

WHO ELSE IN THE US ARMY WORRIES ABOUT THE QUALITY OF A CHATEAUBRIAND OR
THE LARGESS OF LUNGS IN LA PAZ, BOLIVIA

Either because of neglect or too much drink, this narrative of dubious value to our inheritors is being written more or less backwards...but nevertheless in the hope that those who may be so fortunate as to follow in our darkened footsteps will be able to glean a bit of wisdom from it. Primarily wisdom as to where not to go and what not to do.

Today is Sunday, April the 17th...La Paz, Bolivia. The city itself is located in a sort of bowl affair among mountains decorated by terraced land and adobe dwellings. A taxi ride costs you more going up than down. It involves a modus operandi known popularly in San Francisco as the Jewish Joy Ride, i.e. kill the engine while screaming downhill from the lip of the alto-plano. Which brings us to something else. Airplanes. They do not land in ~~extremis~~ La Paz. The airport is located on the gigantic flatland above the bowl called the altiplano....flat as far as the eye can see, and at about 14,000 feet altitude. Airplanes merely fly in and stop. The doors are opened and almost invariably a passenger or two finds himself without oxygen and temporarily leaves a considerably blackened world behind. So much for the city. Activities.

As I said, today is Sunday, and this morning we witness^{about as} a blatant display of sex, wealth, and other accoutrements of social size as one can imagine. Paseo, a sort of promenade generally seen only on Easter in the states. Not here. Every Sunday....and to the tune of a military band. The people, fortunately including many chicas, parade around and around the grass-divided center of a four-lane street in the heart of the city.

As I said, a blatant display of....cameras in hand, ~~sticking~~ tongues[“] somewhere along our chests, we came, we saw, and....well, that's another story.

Yesterday was Saturday as is obvious to any reader who is truly paying attention to what is being said here. We went, tourist style, to take a few feet and shots along, in, under, around, and of the so-called thieves market. A kind of minor tent city, this market is a conglomeration mostly of people, small booths, ~~people~~ people, and items of every size and description. From Beatles chewing gum to Doble W bourbon stolen and smuggled in from Argentina to bowler hats made in Houston, Texas. Incidentally, the aforementioned bowler hat is a sort of Bolivian trademark. Not in the British sense, heaven forbid. Here they are worn by the Indian women. Descendants of the mighty Inca placed ignominiously below a British style bowler. So much for descendants.... we have more of our tale for ours.

As we ambled along (ambled/....? up those hills?) in the market area, we photographed a multitude of things; I with my Bolex, George with his 8mm and Bob with the howitzer, fat version (wide-angle on Pra-VI). The pictures were stolen. As a general rule, many objections are raised at photographers. Witness the fact that we were targets on a couple of occasions for well-aimed missiles of discord from the populace. Disregarding possible mayhem for the greater good of posterity, we moved on....click, snap, whirrr.

Being tall, blond, and great, armed with one each bolex, I became an object for conversation as I passed not so unobtrusively along the street, hanging my head up on signs, booth fronts, etc. Bolivians are rather short. But George, to get back to the story, has concocted (and yesterday employed) the tactic of walking behind me and the bolex to hear what the people say. I found out later that I was variously described as being a newsmen, reporter, from television, from Hollywood, a bum, a gringo (same thing), and a museum piece. Amusing? Maybe to George, but I was the one who was hit first by those flying objections.

And that night, we worried about the quality of our chateaubriand.

But this is as good a time to backtrack a couple of days to Panama, and our trip here. ~ ~ ~

Came Wednesday morning, the arrival of our transportation to the airport, George and Bob had had about an hours sleep...as usual prior to a trip. I, being upright, honest, and nonalcoholic, had slept soundly for several hours.

The flight to our first stop, and an overnight rest, was smooth. We arrived in Lima, Peru, departed the airport via Mercedes-Benz (bus) for the Crillon hotel. No incidents yet, but stick around. Flopping our gear in the room, we again made like tourists...into the street, into the story, up with the money, and out with the goodies. Back to the hotel and into the Rustic Bar.

This is where the narrative, of necessity, begins to become a trifle vague. There is a simple explanation for this which is rooted in tradition, nursed by George who had been there before, enchanted by the moment, smiled at by the natives, and participated in by many a fool. In short, we got drunk.

Not a common, ordinary, everyday garden variety of drunk on booze to which normal man is at least accustomed. Not us. We had to drink Pisco Sour. As I said, tradition, etc.

It is said that usually after four of those diablitas, everybody heads for their respective rooms to dress for dinner...and are not heard from again until the a.m. We never got to the dressing stage.

The Rustic Bar rusticated my innards with four Pisco surlys, and the same for George and Bob. Feeling smug over my apparent conquest of the well-touted sneaky effects of Pisco, I dutifully followed the team to the Telephone Bar for what turned out to be the beginning of a very horrible end. Also the beginning of the end of sanity, sense, and memory.

Working on P.S. #5, we became involved in conversation with a young lady who occupied a bar stool somewhere near my mental flummery. George eventually ended up taking that over, since it soon became apparent it would be all I could

do to keep my feet under me. Bob, meanwhile, was speaking Spanish like a native to a native. Female, naturally. At this point, I'm sorry to say, my memory fails me as do those of George and Bob.

However, as best we can reconstruct our retreat, and it can only be described as that, this is what happened.

Finding our senses shot, our navigation ~~fixed~~ equipment fouled, and the city on its ear, we reeled back to the hotel where George and Bob passed out almost immediately.

But not for me. I had a grand finale yet to go. I won't go into the gory details; suffice it to say I made many, many painful visits to the bathroom to survey the remnants of what had nearly destroyed me. Tradition had won again.

Arrive the dawn, and the senseless clatter of the alarm clock. Babbling somewhat like an idiot, I arose from what was nearly my tomb, scattered my steps about the room waking up the dead, and moved to the scene of my early morning crimes. Ack!

The Plane got off more or less on schedule despite moans emanating from about three seats. All was well until the low-level flight over the altiplano where the winds of fate caught up with me. My senses reeled. The world reeled. My stomach reeled. And I reeled in my tongue, jammed it in my throat and thus courageously prevented a minor catastrophe. And we landed in La Paz.

George had a girl in La Paz. I said had, because he showed uncommon tenacity in getting rid of her. Something involving Susana, I'm sure. So he lined up Bob and I for a date Friday night with Martha. Martha is a young, well-endowed Bolivian female who, with a sister and a cousin, took Bob and I to the Crillon Hotel for a bit of booze and a bit of the dance.

Having recovered somewhat from the LimaPeruPiscoSourRoute, I plunged, with Bob, into another ridiculous situation. Our Spanish is minimal, Their English the same. But, outside of a couple of lapses, the conversation went just slightly slower than did the money....which went at a frightening rate.

Moving to the Club 21, we found more dancing, boozing, and a floorshow of value only as a conversational rest. And then my glasses became a subject of discussion, then one of thievery, and before long a headache set in, I got mad, Bob laughed, the night went pufi. We walked them home, exchanged more unkind words, and I stalked home...in a straight line. End of flummery with Martha.