

# Cassidy lives in letters, memories and 'Wild Bunch'

By Carla Engstrom

Editor's note: This is the first article of a three part series on Butch Cassidy and the Wild Bunch. Information is taken from *The Wild Bunch* by James Horan, Signet Books, published by The New American Library, Inc. New York, N.Y., 75 cents.

A wanted poster dated 1892 said the man was 5'9" and broad-shouldered. His short, golden hair blended with his fair skin and clear blue eyes. Under his left eye was a small scar from a childhood injury.

"Forty years after his death, women still remembered Butch Cassidy," wrote James Horan, author of *Desperate Men* in 1949.

### Files, letters and reports

Horan's book, based on sealed Pinkerton files, includes the history of Cassidy and the Wild Bunch. In his introduction of *The Wild Bunch*, 1958, Horan states his first book went out of print after several printings but did accomplish one thing. It "attracted countless letters" from persons who'd known Cassidy or the Wild Bunch including reports from men who'd been in posses after the outlaws in the U.S. or South America.

By coincidence, while Horan was writing the last chapter on the outlaws' deaths in *The Wild Bunch*, a tall, white-haired man named Walter Hampden visited him.

"It seems he (Hampden) had read *Desperate Men* years ago and had some tales to tell me of Cassidy. One very important contribution he made was the account of the outlaws' deaths. To make sure I got it straight, Hampden sketched the barrio (quarters) besieged by the Bolivian cavalry and the interior of the house," Horan wrote.

### True confessions

Other letters included accounts from relatives, sweethearts and members of the Wild Bunch.

From these accounts a likeable picture of Cassidy emerges. He is not described as moody, sullen or sad. His main difference from others who rode with him was he didn't have a "dark streak of violence," according to Horan.

Cassidy never killed anyone in a holdup,

which Horan considered an outstanding quality since he lead the largest outlaw band in the American West. But he did engage in all forms of crime, from rustling to train robbery.

Butch's outlook on life was simple. Horan said he was an "outlaw only because he wanted to be one. He was quite aware that he was the quick and the dead."

Cassidy was born at Circle Valley, Utah in 1866 with the name George Leroy Parker. When George was 10, his father bought a ranch 12 miles north of Circleville, Utah.

During his teens, George was fascinated by "happy-go-lucky Mike Cassidy, a top-rate hired hand and an "expert horse thief and rustler."

Mike taught George to fire a six-shooter "to kill".

After George perfected his outlaw skills, Mike took him on a horse raid. Outlaw blood was in his veins and by age 18, he had firsthand knowledge of a "rustler's syndicate"

### The butcher

When George received news that Mike died in a gunfight he left the ranch as George Cassidy, his tribute to the dead outlaw.

Years later he went to Rock Springs, Wyoming, where he worked as a butcher and got the name Butch Cassidy.

Butch drifted from jobs until he joined an outlaw group named the McCarty's.

Things didn't go well for Butch. In June 1894, he stole 30 head of horses. At the time, he was attracted to a daughter of a local rancher whom he asked to be his mail courier.

Unfortunately for Butch, she broke under questioning by the law and Cassidy was captured.

At his trial, evidence included the girl's testimony.

"But Cassidy still played the gay and gallant outlaw. He winked as she stepped down from the witness stand after denying all charges," Horan said.

### Prone for prison

Cassidy was found guilty and sentenced to five years in the state prison.

In the winter of 1895, Governor William Richards called Cassidy to his office and asked Butch to promise to go straight.

Cassidy refused, saying he couldn't promise because he'd only break his word. However, he promised never to "molest the state of Wyoming again."

That was good enough for the Governor. On January 19, 1896, Butch Cassidy left his cell wearing prison-made clothing. He cleared out of town the next day wearing cowboy clothes and rode for Brown's Hole, an outlaw's hold up at the point where the eastern line of Utah and the western line of Colorado joined the southern line of Wyoming.

This was the place many say where God turned back and the devil stepped in.



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