

SKULL GAMES

Applying military intel skills to a domestic problem

A nonprofit organization led by veterans is using open-source intelligence to identify sex trafficking victims and predators



Jeff Tiegs
Skull Games

I joined the military when I was 17 years old, and I was in special operations almost my whole career. During that time, the 9/11 terrorist attacks occurred, and the military shifted the way we conduct warfare.

With Al-Qaeda and ISIS, we were not fighting against countries or near-peer competitors. Instead, we were trying to break apart a network of people with a shared ideology. In response, we perfected a cycle that involved intelligence experts gathering the necessary information and the operations teams prosecuting the target, and each activity fed back into the other.

As I was moving toward retirement from the military, I realized that I enjoy the intelligence and operations cycle. I enjoy hunting bad people and protecting vulnerable people from being exploited. With that combination in mind, I looked for a new frontier and a new enemy I could target that might be of interest to other veterans coming out of special operations.

I worked with a team for nearly 10 years supporting other nonprofits before we decided to venture out on our own and founded Skull Games in 2023. We specialize in providing operational and analytical support to law enforcement, particularly local and regional agencies.

Investigating a crime that is advertised online

With sex trafficking, the crime is advertised online. Men can go to a website and order a girl similar to how they would order a pizza. There is a list of “options” they can order and photos of the victims. Buyers need to contact the victims, which often means going through the trafficker, so there has to be a phone number, an email address or a website to connect through. These are all vulnerabilities that we at Skull Games can take advantage of, and it’s all publicly available information sitting in plain view on the open internet.

Using this open-source intelligence (OSINT), we identify women and children who are being trafficked and identify their exploiters. We package up all

that information and send it to our law enforcement partners for action.

Our task force relies heavily on veterans, but we also created the Survivor-Hunter program for women who have survived the sex trafficking industry. We teach them about OSINT, and they



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Around that time, I became aware of the explosion in commercial sex trafficking in the United States. I was sad and angry about it, and I saw the opportunity for a partnership between law enforcement and a private, nonprofit entity built on the analytical expertise of military veterans.

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use their knowledge from inside the industry to hunt alongside us, which gives them a sense of empowerment and healing.

Breaking the code that traffickers use

During my career in the military, we found that members of Al-Qaeda and ISIS spoke to one another in a very rudimentary code. At Skull Games, we applied those lessons to the sex

trafficking industry and discovered that traffickers also speak in code.

Once we know the acronyms and the emojis and the way they speak, we are able to unravel who's doing what, why, when and where, and we can share all that information with law enforcement. Those indicators sit on the internet, and although they might not be visible to the average viewer, our trained analysts can see them.

There are plenty of false positives and false negatives, but we do our work very systematically to ensure that any information we provide to law enforcement is 100% accurate. ■

Jeff Tiegs is president and founder of Skull Games.

SKULL GAMES

SKULL GAMES IS A 100% VETERAN FOUNDED AND OPERATED 501 (C) (3) NON- PROFIT ORGANIZATION.

OUR 3 FOCUS AREAS

- 1 **IDENTIFYING** predators and their prey 
- 2 **INTERDICTING** predators for pleasure and predators for profit 
- 3 **EMPOWERING** communities with purpose 

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