

## **A Good Time with a Good Friend**

By

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### The Book's Private War

A while back I mentioned private Helixson. He was king of a nice guy but a little on the wimpy side. He was about 5'6" and a little on the chubby side. He was the first locker in the first bay, which meant that he was also the first one inspected at every inspection. I was the next locker up, which on this day was clearly not the place to be.

In every dorm there was a meeting room. My memory escapes me on this point but I seem to remember that it was called the chapter room. One of the sergeants, usually Sergeant Ward, would call us into the chapter room and give us a lecture or explain how something was to be done.

On this particular day, he explained how to store our rain cap. In the Air Force, they issue what is called a bus driver's hat, and, as you might guess by the description, it looked like a hat worn by a bus driver. Because it was flat on top, they also issued a plastic cover to keep it dry in the rain; this looked exactly like a shower cap. On one side of the cap was a button and on the other side of the cap was a strap that was about an inch long. These two items were designed to attach the cap to the hat.

Sergeant Ward was not short on explanation. He could take the simplest thing and turn it into an hour's discussion (much like one of my articles). On this day he was in rare form and, as it was only about 10:00 a.m. when he started, I figured that we were in for a good two hours.

The military was not big on sleep and it would be safe to say that after a week of this nonsense, we were all rather tired. Cramming a flight of 50 airmen into a small chapter room didn't help the smell of our clothes or the heat in the room. We spent the first week in the same fatigues; by this point, they had big salt stains from our own sweat. After about 15 minutes, the chapter room was not the place to be.

Anyway, Sergeant Ward droned on. First he spent about a half hour showing us how to fold our raincoat. I have to admit that, as fascinating as this all was, I was nearly half asleep and I doubt anyone was doing much better except the good sergeant, as he loved to hear himself talk, which was good because he did a lot of it.

Once he got done with the raincoat, he started explaining the protective cover for our bus driver's hat. Would this never end? He showed us how to lay it flat and smooth it out and then to fold it into quarters. When he got done with this explanation, he showed us how the button and the strap came together and how if you were an idiot, you might

actually want to button the strap to the button, but obviously that would be stupid. He went over it again just in case we were slow. "Lie flat, smooth flat, fold into quarters, BUT DON'T BUTTON IT," he said.

Then he went onto some other topic that lasted another hour. By this time we were all practically passed out on the floor. Just when I couldn't take it anymore, he told us that inspection would be in five minutes, so we all shook ourselves and headed off for our lockers.

Passing by, I noticed that the wicked witch of the west, Sergeant Hurley, was sitting in the TI's office. I had already learned that before an inspection this was not a welcome sight, and it was made doubly so because she and I had not grown close since she had conjured up the nickname of "Laughing Boy" for me. She was also never pleasant during inspections, so I could see that the day was about to turn south.

"Attent HUT," and we were brought to attention next to our open lockers. Poor Sergeant Ward couldn't do anything without perfect military precision. Even when he walked he marched. He was a Marine that had gotten confused and joined the Air Force. Speaking of which, we had a guy in the flight that had been a Marine and had gotten out and then joined the Air Force. I swear that they were out to prove that no Marine could make it in this man's Air Force, because they were far tougher on him than anyone else. Inside, he was probably laughing at them the whole time for their lame attempts at toughness. I still had to wonder about him though.

Anyway, here came Sergeants Ward and Hurley around the corner of the first bed and straight at Private Helixson. When I was a kid, I had two mallard ducks, which were not allowed to leave the backyard to go out into the driveway. However, every time the gate was left open even for a minute, the hen would start bobbing her head and quacking at the male like she was egging him on to go out the gate. Every time he would go out the gate and get in trouble. When I would drive him back through the gate, she would always have her head in the grass looking for bugs like she didn't know I was there. Well, Sergeants Ward and Hurley had that sort of relationship. He was just about the same level as my male duck and she was running the show.

Sergeant Hurley inspected Helixson's uniform while Sergeant Ward inspected the locker. She started off like usual, commenting on his shave and his boots and so on. It was about that time that Sergeant Ward got rigid staring at Helixson. "What in the hell do we have here? Helixson, don't even tell me that that this rain cap is buttoned," he said.

This is where Helixson was at his best. As I mentioned he was sort of chubby and when he got upset he shook like a bowl full of jelly. With a quivering chin, he looked down. That started Hurley right off. "Who in the hell told you that you could look down?" she barked. "You can't follow simple orders, you can't fold your clothes, and you can't stand at attention. Did your mother just finally get sick of you as a lost cause and send you to us?"

Old Helixson was about to do the jitterbug, when Sargent Ward said, "Put this rain cap on your head." Helixson reluctantly complied. I couldn't resist a quick glance out of the corner of my eye. There was Helixson with a shower cap covering his square head and the strap on his little shower cap hanging down to his sideburn on the left side of his face. His chin was quivering and he was about ready to cry.

Squeezing in as close to Helixson as he could possibly get, Sergeant Ward practically crawled into his uniform with him. In a very low voice he said, "Now button it you dumb ass." With the button at ear level on one side of his head and the strap just clearing the sideburn on the other, there was no physical way that was going to happen. However, what was he going to do but try. Pinching both button and the strap between the thumb and first finger on each hand, he gave it a pathetic little tug and started whimpering, "Sir, I can't. Sir, I can't." By this point, he had a catch in his throat and he was about to cry. It was at this point that that Sergeant Ward said, "Of course you can't you dumb ass! That is why I told you not to button it."

Now I can only be expected to keep a straight face for so long, and it was about here that I couldn't deal with it any longer. When he started tugging on those straps, I had to bite my lip, but when the good sergeant gave him that explanation, I lost it. I had been watching this whole episode out of the corner of my eye, but upon laughing out loud, I was now looking straight ahead and waiting for what was surely to come.

"Well if it isn't Laughing Boy. We haven't heard from you today. If you think this is so god-damned funny, maybe I ought to come visit you!" she said. "Isn't that just great," I thought. Here they are standing and witnessing this whole thing, and they can't see the humor in it. Click, Click, Click -- I could hear her shoes coming around the end of my bed and yep sure enough now she was in my line of sight (LOS), and her beady eyes looked meaner than usual. "You have to be the stupidest @#@@% I have ever had the misfortune to come across. With you two @#\$\* @&&@ right in a row, I can hardly wait to inspect the rest of this flight! Since you think this is so &^%\$\*% funny, let's take a quick look into your locker."

"Gee, I bet she is going to come back up straight and tell me how nice my locker looks," I thought. This only started me jerking around with internal laughter. In the military, because underwear can never be folded exactly to the same size, you are supposed to stack it from biggest at the bottom to smallest at the top. They call this a pyramid.

In fact, she said, "Do you call this a pyramid?" I said, "Yes mama." "Well then you are dumber than dog &^%% on a wet winter's morning." I was still trying to figure out if this was a good or a bad thing when she reached down and picked up the entire stack. She straightened up and took about two steps out in front of me and then turned around. "This is no \$%^&^%\$ pyramid of cloths you dumb \$%^&\*\*." With that she pulled the whole stack back behind her head and threw them directly into my face with a muffled wop.

Things might have ended there except one of the pairs of underwear happened to catch on my ear and hang there. There I was standing at attention with a pair of underwear hanging on my ear. Well, this was classic, and I was once again shuttering with internal laughter. I might have been able to hold it in if it weren't for the guys on the other side of the bay. They had to watch this full on, and it was just too much. One of them broke down, and then I broke down laughing.

Sergeant Ward lost it too, but not in a funny sort of way. He grabbed Helixson's bed and flipped it over while he was screaming at me, and then he flipped my bed and the bed after that until he had gone down the whole row. Then he marched down the row to scream at me some more. I almost had it back together when one more chuckle came from nowhere and he called a fire alarm and we all had to go outside and stand at attention for an hour in the hot summer sun. I thought the guys would be upset, but after we got the dorm back together and the good sergeants had left, my bay had to tell the other bay what had happened and I sort of became a folk hero. Talk about stepping in dog \$%^#\$ on a wet winter's morning and coming up roses.

### **The Great Mauricio Jemal**

I thought I would take a break from the usual to talk about a relatively new acquaintance that I have quickly grown to admire and respect. His breeding achievements in this sport are nothing short of amazing. He has been honored and recognized by the legendary Piet DeWeerd with four testimonials for his skill as a breeder. This clearly establishes him as an individual that Piet held in extremely high regard.



(Mauricio Jemal is on the left)

While I may have heard of Mauricio prior to 1980, it was not his achievements that caught my attention. While at a friend's house I came across what I thought was one of the most phenomenal pigeons I have ever handled. I was told that she was from a family of pigeons called the "Jemal Janssen." What made her even more special was her ability to produce winners. In fact, in a five-year period, she bred 13 winners (one was a triple winner) and countless diploma winners in several different areas. Through two of my out-crosses, this blood is still alive in my loft today.

(Picture)

### The Jemal Hen bred 13 winners

Shortly after writing my first article for Winning, I was going through the site archives when I came across an article by none other than the great Mauricio Jemal. Based on a fair amount of hearsay over the years, I was eager to learn more about this individual. If even half of what I had heard was true, he was almost certain to be a fascinating character.

Throughout my pigeon-flying career, I have always had the good fortune to be in the right place at the right time -- this would be no exception. One day, several weeks after reading Mauricio's article, I was busily going through my emails when up popped an email that had been mass-mailed to a number of fanciers. I was sort of surprised to see that it was from Mauricio.

Having never met the man, I just figured that somehow I had gotten on his mass-mailing list by mistake. Several weeks went by, and then there was another email, but this one was sent directly to me complimenting my most recent article.

I was sort of surprised to learn that anyone was actually reading what I had to say. (As Steven Van Breeman has been pointing out to all his subscribers lately, it's important to let the writers know that you read them.) Until then, I truthfully thought that I was writing just so I could hear the rhythmic clatter of the keyboard. Yet, here was a response from one of the legends of the sport, and he was complimenting my articles!

I quickly wrote him back and thanked him for his interest in my articles. This led to more in-depth emails, and soon, we were writing each other several times a day. In fact, as time went by, we started writing each other so many times a day that we were oftentimes writing at one and two in the morning.

Things were going great until one night the princess of darkness awoke with a sudden start and, through half closed eyes, shot a glowing red ray of light about the room. The clatter of keys stopped immediately, and I froze like a mouse as this powerful force surveyed its kingdom. Unfortunately, the luminous rays from my monitor betrayed me exposing my profile to her in the darkness. I must have looked like a fat tick that needed popping.

I saw the ominous glow of red from one of her glowering eyes move swiftly to the clock for a confirmation of the exact time. Now both eyes were open and she began to coil. I clearly had her attention. Then with a guttural hiss she asked, "Do you know what time it is?" Thinking quickly about the food room episode, I recollected that you should never answer this question directly, so I stammered, "Ah no, the clock is turned toward you." "Well then," she hissed, "let's fix that." An arm shot out from somewhere under the covers and suddenly I could see the clock quite clearly.

"Just as I thought," she said, "it is 2:00 a.m." Like an idiot, I said "Oh, well, my computer clock only says 1:45." "So then," she said in a soft whisper, "you can see a clock and that means that you know what time it is." Well, at this point it was all pretty much over but the shouting, and I had a feeling that was just about to begin. As there may be some readers and apparently one author that are not considered adults, I will skip the rehash, and just say that Mauricio and I now have a 10:00 p.m. curfew.

I did lamely try to explain that this was the great Mauricio Jemal from Mexico City that I was writing to. At which time I learned that if you are going to be a mouse, it is best to sit quietly, conserve your energy, and wait to be eaten; otherwise, you will be squeezed until your eyes pop out. After collecting my eyes, I managed to squeak, "Could I at least tell him that I can't write anymore tonight?" "Alright, but make it real quick; otherwise you will be moving your computer to the family room," she hissed. This would be bad as there is no TV in the family room, which probably has something to do with the limited family gatherings in the family room.

So I sent one last email out into the night. However, all that came back was the sound of Mexican crickets. It seems that during the extended silence on my end, Mauricio had become nervous, so he pulled up the tent stake, burned the decoder booklet, and quickly blended into the jungles of the region. Those were indeed troubling times.

Anyway, the emails continued at a staggering pace, and they covered an amazing variety of subjects. This guy was quite interesting, and, considering he is nearing his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, his recollection of detail is nothing short of extraordinary!

On several occasions, Mauricio had mentioned that he would like to come for a visit. Truthfully, I hate this time of year because the birds are fat, just finishing up with breeding, and the weather is usually well into the 100s. I also like to look at pigeons after the moult, so I mentioned October as a possible time for a visit.

Mauricio told me that he and his wife were soon going to visit their daughter who happens to be here in the States, so he wanted to visit then. Well that happened to be this last week.

So this last Tuesday, my son and I picked him up at the airport for what was to turn out to be nothing short of an excellent visit. He lived up to his billing in every way. Even the princess of darkness, Mrs. Book (as Marty Ladin calls her), seemed genuinely taken by him, although she didn't soften on our curfew. He didn't talk about pigeons for the entire

meal, which in her view showed good etiquette and tolerable breeding. Fortunately he had been paying attention to my articles!

(Picture of Mauricio and the family)

We had several excellent meals and Mauricio would not leave any restaurant until the plates were clean of food. I even witnessed him eat 1½ loaves of bread. He also negotiated with the waiter for nearly a half hour over a glass of wine. It was amazing to watch.

We also looked at 18 pairs of pigeons and 30 youngsters at least seventy-five different ways. The hinges on my individual sections are now worn out from fatigue as is their owner.

The first night I dropped him off at his hotel after a very big meal and what should have been for him a very long day. (He went from 5:00 a.m. to nearly midnight.) I am not a high-energy person, and I will be the first to admit this. In fact, as my friend Marty Ladin often says about me and my friend Steve Baldwin, “Book, if you had to follow Steve around, you’d be dead in a month.” Well, if I had to follow Mauricio around, I would be dead in a week. I have been thinking about introducing the two of them and then Steve would be dead in maybe two weeks and then maybe I could keep up with him easier, although at that point, he might start to stink. Marty always tells me that Steve is fifty, but he is a young fifty. The Book’s 45, but he’s an old 45 -- more like 70. That is why when I visit Marty, we sit around and watch TV and do Geritol chasers together. Marty moves just the right speed for me.

Anyway it was a great time! He took far more interest in my pigeons than I have at any time recently. He is an excellent selector and very knowledgeable about muscle quality! We do not share the same methods or even necessarily the same opinions, and although I would probably say that we are not on the same track at this point in time, I still never once doubted his ability. He didn’t try to force his opinions, and I didn’t try to force mine. We politely listened to each other, and, while I can’t speak for him, I am still thinking over much of what he had to say.

What I really enjoyed were the conversations, especially those involving the past. They were endless. We exchanged ideas and defended positions. We talked a lot about mutual old friends. He goes back ten more years in the sport, but we had a lot of common history and mutual friends from which to work. At one point, we even discovered that we were both born in Glendale, California. In fact, he went to the same grade school as my dad, and it is very possible that they were actually there at the same time. Mauricio would have been in the 1st grade when my day was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

This sport does not always come up roses. In fact, as my good friend Ed Lorenz often says, “There are way more lows than highs in this sport.” However, maybe that makes you better appreciate the real highs. When I am old (probably 50), and sitting in my

rocking chair, and all I have left are those great memories that I can still remember, I think one of those will be this visit from my friend Mauricio Jemal.

Until Next Time!

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