

= The Wild Bunch =

The Wild Bunch is a 1969 American epic Western Technicolor and Panavision film directed by Sam Peckinpah about an aging outlaw gang on the Texas ? Mexico border , trying to exist in the changing modern world of 1913 . The film was controversial because of its graphic violence and its portrayal of crude men attempting to survive by any available means .

The movie , whose screenplay was written by Peckinpah and Walon Green , stars William Holden , Robert Ryan , Ernest Borgnine , Ben Johnson and Warren Oates . It was filmed in Mexico , notably at the Hacienda Ciénaga del Carmen (deep in the desert between Torreón and Saltillo , Coahuila) and on the Rio Nazas .

The Wild Bunch is noted for intricate , multi @-@ angle , quick @-@ cut editing , using normal and slow motion images , a revolutionary cinema technique in 1969 . The writing of Green , Peckinpah , and Roy N. Sickner was nominated for a best @-@ screenplay Academy Award , and the music by Jerry Fielding was nominated for Best Original Score . Additionally , Peckinpah was nominated for an Outstanding Directorial Achievement award by the Directors Guild of America and cinematographer Lucien Ballard won the National Society of Film Critics Award for Best Cinematography .

In 1999 , the U.S. National Film Registry selected it for preservation in the Library of Congress as culturally , historically , and aesthetically significant . The film was ranked 80th in the American Film Institute 's 100 best American films , and the 69th most thrilling film . In 2008 , the AFI revealed its " 10 Top 10 " of the best ten films in ten genres : The Wild Bunch ranked as the sixth @-@ best Western .

= = Plot summary = =

In Texas in 1913 , Pike Bishop (William Holden) , the leader of a gang of aging outlaws , is seeking retirement with one final score : the robbery of a railroad office containing a cache of silver . They are ambushed by Pike 's former partner , Deke Thornton (Robert Ryan) , who is leading a posse of bounty hunters hired and deputized by the railroad . A bloody shootout kills several of the gang . Pike uses a serendipitous temperance union parade to shield their getaway , and many citizens are killed in the crossfire .

Pike rides off with Dutch Engstrom (Ernest Borgnine) , brothers Lyle (Warren Oates) and Tector Gorch (Ben Johnson) and Angel (Jaime Sánchez) , the only survivors . They are dismayed when the loot from the robbery turns out to be a decoy : steel washers instead of silver coin . The men reunite with old @-@ timer Freddie Sykes (Edmond O'Brien) and head for Mexico .

Pike 's men cross the Rio Grande and take refuge that night in the village where Angel was born . The townsfolk are ruled by Gen. Mapache (Emilio Fernández) , a corrupt , brutal general in the Mexican Federal Army , who has been ravaging the area 's villages to feed his troops , who have been fighting ? and losing to ? the forces of revolutionary Pancho Villa . Pike 's gang makes contact with the general . A jealous Angel spots Teresa , his former lover , in Mapache 's arms and shoots her dead , angering Mapache . Pike defuses the situation and offers to work for Mapache . Their task is to steal a weapons shipment from a U.S. Army train so that Mapache can resupply his troops and appease Col. Mohr (Fernando Wagner) , his German military adviser , who wishes to obtain samples of America 's armaments . The reward will be a cache of gold coins .

Angel gives up his share of the gold to Pike in return for sending one crate of the stolen rifles and ammunition to a band of rebels opposed to Mapache . The holdup goes largely as planned until Deke 's posse turns up on the very train the gang has robbed . The posse chases them to the Mexican border , only to be foiled again as the robbers blow up a trestle spanning the Rio Grande , dumping the entire posse into the river . The pursuers temporarily regroup at a riverside camp and then quickly take off again after the Bunch .

Pike and his men , knowing they risk being double @-@ crossed by Mapache , devise a way of bringing him the stolen weapons ? including an (anachronistic) Browning M1917 machine gun ? without him double @-@ crossing them . However , Mapache learns from the mother of Teresa that

Angel embezzled a crate of guns and ammo , and reveals this as Angel and Engstrom deliver the last of the weapons . Surrounded by Mapache 's army , Angel desperately tries to escape , only to be captured and tortured . Mapache lets Engstrom go , and he returns to rejoin Pike 's gang and tell them what happened .

Sykes is wounded by Deke 's posse while securing spare horses . The rest of Pike 's gang returns to Agua Verde for shelter , where a bacchanal celebrating the weapons transfer has commenced ; they see Angel being dragged on the ground by a rope tied behind the general 's car . After a brief frolic with prostitutes and a period of reflection , Pike and the gang try to forcibly persuade Mapache to release Angel , barely alive after the torture . The general appears to comply ; however , as they watch , the general cuts his throat instead . Pike and the gang angrily gun Mapache down in front of hundreds of his men . For a moment , the federales are so shocked that they fail to return fire , causing Engstrom to laugh in surprise . Pike calmly takes aim at Mohr and kills him , too . This results in a violent , bloody shootout ? dominated by the machine gun ? in which Pike and his men are killed , along with many of Mapache 's troops and the remaining German adviser .

Deke finally catches up . He allows the remaining members of the posse to take the bullet @-@ riddled bodies of the gang members back and collect the reward , while electing to stay behind , knowing what awaits the posse . After a period , Sykes arrives with a band of the previously seen Mexican rebels , who have killed off what 's left of the posse along the way . Sykes asks Deke to come along and join the revolution . Deke smiles and rides off with them .

= = Cast = =

= = Casting = =

Director Sam Peckinpah considered many actors for the Pike Bishop role , before casting William Holden : Richard Boone , Sterling Hayden , Charlton Heston , Burt Lancaster , Lee Marvin , Robert Mitchum , Gregory Peck , and James Stewart . Marvin actually accepted the role but pulled out after he was offered a larger pay deal to star in Paint Your Wagon (1969) .

Peckinpah 's first two choices for the role of Deke Thornton were Richard Harris (who had co @-@ starred in Major Dundee) and Brian Keith (who had worked with Peckinpah on The Westerner (1960) and The Deadly Companions (1961)) . Harris was never formally approached , but Keith was , and turned the part down . Robert Ryan was ultimately cast in the part after Peckinpah saw him in the World War II action movie The Dirty Dozen (1967) . Other actors considered for the role were Henry Fonda , Glenn Ford , Van Heflin , Ben Johnson (later cast as Tector Gorch) , and Arthur Kennedy .

Mario Adorf was considered for the part of Mapache , but the role went to Emilio Fernández , the Mexican film director and actor and friend of Peckinpah .

Among those considered to play Dutch Engstrom were Charles Bronson , Jim Brown , Alex Cord , Robert Culp , Sammy Davis , Jr . , Richard Jaeckel , Steve McQueen , and George Peppard . Ernest Borgnine was cast based on his performance in The Dirty Dozen (1967) .

Robert Blake was the original choice to play Angel , but he asked for too much money . Peckinpah had seen Jaime Sánchez in the Broadway production of Sidney Lumet 's The Pawnbroker , was impressed , and demanded he be cast as Angel .

Albert Dekker , a stage actor , was cast as Harrigan , the railroad detective . He died months after filming ; The Wild Bunch was his final film .

Bo Hopkins played the part of Clarence " Crazy " Lee ; he was cast after Peckinpah saw him on television .

Warren Oates played Lyle Gorch , having previously worked with Peckinpah on the TV series The Rifleman and his previous films , Ride the High Country (1962) and Major Dundee (1965) .

= = Production = =

In 1967 , Warner Bros.-Seven Arts producers Kenneth Hyman and Phil Feldman were interested in having Sam Peckinpah rewrite and direct an adventure film called *The Diamond Story* . A professional outcast due to the production difficulties of his previous film *Major Dundee* (1965) and his firing from the set of *The Cincinnati Kid* (1965) , Peckinpah 's stock had improved following his critically acclaimed work on the television film *Noon Wine* (1966) . An alternative screenplay available at the studio was *The Wild Bunch* , written by Roy Sickner and Walon Green . At the time , William Goldman 's screenplay *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* had recently been purchased by 20th Century Fox . It was quickly decided that *The Wild Bunch* , which had several similarities to Goldman 's work , would be produced in order to beat *Butch Cassidy* to the theaters .

By the fall of 1967 , Peckinpah was rewriting the screenplay and preparing for the production . The principal photography was shot entirely on location in Mexico , most notably at the Hacienda Ciénaga del Carmen (deep in the desert between Torreón and Saltillo , Coahuila) and on the Rio Nazas . Peckinpah 's epic work was inspired by his hunger to return to films , the violence seen in Arthur Penn 's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) , and America 's growing frustration with the Vietnam War and what he perceived to be the utter lack of reality seen in Westerns up to that time . He set out to make a film which portrayed not only the vicious violence of the period , but as well the crude men attempting to survive the era . Multiple scenes attempted in *Major Dundee* , including slow motion action sequences (inspired by Akira Kurosawa 's work in *Seven Samurai* (1954)) , characters leaving a village as if in a funeral procession and the use of inexperienced locals as extras , would become fully realized in *The Wild Bunch* .

The film was shot with the anamorphic process . Peckinpah and his cinematographer , Lucien Ballard , also made use of telephoto lenses , that allowed for objects and people in both the background and foreground to be compressed in perspective . The effect is best seen in the shots where the Bunch makes " the walk " to Mapache 's headquarters to free Angel . As they walk forward , a constant flow of people passes between them and the camera ; most of the people in the foreground are as sharply focused as the Bunch . The editing of the film is notable in that shots from multiple angles were spliced together in rapid succession , often at different speeds , placing greater emphasis on the chaotic nature of the action and the gunfights .

Lou Lombardo , having previously worked with Peckinpah on *Noon Wine* , was personally hired by the director to edit *The Wild Bunch* . Peckinpah had wanted an editor who would be loyal to him . Lombardo 's youth was also a plus , as he was not bound by traditional conventions . One of Lombardo 's first contributions was to show Peckinpah an episode of the TV series *Felony Squad* he edited in 1967 . The episode , entitled " My Mommy Got Lost " , included a slow motion sequence where Joe Don Baker is shot by the police . The scene mixed slow motion with normal speed , having been filmed at 24 frames per second but triple printed optically at 72 frames per second . Peckinpah was reportedly thrilled and told Lombardo : " Let 's try some of that when we get down to Mexico ! " The director would film the major shootouts with six cameras , operating at various film rates , including 24 frames per second , 30 frames per second , 60 frames per second , 90 frames per second , and 120 frames per second . When the scenes were eventually cut together , the action would shift from slow to fast to slower still , giving time an elastic quality never before seen in motion pictures up to that time .

By the time filming wrapped , Peckinpah had shot 333 @,@ 000 feet (101 @,@ 000 m) of film with 1 @,@ 288 camera setups . Lombardo and Peckinpah remained in Mexico for six months editing the picture . After initial cuts , the opening gunfight sequence ran 21 minutes . By cutting frames from specific scenes and intercutting others , they were able to fine @-@ cut the opening robbery down to five minutes . The creative montage became the model for the rest of the film and would " forever change the way movies would be made " . Further editing was done to secure a favorable rating from the MPAA which was in the process of establishing a new set of codes . Peckinpah and his editors cut the film to satisfy the new , expansive R @-@ rating parameters which , for the first time , designated a film as being unsuitable for children . Without this new system in place , the film could not have been released with its explicit images of bloodshed .

Peckinpah stated that one of his goals for this movie was to give the audience " some idea of what it is to be gunned down " . A memorable incident occurred , to that end , as Peckinpah 's crew were

consulting him on the "gunfire" effects to be used in the film. Not satisfied with the results from the squibs his crew had brought for him, Peckinpah became exasperated; he finally hollered: "That's not what I want! That's not what I want!" He then grabbed a real revolver and fired it into a nearby wall. The gun empty, Peckinpah barked at his stunned crew: "THAT'S the effect I want!!" He also had the gunfire sound effects changed for the film. Before, all gunshots in Warner Bros. movies sounded identical, regardless of the type of weapon being fired. Peckinpah insisted on each different type of firearm having its own specific sound effect when fired.

= = Themes = =

Critics of *The Wild Bunch* noted the theme of the end of the outlaw gunfighter era. Pike Bishop says, "We've got to start thinking beyond our guns. Those days are closing fast." The Bunch live by an anachronistic code of honor without a place in 20th @-@ century society. When they inspect Gen. Mapache's new automobile, they perceive it marks the end of horse travel, a symbol also in Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country* (1962) and *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (1970).

The violence that was much criticized in 1969 remains controversial. Peckinpah noted it was allegoric of the American war in Vietnam, the violence of which was nightly televised to American homes at supper time. He tried showing the gun violence commonplace to the historic western frontier period, rebelling against sanitized, bloodless television Westerns and films glamorizing gunfights and murder: "The point of the film is to take this façade of movie violence and open it up, get people involved in it so that they are starting to go in the Hollywood television predictable reaction syndrome, and then twist it so that it's not fun anymore, just a wave of sickness in the gut... it's ugly, brutalizing, and bloody awful; it's not fun and games and cowboys and Indians. It's a terrible, ugly thing, and yet there's a certain response that you get from it, an excitement, because we're all violent people." Peckinpah used violence as catharsis, believing his audience would be purged of violence, by witnessing it explicitly on screen. He later admitted to being mistaken, that the audience came to enjoy rather than be horrified by his films' violence, something that troubled him.

Betrayal is the secondary theme of *The Wild Bunch*. The characters suffer from their knowledge of having betrayed a friend and left him to his fate, thus violating their own honor code when it suits them (" \$ 10 @,@ 000 cuts an awful lot of family ties "). However, Bishop says, "When you side with a man, you stay with him, and if you can't do that you're like some animal." Such oppositional ideas lead to the film's violent conclusion, as the remaining men find their abandonment of Angel intolerable. Bishop remembers his betrayals, most notably when he deserts Deke Thornton (in flashback) when the law catches up to them and when he abandons Crazy Lee at the railroad office after the robbery (ostensibly to guard the hostages). Critic David Weddle writes that "like that of Conrad's Lord Jim, Pike Bishop's heroism is propelled by overwhelming guilt and a despairing death wish."

= = Reception = =

= = = Critical = = =

Vincent Canby began his review by calling the film "very beautiful and the first truly interesting American @-@ made Western in years. It's also so full of violence--of an intensity that can hardly be supported by the story--that it's going to prompt a lot of people who do not know the real effect of movie violence (as I do not) to write automatic condemnations of it." He said, "Although the movie's conventional and poetic action sequences are extraordinarily good and its landscapes beautifully photographed... it is most interesting in its almost jolly account of chaos, corruption, and defeat". Among the actors, he commented particularly on William Holden: "After years of giving bored performances in boring movies, Holden comes back gallantly in *The Wild Bunch*. He looks older and tired, but he has style, both as a man and as a movie character who persists in

doing what he 's always done , not because he really wants the money but because there 's simply nothing else to do . " Time also liked Holden 's performance , describing it as his best since *Stalag 17* (a 1953 film that earned Holden an Oscar) ; said Robert Ryan gave " the screen performance of his career " ; and concluded that " *The Wild Bunch* contains faults and mistakes " (such as flashbacks " introduced with surprising clumsiness ") , but " its accomplishments are more than sufficient to confirm that Peckinpah , along with Stanley Kubrick and Arthur Penn , belongs with the best of the newer generation of American filmmakers . "

In a 2002 retrospective Roger Ebert , who " saw the original version at the world premiere in 1969 , during the golden age of the junket , when Warner Bros. screened five of its new films in the Bahamas for 450 critics and reporters " , said that back then he had publicly declared the film a masterpiece during the junket 's press conference , prompted by comments from " a reporter from the *Reader 's Digest* [who] got up to ask ' Why was this film ever made ? ' " He compared the film to *Pulp Fiction* : " praised and condemned with equal vehemence . "

" What *Citizen Kane* was to movie lovers in 1941 , *The Wild Bunch* was to cineastes in 1969 , " wrote film critic Michael Sragow , adding that Peckinpah had " produced an American movie that equals or surpasses the best of Kurosawa : the *Götterdämmerung* of Westerns " .

= = = Box Office = = =

Produced on a budget of \$ 6 million , the film grossed \$ 10 @. @ 5 million at the US box office in 1970 and another \$ 638 @, @ 641 in the US on its 1995 restored box @- @ office release , making a total of \$ 11 @, @ 138 @, @ 641 . It was the 17th highest grossing film of 1969 . Today , the film holds a 98 % " Fresh " rating on Rotten Tomatoes based on reviews from 46 critics .

= = Documentary = =

Sam Peckinpah and the making of *The Wild Bunch* were the subjects of the documentary *The Wild Bunch : An Album in Montage* (1996) directed and edited by Paul Seydor ; the documentary was occasioned by the discovery of 72 minutes of silent , black @- @ and @- @ white film footage of Peckinpah and company on location in northern Mexico during the filming of *The Wild Bunch* . Michael Sragow wrote in 2000 that the documentary was " a wonderful introduction to Peckinpah ? s radically detailed historical film about American outlaws in revolutionary Mexico--a masterpiece that ? s part bullet @- @ driven ballet , part requiem for Old West friendship and part existential explosion . Seydor ? s movie is also a poetic flight on the myriad possibilities of movie directing . " Seydor and his co @- @ producer Nick Redman were nominated in 1997 for the Academy Award for Best Documentary (Short Subject) .

= = Awards , honors , and nominations = =

Following its release , Peckinpah was one of ten directors to receive a nomination for the Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directing ? Feature Film . The film received two Academy Award nominations , for Best Original Screenplay (Walon Green , Roy N. Sickner , Sam Peckinpah) and Best Original Music Score (Jerry Fielding) . At the 42nd Academy Awards ceremony , both awards went to crew members of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (screenwriter William Goldman and composer Burt Bacharach) .

Decades later the American Film Institute placed the film in several of its " 100 Years " lists :

AFI 's 100 Years ? 100 Movies ? # 80

AFI 's 100 Years ? 100 Thrills ? # 69

AFI 's 100 Years ? 100 Movies (10th Anniversary Edition) ? # 79

AFI 's 10 Top 10 ? # 6 Western

The film is ranked # 94 on Empire magazine 's list of the 500 Greatest Films of All Time . In 1999 , the U.S. National Film Registry selected it for preservation in the Library of Congress as culturally , historically , and aesthetically significant .

= = Versions = =

In 1993 , Warner Bros. resubmitted the film to the MPAA ratings board prior to an expected re @-@ release . To the studio 's surprise , the originally R @-@ rated film was given an NC @-@ 17 , delaying the release until the decision was appealed . The controversy was linked to 10 extra minutes added to the film , although none of this footage contained graphic violence . Warner Bros. trimmed some footage to decrease the running time to ensure additional daily screenings . When the restored film finally made it to the screen in March 1995 , one reviewer noted :

By restoring 10 minutes to the film , the complex story now fits together in a seamless way , filling in those gaps found in the previous theatrical release , and proving that Peckinpah was firing on all cylinders for this , his grandest achievement And the one overwhelming feature that the director 's cut makes unforgettable are the many faces of the children , whether playing , singing , or cowering , much of the reaction to what happens on @-@ screen is through the eyes , both innocent and imitative , of all the children .

Today , almost all of the versions of the film include the missing scenes . Warner Bros. released a newly restored version in a two @-@ disc special edition on January 10 , 2006 . It includes an audio commentary by Peckinpah scholars , two documentaries concerning the making of the film , and never @-@ before @-@ seen outtakes .

There have been several versions of the film :

The original , 1969 European release is 145 minutes long , with an intermission (per distributor 's request , before the train robbery) .

The original , 1969 American release is 143 minutes long .

The second , 1969 American release is 135 minutes long , shortened to allow more screenings .

The 1995 re @-@ release is 145 minutes long , identical to the 1969 European release , the version labeled " The Original Director 's Cut " , available in home video .

= = Remake = =

On January 19 , 2011 , it was announced by Warner Bros. that a remake of The Wild Bunch was in the works . Screenwriter Brian Helgeland was hired to develop a new script . The 2012 suicide of Tony Scott , who was scheduled to direct , put the project in limbo .

On May 15 , 2013 , The Wrap reported that Will Smith was in talks to star in and produce the remake . The new version involves drug cartels and follows a disgraced DEA agent who assembles a team to go after a Mexican drug lord and his fortune . No director has been chosen , and a new screenwriter is being sought .