



WORLD & NATION

Unexpected Adventure in Bolivia of Brat Pack Member Emilio Estevez : Drug scare: Incident features false allegations of drug trafficking, an upset film star and a Learjet confiscated by the Bolivians.

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A confused, bizarre incident involving the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Bolivian narcotics police has swept up a \$1.5-million executive jet owned by an aircraft charter company with strong Hollywood ties and momentarily terrified Brat Pack actor Emilio Estevez.

The episode began with a charter flight five weeks ago from Van Nuys Airport to Bolivia, arranged so Estevez and three other passengers could investigate, Estevez said, the authenticity of a proposed screenplay set deep in the South American jungle on a tributary of the Amazon River.

For the record:***12:00 a.m. July 21, 1990 For the Record****Los Angeles Times Saturday July 21, 1990 Home Edition Calendar Part F Page 4 Column 1 Entertainment Desk 1 inches; 26 words Type of Material: Correction**Wrong name--In a story Friday on the seizure of an executive jet chartered by actor Emilio Estevez, Calendar incorrectly identified the president of Bolivia, who is Jaime Paz Zamora.*

Days later, in a melodrama of soap opera proportions, the plot climaxed in the middle of the night at a La Paz police station where the plane's two pilots, the 28-year-old actor and his three companions were detained in a cocaine and marijuana smuggling investigation.

Although Estevez and his party were cleared--by both the Bolivian authorities and the DEA--of any involvement in drug trafficking, the plane in which they flew to Bolivia was subsequently confiscated and the party of six exited the country on commercial flights.

Details of the incident emerged this week in interviews with and from documents supplied by a Bolivian government spokesman, a DEA supervising agent, Estevez and the owner of the aircraft--a luxury Learjet that has been transferred, over the protests of the Van Nuys charter firm, to the Bolivian air force.

The plane is--or *was* , according to the Bolivian embassy in Washington--owned by Clay Lacy Aviation, a prominent charter carrier and aircraft dealer with long-established ties to a variety of motion picture production companies. The situation has prompted Lacy, who is also a United Airlines pilot, to complain that the U.S. government has not made enough of a fuss about the fate of his jet.

Lacy contends that if the plane had been an aged, airline-owned Boeing 727 of about the same value as his Lear, Washington would have made "an international incident" out of it. Instead, Lacy has contended in a summary of the episode prepared for his insurance company, the United States stood idly by as the Bolivian air force held a formal ceremony to receive the Learjet at the La Paz airport, attended by Bolivian President Fernando Collor de Mello.

In Washington, a State Department official took issue with contentions that the agency had failed to act in the situation. "Basically, the embassy and the ambassador (Robert S. Gelbard) have spent a lot of time trying to get that plane released," the official said. "The

ambassador even called Mr. Lacy to brief him on the situation. They're not dropping it. They're working very hard to get that plane released."

In fact, said the State Department, local newspapers in Bolivia have raised such a clamor about the episode that there have been calls for Gelbard's expulsion from the country because of the embassy's attempts to secure release of the Learjet.

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The Bolivian government and the DEA said the airplane was seized after agents of the Bolivian Special Force in the Fight Against Narco-Trafficking vacuumed the interior of the plane twice, administered sensitive chemical tests to the dust and found minute traces of marijuana and cocaine.

Estevez contended that the airplane presentation ceremony occurred after a comical incident in which agents of the narco-trafficking unit briefly held air force personnel at gunpoint on the Tarmac when the air force first attempted to take possession of the plane without permission of drug commandantes.

Lacy and Estevez both said unequivocally that the drug allegations were fabricated. The DEA said its own investigation exonerated the pilots, the passengers and the aircraft. "I want to make it perfectly clear," said DEA acting La Paz supervising agent Gene Castillo, who was personally involved in the Bolivian investigation, "that, as far as we know,

there was no involvement in trafficking by this airplane or by the passengers, who were down here on a purely commercial venture.”

“It would be ludicrous,” said Estevez, “to *bring* drugs into a place that *exports* them. Even if you were a drug addict, you would know enough not to do something that silly. You’d have to be out of your mind.”

“As a law-abiding citizen and certified air carrier,” Lacy’s prepared statement concludes, “I feel the U.S. government should have offered far greater assistance and not allowed the airplane to be confiscated so easily.”

The incident began on June 11, when Estevez chartered the Learjet to fly him, a screenwriter, a cinematographer and a friend to Bolivia so he could join a novelist trying to interest Estevez in a screenplay about a fatal confrontation between would-be gold miners and Indians in the Amazon jungle. The plot was said to have been based on an authentic incident that occurred about four years ago, Estevez said.

Estevez, the son of actor Martin Sheen and brother of actor Charlie Sheen, has appeared in such films as “Young Guns,” “The Breakfast Club,” “That Was Then, This Is Now,” “Tex,” “St. Elmo’s Fire” and “Stakeout.” He has also tried his hand as a screenwriter, producer and director.

On June 12, the Estevez party arrived in La Paz. The young actor and his three companions went off to the jungle, leaving the plane’s pilot, Ron Freswick, the co-pilot, Winfield Turner, at a hotel. Turner, Estevez said, turned out to have been a classmate of his at Santa Monica High School.

But six days later, according to the DEA’s Castillo, a Bolivian informant stationed at the airport contacted American drug agents to report the presence of the Learjet, which had apparently roused the informant’s suspicions.

Castillo said the information was passed on to the Bolivian narco-trafficking force, and that American agents routinely ran the aircraft's registration number through DEA intelligence files. In the search, Castillo said, information was discovered tying the aircraft to a single flight--in 1987, between Iceland and Newfoundland--in which the pilot was a person with alleged drug links. The intelligence materials included no mention of the aircraft itself ever having been involved in drug trafficking, Castillo said.

On June 19, Castillo and a Bolivian embassy spokesman said, Bolivian police collected the two pilots, took them to the airport and executed the vacuum cleaner search of the interior of the plane. In the interim, Estevez and his party had returned to La Paz and, when the pilots could not immediately be located, Estevez said he went to their hotel--arriving about 11 p.m., just as Bolivian police led the two men through the lobby en route back to police headquarters after searching their rooms. The Estevez party was soon invited to join the pilots in custody. Two young Bolivian nationals who had befriended the Estevez party acted as interpreters and turned out to be the sons of influential businessmen, who attempted to intervene on Estevez's behalf, Estevez said.

Later, a Bolivian crime laboratory report--a copy of which was supplied by Lacy--reported that chemical tests on the airplane vacuum cleaner dust found traces of marijuana and cocaine, but not enough to sustain a prosecution.

The pilots and the Estevez party were held at the police station all night, Estevez said. The Bolivian government identified the other members of the Estevez group as Theodoro Stuart Miller and Paul Edward Robinson--both Americans--and a British screenwriter, Pierce Ashworth.

"The only time I really got nervous was when we thought they might plant something," Estevez said, "in our hotel rooms while we were (at the police station), on the plane or somewhere and say it was ours. We just didn't know. It was so unpredictable. They seemed to be making up the rules as they went."

Estevez said the six men were treated well. In fact, Estevez said, they weren't actually questioned--just detained while Bolivian police tried to determine how to handle the incident.

"After a very brief interrogation," said a Bolivian embassy official, speaking on the condition he would not be identified by name, "police decided that the persons detained didn't have any relation with the cocaine and marijuana."

Lacy noted that the seized Learjet was manufactured in 1977 and that his company is the aircraft's second owner. He said the plane is a busy charter property and that tiny amounts of drugs could have been left in the carpeting by previous passengers over the past several years.

Officials of the U.S. embassy in La Paz eventually intervened and, Estevez said, the party was freed the following afternoon. After several days of abortive attempts to have the airplane released, Estevez and his companions and flew back to Los Angeles commercially.

Eventually, Bolivian newspapers picked up the story and front page accounts were published falsely linking the plane to delivery of a shipment of drugs. The ensuing public clamor, Estevez and Lacy said, apparently complicated the process of retrieving the aircraft.

And, Lacy said ruefully, nothing has changed since then. He said he carries confiscation insurance on the aircraft and that his insurance company has begun an effort to retrieve the plane. The DEA's Castillo registered surprise that Lacy hasn't retained a local Bolivian lawyer to assist him. Lacy said the insurance company is attempting to handle the transaction.

"Little help came from the U.S. embassy and U.S. government officials. To anyone's knowledge, this airplane has never been involved in any way with drugs," said Lacy.

“The Bolivian drug test indicated a minimum trace of cocaine and marijuana, not enough to prosecute. It is known by the U.S. embassy that five or more Bolivian aircraft were released with higher drug contents.”

In an extensive memorandum summarizing the situation, Lacy noted that his company has done charter work for film companies and former Presidents of the United States--who were accommodated, he said, after extensive security checks by the Secret Service.

“What I’ve sort of been telling people,” said Estevez, “is that we went down to Bolivia to research an action-adventure film and I got caught up in an adventure myself.”