

Professor Richard P. Rickerts



Professor Rickerts as he appeared in May 1941 at the Kodenkan dojo in Honolulu.

Professor Richard Peter Rickerts became a Jujutsu student of Professor Okazaki in 1932. He became an instructor in 1938 and eventually headed the dojo at the Army Navy YMCA. He was one of the principle teachers of Jujutsu at the Kodenkan in the late 1930's and early 1940's.

Richard Peter Rickerts was born on July 18, 1906, in Petaluma, California. Both his mother and father were of German descent. His mother was born in Germany and immigrated to the U.S. at the age of sixteen. His father was born in California of German parents.

Rickerts attended three primary schools in Petaluma. After having trouble getting along with his teacher, Rickerts persuaded his parents to send him to a small country school in San Antone County, CA. Here, he attended the 7th and 8th grades. Rickerts recalled that his teacher, Mrs. Fallon was instrumental in

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keeping him motivated in attending school and not dropping out. After that he attended part-time school learning shop mechanics and citizenship.

From early in his life Rickerts lived in an farming environment. He was always expected to perform chores associated with tending chickens, cows, horses and other duties. His grandfather owned the farm, while his father was employed in a shoe factory in town. Rickerts' first salaried job was helping a man who went from farm to farm buying burlap sacks and then selling them to a feed company. He did this job during summer vacation and his pay was \$0.25 per day plus lunch. His next job was a major step-up. His father got him a job at the shoe factory for \$0.12 per hour! The next summer, he worked for \$15.00 a week plus board on a haypress owned by Stone Bros. Wood and Coal Yard in Petaluma.

Rickerts graduated from the San Antone School in December 1917, but two days later, he suffered a severe case of tonsillitis. He was hospitalized at the Hanemann Free Clinic in San Francisco. His tonsils were removed, and he was laid up in excess of two months.

After working several other jobs of the same type as before, Rickerts was, as he put it, "seized with wanderlust". He worked with several building contractors in Petaluma. During slow periods, he began to seriously pursue one of his favorite hobbies, amateur boxing. This would have important consequences in his future.

In the spring of 1927, Rickerts' wanderlust became a reality. He and two of his friends (each with about \$14.00) boarded a freight train and headed east. Their goal was the east coast. They made stops in Sacramento, CA, Truckee, CA and then Reno, NV. They then rode back to Sacramento where Rickerts' friends separated and headed back to Petaluma and San Francisco. After several months in Sacramento and then Modesto, CA, Rickerts caught a car ride to Los Angeles. After arriving there, Rickerts found work at a garage.

Rickerts' stay in Los Angeles lasted about six months. During that time, he nearly invested a thousand dollars in a future orange grove in Granada. He made a down payment of \$100 on the property. After about a month of reconsidering the deal, he decided not to invest the rest of the money and chalked the hundred dollars up to experience.

Following his experience in Los Angeles, Rickerts again hopped a freight train. This time it was headed home. While working several odd jobs, he continued his boxing and in October 1929, he won the Pacific Coast Jr. Amateur Lightweight Boxing Championship.

After moving to San Mateo and working with several heating firms, Rickerts began to train at the Olympic Gym in San Francisco. He fought a tough lightweight division bout at the 1930 Far Western Amateur Championship Tournament with his friend Don Gomez, but Gomez was the winner. The next big event was a tryout for the National Championships at New York. This time the coach had Rickerts represent the club in the welterweight division. In his first bout, he drew the most experienced fighter in the division, Joe Terzo, a southpaw from San Jose, CA. The first punch Terzo threw was a left to Rickert's chin that decidedly knocked him down. Rickerts recalled, "The first thing I knew was that I was down, and the referee had just counted six. I waited for the count of eight before rising and when I did, Terzo came towards me with a confident smirk on his face to finish me. This made me very angry, so I stepped in and let my right go inside his left, landing on his chin and knocking him off his feet. He jumped up without taking a count, so I let him have another. This time he stayed down for the full nine counts. From then on, the whole fight seemed like a dream and I had no clear recollection of it, being dazed or punch drunk until the next morning. The fight was called a draw at the end of three rounds, so we had to fight an extra round, which the judges gave to him and that was my last fight in San Francisco."

In April of 1931, Rickerts signed on to work on the Gulf Pacific Line Freighter Point Montara. This took him to a variety of ports including Vancouver, Seattle and Portland. Later, the ship sailed through the Panama Canal to South America. While in the small seaport of Barranquilla, Rickerts nearly got stranded when he was late for his ship. As he told it, "Four of us went ashore in the morning to spend what was left of our South American money, the ship being scheduled to leave at noon. So about eleven o'clock I mentioned that we had better get back to the ship. Well we decided to get some more beer, which called for one more, I tried again at eleven thirty to get started back, but again we had time for one more. So about five minutes of twelve we pooled the rest of our money to buy a half dozen bottles of beer to take with us. Just as we got to the pier we saw the ship cast off and stand out to sea. So, we dashed out to the customs house on the end of the pier and started to demand transportation from the Spanish customs official that could speak no English. So, we were in a "fine predicament", the ship was about five miles out when all of a sudden it came about and started back, much to our delight. The reason she came back was because there was a half-witted native who had stowed away, and the ship was bound for a British port and had no clearance papers for the native. The captain logged us a two-dollar fine to be given to the Red Cross, so we were tickled to get out of that so easily."

From there the ship sailed on to Kingston Jamaica, Corpus Christi (TX), Galveston, Houston, Tampa (FL), Mobile (AL) and New Orleans (LA). During this trip Rickerts and several of the crew had become angry with the steward. The steward had not adequately provided good food nor linens for them. Upon

arriving in New Orleans in June of 1931, Rickerts and one of his shipmates decided to quit and square their account with the steward. Rickerts tells, "So after moving our clothes uptown and then getting our money and discharges, we waited for a chance to get the steward. The chance came when he left the galley to go to his storeroom. I had Joe Paxton go to a thwart (crossways) ship passageway, so we would have him in between us. Just as he came out of his storeroom I started walking towards him and when he came within range I let him have my right as hard as I could hit. The blow caught him on the cheek and the force carried him backwards. At the same time, he spun around so that he fell on his face beyond the passage where Joe was. As he jumped up to his feet and started down the passageway I sped him on his way with a well-directed kick. Knowing that he was after the ships first officer for help, we immediately jumped ship and got a taxicab for town."

Since the shipping business was poor at that time Rickerts and Paxton headed back to San Francisco over land. Since this was during the height of the Great Depression, work was scarce. Soon after his return to the west coast, a friend of Rickerts offered to pay his fare to Honolulu and put him up until he could find work. On Sept 26, 1931 he boarded the Wilhemina of the Matson line bound for Honolulu. The ship landed in Honolulu on Oct. 2, 1931. Rickerts described his arrival as follows: "My friends (the Dunn family) were on the dock to meet me. They placed two leis of carnation flowers around my neck, a lovely Hawaiian Aloha custom. They made me feel as though I were a loved member of the family and my first impression of Honolulu was very favorable. It was about the happiest and contented place I have ever experienced or at least that is the way it seemed to me."

Shortly after his arrival in Hawaii, Rickerts found work with several building contractors. It was not long after this that he once again started to box professionally. His initial three fights were not very lucrative, and he resolved not to fight again unless there was a fair purse. While training at the gym, he became acquainted with some boxers on the Coast Guard Cutter Itasca and their trainer Mr. Dickinson. Dickinson told Rickerts that he would like to have me join the Coast Guard so that he could fight for them. Attracted by this offer, Rickerts enlisted on March 26, 1932 as an apprentice seaman. With the Coast Guard, he was able to continue his boxing career and not have to worry about meals and housing. On the day following his enlistment, he was matched against the 14th Naval District Champion and won a very easy decision along with the championship belt. He represented the Navy in the Army & Navy championship matches in 1932 and fought to a draw. He also fought several inter-service matches and had no trouble winning. Rickerts quit boxing in 1932.

Shortly after his retirement from boxing, Rickerts enrolled in a Jujutsu class at the school of Prof. Henry S. Okazaki. He enjoyed the class, but after 3 months

of practice, he suffered a badly dislocated ankle that kept him limping for more than a year. During this time, he continued his service with the Coast Guard on the USCGC Itasca. (Note: The Coast Guard cutter Itasca was the ship that received the final radio transmission from Amelia Earhart before her plane was lost in the south Pacific on July 2, 1937.)

In March 1935, the Itasca left for the South Seas under sealed orders, with men and supplies on board from the Department of the Interior. Rickerts later found out that the mission was to colonize Jarvis, Baker, and Howland Islands. They left parties of five men and supplies on each island and then sailed to Samoa. After they went on to Honolulu where Rickerts left the Coast Guard and registered with the Seamen's Institute. He signed on to the SS Lurline and sailed to San Francisco for a reunion with his family. In June 1935, Rickerts signed on to another ship, the SS President Lincoln and sailed to New York via the Panama Canal and Cuba. During this trip he also stopped in San Francisco and visited with his family. The trips continued into the Pacific with stops in San Pedro, Honolulu, Yokohama, Kobe, Shanghai, HongKong, Manila and then back to San Francisco. After being discharged from this ship, Rickerts sailed back to Honolulu and arrived on October 12, 1935. He then started work for a plumbing company at Pearl Harbor.

On November 1, 1936, Rickerts enrolled in the Army & Navy YMCA Jujitsu Class with Instructor Harold E. McLean (a student of Prof. Okazaki). The following February, he joined Budokukai Society, a Japanese athletic organization which promoted interest in Jujitsu, Kendo, and Archery. On May 25, 1936 awarded the brown obi, by Instructor McLean. (At this time, the brown belt was used to indicate Ikkyu.) Rickerts noted that he had never been so enthused over anything in his life as Jujitsu. He was fully determined to earn the first rank and be awarded the black obi. He spent all of his spare time practicing Jujitsu and studying anatomy. On Sept 10, 1936, Prof. Uto, a 7th rank Jujitsu Instructor from Japan, visited the Army & Navy YMCA. Rickerts learned several valuable arts from him during his month-long stay in the islands.

Over the preceding six-month period, Rickerts and McLean had become very good friends and since they lived in the same building, they were together almost every day. About the middle of July, at 4:00 AM, the elevator boy called Rickerts and said that McLean wished to see him in the lobby. Upon arriving, Rickerts found McLean in the lobby suffering intensely from his kidneys. He called a taxi and accompanied him to the Queens Hospital. The doctors couldn't seem to find out just what was the matter. They took many x-rays and about 15 cystoscopic operations during the next two months. During his episodes of intense pain, which he had about six times a day, the doctors gave him injections. McLean returned home around the middle of August, but three days later he was readmitted to the hospital. This time he underwent surgery

to remove his appendix and about 18 inches of his intestine. He recovered well from the surgery, but his heart was in pretty bad shape. During this time, McLean was only able to attend the Jujutsu class. Prof. Uto did the instruction.

Rickerts described the next few days: “On Saturday night we went to the Waikiki Theatre together, and he felt pretty good. The next evening, I called at his room but he had already gone out. As I later found out, he went to the Princess Theatre and while he was there he got in a fight with some drunk and knocked him out. The excitement and physical effort started his heart to ‘act up’ so he dropped in to a restaurant for a bite to eat and while he was in there he got into an argument with another drunk, which further aggravated his condition. He went home and about nine o’clock that evening the desk clerk received a phone call to come up to the third floor, and when he did he found Prof. McLean sitting the floor and shaking like a leaf. He called an ambulance and they took him back to the Queens Hospital. The next day pneumonia set in and his condition became very grave. At 4 am on Thursday, I received a call from the hospital to come at once; the nurse told me that he was in a critical condition but there was still a chance for him to pull thru. So, I decided that to talk to him then would weaken him further and also alarm him, so I stayed just outside of his ward until 5.30; I then had to leave for work. I left word to call Prof. Okazaki at 7, and I called Mr. Glover before leaving for work. Prof. Okazaki stayed with him from 7 until 8 am and had a long talk with him; his last wish was for us to keep the Jujitsu class going, naming Emil Freedman, D. Muggie, Charles Wagner R. Glover and myself. Freedman came just as Prof. Okazaki left, and was with him until the end; he passed on at 8:25. I received word of it at 9 am and requested 2 days leave to attend to funeral arrangements. Only had seven hours leave left, so had 1-day leave without pay. Prof. McLean had no relatives here, so Mr. Glover cabled his brother, who was in the army on the east coast, informing him of the passing of his brother and requested authority to move his effects, and disposition of the body. In the meantime, I wrote his brother a letter giving all the details since I knew Prof. McLean. Mr. Borthwick, a mortician and Lodge brother, took care of the body free of charge, until they shipped the body to Boston on the Army transport, on October 12.”

The death of McLean had a profound effect upon Rickerts, the other students and especially Prof. Okazaki. The Army-Navy YMCA dojo was closed until October 4, 1938. A special service was held there on October 13.

On Dec. 14, 1938, Prof Okazaki hosted a Sukiyaki dinner at his home. At this event, he showed Rickerts and some others the black belt diplomas and explained the traditions and history of the diplomas. On the following Jan. 7, a Jujitsu ceremony was held to open the New Year at Prof. Okazaki’s Kodokan Dojo. Rickerts and the others took part in a demonstration of Shime No Kata,

and Knife and Sword defense. Afterwards, they received the “Black Obi”, and a blessing from the Buddhist priest.

On Jan. 23, Prof. Okazaki had several of the older members of the Judo Class to his home for breakfast after the usual Sunday morning class. Okazaki explained to the group that on the 23rd of each month, he partook of no meat or fish in honor of H. E. McLean, who passed on the 23rd day of the month. On Feb. 1, Prof. Okazaki started to instruct the “Black Obi” class in Shinyo No Maki. By Feb. 2, Rickerts divided Army & Navy Judo Class into two classes, the Sr., or instructor class on Mondays and Thursday nights, and Jr., or self-defense class on Wednesday and Friday nights. There was also a special class on Saturday afternoons. On Feb. 25, The senior students presented a Judo demonstration at the University of Hawaii, (Atherton House). This was the first public demonstration of Shinin No Maki for the first time.

On March 20, Rickerts and others received Budokukai examination for rank of Shodan. Rickerts recalled that on May 3, they received word from Japan of the passing of Prof. Jigoro Kano. Rickerts described him as, “the Grand Old Man of Judo, who holds an honorary rank of 2 degrees above any living instructor.” Funeral services held in honor of Prof. Kano at Kai Shinto Temple on May 9, and about 15 students of Army & Navy YMCA attended.

On May 22, Rickerts and others attended a massage class at Prof. Okazaki home. There Okazaki dissected a young calf after first breaking a bone and bruising various parts of its body. They learned some very interesting things concerning bruises and injuries and their cure and care. A week later, on May 29, Rickerts, Charles Wagner, Denzel E. Muggie, Emil Freedman, and Robert Glover received an instructor’s diploma, listing 375 Arts, and the history of Ju Jitsu, the History of my instructor, and my own history, also the Ethics and philosophy of Jiu Jitsu. On June 4, at a dinner at Prof. Okazaki’s home Rickerts, Wagner and Freedman and received Instruction form Prof. Kosokabe, (Prof. Okazaki’s Instructor) on the history and Ethics expected from Judo Instructors.

On Sept. 3, the group received instruction in the first 5 Arts of Shingen. On Sept. 18, Rickerts attended a ceremony for presentation of Judo and Massage Diplomas to Don Carver. Presented Don Carver with a Knife, (inscribed) in behalf of Army & Navy YMCA Judo Class. The next week, on Sept. 23, Rickerts took the day off to see Don Carver away. He also presided as Chairman for the A&N YMCA at the Buddhist Memorial Service in honor of the memory of H. E. McLean. Two days later, he attended Kodenkan party in honor of the 100th Birthday of Col. Pierre Baron and presented him a gift of 100 dollars. This was donated by Prof. Okazaki and his Class.

On Oct. 16, Rickerts won a Mantle Clock as his first-place winner's prize in a five-man Sumo Contest. The next day, he was in attendance as Prof. Okazaki presented Bud Estes with Black Obi. Estes was the first student of A&N YMCA to receive this honor since Rickerts and D. Muggy had been instructing.

On Jan. 6, Rickerts and Muggy participated in a sword defense demonstration at opening of the New Year ceremony at Kodenkan.

On Mar. 10, Bud Estes Black Belt Jujitsu Student left for California to start a Ju Jitsu School. On Mar. 27, Rickerts started new system of classes and pay for the same at A&N YMCA. Self Defense class 2.50 per month, Ju Jitsu class 3.50 per month, and both classes five dollars per month.

On Apr. 23, Rickerts participated in the Black belt and diploma presentation honoring Ray Law. On May 21, Rickerts took examination for Ni Dan or second rank black belt. The next week, on May 30, Rickerts participated in diploma and black belt presentations at Prof. Okazaki's dojo. Of the 17 men receiving honors, 8 were from A&N Y Class: J. Swearingen, M. Anderson, L. Davis, T. Muran, Ed Smith, Lt. R. A. Keating, Souza, and V. Ward.

On Sept. 1, Rickerts changed the A&N YMCA self-defense class to a Police class. On Sept. 19, he held a meeting of the black belt group to organize Jujitsu Guild.

On Oct. 19, five Ju Jitsu experts from Training ships called at A&N YMCA to give instruction in Jujitsu. They were H. Hozoya, Y. Sakabe, F. Sakasaki, S. Kuhara and D. Ito. On Oct. 21, Rickerts participated in the Judo Welcome matches at Budokukai, and lost in a match with 3rd rank expert. He noted that he was, "very proud to have received personal black belt from S. Kuhara, following the matches." On Oct. 22, he attended dinner at Prof. Okazaki's home honoring Kikuta Kesagoro, Director of Judo in Japanese Navy, and all-Navy Champion, (5th rank) and K. Shirato, the previous year's all-Japan Champion. Following the dinner, they demonstrated several arts. The next day, they visited the Japanese training ship Yakumo to call on Prof. Kikuta Kesagoro, who presented Rickerts with a Jujitsu Jacket and his personal Belt, which was quite an honor. By Nov. 1, quite a dispute had developed in local Ju Jitsu schools concerning the welcome matches for the training ships of the Japanese Navy due to the opposition of H. I. Kurasaki of Yudanshakai who opposed any participation of others than Japanese in the matches. When Kurasaki was overruled by the committee, he withdrew all members of his organization.

On Nov. 4, Rickerts and Muggy received the remaining arts of Shingen No Maki from Prof. Okazaki. The next day, a farewell dinner was held at Prof. Okazaki's home for Muggy who was being transferred to the Philippine Islands. On Dec.

23, Rickerts participated in Shinto ceremony and presentation of first diplomas written in English on Restoration Massage. Recipients, M. W. Anderson, Robert Bloem, P. Muslawski, Mr. Okazaki, (Prof. Okazaki's brother), Mrs. Pierce, and Mrs. Kimura.

On Jan. 3, 1940, Rickerts conducted the 1st Jujitsu class of the New Year. On Feb 15, he presented Lt. A. B. Ogden, Dee Rogers with Diplomas at Prof. Okazaki's gym. On May 12, he attended the graduation ceremony at the Kodenkan. Black belt graduates were: Dee Rogers, J. Bloem, P. Muslawski, John Riley, Harry Six, H. Wirta, F. Nice, A. Holtman, (Diplomas); Black belt graduate-A. Andreola; Brownbelt Dan Wallace.

On Sept 14, Rickerts acted as Chairman at a demonstration for John Cahills class. On Oct 2, Rickerts gave Horace H. Smith advanced lessons in Jujitsu as requested by D. Muggy who had instructed Smith in China. Mr. Smith had studied Jujitsu for 8 years while connected with Consulate Service in Orient. On Oct. 16, H. Smith was presented with an instructor's diploma and black belt at Buddhist ceremony at Kodenkan. The next evening, he attended a dinner at Moana Hotel as Horace H. Smith's guest.

Rickerts left the Hawaiian Islands on Dec. 6, 1941, one day before the attack on Pearl Harbor. He settled in the Oakland area where he continued to teach Jujitsu and massage in Oakland and later in San Mateo. Along with Bud Estes, Ray Law and John Cahill, Rickerts founded the American Judo and Jujitsu Federation in 1958.

Professor Rickerts' wife Helen was also a black belt in Jujutsu. They had four children: Robert, Diane, Katherine and John. Professor Rickerts ran the successful Rickerts Drilling Company in the bay area.

Professor Rickerts suffered from Parkinson's disease beginning in the late 1960's and retired from teaching. He passed away in 1989. Helen passed away in 1998.

Note: The majority of this information contained herein (as well as most of the photos below) come from Prof. Rickerts' personal diary. It is used here with permission by his daughter, Diane. Many thanks for sharing this interesting information about your father. Modifications to the third person and minor grammatical changes were made to the text by the editor.

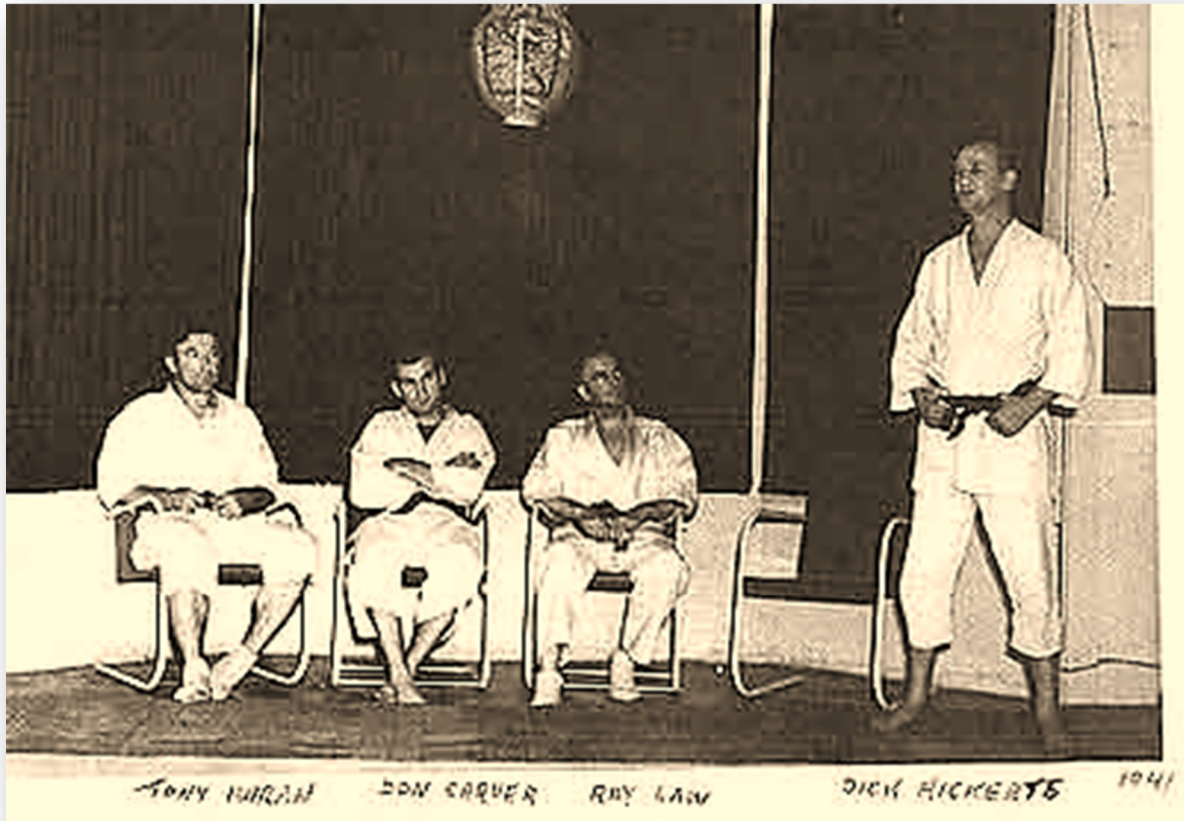
Photos of Prof. Richard Rickerts.



Apprentice Seaman Richard Rickerts after enlisting in the U.S. Coast Guard in Hawaii, March 1932.



Helen and Richard Rickerts in Hawaii in 1941 shortly before sailing to the U.S. mainland.



Tony Muran, Don Carver and Ray Law listen as Richard Rickerts addresses a class at Ray Law's Oakland dojo in 1941.



This picture shows all four founders of the AJJF: John Cahill, Bud Estes, Ray Law and Richard Rickerts. Front (L to R): Abigail Cahill, John Cahill, Bud Estes, Richard Rickerts, Ray Law, Glenn Smith. Back (L to R): Lucille Estes, Lamar Fisher, Marie Law. The photo is circa 1959.



The four founders of the AJJF address the first convention in 1959. Shown here (L to R) are Lucille Estes (seated), Richard Rickerts, Ray Law, John Cahill and Bud Estes .

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