

National Security

Caper

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By Art Buchwald

"In keeping with our policy of paying all news sources, the Combustible Broadcasting Co. presents tonight an exclusive interview with Bonnie Parker, aide, confidante and chief of staff to Clyde Barrow, the greatest bank robber of our time. Bonnie Parker was paid \$354.67 to appear on this program, which we believe has great historical significance.

"Bonnie, you were closer to Clyde than anyone else. What was he like when you worked with him?"

"He was weird. There was a part of him which was very decisive, like when he decided to stick up the Third National Trust Co. of Omaha. But there was another part of him that showed he had a great inferiority complex."

"Explain that."

"Well, he never thought he tipped enough when he went to a roadside diner. He always believed that after he left the waitress would say he was a cheapskate. Once he said to me after we took a Brink's truck outside of Des Moines, 'I wonder if history will remember me for this or for the fact I left a dime at a Howard Johnson's in Tulsa, Okla.'"

"Bonnie, Bill Quickfire in his book 'The Rise and Fall of Bonnie and Clyde' said you were ruthless in the way you ran the gang—that you had a short temper and chewed out anyone who tried to get near Clyde. How do you plead?"

"I wouldn't say ruthless. I would say tough. Clyde always had a lot of things on his mind. He was planning payroll heists, savings and loan stickups and he even had a grand plan to break into the national mint.

"My job, as I saw it as chief aide, was to protect him from all the third-rate crooks who were trying to suck up to him. I had to keep Clyde free from the day-

to-day operations of the gang. Sure, they got mad at me. But no one makes friends in this job."

"Bonnie, one of the things said was that you and Clyde, as well as the rest of the gang, looked on everyone as enemies. True or not true?"

"True. But I think Clyde summed it up best in his farewell address to us when he said, 'Always remember, others may hate you, but those who hate don't win unless you hate them.' I think you have to keep this all in the context of the times. We were robbing banks, and the press was on our backs for it. The newspapers never wrote anything good about us. Well, after a while this gets to you. It isn't much fun for you or your families to be called gangsters. So we decided anyone who didn't approve of our business was our enemy. That's only natural."

"Right. Now, Bonnie, let's get on to the job that finally got you all caught—the break-in of the First National Bank of Watergate. Looking back on it, would you have done it again?"

"In retrospect, I guess it was stupid, not because we did it but because we were caught. I have to take some of the responsibility for that."

"Why?"

"Well, after the robbery we split up the money and we had all these canvas bags left over, with 'First National Bank of Watergate' printed on them. Clyde asked me if we should destroy the bags. But I said no—that we should keep them for historical reasons. I never in my wildest dreams ever thought the bags would be used against us as evidence. If I knew then what I know now I would have told Clyde to burn them."

"Then what you're saying, Bonnie, is that you have no regrets about robbing banks. You are only sorry you got caught?"

"That's correct. At the time we thought bank robbing was the best thing for the country. But I'd like to say one more thing. The Bonnie and Clyde gang spent only 10 per cent of their time sticking up banks—90 per cent of what we did had nothing to do with crime. But the press doesn't talk about that. Someday, when passions subside, I hope the people will think of the other things we did, like watching baseball and drinking beer and going to the movies and hunting squirrel. Take away the bank robberies and we're as American as apple pie."