

#68 (JIM ROSE)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing Crime features conversations with influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers.

Jim Rose is the Senior Advisor to the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, and the Regional Gang Advisor for Central America. He's also the white narcotics cop in the real world featured in the movie *BlacKkKlansman*. We talk about his time infiltrating the KKK and his pioneering work since then in Central America.

Welcome to Reducing Crime, I'm Jerry Ratcliffe.

If you've seen the movie *BlacKkKlansman*, and if you haven't, you should, then you're in for a treat. *BlacKkKlansman* is a 2018 comedy drama loosely based on the true life exploits of Ron Stallworth, an African-American police detective in 1970s Colorado Springs, who ends up sort of infiltrating the Ku Klux Klan, the KKK. It's got a spectacular 96% rating at Rotten Tomatoes, so this really is a must-see movie. I say loosely based on Ron's story because in the real world, as you'll hear, Ron is Black, and so had to recruit two white narcotics officers to do the actual infiltration.

One of those officers ended up in his undercover role being bodyguard to the infamous David Duke, former Grand Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. That detective was Jim Rose, my guest on this episode of the podcast. While Jim's law enforcement journey started in the Colorado Springs Police Department, the majority of his career was spent with the DEA, the Drug Enforcement Administration, in Central and South America. He now serves as a senior advisor to INL. That's the US State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. He's the Regional Gang Advisor for Central America, based at the US Embassy in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador.

After chatting about his early career KKK infiltration, we discuss his innovative work helping the National Civil Police of El Salvador, the PNC, and other police services across the region develop intelligence-led problem solving and community-oriented policing. We caught up for breakfast at last year's IACP meeting. Just after we sat down, the singer at the restaurant across the street started up with a vocal range that wandered from warbling to screeching. So with that providing a little background, yeah, I'll go with ambience, why not? Come and join us while I sat down with Jim for a leisurely breakfast at an outdoor restaurant in San Diego.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When I say breakfast is on me, I don't mean it's like slathered all over me. I mean, I don't do that anymore.

Jim Rose:

No, we won't do that. You haven't eaten here before, have you, either?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, sir.

Jim Rose:

I don't know what half this stuff is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Everything is a mystery here. You started in Colorado Springs back in the, what? Prehistoric era? When was that?

Jim Rose:

Yeah, we were riding horseback and horse-drawn buggies.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How many states were in the Union at that point?

Jim Rose:

Good question. No, I started in the early 70s, did my journeyman time there in the police department, and moved on, of course, to DEA.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Tell me about the time in Colorado Springs. Did you think that you'd just stay in Colorado Springs your entire career? Was it-

Jim Rose:

I did think that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What pushed you into policing?

Jim Rose:

That was my plan. You'll get a kick out of this, but I was military police in the Air Force and I saw some Dirty Harry movies and I thought that would be a really cool career.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh my God.

Jim Rose:

Yeah, for sure.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I suppose that's not worse than kids nowadays watching CSI and all wanting to be forensic examiners.

Jim Rose:

Sure. So I'm in my last tour of duty in the Air Force in Colorado Springs and getting discharged, and my buddy said, "Let's all go down and sign up and take the test for the police department," and three of us joined the police department there together, at the same time.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's fantastic. Did they stay in?

Jim Rose:

No. One got fired and one left and went to law school. So, it's a mix. That's real life.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That is, yeah. So when you joined, did you think it was going to be a job for life?

Jim Rose:

I did. My plan was I had no desire to promote. I wanted to be a police officer and maybe a detective for my whole career, and reach that golden age of 50 years of age when I get a 50% retirement and call it quits. But that wasn't a very realistic plan.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, it was a perfectly realistic plan. It just wasn't the plan that happened for you.

Jim Rose:

Yeah, well, that and it wasn't going to work out. I mean, 50% of a police officer's retirement in those days was not that great, so my opportunity came three years in when I got an opportunity to go into the narcotics unit. That was probably some of the most fun times I ever had. Really, a lot of fun. This was back in the 70s, the hippie days, marijuana, hashish.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Stuff we don't really worry about nowadays.

Jim Rose:

We don't worry about now, and that's where I got my interest in drug law enforcement.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But then you had this minor distraction when Ron Stallworth walked down the hallway and come and tapped you?

Jim Rose:

Yeah, so Ron Stallworth was an intelligence detective, and his job was to screen the newspapers every day looking for suspicious ads in the classifieds, et cetera, et cetera. He came across an ad for recruitment for the Ku Klux Klan.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Hold on a minute. They just advertised in the newspaper in those days?

Jim Rose:

Yep. "Contact us at this number." He called. He thought it was a joke. He called and it was for real, and they interviewed him. He said all the right things, and they said-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is just on the phone, right, because he's Black?

Jim Rose:

He admits he made a mistake. He gave them his real name.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, good God.

Jim Rose:

Because he didn't plan on ever meeting with them. This was intelligence. So they talked a couple of times and finally they said, "Well, we want to interview you. We think you'll do." He got in a jam then, because he couldn't go meet with them. He was a Black intelligence officer.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which in the 70s would've been a rarity, anyway.

Jim Rose:

Oh my goodness. Yeah. He was the first Black detective on the force. Very unusual, very smart guy. One of the best cops I ever worked with. Anyway, he realized, "If I want to continue this thing, I've got to get somebody to step in for me." So he came down to the narcotics office, and the first one he picked to do this was my senior partner, and he tapped Chuck Luck to go in his place. So Chuck went in, did the interview, and got accepted first. Then there was also a rule that you had to recruit two new people into the Klan, so Chuck brought me.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

An undercover cop, recruited you into the Klan?

Jim Rose:

Correct.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Fantastic.

Jim Rose:

So we met at a pool hall, and the leader of that Klan there in Colorado Springs did the interview. It was me and another female that was trying to join. I don't know who she was.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, so she wasn't in the job?

Jim Rose:

No, she was a for real interested member. It almost came to an end right there though, because they were pouring pitchers of beer and I hadn't eaten much. Finally they said, "You'll do." He hands me the application to fill out, and I had been using an undercover name though. I started filling out the information and I put James Rose, and then I realized, "Oh my God." There was no other Rose on the police department. So I wadded it up and I said, "I screwed this one up. Do you have another one?" He says, "Okay, yeah, yeah, here." So, I started to throw it in the trash. He said, "No, give it to me. We don't want anybody to find this." He put it in his coat pocket.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, shit.

Jim Rose:

I thought, "Well, that's it. He's going to leave and he'll read that and figure out that I'm not who I say I am, and we're done." Apparently he walked outside and threw it in a dumpster, and everything was kosher.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, you joined the Klan?

Jim Rose:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do I want to say congratulations?

Jim Rose:

No, no, not at all.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're not still a paid-up member, are you? Because we've got to stop at this point.

Jim Rose:

No, no, no, no, no. I'm sure we've been scratched from the rolls, but we weren't inducted yet, but we were recruits allowed to attend all the meetings. That came later with David Duke.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I should say that David Duke, is he still the Grand Poobah Wizard? I'm not sure what it is.

Jim Rose:

I don't know. I doubt it. I doubt it. But-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

He was the Grand something or other in the Klan, wasn't he?

Jim Rose:

He was the Grand Poobah, whatever they called him.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Wizard, Dragon, I don't know. Yeah.

Jim Rose:

The Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, I guess, in Louisiana. The reason the chief approved this, because this was 1978, and there were some racial tensions building in Colorado Springs. Eldridge Cleaver came and was giving speeches to the Black community.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I have no idea who that is.

Jim Rose:

Black Power.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, right. Yes, of course. Thank you, that reminds me.

Jim Rose:

He preached violence. So while he was doing that, the Klan decided that they needed to countermarch, so we were concerned about violence erupting. In addition to that, David Duke was planning on coming to Colorado on a huge recruitment event. So, we wanted to have eyes and ears inside. You have to remember the concern too was back in the 1920s, the Klan basically controlled the government in Colorado. These were powerful, influential people. Mayors, judges, city councilmen. Influential, important people who basically ran the state.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I don't think people who know Colorado now or visit Colorado know anything about this history.

Jim Rose:

About that? I didn't know at that time. The concern was, wow, apparently everybody thought the Klan was trying to come back and make a big comeback in the state. We went to the meetings, we avoided the meetings where they were building wooden crosses to go burn in Black people's yards. They had a big plan to put up a whole bunch of huge crosses on high points throughout the city. We were able to deter all of those, because once we found out where they were going, we would saturate the area with marked units. They were never able to burn a cross, throughout the whole summer.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think that in itself is an underappreciated goal, which is just simply disrupt criminal activity so that you can at least stop racial tensions flaring.

Jim Rose:

Prevention.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, but just disruption for the goal of prevention. It's underappreciated. People look too much towards arrest and prosecution, but sometimes you can just screw up somebody's plans nicely. That's great.

Jim Rose:

Obviously, they weren't the sharpest tools in the toolkit because they should've figured out that every time they had met at one of the houses to build these crosses, we had to go somewhere else. My mom was sick, we're going out of town. We never attended one of those because we were prohibited from participating in overt acts.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You never got to wield your carpentry skills?

Jim Rose:

That's true. Not that I ever had any, but anyway, David Duke shows up, and that's when it really got interesting. Because what he was trying to do was form an alliance with a group called the Posse Comitatus. They are an anti-government organization, and they only accept elected sheriffs as true law enforcement authority. They were planning some violent events to blow up some government buildings, and we went with David Duke to the leader. Chuck Howarth was the leader of the Posse Comitatus. We went to their house. We weren't allowed to sit in the private sessions between the two leaders, but we were told later that they were forming an alliance.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm just impressed that a bunch of knuckle-dragging racists actually know any Latin, Posse Comitatus.

Jim Rose:

Posse Comitatus were blue collar workers. But the Klan, they were mostly enlisted Army soldiers at Fort Carson.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, good grief.

Jim Rose:

Poorly educated. They just weren't very sharp.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, this is all post-Vietnam right then, wasn't it?

Jim Rose:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Military recruitment was a thing.

Jim Rose:

You had, remember, recruited by the courts.

Server:

Enjoy.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cheers. Thank you.

Server:

You're welcome.

Jim Rose:

So, the judges recruited some of these guys. So anyway, we did some events with him. We were his security while he was in town. We escorted him to a local radio station where he had a debate with a University of Southern Colorado Black history professor.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you think he had any idea that it was undercover police officers as his security and bodyguard? This is such a surreal experience.

Jim Rose:

So when we're escorting him into the station, people were throwing rocks at us and bottles and screaming and yelling, but I must-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're like, "I'm with you!"

Jim Rose:

I must tell you though, he's a very intelligent guy. He has a Master's degree from Louisiana State University, I believe. His new presentation was, "We're not against Black people. We're just for white people."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

For uneducated people who don't get out very much.

Jim Rose:

They bought that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You can see how that can be an alluring message, even though the horrible underpinnings of racism keep coming through. It's a different tack every time.

Jim Rose:

Yes. So in the end, we went through the summer. Now eventually, we had the final swearing in ceremony in Denver.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

To join the Klan?

Jim Rose:

To join the Klan, learn the secret handshake. Take the oath. We had on Black Power T-shirts. Not Black Power, excuse me. White power T-shirts. You see how you get confused? White power T-shirts, because the police department would not sprout for the full robe.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. This is the part that cracks me up. So there is a great photograph which you've kindly shared with me of you undercover sitting next to David Duke, the Chief Wizard Poo-bah Dragon whatever of the Klan. I burst out laughing the first time I saw it. Do you mind if I share it with-

Jim Rose:

No, fine, fine.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Thank you for allowing me to do that. I will share it. People come to the podcast page to reducingcrime.com/podcast, and they look up your entry there, I will share a link to this photograph because it's an incredible piece of policing history because it's you undercover with David Duke, but you're wearing this T-shirt that says, "Ku Klux Klan White Power." I went, "How in heck, God's name do you end up wearing that T-shirt?" It's because the police department, it's all they would reimburse you for?

Jim Rose:

I think those were five or \$10, and the full robe was like 50 or \$70.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which was a lot of money in the 70s.

Jim Rose:

They wouldn't front for it. So they said, "That's acceptable. You buy the T-shirt, and you're okay."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So hold on a minute, your undercover career was at risk because the police department wouldn't stump up to buy \$50 worth of robes?

Jim Rose:

I don't know if it... but anyway, that picture when we took it, those were Polaroids. That was the day of Polaroids, and I had him sign the back of it and he said to Rick Kelly, which was my undercover name at the time, "White Power forever."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Good grief. So we should say that for people who have seen the BlackKlansman movie, the section where Ron Stallworth's character gets a photograph taken with David Duke, that didn't actually happen, but it's you in the real photograph. It did happen for you.

Jim Rose:

It happened for me and my partner, Chuck, standing there in front of the cross with David Duke and a bunch of other recruits. I would guess half of them were undercover police officers because we were sharing intelligence with the Denver Police Department and Lakewood Police Department. We were bringing these people in and introducing them into the Klan also.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's fantastic. I mean, you guys have basically, solidly, you and others have infiltrated any attempts by the Klan to really work properly.

Jim Rose:

Correct.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, what was the upshot? Did they just give up?

Jim Rose:

So, they were still pretty active. We started slowly withdrawing. David Duke left. People were losing interest, and some of the members from Fort Carson were being transferred out. The criminal charges that did come out of that finally was against Chuck Howarth and the Posse Comitatus because it was several months later, they were arrested in a conspiracy to blow up a federal building. Anyway, we kept the peace. We did our job and everybody went home safe.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Why do you think there are some states that seem to foster some of this white supremacist extremist views?

Jim Rose:

It could be history in the South. It's ignorance. It's a lack of education. If you get enough education, you have to eventually face some of the deceptive thoughts that have infiltrated your mind. So, I think that's part of it. There is racism in the US, of course. I think we're making progress in that area, but I think to some degree, it will always exist.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But some states seem to do a better job of just exposing the population to a broader world, and-

Jim Rose:

Sure, sure. As far as I know, the KKK is no threat in Colorado right now. He ran for a congressional district a few years later, and David Duke could not get elected. So, thank God for that. So after Ron left the police department, he decided to write a book. The book is pretty accurate. The movie has a lot of movie stuff in it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's fair enough.

Jim Rose:

To make it more interesting.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The book is called Black Klansman.

Jim Rose:

Black Klansman. Apparently somebody in Hollywood's read the book.

Server:

The mushroom and fig [inaudible 00:16:30].

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cheers, thank you.

Server:

You're welcome.

Jim Rose:

I seem to recall it was Bette Midler, and she called Spike Lee and said, "You have to read this book. This is an incredible story. You have to do something with this."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It is a great story. It's fantastic.

Jim Rose:

So Spike grabbed the book, and they wrote a script.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I remember us meeting at an ICP meeting in Philadelphia, and we grabbed a drink and a whiskey at the bar. Then you came out with the most bizarre statement I think anybody's spoken to me. You said, "So, my movie's coming out next week." I wondered what the hell you were talking about. You're continually an undercover dude in many regards, my friend.

Jim Rose:

Well, my undercover days are over. Anyway, that movie actually won an Oscar and Ron Stallworth, I watched him go up on the stage with Spike Lee to receive the award.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Good, fantastic.

Jim Rose:

He called me the night before and he said, "If I can get on the red carpet, I'm going to give you a big shout-out." But he's a great guy. He's retired now, lives in El Paso, and we stay in touch occasionally. But sometimes I look back on those, it's like a dream. I can't believe we actually did crazy stuff like that. But it was a nuisance assignment to me, because I'm learning the drug trade.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You wanted to be a narc, yeah.

Jim Rose:

Yeah. I'm trying to hone my skills, tradecraft, and I had to put a lot of time into it, and it was a nuisance to me. But now I look back on it, it was quite an event, I guess.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So the whole BlackKlansman thing wrapped up, what was next?

Jim Rose:

I stayed in plainclothes in narcotics for about eight years. We got a new chief, the first outside chief we'd ever had, from LAPD.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Radical, I bet that caused some friction?

Jim Rose:

He had a philosophy that anybody who was undercover or in specialized units for more than two years should return to patrol.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, there goes all your specializations.

Jim Rose:

So I wound up on a midnight shift and I realized this is a young man's job. So I had some friends that recruited me to apply for DEA, and went to the DEA Academy, and I started my DEA career, which lasted about 21 years. I applied to go overseas, and I spent about half of my DEA career overseas in Bogota, Costa Rica, El Salvador.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did you have fun?

Jim Rose:

Great fun. It's a great job. I got to see a lot of the world.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Some of the worst parts of it.

Jim Rose:

Some of the worst parts of it, but I got to work some really good conspiracy cases at the highest level of drug trafficking. I was no longer buying ounces of marijuana in Acacia Park in Downtown Colorado Springs. I actually was working with Javier Pena and Steve Murphy, the Narcos DEA guys?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, from the TV series?

Jim Rose:

In Bogota, we were actually working in the office, there were only 15 agents at the time, and that was a lot of fun.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, you go from taking down a few ounces to taking down what kind of sizes?

Jim Rose:

Laboratories in the jungle that produce 5,000 kilos a month.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Wow. But when you go into an op, you're taking how many people to take down laboratory in the jungle?

Jim Rose:

Oh, you're with a company of well-trained Colombian cops.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They've got good people for this kind of work?

Jim Rose:

They were. For the most part, they were all good people. The commander of the operations group that we worked with to destroy the labs, Edgar Ramirez, I believe his name was, eventually was killed by the FARC.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

According to Wikipedia, they are the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, and a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary guerrilla organization, which is hard to say when you had a couple of drinks last night.

Jim Rose:

Correct, correct. Think about that. 50 years, they controlled large parts of Colombia. So after they did their little piece of court thing not too long ago, think about that transition for law enforcement in a 180,000 manned police force. Those have an impact on the way you do business in law enforcement. The same thing is true then of Central America.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. When did you move to El Salvador?

Jim Rose:

I arrived in El Salvador in 2000 as the DEA attache, and I worked there five and a half years. I got caught in the promotion cycle. I had to go to Washington to do my headquarters time.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's like a punishment, isn't it?

Jim Rose:

Oh, it's terrible.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is what's a little fascinated by these organizations where people spend so much time in the field, and at some point, you have to cycle through Washington and everybody dreads it.

Jim Rose:

You have to go to the circus and see how it operates. So, I did two years there. I was eligible to retire. I got a call from somebody at the State Department asking me if I wanted to go back down and stand up an anti-gang strategy basically for Central America. Nobody else was doing it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, it's a hell of an ask, isn't it? Here is a huge job, and we'd just like you to pop down there and do it.

Jim Rose:

So I said, "Yeah, I know El Salvador. I have good contacts there. I have good relations with the cops, so I think I can do this." They gave me like \$9 million and said, "Create a strategy."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In a suitcase?

Jim Rose:

No, it doesn't work that way.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

All right. So, this is not Afghanistan then?

Jim Rose:

It's not Afghanistan. That's correct. So first of all, we had to create a work plan. I think I flew 50,000 miles the first year throughout Central America just doing capacity assessments of the different police forces to see what they were lacking, what they needed, what training they were lacking, what equipment they needed.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But what you learn in that is amazing because I mean, I've done some work with you in a number of those countries, policing in Honduras, policing in El Salvador, policing in Guatemala, policing in Costa Rica. It's like they're not even on the same continent.

Jim Rose:

That's true, I agree. That's because their creation and their development as a law enforcement agency organization is...

Server:

Is there anything else I can get for you guys here?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I could do another coffee, please.

Jim Rose:

I'm good. Thanks. It's impacted by the political environment from time to time. Well, the perfect example is El Salvador. El Salvador went through a 12-year civil war. The international community came together with both sides and created the peace accords. Their main concern was to make sure that there were not going to be human rights violations in whatever iteration of law enforcement we created.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But then you compare that to somewhere like Panama, that seems to have almost a paramilitary policing unit.

Jim Rose:

Correct. Different culture.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Different culture.

Jim Rose:

So, what they did was they eventually created a brand new national police force. They've been around about 30 years, but they took about a third, not exact percentages, but about a third from the guerrillas, a third from the military forces, and a third from the civilian population, threw them together and grabbed a bunch of them and said, "You are the *commissionados* [leaders] in police." None of them had any law enforcement experience, so that's what I inherited.

The reason I was there was because the violence was out of control. It was about 2005. Viejo Lin, who was a *vocero*, a leader of one of the gangs, had killed a few young women, abused them, cut their heads off, put them in suitcases and dumped them in parts of the town. The alarm bells went off. Oh my God, we have a problem. Who do you call? The police.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right, a police department that had been formed about a week previously with a bunch of people in charge who had no idea how to run a police department.

Jim Rose:

They had been around about 10 years, but-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's still like a week in normal times.

Jim Rose:

So, they did what they could do. They created this Operation Mano Dura, heavy hand.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Iron Fist, yeah.

Jim Rose:

They rounded up everybody they saw with tattoos on the street and charged them with illicit association.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's right. Manager at Iron Fist, isn't it?

Jim Rose:

Then they did a Super Iron Fist.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because the first one wasn't irony enough or hard enough.

Jim Rose:

Right. So, the problem was these were not criminal investigations. There wasn't any evidence against most of these guys. I think in the first year, in 2005, I'm not sure about the exact year, but they arrested about 15,000 alleged gang members, and about 10,000 of them were released within 72 hours. So, was that a failure? In some ways, it was. But what they gained out of that was intelligence. They finally were able to see the structure of the gangs, how they operated, the command structure. So the intelligence gain was great, but that wasn't the solution to the problem.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No. It was a huge price paid for that as well.

Jim Rose:

Huge price paid for that. This is a socio-economic problem. It's an education problem. Economic opportunity problem. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What do you do with a bunch of young people who are just emerging from a civil war? It's a nightmare, with no employment opportunities or education.

Jim Rose:

Well, there's that and then a lot of them escaped during the war to the US and went to places like LA, Washington, and other places. Especially in Los Angeles, they found themselves to be set upon by Mexican gangs. That was the start of 18th Street and MS-13. They had to defend themselves.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They were forced to create gangs to defend themselves in Los Angeles.

Jim Rose:

In some sense. So when you start that activity, you go into criminal activity and you wind up in jail, and then you get deported. You have no job skills, no education, but what you do know how to do is extort money, do armed robberies, whatever it is. What our position has been is we have a shared responsibility with our neighbors in Central America to try to deal with this problem in their countries and in ours, because some of it was exported from the US. Now a lot of it's being exported from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala to the US, so we have a shared responsibility, and that's what INL is all about.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The Institute for Narcotics and Law Enforcement. It sounds more Draconian in enforcement than it actually is. It's much more about capacity building, isn't it?

Jim Rose:

That brings us to why we brought you to Central America.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Just to give people in America some respite from me, just to give them a break.

Jim Rose:

Well, what I found was because of the way they were created, the police operations were reactive in nature. You stand around and wait for the event to happen. You go clean it up, you go back and wait for the next event to happen.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's pretty much fire brigade, fire service policing.

Jim Rose:

Exactly. There was no prevention. They weren't preventing crime, and they weren't preventing recruitment of gang members, so that's where we tried to focus.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's been fascinating. I've been coming down, well, for at least I think over a ten-year period, I used to come down three or four weeks a year, and it was fascinating.

Jim Rose:

You know more than most people about the history there and what they're facing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Incredibly complicated.

Jim Rose:

Very complicated.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It defies simplistic notions. I think one of the things that I struggle with is when I see well-meaning politicians out of the US go down there and say, "We're going to have a regional initiative that's going to work for Central America." I'm thinking, "There is no Central America other than geographically, all these countries need completely tailor-made solutions." They need tailor-made solutions within the country in different places.

Jim Rose:

Yeah, that's true. El Salvador has problems that we don't have in the US. We're trying to help them craft their own solutions within the rule of law and with due process. That's a challenge, but one of the things that happened was I was trying to figure out how we could move them forward, and someone walked into my office and handed me a book called Intelligence-Led Policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's a terrible read. Terrible book, way too wordy.

Jim Rose:

I read that book and I said, "This can help them. This is a concept that they need to understand and adopt." I remember twisting your arm and begging you to come down and teach some courses, and it's had an impact.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You tempted me with Ron Zacapa, that fine, very good sipping Guatemalan rum, which is-

Jim Rose:

That's true. That's true. I had to bribe you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's disgracefully good stuff.

Jim Rose:

So, we had our own form of corruption between us.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'll own up to that one. So tell me, Jim, how do we turn things around? Because each country does feel like it's its own obviously, country.

Jim Rose:

Yeah. These things take time. We're identifying places where we can have regional cooperation that will have an impact. I'll give you an example. We have a border intelligence sharing unit that the countries in the region all have analysts assigned to. The idea is at the border crossings in the US or wherever, when they intercept someone who they don't understand who they really are or what their criminal affiliation might be, they can contact their analyst in this regional center in El Salvador, and these analysts from different countries access their own databases and try to provide the information needed to see if there's warrants for their arrest, whatever.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's an unprecedented level of international cooperation.

Jim Rose:

It is, it is. It's a first.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's important.

Jim Rose:

It's very important and it's been very successful. The training programs that we decided upon, with intelligence-led policing for one thing, it has had a great impact on law enforcement. I don't know to the degree it does in Honduras and Guatemala. They've all been trained. You've trained them. But in El Salvador, it has.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'll take the blame for their failures, then. There you go.

Jim Rose:

They have written into operational strategies an intelligence-led policing model. We've worked hard on that. We've trained thousands of them, and it's having an impact. You've heard about the truce situations there, and they've gone through various attempts at truces, which generally always break down. They just can't last. It's hard to make a truce with the devil. But when they did break down, the violence increased dramatically between the police and the gang members. There were shootouts almost weekly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

One of the things that astounded me when I came down there is that you've got decent cops down there, good people, patrol officers with bachelor's degrees and stuff earning like 430, 450 bucks a month US. The PNC, the police department's got how many cops?

Jim Rose:

25,000.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

25,000-

Jim Rose:

More or less.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which is smaller than the NYPD and at one point, they were burying a police officer a week getting murdered in shootouts and-

Jim Rose:

In 2015, they had more than 60 assassinated.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In one year?

Jim Rose:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

For a police department that's smaller than the NYPD.

Jim Rose:

In shootouts, they were killing dozens and dozens of these gang members. What we realized was they're not using proper tactics. So they would stumble onto a group of gang members, one of them would pull a gun out, and the shootout would begin. Usually, there was some collateral damage. Maybe one of the gang members that wasn't armed got shot.

So, we realized they're not using the proper tactics. They have no operational planning capacity. So we focused on that, and we created some tactical courses. We trained up a group of 30 train-the-trainers, and took them to an academy in Florida and trained them for a couple of weeks on tactics, dynamic entries, perimeter security, operational planning. They got it. Those incidents of shootings between the gangs and the police have been reduced dramatically.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's fantastic. You also started a model precinct project. I like the idea of it, but you should explain what it is because it's almost like a show home on a new housing project.

Jim Rose:

There's nothing magical about it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I'm trying to fluff you, mate. So, come on.

Jim Rose:

So I went to the-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think it is. I think it's a great idea.

Jim Rose:

I went to the director of the police and I said, "We want to try a pilot project." Basically, the idea was let's convert a delegation from reactive policing to proactive.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We should say a delegation is equivalent of a-

Jim Rose:

Police precinct.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Police precinct or a police district.

Jim Rose:

Correct, correct. So they said, "That's a good idea." We just created a brand new district precinct delegation in Lourdes Colon, because it's so bad there we had to create a whole new delegation just to deal with the violence.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

If I remember correctly about Lourdes, having been there and done some field work there, I remember you did warn me in advance that there's about 90 to 100,000 people there. In the previous year before we arrived, they had 300 people murdered. I was doing the sums in my head. That is a homicide rate more than 300 per 100,000, and that's off the charts. That's crazy.

Jim Rose:

Yeah, it was bad. They didn't have radio. They didn't have protective vests.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The US has a homicide rate of about four or five per 100,000, and everybody here is armed to the teeth with protected vests. Now, imagine telling cops in the US to go work somewhere for 450 bucks a month where the homicide rate is 300 per 100,000, and you don't have a vest.

Jim Rose:

The highest point was nationally, not just in some of those precincts in 2015 was a peak, it was 106 homicides per 100,000. It was the murder capital of the world.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Places like Lourdes were the murder capital of the murder capital of the world.

Jim Rose:

Yes. Yeah, it was the worst. It wasn't just homicides, it was extortion and violence. What we tried to impart to them was don't tell everybody what you can't do because of what you don't have. Think about what you can do with what you do have. There's always something you can do as a precinct to make life better and more secure for the people you serve. There's always something you can do.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You can't bring in a first-world perspective. You have to come down and say, "Okay, let's assume that they don't have any traditional policing tools or real prosecution systems or functioning courts." It's really a lesson in situational crime prevention, because you can't rely on the criminal justice system. It's basically not functioning.

Jim Rose:

One of the first community policing courses we gave them, we took them up to St. Petersburg College, which is a police academy, and the officers from Florida came in to teach this course, and they were telling them, "Listen, you can't just sit in your police cruiser. Turn off the air conditioning, turn off the radio, and get out and walk around." They're looking at each other like, "Who has an air conditioner? Who has a radio?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

"Who has a police cruiser?"

Jim Rose:

So after that first iteration, we took the instructors aside and we said, "You've got to fine-tune this for the operational environment they live in." So the courses got better, needless to say.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I remember we visited a police station in Honduras up on the top of a hillside in one of the Hurricane Mitch communities. No running water, no communications with headquarters. When they had a homicide, they were telling us they took photographs of the body with their personal cell phone and then had to drive down the hill 40 minutes before they got

a cell phone signal and can call headquarters. I don't think anybody here understands just the enormity of the difference between countries.

Jim Rose:

We put a team over there to do an assessment to pick a location for a pilot project on a model police precinct. So we made an appointment, we went and met with the commander of the precinct, and we talked about the challenges he faced, and I asked him, "So, how many homicides did you have here last year?" He said, "We don't keep those stats here. They keep those down at headquarters." I said, "Okay, so what do you think is the source of most of the violence in the homicides here?" He said, "Oh, just social disintegration." Thank you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, thanks for your time.

Jim Rose:

We're out of here. That's the other thing we learned, was that if you don't have a proactive leader in a precinct, you're not going to make any ground. So we had success wherever we went, wherever we had proactive leadership, but it wasn't being institutionalized.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's always the problem, because I remember Lourdes went from being the most out of 25 or so delegations, went from the most dangerous to one of the safest.

Jim Rose:

Same thing happened in Santana, the second MPP program. We gave them i2 Analyst's Notebook. They did a diagnostic for six months of the previous year's homicides. Using those tools, they found out the 11 cliques that were committing the violence-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We should say that a clique is a subset of a gang. Now, a clique is like a subset of MS-13 or 18th Barrio.

Jim Rose:

They cover a geographical area for that-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

For that gang?

Jim Rose:

... larger gang.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Larger gang, yeah.

Jim Rose:

They found out that one of the 11 cliques was responsible for 80% of the homicides. There you go.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There's your target.

Jim Rose:

They found out where they were doing the homicides, and they found out what time they were doing the homicides. So, where do you think they focused their limited resources?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Fantastic.

Jim Rose:

They dropped homicides by 60%. Now they transfer these leaders out and it's not being institutionalized, because we probably should've written up an MOU with a director general to get a commitment to institutionalize these best practices. We didn't have that. So when they moved these people out, it went back to the way it was. So, we've adjusted that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That I think might be one of the most important lessons from this whole experience, which is you can do something when it seems impossible, in a place that seems like all hope is lost, but you have to institutionalize it and you have to make sure, and that's maybe the greatest thing a leader can do, is to make sure that there's a legacy that's left behind.

Jim Rose:

Yeah. It takes time. It takes time to change the culture of a huge law enforcement organization. It doesn't happen overnight. Investment in time, money, training, equipment.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, do you think then the money that US taxpayers are spending down there on projects like this is money well spent?

Jim Rose:

I do. I do. Listen, this is not Plan Colombia. This is not billions of dollars. Here's our goal: A safer and more secure El Salvador is a safer and more secure United States. That's what we're trying to accomplish here. I got to say, it's been rewarding. It's been fun. I feel blessed to have had the opportunities I've had to engage in trying to build law enforcement capacities around the world.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

At the very least, you didn't get offed by the KKK. That's a result. Yeah. Hey, thanks for coming out for breakfast, mate. I appreciate it.

Jim Rose:

Thank you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was Episode 68 of Reducing Crime recorded in San Diego in October 2023. The photo of Jim while undercover with David Duke can be found at reducingcrime.com/podcast, where you can also find transcripts of this and every episode.

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