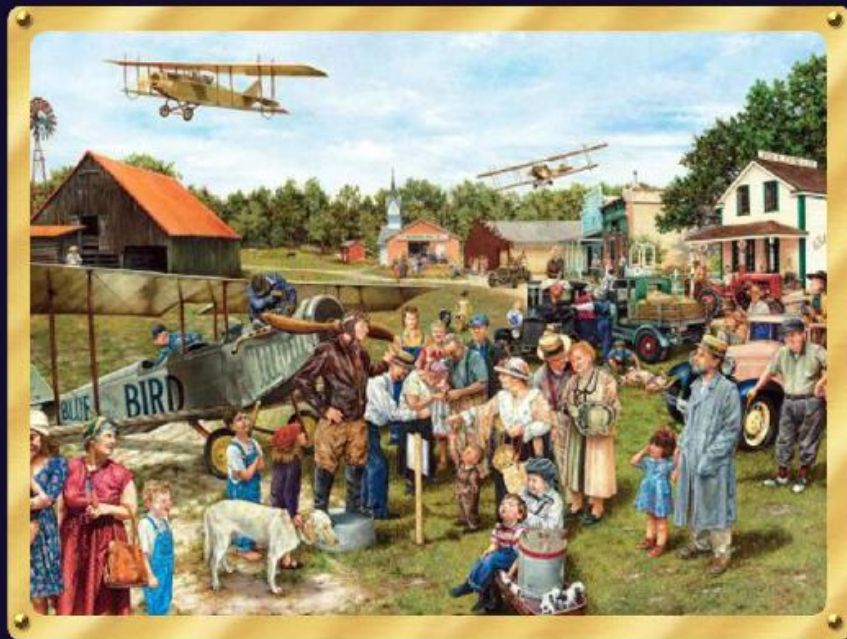


# LIFE OF AN AVIATOR

## SHORT STORIES

by  
*Robert Novell*

### Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid





# Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid

## Part One (The Phone Call)

The day had started normally with me making a quick call to operations to check on any recent schedule changes, but no changes and all was quiet. The morning in Miami had been mostly rain, as had the night before, but now the sun was breaking through the overcast and the temperature, and humidity, was on the rise. The rain had initially provided me an excuse to be a couch potato but now it was time to get up, get out, and enjoy the Florida sunshine. Maybe a good beach day I thought but first I need to go do my normal three-mile run to get rid of the unwanted effects of beer drinking. I had been at my favorite Oyster Bar the night before listening to a friend tells me about his bush flying in Kenya, with a Boeing 707, for the 157<sup>th</sup> time. It is amazing how much beer you can consume when an old friend has cornered you and had no escape except to change barstools. However, that was not an option I wanted to exercise with my old friend. It appeared that this night he needed an old friend to help him celebrate his glory days in Aviation. However, before I could even get my running shoes laced up the phone rang. I was scheduled to go to Bolivia, the trip was expected to take five days, and I had three hours to be at the airport ready to close the door. Operations was

working the overflight permits, and landing clearances, and my Co-Captain had been notified. Guess I will skip the run, the beach, and go make a little money and see a few new places instead.

The flight had been booked by a production crew who needed to scout out locations for a movie and get the appropriate permissions to film parts of that movie on location in Bolivia. I had no information on where their company was based but was told they would be arriving from North Carolina in two hours and wanted to leave immediately for La Paz, Bolivia. Not many folks want to go to Bolivia so I found it curious that a film crew wanted to shoot a film in a country with hyper-inflation, and widespread corruption, but if they were willing to pay the twenty-five thousand plus dollars for the flight they must have a real need for speed as well as a desire to make a statement by arriving in a Lear Jet.

I had not asked about the route during the hurried conversation with Operations, but I know the Lear-36 is going to need a fuel stop, and I hope I am not the one who has to tell these nice Hollywood types that their flight needs a fuel stop. Oh well, I have heard all the ranting and raving about how time is money and how much money this is costing them before so one more time really won't make a difference. Ninety percent of my job is dealing with attitudes, and I was actually getting good at dealing with prima donnas and keeping a smile on my face.

Turns out Operations had actually advised Sales that there would be a fuel stop, and the customer seemed not to be upset with the delay. Operations had us going into Guayaquil, Ecuador for fuel, which I thought was a little strange, but better than Cartagena, Colombia where extensive delays by customs could make things a challenge. I had better get a move on, considering Miami traffic was going to slow down my ride across town, and maybe Guayaquil can do a quick turn so that we can get into La Paz before sunset.

La Paz is at an elevation of around thirteen thousand feet so this should be interesting even though I had flown into Bogota, Colombia, which has an

elevation of 8500 feet, and Quito, Ecuador, which has an elevation of 9400 feet, numerous times. I also know that our departure from La Paz will have to be made using minimum fuel, which will result in our having to do two fuel stops; however, operations had said to expect a few nights in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, which was only about thirty minutes away from La Paz, so perhaps we will leave from this location for our return trip. This would make things easier for fuel planning and I think we can go direct to Panama City, Panama depending on the winds.

The flight was uneventful, the fuel stop in Ecuador was quick, and the approach, and landing, in La Paz was made under crystal blue skies and a setting sun. Great flight but when we got out of the airplane, and started unloading bags and equipment, I knew I was 13,000 feet. I am not in bad shape, and I run almost every day, but trying to hustle bags and secure the airplane at this elevation had me stop at least three times just to catch my breath and get my heart rate down.

The schedule said we had only one night here in La Paz and then we would leave for Santa Cruz the next morning, which was across the mountains in the basin, and the elevation there was almost sea level. This was more to my liking and maybe if I could make chartering an airplane work, at a reasonable price, I would even get to go spend a day with Butch Cassidy and his partner Sundance. The small mining community of San Vicente, Bolivia which was about three or four hours away from Santa Cruz, claimed to have the graves of the famous duo.

The night in La Paz was uneventful and our scheduled departure was approaching when Customs arrived on the scene to check out our airplane and ask questions. Normally these guys are looking for a hand out so I was prepared but just as we were finishing introductions our passengers showed up in a caravan of government vehicles. Customs acknowledged the local officials escorting our clients, had a few words with one of the Bolivianos wearing a three-piece suit, and then slowly walked away deciding that maybe it was best not to do a shake down of the gringos with the expensive private airplane.

We departed on time, arrived on time at Santa Cruz, and before I knew it I was sitting by the pool at the hotel contemplating my next move. My Co-Captain, who was divorced, had already advised me that he was going to find himself a girl friend to hang out with for a few days so it was just me, me, and me for the rest of my time here. So, time to put the pieces together for my Bolivian adventure so that I can pay my respects to Butch and Sundance.

Now, for those unfamiliar with the legend of Butch and Sundance let me fill in the blanks with a look back at some of the history on the famous duo found on the web.....

One of the more popular movies of the 1960s was the movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, which featured Paul Newman and Robert Redford as the two, titled Western outlaws. The film portrays the careers of Butch and Sundance, and how they were forced by the law to leave the Wild West for South America. In the last scene of the movie the two outlaws are shown surrounded by South American soldiers, after a failed robbery attempt, and facing capture Butch and Sundance charge out of their hiding place, guns blazing, and then the film stops there giving the impression that the two outlaws died in a blaze of glory with their boots on.

Not exactly.....

Members of both men's families, as well as some historians, believe that the two men survived the shootout and later returned to the United States. A number of men have claimed to be the notorious outlaws, the most credible being a machine-shop owner by the name of William Phillips who said he was really Butch Cassidy. Based on the available information, the debate could go either way.

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid both came from respectable families that were trying to make a living on the wild American frontier of the nineteenth century. Butch was born Robert Leroy Parker and was actually

the grandson of one of the original bishops of the Mormon Church. However, early on in his life, Robert turned to crime. He started out small, rustling cattle and stealing horses. Robert Parker picked up his alias from his short career as a butcher. The name Cassidy came from Mike Cassidy, the con who taught Parker how to rustle cattle. Caught trying to steal a horse in Cheyenne, Wyoming in 1893 Butch was arrested and served time in the State Penitentiary. When he got out, Butch teamed up with several other outlaws and formed the Wild Bunch. One of the members was Harry A. Longabaugh, also known as the Sundance Kid. At first, the gang concentrated on cattle rustling and robbing an occasional bank. Eventually, the Wild Bunch moved on to bigger things, mostly train robberies because there was more money involved. When planning and carrying out robberies, Butch always tried to avoid hurting anybody. When being chased by posses, the gang would shoot at the other men's horses. When asked by a reporter how many men he had killed, Butch honestly replied, "none." Despite their careful concern for others, the gang stole so much money from the railroads that the "Iron Horse" called in the Pinkerton Detective Agency to stop the robberies. Pinkerton agents, armed to the teeth, rode the trains, and sent out posses looking for the Wild Bunch. Sensing that their time was almost up, Butch and the rest of the gang decided to seek greener pastures in South America.

In March 1901, a Mr. and Mrs. Harry A. Long took the steamer *S.S. Herminius* from New York to Buenos Aires, Argentina. Pinkerton agents later determined that Mr. and Mrs. Long were really the Sundance Kid and a female companion, Miss Etta Place. Butch joined the two in South America in 1902. The three settled down and bought a ranch in Argentina's Cholila Valley. Many of their neighbors were fellow American expatriates. During their time in Cholila, Butch, Sundance, and Etta became good friends with Percy Seibert, an American who owned a ranch and mine complex. Seibert often let the two outlaws work for him when they were down on their luck. Another close neighbor was George Newbery, who was the United States' vice consul in Argentina. Recognizing the outlaws from wanted posters, Newbery contacted Pinkerton agent Frank Dimaio who had come to Argentina looking for Kid Curry, another member of the Wild Bunch.

Dimaio rounded up a posse and headed out for two fugitives' ranch. However, Butch and Sundance slipped out of town before the posse arrived. Etta Place, Sundance's friend, seemed to disappear. After the failed attempt to capture the two bandits in Argentina in 1903, the trail went cold. Suddenly in November 1908, newspapers across South America began to run the story of the deaths of two gringos in a robbery of a mine payroll in Bolivia. Based on the one-line description of the robbers, the Pinkerton Detective Agency identified the two dead men as Butch and Sundance, and notified law enforcement agencies in the U.S. The federal authorities pulled their offer of 15,000 dollars for information leading to the arrest and capture of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

Case closed. Or was it?

Almost as soon as the outlaws were declared dead, rumors started circulating that they were still alive. Reports appeared claiming that the two men were doing everything from robbing banks in Russia to running a dry-cleaning business in Omaha and since so little was reported about the gunfight, in Bolivia, many people believed that the Pinkerton Agency had made the whole thing up. Even the agency itself found it hard to believe the tale; for years, Butch and Sundance were listed by the agency as "dead, but unaccounted for." Relatives of the two bandits added fuel to the flame by making claims that the men were alive and living in the United States.

Legends about the two outlaws' survival persisted for so long because for a real long time little was known about the gunfight in Bolivia. The only real information came from the newspaper articles that the Pinkerton Agency used to declare the men dead. Because of renewed interest in the subject following the premiere of the movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* several Wild West experts, and historians, took trips down to Bolivia to try to find more information about the shootout. Finally, in the late 1980s two historians, Anne Meadows and Daniel Buck, found a letter written by the chief of the American embassy in Chile that gave the following account of the outlaws' final years:

*“Following their close call in Argentina, Butch, Sundance, and Etta Place headed for Chile. Most of the money that the three had had gone into the ranch in Cholila. Needing money to start over in Chile, the two American outlaws went back to their old ways. The first victims were two Argentinean banks that were robbed in 1905 of a combined total of 400,000 dollars. After the two robberies, Butch and Sundance lay low for a while. During the interim, the two banditos worked at the Concordia tin mine run by their old Cholila neighbor, Percy Seibert. On Tuesday, November 3, 1908, the paymaster for the Aramayo, Franke & Company silver mine left the mine’s office in Tupiza, Bolivia for the corporate headquarters in Quechisla. The next day, the payroll caravan ran into two white-masked men armed with rifles and pistols. The two robbers demanded that the paymaster hand over the two mules carrying the payroll. After the bandits had left, the paymaster hurried off and warned police and the Bolivian army of the robbery. A posse composed of soldiers, police and armed citizens were organized to track the fugitives. On November 7, three days after the robbery of the payroll, a three-man Bolivian army patrol ran into the duo in the village of San Vicente. The bandits opened fire, killing one of the Bolivians. A standoff ensued, followed by a long period of silence. Suddenly, two gunshots broke the quiet. The two remaining soldiers rushed the outlaws’ hideout, only to find the two men dead from self-inflicted gunshot wounds. The soldiers recovered the 90,000-dollar payroll only to have it seized by a Bolivian judge investigating the incident. The money was never returned to the Aramayo, Franke, & Company silver mine. The bodies of the two men were buried in the cemetery in San Vicente side by side.”*

During most of their stay in South America Butch and Sundance lived in either Argentina or Chile. So, when the two men robbed the payroll in Bolivia, the Bolivian police were caught off guard. Butch and Sundance most likely chose to rob the payroll because it was not well guarded, and it was located far from where American law enforcement thought the two men were hiding. The Bolivians had been told by the American government to look out for American bandits on the loose, but not for Butch and Sundance because the American government, according to the letter from the Chilean embassy, thought that the two men were still in Argentina. The Bolivian



government probably never knew how important the deaths of Butch and Sundance were to the Americans. That is why the Bolivians never asked for the reward money; they did not know any existed. The payroll guard did give two different versions of what the two suspects looked like. However, one of the Argentinean tellers at a bank robbed by the *Americanos* said that one of the robbers referred to himself by the common Chilean name Madariaga, the same name used in the payroll guard's account. Most likely, then, one of the American bandits was simply using an alias to hide his real identity. Instead of changing his account of the robbery, the paymaster was simply clarifying the matter. The fact that the two men killed themselves should not surprise anyone. The two American outlaws did not know Bolivia as they had known the Wild West the terrain, hideouts, and the like. The two men were also out of ammunition. Faced with the threat of languishing in a harsh Bolivian prison for a long time, the two probably thought death would be an easier way out. Many outlaws have committed suicide when they had no way out. In fact, one of Butch and Sundance's old compatriots from the Wild Bunch, Kid Curry, killed himself after being surrounded by local law enforcement after a robbery in Utah in 1906.

More than a hundred years have passed since the disappearance and supposed deaths of Butch and Sundance, and no one is any closer to solving this mystery, so the legends live on.

Now, back to our story.....

## Part Two

### (Why Do I need a Cessna 206?)

Now you would think that since I live in Miami I would have the ability to speak Spanish – I don't. Like most Americans I am lazy and I think the whole world should speak English so I can communicate wherever I go. That having been said, I do speak a small amount of gringo Spanish; however, I had prepared my contact at the hotel to bail me out of a tight spot, by passing him a twenty dollar bill to ensure he answered his phone, and

with Jose at the ready I was off to the airport to see about an airplane to San Vicente.

The first surprise was that there were no airplanes on the ramp even though I was told at the hotel that there were a number of operators that would be happy to have U.S. dollars. A quick phone call back to the hotel, to speak with my contact there, and Jose advised me to standby – I think his exact words were “Moment Mr. Bob I check for you.” When he returned to the phone I received my second surprise. “Sorry Mr. Bob but all of the little planes leave early to take things to the small Pueblos and they come back in maybe four hours.” OK, so I guess I need to find a cup of coffee and wait. I advised Jose I would call him back after lunch, unless I had a problem, whereby Jose announced, “OK Mr. Bob, no problem with problems.”

I sat in the airport restaurant for about three hours before a Cessna 210 taxied in and shut down. This would be the perfect airplane I thought and after at least six coffees, breakfast twice, and an assortment of candies a young lady had for sale I was ready to get away from the food and get on with my adventure.

I met the 210 pilot as he entered the lower level of the baggage area, and in my best gringo Spanish, I said, “Senior, I need to go to San Vicente – will you take me there?” The pilot looked straight in to my eyes and said, “No.” Now wait a minute. Either he doesn’t like gringos or he did not understand that I wanted to pay him to go to San Vicente so I followed him, while dialing Jose’s number at the hotel, and I said “Senior, one moment please.” I handed him my phone, after telling Jose the problem, and after about two minutes of dialog between the two the pilot of the 210 handed me the phone back, and quickly turned away and started walking for the door. I put the phone to my ear, to see if Jose was still on the line, and was immediately informed that Mr. Bob had a problem. Turns out that fuel was a problem and to go, and come back, the airplane had to carry all the required fuel to accomplish that. OK, so I understand that and if the AirForce can fly Boeing 707s, as fuel trucks, then I can fly something a bit smaller even though

aviation gas is a little more volatile than jet fuel. However, it appears that I won't fly in a 210.

Turns out I was going to have to get something slightly larger than a Cessna 210 and the pilot of the 210 had advised Jose that his friend, who operated a Cessna 206, would probably do it. "OK, so when does his friend return?" I asked. Not sure Mr. Bob but I will call you back.

Two hours later, more or less, the phone rang. Jose was proud to announce that he had confirmed the Cessna 206 was on the way back and at this very moment the owner of the 206, who speaks good English, was on the way to the airport to meet me, show me the airplane, and talk business. "Great," I said and then asked Jose what is this man's name? Jose advised that his name is Jesus and he knows what I look like, so relax, have a coffee, and he will find you. Well if I have had six cups of coffee already I don't think one, or two, more will hurt me.

Sure enough Jesus found me and as he ordered us each a beer, I had respectfully declined his offer to buy me a coffee, the Cessna 206 taxied on to the ramp. That is my airplane Mr. Bob. She needs a little paint but her engine is strong. Jesus' comment about paint was a bit of an understatement but this I could live with. It was the engine, the prop, and the pilot that I needed to know about. I was advised that his pilot, who was the best 206 pilot in all of South America, had only had two accidents with no one killed. "What happened?" I asked.

First accident was when he hit a dog on take-off and the second accident was when a wheel came off on landing. How often do dogs get on the runway? Not much but this is Bolivia Mr. Bob. "How about the wheel?" Not a problem – I fired the mechanic and the new mechanic always checks the wheels each day. OK, food for thought and maybe I will help with the preflight tomorrow.

I looked the airplane over, checked the wheels, talked to the pilot, using Jesus as my interpreter, and was told they needed to take 50 gallons of fuel

to make the trip. That is not a lot of weight to carry I thought but considering the high altitude airport that we were going to every pound counts. How do you carry the fuel? Jesus advised they had plastic containers for that and we will probably need about three of them. We struck a deal for about two hundred more dollars than I wanted to pay, and as we shook hands I asked Jesus where he learned English. I use to live in Miami Mr. Bob, just like you do, but Bolivia is my home and I am home now with all of my family together. You are a lucky man Jesus - what time for tomorrow? I think I will pick you up at 5:00 AM. It will be a long day and we need to be back before dark. My pilot does not like to fly at night. "That's good to know," I said, and then I thought to myself that if he doesn't like the dark then neither do I. Always good to observe your limitations and that of the machine you are flying.

## Part Three

### (The Flight of The 206)

Jesus arrived ten minutes early the next morning, a trait not observed by all Latinos/Gringos, and we headed off to his favorite airport restaurant for breakfast. If you have never had huevos ranchero con arepa (eggs with diced tomato, onion, and peppers and the arepa is flat bread from cornmeal) then put that on your list. That was my breakfast meal that morning and the sauce on the eggs, and the arepa, was some of the best that I have ever had.

After we finished our food, and settled back in our chairs to enjoy our second cup of coffee, I asked Jesus about his airplane. Where did he get the plane, how long had he owned it, and how complicated was it to maintain a turbocharged Lycoming engine so far away from a major parts provider. He advised that parts were available from La Paz pretty quickly but the problem was the cost. Everything there was three, or four, times the normal price because of inflation and he was forced to rely on his mechanic, the local machine shop, and stolen parts which were available from certain sources. "Stolen Parts?" I asked. Yes, the police will seize airplanes from the latinos/gringos running drugs and then if you are connected with the local police officials you can help yourself, at night, to what you think you can sell or use. Of course there is a little money involved for the police to look

the other way but this is normal for here in Bolivia. No problem for me – just business.

The airplane, however, was a story all it's own, but here is the short version. The airplane was originally a U.S. registered aircraft, based at a small airport south of Atlanta, and was stolen by someone who was obviously in the drug trade. The airplane reappeared in Colombia, with a Colombian registration number that had been borrowed from an abandoned aircraft, and operated there for about six months before the authorities figured out what was going on and then, once again, the airplane mysteriously disappeared from the radar.

Some time later the airplane appeared in Bolivia with a Bolivian registration, and once again the registration number had been borrowed from an abandoned airplane. However, this time the authorities caught on pretty quickly as to what was going on. Once the airplane had been seized Jesus had a contact with the police that made him aware that he might be able to buy this machine if he was willing to pay for the the right to be considered. Jesus played the game, paid for the appropriate consideration to be the only bidder, and after about a year was awarded ownership for the equivalent of about five thousand dollars U.S.. Now, when you consider the other moneys paid, for getting special consideration, I would bet the price was around twenty thousand dollars U.S., but even at this price it was a deal. Jesus had been operating a Cessna 172 but soon after he acquired the 206 he sold the 172 and now he is looking to buy a Cessna 185 if he can get special consideration. Jesus also revealed that what he would really like to have is a DC-3, but he doubts that will happen; however, you never know. Jesus told me then that he had two sons, who he wanted to take over the business, so perhaps they will take the family business to the next level if they can get a little special consideration from Dad's contacts.

We arrived at the airport a little later than I had expected but Jesus assured me that we could still make the schedule. "That's good," I said and what about the flight time? Are we planning on two hours to Potosi and then a three hour jeep ride up to San Vicente? Yes Mr Bob that's right. Potosi is

about 13, 000 feet but San Vicente is 15,000 feet and the wind is always blowing in excess of fifty KPH. Not a good place for airplanes. We will meet your pilot in the MET office, and I want to call my brother's friend to be sure he is waiting with his jeep, and then we will go to the airplane. With the weather checked, the tires inspected, and a confirmation that the jeep was waiting for us I fastened my seat belt and then we were on the way climbing up to ten thousand feet.

One interesting thing about the take off, the nose wheel had a bad shimmy dampner, which for non aviators this is the item on the nose gear that absorbs the left and right oscillations from the rough runway and smooths out the travel of the nose wheel, so the pilot, whose name was Juan Garcia, employed a soft field take-off technique. He had the yoke full aft as he applied power, the nose was off the ground soon after, then he let the airplane fly off at about forty knots, accelerated in ground effect until around one hundred knots, and then he let it climb. The airplane was heavy but the turbocharged IO-540 did a good job and soon after we leveled off at our cruising altitude. It had been a long time since I had used, or seen, the soft field technique employed. It was nice to see Juan practice his craft although a new shimmy dampner would have been nice as well.

We had been level for about forty-five minutes when Juan started climbing again, and since my feet were already cold, I reached down to turn on the heat. Nothing, the lever would not move. Juan quickly reached behind the front seats, handed me a blanket, and pointed to my feet. It appears that Juan knew what I needed and he also knew there was no heat to be had. OK, so I will add that to the list – the airplane needs a little help with corrosion control and a fresh paint job, a new shimmy dampner, and the heater repaired. At least the tires are good and I hope no dogs on the runway when we land.

Once level at 15,000 feet we crossed over a couple of ridge lines and proceeded down a valley where I assumed we would find Potosi. The scenery was magnificent, the ride was fairly smooth, and as Jesus had indicated during our first meeting, the engine was strong and running smoothly; however, the one thought that did come to mind, was what will

we do in the afternoon if the ridge lines are covered with clouds and thunderstorms? I hope the best pilot in South America was ready for that challenge.

We landed at Potosi on schedule and there was a jeep on the side of the ramp waiting for our arrival. Juan and the driver, who was also named Juan, talked a few minutes and then I got myself strapped in to the jeep. Juan, the jeep driver, told me in Spanish that we needed to hurry because Juan, the pilot wants to be back before dark. Listo (ready) senior. The jeep ride was a story all to itself. I have had rough rides, and some off road adventures, but the ride up to San Vicente was an adventure all to itself. My head was sore, my shoulders were sore from bouncing off the hard side walls of the jeep, and I was cold. Turns out the heater didn't work on the jeep either so I guess heaters are a luxury in Bolivia.

As promised, we arrived about three hours later to the wind blown plateau where the mining town of San Vicente is located. The first question anyone has, I would think, is why would anyone want to live here? The second question is why would Butch and Sundance choose this spot for a hideout? That having been said we parked outside the cemetery and Jose took me to the gravesite of the famous duo. Not sure I believe that this is the real resting place, both graves looked to be about five feet long, but the locals had the graves all dressed up, headstones were in place, and they even had pictures of the two. Well, let's move on and see the museum I said in my best gringo Spanish.

The museum was a small building containing a multitude of items including pistols, rifles, clothing, pocket watches supposedly from the duo, and lots of pictures. There was also a caretaker, or perhaps museum guide, who wanted to give a guided tour of the museum, and the town, but I thanked him and declined. Jose and I walked around on our own, he tried to fill in some of the blanks about what I was seeing but he spoke entirely too fast for me to understand. After an hour of wandering around, and being pounded by the wind and sand, I headed for the jeep with Juan close on my heels. The ride back down was once again an adventure but all is well that ends well.

Now, a few interesting facts about Potosi, Bolivia before we move on. Jesus gave me a quick brief on Potosi, during our initial meeting, but I was focused on San Vicente and not Potosi. Since then, however, I have taken the time to go back and do a little research, on the web, on what was the richest city in all of the world.

Turns out the Potosi was the main source of silver for the Spanish, and their “New World Empire,” and all of that silver came from the mountain that lies at the foot of the town. The mountain, which is called Cerro Rico, which means rich mountain, reaches a height of almost 16,000 feet and the Spanish removed around fifty metric tons of silver. The silver was taken by llama, and mule train, to the Pacific coast, shipped north to Panama City, carried by mule train across the Isthmus of Panama to the current day city of Portobelo where it was taken to Spain on the Spanish treasure fleets.

In 1672, a mint was established in Potosi to coin silver and water reservoirs were built to fulfill the growing population's needs. At this time in history, the city's population increased to nearly 200,000, making it one of the largest and wealthiest cities in the world.

One more interesting fact, before I return to our story, was that the use of African slaves. To compensate for the diminishing indigenous labor force, the colonists made a request in 1608 to the Crown in Madrid to begin allowing the importation of 1,500 to 2,000 African slaves per year. A total of 30,000 African slaves were taken to Potosí during the colonial era. The African slaves were forced to work in the Casa de la Moneda (mint) as human mules because the mules being used would die after a couple of months of pulling the mills, so the colonists replaced the four mules with twenty African slaves.

OK, back to our story.....

Juan, the airplane pilot, was waiting inside the airplane sleeping in the seat when we arrived but was awakened by Juan, the jeep driver, when he blew



the horn. “Damn,” I said. The horn works but not the heater – that’s just wrong especially if you are from Miami where freezing begins at 72 and not 32.

Juan and Juan talked for a few minutes, some money exchanged hands followed by a handshake and then Juan, the jeep driver, walked over to shake my hand. As he stood smiling at me I noticed Juan, the airplane pilot, was shaking his finger no which I intepreted to mean don’t give him money. I shook the jeep driver’s hand a second time, slapped him on the shoulder, and then said, “permiso,” as I turned and walked to the airplane.

The ride back to Santa Cruz was uneventful and the clouds on the ridge lines proved not to be a problem. On landing, it was getting a little dark, I noticed Jose did not use landing lights. I guess the bulbs are on back order from La Paz so I will add those to my list as well. However, Juan made a perfect landing and as we taxied to parking , and shutdown, I saw that Jesus was waiting for us with a big smile. Before I got out of the airplane I shook Juan’s hand, slipped him a twenty dollar bill, and in my best gringo Spanish I complimented him on his piloting skills. He seemed appreciative of the twenty, and the compliments, but I don’t think I really got the compliments across. At least he didn’t quit smiling so I feel certain that I was at least partially understood.

Jesus swept me off to his favorite airport diner again but this time it looked more like a salsa club. Lots of music, lots of beer, and few of the gentlemen there were dancing with their wives or girlfriends. I commented to Jesus that this was quite a change. Yes, kind of nice don’t you think? This is my Bolivia and I love it so.

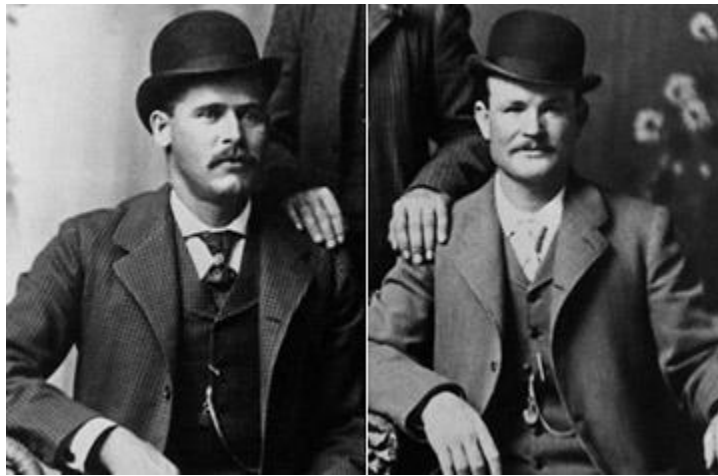
Jesus and I sat down, he ordered us a beer, and I proceeded to ask questions. Jesus, tell me this. “Do Boliviaanos believe that Butch and Sundance are buried in San Vicente?” Jesus thought for a moment and said, “There are legends and then there are legends. This one belongs to Bolivia and yes we are proud people.” OK, I think what you ae saying is that regardless of whether it is fact, or fiction, this is part of your history and as a Boliviano it

is accepted fact. Yes, more or less. I think it is a good legend but there are people in the U.S., and elsewhere, that believe Butch and Sundance survived and returned back to the U.S.A.. Yes, I have heard that but you know what I believe. OK, fair enough. I will say that San Vicente seems to be a hard place to live and work. Jesus shook his head in agreement and commented that there were only around one thousand people there with the mining industry and life was hard. Well, I think we need to have a toast to Butch and Sundance. Jesus agreed and as we emptied our glasses there suddenly appeared two more beers to help finish the toast. Here is to you Jesus and thank you for all that you have done. Jesus raised his glass, gave me a big smile, and announced that it had indeed been a pleasure to help his new friend from Miami.

Jesus and I had a few more beers and when I was encouraged to get up and dance with the local ladies I had to decline and opted to get a cab back to the hotel. I shook Jesus's hand again and before I knew it I was back by the pool, under a beautiful clear night sky, having one last beer to celebrate having survived my adventure.

A few last thoughts on Butch and Sundance. While I believe it was possible for them to have gone to San Vicente from Potosi, which is where they supposedly robbed their last bank, I find it illogical that they would have boxed themselves in on a barren plateau where vegetation is sparse at best. I took the ride of my life in a jeep that took almost three hours to climb the roads to their final resting place so how long would it have taken them? Supposedly they were on mules, a mule is more sure footed on the mountain trails than a horse, so I would think eight or ten hours at a minimum to make the climb and most of this would have been in darkness. Oh well, not my place to rewrite the history books for Bolivians and the people of San Vicente need their claim to fame. They have little else to be proud of, on the wind blown plain where they live, and the dedicated few who preserve the graves, and maintain the museum, deserve credit for their unpaid dedication and loyalty to the bank robbing legends.

The trip back to Miami was uneventful and the winds were such that the Lear 36 made it to Panama City, Panama without a problem. We arrived Miami at around eight in the evening and by nine at was sitting at the corner table in my favorite oyster bar. I had a few cold beers, and a few oysters with tobasco, and thought over the events of the last few days and decided to lift my glass one last time in a toast before I called it a night – “Cheers gentleman and good night to you Butch, good night to you Sundance, and may your legend live on in the history, and lives, of the good people of Bolivia now and forever.”



(Good Night Gentleman and may your legend live on)

Hopefully the phone will remain silent for the next few days so I can get back on my running schedule, and get rid of some of the beer calories, but should it ring, and another adventure ensues, I will hopefully have another story to share about the **“Life of an Aviator.”**