

## The War Wagon (1967)

<b>John Wayne</b>	as Taw Jackson the maligned rancher
<b>Kirk Douglas</b>	as Lomax the safe cracker and gun fighter
<b>Howard Keel</b>	as Levi Walking Bear the comedic relief Indian
<b>Robert Walker</b>	as Billy Hyatt the young alcoholic explosives expert
<b>Keenan Wynn</b>	as Wes Fletcher the crazy jealous thieving wagoner
<b>Bruce Cabot</b>	as Pierce the evil force
<b>Joanna Barnes</b>	as Lola the poker player
<b>Valora Noland</b>	as Kate the property of Wes Fletcher

Screenplay by **Clair Huffaker**, based on his book "Badman". Filmed in Durango Mexico.

A rancher seeking retribution devises a plan to steal a large shipment of gold dust taken off land that was once his.

Lomax: "You were a hard working rancher defending your property. Yet it's you who gets shot, framed and sent to jail. I always thought that was kind of amusing."

The on screen chemistry between John Wayne and Kirk Douglas along with the comedic changes to the screenplay make this an entertaining film.

Lomax: "Mine hit the ground first."

Jackson: "Mine was taller."

The **Burt Kennedy** directed film features typical Western genre point shooting, a rampant disregard for muzzle control, discharging a firearm in a public place, and gun twirling for show. A point for shooter education can be made by the main characters constant vigilance and ability to respond with arms at any moment.

Lomax: "You always wear a gun over your underwear?"

Jackson: "Just lately."

The saloon fight is notable for its involvement of characters and the non-escalation into a shooting scene. This is more of the "boys letting off steam" variety of bar fight than the vicious hand to hand combat that yields maiming and death.

Bars are one of the places you are not allowed to legally carry a firearm (in Florida). In this film, no one gets shot **inside** a saloon.

While there is a fair amount of shooting in the movie, killing is not an overwhelming feature. Two of Pierce's men are killed in self-defense by Lomax and Jackson. One of them is played by **Bruce Dern**.

At the risk of starting a range fire, Jackson and Lomax rescue Levi Walking Bear without killing any gang members. Well we don't actually know what Lomax did to the gang member who was setting up the targets.

Jackson avoids killing the guards at his former ranch when he, Lomax, and Hyatt go there to steal nitroglycerin.

The attacking Native American Indians take the worst at the muzzle of a Gatling gun newly mounted on the War Wagon when they pursue the wagon to keep it moving into the ambush.

There are several victims of workplace violence as the wagon is being ambushed. Pierce shoots two of his employees as they attempt to exit the wagon. The second one fatally shots Pierce.

Wes Fletcher is killed by an Indian when he attempts to respond to the Indian opening the flour barrels which contain the gold dust. This was pretty much expected as needed to free Kate from Fletcher, so she can ride off with the young alcoholic explosives expert Hyatt.

A sub-plot involving a tribe of Native American Indians attempting to relocate because of the action of Pierce is imbedded in the willingness of the warriors to take up a fight against Pierce. The women, children and old men of the tribe are the beneficiaries of the spilled flour barrels caused by the Indian leader seeking to renegotiate the agreement after the wagon has been toppled.

I enjoy this film for its plot, interchange between characters, and relative lack of cold blooded murder. – *Greg Poole*