



12th Annual ASC AWARDS MOVIE OF THE WEEK OR PILOT

WILLIAM WAGES, ASC - Winner Buffalo Soldiers

Georgia resident William Wages, ASC earned his second consecutive ASC Award this year for **Buffalo Soldiers**. He garnered last year's trophy, as well as a Cable ACE Award, for **Riders of the Purple Sage** (see AC May '97). The cinematographer has enjoyed a fortuitous collaboration with director Charles Haid, and **Buffalo Soldiers** is the duo's sixth film together it is also Wages' sixth ASC Award-nominated work. He earned previous nods in 1988 for **Gore Vidal's Lincoln**, in 1990 for both **Caroline** and **Voices Within: The Story of Truddi Chase, Part II** (AC May '91) and then in 1991 for the series **I'll Fly Away** (AC May '92). Wages has also photographed such feature films as **Down in the Delta**, **Love Potion No. 9**, **In the Army Now** and **Iron Will**.

For **Buffalo Soldiers**, Wages and Haid approached the material in a very different manner than they had on **Riders of the Purple Sage**. The cinematographer notes, "**Riders** was much more of a classic western, while **Buffalo Soldiers** is the story about how the white establishment of the late 1800s tried to use African-American Civil War veterans of the 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry to perform genocide on the Native Americans. It's a brutal and **true** story, so we decided to tell it in a very straightforward way, not glamorizing anything and not holding anything back. Basically, it's just in-your-face [photographically].

"The lighting style was realistic as well, so that it would look real and not lit which meant that for the most part, it was not a hard-light style. We very

seldom live in a hard-light world, and they certainly didn't back then, unless you were outdoors."

In crafting a stark tone for this untold story, Wages was initially concerned with rendering the dark-skinned actors' facial details accurately while they were shadowed under the wide brims of their hats. "Almost any cinematographer will tell you that one of the most difficult things to do is photograph African-Americans in the desert with hats on," he opines. "It's a delicate balance to keep the facial detail and yet not allow things to look 'lit.' A lot of the scenes that are outdoors in the daytime are in fact **extremely** lit. There's a lot of lighting going on that is hopefully invisible.

"During prep, I did an across-the-board, unbiased test of every available Fuji and Kodak film stock, to see which gave me the most shadow detail under these conditions," he explains. "I didn't select my film stock for a specific rendering of a gritty reality, but for the widest latitude. In my tests, I shot a stand-in wearing a hat in the desert with all of the stocks, just changing the magazines for the same exact shot, and I ended up using Fuji's tungsten F-250 8551, which had the most latitude. I love the new Vision stocks and use Kodak all the time, but for this particular film and this particular look, the Fuji 8551 was the way to go. Black people have wonderful tonal ranges in their faces, and this stock captures them."

Despite the Fuji stock's latitude, Wages still paid particular attention his levels of fill lighting while shooting on the production's blazing Arizona locations. "I used a lot of 12' by 12' bounces with muslin and what we called a 'microwave,' which is a sheet of material with silver lamé on one side and white on the other," he details. "I usually had the grips string one of those up, because that way I had the option of using either side. I used the white side most of the time. The white is a bright white, but it has a dull finish unlike a Griffolyn, which is shiny. Actually, the Griffolyns used to be dull when they first came out, but they've changed the way they make them, so I don't used them very often."