



Newly completed Pacific Adventist College which later became Pacific Adventist University, 1984.

Photo courtesy of Barry Oliver.

# Pacific Adventist University, Papua New Guinea

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## RAYMOND WILKINSON

Raymond Wilkinson, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) was born to missionary parents and grew up in Fiji. He was educated at Longburn College, Massey University New Zealand, and Avondale College Australia. With wife Ruth, his Church service involved teaching and educational administration in the South Pacific Islands. He retired 1994 but since then has enjoyed volunteer service in the islands. Now married to Lola, Raymond has four adult children and eight grandchildren.

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Pacific Adventist University (PAU) is a coeducational senior boarding university situated in Koiari Park, approximately 20 kilometers (12 miles) northeast of Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea. An

institution of the South Pacific Division, it has served since 1984 as the senior tertiary institution for the Pacific Island nations of the South Pacific. It has schools of business, education, theology, humanities, and science.

## Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Training Schools in the South Pacific

As early as October 1890, five years after a group of Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs), led by S. N. Haskell had brought the church to Australia and New Zealand, the newly completed SDA mission schooner *Pitcairn* left San Francisco carrying three missionary couples to commence evangelizing in the South Pacific Islands.<sup>1</sup> Early overseas missionaries quickly saw the potential of islanders to become effective teachers of the gospel and began training some on a one-to-one basis. John Edwin Fulton,<sup>2</sup> working in Fiji, gave personal guidance to Pauliasi Bunoa,<sup>3</sup> a former teacher, minister, and missionary for the Methodist church, who became an SDA minister and translator and the first island national minister in the South Pacific Islands to be ordained. Fulton urged the need for a training school to be established, and in 1905, Septimus Carr became the first principal of such a school at Buresala,<sup>4</sup> on the island of Ovalau in Fiji. That school soon had students also coming from Tonga, and by the 1930s, other small training programs for elementary school teachers were established at Samabula, Navuso, and Vatuvonu,<sup>5</sup> all in Fiji. Other mission schools that gave basic education were soon being established in Fiji and other island groups. In 1939 the decision was made in Fiji, and endorsed by the Australasian Union Conference, to combine the four small training programs in Fiji, and Fulton College (named after J. E. Fulton) was established in Tailevu on the eastern side of Fiji's main island. The Buresala training school was closed, and the other three centers continued as schools but without programs designed to prepare students for employment. Fulton College began such programs in 1941.<sup>6</sup>

Transport options between islands and between island groups were making it easier for students to travel to training centers. Higher standards of education were being required by employers and were gradually becoming available from both government and mission schools. By the mid-1940s, Fiji had teachers' unions, and there were increased Government requirements for the training and registration of teachers. Other island administrations soon followed. At the same time, the Church's growing need for better-educated employees in all areas of mission activities led to more interisland pupils attending Fulton College—a trend that was further strengthened when Fulton College came under the control of the union in 1949.<sup>7</sup> Other training centers were established, particularly to meet the increasing church growth in Papua New Guinea (PNG). A start to training workers was made at Merigeda in Papua, but World War II ended the program there. Not long after the war Jones Missionary College began providing training at Kambubu on the island of New Britain, particularly serving the needs of eastern PNG and the Solomon Islands. Later, training of future employees was also carried out at Kabiufa in the highlands of New Guinea to help meet the growing needs of what was then Papua and New Guinea. In 1968 the training programs offered at Kambubu and Kabiufa were combined and relocated near Kokopo on New Britain Island when Sonoma Adventist College was established.<sup>8</sup>

## Need for a Tertiary Institution in the Pacific to Train Secondary School Teachers

As early as the middle 1960s a number of the staff at Fulton College urged the need for a fully tertiary college to be established, separate from elementary and secondary classes, with qualified staff and specialized facilities. Some church leaders considered that the burgeoning needs of the Church in the islands for more highly trained indigenous employees could be met by sending selected students to Avondale College in Australia, and a few students were sent on such a plan, but with only limited success. It was clear that such a program would not meet the ever-increasing needs of the island missions for trained personnel and at the same time satisfy the educational desires of the growing number of Adventist youth wanting to gain professional qualifications in a Christian environment.

In the Christmas vacation of 1968, Pastor Ken Gray, education director for the Central Pacific Union Mission (CPUM), convened a CPUM Board of Education meeting at Fulton College, to which were invited a number of the principals of junior secondary schools the Church was operating in such scattered areas as Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, and New Hebrides (later to become Vanuatu)—all within that Union. One of the items discussed at the meeting was the urgent need to train local men and women as secondary teachers for those rapidly developing secondary schools. Some at the meeting believed such training could commence at Fulton as early as the following year. Pastor Gray challenged them to come up with a more detailed plan. A small group, one of whom was Glynn Litster, worked late into the night to outline the needs and possibilities, which they presented to the meeting the next day. After discussion and small changes to the proposal, it was referred to the CPUM Executive Committee and by them to the Australasian Division.<sup>9</sup> The suggested plan was not fully followed, but Fulton College did start training junior secondary teachers, and from that time the need for a tertiary institution for the island territories of the division was kept under serious discussion.

One who took the need seriously was Pastor Lance Butler, Australasian Division treasurer, who by the mid-1970s was already allocating funds toward the establishment of a tertiary college to serve the island union missions. In July 1977, a meeting of island field education and division representatives was held in Honiara, Solomon Islands, to further discuss the need for an island field tertiary college. A clear decision was made to request the division to plan for such a college to serve the needs of the island unions.<sup>10</sup> In that the planned tertiary college was to serve the union missions in the same way as Avondale College, a division institution, served the more established unions of the division, the Island institution should also be a division institution. The division acted promptly on the request and subsequently took responsibility for the financing, planning, and establishment of the new institution. Dr. Gerald Clifford, the division education director, took a very personal interest in the needs, and possibilities, of the proposed college.

The division administration requested that a study be made of where such a college could best be established, the land and environmental qualities that should be met, and staff and facility needs for such a college. Ray Wilkinson, who had just completed a division-sponsored doctorate involving educational administration, facility planning, and curriculum development at Andrews University, and who had administrative experience in both Fulton and Sonoma Colleges, was given the task of drafting a set of land and facility requirements. The proposal was to include an estimate of major plant and utility needs together with the administrative, academic, and support staff that would be needed to establish a tertiary college for the islands. His draft was subsequently studied by architects and various division committees. Concurrently, the division initiated a search for a suitable site.

## A Site Close to Port Moresby

The search team considered land in Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea (PNG). Criteria considered included a reasonably large estate allowing for agricultural use, with suitable building sites, easy access to overseas shipping and air terminals, reasonable proximity to a commercial center, and if possible, to government offices and other tertiary institutions. No suitable site that met those requirements was found in either Fiji or the Solomon Islands. Toward the end of 1978, Pastor Lester Lock, who had spent most of his life in Papua New Guinea, was asked to check out possible sites in that nation, which certainly had the largest population of the territories involved—over three times the population of all other island territories in the Australasian Division combined. Accompanied by Pastor Yori Hibo, president of the Central Papua Mission, and David Sutcliffe, the union education director, he finally found a suitable block of land said to be about 460 hectares (1.77 sq. miles) in area, and some 21 kilometers (13 miles) from Port Moresby, the capital of PNG, on the Sogeri Road, which was a sealed road. The land had good access to Port Moresby's water supply and to electricity and telephone services. It was close to Port Moresby's international airport, PNG's government offices, the University of Papua New Guinea, and Port Moresby's port and commercial area.

The land, known as Tanuabada (meaning "a large plain"), had formerly been a traditional fighting area where the Koiari people of the mountains and the Motu people of the coast would war. Once Papua came under Australian administration, government forces imposed peace, and the land was used for some time as a tobacco farm and pig farm. During the Second World War, it became the site of a United States army camp. After the war, a cattle station and dairy farm were established there, but the leaseholders had decided to close their venture. After negotiations, which involved the Koiari people, who were the traditional owners, the PNG Government, and the Church, a long-term lease (99 years) was agreed and the estate, which the Church decided would be called Koiari Park in honor of the traditional owners, was secured as the site where the Church would establish a tertiary college to serve the Division's Island fields. The property had flat areas suitable for farming, and three areas where small lakes could be formed, slightly higher land where major buildings could be established, and

some raised land suitable for home sites for faculty members and administrators. The same year the lease was confirmed, 1979, Phillip Ellison and some national farm workers moved onto the property and began caring for the fences, roads, and cattle on the block and also began growing food crops. Once sites had been decided and building work was about to start, Carl and Carol Stoneman were appointed by the division to oversee the building work carried out by both volunteer builders and the building contractors. Carol served as a volunteer business manager until mid-1982, when John Pocock was appointed as business manager for the project.

## Pacific Adventist College

The first person actually appointed to the staff of the future college was Brian Townend, who had been librarian at Avondale College (and before that Fulton College). Starting in 1981, he was allocated facilities in the Avondale College Library and began collecting and categorizing books for the future library. Thousands of books were gathered, processed, and packed ready to be shipped to the site as soon as a library building had been completed.<sup>11</sup> Toward the end of 1981, Dr. Ray Wilkinson was appointed to be the principal of the college, and in 1982, he began recruiting staff and planning the work to be completed before the college opened.

Site works were begun in 1980, and roads, building sites, lakes, and a sewerage pond were formed. Major building work started in 1981 and continued into 1984. College buildings, such as the library and administration block, lecture and specialized classroom blocks, residences for the single ladies and single men, and “village” clusters of married student homes, were built by commercial contractors. Faculty and staff homes were built by volunteers from Australia and some local builders, but all was done under the careful supervision of Carl Stoneman, the division-appointed clerk of works. Toward the end of 1982, the college was offered quite a large building, the Government’s Kone Powerhouse, which was being replaced, on condition that college workers would move the building from its site and leave the site clear. The building team accepted the challenge, and under Carl Stoneman’s leadership moved the building in sections to the college campus and set it up as an engineering and farm building. From the sale of copper wiring in the structure, they were able to line the building and provide a color-bond roof. That building has proved very important for the engineering and farm work of the college.

The name chosen for the college was Pacific Adventist College (PAC). During 1982 and the first half of 1983, a draft bill was negotiated by the Church and its legal advisors and the PNG Government. This was accomplished with the assistance of Dr. Geoff Gibson, who had long been a leader in PNG’s education system and later joined the college staff as head of its Education Department. On August 12, 1983, that bill, the Pacific Adventist College Act, was passed by the PNG Government (as Act No. 24, 1983) giving authority to the Church to operate a recognized tertiary institution, and the college was notified the next day.<sup>12</sup> The act recognized that the college would have a Christian educational philosophy, would be accepting students from many island territories, and would want to employ some lecturers and staff members from other island territories as well as PNG. The

college was authorized by the act to award degrees, to set up subsidiary campuses, and to add new areas of study to its program.

By early 1983 a nucleus staff was in residence, including the principal, business manager, academic dean, librarian, registrar, heads of the training departments—theology, education, business, secretarial, manual arts, and agriculture—and the work of planning courses and preparing for the acceptance of students and planning for the commencement of classes was carried out. Because students were to be accepted from different island territories, which had different secondary school systems and standards, great care had to be taken to set close to equivalent requirements so that students accepted into course programs would have an adequate background of knowledge and study skills to build on. The college also planned for some “preliminary classes,” which could help students considered to need some preparatory work in basic subject areas to lay a foundation for later course programs. That preliminary program was soon found to be unnecessary because of the large number of applicants to the college who met the prerequisites for the course work, but some remedial subjects were retained to help students who needed such help—particularly in English.

Getting the college facilities and grounds ready for the opening involved a great deal of work. Much help was given by volunteer groups from nearby Adventist churches, and those few resident college administrators, lecturers, and staff members and their families were also very generous in the extra help they gave. A bonus came when a group of students who, because of available cheaper travel arrangements, arrived from Fiji some weeks before the official opening of the college, willingly helped to get the grounds and facilities ready for the opening.

The college was officially opened by Sir Michael Somare, prime minister of PNG, on Monday, February 13, 1984, with representatives from several Island governments, all levels of the Adventist Church from General Conference to local missions, and many local friends present. Shirley Tarburton listed the newly appointed faculty and staff who were present: “Principal Ray Wilkinson, Academic Dean Allen Sonter, Registrars Don Halliday and Ruth Tame, Business Manager John Pocock, Head of Theology Pr Len Tolhust, Head of Education Dr Geoff Gibson, Head of Commerce Dr Pak Thong Lee, Head of Humanities Richard G. Anderson, Head of Science Dr Laurie Draper, Head of Manual Arts Dennis Tame, Head of Agricultural Science Ken Dever, Director of Student Services Pr Saula Ratu, Dean of Men Pr Jim Manele, Dean of Women Beverly Kaleva, Church pastor Pr Neil Watts, Food Services Director Eva Ratu, Martin and Olga Ward, Nemani and Francoise Tausere, Bryan and Rebecca Paul, David and Jenny Williamson, Merle Marx, Billy Kaleva. Nolly Noah, and numerous others who were employed in the office, farm, primary schools, library, security and maintenance.”<sup>43</sup>

The next day the class program began. Both students and staff were very cooperative in coping with the birthing needs of the new institution, and in later years the first year or two was sometimes referred to as the “Honeymoon years” of PAC. That first year there were 13 faculty members and only 107 students from 10 Pacific countries, and the courses offered were bachelor’s degrees in theology and education, and diploma programs in

theology, education, commerce (accounting), and commerce (secretarial skills). Some students had completed diploma level study at Fulton College, so they could proceed into degree classes. Others had completed part of the diploma requirements and were able to complete their diploma level in their first year at PAC, so at the end of 1984, twenty-five graduated with diplomas. By the end of 1985, eleven students gained the first PAC degrees (5 in Theology, and 6 in Education), and a further 28 gained diplomas.<sup>14</sup>

Those planning the course curricula had sought to devise a program in which the mental, physical, social, and spiritual needs of the students were met in a balanced way. For that reason, one of the elements of the program developed was the work education requirement, by which all students were required to participate in practical work as part of their educational program. Ancillary staff members, including the engineer, food service director, office and library personnel, dormitory supervisors, building and maintenance directors, and the farm and campus supervisors, were asked to supervise and instruct students in their practical work assignments. The students' work input meant that the college did not need to employ as many staff members to carry out tasks students could perform, and the reduced expense enabled the college to keep fees more affordable. Work education also helped to produce responsible students with desirable work attitudes and skills, and graduates were soon sought after not only by the Seventh-day Adventist Church but also by business and government employers. Often, when accounting or secretarial students were allocated to gain work experience required as part of their course in government or business offices, they were offered immediate or future employment by the group they worked for. The work education program is still a feature of the university's program,<sup>15</sup> though the required hours of work have been reduced. With financial help from the division, it became possible to introduce a work sponsorship program by which a limited number of students were able to work their way through their study years by working extra hours during the semesters and full-time for the college during college breaks.

From the time of its opening, the college was successful in attracting motivated and cooperative students as well as experienced, qualified staff. Some of the early graduates went on to other universities for advanced education not being offered at PAC and performed well. Their success earned the college a good reputation and encouraged wide acceptance of qualifications students had received at PAC. Soon the graduates were receiving recognition throughout the South Pacific region. Diploma in business graduates were accepted into membership by the PNG Association of Accountants. PAC's bachelor of theology program was recognized by the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools, and education graduates were being accepted and registered as teachers in their home areas.<sup>16</sup>

With its carefully designed buildings, roads, and lakes, as the campus was developed it became recognized as a very attractive place, and visitors would come just to enjoy its beauty and tranquility and would sit under trees by the lakes to enjoy a picnic. Another reason many visitors came was the abundance of bird life. Even before the college opened, the whole of Koiari Park was declared a bird sanctuary, and efforts were made to grow features that would attract bird life. The lakes also became a stopping place for many migrating flocks of birds.

As its reputation became known, avid bird-watchers from overseas came to study the various groups of birds in bush areas, the farm, and the campus and lakes.<sup>17</sup>

Right from the college's start, the students and staff became involved in meeting local needs. Friendly help such as literacy programs, instruction and help in the growing of food crops, and domestic skills such as sewing, cooking, and child care were offered in some of the nearby settlements. Such community help reflected the motto chosen by the college, "Educate to Serve." The college personnel also helped meet the needs of Adventist Churches in the area and started a number of branch Sabbath Schools. Before long, it was possible to meet with Bible study groups, and there are now several Adventist churches in the area around the college that have been established as a result of the outreach programs initiated. The proximity to the city of Port Moresby, capital of PNG, has also been an advantage with its commercial center and port, government offices, international airport, University of Papua New Guinea, many Adventist churches, and the headquarters of the Central Papua Conference.

From its opening in 1984, the educational institution has had an elementary school to serve staff and married students' children as well as some children from the community. That school has proved very efficient over the years and had an interesting bonus benefit for the college community. In the early years when PAC was experiencing some problems from gangs who came to steal, because a number of elementary pupils came from police families at the police staff homes in nearby Bomana, the police took a particular interest in our institution and their response to any reports of trouble were both quick and effective—a help on a number of occasions.

## Pacific Adventist University

An important development and change to the status of the college came in November 1996, when after much negotiation between the SDA Church and the PNG government, the PNG parliament passed the Pacific Adventist University Act (Act No. 34, 1997), by which PAC was given university status and the name was changed to Pacific Adventist University (PAU). The change involved some reorganization, such as the principal being titled vice-chancellor, departments being termed schools, with each school headed by a dean.<sup>18</sup>

Since that date, considerable development has continued, with additional land being added to the Koiari Park estate so that the total area is now 487 hectares (1.88 sq. miles),<sup>19</sup> and buildings and additional courses have been added. In 2000, a bachelor of science degree was added (science had previously been offered only as a secondary school teaching field), and a master's program was commenced as a part-time program involving summer-schools. In 2001, the Sopas School of Nursing was relocated on the PAU campus. In 2002 building commenced on a PAU Church, and that much-needed facility was officially opened September 6, 2003, by Papua New Guinea's governor general, Sir Silas Atopare.<sup>20</sup> Other building projects have included additional residences for the single women and the single men and new specialized classroom blocks. In 2005 the new School of Health Science block, financed from the PNG Incentive Fund financed by the Australian Government, was

officially opened by Sir Michael Somare, who had opened the college in 1984.<sup>21</sup> In addition, recently a building for the School of Arts and Humanities has been added, as has a building for the School of Business, and an administration block. Another recent addition has been the studio rooms for radio station 2G 97.9 FM, and PAU is also now involved in helping the production and broadcast of Hope TV programs in PNG. In 2015, Pacific Adventist University established its second campus by its amalgamation with the Atoifi Adventist College of Nursing on the island of Malaita in the Solomon Islands, thus forming the Solomon Island Campus of Pacific Adventist University and offering a bachelor of nursing. In June 2016, a new secondary school complex was opened in the Koiari Park estate to house the Koiari Park Adventist Secondary School, which had commenced operation in 2013.<sup>22</sup>

In 2009 PAU published its first issue of *Davaria: Journal of Pacific Adventist University* as an electronic publication, which gave staff and students the opportunity to publish items on the history, developments, and even dreams of possible future growth and development of the institution.<sup>23</sup>

The University has recorded that its Mission and Vision are as follows:

Our Mission is to prepare GRADUATES who are equipped and willing to serve their Community, their Country, their Church and their God.<sup>24</sup>

The vision for its future has also been stated as follows:

Our Vision is to be the BEST provider of quality tertiary Christian education in the Pacific Islands. This will be achieved by being:

Biblically Sound

Educationally Valid

Spiritually Challenging

Technologically Relevant.<sup>25</sup>

Since 1984 PAC-PAU's tertiary enrollment has grown from the initial 107 in 1984 to 1,202 in 2017 (that total includes 52 School of Nursing students at the Atoifi, Solomon Islands campus). From 1984 to 2016, a total of 2,918 graduates have gained diplomas and degrees from PAC and PAU.<sup>26</sup> Many graduates have served as leaders in their communities, their church's programs, and some in national governments. Some are now department heads at PAU, having gained higher qualifications, mainly at overseas institutions of learning.

PAU's academic program is currently (2019) organized into four schools, each operating its own academic program. The schools are School of Business; School of Health Science; School of Humanities, Education, and Theology; and the School of Science and Technology. In addition, there is an Office of Research and

Postgraduate Studies and an Institute of Alternative Energy.<sup>27</sup>

In recent years PAU has increasingly featured in research projects. Some projects are by individual students writing these for graduate degrees, while others have been on behalf of the PNG government and many are carried out in collaboration with other institutions such as Deacon University in Australia, The Australian Center for International Agricultural Research, The University of Canberra in Australia, the National Agriculture Institute in PNG, Massey University in New Zealand, and The University of Cincinnati in the United States. Research projects involve topics as diverse as "Improving the Lives of People in Rural Communities," "Early Childhood Education in PNG," "Gender-Based Violence in Rural Communities," "Good Governance for Political Leadership," and "Radiation Research."<sup>28</sup>

## The Mission of PAU

Indicative of the academic status of PAU is a statement taken from the *2016 Academic Bulletin*.

Pacific Adventist University is a member of the worldwide network of Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities. Along with more than one hundred other colleges and universities, it is currently accredited by the Adventist Accreditation Association (AAA), the accrediting association of Seventh-day Adventist schools, colleges, and universities across the world. This accreditation gives Pacific Adventist University degree holders potential access to postgraduate programs around the world.

Pacific Adventist University courses are recognised in most South Pacific countries, including Australia and New Zealand. Pacific Adventist University and Pacific Adventist College graduates have successfully studied at Avondale College, Edith Cowan University, James Cook University, the University of Newcastle, the University of Southern Queensland, the University of Sydney, and the University of Wollongong in Australia, and at Massey University in New Zealand. In the United States of America, they have studied at Andrews University, La Sierra University, and Loma Linda University.

Professional recognition of relevant programmes is granted by the following professional bodies:

Certified Practising Accountants Papua New Guinea (BBus)

The Nursing Council of Papua New Guinea (BM and BN) and the Solomon Islands Nursing Council (BN)

The Papua New Guinea Teaching Service Commission (BEd [Sec]).<sup>29</sup>

Pacific Adventist University is continuing to expand and to serve its region. It was recently stated by Professor Ben Thomas, then vice-chancellor, that so long as there is the necessary external financial support for PAU, the University could foresee a 5 percent annual increase in its enrollments.

## Principals of Pacific Adventist College (1982–1997)

Ray Wilkinson (1982–1991); Allen Sonter (1992–1994); Owen Hughes (1995–1997)

## Vice-Chancellors of Pacific Adventist University (1998–)

Owen Hughes (1998–1998 1st semester); Harold Peters (1998 2nd semester–2002); Nemani Tausere (2003–2006); Branimir Schubert (2007–2010); Ben Thomas (2011–2016); Raul Lozano (2017–)

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2. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), s.v. "Fulton, John Edwin."
3. Eric B. Hare, *Fulton's Footprints in Fiji* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1969), 105–117.
4. Buresala was a forerunner of Fulton College. See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Fulton College."
5. Ibid.
6. Much of the history of this institution is based on the personal knowledge of the author as the founding principal of Pacific Adventist College.
7. Ibid.
8. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Sonoma Adventist College."
9. Glynn Litster, e-mail message to author, October 24, 2016.
10. *Academic Bulletin*, Pacific Adventist University, June 3, 2016, 11.

11. Brian Townend and Daphne Townend, interview by author, Avondale Lifestyle Community, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia, February 14, 2017.
12. Raymond Wilkinson, personal knowledge as the first principal of Pacific Adventist College.
13. Shirley R. Tarburton, "PAU Twenty-Five Years Ago," *Davaria: Journal of Pacific Adventist University* 1 (2009), 5, [http://pau.adventistconnect.org/uploaded\\_assets/440599-Davaria\\_Volume\\_1.pdf?thumbnail=original&1431991708](http://pau.adventistconnect.org/uploaded_assets/440599-Davaria_Volume_1.pdf?thumbnail=original&1431991708).
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