

IN PORT CHICAGO

Contra Costa Gazette 7/18/47

Hundreds Dead in Navy Blast, Bay Area Rocked by Terrific Explosion of Ammunition Ships

A death toll of between 375 and 450 men, scores of injured and millions of dollars in property damage today lay in the wake of a thunderous explosion at the Port Chicago Naval Ammunition Depot which shattered glass within a radius of 25 miles and rendered hundreds of the unincorporated town's residents temporarily homeless.

The 12th Naval District Public Relations Department assayed the loss of life as follows, pending a checkup of the rolls:

Two hundred and fifty enlisted men, principally Negro work battalion members; nine naval officers; four civilian construction workers; four coast guardsmen; and one marine. Approximately 70 men aboard one of two munitions ships which exploded, and from 40 to 50 men aboard the other.

Navy said tentatively 338 were listed as missing in the explosion, presumably dead.

The explosion stopped clocks and some wrist watches in Port Chicago at 10:19 p. m. It literally blew to bits a Kaiser Liberty ship and one of the heavier Victory ships, collapsed a \$250,000 recreation building and theater at the munitions depot, blew out windows and sections of barracks and wrecked the loading dock where the ships were moored.

Exploded Simultaneously

The ships, which were being loaded by crews of Negro sailors, exploded almost simultaneously. Pedestrians in Port Chicago were knocked to the ground or from stools in eating and drinking establishments. Some early retirees were shaken out of their beds.

In Martinez, Pittsburg, Concord, Walnut Creek and other nearby communities the thunderclap was preceded by a blinding flash of light and what appeared to be a distinct earthquake. Hundreds of citizens instinctively turned off their lights and drifted dazedly outdoors in the belief that an enemy airplane attack had smitten the city. Then they began streaming downtown when stores, minus plate glass fronts, began to glow with light as owners turned out to sweep away the debris. Even as disaster struck the district centering about Port Chicago, the bay area mutual aid program swept smoothly into operation.

Within 50 minutes after Sheriff James N. Long's deputies issued a call for help, a score of ambulances were burning the highways between Port Chicago and hospitals of the bay. More than 200 police officers, 56 of them dispatched by Sheriff Jack Gleason, had filtered into the area to aid in evacuating wounded and to prevent looting along the darkened streets. Nurses and nurses' aids, some from Oakland and Berkeley, sped to Martinez, Concord and Port Chicago.

Emergency Casualty Centers

As the County Hospital, Community Hospital and Concord hospital became overtaxed with ambulatory cases, casualty

Local Losses Heavy, Plate Windows Are Hurled Into Street

There are few plate glass windows in the business section of the city today. Main street, Ferry street, Pine street and Alhambra avenue are alike—just vacant spaces which yesterday were occupied by windows. Though here and there are windows left untouched in a block where practically all other windows were smashed.

Beautiful, But Horrible

Great Flash Seen From Bus Crossing Carquinez Bridge

CROCKETT (U.P.)—A shining white flash soared into the sky over Port Chicago and mushroomed into a million vivid, red streaks before bus passengers on the Carquinez Bridge felt a shuddering concussion, a Pacific Greyhound driver said tonight.

"The flash went up about 1,200 to 1,500 feet," Dan Evander, 27, of Richmond, said. "It looked like burning gasoline and oil together."

"The first white flash mushroomed into red incandescent flames."

(Continued on Page 8)

Damage to buildings otherwise seems not to have been heavy. Window sashes were blown in, or out, and doors were torn from their casings and hinges. Venetian blinds are among the casualties wherever these blinds were in use.

STREETS CLEARED

The street department worked all night to remove broken glass, after it had been swept into the gutter from the buildings.

Property owners made a clean sweep of removing the glass from their premises and many secured lumber of various kinds to board up windows.

To attempt to enumerate this damage would be a waste of time and space. Suffice to say there are few plate glass windows left in the business district.

Throughout the residential area considerable damage was sustained in shattered windows and doors torn from their casings. This is true also in Alhambra Valley and Pleasant Hill.

Contra

CENTRAL PRESS ASSOCIATION
EIGHTY-SIXTH YEAR MA

TOJO CHIEF

Wallace in Chicago to Seek Votes

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Wallace disclosed his intention in an urgent request from Chairman Jake Moore, of the Iowa delegation, that he hurry to Chicago and shake hands with the folks.

Wallace's telegraphed reply said: "I shall be with you Wednesday morning. Thanks."

Governor Dewey Charges Politics Played With Veterans Right to Vote

ALBANY, N. Y. (U.P.)—Thomas E. Dewey, Republican president nominee, charged today that "a group with unlimited financial resources has been playing partisan politics with the fight of New York State's fighting men to vote."

He demanded that "this campaign of defeat be labled and exposed."

★ Today Stocks

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Emergency Casualty Centers

As the County Hospital, Community Hospital and Concord Hospital became overtaxed with ambulatory cases, casualty centers sprang into action at the Port Chicago Legion Hall, the Martinez City Hall, Concord Memorial Hall, Martinez Memorial Building, Masonic Temple and other places. Doctors and nurses began streaming into the area from the east bay at the urgent request of the sheriff's radio.

The force of the explosion rattled windows as far distant as San Jose and scattered heavy pieces of twisted metal shells over an area within a radius of two miles of the loading dock.

This morning all that remained visible of the two munitions was the protruding stern and propeller of the Victory and the bow of the Liberty. Deputies who were allowed to visit the area of the dock said the scene was one of indescribable horror. Naval officers and personnel attached to the munitions depot were unable to describe the devastation of the dock area but said it matched the rubble of heavily bombed military installations.

Patrons Escape

By a freak of circumstance, 192 patrons of the Port Chicago theater, viewing the picture "China" in which bombings are depicted, escaped without injury when the blast buckled the building's north wall as if it were cardboard. The manager was not so fortunate.

Mr. and Mrs. Mannie Weinstein, the former manager of the house and a veteran of the Southwest Pacific campaigns, was discharged because of malaria, suffered lacerations to the face and hands when glass panes in the lobby of the house fell upon them. Joe Myer, who was in the projection booth, also received a memento of the explosion.

I heard the explosion and looked out the window and (Continued on Page 8)

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Additional News Of Port Chicago Disaster Appears On Pages 2 and 8

MARTINEZ FREE OF LOOTING AS C WINDOWS LAY BARE MANY VALU

EXCELLENT ORDER MAINTAINED BY LOCAL POLICE, ARMED MILITARY GUARDS; PORT CHICAGO CASH REGISTER

Despite scores of broken and open display windows where valuable items were within a hand's grasp, there was no case of looting reported in Martinez.

At Port Chicago, one cash register was rifled.

Martinez police summoned their auxiliary staff, and aided by 100 soldiers with side arms and rifles, maintained peace and order. After midnight the military aides were reduced to 50. Chief of Police Steve Neilson said.

Throughout the day soldiers continued to patrol sidewalks unobtrusively, and they will be on duty again tonight. Two guarded the Ration Board and a third sat in the Sheriff's dispatchers' office. Because hundreds of soldiers—

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NEW HOME WRECKED

The entire front of the beautiful new home of Frank Donley in the latter section was caved in. Mrs. Donley was alone at the time. She saw the fire from the explosion before the concussion hit her home. She was cut by flying glass. Mrs. Donley had entertained the Soroptomist Club during the (Continued on Page 2)

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★ Today Stocks

A. T. & T.	162 1/2	
Caterpillar	51 1/2	
General Motors	64 1/2	
Mont. Ward	47	
Standard	38 1/4	38
Shell	26 1/2	
Tide-Associated	16 1/4	-16 1/4
P. G. & E.	32 1/4	32 1/4
Transamerica	9 1/2	9 1/2
Union	20	

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Town In Wreckage, Not Pane of Glass, Intact, Is Report From Scene

By NORMAN MONTELLIER
(United Press Staff Correspondent)

PORT CHICAGO (U.P.)—Flickering lantern lights and automobile headlights, the only illumination in black Port Chicago, reveal a town shattered by the explosion of ammunition aboard two 6,500-ton Liberty ships being loaded in the bay.

Casualty estimates still are unofficial, but Sheriff James N. Long told me tonight he believed 350 people were killed and 650 to 800 injured. Long said he believed the bulk of casualties was among naval personnel.

One of the city's main streets a five-foot slab of steel, believed to be a ship's plate, was embedded in the concrete sidewalk.

Barracks outside the ammunition depot, surrounded by a cordon of armed guards, were wrecks. Some of them appear to be on the verge of toppling. Most of them are two-story type of dormitory buildings.

Windows shattered. There is not a pane of glass left in the town. Front doors were blown off their hinges. I saw hundreds of window sills blown off with their panes of glass.

Many people were wandering through streets collecting chunks of twisted steel which men who worked at the wharves claim were parts of the ship plates.

The explosion occurred in the middle of a war picture at the local movie house. The blast buckled the entire side of the building, blowing it into a concave shape. Of the 195 people in the theater only two persons were injured. The walls did not collapse, but their bases were ripped up from the foundations.

Highways leading to and from Port Chicago were jammed with automobiles and ambulances as I approached the town. Most of the injured Navy personnel were evacuated in Navy buses, station wagons and ambulances.

Workers who left the depot area were checked by Navy guards and marines. They would not discuss the blast.

TERRIFIC IMPACT
A. F. Langwell said he was in bed when the explosion occurred. "It blew the front door right into the house," he said. "I woke up on the floor. I went through the house and found that all the windows and window sills had been torn from the frames.

The ice box in the kitchen was turned upside down. Plaster from the walls and the ceilings was all over the house."

Langwell's brother, Samuel, was working on a caterpillar tractor. "The explosion lifted me out of the tractor seat and threw me to the ground," he said. "I wasn't hurt, just shaken up. I saw a big flame rise up over the area and then the force of the explosion hit me."

SURVIVORS OF HORROR TELL TRAGIC SIGHTS

Survivors of the shattering munitions explosion at Port Chicago streamed into Martinez last night and told of a "terrific concussion" which produced a maelstrom of flying metal and fleeing citizens.

Dr. J. M. Huston said he had been working on survivors since shortly after the explosions at 10:20 p. m.

"I've been sewing for nearly three hours," he said.

A circus manager, John McNurlin, Ashland, Kentucky, said he was standing in front of the "big top" when the explosion occurred.

"A terrific concussion hit me and knocked me down," he said. "Pieces of metal began flying all around us. As I fell to the ground, I saw the entire front of a garage across the street blown in."

"Chief White Eagle," an Indian employe, was sleeping on his bunk. He was blown from the bunk and was said to have lost all hearing and use of his tongue. His dog, sleeping beside him, was killed, McNurlin reported.

Raymond E. Holdforth, chief engineer on a Union Oil tanker going downstream, was wiping blood from his face as he declared the explosion ripped the top from the pilot house of the vessel and smashed in the bulkheads of all of the cabins.

"One bulkhead was blown clear out the other side of the ship, completely demolishing the cabin. It seemed as though shells or bombs were bursting all around us and we ducked. One shell dropped through the roof of the engine room and blew the engine all to hell," Holdforth said.

"The explosion even blew the fan off my cabin wall through my bunk," he said. "If I had been in that bunk I wouldn't be talking now."

He suffered a cut over his right eye and his face was streaked with blood. He said a Coast Guardsman told him there was "absolutely nothing left of one nearby wharf."

Martinez Losses Hit High Figure

(Continued from page 1)

evening, the members had been gone but a short time. Donley was attending a meeting of motor dealers in Walnut Creek.

He said today that a plane went over the city just at the time of the explosion and his group rushed into the street with the thought a bombing was taking place.

COUNTY LOSS HEAVY

Damage to the court house and hall of records will approximate \$15,000, according to an estimate made this morning by Superintendent of Buildings E. A. Lawrence and Purchasing Agent J. H. Morrow.

Windows were smashed, casings were torn loose, doors were torn from their hinges, plaster was shaken from the ceilings, and side-walls and marble were dislodged in the hall of records. Lights were torn from their fastenings. In fact, about all of the windows in the entire east end of the court-house were destroyed. Heaviest damage apparently was in the

INVESTIGATION OF DISASTER LAUNCHES SHIPS INSTANTLY SINK FROM

By EDWIN EMERY

(United Press Staff Correspondent)

An earth-rocking explosion of two ammunition ships loaded at the U. S. Naval Ammunition Depot at Port Chicago caused "heavy casualties" and extensive damage, 12th N. District headquarters announced today.

"The casualties will be heavy," the Navy said, "but as severe as early unofficial reports indicated." These estimates had ranged as high as 600 dead and injured.

As the Navy continued the investigation, officers estimated that between 200 and 250 enlisted men and nine officers could be listed as "missing and presumed dead." An additional 100 Navy personnel had been taken to military hospitals.

SHIPS DISAPPEAR

Not a sign remained of the two ammunition ships, which had been anchored alongside the loading wharf at Port Chicago. Cause of the blast remained unknown, with no report from possible survivors yet made public.

An Associated Oil Company barge was anchored between two ships, and was reported destroyed, along with several other small ships anchored nearby.

Coast guardsmen, who reached the scene within 10 minutes, picked up four seriously injured men. They said strong winds and tides swept other possible survivors and debris up-channel.

Small craft had been warned away from the port area, 35 miles northeast of San Francisco, since live ammunition was reported floating on oil-slicked waters, the Navy said.

"There was a flash that went 1,000 feet into the air," one eye-witness said. "Then pieces of metal rained down like hail."

A 150-pound piece of metal, 18 feet long, was blown through the air for a mile.

BLINDING FLASH

The first blinding flash mushroomed into the sky, turning night into day, and then fell apart into myriads of red incandescent streaks, cascading downward like giant tracer bullets, eye-witnesses recounted.

Within a few moments the roar of the blast shot out across the San Francisco Bay area, causing rumors of an earthquake as windows scattered and plaster fell from ceilings and walls 30 miles away.

Don Cramer, Red Cross director for the Pacific area, reported that an early visit to the explosion scene showed that four deaths had been reported among civilians outside the post. He said numerous casualties were reported from flying glass.

Cramer reported that "Port Chicago was badly wrecked."

Casualties were being evacuated to hospitals at nearby Concord and Martinez, Cramer said. The Red Cross arranged for shelters for those made homeless by the blast and aided in other relief duties for the 1,000 population of Port Chicago.

The hospital at Martinez was reported filled, with injured in

Doc Stork Makes Landing in Midst Of Blast Turmoil

It never fails department

As doctors and nurses at Martinez Community Hospital frantically to give aid to scores of casualties rushed here after the explosion at Port Chicago, Mrs. Mark E. Hatch, Martinez, gave birth to a 7 1/2-pound Mother and son are doing hospital attendants reported

the halls. Red Cross, military civilian disaster officials mortally and injured were being taken all nearby hospitals, including that at the Mare Island Naval Yard at Vallejo.

Communications throughout the area were disrupted by the blast, adding to the confusion at the scene.

Red Cross officials said Martinez Chapter was prepared to feed from 1,000 to 1,500 people at Port Chicago, and reported from 150 to 200 homes apparently uninhabitable. Not a single child in the town escaped damage and most were described as complete losses."

Span Check Stops Trains

Rail Traffic Delayed While Engineers Make Inspection of Bridge

Crew of a Southern Pacific train engaged in switching at Port Chicago was rushed to a hospital in San Francisco for treatment. The extent of the casualties could not be determined early today, though it is known several of the men were badly hurt. All work in the yards at Port Chicago has been suspended until a search can be made to determine the presence of bombs.

The S. P. and Santa Fe stations were almost completely wrecked. All Santa Fe trains were halted for hours.

The Southern Pacific bridge evidently sustained no damage. All trains last night were held on either side of the bridge until engineers could make a thorough check of the structure and then only light trains were run. Today the check is continuing, but train service is normal. All San Joaquin Valley trains are running on schedule.

Red Cross in Plea For Electric Plate, Electric Percolator

Mrs. James E. Hoey, head of the local Red Cross camp and hospital service, today announced urgent need for an electric plate and electric percolator for use on an airplane carrier in the Southwest Pacific. Anyone with such equipment to contribute to a worthy cause was asked to telephone Mrs. Hoey at 502.

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Concord, California
Tues. & Wed.

LORETTA YOUNG
LADIES COURAGEOUS

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DELLA RYTHM BOYS
SO'S YOUR UNCLE

ORINDA

Last Times Tonight

Pilot Jailed For Gunplay, Beating His Former Wife

LOS ANGELES (U.P.)— Vance Bræse, 37-year-old test pilot, to

Always Tired?

Kidneys Sluggish? Does Rheumatism, Arthritis, Lumbago, Neuritis, etc., Bother You? Ask Your Druggist for the Rheumo-Sho Money

A fantastic supposition view of the fact that produced over 40,000 last year to protect food supply of the is interesting to come might happen if the were melting away.



RICHMOND NURSE KILLED SPEEDING

Woman On Way To Aid Blast Victims Fatally Injured In 3-Car Wreck

The Port Chicago tragedy is believed to have been a factor in the death of a Richmond grandmother, Margaret Adkins, 63, who died early this morning in a three-car accident in the Franklin Canyon.

Mrs. Adkins, her son, Frank, 33, and six-year-old grandson, Billy, were riding toward Martinez, a mile south of the city, en route to volunteer Mrs. Adkins' service as nurse. Their car was struck by another driven by Lee Roy Wortham, 36, 5930 Chesley avenue, Richmond.

After hitting the Adkins' vehicle, Wortham, according to state highway patrol officers, struck another car driven by Raymond Lawrence, 2851 Buena Vista avenue, Berkeley, said to be a Navy officer.

Wortham, who was en route to Richmond, had as a passenger Willie A. Jackson, 35-year-old employe of the B & L Cafe, San Pablo, Jackson, the Adkins boy, Wortham and Lawrence were treated at the County Hospital.

Mrs. Adkins was picked up by a Red Cross ambulance, coming in to the stricken area from St. Helena. She was taken to the Richmond Hospital, where she died.

Wortham was charged with driving while intoxicated and being involved in an injury.

'In Our Time' Joins War Film On State Screen

The State Theatre will present Warner Bros.' new production, "In Our Time," tomorrow and Thursday. This love story, clouded with the hardships of current events, takes place in Poland, just at the beginning of the war.

Ida Lupino and Paul Henreid have the leading roles. Also featured are Nancy Coleman, Mary Boland, Victor Francén and Nazimova, who returns to the screen after a long absence.

On the same program will be "Tunisian Victory," presenting for the first time a motion picture jointly produced by the governments of the United States and Great Britain. It tells how these two countries combined in one operation their armies, navies and air forces to wrest Northwest

HUNDREDS KILLED, MAIMED IN NAVY AMMUNITION BLAST

(Continued from page 1)

something hit me on the back of the head," Myer said. Postmaster George C. German got a brief visual memory of the explosion before he was hurled to the ground of his home at 11 Champion street.

"It was like fireworks you have never seen," German said. There was a tremendous shaft of white hot flame that seemed to reach to the stars. Then it flowered into a huge mushroom of colored fireworks. There were two blasts but they were almost simultaneous. Just as I was blown to the ground by the concussion, a lattice fence came crashing over into my yard."

SERIOUS FIRES AVERTED

Linemen of the P. G. & E. and the Coast Counties Gas sped to the stricken community to cut off gas and electricity for fear of a holocaust.

Deputy Sheriffs Stanley Millnich and Thomas Smith were among the first into the naval compound and the former brought out a load of walking injured. At the outset, station wagons, patrol cars and private automobiles were used to evacuate the wounded from Port Chicago and the naval depot. Military personnel were taken to the Camp Stoneman Hospital, but many found their way to the private hospitals and casualty centers.

The Navy disclosed that two smaller craft, one a Coast Guard patrol boat, were demolished by the blast, the latter with a toll of four missing men. The other craft, it was reported, was a barge.

The Victory ship, which arrived on its maiden trip from Portland at 5 p. m. had a complement of 78 men, of whom from 15 to 18 were believed to have been ashore. The 10,000-ton Liberty ship was nearly loaded with 8,500 tons of explosives. Both were tied up at the end of the "naval loading wharf, situated some distance from the barracks.

MANY BODIES MISSING

Naval officers at the scene said

the bodies of most of the victims probably would never be found. When newsmen were taken inside the naval compound before day-break by a Public Relations officer, he declined to take them to the core of the blast area.

"You wouldn't write about what you'd see there," he said. Several officers and enlisted men on leave from the two ships had their stars to thank for their safety, but most of them were tearful over the fate of their companions.

Lieutenants Virgil Akin and John Nash, who left the ship at 8 o'clock, argued their course of action on the dock, the latter insisting that they wait for the "leave list" to be issued and Akin holding out for going ashore until 11 p. m., when they would have to report in.

"I was in the Bank Club when I saw the flash, followed by the whoomph *woomph," Lieutenant Akin, steward aboard the Liberty ship, said. "I screamed 'fall on the floor' and hit the deck. It was like bombings I've seen in the South Pacific."

Cause of the explosion was unknown as Naval Intelligence officers launched an investigation and Mare Island authorities announced a naval board of inquiry will be called.

The blast hurled unfused shells and twisted bits of hull and decking plating over a wide area. One of the projectiles plopped through a corner of a Main street card room where a game of poker was in progress. Another embedded itself in earth a half block off Main street and Inspector Ray Stoffels sent out a call for the Army's bomb demolition squad. One 200-pound piece of metal embedded itself in a sidewalk a full mile from naval depot waterfront.

Sheriff Long, while deploring the magnitude of the catastrophe in a nationwide radio broadcast over the Mutual System, paid tribute to the efficiency of the disaster organization and the area-wide mutual aid system.

HOSPITALS IN COUNTY FILLED TO OVERFLOW Partial Casualty List Is Revealed

Between 100 and 125 people were given first-aid treatment at the Community and County Hospitals last night, the majority later being moved in ambulances to hospitals at Mare Island and San Francisco.

Six men were kept at the Community Hospital for further treatment and one girl was brought in this morning, from Port Chicago to the county hospital.

The injured at the local hospitals are Shirley Wellborn, 23, Montague Pollard, Scipio Scott, Jewell Perry, one man as yet unidentified, all of the naval supply depot, Cpl. Fred Lewis, Marine, and Nils Anderson, Union Oil Company employe.

A Mrs. Clark of Port Chicago was brought to the Community Hospital for treatment and later sent to Peralta Hospital, in Oakland.

Many of the injured brought to the county hospital were given first-aid treatment and later evacuated to the Martinez Junior High School, where they were taken care of by the Red Cross.

Concord Hospital treated 75 casualties of the explosion last night, the majority of them Navy

Bodies of Two Men On Construction Work Brought Here

The bodies of two men, L. C. Buabstract and Hulverson Gunnard, both employees of the Macco Construction Company, were brought to Martinez this afternoon from Port Chicago. David Hunt is reported missing by the company.

Three trainmen, of the depot's transportation system, are reported missing, according to Walter Snelgrove, deputy coroner.

personnel, who were later moved to other hospitals or evacuation centers, temporarily set up. A large number of the local people took the casualties into their homes after they had been given first-aid treatment.

Casualties of the Port Chicago disaster, who are still receiving treatment at the hospital, are William Leath, Mrs. Janice Leath, Mrs. William Hatcher, Mrs. Anna Palubichi, Bob Hatcher, Mrs. Adele Schmidt, Miss Helen B.

Borkos, I. Matthews, Raul Schreyer, W. R. Nichol, Martin, lost and dreadful, three local reported. All were Mayor C. Livered by United L. Mittee, m. Main and. When th on two s warning. Roy Stu Schnaitack hit, being hands and pital care. worse case asked to b Roy Stu scalp cut. Schnaitack small cuts.

AMBULANCES RACE THROUGH CITY IN RESPONSE TO CALL

Hundreds of ambulances and shore police and Army military cars carrying nurses and doctors rushed through the city last night under highway patrol escort. Main street and Escobar street were made thoroughfares under intersection patrol for these convoys.

Doctors and nurses came from as far away as San Jose, Vallejo, Richmond, Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco and other communities dispatched Red Cross workers, nurses and doctors here.

City emergency service was placed on a wartime basis. Emergency firemen and auxiliary police were placed on duty. Navy

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WEDNESDAY and THURSDAY