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[00:00:29] Hey guys, Tim Ballard here. This is In The Trenches. These are the stories of Operation Underground Railroad, our successes, our challenges, our operations, 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](http://ourrescue.org) and help us out. Thanks so much.

[00:00:52] Hey everybody. Welcome back to another episode of In The Trenches where we take you inside the trenches of operations, law enforcement, aftercare, everything we do here at Operation Underground Railroad. I have a really important guest here, one of my favorite people in the world, JC Holt, who runs our domestic projects, but that's not how you entered o u r initially. Tell us your experience. How did you learn about who you are? How did you get involved, and what did you do?

[00:01:17] **JC:** I learned about O U R several years ago when I was a police officer. I had a buddy who was a friend of yours or an associate, and he was telling me about what you were doing and I thought, well, that's noble.

[00:01:28] You know, I'm glad that there are people that are out there doing that. And I didn't think that I was gonna be one of them, to be honest with you. And I had some experience in training undercover and doing undercover work and so I actually I met your organization or came into the group by that way of just spending some time sharing talents on training people how to do undercover work from the police side of things, from the police world.

[00:01:54] **Tim:** Because you were doing undercover work before I even knew who you were. Yeah. I recruited you at a time when, honestly, at the time I didn't even know you had worked for us in that capacity.

[00:02:02] **JC:** No. It was funny. I tell everybody the story of that and I don't think they believe me. I worked for Tim Ballard for like three years before I actually met the guy, you know?

[00:02:10] Yeah. In person, in the flesh. I did some training with Undercovers and then a couple of your employees said, you know, why don't you come do some operations with us? And I just, to be honest with you, I didn't think I

would ever do that. It was a little bit outta my comfort zone to be quite candid and I ended up doing several undercover operations

[00:02:30] **Tim:** and some crazy ones. And you got stuck on the Amazon, right?

[00:02:33] **JC:** I had some crazy ones.

[00:02:34] **Tim:** You got chased outta Mexico?

[00:02:35] **JC:** Yeah. Yeah, I did. I had some crazy ones that I felt like I, I almost didn't come home, just things happened. I tend to be the guy that, the handful of the few that I went on, some things happened and it just, it was very difficult for me, but very character defining be quite honest with you in all seriousness, changed my life.

[00:02:53] Changed my life and I've come from a background of service public service in my professional career, and I just view this as an extension of that. And I think in a lot of ways it's what drives me in life, whether I want it to be or not. It's just where I've, where I found myself.

[00:03:10] **Tim:** Well, I know you showed up with passion because in the first year Of you taking over our domestic program from the previous person you did more in that year than the other person had done in like five years, like not even close, like ran circles around this other person. And I think the difference is that passion the we lacked because, you know, when O U R started, it was based on a true story. Yeah. Right. When the true story was as an HSI agent, I was limited jurisdictionally about where I could go.

[00:03:41] So if I got leads that took me too far out of where I had jurisdiction, I had to come home and, but I got too close to seen too much. And so we went the idea was we're gonna go into these countries where there's very few resources and actually go in and help. But then after we started growing for a while, we realized, and we watched the stats coming from the us like, wow.

[00:04:02] Yeah. I mean, the United States we're in the top three for destination countries for human trafficking. We generally year after year, produce more child exploitation material and consume more than any other country. So you start recognizing, wow, things aren't as stable at home as I kind of thought.

[00:04:18] And so we came, I think our two, two and a half years we came back in and made basically one of the regions of our operation domestic United States. And, but it really wasn't until you came on that it really exploded what

we could do. I think we were in like a couple states doing some stuff, but tell me what your experience, like you come in here and you really change the whole game in terms of what we can do domestically. What was that experience like for you?

[00:04:44] **JC:** It's kind of scary to be honest with you. I remember, I had a vision in my head of how it might work and I think the scariness came from failing, maybe perhaps like coming in and not being able to deliver what I felt like was appropriate for the time. And I've always viewed this subject as we need people to be addressing it and working on it right now, like not tomorrow, not next week, but like now and yesterday.

[00:05:12] And so I've just always viewed it that way, where it needs to be done. And so, I have a certain sense of urgency and I think I approached it with a little bit of timidness at first cuz I wanted to make sure that we were able to deliver. But I think certainly one of the things that helps me the very most and with the team that I now supervise is we're all ex law enforcement officers. I mean, I'm a retired law enforcement officer and I worked sex crimes for many years in my professional career. And I think just the ability to interface with other police officers in the United States, just having that background, it's almost like an instant in with them that we speak the same language and that has been extremely helpful.

[00:05:56] And then obviously just the blessings of resources that we've had as an organization to be able to go in and offer some of these things that they can't get, maybe they don't have budget for or other things. So just the relationships, the ability and the willingness to get things done now.

[00:06:15] Typically if you're working for the government and you apply for a grant, I mean, you've probably done this back in your government days. You apply for a grant and what you hear six months later, "oh, you know, Hey, we didn't get that grant by the way", agencies approach us and it's done in a week.

[00:06:32] **Tim:** And they're always shocked, right? They're like, how did you do that? How did you blow past the bureaucracy? Well, because we don't have any.

[00:06:37] **JC:** We sign the paperwork, we sign the MOU and we get it done. We make it happen to where they get those resources immediately. And once we started working with a few law enforcement agencies and they saw that model and they saw how it worked, the phone hasn't stopped ringing.

[00:06:55] You know, now we have groups coming into us and we're grateful to be in that position that more people know about us so that we can help. Because the whole purpose of why we are doing this is to fight these types of crimes. Yeah. And just the ability to do that at an accelerated pace is just awesome. You know, and I attribute it to the members of the team that work there and just the fact that they're just getting things done.

[00:07:20] **Tim:** So I remember sitting with sheriff Grady Judd from polk County in Florida, and we sat down, we were trying to, and we chose him because he clearly is passionate about fighting crimes, protecting children in that county. And we showed up and we said, Hey, we wanna give you a half million dollar mobile lab so that you guys can move around and do warrants quicker and, you know, do the digital forensics on the scene so you can actually get enough evidence on that day and hopefully make an arrest that day, as opposed to waiting for eight months for the, you know, for the digital forensics to be done in some lab that's backlogged. And we sat there pitching. He's like, this is a beautiful piece of equipment, but I don't think I can say yes to this. I'm like, why?

[00:07:59] He's, I will, cuz I'm smart enough to know that there's some catch here. Like, what are you in three months? Do you give us a bill for the software that you need to buy in order to turn the thing on? And like, no. No, no strings attached. Like, here it is, here's the keys. Like, we're out. And he really couldn't believe it.

[00:08:17] **JC:** Yeah.

[00:08:17] **Tim:** Because this is not something you see, right? I mean, you deal with that when people are like, this is too good to be true. What's the catch?

[00:08:23] **JC:** Yeah. We hear that a lot actually. You know, nothing's free there, there has to be something attached with this and you know, there's just not there. There are a few little things to be honest.

[00:08:33] Just that, that hopeful working relationship that we have with them, that they can share their success stories with us. That way we can go back and give our donors the feedback that they need to know how we're deploying these funds that we take in to fight this. And they're all too happy to reciprocate on that.

[00:08:51] I mean, we kind of have a motto on my team. We fund the police instead of defund the police.

[00:08:58] **Tim:** We fund the police.

[00:08:59] **JC:** We fund the police, okay. Because they need it. They need the resources to fight this and it's expensive. Some of the tools and equipment and stuff that they need it's expensive.

[00:09:08] **Tim:** I was so frustrated during that whole, and it's somewhat, we still see, you know, remnants of it, but this whole defund the police. Because I know what, you know, what law enforcement knows is, look, there are proactive investigative groups and reactive groups. The reactive groups, you have to respond. I mean, the it's right in your face. It's homicide, it's bank robberies. It's right there. Like there's nothing you've got to respond.

[00:09:30] Unfortunately, child crimes generally, they're not generally reactive sometimes, but usually it's, you gotta get out there, you gotta be aggressive, you've gotta go after. These guys are hiding their crimes and hiding the children, right? You gotta go after them. The first group's always to get cut when you lose budgets is the proactive groups, the child crimes groups.

[00:09:47] **JC:** It was that, it was my experience in my professional career that was the case. I mean, I remember the police department where I worked, when we struggled with the staffing issues throughout the years, it was one of the first things that got cut. We had an ICAC position that was managed at a state level on a multi-jurisdictional team and whenever we got short on staffing, they always pulled that ICA team member back.

[00:10:08] **Tim:** And it's so sad.

[00:10:09] **JC:** You know, you look at it now and you're like that's, it's one of the most valuable spots for a police officer to be, to protect our children, you know, and protect the young and vulnerable, and we're pulling those positions back when we have staffing issues.

[00:10:23] Yeah. And that, that happens. I mean, that's happening right now today in America where departments are struggling with staffing in these investigative units in many different areas, they're being depleted and officers are being, you know, they're out on patrol, they're responding to the bank robberies, the crimes in progress because, they have to be reactive in some sense, right? And so just the ability to not be proactive is a huge hindrance to our law enforcement officers.

[00:10:51] **Tim:** Yeah. What are some of the favorite tools that you like to get out there with?

[00:10:54] **JC:** Certainly the canine program is a shining star in our domestic program. These dogs that are trained to smell the chemical commonly found in digital storage devices. Just phenomenal. We've been fortunate enough to sponsor more than 60 of these dogs across, you know, 30 plus states in the United States just in the last two years. It's been phenomenal. You know, we pull numbers from these guys where we ask, because we wanna talk about the efficacy of the tool.

[00:11:23] It's one thing to sit and theorize about how cool it is, but until you have something, some data to attach to it. But, you know, I would just tell you this, in 2022 alone, we tracked about 50 of these dogs. Collectively they went on 1300 plus search warrants. They found devices, hidden devices 75% of the time on those warrants.

[00:11:44] Attributed hundreds of arrests as a result of that and helped countless victims. So I mean, that is a huge one. And probably secondly, I would just keep it simple and say the devices that those dogs find, or the officers find, now they have the complexity of getting into that device. What if it's locked?

[00:12:04] What if it's encrypted? So there are software companies that cater to this. And that equip law enforcement with the technology to do that. However, that software is oftentimes out of reach from their budget, and we're able to come in and supplement with them and provide the funding for that software, that digital extraction software.

[00:12:24] The cool thing, and one of the things that I'm excited about that we're doing now is the model of we're approaching these police departments and because we're getting more volume of people coming in, we're asking them, what can you contribute for it? And I mean, let's say they can only contribute a thousand dollars and the thing costs \$10,000.

[00:12:43] We don't care. We'll cost share that with them to let them know like, Hey, we want to fight this with you. Bring to the table what you can bring to the table. We'll bring to the table what we have and then we'll get you equipped and hopefully that will help make a difference in your communities. It's just been a powerful model.

[00:13:00] **Tim:** Yeah, no we love it. We love getting the reports. I love seeing all the good that we're doing. I can't believe, you know, when you came on

board, I think we were in two, maybe three states and it, I don't know, it was just seemed like maybe a year later you were reporting we've, we have now been active in every single state in the United States and only growing. So it's amazing work you're doing.

[00:13:23] **Matt:** So for departments to take on dogs, it's like a lot of downline costs, right, to maintain that dog. Would you be able to speak to any of those, like the commitment that the departments have to take on a canine?

[00:13:35] **JC:** Yeah, for sure. The I think everybody sees these canines, you know, and they're working and they don't understand how much work the handlers put in. So I would speak to, first of all, the dedication of the handler is a big deal. I mean, these dogs are food-based reward, which means when they find the device they get fed and it is the only way they get fed. Which means when you're not on search warrants and you're not working and you're home on Sunday watching football and your dog is hungry, guess what you're doing?

[00:14:08] You're training the dog to keep them sharp. And so that happens several times each day from these handlers. So these guys that take on these dogs, they're dedicated professionals that are investing even more than their 40 hours a week into helping in these types of cases.

[00:14:26] Secondly, you know, departments need to take on costs of the dog, vet bills, food, and we do help in those areas where we can, and there are several dogs that we fully sponsored and we still fully sponsored today as their home and then others departments are coming in and picking up costs in that cost share model.

[00:14:43] But yeah, it's a whole lot more than just getting the dog and then coming home and getting to work. I mean, the handlers have to stay on it. They have to continue training the dogs to have 'em be an effective tool. It's like anything else. I mean, practice makes perfect and they practice a lot.

[00:15:00] **Matt:** Yeah, no, I think it's great, especially in the era of defund the police. Yeah, it's just warms my heart that we're able to fund police and yeah, the results speak for themselves are putting up those numbers.

[00:15:10] **Tim:** Well, JC thanks so much. Keep it up and thanks for coming on the show. Yeah, and thank you guys for tuning in and we'll see you next time from In the Trenches.