



On Prince Faisal's lawn, Confederates from Kennesaw are joined by almost 700 uniformed extras for the movie's mob scene finale.

Hollywood Comes This-A-Way

By Pat Watters

IF you were in Atlanta during the spring and even slightly keeping up with the media, it probably did not escape your attention that a movie (with the kind of cumbersome title "They Went That-A-Way and That-A-Way") starring the comedian Tim Conway was being filmed in the metropolitan area.

Surely you remember. There was Conway, flanked by Confederate soldiers on horseback and afoot, squatting to light the fuse of a short and stolid Civil War cannon set down on the sweeping green lawn of the Nunnally mansion out on stately Blackland Road in exclusive Buckhead. "Stand by, we are rolling," and ka-boom, with blue smoke rising, the cannon roared and with Rebel yells the soldiers charged.

That kind of thing. Mostly lost in the media hype, though, was an underlying story of a serious Atlanta business adventure. The filming was being done by The International Pic-

ture Show (TIPS) company, established last year in Atlanta as Georgia's only locally owned, locally operated, independent motion picture production and distribution company. If it lives up to its promise, TIPS could be the beginning of a big, permanent film industry in this state—which is already famous for the number of itinerant producers it has attracted to make movies within its borders (more than 100 since 1972).

There were just too many good show-biz angles for the straight business story to come fully through while the filming was going on. The hullabaloo on the Nunnally lawn, as may be recalled, did not set well in Buckhead. A petulant-faced young matron glared out from her big car as traffic crept, Atlanta-curious, by. "I'm just glad I don't live around here any more," she snarled at the black cop directing traffic. The mistress of a nearby mansion had earlier raised hell with all concerned about horses being tethered on her lawn.

The main scene shot on the Nunnally lawn was a wild charge by a

mob of 700 uniformed extras—soldiers from Ft. McPherson (with their own cannon), Navy, Marine and Coast Guard reservists, Atlanta, DeKalb, Cobb and Powder Springs policemen, Fulton County and Powder Springs firemen, not to mention a Confederate Army contingent from Kennesaw. Police cars and ambulances, blue lights flashing, and fire engines lined both sides of the curved driveway, as a helicopter lifted with wild roar and blast of wind to film the mob running and horseback riding and Rebel-yelling all over that sweeping green lawn. Buckhead would never be the same.

Chuck McCann (the "Hi guy" deodorant commercial guy), co-star in the film, said the affront to Buckhead was the essence of the kind of comedy being enacted. "We dump on dignity."

Over and over, they shot that mob hollering and stampeding—helicopter roaring—five times. In the midst of one of the shootings, a long, black Cadillac, chauffeur-driven, pulled into the emergency vehicle-lined driveway, and a Semitic face, eyes bulg-

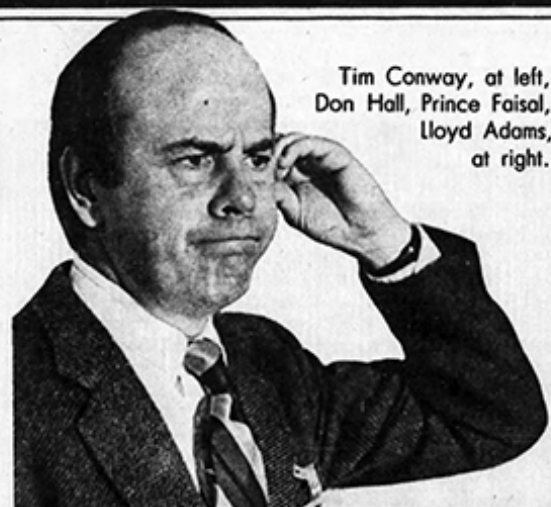
ing, stared out from the back window.

It was the new owner of the mansion, Prince Faisal Mohammed Saud al Kabir of Saudi Arabia, whose plans to embellish the estate with such things as sentry houses and a quarter-acre parking lot had already set Buckhead tongues to wagging. He had, through his agent, granted permission for the filming on his lawn, but apparently hadn't been filled in on what exactly would be filmed.

"He got there, got out of the car, looked all around and couldn't believe it," said one of the filmmakers. "He got back in the car and said, 'I'm going to Texas.' Nobody got to talk to him. I think he was as astounded as the lady across the street."

A final note of irony to the episode: The prince had agreed to the filming out of a desire "to be a good neighbor" in the Atlanta community.

The comedy within a comedy in Buckhead points up aspects of the serious side of the TIPS story. The madcap, you might say slap-cannon, kind of visual humor out there re-



Tim Conway, at left, Don Hall, Prince Faisal, Lloyd Adams, at right.



Photography by J.M. Armfield



Photography by Charles Pugh

Local actors appear with stars Chuck McCann and Tim Conway (top right). Lanny Montana, Richard Keil (bottom center) clown with Don Hall.

With... Georgia's Own Picture Show Co.

flects a firm policy that the company will make only family-fare, G-rated movies. Its first production, called "The Billion Dollar Hobo," produced in Hollywood last year, also starring Conway, is a children's comedy. "They Went . . ." is aimed at all ages and aspires to the high mantle of the Laurel and Hardy comedy-team tradition, as will another Conway vehicle to be filmed in Georgia this fall.

All of the company's subsequent movies will be shot in Georgia. After this year's frantic pace (from pre-production work to putting the film in the can, "Hobo" was completed in exactly five months, and "They Went . . ." almost as quickly), the company will settle into a schedule of four films a year. Lloyd Adams, the owner of TIPS and executive producer, declares: "I want to take each film and put a lot of care, attention and pampering both into the product and the sales—much more so than we've had time to do on these first two pictures."

The G-rated policy reflects both esthetic and business judgments.

Lang Elliott, executive vice president in charge of production, gives the esthetic rationale: "I just think we are all sick of seeing sex and violence. With all the violence in the country and world today, we need to get back to entertainment. Just wholesome entertainment. You know, go to a movie to escape for a while—and come out feeling much better. You have a good time. This is what we're trying to do—create a good time for people."

Owner Adams explains the business judgment. G-rated films are a safe investment risk. He cites Disney productions. They seldom knock the top out on profits, but they almost never fail. That's what Adams wants. Sale of television rights also figures in. Sponsors, Adams notes, are backing away from sex and violence. G-rated, he believes, is "the wave of the future in filmmaking."

The Nunnally lawn episode also illustrates the way TIPS operates. It is small, as movie companies go, tightly knit, and without, as various of its people pointed out, a lot of up-tight executives delaying decisions on

the one hand and harassing film crews on the other.

Adams runs the picture show. He pointed out that the Blackland Road mob scene was not in the original script. What was in it, as a finale for the film, was a pie-throwing thing out there on the lawn. This was shot and (let potential audiences be grateful) was judged not to have worked. So the whole mob scene, including recruitment of all those uniformed extras, was put together in a week. Not only that, since time was running out, it was decided to shoot the scene on a gray, misty day on the gamble that it wouldn't rain hard. Had it rained hard, the mob would have had to be brought back another day at considerable expense. The gamble paid off. It didn't rain hard, and by technical magic, the mist doesn't even show in the film.

"People call from California," Adams brags, "and say 'You guys have got the guts of a Mississippi River boat gambler, or at least the instincts.'"

The main thing they had in this instance was versatility, spontaneity

and an organizational form which allows such improvisation. Tim Conway, who has starred in a Disney film and worked in other major company productions, not to mention big-time television on the late lamented Carol Burnett Show, talks about how much "looser" TIPS is. "It's like being in on the start of the Hal Roach studios. It's all of us starting on the ground floor. Nobody has a big office. Nobody is sitting behind a big desk saying 'I think that's funny, I don't think that's funny.' We're just doing what we think is funny. It's kind of nice."

Owner Adams speaks, too, of the skilled and professionally experienced people he has hired. Producer Elliott, for example, grew up in the Hollywood film world, his mother an actress, his uncle old Wild Bill Elliott of cowboy film fame, and is a veteran producer, whose credits include films for Universal. Associate producer Eric Weston, a New Yorker, has 15 years of show business experience.

Only Adams himself, the owner
Continued on next page

ENGLISH SHELL

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CAMELLIA

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CHAPEL BELLS

QUEEN'S LACE

FAIRFAX

BLOSSOM TIME

OLD MASTER

VIRGINIAN

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PATTERNS
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MOVIE

Continued from page 33

and driving force of the company, is relatively new to motion pictures. A 42-year-old native of Savannah, he settled in Atlanta after graduating from Georgia Tech and serving a brief stint in the Marine Corps. He built a career during the 1960s as a financier and investment syndicator. In the late 1960s, he was heavily into real estate, with one of the few investment syndicates operating in Atlanta. But then he saw others getting in, amateurs, he says, with the result that prices got artificially high. So he sold out, just before the local real estate market took a tailspin in the early 1970s.

He set out then to find a business so complicated that amateurs couldn't get in and mess it up. He and some associates set up Film Ventures International as a distribution company. They bought films mainly in Europe, mainly ones the big companies had passed over and hence were cheap. They built a national and international distribution company on those cheap films.

But then "phony economics" in Adams' phrase, messed things up again. A movie investment tax shelter, since outlawed, was discovered which for the time put an end to picking up foreign films cheaply. So Adams and his associates set out to produce their own films to feed into the distribution system.

"We came back to Georgia and we produced the first film in the history of Georgia that was produced in Georgia by a Georgia company, distributed by a Georgia company and financed with Georgia money." It was a "Jaws"-type show called "Grizzly" about a berserk bear, and was shot in Clayton. There followed another scare-type film entitled "Day of the Animals," and things were going well again.

Then Adams and his associates fell out over two things: whether to move to California where most of the film action still is, and what kind of films to make. Adams wanted to stay here and make not scare epics but light, family-fare films. They disbanded early last year, the associates returning to California, and Adams setting up TIPS.

Among people who approached Adams with an idea for a film during the brief era of Film Ventures were producer Elliott, associate producer Weston and another associate producer also now permanently with TIPS, Wanda Dell. (She is an Atlanta who went to California to invest in films and got caught up in the process of making them.) The three collaborated to produce "The Farmer." It was not exactly a glaring success, but working on it banded them together as an effective production team with a strong commitment to making family-fare films.

They had the script for "The Bil-

lion Dollar Hobo," but needed financing. Adams turned them down on it two years ago. But when he formed TIPS, he came back to them. Said Elliott: "His real thoughts and feelings were in regard to making family-oriented films. That's where we were too. The company evolved around the project of filming 'The Billion Dollar Hobo.'"

TIPS is projecting that "Hobo" will have a box office gross of \$12 million in the U.S. and Canada. Here is where the distribution system that Adams put together comes in. His business background makes him different from most independent producers. "Most independents want to go out and make a film and turn it over to a major studio and expect the money to come pouring in. I came to the conclusion that if you don't get close to the money, very little of it ever gets down to you."

To market "Hobo" and subsequent productions, TIPS works out of Atlanta and Los Angeles to line up television ads in 39 major markets which umbrella the country. Then through chains and prestigious independent theater owners, the organization seeks booking in every city in each TV market. Again, Adams has old pros at film distribution working for him.

Part of the distribution end is handling films made by other independents. TIPS touts its marketing organization and know-how, and its "clear, crisp, precise" accounting system. "There is a big need in the business for distributors who have total integrity, and will give producers an honest accounting," Adams says. "We set up our system to attempt to do this. If we're successful, I'm hoping we'll have people with very high quality films bringing 'em to Atlanta for distribution. We've already had some evidence of the effectiveness of this policy."

THE best evidence so far is that TIPS has been awarded domestic distribution rights to "The Magic of Lassie," the first Lassie (the dog) film in 20 years. In the process, TIPS won out over not only the vaunted Disney operation, but Universal and some other major studios as well. Don Hall, chairman of the board of TIPS, and others of the company indicated this could be the big breakthrough they have been waiting for on distribution. The film is a big one. Produced by Bonita Granville and her husband, Jack Wrather, it stars—in addition to the new Lassie—Jimmy Stewart, Mickey Rooney and Debby Boone, a sort of ultimate family film.

Atlanta's advantages for distribution are among reasons Adams insists on staying in the city, and for his belief it could become a major motion picture town. "Atlanta is a tremendous transportation center. You can get stuff in and out of here quick."

He goes on to list other advan-

Continued on page 39

MOVIE

Continued from page 34

tages. "You've got fresh back-grounds, fresh scenery. A lot of films you go to, you keep seeing the Hollywood hills, the same kind of feeling and background. But here you can throw something fresh out." Georgia provides all kinds of locations—swampland, mountains, metropolitan areas, farm country, seacoast—"everything but a desert." Georgia people have "strong facial characteristics," making them ideal for extra parts. And Atlanta has a good acting community to draw on. Twenty-one of the 35 speaking parts in "They Went . . ." were played by local talent. None had a major role, but Adams expects to use more and more Atlanta people and in bigger roles.

"Another big advantage of shooting here," he goes on, "is local cooperation. California is so sated with the film business, people just don't get excited. And if you want stuff, nobody will cooperate with you unless you pay big money."

Scenes for "They Went . . ." were filmed at a little gas station-grocery store in Conyers, the abandoned prison farm in Panthersville, a city dump, all over the town of Powder Springs, and in the executive office of Gov. George Busbee.

"If you went out to California and asked Gov. Brown to let you use his office, he'd throw you out of the state capitol," Adams exclaims. "But here, our governor takes a little cubbyhole down the hall to run state business while we shoot in his office."

Mayor John Rogers, having read about plans for the movie, personally invited TIPS to film it in Powder Springs for a fee of \$1, figuring to promote the town nationally. "It's tremendous," Adams exclaims. "Just because we're a local company trying to get a foothold, we've had tremendous help and cooperation from everybody around Atlanta."

Georgia weather, he concedes, is not as good for movie-making year-round as California's. But the main disadvantage in Atlanta is one that might be overcome—lack of proper post-production facilities for putting movies together in finished form after they have been shot. TIPS people had to go to California to do that on "They Went . . ." Adams says he is confident the city will get

such facilities, and once it does, other production companies will flock in, making Atlanta a major motion picture production center.

Might not TIPS cash in on the need for the post-production facilities? Possibly. "You see," Adams explains, "this company just started March 1, 1977. Since then we've put four films into distribution. We've built a staff here and on the West Coast. March first last year we had one employee. Today we've got 30. That's doing a hell of a lot in one year."

Adams' vision shimmers: Atlanta developing a Hollywood of the South, happy home of the resurgence of G-rated family entertainment. Certainly on the score of G-rated, Adams' vision has proved sound. Sophisticated Buckhead might have given the TIPS filmmakers the cold shoulder, but you should have seen them out in Powder Springs.

Tim Conway was taking time out between scenes to hold a little fellow wearing leg braces on his knee for a publicity photo in connection with the big Oct. 5 premiere of "They Went . . ." to be held at the Fox Theatre. The little boy was from the Scottish Rite Hospital for Crippled Children to which proceeds from the premiere will go. As all during the filming, local people stood about, drinking in the glamor of movie-making. Eight little girls in a group giggled as Conway talked to the little boy. An older man in overalls and his farm wife looked on approvingly. School had let out and more and more kids crowded around, with autograph books and cameras. Adults joined the throng as Conway did some impressive stunt driving up and down the main street. By late afternoon, the crowd was so large, he took refuge for a while inside the police department.

Middle America out there in Powder Springs obviously loved what TIPS is about. And there is more of the middle than of the uppercrust in America. Not to mention the world.

Adams sounded the ultimate Atlanta business note about that. "I know how to sell something in Swainsboro, Ga. Now I want to sell it in Hong Kong. It doesn't bother us. We have developed enough self-confidence to go up against any of 'em in the market place anywhere in the world. We think national and international." ■



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