

Stagecoach

Written by Dudley Nichols
Based on a short story by Ernest Haycox

- 1) Officers at a U.S. Cavalry camp learn that Geronimo has broken out of the reservation. He is burning ranches and may attack the stagecoach. The line to Lordsburg has been cut.
- 2) Curley, the sheriff of Tonto, greets the arriving stagecoach and its driver Buck. Two passengers are Mr. Peacock, a travelling whisky salesman, and young Mrs. Mallory, on her way to join her husband who is with the Cavalry unit stationed at Lordsburg. Lucy Mallory is recognised by Hatfield, a "notorious gambler" with aristocratic manners. The sheriff tells Buck that there is a posse out trying to arrest the Ringo Kid, who has just broken out of jail. Ringo is probably "trying to get even with them Plummer boys," who are in Lordsburg.
- 3) Gatewood, the banker, is seen cleaning out the safe, preparing to abscond with embezzled funds.
- 4) Gateswood's wife is leader of the ladies of the Law and Order League, who are escorting Dallas, a "saloon girl," to put her on the stagecoach and banish her from the town. Another unwanted citizen is Doc Boone, the alcoholic physician whose landlady is throwing him out of his lodging because of rent arrears. Introduced to Peacock, Doc shows immediate interest in the whisky salesman's samples.

A contingent of cavalry under Lieutenant Blanchard arrive, announcing that they will escort the stagecoach, but only as far as the next station, where they will be handed over to another troop. Buck, the driver, is apprehensive at the news that Geronimo is on the warpath. Curley announces that he will join the coach, but it is left to each of the passengers whether to risk the journey or not. Hearing of the danger, Hatfield insists on joining the stagecoach, offering himself as protection for young Mrs. Mallory, who seems to be in failing health and eager to reach her husband.

At the edge of the town the stagecoach is flagged down by Gatewood, the banker. He announces that he has had a telegram and had to pack his bags hurriedly in order to get Lordsburg. Learning belatedly of danger of an attack by Indians, Gatewood is indignant, but does not pursue the matter when asked why his message from Lordsburg didn't include the information.

5) Some distance on the stagecoach meets the Ringo Kid, carrying his saddle and a rifle but without his horse. His mount went lame. Ruefully, he surrenders to the sheriff, who puts him under arrest and takes possession of his weapon.

Squeezing into the coach, Ringo is introduced to the others. Gatewood has heard of Ringo's reputation and disapproves.

Doc Boone knows Ringo's family. The Doc once treated one of Ringo's brothers. Ringo, remembering, thanks him. "You did a good job, Doc, even if you was drunk." Doc takes this as a professional compliment. "What happened to the boy?" he asks. "He was murdered," Ringo answers quietly.

Mrs. Mallory is disturbed by the smoke of Doc's cigar. On her behalf, Hatfield insists that Doc throw it out of the window. "A gentleman doesn't smoke in the presence of a lady," says Hatfield. Doc apologises to Mrs. Mallory, but remarks that recently he had to extract a bullet from someone who was shot by a "gentleman." The bullet was in the victim's back. As Hatfield reacts, Ringo has to intervene. "Doc don't mean no harm." Hatfield, hesitant, does not pursue the matter and is plainly aware of the determined character that lies behind Ringo's casual manner.

6) The stagecoach arrives at the point where the next contingent of cavalry is to meet it. It was to be under the command of Mrs. Mallory's husband, but the passengers learn that it has been redirected to deal with an Indian attack elsewhere.

Should they continue or turn back? Blanchard explains that he has strict orders to go back. Gatewood protests. He cannot go back, and it is the duty of the cavalry to assure his safety as they continue. He will take it up with the lieutenant's superior officers if the troops refuse. When the officer retorts that he will put Gatewood under restraints if he makes trouble, the banker backs down.

7) The passengers move inside the station guesthouse in order to eat. They debate whether or not to risk going ahead without escort. Buck is nervous, though the sheriff points out that they can reach the next post by sundown. There are certain to be soldiers there who will escort them as far as the ferry. "We got four men that can handle firearms... Five with you, Ringo."

They defer to Mrs. Mallory. Disappointed at not finding her husband at this place, she assures them that she is determined that she doesn't want to be separated from him any longer. Captain Mallory must be with his men at the next stop, Apache Wells.

The sheriff is turning to the men to ask their opinion when Ringo reminds him that he hasn't consulted Dallas. The "saloon girl" says that it makes no difference to her. Gatewood insists that they go on. "I demand it. I'm standing on my legal rights." Hatfield, watching Lucy Mallory, votes Lordsburg. Peacock and Doc, who is well fortified by the whisky samples, agree. The sheriff overrides

Buck's feeble protest and tells Ringo that, as his prisoner, he has surrendered his proxy to his captor. Ringo, amused, assures the sheriff, "Ain't nothing keeping me out of Lordsburg, Curley."

As they sit down to the meal, the passengers very conspicuously ostracise Dallas and Ringo. As she sits alone, he joins her, commenting, "Looks like I got the plague, don't it?" "No... it's not you," says Dallas. Hatfield, aware that Lucy Mallory is looking unwell, offers assistance. Declining, she asks him if he has ever been in Virginia. "I was in your father's regiment," he says.

8) The lieutenant and his men continue as escort to the stagecoach to a fork in the trail before the cavalry turn back. Ahead lies flat prairie.

As they continue, the sheriff, with a shotgun across his knees, sits beside Buck. They discuss Ringo. Buck offers it as his opinion that if he was sheriff, he would let Ringo and Luke Plummer shoot it out. "I ain't saying I don't share your sentiments, Buck," says the sheriff, "but you're a born fool. In the first place Luke would kill the Kid in a gunfight. In the second place, if Luke did get shot he's got two brothers just as ornery as he is. The only safe for Ringo is in the pen and I aim to get him there all in one piece."

9) Inside the coach, Gatewood continues to fume at the impertinence of Lieutenant Blanchard, enlarging the topic to complain of the attitude of government to businessmen, the interfering of bank examiners, taxes and the national debt. "What the country needs is a businessman for president!" Doc Boone shows no support. He is quite drunk.

Dallas, aware that Lucy Mallory is in a state of exhaustion, offers to sit next to her so that Lucy can lean on her shoulder. Lucy declines and Dallas feels rebuffed. Hatfield leans out of the window to ask Buck for the water, which is carried in a canteen. As the sheriff passes it down to them Hatfield produces a small silver drinking cup for Mrs. Mallory to use. She notices its engraved crest. Hasn't she seen it before? Isn't this the crest of a family she knows? Hatfield claims that he doesn't know. He won the cup in a wager.

Again, Ringo has to remind Hatfield to offer the canteen to the other female passenger. Hatfield does so without the silver cup.

The journey continues...

10) Apache Wells. It is manned by Mexicans. As the stagecoach pulls in, Buck greets the potbellied station manager. Boasting of the good time that they have made, and that they saw no signs of Indians, Buck and the sheriff ask where the soldiers are. "Ain't no soldiers. Soldiers gone," explains the Mexican.

As Lucy Mallory descends, supported by Hatfield, she hears the Mexican explain that Captain Mallory, her husband, was wounded in a skirmish with Apaches last night and that his men have taken him to Lordsburg. Was he hurt badly? The station manager nods. "Yes señora, I think so."

11) Inside the station house, Mrs. Mallory faints. With the help of Hatfield, the sheriff carries her to a bedchamber, watched by Gatewood, Doc Boone and Dallas. Now, because he knows he is too drunk to assist in the delivery, recognising that Lucy Mallory is pregnant, the doctor is in anguish. Dallas, with support from Ringo, takes charge, as Doc asks for coffee, black coffee – lots of it.

While they work at sobering the doctor, forcing him to vomit and again filling him with black coffee, Peacock is startled at the appearance of a young woman, obviously an Indian. The station manager explains it is his wife, and that she is Apache. "Sure, she is one of Geronimo's people. Maybe it's not so bad to have an Apache wife. Apaches don't bother me."

12) Doc Boone, finally sober, moves in to the bedchamber with Dallas. The others wait.

Outside, the Mexicans of the station are seated around a fire. One plays a guitar. The Apache girl, wife of the station manager, is singing, but watching the darkness. Presently, she moves to join the men, the vaqueros around the fire.

Inside, the sheriff, Buck, Ringo and Hatfield react as they hear the sound of horses outside. Hurrying out, they discover that the Mexicans have ridden off, taking with them but one of the spare horses that were to carry the stagecoach on.

13) The baby is born. Dallas brings it from the bedchamber. It's a girl. As Doc Boone appears, the men show him some grudging respect.

14) Ringo is moving to follow Dallas, who has gone outside, when he is intercepted by the station manager. Privately, the Mexican wants to offer information and advice to Ringo, whom he likes. Ringo must stay away from Lordsburg because all three of the Plummer brothers are there. "Three against one is no good," says the station manager.

15) Ringo joins Dallas. She asks him why he doesn't try to escape. He assures her that he will escape, but not until they get to Lordsburg. There Ringo will deal with the Plummer brothers who killed both his father and his brother. Dallas reveals that she lost her own parents in an Indian massacre. Ringo tells her that having seen her help deliver the baby, he has been thinking that perhaps together they could both

make for the Mexican border. He has a ranch across the border. Dallas protests that he doesn't know her, doesn't know who she is, but he insists that she's the kind of girl a man wants to marry. They are interrupted by the sheriff.

16) Inside. Daylight. The sheriff sleeps with his ankle attached by handcuffs to Ringo's ankle. They are wakened by the station manager who has just discovered that his wife had disappeared. She has stolen his rifle and his horse. It's the horse that he misses most.

The passengers discuss the problem of the danger of the attack from Apaches, who will now have been alerted by the absconding wife. There is still the problem of the delicate condition of Mrs. Mallory. Gatewood and the sheriff quarrel. Hatfield is still concerned for Lucy Mallory. Peacock is scared but willing to proceed.

Ringo finds Dallas alone. He wants an answer to the proposal interrupted the previous evening. Dallas again urges him to escape on one of the horses that has been left. With the stagecoach in danger, the sheriff cannot afford to pursue him. Ringo insists that he must get to Lordsburg but he asks Dallas to make for his ranch in Mexico and wait for him. She refuses him brutally. Why wait a for dead man? "You haven't got a chance," she tells him. "It was three against one when the Plummers swore you killed their foreman and got you sent up. It'll be three against one in Lordsburg." She makes a counter suggestion. If Ringo will take off for Mexico now she promises that she will follow. She must stay to take care of Mrs. Mallory and the newborn infant but will join Ringo in Mexico after the stagecoach has reached Lordsburg.

17) The sheriff is still arguing with the others when he realises that Ringo is absent. He runs out and sees Ringo taking leave of Dallas. She shouts to him not to stop as the sheriff yells after him. At the top of a rise some hundred yards away, Ringo halts. He turns and rides back to the sheriff who is ready to handcuff him again. Ringo points to smoke on the horizon: Indian war signals.

18) With Ringo in handcuffs, the sheriff and Curley assemble the passengers and start on the road for the ferry across the river. Lordsburg is only a short distance beyond.

The passengers continue to quarrel. Peacock is still scared. Gatewood blames Hatfield, who threatens to throw him off the coach. Ringo, manacled, promises them they may get a chance to fight soon enough.

19) The stagecoach arrives at the ferry to find that the buildings, the wharf and the boat have been burnt.

The sheriff calls on Ringo to help and extracts a promise that he will not try to escape. Ringo gives his word... until Lordsburg. The sheriff removes the handcuffs.

Hatfield discovers the corpse of a woman, mutilated and scalped by the Indians.

Having jettisoned all baggage, including Ringo's saddle, the men lash logs to the wheels of the coach and float it across the river to the far side. They reload and continue, moving through more desolate and wilder country.

20) Geronimo, in command of a war party of Apaches, is waiting for them in one of the canyons that lie ahead.

21) Believing that they are now safely within reach of their destination, the passengers are more relaxed. Gatewood apologises to Hatfield. Peacock is feeling less nervous. Doc Boone is proposing a toast when the first Indian arrow hits the whisky salesman. Peacock is seriously wounded.

The Indian ambush has come as the stagecoach is in a ravine. Mounted Apaches swarm down the slopes. While Doc tends to Peacock and Dallas tries to protect Mrs. Mallory and the baby, the sheriff passes his gunbelt to Hatfield. Buck throws stones at the horses, urging them to greater speed as Ringo, using the shotgun, crawls out to sit on the exposed roof, firing back at the overtaking Apaches.

One of the Apache braves, managing to reach the horses of the stagecoach, leaps from his own mount onto the leading pair. Buck shouts to Ringo, who turns his attention towards the front, shooting the Indian, who is crouched on the shaft between the horses pulling the coach.

The war party has now overtaken the coach completely. One of the apaches shoots and wounds Buck so that he cannot control the frantically galloping team. The sheriff takes the reign from Buck and yells to Ringo, who comes forward to crawl out along the shaft, reaching the lead horse and mounting its back. Driving the team by riding the lead horse, Ringo frees the sheriff to use his shotgun on the Indians.

Doc Boone, using a pistol, is firing out of the window at the Indians who are galloping alongside. Doc runs out of ammunition and calls for more. The sheriff shakes his head. The their ammunition has run out. Hatfield checks his weapon – there is one bullet left. He turns it toward Lucy Mallory. But a moment later Hatfield is hit by an Indian bullet, mortally wounded.

At this point comes the sound of a distant bugle. Lucy Mallory is first to hear it. She is supporting Hatfield. Dying, the gambler asks her to pass a message to his father.

Apaches scatter as the troop of cavalry comes up to the coach where Ringo holds the leading horse.

22) Lordsburg. Officers of the cavalry bring news to Mrs. Mallory that her husband is safe – the wound was not serious. As a nurse takes the infant, Lucy calls for Dallas, trying to thank her.

23) Ringo brings the stagecoach in to the town. He is recognised by some bystanders.

24) News is brought to Luke Plummer, who is playing cards in a saloon. Unnerved, he sends a Mexican to fetch his brothers.

25) Dallas watches cavalrymen removing the corpse of Hatfield. Mr. Peacock, recovered, bids Dallas goodbye.

Still in custody of the sheriff, Ringo asks him how much of a sentence he might get for breaking out of jail. About another year, says the sheriff. Ringo asks a favour. Would the sheriff help Dallas to get to Ringo's ranch in Mexico? Lordsburg, says Ringo, is no place for a nice girl.

They are joined by the sheriff of Lordsburg who offers Curley a pair of handcuffs to put on Ringo. Gatewood, noticing that Ringo is unguarded, calls this to the attention of the sheriff of Lordsburg. On hearing it he seizes Gatewood, putting the handcuffs on the banker. "You didn't think they'd have the telegraph wires fixed, did you?"

Ringo asks Curley if he will let him go and meet him in ten minutes. Curley reminds him that he is out of ammunition, but hands him the rifle. Ringo removes his hat and takes cartridges from inside it. "I lied to you, Curley. I've got three left."

26) Luke Plummer is joined by his two brothers. They are waiting for the appearance of Ringo. The bystanders in the bar are aware of the tension. The unexpected entrance of Doc Boone startles them. As Doc fortifies himself with a drink, Luke Plummer demands that the barmen give him the shotgun that is kept behind the bar. The barman is reluctant. Luke's woman is hysterical. She tries to intervene but is rudely thrown aside.

27) Ringo is walking with Dallas. She has led him to a quarter of the town that is plainly the brothel district, turning on him to say, "I told you not to follow me." She leaves him and moves towards one of the houses. He calls after her. She stops, but she doesn't turn. Coming after her Ringo reminds her that he asked to marry her. He shows the scars on his wrists. Handcuffs. But scar wear off, he reassures her. He asks her to wait till he returns in ten minutes.

28) Buck arrives at the saloon where Doc Boone and the Plummer brothers are still waiting. Buck has a message: Ringo says he will be passing this way in six or seven minutes.

As Luke and his brothers prepare to leave, Doc Boone moves to confront them, challenging Luke, demanding that he surrender the shotgun. "I'll have you indicted for murder if you step outside with that shotgun," warns Doc. After a moment, Luke grins and gives Doc the weapon. When they have left, Doc pours a drink, and urges the barman, "Don't ever let me do that again"

29) Outside the saloon, Luke's woman friend calls to him from a balcony above the doorway, then tosses down a rifle. Luke, now better armed than before, advances down the main street flanked by his two brothers.

30) The editor of the Lordsburg *Sentinel* scurries into his office instructing his typesetter to prepare a new front page: "'The Ringo Kid was killed on Main Street in Lordsburg tonight. Among the additional dead were...' Leave that blank for a while." The old typesetter complains that he heard no shooting. "You will, Billy, you will," he is assured.

31) Empty main street. The three Plummer brothers advance with guns drawn. Ringo is coming to meet them from the other direction. Ringo throws himself flat, firing as he does so, reloading as fast as he can.

32) The sound of gunfire is heard by Dallas. Then silence. Dallas runs, calling out Ringo's name.

Cowboys in the saloon are also reacting. The door is thrown open. Luke Plummer appears. He begins to walk slowly toward the bar, reaches for it, but staggers and falls stone dead.

33) Dallas reacts as she finds Ringo returning to her. They embrace.

34) Buck and Curley drive up to Dallas and Ringo in an open buckboard wagon. The sheriff invites Ringo to get into it. As he does so, Ringo explains to Dallas that Curley will see to it that she gets across the border to Ringo's ranch. As the lovers say goodbye, the sheriff, as an afterthought, suggests that Dallas might like to ride a way with the kid. As she climbs up beside Ringo, the sheriff and Buck, now joined by Doc, lash at the horses, driving the buckboard and its occupants off on their own. "Well, that's saved them the blessing of civilization," says Doc. The sheriff agrees, and offers to buy Doc a drink. "Just one," says Doc.