

Centipede Valley (A tale from an infantryman in Hawaii)

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A tale of two grunts with Twain humor and wound-wet jungle.



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'Welcome to the 25th Infantry Scofield Barracks Hawaii' the sign read as the taxi van rode past. The only thing in the boy's mind was of guns, tanks, soldiers, and grenades. He accompanied his father who had used his veteran credentials with the Coastguard to gain admittance to the base; and thus able to reserve a round on the famous 'Schofield golf course.' They were on vacation, and left the women at home.

The boy, expecting to see an army division rappelling down the buildings that the van was streaming past, was scrutinizing every person, vehicle and store. He thought he saw a humphvee, but it was just a hillbilly driving his spray painted doorless Ford Bronco-with his flip flop clad foot hangin over the side. The boy spied a soldier in camouflage uniform with what looked like a rifle,"wooweee ,a rifle." But as the van closed on the pedestrian soldier,it was revealed that he was carrying only a loaf of french bread. Then another soldier,"wowiee,a bazooka," but only a folded up beach chair.

Then a helicopter screamed overhead, the boy scrambling to position his head to see the still hidden helicopter was ready to tear the roof panel off, "Hey easy Ben," said his father at the other window. The helicopter came into view,"must be an Apachee," he thought as his eyes came to discern a sign trailing from the helicopter ..."60% off flip flops at Kemoho's market." The boy sank down in disappointment.

He begged his father in order to come with him. The father acquiesced but with the surrender conditions being "Im playing golf, your going to watch me and be a good boy then we are leaving."

They were on a tough schedule and had engagements with the rest of the family.The father promised him that they would visit Pearl Harbor and the Coast Guard base. Ben would enjoy the battleships at Pearl Harbor, but he had heard from his friends that the rockstars were the "infantry." They were the 'Billy the Kids' of the military; guns and mischief, and most of all....glory. But he would only see them and their toys from a van--and then a golf course. That was straight 'malarkey'to him, and that was what his mind kept repeating.

The van pulled up parallel with the side walk that was lined with a chain link fence. Palm trees rowed the inside of the fence, and the boy could see the lime green grass of fairways-he sighed. His father tipped the taxi driver, and grabbed out his club bag; they proceeded down the sidewalk in direction of a shadow, which was the 'Scholfield Golf' club buiilding. The boy looked across the street at a barracks, tiered with balconies, he could see men in fatigues moving about on them,"wowweee,grunts." But they were only brandishing mops

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and brooms. "Malarkey."

They entered the air conditioned building, the boy became sleepy as he waited by his father's side who was checking his reservation in the golf store. "Alright sir, if you want you can sit out there on the verandah with complimentary drinks until we bring your cart up to you."

Re-entering the stone paved fenceless verandah, they took a seat at a round table with an umbrella. The humid heat woke the boy back up. A vantage of bright green grass, palm trees, and men hustling back and forth in white dock pants opened up before them.

There was a grey haired man sweeping up the tile of the verandah within earshot of the father and son. The boy watched the old man sweep up something in his dustpan, then bend down and put it in a zip lock bag that he produced from his pocket. The boy's curiosity was ignited, he had to know what it was, maybe a spent shell casing, or a tripwire; he jumped down from his stool and approached the old man.

"Excuse me sir," what was it you picked up, a shell casing?" the old man just looked at the boy and smiled, and continued sweeping. "Ben, don't bother that man please," admonished his father.

Ben walked back to his chair, and picked up his coca-cola, and pretended as if his curiosity was quenched. He watched the old man, sweeping and sweeping, until he bent down to pick another object up. The boy flew from his seat and closed on the old man.

"Ohhh man mister, what is that thing, a dragon?" At the old man's feet was a coil of something, corrugated, black with a red neon tinge, incisors and mandibles the size of paper cutters. It was dead whatever it was, but its shell was still intact; and so was everyone of its hundred legs, its fearsome face was preserved amid a deathly stare with blackened eyes.

"Don't worry, it's nothing, just a bug sonny," said the old man who packed it away in a zip lock bag.

"Then why are you collecting them in ziplock bags?"

The old man hesitated, then he sighed knowing it was futile.

"If I tell you, you cannot freak out. I'm supposed to rid these creatures from the guests sight."

"I won't freak out--that thing looks like one of those chinese new year dragons they parade in the streets."

"It ain't no dragon son--it is a Centipede." But to the boy, it reminded him of those Chinese dragon parades. It was massive.

The boy was hailed back to where his father was sitting. "Ben leave that man alone, he has a job to do."

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The boy thought the old man and his centipede to be a riddle of the highest importance. He sensed a story, before he knew what a story was. He looked at this man inquisitively; he looked to be Hawaiiin ,maybe South American, but he also had a martial stare.

The old man looked at his watch and sat down at table at the corner of the stone paved verandah, bordered by bright green grass. Ben saw centipedes now in the design of the old man's hawaiiin shirt.

Producing a mango from his pocket, the old man proceeded to strip the tough skin and spit out the peelings onto the grass as Ben's attention was broken by an employee. "Excuse me sir, there seem's to be a slight problem ya, there's only one golf cart available, and we have to fit you and someone else on there, but there is your son?"

The father's face froze. "oh, my son, oh yeah" he mumbled as he watched the beautiful tropical neon course ahead of him." The groundsworker who was finishing his mango was paying attention to the whole interaction. He watched the boy scanning the greens, it made the old man smile.

" Excuse me sir, I think I can help out, I can babysit the lad right here, and tour the golf grounds with him, I finished my duties....."

The father looked at the old harmless man. The hawaiiin accent on him, and hawaiiin shirt on him, rendered him as harmless as puff the dragon. No one has ever committed a misdeed in a hawaiiin shirt, and that resonates in the subconscious of visitors to the Hawaiiin chains. For Captain Cooke(the first anglo visitor to Hawaii) was boiled in a pot by shirtless Hawaiiins.

" Sir, I can vouche for my employee....." It was in agreement, the father sped off.

They had two hours to kill. Just enough time for a story.

" So Ben, Im Edison, would you like to hear a story--" the boy interrupted him, " About the infantry?"

" Yes, the infantry, Hawaii, and dragons." The scene was too unreal. The tropical tableau panorama behind the old man--that made the old man's hawaiiin shirt seem to disappear and make his head float--was pastel portraiture with palm outlines bursting with their leaves amid a light blue sky. The old man mumbled his lips every other second, possibly from denchers. The boy watched the floating head mumble, mumbling faster and faster readying for a story, captivating the boy. He came to see the infantry, and he would see them in words. No illusion this time.

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" The story of Hawaii, is a story of short dynasties. The first known dynasty was the Rat dynasties. Like Attila The Hun's followers, the rat's followed their king; down the ropes and piers from the ships and overwhelmed the populace. The set up Rat colonies, fishing centers, and cheese vendors." The boy interrupted the old man, " How can rat's set up cheese vendors?"

" They just did, ' Cheese for Sale' was screeched on every block, now if I can continue my story lad." The boy nodded, sorry for slowing down the story.

" The Hawaiians tried to battle back, arming themselves with brass knuckles of sea conches, and throwing jellyfish at them, but it was of no useâ€” there were too many. Then the other dynasty came, the Python Dynasty. Instead of scurrying down the ropes, they spiraled down at night. They were a clever bunch. They would play dead, and wait for birds who were hungry for a meal, then ' crunch' and the bird would be a knot in the snake's ropey body. The pythons also ate all the Hawaiians roosters. At the height of the islandâ€™s empire, every Hawaiian had a at least five roosters per household. Every sac and backpack was alive and moving as the roosters were carried about on the street. But the Python's ate them making only one rooster per household. The next dynasty was even more clever than the Python--the Mongoose Dynasty. They ate all pythons with lightning speed. They didn't scurry nor spiral down the ropes--they lolly gagged down them. Stopping to stare in the water, for a clam or fish they could eat, they were cocky sons of....

"By the time the Hawaiians raised their jelly fish at them sitting on the ropes, they already ate the belly button lint out of your belly button. They were crafty. But their downfall was that they were not unified. Their kingdom fractured, but they remained on the island.

"The last known dynasty, did not take the rope, but the plank. Drooling, huffing, and snorkeling--snorting up every barnacle on the pier in the two minutes they arrived on the island--the pig. They quickly broke their bonds and took to the mountains and jungles. But something came during the pig dynasty, that was the real scourge of the isles. And it is this dynasty, that my story starts, with two infantry members, from opposite ends of the empire--Seattle and Boston, who arrived to the island not knowing their position on the Hawaiian food chain.

" When Boston first walked into his barracks latrine(bathroom) he was overwhelmed with how humid it was, like he just entered an iguana tank. The ceilings were painted green with mold, the floor kept a semblance to checkered tile due to the heavy mopping of soldiers armed with ammonia. He noticed he was not alone. There were geckos on the ceiling, running around eating giant flying things. The geckos did not bother him, he has seen them in Florida, and perhaps that was there these fellas had come from. He walked over to the sink, for he needed a shave for the first formation. The barracks was old, and used as an overflow for departing service members, or newly arriving ones. It is rumored to still have 50 caliber holes in its

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foundation from Japanese Zero's.

"He looked down into the sink, there was a Gecko's tail, writhing in the sink--not attached to anything. The drain was open, it looked like the cave to a malevolent beast. And it was, a black tendril, or serpent, quickly emitted from the dark drain and grasped the writhing Gecko tail in its mandibles and retreated back into the drain. 'What in holy' Boston whispered as he stepped away from the sink.

"Meanwhile, Seattle walked up to his new room, and used his card key to open his barracks room. The door swung open, and on the floor in front of him, was a large cockroach on its back, apparently dying of over-eating. It bicycled the air, and doggy paddled. Its belly was huge, and its face said 'I lived a good life.' Seattle could only muster the words, 'well that ain't a good sign.'

"Seattle and Boston were roommates for only a month before they became bickering enemies, likened to England and France--coming only together under rules and regulations and enforced peace treaty. It started with a bag of potatoe chips. 'Seattle, you can't come home drunk and leave potatoe chips all over the room. This ain't the mainland, we are gonna get eaten in our sleep by cockroaches. Every night you explode a bag of potatoe chips all over the couch.' It was true, they had a black leather couch given to them by an eager barracks member, and if you sat down on it, you would always hear a crunch.

" ' Whatever Boston, you keep leaving your cherry dip around attracting ants. You fell asleep with a dip in your mouth and you woke up with goat-tee of ants. ' And so it went, it was two male humans in a barracks cage. One, a North Eastern Humano, the other a North Western Humano, both ill-disposed to each other. One more afraid of ants, the other cockroaches.

" But then in a sign of peace offering, Boston introduced Seattle to his Phillipino girlfriend's sister. They went on a double date, and then Seattle went on two other dates after, with just him and her. But then Boston was getting pestered by his girlfriend to 'have Seattle call her sister,' or he was getting pestered by " What , Seattle don't like my sister no more ya?" Boston always dodged the question, knowing the rules. Then one day, Boston had to go up to his room with the two sisters in his car. But they followed him up at the last second, and ambushed Seattle, who was really upset by this and left the room and barracks. That incident could have been water under the bridge, except for what happened.

"When Seattle returned to his now empty room, he opened a draw and removed his sneakers from them, for he still had on his flip flops. He put on his sneakers without socks and was walking down the barracks stairs when he felt it. It was like a nail just went through his foot. A medic in civy's (civilian clothes) was behind him watching him. " You alright buddy," he said.

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" I just stepped on a nail or sumthin," said Seattle.

He shook his sneaker, nothing. Looking at his foot, he saw two fang puncture marks in between his big toes. His vein near the bite was surfacing like a snake all the way up his leg even up to his forehead, he felt dizzy. He shook the sneaker one more time, harder. Inside, now, was a coil, or a nest of black cobras, but it was not many cobras, but one centipede. " what the f...."

The medic looked in, " Thatâs a centipede, highly toxic, if you get really ill come to the Aid Station," he said then left.

"Seattle burned in a fever that night, having dreams of the scorned Phillipino girl haunting him, holding centipedes over him, doing a witch-like curse on him. Seattle was lucky, most react alot worse from the bites. He blamed the scorned girl for putting it there, and most of all--he blamed Boston.

"And that is only one side of the story, for soon after, it was Boston who would become livid with Seattle. One night, Boston was sitting on the pleather couch, with his girlfriend, when they fell asleep on it watching TV--they had the room to themselves. When they awoke they were covered in cockroaches. The girl ran out of the room and Boston's life forever. Upon lifting up the couch cushions, there spied, was a massive moving cockroach galaxy. " Seattle," Boston gritted through his teeth.

" Mister when are we going to get to infantry stuff--" whined the boy.

" Very shortly my lad," said the old man, producing another mango from his pocket and resuming his story.

" Seattle and Boston quickly rose through the ranks, and commanded teams in the same squad. At that time, they got their own rooms, and one would think that would make them get along better, but that was not so. The only thing that assuaged the wise remarks of Boston, and Seattle's feverish temper, was that they had to get along if they lived together, and now they don't. And now they both have a four man team competing against each other, when they are in the same squad.

" Boston's number one on the team was a kid named Mango. He was the go-to guy for Boston, and made his team look good. Seattle's number one guy was a soldier named Biggin who made Seattle's team look good.

" Well, one night, their whole platoon were siting under double canopy in the complete dark. They were in full battle rattle(ammo and body armour) readying their equipment and eating some rations in anticipation of a live-night-fire training exercise. Those exercises were always dangerous, involveing all the platoons weapon systems: machine guns--light and medium, grenade launcher tubes(under rifle) , at-4(disposable rocket launcher), hand grenades, banglomores(used by combat engineers....all in precise cordination with eachother.) All the muzzles orientated in an L shaped pattern on a mock bunkers, trenches, and fighting

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positions. All had to shift fire, as friendly teams bounded forward. Extreme pressure.

"The platoon, is awaiting for the squads to get called up, for this night is a squad level exercise, tomorrow is platoon. Boston's and Seattle's team have not gone in the 'hole' yet. Boston is prepping his night vision, and after he put the batteries in he scans his dark surroundings. All the teams are sitting or laying down, with their ammo vests on. Most are dipping, or eating; some have took off their ammo vests attached to their body armour (as to keep it ready and put together to don it quickly) and are airing out their shirts and allowing precious oxygen to reach their backs as not to get cellulitis from a zit. The back and trapazoids of an infantryman are under constant pressure of their gear, and that is where the most sweat is produced; in 99% humidity a zit work its way back into the body, spreading from the sweat that pools.

â It is dark. There are green 'chem lights' in the middle of the perimeter, illuminating the trash collection point. The air smells of hot sauce from the soldiers meals, and fortunately the soldiers cannot smell eachother at this point, but the smell would be the equivalent of lumberg cheese. But something can smell their cheese.

"As Boston is scanning his fellow platooners in green black night vision, his team member Mango is eating chicken out of a packet, he is wiping his hands all over his ammo and vest as he feels for a spoon he keeps in his grenade pouch. Boston scans right, and notices Bigin, swatting near his ear, like there was a fly there. Boston turned the knob on his nightvision to focus, it was a pig in his ear eyeing the hamburger meal Bigin was eating.â Holy sh.....â

" Before Boston could finish his sentence, the chem lights attached to the trash collection point come alive and hauled ass for the woodline. Mango yells, ' aww my chcken, and my.....' he didn't finish what he said, silencing himself.

" The platoon sergent barked and all had to put away their food. Mango came up to Boston, 'Buston , that pig ran off wit my grenade.' Sheer horror, for to lose grenade was a serious crime, and to lose one to a pig was a hazard. " Your kidding Mango, why would a pig want a grenade.' Mango kept silent about wiping chicken flavor all over it.

" ' 2nd squad, your in the hole, get it on, get it done,' barked the platoon sergent. They were in a jam, Mango was supposed to throw a grenade in the bunker with a range supervisor right behind him. Boston ran up to Seattle, " Seattle, we lost our grenade, when you throw yours Mango will pretend like he threw his at the very same time, they won't know it was only one."

" ' What? Boston, once again making our squad looking bad, if we get caught, it's on you." He turned and returned to his team with the green glow of a chem light illuminating his outline.

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"Everything went as planned, the engineers blew a hole in the wire, the teams shot their rocket launchers, they breached and bounded across the bunker complex, but....

" Bigin was on the support by fire--the machine gun position, he shifted right as Boston's team was coming, he had his hand still on the pistol grip of the machine gun, but then something squeezed his hand like a mother holding a child's tight who just did something bad. A centipede, and it locked on to Bigin's hand. He jerked and traversed the machine left spraying an eight round burst four feet in front of Mango and Seattle who were 200 meters in front of him. The range supervisors shut down the range and failed them. A night of disaster, the centipede did not bite Bigin, and disappeared. He did not mention it.

" That was the first demerit against the squad. Tension was high. The next field exercise at the squad level was on a mountainous, lava rock ridden Hawaiian island. Boston had to lead his team by compass at night to link up at an ambush point where Seattle's team was waiting. They were humping hard and making good pace, they practiced hard for this mission, especially to redeem themselves.

" But calamity struck again. Boston's team was walking up a road, when loud snorting came up from the ravine on the side. A whole gang of pigs that had tusks came up onto the unpaved road. " Boston , shoot it," said Mango.

â He couldn't though, if he fired a round outside of range limits-- it would be a serious crime. The pigs looked formidable with their glistening white tusks under the moonlight, that were razor sharp. They just stood there on the road, implacable, and daring. Boston thought of something, they all had bayonets on them--they could attach them to their rifles and charge. ' Men , fix bayonets, we're fighting through.' But Mango voiced opposition, " Boston, let's throw our rifles like spears, charging is too dangerous, I throw mine and kill one and the rest will run.'

" ' Mango I don't think that's a good idea.' but before Boston could finish Mango had already fixed his bayonet and was lurching forward like a javelin thrower, then he released. The rifle and bayonet landed and hit the biggest pig right in the head. It sunk in one inch. The pig with the rifle sticking out of its forehead just looked at the soldiers then turned and walked into the scrubby field to the side of the road. 'Shit mango, you have to get your rifle or we're

"They failed to meet up with Seattle's team at the checkpoint, for they had to chase a pig that looked like a unicorn all night for a rifle, in which they finally found.

" The platoon sergeant gave them one more chance, before the squad would be dissolved and Seattle and Boston would be demoted. ' You too better work together, or you will never have a leadership position again,' he

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threatened.

"They were in the mountain range called the Kahukus. The last field exercise to get it right.

" ' Boston , you better not mess this up.â

" 'What about you Seattle, you better not.'

" They still were not acting as team, and they needed to here. When they filed in and up the mountain to the bivouac site, they seen fellow battalion soldiers who looked like the remnants of Napoleons army after Boradino. Bandaged heads, hands, limping, despondant.

" Seattle went up to one soldier. ' What the hell happened here?' The soldier said they were attacked by centipedes, it's breeding season, and the wounded soldier warned ' don't go up there man, don't go.' The soldier looked like his head grew to three times normal, and he had two fang marks on the side of his temple. Seattle looked down the line, some had hands as big as ferns, and others had jungle boots that were bursting open from swollen feet. Seattle remembered what that felt like, he thought of Boston and his girlfriends sister, that made him angry, but then he thought that this was their last chance, and they had to get along.

" Their entire platoon humped up the mountain, making mountain streams with their sweat. They reached their bivouac site for the night. Taking off their Kevlar helmets, revealing steaming heads they strung up bungee cords to trees and draped their poncho's over them for shelter for the short rain showerings that came and went all night. ' Alright everyone bed down, squad exercises at 0500 hours,' said the platoon sergeant as the sun just started setting. Anyone who was caught still up and dipping and smoking felt the platoon sergeants wrath.

" But then the first attack came. Biggin laid down on the ground under his teams hooch(ad hoc poncho shelter) without spraying any bug juice. He felt a tickling in his ear, he laughed and thought of pleasant things back home, but then he turned his head. A bright red centipede was dribbling on his ear. He rose up, putting his head through the poncho hooch and collapsing it. His team-mates to his side awoke, ' What is it Bigin?' ' It's a dam centipede, almost crawled in my ear.' That got his teams attention. They propped up the poncho hooch again, and moved all their gear to find it. There was a cord from the ponch hood dangling down from the middle of the hooch as it hung overhead. Someone turned on their red lens flashlight, as they searched on their knees with their bayonets ready.

" Then the side of the poncho that went to the ground, looked like a big red and camouflaged projection screen with the silhouette of a monster on it, writhing it's legs and fangs. The string dangling from the center of the poncho hooch was actually a centipede, none of them knew it. Bigin stabbed at the projection puncturing a hole in the poncho. ' It's a reflection Bigin, it's beside us ya idiot.' But the poncho colpsed from all the stress, and they scrambled out of there, resolving to sleep on their feet the rest of the night. Right when their platoon sergeant was about to yell at them to go back to bed as he laid on the ground in his sleeping bag he was

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"They lingered, already daunted from a daunting start to a mission. They stared at the blue expanse of sky, it was heating up, no more morning caress of the Hawaiian sun. Then they heard a thud. The meal Catfish's head was resting on was snatched out from under him by a mongoose--Catfish's head was concussed from the impact with the rock. ' Jesus, where'd that mongoose come from...' said Boston. The squad looked at Seattle, he shook his head, no they would not turn back still and Bigin had to carry Catfish.

"They moved even slower now, Boston kept looking at his watch, he gave a radio report with the current coordinates of their location. ' Hurry up, you haven't reached your first phase line yet' the radio admonished. The squad was getting spooked, everything looked like a centipede--the vines on the forest floor, the straps on their gear. Mango punched himself in the head because he thought his eyelashes were a centipede. Exhaustion was creeping in, in the form of delusions.

â Lumbering across the valley, enclosed by steep scraggy hills on all sides, Seattle kept on thinking â How are we get up the next incline with two wounded?â But mission failure was not an option for him.

"They reached the phase-line where the sign with the code they are to record was. They dropped their gear in a cache to look for it without the weight of their gear. That is when Bigin noticed something stalking them. ' Boston, look out there, what is that, it's ait's a pig.....' Then they were greeted with utter horror, around one of its tusk's was a grenade. The pin of the grenade was being scraped at by brush as the pig snorted around the woodline--the thumb safety was already off, and if that pin goes.....

" 'Mango , that's your freaking grenade around that pig--' yelled Boston. The squad backed together, in a tight huddle, they looked at Seattle. The pig came closer, Mango was ready to load a live mag and blow it away before Boston stopped him, ' Mango don't, if we do not have all our rounds we are disqualified when we get to the live fire point.....'

"Slowly retreating back to their cache point, they were greeted by a gang of mongoose's--they had ramsacked all their gear and took all their MRE's. ' What are we gunna do now' whined Hamburger as a mongoose ran up his leg and onto his neck to steal a booger out of his nose and retreated to the woodline with its fellow mongooses, and gobbled up its prize. Hamburger dropped his machine-gun, â Aww my nose....that bastard plucked out my nose hair....goddam mong.....â

â ' Push on ' said Seattle interrupting Hamburger.

"Push on they did, reaching the first incline, carrying two unconscious soldiers, well one was almost unconscious, Catfish was mumbling about Vietcong and Ho Chi ming.

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"The sky disappeared , and there was only the trees that had leaves that looked like insects with many legs. ' Seattle, I don't think we can make it Bro,' said Boston, as a pig snorted not too far from them.

â ' We can make it bro, we have to work together, we'll make it,' said Seattle stoically with a steady conveyor belt of sweat beads rolling down his nose.

"Grabbing trees to pull themselves up, they reached a level part where they could skirt the hill, a ridge they could cut around on and continue the azimuth to the second point. All of them had to carry the two wounded men like they were crowd surfing.

"Reaching the other side of the hill, they took a break before the decline. All were staring overhead at the leafs of the trees. Hunger was setting in all of them. Mango saw an Apple Banana tree, ' I'll climb it and get us banana's Boston,' said Mango. No one voiced opposition, they were starving, they were burning muscle, and all could smell it.

"Mango climbed the palm looking trunk of the tree, his spaghetti arms almost built for that purpose. He got three quarters of the way up, when out of the cluster of yellow green apple banana's a swarm of black red tendrils came out, he screamed and rocked the tree so hard it's trunk split in half and he came crashing down with all the apple banana's falling on top of him.

He hit hard, then got smacked of the head with a heavy cluster of fruit. Boston ran to his aid, pulling him up brushing the centipedes off him, but the centipedes clutched his fatigues. Seattle ran up to Boston trying to brush him off, but they clung to him, and Bigin swung his rifle batting them off Seattle but connecting with his knee, crumpling Seattle to the ground. A snort came from the dense growth, then the pig rushed in, a vine caught the pin of the grenade, they heard the clack of the grenade spoon flying off ' shit' said the wounded Seattle who grabbed Mango to drag him out of the tree riddled with centipedes. Bigin, Boston and Hamburger grabbed Seattle and (who held onto Mango) dragged him out over the ridge. ' Over the side' yelled Boston, and they dragged Catfish and the range officer with them. The pig dove into the apple banana's.

"The grenade blew up, they saw the hot sparks screaming into the air above them as they were sliding down the hillside. They slid to a stop. They looked at Seattle who was in pain, he gritted and said ' push on.'

"They now had four wounded, but at least Mango and Seattle could walk. But Mango couldn't carry his gear, his arm was sprained. Boston now took point, carrying the gear of three soldiers, they all looked as if they were squatting the sky and all its atmospheric pressure. They got around the hill, reaching their phaseline. ' You guys stay here, I'll find the sign,' said Boston.

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"He walked into the growth with his bayonet attached to his weapon, stumbling over the slightest trip because of his exhaustion. He fell one more time, and thought of laying there a minute, but a leaf caressed his ear and that sent him to his feet. ' Let's go Boston,' he said to himself and checked his compass. He saw the orange spray painted sign through some vegetation. His heart lifted, he hacked his way and came face to face with the sign. ' No' he said in a despondent voice.

"The tree was swarming and alive with black ripples that slithered over the sign rendering it unintelligible. It was the layer, the layer of the centipede. There were bones of birds, pigs, mongooses and rats at the base of the tree. A centipede crawled out of an eye socket of a mongoose and back into a socket of a pig. Boston stood before the hideous tree, clutching his rifle. A wind blew through the canopy of the surrounding trees sending the centipede-like leaves into a scurrying tantrum. If he get's this code they are done with the land navigation, and they would be allowed to go last on the squad live fire at the end, doing it days later. Seattle pushed through the brush with his M-4 fixed with a bayonet, ' let's do this Boston, let's finish it,' and they took their knife points and tried clearing the metal sign. They stabbed and thrusted to reveal every alpha numeric of the code. As the black tendrils swarmed onto their rifles and up their jungle boots they felt the incisors cutting through their pants; before centipedes bite they clench with one hundred black legs as if their were the hands of demonic monster, that had hands built for stripping flesh.

"A centipede crawled over Bostons eye, and gripped his face, they were on the last number, he swiped at the sign to read it before it was covered by the swarming red tinted blackness again. They got the code, then the centipede incised into his nose sending hot blood running down his nose, he clutched it and in turn his hand was clutched by insectal strength biting him on his hand. Seattle had a centipede on his ear dangling like an ear-ring, it pierced his ear and fell with a piece of it. Retreating, they made it back to the cache, Hamburger and Bigin removed the horde from them with their bayonets.

"The fever was setting in on Seattle and Boston, but the range officer was waking and was able to walk , along with Catfish. They continued their azimuth, all extremely tired, the range officer helped Seattle walk, he was turning pale, and Mango helped Boston, who's face was swelling up shutting his left eye.

"They came into a clearing, with mesh camo tents, and a view of a beautiful ocean down below and the finish point. The range officer at the finish point took down their unit and squad to check them off as 'completed,' but only after saying ' holy shit, what the hell happened to you guys.' The squad and range officer collapsed and they were taken to the medics tent. Where they got the story from Mango. They were all flown back to the rear, all earning commendation medals. The squad healed to full health and was promoted to 1st squad, the best in a platoon, and Seattle and Boston became best friends."

The old man took another mango from his pocket. " Your Mango arn't you," said the boy, enthralled by the old manâs story.

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" Not any more lad, not anymore,' said the old man in a pensive stare.

" Wow, that must have been years ago when you were in the infantry?" Ben said, in awe.

" That was five years ago, when I was in, I was 24 then in the valley of the centipedes," said Mango. The boy looked at him in astonishment as his father was getting off a golf cart coming up to him.

" Hey Ben, you have fun.....thanks for watching him..." said Ben's father, in a jolly mood from his golf game.

Ben was in state of awe still, getting up to join his dad, musing over everything that the old looking young man said.

Then something caught all their eyes. " Hey what is that?" asked Ben's father. " Is that a rabbit..or what is that?" asked Ben. " I think that's a hedgehog, but what is it eating..." said his father unsure..." It's eating spagetiti or something..." replied the boy.

" That's not a hedgehog, that's a chinchilla, and it's eating a centipede," lectured Mango with a cold stare at the animal. The chinchilla was gobbling up a centipede like a noodle, the centipede was biting the chinchillas nose, but the fluffy animal was unfazed.

" Ben, come back and visit" said Mango almost in a trance watching the chinchilla, " And I'll tell you the story of ' Night On Chinchilla Hill' ."

The End

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