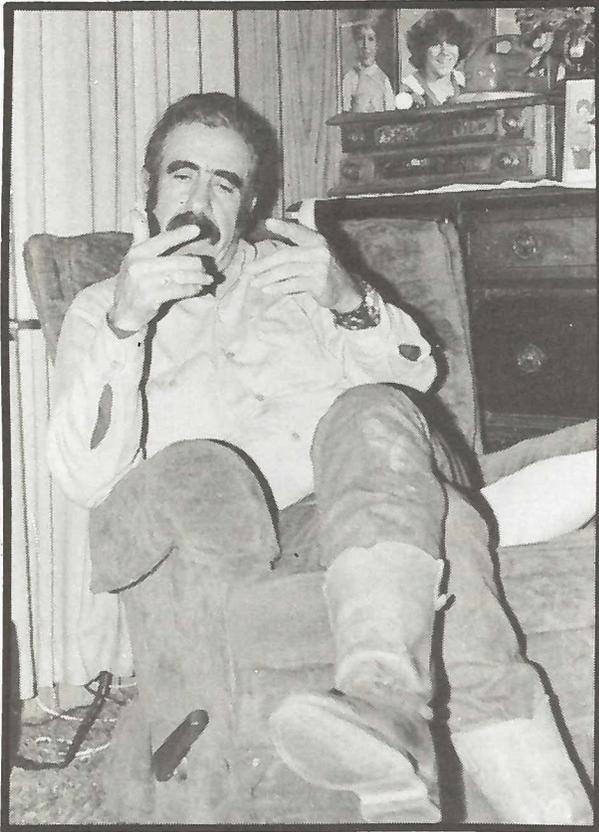


“All I ever wanted to be was a cowboy!”



Ted talking about the thiokol.

Many young men in the early frontier days of the West let visions of cowboying dance in their heads. The lonesome pioneer life of the Western man served as a model for youngsters who thought the wide open spaces were the only challenge for them. To be on an open range with stock, to make a living under the sun and stars and to wrestle with nature has long been an occupation dreamed of by youngsters growing up. Ted Cordova is just such a man who, as a youngster and now as an adult, still has visions of cowboying dancing in his head. He told me, “That’s all I ever wanted to be, a cowboy!”

Ted Cordova was born in 1925 in Walsenburg, Colorado. He told me his story. “Hell, I can’t remember when I was born, but it was down around Rattlesnake Butte, the southern part of the state. I was raised there and went to school in a little rock country school call Fairview. I didn’t have that much schooling because I had to help Dad on the ranch, and there was a lot of work to do. The country school was pretty damn bad, I’ll tell ya’. I think the students knew more than the teachers did. All the teachers knew was how to

Fed Cordova

By **Richard Gilbert**

beat us up with a club or quil. There were no rules or regulations, and the teacher had the power to do whatever he or she wanted.

“It was just a little rock school house right next to Twin Buttes, and there are a lot of rattlesnakes there. I didn’t do much good in school, I tell ya’. All we did or knew was how to fight and play hookey. Anyone would have gotten along there. We only had one teacher for the whole bunch, from kindergarten to 8th grade. Then most people went to a harder school. I never had a girl friend when I was in school. I never had one till I was in my twenties. I didn’t really care for girls, I guess, because I didn’t have any.



Fed’s riding equipment

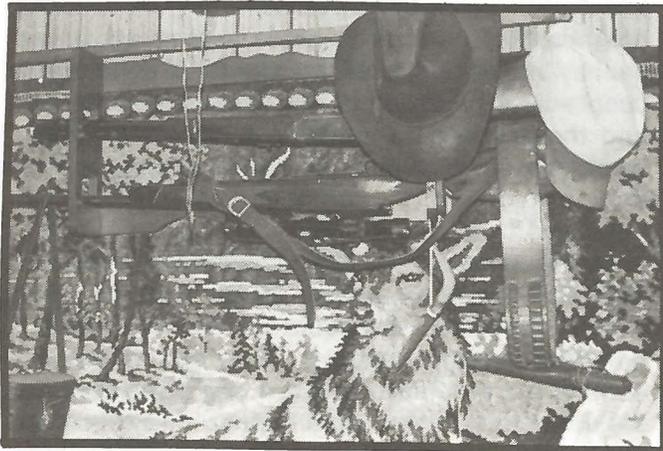
"We were strictly country. I didn't get to see town till I was in my teens. We went on Saturday night, and some times we didn't get to go. Our folks were pretty strict. We were far from town, at least 50 miles. Dad had a car, but he never let us use it. We couldn't go to town on our own.

"Mom did all the shopping, so we never had to worry about clothes. She did it for all of us. There were 12 kids altogether. There were five boys and seven girls. I still see them once and a while. I saw two of my sisters from California this summer, and I have a brother and a sister down home in Twin Buttes. I get to see them pretty much, about once a year.

"My parents used to ranch, and I had to help. That's why I didn't go to school. I was the oldest of the boys. Those days were pretty tough. Nowadays kids get to go to school, and I think that education is great. Without an education people have nothing. I wish I had a better education, because it makes me feel bad not to have one. I wish I could do it again, and I could make something out of myself. In the old days it wasn't so bad, but ranching and cowboying is going out of style. I got cheated out of some really good jobs because of my lack of education.

"My parents used to run a lot of cattle and sheep. They ran more sheep than cattle. I remember I always wanted to be a cowboy. I made it too, and I was a cowboy for 22 years. I left home when I was 17, to become a cowboy and never went back. I remember thinking to be a cowboy, all I had to do was ride a horse. I like to ride horses, bad horses or bucking horses, but there's more to it than that. I rodeoed for a while, till the late 50's.

"After I left home, I went to work for an outfit called the Capp Brothers. They ran nothing but Mexican steers that they brought in from New Mexico. I worked there for two years after leaving home. From there I went to New Mexico, Arizona, Texas and Nevada — cowboying. All my cowboying memories are good. Some were tough but not really bad.



Ted's hunting equipment.

"After that I cowboied in Colorado, South Dakota and Montana. Life was tough, but I enjoyed it anyway. It was always a sixteen hour day job. On my first job working for ranches I would go out around 4:30 a.m. and jingle the horses for a day's work. They were called Remuda, a string of saddle horses. We would work from dawn to dark, moving cattle or whatever. That was the life of a cowboy.

"On the trail we would eat wild game, fish and deer. We never had much to eat and especially not meat. We had to furnish our own game, if we had meat. We mostly ate beans and bacon though.

"We broke our own horses and shod them. We had to. We fixed a little fence now and then, and



Ted showing his chaps.

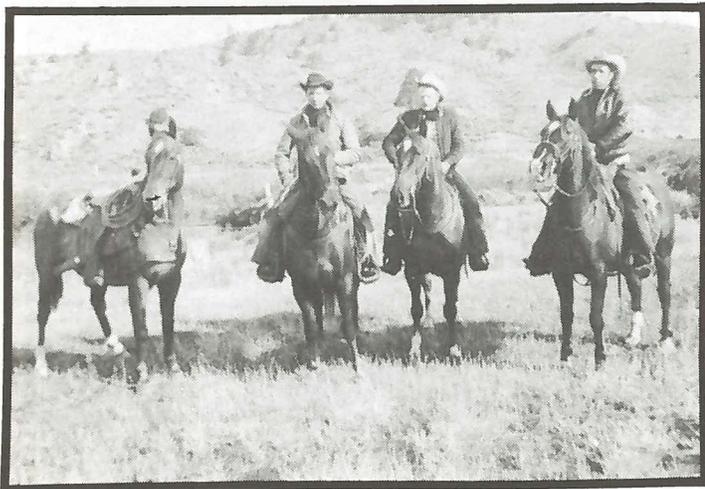
all summer we branded cows out in the open. We didn't brand in corals like big companies do, maybe some but not much. We would have thirty or forty hands to help us brand.

"I have broken hundreds of horses, that was my living. Every winter we used to get \$5 to \$10 a head for breaking a horse. I could break a lot of horses in one winter. In 1945, I took a train load of horses to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and I stayed there that summer breaking some of the green horses that weren't broken. They were to be broken for dude ranches.

"I got quite a few broken bones from breaking horses. I think about every bone in my body had been broken at least three times. I have been in the hospital from breaking horses. I quit breaking horses at 56, but before that I did bareback and bronc riding. I did pretty good, and there were always three or four of us that would travel together. If one didn't do good, then the other was there for support."

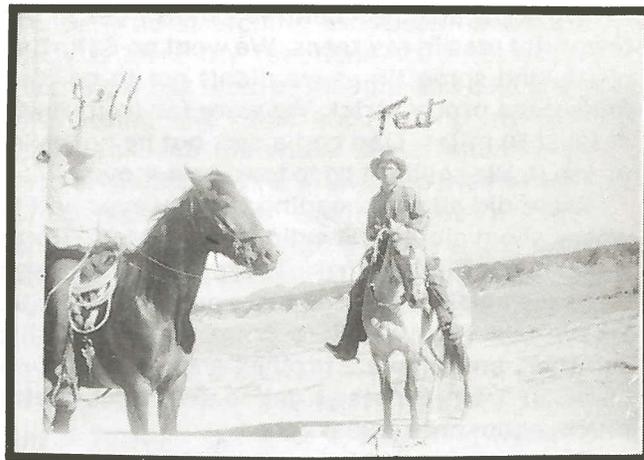
Ted talked more about life on the cowboy trail. "We never got bread, just biscuits. It was a sour dough biscuit three times a day, that was our main meal, biscuits and gravy. Then there were beans, but nothing fancy. A lot of outfits had a cook, but that was only in the winter. The cook would ring the bell, and we would all come to eat. In the wintertime we would stay in a bunkhouse, and in the summer time we were outside. There wasn't as much to do in the winter.

"The nights were long — cowboying, not much to do. We played cards and didn't go out much. We couldn't go out because we were too far from town. When we did go to town, we hung out in saloons and got drunk. If we ever got thrown in jail we didn't have to worry because someone would come and get us. I got thrown in jail a couple of times. We were always showing off and seeing who could do the most or the best, and I was right in there. I could never stay down; I always tried to be the best. I had to be the best on the job too, but that wasn't why I went from job to job. When you're young it's different; you get tired of just one place.



Ted, far right, after a hard day's roundup.

"The best ranch I ever worked for was the Fernchera Ranch. It was a good place. I liked it there in the country and being in the mountains. That was down at Fort Garland in the San Luis Valley. That was the job where I made the most money. I worked there for six years. There I didn't have room and board; we boarded ourselves and split the rent. It was hard to work in the sixties.



Ted and Jell out on the range.

"After the Fernchera Ranch I went to work for the Hatchet Cattle Company. That was around Pueblo, Colorado. I worked there for about three years. I left there and went to work in Elko, Nevada, for the Ellison Cattle Company. The ranch was called White Horse Ranch. I didn't like Nevada. All there was there was alcalide and sagebrush. I came back to Colorado in 1965 and went to work for Keith Studder. That was on St. Patrick's Day. After that I went to work for John Kerstine, then Lloyd Gilroy and a couple of other ranches.

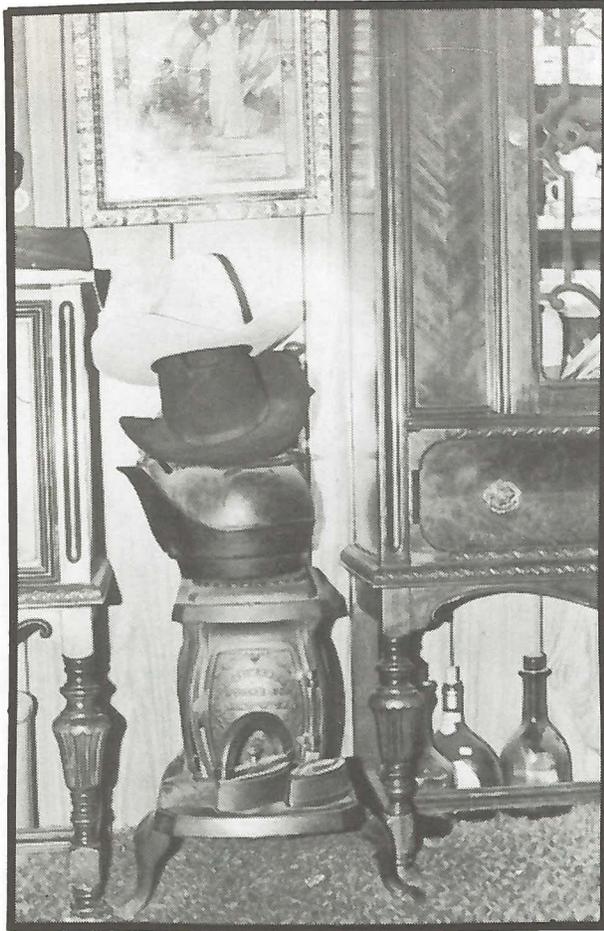
"I really want to go back to cowboying! I was going to go back last year, but I changed my mind. I don't want to deprive my kids because they wouldn't get as much if I was a cowboy. They wouldn't get as much education. If I didn't have the kids I would go, but it is good for the kids to be in one place.

"I always thought I was a good cowboy and that's what the people I worked for told me. I wish I were still a cowboy. One can't beat that life, being out, away with my gear. I always had my riding gear and my little 30-30 saddle gun. That was my most valuable possession.

"I would rather be in the country, even if I didn't make as much money. In the country people are more friendly. When we were in the neighborhood we could go to someone's house nearby and eat, and if we didn't some country people would cuss us out. We used to go to places, and the door was always open. Country people would be down right insulted if we didn't stop by."

As Ted talked with me he told about another phase of his life other than cowboying. "When I first came to Steamboat I never saw so much snow. I thought, 'How could anyone live here?' I got here on St. Patrick's Day and could not believe the amount of snow. I could see only the top of the fence post. Even then I didn't think any human could live here.

"I don't know what the hell made me stay



A cowboy needs a good hat!

here. I worked for OK Lockers before I went to work for the ski hill (Mt. Werner). The butcher shop was the OK Lockers, but I couldn't stand being inside. That was the first time I ever worked inside and I didn't like it. So I went to work for the hill. I started to work on the Headwall lift. That was in 1969. It was a very easy lift to run.

"Then I went to work under Gary Kline. I worked there with heavy equipment in the summer and on the snow cat in the winter as an operator. I have been with LTV (Sheraton) now for 11 years. Some days it has been fun, then others it's not so good, but I have been here for so long because of the money. It is much better paying than cowboying, and I have a family to support, plus my kids need an education."

Ted talked about some problems he's had while working with heavy snow moving equipment. "I rolled a thiokol once and flipped over another one last summer. That was a construction cat, not a snow cat. I have never really ever wrecked a cat, but they slide and hit trees once in a while. One winter a driver wrecked two cats, three times. Summer cats have all steel cleats and winter cats have rubber and steel cleats which are better in the snow. We get turned around once in a while, but always find our way back. Sometimes we look for lost skiers.

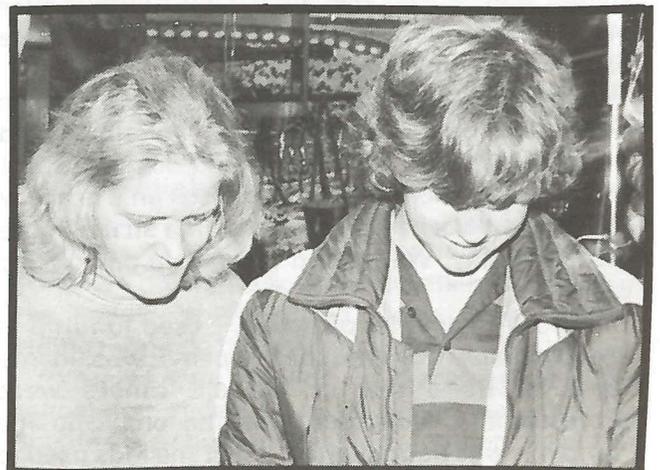
We might do that from four in the afternoon till two in the morning. It's an interesting job, one that keeps me busy."

Ted's relapsed back to cowboy life to bring the interview to a close. He showed me his photo album while he talked. "I still have most of my gear from cowboying. That's what I wore when they took my picture for the Steamboat brochure. I didn't want to have my picture taken, but they talked me into it. It's sort of like Ted's Ridge. That's a new ski run they named after me. We just finished dozing it, and it was open last year. We dozed it good this year. It's right next to the run Vertigo on the mountain."

Ted's philosophy about the present and future seemed to echo what other interviewees for **Three Wire Winter** had said. "Kids today are pretty good. They're okay, and they have a different life too. They have to live fast. It's different from when I was a kid. Today, country kids don't have the opportunity that kids around town have, and they don't have the fancy cars. I think kids always should get an education. Life's hard without an education. I missed that. It's better for the kids to be educated, so as they grow up, they can learn the value of a dollar. We only got fifty cents a week. That's when we were lucky, but I am happy with life.

"I am better off now than I was then. Cowboying life was a lot rougher. Well, it was hard to make a living. The wages I make now, and what I made then, gosh, I make over a thousand a month now. Back then the dollar was worth a lot more. Now it's like a penny in your pocket. Wages were hard to come by then.

"This country is really growing. It's growing so fast. I think it's changing over night. Everything is changing so fast. That is why, if I could change anything, I would go cowboy. It's still in my blood. I like this job here, and it makes a good living. We aren't in bad shape, but we were, when we tried to ranch here and do odd jobs. In the winter there was no work for the lonesome cowboy. I still want to go back."



Richard and Donna Cordova