

[00:00:00] **Tim:** And he was just like, I got girls as young as 13, 12, 13. You know?

[00:00:03] **Matt:** Oh, yeah. Standing right there.

[00:00:04] **Tim:** And I was just like, what? He's like, yeah, they're in the house, right. We can go right now. Oh, I'll come back later. So we turned the information over that spun into a bigger and a bigger and a bigger case. Right?

[00:00:13] **Matt:** Right.

[00:00:14] **Tim:** Um, we were introduced to a female trafficker by the name of,

[00:00:18] **Matt:** oh, well Miss Cartagena,

[00:00:20] **Tim:** miss Cartagena, this whole group of traffickers got together. Mm-hmm. Um, and they came to us. Wanting not just to supply us with children for a party, but they wanted a business partnership. They wanted us to invest in property so they could build a child sex hotel.

[00:00:45] Hey guys. Tim Ballard here. This is In The Trenches. These are the stories of Operation Underground Railroad, our successes, our challenges, our operation. And if you want to donate to make sure that we can continue to make these stories by doing real rescue operations, please go to ourrescue.org and help us out. Thanks so much.

[00:01:09] Hey everybody. Welcome back to another episode of In the Trenches with Mr. Matthew J. Cooper. Uh, actually your middle name is Norman, I believe

[00:01:19] **Matt:** That's right.

[00:01:20] **Tim:** Norman like. What's that from? It's a weird middle name.

[00:01:24] **Matt:** It's from Scandinavia. Thank you very much.

[00:01:26] **Tim:** But is there a Norman in your family or your parents just thought that was a good name? Like

[00:01:30] **Matt:** my grandfather's name. Okay. He's dead. Okay. I'm very offended.

[00:01:33] **Tim:** You. You should be. People dying is very offensive. Well, We went chronologically in 2014 from that Haiti operation. I remember going back and forth between Haiti and Columbia. Haiti and Columbia. Columbia was also an operation that had begun, or at least the beginnings of it began when I was a government agent.

[00:01:52] And what had happened was, if you might recall, or, or maybe you don't, But I, I had been sent sometime before I had left the government obviously to go help do a training to federal police in Columbia on how to infiltrate child trafficking rings. The training that I was doing was actually a PowerPoint presentation.

[00:02:12] I was kind of bored of doing it. I didn't think anyone really paid attention. Everyone just felt good cuz we checked the box right and did a training. I remember doing that training. I just said, let's just not do this training. Let's just do a case. Like what, what are the laws? Where are the kids? And they said, Carthan is the place to start.

[00:02:24] We had this whole plan and we, we were so excited and I was like, I'll come back and we'll do this operation. And, and obviously there was no funding, there was no jurisdiction. And so coming back to Columbia was also kind of unfinished business. And we went and actually executed on that operation that we had planned in, in the training.

[00:02:42] So we roll up there and, um, Were you with us when we went to Playa Blanca that this, these islands out in, in the Baru Islands.

[00:02:50] **Matt:** The beach. Yeah.

[00:02:51] **Tim:** And the, the pro, the prosecution, the Columbian authorities said, we believe that children are being sexually assaulted out there and abused and sold. The only police out there are tourist police and they're there to protect the gringos, the tourists. Right. And if they want kids and they can get kids, whatever. So we went out there, we walked on that beach and I remember we were approached by a man named.

[00:03:13] **Matt:** Fuego

[00:03:14] **Tim:** Fuego, which in Spanish means fire. Fuego means fire. What a weird, can you imagine a guy calling me? I'm I'm fire. Yeah. But it was crazy, right? Cause this, it was just in a few seconds. Gonna be 25 seconds. Right. And he was just like, I got girls as young as 13, 12, 13. You know?

[00:03:32] **Matt:** Oh yeah. Stand right there.

[00:03:33] **Tim:** And I was just like, what? He's like, yeah, they're in the house, right. We can go right now. Oh, I'll come back later. So we turned the information over that spun into a bigger and a bigger and a bigger case.

[00:03:42] Right? Right. Um, we were introduced to a female trafficker by the name of,

[00:03:47] **Matt:** oh, well, miss Cartagena,

[00:03:49] **Tim:** miss Cartagena. This whole group of traffickers got together. Mm-hmm. Um, and they came to us wanting not just to supply us with children for a party, but they want a business partnership. They wanted us to invest in property so they could build a child sex hotel.

[00:04:06] They said, look, we'll build the hotel, we'll keep the talent, we'll keep it packed with young girls, minors, children, and you bring the clients. That was the deal. Right. Do you think those kind of sex hotels exist?

[00:04:20] **Matt:** Absolutely.

[00:04:21] **Tim:** Have you ever been to one?

[00:04:22] **Matt:** I've seen many.

[00:04:24] **Tim:** When was the last one you went to with me?

[00:04:27] **Matt:** I like, do you remember three days ago?

[00:04:31] **Tim:** So that's what these guys wanted to build, right? And so that's, that was the, the thing. And we, we kind of set it up on purpose that way because Fuego's organization, which was run by a guy named Edward, uh, I think they had like 12 kids that they controlled and we wanted to rescue more.

[00:04:48] And so we kind of. That's why we kind of allowed or kind of encouraged the conversation to go towards like building a business because we are not, we're not gonna invest in a business if you only control 12. And what we were trying to do, and we're very careful here, we were very careful to, and there's ways that we can do this to where we're not creating demand, right?

[00:05:06] This stupid argument that people love to make up, that have no idea what they're talking about. You know, the, the whole, OUR creates demand. Like, what does that mean? I don't know. But someone, some professor told me to say that. Because they want the funding to write books and not rescue kids. Anyway, we have ways to ensure that the kids we're rescuing are kids who are in the process of already being abused.

[00:05:29] You're not, you're not creating victims when you're infiltrating an organization that's already exists. That's what we do. These stories are so ridiculous and false. So we walk into a bar and say, give us kids. We don't have kids. We'll, I have \$10,000 here if you can get me some kids. Wink. We like that.

[00:05:45] Never, ever, ever happens. It's like, Just so stupid. Right? Right. But the point is, we knew that he brought other traffickers, inclu, including Kelly. Kelly was Ms. Cartegana famous in town, and she recruited kids to her modeling agency, but she was selling them. 12 year olds. Right. So we get all basically the traffickers in that entire region to the same place, and, and they sold us all these kids, right.

[00:06:12] Um, ultimately they brought the kids to the island near to the property they wanted us to buy, and we, it ended in the rescue of, oh my gosh, like over, I think it was over 50 people, most of which were children. And simultaneously we were doing operations in Medellin and Armenia Columbia as well.

[00:06:29] **Matt:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

[00:06:29] **Tim:** So it was like a huge roundup called Triple Take. It's pretty phenomenal. And, uh, what's interesting about that case, Is going to Cartagena a few weeks ago, you weren't with me, were you? You were in Ukraine. I testified in that, in that trial, and probably that was the most triumphant part, I think, of the entire operation that was eight years ago because when the defense had their chance at me, It was awesome.

[00:06:55] Yeah, it sounded incredible.

[00:06:56] There was no significant question they could ask me, because every question they asked me trying to find something always ended in me saying, and then they tried to sell me 12 year olds, and then they tried to sell me 12 year olds.

[00:07:06] Mm-hmm. And they finally decided, well, no, no further questions, your Honor, because we had filmed it from seven angles. So if anything, it showed that even from day one we were doing things right. I had a very jealous ops chief that came in that I hired and got to the point where he thought he should be the, the face and the boss and, and he started these rumors that anything that happened before I was here sucked, including triple take.

[00:07:29] **Matt:** Right

[00:07:29] **Tim:** which is why they've never had convictions. And the truth is no, it was a court backlog. It was covid and it all proved to be true when the defense has nothing on us. It is airtight, and it's a, it is a very righteous, um, operation. So that's kind of the overview, right? For the audience to understand what Triple Take is and you can watch Triple Take on an upcoming documentary. It's already won three Emmy's, two tellies, no one's seen it yet. We kind of wanted to get the prosecution through and, and, and get the convictions, uh, outta the way so that, so that we wouldn't mess at all with, uh, or taint juries or whatever else.

[00:08:06] But now it's, it's, it's ready to come out. So gimme your perspective as the quiet observer who always right in the, in the action, the operation in Cartagena

[00:08:19] **Matt:** for me, like, you know, it was just a ton of logistical support. Like, because OUR was so small at that time, I remember we just had one travel agent, and so it was like, a billion phone calls cuz we had to send people to,

[00:08:33] **Tim:** and you're doing a lot of logistics during this, right?

[00:08:35] **Matt:** Yeah, yeah. I was sending people to Medellin, sending people to Armenia, sending people to Cartagena. So I was like, take care of that. And then it was really just supporting you in any way I could to make sure that we could get what we needed, which we did, which is proven in court the last week or two weeks ago, three weeks ago.

[00:08:51] **Tim:** Yeah.

[00:08:52] **Matt:** For me, honestly, I, I mean I just, I sat back as like a student, you know, that's, and that's probably probably why I was quiet, cuz like, what do I know? I was just, I didn't go to academy like you did and, and some of our colleagues like Osborne and such. So it was just a lot of, uh, it was a lot of note taking.

[00:09:08] **Tim:** Mm-hmm.

[00:09:09] **Matt:** And lessons learned and things like that, which is why I'm one of your trainers now.

[00:09:12] **Tim:** Yes, you are chief trainer. So do you know who this is? Right here. Do you recognize him? He's got 3000 followers.

[00:09:21] **Matt:** Yeah. So he was one of the, uh, survivors.

[00:09:24] **Tim:** Yeah, one of the, he was one of the children that we had rescued. So him and I stand in touch quite a bit and he works for us now. Right. It's an amazing story. So this kid was rescued and Triple Take, stayed with us. We, we made sure he got the aftercare resources he need. He ended up coming outta that program, you know, pretty, pretty well healed. And then he wanted to go to school so we, we sent him to school. We got him set up with his first business, uh, and then he became an advocate for us. He'd go into the streets of Cartagena and look for trafficking victims. He found this one young woman who was pregnant, based on, you know, being raped and trafficked. And, and he, he went to her and started talking to her, and she said that she wanted to either abort the baby or kill herself, which would naturally abort both, you know, her life and the babies.

[00:10:08] Mm-hmm. And he was like, no, don't do it. Don't do it. Have the baby and I'll adopt the baby. And she kept the baby and he adopted the child. Right? And so he's, he's recruiting and working with a lot of the survivors. So being that this is one of our very first kind of rescue operations, and it's kind of the first time that children became young adults.

[00:10:31] Did it work? You know, not only are we getting a conviction in this prosecution in the trial, but so many of their lives are changed forever. In fact, their lives were defined in a positive way by this because they, um, they took it and said, we're gonna now fight it ourselves. One of these survivors is raising a child who was, you know, uh, brought to the world through the tragedy of human trafficking, but her life is now beautiful. So there's so many amazing things about operation, uh, triple take, um, that that bore out fruit.

[00:11:06] **Matt:** And they're still happening.

[00:11:07] **Tim:** Yeah. That are, that are still going on.

[00:11:20] **Matt:** Yeah. For me, you know, again, that was like, I mean, I was, I was definitely useful, but I was also shocked at it because just like when I was in Haiti, it was like when you, you know, you, you hear about it. You go to, you go to a Tim event and he talks about trafficking event and you see it, it's like there's a whole nother element that just shocks your system. And I think I felt the same sort of way there. Cause I remember when the boat pulled up,

[00:11:48] **Tim:** the kids get outta the boat.

[00:11:49] **Matt:** Yeah, they get out. It's, it's kinda like,

[00:11:50] **Tim:** it's like in your face now. It's like, yeah. Gosh.

[00:11:52] **Matt:** I know. It's like you just, I felt like dizzy almost. Yeah.

[00:11:55] **Tim:** Yeah. So Operation Triple Take, um, what was after that operation? There was an operation actually before those two technical between Haiti and uh, on Columbia. There was an operation in, in Dominican Republic. Right, right. And, um, it was a really, uh, amazing operation. It was the first time we worked in Dominican. Uh, there were, I think 20 plus rescues. No, I think there's, there's about 20, I think, but nine of them, you don't, you don't get to choose who the traffickers bring to the sting operation right. Um, but nine of them were children. And I remember we, we worked together with another two other organizations, one of which handed all the aftercare. We were still building our aftercare program, and seven traffickers were arrested. Seven traffickers were convicted, nine children got aftercare services.

[00:12:45] It, it didn't get a lot of attention at the time because it was, it was put between, you know, kind of bigger stories in some ways, how they played out in Haiti. And, and, and, and in this huge operation in, in Columbia, but it, it got some notoriety several years later, didn't it?

[00:13:01] **Matt:** Oh, that's right. Yeah. There was,

[00:13:02] **Tim:** because there's this disgruntled, uh, there's this woman, okay, so Meg Connolly, you know, I'm, I was friends with her father. We were in the same ward in church. He lived on the street from me, and I can't remember what happened. Someone said, Hey, why don't you, she had just started being a blogger and she was having some success and we were brand new and she's like, Hey, why don't you come watch an operation? So she participated very minimally, right? Do you remember this?

[00:13:28] **Matt:** Yeah.

[00:13:29] **Tim:** Like it was like she came in, we gave her a very minimal exposure. Then she left, she wrote two glowing reviews about the operation. Right? What, seven years later after OU R's getting big, decides to take advantage. Decides to change her narrative eight years later, posturing herself as an expert in human trafficking with her, you know, all of what, 45 minutes of exposure

[00:13:54] **Matt:** right? Geez.

[00:13:54] **Tim:** Um, and comes out with this story completely just lying about me, about the operation, saying that it somehow was all a fraud. And you know, I, I've always said this about that, about her story. If you can tell the story of that operation in Dominican Republic without mentioning the fact that nine children were rescued and had three years of aftercare, that's how real it was, and that seven criminals were arrested and convicted and all serving sentences to this day. If you can tell the story of that rescue operation and, and just leave out those two facts, that's problematic cuz that leaves us with only two conclusions. One, you are a absolutely horrific reporter, journalist, whatever you wanna blogger, whatever, because that stuff is actually available online or you're a liar. It's one of those two. Either way, you have about zero credibility and so anything else in the story is bs.

[00:14:57] And of course it is, and I'm bringing this out on, on purpose because I'm not defending myself. I'm defending children. You know, Meg, you think you're hurting me? You're not. We're stronger than ever. You're hurting children because you're discrediting the vehicle that might be the only vehicle available in certain situations to rescue certain children.

[00:15:18] So that's on you. And I'm defending children right now by exposing what you did. I'm actually grateful because if it wasn't for Meg, I wouldn't even be talking about, I would've forgotten a lot largely about that operation. So it's a great opportunity to to explain what we're doing. And we're still in Dominican Republic, over 300 rescues.

[00:15:36] That we've done in Dominican Republic. We, we read the article, uh, or pieces of it to, to, uh, France Hernandez the Gen, and she was appalled. Just appalled. Like, I can't believe we let this person in this operation. Like we're, we're sorry. The greatest threat to children right now, honestly, more than the traffickers in, in a lot of cases, are people that disprage others in the nonprofit industry

[00:16:03] **Matt:** like yeah, some of our hardest battles certainly been the most draining and taxing I think on us over the last 10 years. It was completely unexpected. I think we went into this like the swords out like, yeah, let's go get the traffickers, and then it was like tried getting hit by all sides, like, what's going on?

[00:16:18] **Tim:** Yeah. The battlefield you never expected was the one at home? Yeah. Again, the good guys who decide I want you to hurt. I want you to fail. I want you to, but we're fighting, we're not. We're we used to just say, turn the other cheek and we did as long as we could. Cuz it was like, is it, if this is just me, if a pride thing, like I have to be right, or I need to be loved or something, then that's no reason.

[00:16:40] But it got to the point and it's gotten to the point where it's like, no, this is not about me. This is about children. They're a real op. I can point to operations that because of lying people, including elected officials who lied about O U R and directly led to the shutting down of rescue operations that couldn't have happened.

[00:17:01] These are true stories. These are real children and people playing politics with it. People playing popularity contests with it. It's sick, disgusting, and you're not a, you're not a trafficker, but you're an accomplice. You're an accomplice. If you, if you're, if you're taking shots at a vehicle that's going to save kids, what are you? What are you, I'm not calling you a human trafficker.

[00:17:23] What, what would you call that person? The vehicle's on its way to rescue. And you're out there shooting bows and arrows. They're throwing rocks and trying to stop it, trying to mess it up. Who, what are you?

[00:17:31] **Matt:** An accomplice? Enabler. A, a bastard.

[00:17:33] **Tim:** Yeah. And with that Word we will end this episode of In The Trenches. See you next time.