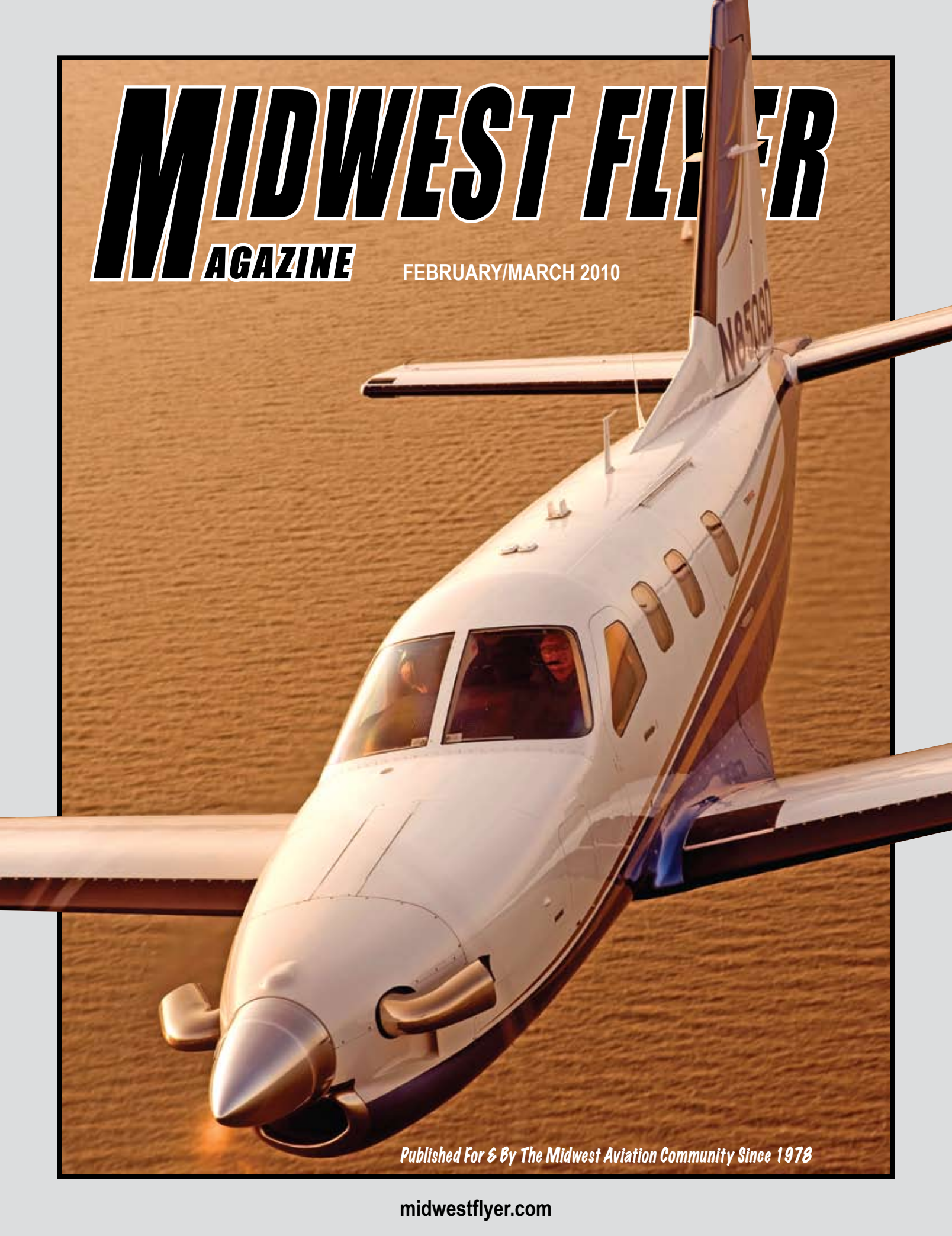


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“Blakesburg”

by Paul Berge

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The sound, like distant gunfire, tapped in uneven beats – *pap...pap-pap...* One eye cracked open, and I awoke to stare up at a full moon robbing the clear night sky of its blackness. By the time the other eye opened, I realized that the sound – *pap...pap-pap-pa* – came from dewdrops rolling off my biplane’s upper wing and striking the lower one. And there were hundreds of these drop strikes all around, because we were camped in a row of biplanes at Antique Airfield (IA27) near Blakesburg, Iowa, home of the Antique Airplane Association (AAA) and the Air Power Museum (APM). This was its annual Labor Day weekend invitational fly-in.

Of course, this same dew also thoroughly soaked our sleeping bags, making it tough to go back to sleep. So, wet, cold and entranced I lay there looking around at dozens of antique airplanes with their tails in the grass. Moonlight washed over the Fleet biplane to our side, its owner asleep beneath a wing. Behind us Jim Jones’ red Meyers OTW glowed deep scarlet in the moonlight; beside it was Captain Downey’s Navy flagged OTW. Further down the line I could



Dr. Brent Blue

make out three Travel Airs, two model 4000s and a rare 4-D. Several Stinsons, Fairchild’s and Wacos, both open cockpit and closed cabin, added to this ghost line as though someone had forgotten to tell them that the 1930s were gone.

That’s the beauty of Blakesburg. It’s a year-round fantasy airfield where pilots can escape the modern world. Although the fly-in is a members-only event, anyone is welcome to join the AAA and participate. You can even drive in. There’s adequate parking with limited room for RVs (the road kind as well as Van’s Aircraft RVs). Officially the fly-in is called a reunion, since hundreds of AAA members arrive from all over the country to spend a few days reacquainting with old friends and family, while their airplanes do what antique airplanes do best – *fly!*

AAA’s mission is to “*Keep the antiques flying.*” This year, 369 antiques, classics, warbirds, neo-classics and homebuilts gathered to fulfill that mandate, making this, according to fly-in chairman, Brent Taylor, “*the best attended five-day event in Antique Airfield’s history.*” Each flying machine brought along at least one human to wipe bugs from its windscreen. As Homeland Security constantly reminds us, humans can be an impediment to flight, but antique airplanes have survived in a hostile world by learning to live in harmony with those humans who recognize the dignity of Joe Shepherd’s 1936 Lockheed 12A, or the timeless elegance of the APM’s Ryan STA.

Dawn Patrol

I don’t remember falling back to sleep, but the next sound I heard was the *clack-clack* of a magneto impulse coupler as someone pulled a propeller through by hand. I know that sound, having flown and taught behind little Continental engines for decades. Without opening my eyes, I could picture the pilot who now called, “*Brakes on, switch on, throttle cracked.*” And when an unseen someone else swung the propeller, the clacks turned to a crisp bark as 65 horses rapped to life. I opened my eyes. There, beyond the row of classic Cessnas – 195s, 170s and a C38



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Airmaster – a lone Aeronca Champ taxied out. Dew streamed across its windshield. The pilot's unkempt hair rustled in the prop-blast through the open window. He needed a shave and probably had bad breath, but being on a mission to be the first one airborne, morning ablutions could wait.

I rolled onto my side, damper and colder than I had been hours earlier. My wife stirred with, "Who's that?" I assumed she meant who's in the Champ and not who was beside her in the sleeping bag. I shrugged and said I didn't know, just someone out to break the dawn for the rest of us. She rolled back to sleep muttering something about how it had been my idea to skip the tent and sleep on the grass like a barnstormer. Actually, after sitting up the night before drinking wine outside the Pilots Pub while talking airplanes with Bette and Jon Fineman, I'd somehow failed to see the need for a tent.

The Champ taxied past WWII vintage Stearmans lined up like silent linebackers and behind a row of Howard DGAs. DGA means, "Damned Good Airplane," and to look at the stocky machines with their radial engines, you knew not to question them. Or at least not disturb their sleep, which this upstart Champ now did as it passed the limp windsock and reached the end of the runway. There, the pilot ran the engine up and checked the "mags." I suspected he hadn't called Flight Service for a briefing, because they probably wouldn't understand what it meant to fly at Blakesburg. "What's your destination?" they'd ask.

"I dunno," the pilot would've answered. "Up, I guess."

The briefer would've replied, "What altitude?"

"Oh, 300 feet..." I would say.

So why bother calling? Sure, TSA might've smeared a TFR across the airspace overnight, but government-induced fear alone can't keep antiquers on the ground when the dawn peeks between the trees, and a thin layer of radiation fog hugs the

gullies, begging to be skimmed.

As the Champ pilot opened the throttle, another Dawn Patroller started up. Soon, the morning chattered with little airplanes – Cubs, Chiefs, T-crafts and Luscombes – pecking about the grass before jumping into the sky. There was no ATC or any hint of authority to ruin the moment.

Antique Airfield is a private airport owned by the Air Power Museum and the Taylor family. Patriarch, Robert Taylor, recipient of the FAA's 2008 Charles Taylor Master Mechanic Award¹ and an Iowa Aviation Hall of Fame inductee, founded AAA in 1953 and co-founded the APM in 1965. That vision, supported by legions of volunteers, led to what now played out on these 177 acres of southern Iowa hill country.

Fly-ins have been held at Antique Airfield since 1971. The north/south grass runway is 2350 x 85 feet, has a few bumps, a fence at the south end and forest off the north end where there's an interesting bit of a hill, making this course a playable par 4. Field elevation is 904 feet and pattern altitude is 700 feet above that with left traffic. Watch for impromptu aerobatics and lots of formation flying in the local area; all pilots adhering to the Federal Aviation Regulations (FARs), of course.

While many antique airplanes have radios and GPS, some mystical force disables such distractions here. Instead, pilots fly the old fashioned way by looking outside for traffic

or shadows, and each approach includes a ready go-around should the airplane ahead fail to clear the runway in time. To get an armchair feel for the in-flight experience, go to YouTube and look for a six-minute video short by producer and antiquer, Joseph Pundzak, called, "Living The Legend"² (Available at AAAAPM1 on YouTube).



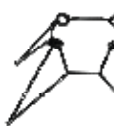

Air traffic order is maintained through common sense, airmanship, plus, some red and green flags that constitute a premier semaphore ATC system. In the spirit of Archie League, the nation's first air traffic controller, who flag-controlled air traffic at St. Louis in the early 1930s, Blakesburg stations a controller at the approach end of the runway armed with two flags – one red, one green. Green means cleared to land or take off, and red means don't do either. When chief air traffic controller, Bob Grimm, throws his baseball cap at you, it means, "Next time, watch my flags!" The FAA likes to tout its futuristic, multi-billion dollar NexGen ATC, but for about 20 bucks, you get AAA's FirstGen ATC, and unlike the FAA's system, it never has labor/management issues.

Theme Park

The AAA fly-ins haven't always had a theme, but last year members celebrated the 90th anniversary of the first scheduled U.S. Air Mail flight. For 2009, the theme was "Corporate Wings." Don't worry, no TARP

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bailout money was used to finance the many antique corporate airplanes in attendance. In a year when grandstanding Senators dragged the larger corporate flight world beneath the political bus, AAA saluted the long history of business aviation. Of the 25 "theme" aircraft in attendance, 14 were Howards. Among the 14 Howards present were Jim Younkin's "Mister Mulligan" from Springdale, Arkansas, and Dennis and Susan Lyons' Howard DGA-15P, "Archibald B," from San Miguel, Calif.

Included in the non-Howard corporate mix were: Rich Hornbeck's Waco ASO, "Texaco Number 7" from Bowdoinham, Maine; Chuck and Jody Doyle's Beech D18S, "North Carolina Pulp Company" from Webster, Minn.; John Swander's Waco UEC, "Viking Flying Boat Company" from DeSoto, Kan.; and Larry Howard's "Berry Brothers" Laird LC-1-B, from Spokane, Wash. Tom and Elaine Huf returned again this year from Kingsey, Pa. with two entries – Tom's "Berghoff Brewery" Cessna T-50 Bobcat, which qualified for Corporate Wings, and Elaine's pink Aeronca L-16, which simply looked adorable.

Russ Williams flew from Bellvue, Wash., in his Firestone Rubber & Tire Company Ryan SC-W. Theme or not, Williams makes the trip every year. He's the AAA/APM webmaster, and you can see his work, as well as extended video and photo coverage of the fly-in, at www.antiqueairfield.com.

Champions All

Sunday night is awards night when an old, gray-haired master of ceremonies with ill-fitting reading glasses mispronounces the names of those airplane owners who've poured gobs of money, time and love into their priceless machines. Trophies and plaques were presented by first-time assistant master of ceremonies, Shayln Applegate, whose family owns a 1936 YKS-6 Cabin Waco, based at Applegate Airport, Queen City, Mo. The Applegate's Waco, plus their J-3 Cub and Pober Pixie, were on display.

Here is a partial list of award recipients: Antique (pre-1936) Sweepstakes Award went to Larry Howard's Laird LC-1-B.

Classic (1936-1941) Grand Champion was Ed and Geri McKeown's Rearwin Cloudster. Jim Wheeler's Waco YQC took the Classic Sweepstakes Award.

Warbird (1941-1945) Grand Champion was Ted Miller's Stearman N2S, while Fred Lundeens' Howard DGA-15 took home the Warbird Sweepstakes Award.

Neo-Classic (1946-1956) Grand Champion was Tim Lynn's Cessna 195. The Neo-Classic Sweepstakes Award went to Cynthia Grant's Luscombe 8E. Cynthia also picked up Best Bride of the '09 Reunion, because she and Howard Hollinger were married at Antique Airfield on Saturday.

Homebuilts were honored with Don

Bates Starduster II picking up Grand Champion and Jim Younkin's Mister Mulligan gleaning the Homebuilt Sweepstakes Award.

Controversy ensued when the award for "Youngest Pilot To Arrive in a Pre-1956 Airplane" went to David Bates, 22, of Fairbault, Minn., flying a custom 450-hp Stearman. While David certainly qualified, the judges inadvertently overlooked Amy Gesch, 18, who flew Steve and Sharon Krog's 1938 Piper J3 Cub to Blakesburg. The judges have since declared co-winners of this award with hopes that both Amy and David will return next year.

The Grand Champion Award is always presented by AAA founder and president, Robert Taylor. This year the prestigious award went to D.J. Short, of Warrensburg, Mo., for his OX-5 powered, 1929 KR31 Challenger.

With the ceremonies over and the runway closed for the night, the crowd headed to the Pilots Pub, conveniently located 30 feet from the awards stage. Sadly, a much-anticipated musical encore performance by Doug Rozendaal on vocals and guitar singing, "Leaving on a Biplane," did not happen. Those who caught Rozendaal's act the previous night are still in awe, while Doug's whereabouts are still unknown.

Sunday evening soared toward another dew-covered dawn as the remaining antiquers crawled into sleeping bags and drifted off with images of biplanes dancing in their heads. Or, maybe, just wishing they'd brought a dang tent. And should you ever awake in a field full of antique airplanes, it could be a dream, or it just might be *Blakesburg!*

EDITOR'S NOTE: Paul Berge is on the AAA National Board of Directors. His new aviation novel, "Inside The Circle," set in 1937, is available at amazon.com.

¹Robert Taylor is not related to Charles Taylor, who was the Wright Brothers' mechanic. In 2009, Robert Taylor received the EAA Founder's Award from Paul Poberezný: www.eaa.org/news/2009/2009-09-10_taylor.asp ²"Living The Legend" link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXWZ4oN-BjY □

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Tommy Georges with his propeller-making machine.



This "T-Bird" was one of the Light Sport Aircraft that flew in to Tommy's Sangchris Lake AirPark. It was built in Iowa by Golden Circle Aircraft, and is owned by Ken Aderman of Lincoln, Illinois. www.americanaero.us

19th Annual EAA Chapter 88 Midwest Ultralight/LSA Rendezvous

by Jim Bildilli

On August 28-30, 2009, the 19th Annual Midwest Ultralight/LSA Rendezvous was held at Tommy's Lake Sangchris Airpark (9LL5), located a few miles southeast of Springfield, Illinois. The 2700 x 100 ft. turf "airpark" provided the perfect setting for a summer fly-in for aviation enthusiasts. With no landing, parking or camping fees, it is an excellent location for the perfect weekend get-away. Whether you flew or drove-in, there was an eclectic mix of aircraft ranging from powered parachutes, to the standard "heavy metal" variety to be viewed and admired.

Although it was a little on the breezy side for lighter aircraft on Saturday, over 50 aircraft owners braved the winds to drop by for the day, and over 100 people attended Saturday evening's spaghetti dinner.

Although Tommy Georges provides the location, EAA Chapter 88 – "The Midwest Ultralight Crophoppers" – sponsors the annual event. The Crophoppers' current project is the restoration of a KR-2 aircraft, which they plan to display at local parades and events.

If having the camaraderie of fellow aviation enthusiasts is not enough, you can see the myriad of projects currently underway, including aircraft and machinery that was designed and constructed by Mr. Georges. Of particular interest is his propeller-making machine, which can produce aircraft propellers up to 10' in length. Without the use of modern-day computer guidance, the machine will replicate a propeller from a "model," using a 10-inch saw blade and an intricate system of gears and switches. In fact, part of the machine incorporates an old Genie garage door mechanism to move the saw blade from one end of the prop to the other.

With a little cooperation from the weather, Chapter 88 is anticipating that this year's 20th Rendezvous will be the largest ever. The fly-in is always scheduled on the weekend prior to Labor Day, so mark you 2010 event planner and plan to bring your camping gear for a wonderful weekend. As usual, there will be activities for kids as well. The "paper airplane" contest and the "candy drop" are always favorites.

For those of you who would like to broaden your aeronautical knowledge, Mr. Georges teaches a 16-hour repairman course for Light Sport Aircraft. Taught in June and October, details can be obtained by visiting www.americanaero.us. □

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