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HISTORY OF  
THE 397TH  
FIGHTER  
SQUADRON

INSTALLMENT  
SEVENTEEN  
Cover the month of  
June 1945

HISTORICAL  
OFFICER  
1st Lt Richard H.  
Elickensdörfer

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Installation XVII

HISTORY OF THE 367TH FIGHTER SQUADRON Section "A"

1. ORGANIZATION (e.g. changes effected by the transfer of the unit or new 1/1's)  
NEGATIVE

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2. STRENGTH ON THE LAST DAY OF THE MONTH:  
Unit strength as of 30 June 1945:  
OFFICERS ASSIGNED:..... 57  
E.M. ASSIGNED:..... 134  
OFFICERS ATTACHED:..... 0  
E.M. ATTACHED:..... 1

3. ARRIVAL AT OR DEPARTURE FROM EACH STATION OCCURRED IN THE E.T.O.:  
No change in station.

4. LOSSES IN ACTION:  
NEGATIVE.

5. AWARDS AND DECORATIONS TO MEMBERS OF THIS SQUADRON:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1st Lt Arledge - 5th and 6th OLC to AM              | Major Tuitt - 4th 5th 6th 7th OLC to AM/-     |
| 2nd Lt Arlington - AM                               |   |
| 1st Lt Baker - 11th 12th and 13th OLC to AM         | 1st Lt Uterhart - 5th and 6th OLC to AM /     |
| 1st Lt Barco - 1st, 2nd and 3rd OLC to AM           |   |
| Capt Barker - 13th 14th and 15th OLC to AM          | 2nd Lt Woodworth - 2nd and 3rd -- OLC to AM   |
| 1st Lt Brayton - 1st and 2nd OLC to AM              |   |
| 2nd Lt Buck - 1st, 2nd and 3rd OLC to AM            | 1st Lt Yancey - 4th 5th 6th and 7th OLC to AM |
| 2nd Lt Chancellor - 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th OLC to AM |   |
| 1st Lt Clary - 5th, 6th and 7th OLC to AM           |   |
| 2nd Lt Deputy - 1st OLC to AM                       |   |
| 1st Lt Duncan - AM                                  |   |
| 1st Lt Fein - 7th 8th 9th 10th 11th OLC to AM       |   |
| 1st Lt Halpin - 3rd 4th and 5th OLC to AM           |   |
| 1st Lt Handlin - AM                                 |   |
| Capt Hogan - 10th 11th and 12th OLC to AM           |   |
| 2nd Lt Hord - 2nd 3rd and 4th OLC to AM             |   |
| 1st Lt Horowitz - 5th 6th and 7th OLC to AM         |   |
| 1st Lt Hunt - 4th and 5th OLC to AM                 |   |
| Major Johnson - Bronze Star                         |   |
| 2nd Lt Johnston - 1st and 2nd OLC to AM             |   |
| 1st Lt Kalen - 8th, 9th and 10 OLC to AM            |   |
| 2nd Lt Keil - 1st, 2nd and 3rd OLC to AM            |   |
| 2nd Lt Knochiuizen - 1st 2nd and 3rd OLC to AM      |   |
| 1st Lt Kestreich - 4th, 5th and 6th OLC to AM       |   |
| 2nd Lt Laubach - 1st, 2nd and 3rd OLC to AM         |   |
| 1st Lt Leavoy - 5th, 6th and 7th OLC to AM          |   |
| 1st Lt LeGrand - 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th OLC to AM    |   |
| 1st Lt Lewis - 6th and 7th OLC to AM                |   |
| 2nd Lt McWilliams - AM                              |   |
| 2nd Lt Price - 2nd, 3rd and 4th OLC to AM           |   |
| 1st Lt Sharp - 8th, 9th and 10th OLC to AM          |   |
| 1st Lt Shea - 1st, 2nd and 3rd OLC to AM            |   |
| 2nd Lt Sheppart - 1st and 2nd OLC to AM             |   |
| 1st Lt Thornton - 4th and 5th OLC to AM             |   |

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| Installment XVII   | History of the 397th Fighter Squadron  | Section 2 |
|--|--|-----------|
| *****<br>* 368th GROUP IS<br>* TO BE OCCUPATIONAL<br>***** | <p>June 1st. Today the fate of the future of the Group was announced to us at special meetings called by Commanding Officers of each of the squadrons. We are to be occupational. This news came as a great disappointment to most of us, for we all had high hopes of returning to the United States by the end of the summer. But, to look on the brighter side of the picture, we have little chance of seeing the G.I. and our work is bound to be much lighter than it was during combat operations.</p> <p>Major Johnson is in charge of the group going to the Riviera today for a weeks leave. M/Sgt Jay M. Jones is among the enlisted men in the party. (S.O. No. 59, Hq, 368th Ftr Gp, 31 May 1945).</p> <p>The following enlisted men of this squadron received promotions today: Pfc's Louis E. Allen, William E. Harrison, Benjamin Milrod and Eugene R. Sibilski to be Corporals. Pvt's Albert K. Barker, Rudy J. Cavanaugh, Harold L. Kelly and Irwin F. Mirkle to be Privates First Class. (S.O. No. 56, Hq, 368th Ftr Gp, 1 June 1945).</p> <p>The following pilots received promotions today: 1st Lt Frisbie to be Captain and 2nd Lt's Buck, Chancellor, Deputy, Johnston, Knochiuizen, Laughbaugh, Shepard and Woodworth to be 1st Lieutenants. (S.O. 152, Hq, 9th A.F., 1 June 1945).</p> <p>June 2nd - 8th. Nothing to report.</p> <p>June 9th Lt Brayton is sent to the Riviera for 7 days leave, also M/Sgt Herbert E. Gray and T/Sgt Martin E. Klein of this Squadron. Pvt Grover C. McDaniel, Jr. also goes to the Riviera today to play in the Group Band there for a weeks engagement. (S.O. No. 59, Hq, 368th Ftr Gp, 9 June 1945).</p> <p>June 10th. Today was Sunday and supposed to be a day of rest, but T.A.C. upset our plans by having an aerial review over Frankfurt. Those who flew on the mission were: Tuite, Freund, Woodworth, Shea, Clary, Watterud, LeGrand, Johnston, Arledge, Wenk, Knochiuizen, Price, Lewis, Duncan, Halpin and Thoratton.</p> <p>Four of our old pilots left today for the U.S. They were the ranking pilots of the Squadron from the standpoint of combat hours and missions. Captain Daze had completed one tour and was half way through his second. Its Baker, Helen and Sharp had been with the squadron since early last autumn and were also sent home for a well earned rest.</p> <p>June 11th. The squadron has been enjoying a visit from P/O Charles E. Vickerman who was forced to bail out over the German lines on December 8th. He escaped with only slight injury to one foot and was captured by German civilians. During most of his time as a P/W he was confined at a camp near Nurnberg. He reports no specific acts of cruelty except for the diet which kept him near the point of starvation for many months.</p> <p>June 13th. The 397th squadron is well represented on the Group Baseball team which went to AIX today to participate in a baseball game. Sgt Jose E. Alequin, Sgt Ralph E. Jones and Cpl Charles E. Check represented this Squadron. (S.O. No. 61, Hq, 368th Ftr Gp, 13 June 1945).</p> <p>June 14th. Lt Milton S. Bender stopped in for a brief visit on his way back to the States. He was shot down and forced to bail out on the 14th January and had been a prisoner of war until rescued by American Troops. He managed to destroy two Me 109's before he got it himself, however.</p> <p>June 15th. Three combat reports were received by group today as the result of P/W interrogations of three former pilots of this squadron. These pilots had all been shot down over enemy lines and held as P/W's until rescued by our troops. 2nd Lt Bechtold claimed two Me 109's destroyed near Bernay, France, 2nd Lt Rinehart claimed one Me 109 destroyed near St Lo, and 2nd Lt Murphy one P-51 destroyed in conjunction with Lt Stoll.</p> |           |

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Installment XVII HISTORY OF THE 397TH FIGHTER SQUADRON Section B

**June 16th.** Two new ground officers assigned to this squadron today. 1st Lt. Housman becomes assistant engineering officer 1st Lt. Proctor assistant communications officer. (S.O. No. 63, Hq, 368th Str Op, 16 June 45).

**June 18th.** Capt Carl H. Gundlach and 1st Lt Jackie M. Moore are assigned to a special Courts Martial Board. Captain Gundlach is also assigned to a Declassification Board. Pvt William K. Harkin is assigned to this squadron. (All by S.O. No. 63, Hq, 368th Str Op, 18 June 45).

**June 19th.** In a reshuffling of Group Officers which sent Capt Powell to another Group. Major Rice is moved from Group Adjutant to Group Executive. Major Johnson our executive, is to be the new Group Adjutant.

**June 20th.** Major Johnson, our executive officer, receives the Bronze Star Medal. Many of our pilots receive additional Oak Leaf Clusters to their Air Medals (S.O. No. 64, Hq, XIX T.A.C., 20 June 45).

**June 21st.** Two of our best known enlisted men left today under the recent army provision that those over 40 years of age may apply for discharge. These oldsters were S/Sgt Henry A. Kroul from the intelligence section and Sam J. Simon of Armament. Both of these men had been awarded the Bronze Star last month for outstanding meritorious service.

**June 22nd.** Another long list of Air Medal awards came out today. Its Duncan, Handlin, Arrington and McWilliams received the Air Medal and many other pilots in the squadron added to their collections of Oak Leaf Clusters.

**June 23rd.** Brigadier General Saunders, new C.O. of XIX T.A.C. visited Group today to present decorations to many officers and enlisted men of this organization. A formal review was held under the direction of Capt Quisenberry with Lt Elmsted as his assistant.

**June 24th.** I and E ran another tour to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia today for those who were unable to go two weeks ago. It was a long hard trip, five hours each way, but the interesting scenery along the way and the opportunity to get out of Germany for a few hours made it worth the effort.

**June 25th.** An aerial parade mission was held today over Bad Kissingen and Wurzburg. Twelve planes from each squadron took part. Our pilots were: Clary, Moore, Buck, McWilliams, Fein Stephens, Barco, Arrington, Uterhart, Shepard, Brayton and Keil.

**June 26th.** A new program has been started by Group to give the Ground Officers a chance to learn to fly a cub. It will consist of twelve one hour missions lessons to be given in the evenings. Although soloing is not permitted by army regulations, students will have more than the required time for solo flights by the end of the course. Major Johnson, Capt Howard and Capt Magnus are in the first from this squadron.

**June 27th.** Today the axe fell in the form of an order from XIX T.A.C. which took over 300 low point men from the group for purposes of redeployment. Most of these men will be assigned to units going directly to the CBI, while others may be lucky enough to go by way of the U.S.. All department in the squadron were heavily hit; and some, such as personnel equipment and intelligence were completely wiped out.

**June 28th.** Many new faces are in evidence today among the enlisted ranks as high point men begin to arrive other groups. The 32nd and the 326th seem to have supplied most of our replacements so far.

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HISTORY OF THE 387TH FIGHTER SQUADRON

Section B

June 29th. Another new list came in today, but this time for seventy men, there have been frequent rumors that officers, too, will be redeployed, but, so far, none have been called. Lt. Staiano was transferred to the 48th Group on a prearranged plan, however.

June 30th. And so the month ends with many changes in the ranks of our saluted men and a feeling of uncertainty about the future among the officers. We are all sorry to see our companions of many months leave, but we extend a hearty welcome to those who come in to take their places. C'est la Guerre!

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COMBAT REPORT OF MAJOR RICHARD E. LEARY \* \* \* \* \* ASN 0-900694

A. Type of Action : Combat  
 B. Date of Encounter : 14 January 1945  
 C. Unit : 397th Ftr Sqdn, 368th Ftr Gp  
 D. Time of Encounter : 1010 hours  
 E. Place of Encounter : Neustadt, Germany  
 F. Weather : Overcast 3000 - 4000'; Visibility good  
 G. Type of Target : 40 plus Fw 190's and ME 109's  
 H. Claims : One Fw 190 destroyed and one ME 109 destroyed

## I. Narrative

I, Major Richard E. Leary, ASN 0-900694, was leading Tropic Squadron on a dive bombing and armed reconnaissance mission at Neustadt, Germany on 14 January 1945. I had just pulled up off a strafing pass when Tropic yellow leader called in bandits. My wingman and I broke out and started west to get away, as we were in a very disadvantageous position. I looked back and saw that Tropic blue flight was boxed in by about 15 Fw. We turned around and headed back to help them. As we did this, an Fw 190 dove down in front of us. I gave him a 90 degree deflection shot which hit him squarely in the cockpit. He broke left in a shallow dive. I closed to 100 yards and fired again. The canopy flew off the Fw and the pilot bailed out.

We started a climbing turn to the left to get back into the fight. As we did so, an ME 109 came across in front of us. I fired a burst and observed strikes on the wings and fuselage of the Fw. He broke for the deck and I followed. I closed to about 150 yards and fired a long burst. The Fw pulled up, and as he did so, the airplane exploded.

As we started another climbing turn, I observed about 15 Fw coming in on us. We broke into them and were doing all right until suddenly my cockpit blew up. I slid the canopy back and bailed out, hitting the tail as I went out. I was knocked unconscious, and came to in a vineyard.

I claim one Fw 190 destroyed and one ME 109 destroyed.

J. Ammunition expended : Unknown  
 K. Combat film is not available.

The undersigned hereby testify that the above statement was made to them by Major Richard E. Leary at 1st General Hospital, Paris, on 7 April 1945.

Stanley C. Johnson  
 STANLEY C. JOHNSON  
 Major, Air Corps

Benjamin W. Jenkins  
 BENJAMIN W. JENKINS  
 Capt, Medical Corps

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SUPPORTING STATEMENT OF SECOND LIEUTENANT CHARLES J. HUNT, ASN 0-710696  
FOR CREDIT REPORT OF MAJOR RICHARD E. LEARY, ASN 0-900694

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| A. Type of Action     | : Combat  |
| B. Date of Encounter  | : 14 January 1945   |
| C. Unit               | : 397th Fighter Squadron, 386th Fighter Group   |
| D. Time of Encounter  | : 1010 hours  |
| E. Place of Encounter | : Neustadt, Germany   |
| F. Weather            | : Overcast 3000 - 4000'; visibility good  |
| G. Type of Target     | : 40 plus Fw 190's and ME 109's   |
| H. Claims             | : Supporting the claim of Major Richard E. Leary, ASN 0-900694, to one Fw 190 destroyed and one ME 109 destroyed. |

I. Narrative

1. 2nd Lt Charles J. Hunt, ASN 0-710696, was flying the wing of Tropic leader, Major Richard E. Leary, ASN 0-900694, on a dive bombing and armed reconnaissance mission on 14 January 1945. Major Leary and I were down strafing a passenger train at Neustadt, Germany, when Tropic leader yellow called in bandits. Being in a disadvantageous position on the deck, we immediately began to climb and to turn toward blue flight which was engaged in combat. Before we reached it, a single Fw 190 flew across in front of us. I had no water injection so I climbed up about 300 feet to protect Major Leary from behind. Major Leary fired a deflection burst at the E/A, then closed and fired again. I saw the pilot jettison his canopy and bail out.

We started to climb again and as we did so, we encountered a single ME 109. Major Leary attacked the E/A closing in behind it. He fired a burst, and I saw the E/A explode and crash in flames.

We started to climb again and were attacked by about 12 E/A. Major Leary's plane caught fire and he bailed out. I was hit in the gun bay and the door was blown off. My plane was losing power and was very hard to control. I was hit again and my controls were shot away. I bailed out and landed in some trees. Some German civilians picked me up and I was made a prisoner of war.

The undersigned hereby certify that above statements were made to them by 2nd Lt Charles J. Hunt at 217 th General Hospital, Paris, on April 7, 1945.

*Levin S. Hunt*  
 LEVIN S. HUNT  
 1st Lt, Air Corps

*Robert E. Thompson*  
 ROBERT E. THOMPSON  
 1st Lt, Air Corps

*Stanley C. Johnson*  
 STANLEY C. JOHNSON  
 Major, Air Corps

*Benjamin W. Jenkins*  
 BENJAMIN W. JENKINS  
 Capt, Medical Corps

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S E C R E T

COMBAT REPORT OF FIRST LIEUTENANT MILTON S. BENDER, ASN O-763468

A. Type of Action : Combat  
 B. Date of Encounter : 14 January 1945  
 C. Unit : 397th Fighter Squadron, 368th Fighter Group  
 D. Time of Encounter : 1010 hours  
 E. Place of Encounter : Neustadt, Germany  
 F. Weather : Overcast 3000' to 4000'; Visibility good.  
 G. Type of Target : 40 plus FW 190's and ME 109's  
 H. Claims : 2 ME 109's destroyed

## I. Narrative

I, 1st Lt Milton S. Bender, ASN O-763468, was leading Tropic Yellow flight on an armed reconnaissance and dive bombing mission on 14 January 1945. Yellow flight was serving as cover for Red flight while it was down strafing at Neustadt, Germany. Yellow flight was at about 10,000' altitude. Blue flight sighted the enemy fighters and called them in first. Over forty ME 109's and FW 190's attacked from our right and out of the sun. I got on the tail of one of the ME 109's almost immediately and fired about a five second burst. The E/A burst into flames, dove down and crashed.

Another ME 109 came across in front of me. I turned left and fired with about 30 degrees deflection. I fired about three five second bursts, and finally saw his plane burst into flame. I turned away from him then and flew straight and level for a few seconds trying to locate the rest of the squadron.

My plane was hit from behind by an enemy aircraft which I did not see, and I was thrown into a spin. I stopped the spin and tried to pull out of the dive, but the plane would not respond. I bailed out and was taken prisoner about four hours later.

I claim two ME 109's destroyed.

J. Ammunition expended : unknown

K. Combat film is not available.

*Milton S. Bender*  
 MILTON S. BENDER  
 1st Lt, Air Corps  
 Pilot, 397th Ftr Sqdn

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ENCOUNTER REPORT

- A. Combat
- B. 14 June 1944
- C. 397th Squadron, 368th Fighter Group
- D. 1230
- E. Bernay, France
- F. Unknown
- G. ME-109's
- H. 2 ME-109's destroyed
- I. (Extract of interrogation of Pilot after release from P/W camp.)

- 
- 3. Type of Aircraft destroyed - 2 ME-109's destroyed
  - 4. Altitude - 500 feet
  - 5. Number one crashed into ground seemingly due to damaged controls. Number two caught on fire.

CERTIFICATE:

I certify that the above information is true  
and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: Robert J. Bechtold  
Rank: 2nd Lt. Air Corps

A TRUE EXTRACT COPY:

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**RESTRICTED**REMARKS

- A. Combat
- B. 12 June 1944
- C. 397th Fighter Squadron, 368th Fighter Group
- D. Unknown
- E. Northeast of St. Lo
- F. Unknown
- G. ME-109 and ME-190
- H. 1 ME-109 Destroyed
- I. (Extract of interrogation of pilot after release from P/W Camp.)

Our Squadron broke up into flights after being relieved of our original job of patrolling the beachhead. We headed northeast from St. Lo and finally turned back. Upon doing so we encountered a dozen 190's and 109's circling. We proceeded to break this flight up and took out after a 109 that was alone. This plane headed towards Germany with us in close pursuit. This is the plane that I believe I shot down. After pulling up and watching this plane explode I joined Lt. Foltz's wing and we started back along having lost the other two of the flight when we encountered the Jerries. Upon turning homeward the two of us turned into four more planes. We started turning with them. At three quarter around Lt. Foltz told me to break right as a Jerry 190 was coming up from the deck at about 2:00'clock. I broke down into him. After going past him I was just going to pull back up into the fight when flak hit my engine or else it exploded. My mercury read zero and as my prop was starting to stop I decided to leave the ship. I rolled it over and came out perfectly O.K., I pulled the rip cord and hit a tree before the first swing. The fight was started at about 1200 feet and I bailed out at or less than 500 feet.

SIGNED: Robert W. Pinchart  
2nd Lt. Air Corps

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### ENCOUNTER REPORT

- A. Combat
- B. 21 October 1944
- C. 397th Fighter Squadron, 368th Fighter Group
- D. 1545
- E. Near Dusseldorf, Germany
- F. Unknown
- G. FW-190
- H. 1 FW-190 destroyed
- I.

(Extract of interrogation of Pilot after release from P/W Camp.)

- 3. Type of aircraft destroyed - FW-190
- 4. Altitude - 650 feet.
- 5. He nosed down into the ground and spread flame for 1/4 mile.

#### CERTIFICATE:

I certify that the above information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: Vernon V. Murphy  
Rank 2nd Lt. O-697223

A TRUE EXTRACT COPY:

NOTE: This claim was submitted by 2nd Lt. Frederick C. Stoll as a joint claim with Lt. Murphy for 1 FW-190 probably destroyed which was confirmed, as a probable, by Confirmation of Victory Credits Board No. 46, dated 7 March 1945, IX Tactical Air Command. In view of the fact that Lt. Murphy saw the FW-190 hit the ground, claim is resubmitted for award of a destroyed FW-190. Attached hereto is copy of original claim of Lt. Stoll.

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397th S-2 Report of Aerial Review Mission - 10 June 45 - Sqn Miss 564.

A - FC #298. Miss No. \_\_\_\_\_ Miss for Day: ONE 10 June 45.  
 B \* Aerial Review over Frankfurt - Base to R-10, at Illesheim, N9201,  
 to Worms, to Nieder Zarf, L2310, to Trier, to Bingen, to Frankfurt, and  
 slightly beyond, to Base.  
 B - 368 FG, 397 FS. 16 a/c disp. plus one spare. No aborts.  
 C - Up 1128, over Frankfurt 1255, down 1353.  
 D - Nil  
 E - Assigned mission was flown without incident.  
 F - Nil  
 G - Nil  
 H - Broken cumulus with bases from 4 to 6000 ft, tops unknown. Vis 4 to 10  
 miles.  
 I - Sqn Code not used.  
 J - None  
 K - No R.T jamming.  
 Tuite, Freund, Woodworth, Shea.  
 Clary, Watterud, LeGrand, Johnston.  
 Arledge, Wenk, Knocuihuizen, Price.  
 Lewis, Duncan, Halpin, Thornton.  
 Spare: Frisbie.

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337th S-2 Report of Aerial Parade Mission - 25 June 45 - Sqdn Miss 365

- A - Op's Order No. ----- Miss No. ----- Miss for Day: ONE 25 June 45  
Aerial Parade - Base to Bursburg to Bad Kissingen to Base
- B - 368th Ftr Gp 367th Ftr Sq. 12 A/C dispatched - No Aborts
- C - Up 1345 - Reached Bursburg at 1355 and Bad Kissingen at 1405 - down 1520
- D - Nil
- E - Mission was flown as briefed - There were 36 ships from the 368th Ftr Gp and probable 36 from the 364th Ftr Gp. Mission was uneventful
- F - Nil
- G - Nil
- H - 7/10 to 8/10 Cloud coverage - Cumulus and Cumulo-Nimbus clouds - Base 2500 to 2500 ft to 3000 ft. - Top 8000 ft to 18000 ft - visibility fair except in one thunder shower
- I - Sqdn code not used.
- J - No ground control
- K - No r/t jamming

CLARY MOORE BUCK McWILLIAMS  
FINN STEPHENS BARCO ARRINGTON  
VIERHART SHEPARD BRAYTON KRILL

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