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Whitefish man sentenced to six years in prison for defrauding Montana investor of \$2.3 million in scheme to fund fake CIA rescue missions

MISSOULA — A Whitefish man who admitted to defrauding a Montana investor of \$2.3 million by falsely claiming to be a former Force Recon Marine and CIA operative who needed funds to run fake CIA rescue missions in foreign countries but instead used the money for personal gain was sentenced today to six years in prison, followed by three years of supervised release, U.S. Attorney Leif M. Johnson said.

Matthew Anthony Marshall, 51, pleaded guilty in November 2021 to wire fraud, money laundering and tax evasion.

U.S. District Judge Donald W. Molloy presided. Judge Molloy also ordered a total of \$3,254,327 restitution, with \$2,355,000 to be paid to the victim, identified as John Doe, and \$899,327 to be paid to the IRS. Judge Molloy accepted a plea agreement in the case and dismissed eight other counts. Marshall was allowed to self-surrender to the Bureau of Prisons.

“Marshall promoted a fantasy world filled with fake missions carried out by fictitious operatives for clandestine agencies in faraway lands for phony purposes. It was all fake, but unfortunately it was paid for with real money from a real victim. And the money never went anywhere except to Marshall’s personal accounts,” U.S. Attorney Johnson said. “The lengths to which Marshall went to carry off this fraud can hardly be overstated. He used a phone application to send fake text messages; he created false emails; he sent the victim prayer beads collected during a fake mission; and he got a tattoo to falsely signify that he was a member of ‘Force Recon,’ etc. The list goes on. I want to thank Assistant U.S. Attorneys Tim Racicot and Ryan Weldon, Trial Attorney S. Derek Shugert, National Security Division, U.S. Department of Justice, and the federal agents who poured countless hours into uncovering this scheme and bringing Marshall to justice,” U.S. Attorney Johnson added.

“Mr. Marshall devised an elaborate scheme layered in lies to defraud the victim,” said Special Agent in Charge Dennis Rice of the Salt Lake City FBI. “Like most fraud cases, Mr. Marshall’s motive was simply greed. The FBI’s Salt Lake City Field Office would like to acknowledge the many special agents across the country, the intelligence community, and witnesses, who worked together to hold this accomplished fraudster and manipulator accountable and seek justice for the victim.”

“Tax evasion and fraud of this magnitude and with this degree of dishonesty and deceit, deserves to be punished. I applaud the investigative efforts of our agents and federal law enforcement partners in uncovering this elaborate scheme and bringing Mr. Marshall to justice,” said Andy Tsui, IRS Criminal Investigation Special Agent in Charge, Denver Field Office. “Today’s sentencing serves as a reminder to others that operating outside of the law and failing to pay taxes on income gained through legal or illegal means has severe consequences.”

In court documents, the government alleged that in Spring 2013, Marshall began working for John Doe. In a scheme that involved numerous lies, fake emails and phony texts, Marshall convinced John

Doe that he was a former CIA operative and a former member of an elite Force Reconnaissance unit in the U.S. Marine Corps who had engaged in covert missions around the world.

Marshall asked John Doe if he would fund “off the books” CIA-backed rescue missions, which Marshall said would involve assault teams he would lead in foreign countries. Based on Marshall’s false representations, John Doe wired Marshall a series of payments, totaling about \$2,355,000, from 2013 to 2016, all under the guise of funding five missions for the CIA as described by Marshall.

As part of the scheme, Marshall forwarded John Doe fake text messages, allegedly from Cofer Black, a former CIA officer who was the director of the CIA Counterterrorist Center, lauding his success. To further the myth that he worked for the CIA under Cofer Black, Marshall obtained fake phone numbers using a phone application, called Burner, and logged two numbers with Virginia area codes into his account as being affiliated with Cofer Black. He then sent himself fake messages, purportedly from Cofer Black. Cofer Black has never been associated with either Virginia number Marshall used with the Burner app and does not know Marshall.

In fact, Marshall was never affiliated with the CIA in any capacity and never served in an elite Force Reconnaissance unit in the Marine Corps. Marshall received an Other Than Honorable discharge from the Marine Corps Reserve in November 1999.

Marshall did not use John Doe’s money for any missions. Rather, Marshall spent the money on personal expenses and loans and gifts to friends and family members. Marshall also failed to report money received from John Doe in 2013 for two purported missions as income on his tax return, resulting in a tax evasion of \$356,756.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Timothy J. Racicot and Ryan G. Weldon and Trial Attorney S. Derek Shugert, National Security Division, U.S. Department of Justice, prosecuted the case, which was investigated by the IRS Criminal Investigation and FBI.

Note: Click to view Marshall Sentencing Memo or visit our website: <https://www.justice.gov/usao-mt/press-release/file/1479846/download>

PACER case reference. 20-32

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