

Hotfoot #36  
Interview with Tom Marquez  
November 12, 1981

KF: This is tape #36, second interview with T. J. Marquez, 12th of November.  
The Prisoner of War project . . .

TJ: All right, the . . . there was . . . back in 1965, somebody escaped from a prison in either North Viet Nam or Laos. We sent a person up to Washington, D.C. to talk to this man, try to figure out what we could do. I think the fellows name was Dangler. Decided there was really nothing we could do; we didn't have much American presence over there, wasn't sure if there were any other prisoners, we just felt very badly and didn't do anything. Several years later, 1969, Ross and I went down to a local television station to look at a public interest program -- the tape broke, while the tape was being fixed we were visiting with Murphy Martin, who then was an anchor man for Channel 8, he used to be an anchor man for ABC. At a Sunday night program, and he said that we ought to watch this Sunday night; it's going to be a very interesting program and the program was going to be four wives that he had taken, whose husbands were either POWs or Missing in Action, he'd taken over to Paris, met with the North Vietnamese in Paris and come back and they were going to have the setting, the table and tea and everything. So, that Sunday night, this I think was on a Friday, Ross and I both watched the program, talked to each other on the phone afterward and said we have to do something about these guys, because at that point in time it was American policy not to even acknowledge that we had Prisoners of War. So, we called Murphy, got together the next day with the wives, got together over at one of their houses. One, her name was Singleton, had two children, lovely little children, and we decided we've got to do something about this. Something to help our prisoners. At that point in time we have started getting a few, there were several hundred, and it really wasn't talked about or printed or anything, we just kind of, they didn't exist. I remember, one of the motivations was, we weren't even sure

we knew anybody there, but as Ross said, "The Lord sure has been good to us; been good to us in business, and we could just as easily be over there and them be here." And, I would hope that if we were over there, somebody would think and do something about us. So, the, and we kicked it around, Ross, Merv, and myself mostly. Then Ross went to Washington, got together some people up there and old Haig was involved, Kissinger was involved, and certain Presidents, and said, "We really wanted to do something to help these fellows." They were in total agreement that something needed to be done, that, and so, Ross felt we didn't really have much leverage except through public opinion, on the Vietnamese. And the public opinion in this country was very bad in terms of against the war, but we had to make holding prisoners and mistreating prisoners a politically bad situation for them in order for them to have any motivation to change the treatment of prisoners. And basically, what we were interested in doing was getting the treatment improved by allowing letters and mail to start coming in. And keeping guys alive, because they were starting to die, we knew that from prisoners who had either escaped or they, they did actually release I think three. We spent alot of time interviewing them, finding out what the conditions were really like. So, we felt in order to do this, we had to get alot of publicity to educate the American people particularly on the treatment. We . . . went to the top. Well, we talked to several advertising agencies, but I know Ross and Murphy Martin and somebody else went to New York and met with J. Walter Thompson, who was the top advertising agency in the world. Told them about the plight of the prisoners and what we wanted to do was start a campaign to immediately get people educated. J. Walter Thompson was all for it; they thought it was a great project, patriotic, on and on. They figured they could come up with a campaign, probably in 30 to 60 days with a plan. And in a year, we could go a long way. Ross said, "No, I want to do it now." This is in late November. So he came back; we got a group of guys together here; started

calling newspapers, started writing ads. Little coupons to clip out to write letters. And then started making placements of these ads all over the country. It was over 100 newspapers, several hundred thousand dollars in expenditures. It started working. We started getting these coupons back, getting phone calls. We really touched a very sensitive issue. Not only did we get the word out through the advertising, but we also started getting editorial comment articles being written about prisoners. In addition to that, we had millions of little postcards that were distributed through places like the VFW, American Legion, this kind of thing. So it was working, but we were not satisfied that it was working good enough, because we needed some good follow up. So Murphy Martin was the one who had the idea. He said, "You know, Christmas is coming up very soon. (This was in December sometime.) Typically Christmas time is a very slow newstime. Why don't we try to take Christmas dinner to the prisoners? If nothing else breaks, we can get international publicity." So Ross says, "Fine. That sounds like a good idea." Several hours later, a news conference was held. We had no plane, we didn't have anything. At the news conference, we just said "we're going to take Christmas dinner to prisoners". The only details we had was what the dinner was going to be. I think it was a turkey dinner, and who was going to fix it. Then we decided we'd better start looking for a plane, things like that. We started calling around. The obvious ones to call were Pan Am, TWA, the international carriers. They turned us down flat. Some just said they couldn't get any aircraft, it was a bad time of year. Which Christmas time is a bad time. Others said we just couldn't take a chance. We said we'll absorb any liability, we'll get whatever insurance ; we're not going to let our planes go into war zone. Pan Am was already flying in; they were allowed to fly in once a day. We tried World Airways, which was flying in quite a bit, because they did the R and R for guys out of Saigon. But they wouldn't do it. We tried American; it wasn't negotiation; it was flat no. We were over at Exchange Park where our

headquarters were then. In the Park, also was Braniff. We never thought of Braniff, because we were looking for international carriers. Then it dawned on one of us, heck, they fly down to South America. So somebody called Harding Lawrence, who was chairman of Braniff, told him what we wanted to do. Harding said, "you bet. I'll get you a plane; what do you want?" By that time, we had another idea in that why don't we take some wives and children at the same time, go over to Paris, call on the North Vietnamese. Spend Christmas Eve at Notre Dame Cathedral either before or after calling on the North Vietnamese. So when Harding said yes, he said "Well, we'd like two planes". I think we even specified color, because remember at that time, Braniff was having various colors. They had a big campaign going on. So we got a green and a red to go to Europe. So Merv had to pull together, start getting wives names and children, the whole works, to take the crew to Paris, which required...I called a bank president who I knew was on the board of some hospital so he could get a doctor and nurse to go along. We got that whole thing pulled together. As it turned out, Harding Lawrence used to be Executive Vice President of Continental. While he was Executive VP of Continental, he started Continental Air Services over in Vientiane Laos, which I told you earlier, Larry Joseph was head of. So we didn't know it at the time, but we found out later, why Harding was so responsive. He identified with the people and everything. He said the only extra was we needed \$10,000 because we were going into combat zone, additional insurance. So he made those arrangements, and we decided since we were going over there, we knew pretty darn well we weren't going to get into North Viet Nam. We would have loved to, but we knew they weren't going to allow it. Our objective was to get publicity for them to start easing up on the prisoners. We decided since we are going that far, and there is a remote chance that we might get in or we might be able to get something to them, let's fill up the plane with things that they are going to need. So by talking to DOD, the POW specialists there, plus the guys coming out, we came up with a list of things that amounted to about 60,000 pounds.

Everything from baby powder to wool socks to sleeping blankets to various kinds of medicines. I think Merv has a list someplace of the types of things. But anything they could possibly use we put on the plane. Then we called around to get it. Remember, we're now within 4 or 5 days of leaving. So we called up some of the major retailers and drug chains to give this. And they just laughed. They said "You realize this is Christmas. If you want anything delivered by Christmas you order in August, July, June." So we called this dear friend of ours who took us public, Ken Langone, up in New York. Asked Ken, said "Do you know a lot of these people, or if we can get to a lot of these people. We're so busy down here will you get on the horn and talk to them and get this list of stuff to Tiger International the night of December 22 by 10 o'clock". So Ken got a couple of his guys together, and they started making calls and were getting the chairman of the board. These guys were just stopping their business, rerouting stuff, and got what we wanted. Somehow got it to California. We called Les Alberthal, who was then a trainee for EDS who is now a Vice President Director of the company, in San Francisco, and told him to get some of the other trainees down to Tiger International in Los Angeles...am I getting too much detail?

KF: A little too much, but go on.

TJ: Anyway, get down there, get the stuff transmitted. In the meantime, we invited the major networks, New York Times, Washington Post, Readers Digest, major magazines to come with us, which they did. We left here, we got to LA, somehow all that stuff got done and got loaded. We had a press conference out there, left, then went to Bangkok. From Bangkok, we ended up spending Christmas in Vientiane, Laos. See, the North Vietnamese had an Embassy in Vientiane. So we were meeting with them. They really didn't want to meet with us, but they didn't have any choice, we just showed up and they had to meet. So we were negotiating with them, and they were claiming they had nothing to do with the prisoners; these were war

mongers, on and on. The whole press...sure enough, we're the only news around the world, we're top feature on TV, newspaper, everything. That part really worked. They were getting very nervous. In addition to that, we were putting a lot of pressure on the Russians to try and get involved and then put pressure on. Ross had Gallup do a poll on the feelings of the American people about prisoners, about Russia's involvement. So we were very carefully--and it was working with the press--separating the war from the prisoners. So that we didn't have the stigma of the anti-war. And it worked. We had people from Sweden trying to help us. To make a long story short, on that trip, we achieved our goal in terms of the prisoner treatment overnight changed. Most of the torture, the beating stopped; they started getting mail; they allowing them to write mail. Of course, we didn't find this out until after the guys got out. But it was almost instantaneous with our efforts. Again, we didn't know it. So we finally got turned down. We had had so much heat on them, that they couldn't flat say no. They finally made a deal with us. They said "If you can get these goods repackaged into something like 2 pound cartons, get them to Moscow by midnight December 31, we'll get them delivered". You couldn't get to Moscow, even if you had permission, at that point in time. So we said fine, we'll do it. We went back to Bangkok. No, we were still in Vientiane. They had made arrangements, the Russians had, I'm sure, so we couldn't get permission to fly over India, Burma, and some other countries, and we couldn't figure out what's the best way to get there. And I remember Bernard Kalb of CBS walking in, and said "You dummies, don't you know the world is round? Why don't you just go over the top of the world?" Which we did. In the meantime, phoned Dallas, told them our problem about repackaging this stuff. It was all in big cartons. We had to stop for refueling in Alaska, so they had made arrangements. They called up there to Fairbanks, got a hold of every organization imaginable. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Rotary, Kiwanis, everything. Got the Air Force to make a hangar available. When we landed, they had hundreds of volunteers had boxes, wrapping paper, labels, everything waiting. Just a total

volunteer effort; 11-1200 people, at least. Repackaged all this stuff into the small packages. Reloaded them on the plane, took off to Copenhagen. Now in the meantime, I stayed back because I was going to do a tour of the prison camps. Because we said we were going to inspect all prisoners; we're not just interested in American prisoners; we're interested in North Vietnamese prisoners and every other prisoners. This announcement was made just before we left. Of course we didn't have permission to do this or anything. I got the job of going down and convincing everybody that it was a good idea for us to take the press into the South Vietnamese camps. Which we eventually did; we didn't have any problems with the South Vietnamese. We had a hell of a problem with our State Department. They didn't know what was going on. And there were all these articles about the torture and this and that, which wasn't true, thank goodness, or we'd never have gotten in the prisons. They got through the...they met with the Russian Embassy's Ambassador several times and he gave all these unbelievable bureaucratic reasons why they couldn't go into Russia. So finally, Ross just said "Let's get a hold of (whoever was head of Russia then) Breshnev. So Murphy Martin picks up the phone, gets through to the guy's house, which I'm sure nobody's ever done since. His aide answers the phone. I'd hate to be the guys over there in Copenhagen, because I'm sure they went to the salt mines for allowing that to happen. But it happened; we got through. Of course, he was unavailable and we got turned down. Finally we just couldn't get through. But again the publicity was going on, the whole world was following the flight from Vientiane, Laos to Bangkok to Alaska. All kinds of publicity, pictures everywhere and of the volunteers. You had everything from the Boy Scouts to heavy anti-war people working side by side repackaging this over to Copenhagen. Then we flew back in time to get here to be on the Today show. I think that was January 1. Then flew back to Dallas. Dallas had the biggest bowl game that year, which was Notre Dame-Texas. They got there right in the middle of the game, and overflowed the stadium. Apparently national TV picked it up. To make a long story short, that thing really worked in terms

of getting publicity. But we weren't sure about the change in treatment. So we had to have a follow up because we had the hearts of the people. So our next step was to organize the United States by community. For them to get together to have their own POW organization. They then got money together, sent delegations over to meet with the North Vietnamese over in Paris. Lots of times they wouldn't meet with them, but they had the local newspaper reporter there with them, so they had tremendous amount of publicity went on. Others had telethons; over in Ft. Worth, they built cages like they were being kept in and displayed them. Ross went before Congress. Those Congressional hearings I'm sure are available; talked to them about what they could do. One thing he proposed there what they build a typical cell with a prisoner in there. Showing a rat and fly and this kind of thing and put it in the rotunda of the Capitol. So people who visited the Capitol that summer would be reminded of the plight of the prisoner. They said yes, so we built it for them; it was a beautiful thing. It was so realistic, it was unreal. By this time, it was so popular, the Democrats and Republicans both were just tripping over each other to be compatible. In fact there is a law that says nothing can be displayed in the Rotunda of the Capitol. No one even pointed that out for about 8 or 9 months, and by that time we had accomplished what we wanted. They finally took that out. But Ross spent an awful lot of time going all over the country. He started in San Francisco and hit Denver, Colorado Springs, Iowa and New York. All over making speeches and really energizing. The other thing was this part of all this was getting letters written and send them to Hanoi. Through general feedback and finally on their official Hanoi radio, just pleading with the American people to stop writing letters, it screwed up their whole postal system. Also, it was making it hard, a realistic standpoint, for the true mail to get through. There were a lot of people in this country that were sending letters and knew they were all going to be open. So we diverted the people after awhile from sending them over there to send them to Paris. We had a warehouse full of letters and cards. The brother of



one of the prisoners...one prisoner's father was head of the fleet in the whole Southeast. So his son was tortured more than most people because they knew it. And it was very important for them to break him. Anyway, his brother led a group of people that came and got our mail in a big 18 wheeler truck; went from here to Washington and had press conferences and then to New York. And took it over to Paris. I think they ended up dumping it at the Embassy over in Paris. But they got a tremendous amount of publicity. The long shoremen were 100% for us; they stopped unloading Russian boats to try and put pressure on them and other Communist countries. They made arrangements to get all the mail we want over there for nothing. It really energized and we had very little opposition. Because we very successfully separated the two. In the meantime, the women were starting to be interviewed a lot; were on national programs. They went around personally met with editors of Time, Newsweek, to keep this thing going. And to keep that thing going for that long was really something. So that basically is the highlight of what we were doing. In the meantime, Ross was working in close cooperation with Haig who was then Kissinger's assistant in the White House. I know he met with the President a couple of times. Of course we were just...everybody in DOD was tremendously cooperative. I'm talking about from the top to the bottom. In April of that year, we decided to take another trip over there to inspect the prisons in the south. This time we took about 85 news people; these were mostly newspaper people from mid-America: Oklahoma City, San Antonio, Dallas. The first time, we had mainly the LA Times, Washington Post, New York Times. So they just bent over backwards over there to accommodate us. We had been ordered fighting was pretty heavy at the time. So even though we had the White House approval of what we were going to do, they said fine; they were all for it, DOD and everything. The guy that still runs things is the Ambassador. So Tom Meurer and I were there making arrangements. We had the whole thing set out. How we were going to get people from camp to camp, the logistics of where they stayed, food, everything. And the Ambassador says they cannot come in; it's too dangerous.

Boom. And nobody could overrule him. That was it. So the plane had already left Dallas. They were in Hawaii. So Tom and I leave the Ambassador's and were going down to phone Ross. We get Murphy on the phone; how are things going? fine; come on, everything's set up. And he hung up. Meurer said "What the hell are we going to do now?" I said "I don't know, but we've got 12 hours to do it." So we waited til it was too late for them to do anything, and then went back to the Ambassador and said "Gosh, I'm sorry, but this planeload of people, including the press of America is coming here". In addition to that, we had made arrangements for CBS, ABC, NBC to cover the thing. They were going to use their people that were already there. They were set up; the news wires were set up. We just flat put it to him: are you going to not allow them to land and risk their lives and are you going to say no to the press of the world? What could he say? He knew we had him. So he said, "Aw, cripes, okay". So, they had to go get, you know, and, no I think we went to the South Vietnamese then to get the buses and police escorts, security and everything. Plus, we needed microphones and things to have a press conference at the airport. Pretty soon, the Press Secretary at the Embassy gets a hold of us and he says, "Guys, you're not going to believe this." I said, "What's that?" And he said, "The Ambassador would very much like to welcome Mr. Perot and the press in Nam." And not only that, we have to write his speech and he would for you to look it over and see if it's all right. So that thing just completely turned around and that was very successful and it accomplished a purpose in that that was Easter time, see, and we had a slow Easter period in terms of news. So, on a lesser scale, it accomplished what we did at Christmas and then it kept the momentum going, kept it as an issue on peoples minds.

KF All right. Why did Ross go to Laos over this? This is for the MIAs. You've been talking about POWs.

TJM Well, POWs and MIAs. We were interested in better treatment for the POWs, plus getting names of MIAs, and trying to identify who was dead and who was alive, and get information. The reason for Laos, was that was the closest country to North Viet Nam. In addition to that, they were represented, I mean Laos, you know, the Red Chinese were there, the Russians were there, the XX were there, the North Vietnamese, everybody's in Laos. It's a really interesting little community, you know, without a paved street. Fascinating! I loved it there.

KF But why did you need to, why did you need to go there? I mean, what, what did you achieve by going there?

TJM That's the only place where we could talk to the North Vietnamese. See, we had to negotiate with them.

KF Right.

TJM Oh, we had these negotiations going on every day. And North Vietnamese at one point in time said, well, the reason they weren't going to let us go is because these are criminals, they have destroyed schools and hospitals. So Ross says, Fine, I will rebuild the schools and hospitals if you let us take this to them. Well, of course, that was the headline the next day, "Perot, you know, you just identify where they are, you know, we'll make arrangements, we'll get them rebuilt for you." So, they dropped that and they'd come up with some other reason why we couldn't, and Ross would come up with . . .

KF What period are these negotiations?

TJM This is between Christmas and New Years.

KF I see.

TJM     So that's that slow period. All the networks are there. They were tickled to death. See they get so much every minute that they are on national TV, and they were sending stuff back. We were getting good coverage every day on national TV. By this time, all the foreign press was there, too. The European press.

KF     What year is this?

TJM     Christmas 1969 and New Year 1970.

KF     Did you ever get any names out of them?

TJM     No, not out of them.

KF     I seem to remember that names started to come through at one stage.

TJM     Oh yes, names did start to come through. When I say "did we get any"...they started releasing some names.

KF     When?

TJM     Soon after this.

KF     So you think that achieved something as well.

TJM     Plus they felt the pressure. What they started doing then, there was a few really wayout anti-war, anti-Nixon, anti-American, anti-Perot type people. So what the North Vietnamese did then was realize that they were going to have to do something to get the pressure off. They started trying to give them credibility

by giving information to them and let them read it out. A couple of times we were able to intercept that information and release it first. They still don't know how we got it.

KF Okay. The only question I have now is that Ross told me a little of this. He told me that Kissinger called him. Now you've told me that basically it was that you had the idea down here and you went to Washington.

TJM No. We had the idea of doing something. I think what happened was we had the idea of doing something. We were going to do something; they heard that we were going to do something. See, we already had very good friends in the administration, hate to admit it. Like John Ehrlichman, guys in the White House. We had some people that had worked advance back in the 68 election that really did a good job. So we were well thought of. I think they heard of our interest. Because we had Tom Meurer, even though he was working here, had done some of the advances. Took Mrs. Nixon down when they had the big earthquake down in Peru and things like that. So there was a lot of communication going on anyway. But I think they probably heard of our interest. But I think 99% of the ideas were Ross' and this group. They were tickled to death. They were scared to death that something might backfire. When they saw that he was going; you talk about guys that jump on the bandwagon. So do you understand the warm feeling that particularly DOD has and why Ross would go up there anytime. That goes back to that. Because here was a guy that really stepped up to the line in a time when their image was zero. The war was going against them, everything was bad. And here's a guy that stood up and brought out something good. He stuck by his guns.

KF The point of all that, as I recall, was that there had never been a declaration of war, so the North Vietnamese argued that they weren't subject to the Geneva Convention.

TJM Which is baloney. They were subject to the Genova Convention.

KF Well, whether they were or not, the point was that ill treatment is ill treatment, regardless of whether a particular piece of legislation is enforced. That seems to be the point he must have gotten across.

TJM Okay. Then you know about meeting Bull as a result of that.

KF I thought that came about as a result of the Son Tay Raid.

TJM It did, but it all ties together. See when the guys came back, they wanted to know what they could do for Ross. And Ross says "you can't do anything for me. You coming back is all I need. What can we do for you?" "Well you can't do anything for us". It was one of those things. Then the other significant event was the Son Tay Raid. And that made major changes to their treatment from the standpoint. Do you know how that affected them? They used to keep them in a lot of different prisons, so therefore, they keep them in solitary confinement. After the Son Tay Raid, they realized how vulnerable they were, then they moved them all into two camps. One by the Chinese border and one in Hanoi Hilton. Consequently, they didn't have room for solitary confinement for everybody. For the first time, they were able to start talking to each other. So our deal improved the treatment, that one got them together. So they were forever endeared to them; through that, they came up with the idea of having this party that the POW's that were in the camp would have for Son Tay Raiders. That's how we got to know Bull and the rest of the Son Tay Raiders and got them to San Francisco.

KF And that story I know.