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# Steve Murphy and Javier Pena tell LET what it was like hunting down the world's fiercest narco-trafficker: Pablo Escobar.

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**W**hat would you consider the highlight of a law enforcement career- solving a thirty year- old cold case? Rising up the ranks to chief of police?

But how about taking down the world's most notorious drug kingpin, Pablo Escobar.

Well that's exactly what retired DEA Agents Steve Murphy and Javier Pena did.

Steve and Javier recently published their tell-all book about their adventure chasing down Escobar called *Manhunters: The Hunt for Pablo Escobar* (available on [www.DEAnarcos.com](http://www.DEAnarcos.com)) Their wild journey was also turned into a hit Netflix series *Narcos*, based on real events.

In an exclusive interview, Javier tells LET:

**“I tell people that the chronology is pretty accurate on the show; the timeline, the assassination, a lot of the major events, but the producers have to make it interesting.”**

And the show was certainly interesting. It led to 3 seasons and a spin-off series, *Narcos Mexico*. But the producers had to take some creative liberties to make it more dramatic.



The show portrayed Javier using dirty tactics by unethical means. When asked if his character was accurate, Javier said:

**“If that were all true, I’d be getting out of prison right about now.” Javier continues, “The executive producer called me up and says ‘We know you’re not dirty, but we’re going to make you out to be a little bit on the dirty side-working with Los Pepes, killing people and all the affairs.’ I do wish all the affairs were true.”** Javier said jokingly.

Steve then tells LET:

**“Second thing was the violence. As bad as it was in the Narcos series, in real life, it was much, much worse.”**

And to put Steve and Javier’s mission into perspective, here are some facts according to Britannica.com.

- At the height of Escobar’s cartel, they were making *\$42 million* per week!
- As part of turning himself in, the Colombian government agreed to allow Escobar to build his own prison, which housed a nightclub, soccer field, waterfall, and other personal luxuries.
- Escobar was responsible for 80% of the world’s cocaine.
- It is widely believed that Escobar is responsible for over 4,00 deaths; officers, judges and politicians among them.

But as any cop walking the beat knows, the situation on the frontlines is hardly as accurate as the upper echelon believes.

Steve said:

**“We attribute 15, maybe 20 thousand murders to Escobar. Popeye, Escobar’s main Sicario says that number is more like 50 thousand people.”**

As a fan, I also felt the violence portrayed in the series was worse in real life, but I didn’t realize how bad it really was. Some of the things Steve and Javier said were mind-blowing.

Steve said:

**“General Maza Marquez was the head of DAS (The Administrative Department of Security) and Escobar’s prime target. He (Escobar) filled a bus with 500 kilos of dynamite, parked it in front of the DAS headquarters and blew the damn thing up... left a humongous crater. The chassis of the bus was found on a building a couple of blocks away. A perfect example of the viciousness of Escobar and the fact that he killed 100 people with that bomb.”**

Steve then said: **“If Pablo wanted to kill you, he would not only come after you, he come up to your wife, your children, your parents, anybody that he could find associated with, he would take everybody out.”**

Although Escobar himself was cruel and evil, you can't forget about the influence he had on the younger population and what he turned some of them into.

Javier said:

**“I once talked to a 15 year- old Sicario, he said Escobar has given him another life by giving him money. He then told me ‘I’m going to kill whoever the boss wants me to because that’s my life and I owe him even though I’ll be dead by 22 or 23.’”**

Javier then said:

**“Escobar put a bounty on police officers and another 15 year- old thug nonchalantly said ‘I’ve already killed 10 police officers, at a hundred bucks a head, I get paid at the end of the day.’ That’s the attitude the Sicarios had... multiply that by 500 Sicarios.”**

With all that violence and death Steve and Javier were embroiled in, one would have to assume their daily job was extremely dangerous.

According to Steve:

**“You had to travel with your gun to your chest ready to engage targets because two riders on a motorcycle was one of their favorite ways to assassinate people.”**

And Javier said:

**“One of the most dangerous parts were the car bombs. He (Escobar) would put them right outside our base... a lot of cops got killed because of them. We passed by and a couple missed us, but you hear that noise, that bomb, that sound- that was the scariest part.”**

Javier also said, **“After we started a reward for Pablo Escobar, one of the dumbest things we did was we’d meet informants for the first time at a bus station in Medellin...I was always scared it was going to be a hit on us.”**

But Steve and Javier weren't alone. They had some of the worlds most elite fighting force alongside them, the Army's Delta Force and Navy Seals.

Steve said:

**“Navy Seals are the studs of the world. If we're ever kidnapped, that's who I want to come and get us because I've seen them operate.”**



Steve and Javier got along very well with all of the special operations soldiers and Seals, despite being on two different wave lengths.

Steve said:



**“The difference between us and them (US military) is they follow orders and we violated internal DEA policies.”**

Violating policy is not usually encouraged, but Steve and Javier were in uncharted territory- fighting narcoterrorism. They had to get the job done somehow and now have created the blueprint for fighting narcotraffickers around the world.

Much like today’s issues cops are faced with, politics got in the way.

Steve said:

**“If Delta and Seals have been allowed to do the job and go out of base, we firmly believe that we would have had Escobar captured or dead in less than three months, but politics got in the way. The bureaucracy cost thousands of people their lives.”**

Capturing or killing Escobar was no easy task. He had a strong security system, virtually unlimited funding and lot of supporters in Medellin.

Javier said:

**“We came close so many times, especially when he first escaped his so-called prison. We had him located several times, and we’d go in helicopters- the only way in jungles- but people would warn him. He heard the noise. We would get there and his coffee was still warm. We barely missed him so many times.”**

## **Los Pepes**

The subject of Los Pepes was unavoidable.

Escobar killed two of his partners while he was in his personally built prison, *La Cathedral*. The wife of one of the victims, Judy Moncada, teamed up with Don Burnas- and Los Pepes was born, which stood for *persecuted by Pablo Escobar*.

Funded by the Cali Cartel, Los Pepes’ mission was to kill Escobar and everyone he’s associated with- which they did. They used brutal tactics, much like Escobar, because they didn’t fall under the morality of the legal system.

According to Steve, the Attorney General of Colombia assigned Don Burnas to help them after the incident in La Cathedral.

Steve said:

**“We went to Colonel Martinez and said ‘who is this guy (Don Burnas)?’ But he was authorized to work with us and the Search Bloc.”**

Javier told LET:

**“Los Pepes is one of those sore spots. Don Burnas was helping us out with intelligence. However, we did not know he was setting off a lot of bombs, trying to kill Escobar and his family.”**

Steve then said:

**“Everyone else knew who Don Burnas was except us. After Escobar’s death, we found out he was the head of Los Pepes! That was very eye opening when I found out because they are stone cold killers!” Steve said, “I’m sure they would’ve had no problem putting a bullet in our heads because they’ve done it to a lot of other people.”**

## **Mexican Cartels**

The focus on the war on drugs has moved to Mexican Cartels, who are just as brutal as the days of Escobar’s reign.



Javier said:

**“We’ve all seen the photos of bodies hanging off bridges, when they kill people, the heads being rolled onto a dance floor. They’re vicious but I think the Colombians were more violent.” Javier continues, “They (Mexican cartels) caught a guy stealing dope from them. They had his whole family in a room, the 10-year-old daughter... they made him watch, they opened his eyes, killed her in front of him.”**

Steve added:

**“Some of the Mexican authorities that we work with later in our careers, former Attorney General down there has been indicted here in the United States for taking millions and millions of dollars in payoffs from the drug traffickers in Mexico. It's one of the most horrendous situations in the world right now.”**

Drugs still continue to cross into the United States and there is a plan in place to curtail drug smuggling- going after the traffickers and the people that support it.

Steve then said:

**“You may be familiar with the 959 and 960 statutes that allows the United States to go after people that haven't set foot in the United States. You have to establish venue- that's one of the primary elements of any crime.”**

Although the war on drugs will never end, law enforcement agencies around the world have to continue to fight and reinforce the notion that if you traffic drugs, you will get caught. But that won't stop criminals.

As every reader here knows, if there's money to be made, there will be criminals out there trying to get their share.



Steve Murphy and Javier Pena now spend their time doing interviews and promoting their book *Manhunters: How We Took Down Pablo Escobar*. They also offer speaking engagements, which of course is limited due to the pandemic, but they expect to get back to it eventually.

Steve and Javier are offering all LET readers an autographed and personalized copy of their book, *Manhunters*, along with a special 20% discount. Visit their website [www.DEAnarcos.com](http://www.DEAnarcos.com) and enter discount code LET2020.

*About the writer: Eddie Molina is a leadership professional, blogger and author. He voluntarily writes articles to keep the law enforcement, first responder and military community informed on important issues. For more go to [www.eddiemolina.com](http://www.eddiemolina.com)*