, the unit was reorganized as the 182nd Tactical Fighter Group, Illinois Air National Guard, with the group becoming the dominant element and the 169 Fighter Squadron remaining as its tactical unit. Lt Colonel Harold Norman, who had become deputy commander of the 131st Fighter Wing while located in France during the Berlin call-up, was appointed Commander of the 182nd Group. Lt Colonel Arthur J. Schertz became Deputy Commander for Operations and Major George Mason, Commander of the 169 Squadron.

In spite of personnel shortages, the 182nd Group and its assigned units accomplished their tasks, attending Field Training at Volk Field, Wisconsin, in 1963 with the 131st Tactical Fighter Group, Missouri ANG, and the 183rd Tactical Fighter Group from Springfield, Illinois.

During the early part of 1964, the 132nd Group's tactical unit deployed to Luke AFB, Arizona, and participated in dive bombing, rocket firing, strafing and air-to-air gunnery. The unit's F-84F were refueled in their deployment to Arizona by tankers from the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Chicago-O'Hare.

From 1965 to early 1969, the 182nd Tactical Fighter Group, with its support and assigned units, participated in many joint exercises and weapons deployments to Alaska, California, Colorado, Arizona and Louisiana, while accomplishing its Field Training at Volk Field, Wisconsin and Collins Field, Alpena, Michigan, alternately. These exercises included "CINCAFSTRIKE" and "DIAMOND LIL XVII". The latter one involved flying twelve F-84F's from Volk Field nonstop (with air refueling provided by 126th ARW tankers) to Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska.

In May 1969, the 182nd Group received a change of mission and new aircraft. Twenty-six F-84F's and three T-33s were turned in for seventeen U-3 and one VC-47, and the group renamed the 182nd Tactical Air Support Group.

The new mission of the 182nd Group was: To organize, train and equip assigned personnel to provide operationally ready Tactical Air Support Squadrons; Direct Air Support Centers (DASCs); and Tactical Air Control Parties (TACP's), capable of operating and maintaining a ground-to-air communication system in support of ground forces.

During 1970, the 182nd participated in Exercise "SENTRY LONGHOUSE" in New York (Jul-Aug); Exercise "REFORGER II" conducted in Western Europe in October; and in Exercise "SENTRY CANECUTTER" in Puerto Rico in November.

Tactical elements of the Group participated in Operation "GUARD STRIKE III" at Gulfport, Miss., and underwent tactical air control training at the Air Ground Operations School at Rhein-Main AB, West Germany in September and October.

In 1971, the Group turned in 16 of its U-3 and replacing them with eighteen O-2As, keeping one U-3 and its C-47. Tactical elements of the Group participated in Operation "GUARD STRIKE III" at Gulfport, Miss., and underwent tactical air control training at the Air Ground Operations School at Rhein-Main AB, West Germany in September and October. The 182nd Group and assigned units comprised at this time of 41 assigned Officers (53 authorized) and 172 Airmen (246 authorized).

1972 saw the 182nd TASG's tactical aircraft and aircrews deployed to Mississippi, New Mexico, Kansas, Nevada, and Wisconsin participating in Operations "CAJON TOSS", "SENTRY CREOLE", "GUARD STRIKE" and "CANE CUTTER".

Participation in training and exercises included Operation "GALLANT HAND" in Texas, Idaho and Kansas, while during 1974 air crew training and exercises took place at Volk Field, Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, Gulfport, Miss., and Holloman AFB, in providing air strike control and liaison functions in direct support of ground elements. Also during the year, the unit participated in operation "HOT WHEELS", in Colorado; "ROBIN SAGE IV" in North Carolina; Exercise "RAZORBACK" in Missouri; and SOLID SHIELD" in Mississippi, and also supported Special Forces in Idaho.

Major events and training exercises included: deployment of aircraft and personnel in support of operation "BRAVE SHIELD XIV" and "BRAVE SHIELD XV" at Eglin AFB, Florida, in October. More than 16,000 personnel from all branches of service, including, Air National Guard and Reserve units, participated in these Joint Chief of Staff exercises.

Other exercises engaged in by the 182nd were; Operation "RED FLAG II" in Nevada; and stagings at Volk Field, Wisconsin; Fort Smith, Arkansas; Alpena, Michigan; Gulfport, Mississippi; and supported the 163rd Armored Cavalry of Montana's Army National Guard.

In 1973, the 182nd Group's inventory had grown to twenty-six O-2A's, one O-2B, and one T-29 replacing the C-47. Participation in training and exercises included Operation "GALLANT HAND" in Texas, Idaho and Kansas, while during 1974 air crew training and exercises took place at Volk Field, Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, Gulfport, Miss., and Holloman AFB, in providing air strike control and liaison functions in direct support of ground elements.

The year 1975 brought a shuffling of leadership to the 182nd. Col Harold Norman, group commander, was replaced by Colonel George Mason in March by MG Harold Patton, the Illinois Adjutant General. Col Norman fought the AG's decision in the courts and was reinstated as group commander in October.

While Col Mason was commander, a portion of the unit full-filled its State mission by being activated to help the citizens of Canton, Illinois, when on 23 July, a tornado struck the heart of that city, as well as residential areas.

Also during the year, the unit participated in such far-flung operations and joint exercises as operation "HOT WHEELS", in Colorado; "ROBIN SAGE IV" in North Carolina; Exercise "RAZORBACK" in Missouri; and SOLID SHIELD" in Mississippi, and also supported Special Forces in Idaho.

A C-131E replaced the group's T-29

As the year 1977 began, it became apparent that another change of command would take place. On 28 February, Colonel Roland E. Ballow replaced Colonel George H. Mason as commander of the 182nd Tactical Air Support Group, IL ANG.

Also during the early months of 1977, the 182nd participated in a staging at Eielson AFB, near

Fairbanks, Alaska, called operation "JACK FROST", and at the time of publication of this anniversary album (June, 1977) the Peoria Air Guardsmen and women were looking forward to participating in another "BRAVE SHIELD" exercise in Florida during the last half of 1977.

PEORIA AIR GUARD HISTORY IN THE BEGINNING ... there were 15 officers, 47 airmen, an old tin shed, a makeshift ramp and a shale runway. Pretty humble, but beginnings are like that, sometimes. It all started on 7 December 1946 when about 12 "brown-shoe" war veterans, led by Lt Col Ralph Pickering, held an organizational session at the old Peoria Armory and formed the 169 Fighter Squadron. There must have been a lot of confidence, enthusiasm, and stick-to-itiveness in the old boys, 'cause look at this outfit now! Over 900 members strong and looking forward to a whole new base.

They stood their first inspection and muster at 1300 hours on 21 June 1947 at the Peoria Armory. Lt Col Ralph M. Pickering was the commanding officer. He resigned shortly thereafter and returned to active duty. The then-Major Arthur F. Szold took over command.

There are several familiar names on that original roster, even to a relative newcomer ... Privates Willie Coon, Bob Needham, Emil Weber, Bob Barnett, Ed Scales, and Webb Norman. (Deward Resler, now deceased, was also a Private in that first contingent.) There are a couple of vaguely familiar First Lieutenants - Harold E. Haskett and Harold C. Norman. Boniface Mayer (whose son is now a pilot in the unit) was a Second Lieutenant; Art Szold, at that time, was a Captain ... no pun intended.

It wasn't too long before there was a hangar to house the eight P-51 fighters, four AT-6 trainers and the assigned B-26 tow target plane. The unit was still a long way from "uptown," but at the end of the first year membership had grown to 40 officers and 215 airmen. Recruiting, in those days, was done by word of mouth, so the "word of mouth" must have been good.

Field training, at first, was conducted in Peoria with the personnel housed in and operating out of tents. Things did get better in later years; field training was conducted at different locations - Camp Williams, Wisconsin; Grayling Army Air Field, Michigan; and Collins Field, Alpena, Michigan. Some of the early-timers say they can remember when field training was held in the hangar in Chicago.

By 1953, a major construction program had greatly improved the facilities. An administration building, base supply warehouse, aircraft maintenance building, fire station, motor pool, and a paint storage building were constructed.

The unit underwent several designation changes. It was known as the 169 Fighter Squadron (SE), the 169 Fighter Interceptor Squadron, and the 169 Fighter Bomber Squadron.

Remember when O'Hare was called Douglas Field? Remember eating in the hangar? Remember the Polish bar on 93rd Street in Chicago? Remember the "Una's pie" airlift? Remember Camp Ellis? Poor Camp Ellis! One of the boys buzzed the dragstrip, put the race cars to shame, then called in his position as being over Moline. Another one landed at Camp Ellis rather abruptly ... gear-up landings are like that!

One of the earliest recollections was of flying the P-51's down Main Street in Peoria at VERY low level. Naturally, there were some complaints, so the little boys were told not to play with their toys so close to the ground.

Another trick the boys liked was to fly real low along the railroad tracks, at night, gear down and landing lights on. Trains would come to a screeching halt, and the boys would get a chuckle. The laugh was almost on the boys when, one night, BOTH "trains" turned out to be P-51's.

And talk about low level flying! One of the boys came home with a guinea hen plastered all over his windshield. Did you ever see a guinea hen more than three feet off the ground. . . without help???

There was a former commander who flew P-51's about whom it was said, "he couldn't hit his ass with both hands." In formation flight, the boys used to deliberately lead him into the clouds . . . then lose him.

It's a wonder some of you are still around. During night flying one of the boys thought he had lost his wingman, so asked for a "bright" on the nav lights. He was nearly blinded by a light about two feet from his face!

Once, on a trip to Sacramento CA by way of Offutt AFB NE and Lowry AFB CO, a flight of P-51's ran into a line of squalls somewhere between Omaha and Denver. Their navigation system was "next to worthless," but they decided to press on anyway. They got lost. A passing airliner advised that they were over Texas, so they picked up Route 6 and flew IFR (I Follow Roads) to Denver. They made it to Sacramento - only one day late. The aircraft had to be left behind since they were being reconfigured and sent to Korea. The C-47 picked the boys up for the return trip to Peoria - which took FIVE days! Well, fly a while . . . party a while ... fly a while ...

In 1958, the unit started its transition to the F-84 aircraft. One of the Maintenance troops described the F-84 as, "A streamlined crowbar that flew like a homesick brick. " Colonel Norman flew the first F-84 in to Peoria; the F-84 that is now on static display on the pedestal out by the main gate. It was a very impressive flight until he landed, and then . . . SURPRISE! . . . the drag chute malfunctioned.

But the men learned qUickly and only three years later, two of our F-84's completed the first Air National Guard air-to-air refueling. That was just one of the many "firsts" for which this unit was responsible.

Federal activation for the Berlin Crisis came in 1961 and after that, in 1962, Headquarters 182nd Tactical Fighter Group was formed which assumed all support functions and the 169 Tactical Fighter Squadron. By 1965 the unit was so good that it furnished half the fighter force for Exercise Diamond Lil XVII. This exercise deployed a task force of 12 F-84's from Volk Field nonstop to Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, with inflight refueling. Redeployment to home base was also nonstop with aerial refueling.

One of our F-84 drivers was known for heading straight for his destination, no matter what. One day, with this particular pilot as flight lead, a fourship was headed for the range when suddenly, up ahead, a squall appeared. And, just as predicted, he flew straight into it. The other three ships flew around the squall, joined him on the other side, and he never knew the difference.

One of the dangers of flying a range mission is target fixation. They tell the story about one of the pilots who became so fixed on the target that even shouted warnings from the range control officer did not break his trance. The plane just kept diving further and further until it disappeared behind some trees. There was a cloud of dust and range control activated crash procedures. Then they saw the plane come sort of lumbering up out of the trees and head off the range. The crew chief swears to this day that there was grass and mud on the belly of that plane. And the pilot, after that day, was known as a chain smoker.

Some of the guys were sitting around on the bank of a big lake in Michigan. They were discussing the depth of the water. There were all kinds of estimates from REAL deep to just so-so. But all bets were off when they looked up to see one of our boys standing knee-deep in the middle of the lake happily serving some liquid refreshment to a couple of startled fishermen in a boat.

One of the boys caught a really BIG fish up at Volk, iced it down in a cooler, put it on, the C-47 and asked the flight mechanic to keep an eye on it for him on the trip home. There was some delay in takeoff because the C-47 developed a problem . . . and so did the fish, after about three days!

Then there was the "abandoned" tank that the boys found in the woods at Alpena. Whoever left it there couldn't get it started ... but our boys could. They painted it all up with graffiti, drove it on base and parked it in front of the chow hall one night. They made the boys put it back.

And there was the time that a couple of the boys were out in a boat fishing all nice and peaceful when, suddenly, a big ole' bear showed up on the far side of the lake. Well, they figured they'd just ignore that ole' bear ... until one of our boys, safely on the opposite side, decided to growl at the ole' boy. The bear must have thought the growl sounded like it needed investigating (maybe he thought it was a girl bear!) because he made a beeline for the other side, headed directly at the boys in the boat. Here they were, trying to keep an eye on the bear, cranking like crazy on a stubborn, stalled boat motor and yelling at the idiot on the other side to "STOP

GROWLIN', YOU "

In 1969 the unit was redesignated the 182nd Tactical Air Support Group and was equipped with the U-3 as an interim aircraft. The O-2's came in 1970. They were small, push-pull, propeller driven, noisy and UGLY! They looked something like a pregnant guppy. But they kept the unit in the flying business. Again, the boys learned quickly and the unit was soon involved in exercises all over the country and even out of the country. . . Puerto Rico, Germany and Alaska. The Maintenance people won an award for their method of "packaging" the O-2 for deployment. It could get there faster "packaged" by airlift than it could under its own power!

But slow, noisy or ugly, that little plane kept busy. The unit participated in RED FLAG exercises at Nellis AFB, Nevada, in O-2' s. Those were tough, realistic exercises.

The story is told about one of the O-2 aircrews who was obviously not accustomed to being propeller driven. During a range mission at Atterbury, he forgot to switch fuel tanks. When things suddenly got very quiet in the cockpit, he radioed, "I think I've had a flameout."

It got very boring just taking the O-2 "around the pattern" and a lot of the boys sort of, one hesitates to say, "created" flight time. But they found a lot of nice places to stop - for breakfast, lunch, or just a coffee break. Decatur was a good place. Quincy and Mattoon were popular. Davenport was especially nice on Friday nights; there was a seafood buffet. Poor babies really got their wings clipped when it was discovered one day that there were more O-2' s on the ground in Decatur than there were in Peoria!

With the O-2' s came the jeeps - the MRC-108 Communications Central, actually. Those jeeps took some know-how to operate. They also took gasoline. Someone launched a convoy of jeeps just to practice and just to go around the airport. About halfway around, someone realized that all the vehicles' gas tanks were on empty.

Another convoy was coming home from Volk. Their leader swears emphatically that some gremlin stole a road sign and they missed their turn because, before he realized it, they were approaching a toll gate where there shouldn't have been a toll gate. It cost him fifteen bucks.

In 1979, the 182nd was awarded its first Outstanding Unit Award, a proud moment in its history.

In September of 1979, the first OA-37 landed in Peoria. That, too, was a proud moment. The unit was back into jet aircraft. The mission was still the same and the jets were not big, but they were jets. And, true to form, the unit put forth a tremendous effort with the result that conversion to the OA-37 was completed ahead of schedule. The last O-2 left and the remainder of the OA-37's arrived in April, 1980. Unit manning was on the upswing with many pilots joining the unit.

Very soon, 1981, the unit was involved in RED FLAG exercises again. The first one was a good

sized deployment requiring four C-130's to haul all the equipment and personnel. In addition to its many exercises, the unit was being called upon to instruct personnel from other units and even from the active duty Air Force during those first few years. By August 1981, the unit had progressed to the point of being called upon constantly to support exercises and even to assist in a test of Electronic Warfare/Close Air Support at Nellis AFB. Nellis in August is one hot spot! The Maintenance and Munitions people spent a lot of time on those hot, concrete ramps.







USAF Unit Histories
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Sources

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