

FEBRUARY 11, 1988

Nothing has been overlooked in planning this trip. I'm reporting from the library on the third deck of the Mt. Orpheus, docked in Rio de Janeiro. My face is browned to a perfect mariner's tan; my traveling weight has been drawn down a full 6.7 ounces to assure seaworthiness. And right down to boarding time I have maintained a rigid citrus diet (to prevent scurvy) of fruit so tart and sour that the resulting labial contractions and expansions have set the rakish smile of a dauntless seaman on my face.

Out of the open deck, the whole vista of Rio opens. Above the building lines, the verdant peaks and eternal crosses and the white statue of Christ rise out of reach of man's habitations.

Something seems wrong in this city. Too much is shattered and chipped from the windows and the stucco. Too many vendors and too many children scurry around with food carts and trinket trays and shoe shine boxes. I much prefer looking off up into the mountain ranges to moving through the streets.

My prospects, however, are outstanding. In the morning I am to go on this ship, with a Smithsonian Institution group, from Rio to ports along the east coast of the continent, to down around Cape Horn, and on up the Chilean Coast where we leave the ship for a concluding flight to Santiago.

One deck below, I have a cabin with a private bath and enough closet space to store my gear. A sea chest is unnecessary as one or the other of the two U.S. based airlines on which I got here is using a zig-zag course to get my luggage here.

Last night before we left Miami, I advised the party of the first part's claim agent that this time instead of asking for damage against his corporation, I was filing criminal charges based on a long ago tort on land piracy.

At the second claim office, I told the other offending line that unless my bag was on ship by evening, it would give me the finest satisfaction to meet any or all his fumbleheaded baggage personnel for a sword duel off the end of the highest point on these docks.

For emphasis (I suppose I was a bit carried away) I snapped my lapel handkerchief from jacket pocket to pop it like I had once seen Errol Flynn do in an old movie, and did myself a rather smart welt on the right bridge of my nose on the back swing. Nevertheless, I stalked away in a manner that would have intimidated anyone except the most insensitive of underlings.

Dusk has settled on the harbor, bringing out the orange and yellow lights from the shore. If I were to put my luggage tags on the Rosetta Stone in the National Museum London, it'd take Scotland Yard a month to recover the rock. When I get through with the airlines this time they are going to be willing to assign a porter to travel.