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Exclusive Interview: Retired DEA Agents Steve Murphy and Javier Pena Talk to Blue About Hunting Down Pablo Escobar

By Eddie Molina (www.eddiemolina.com)

When it comes to television shows, I'm very picky. I keep a watchful eye out for flaws, inconsistencies, unlikely coincidences- anything that will make me shun the show and give up on it.

But every once in a while I come across a gem that is perfect in every way. My favorite are shows based on actual events.

And that show is Netflix's *Narcos*.

Narcos is the true story of the DEA's hunt for the world's first narco-trafficker- Pablo Escobar, one of the most ruthless drug lords in modern history.

The Blue Magazine sat down with the two retired lead DEA agents responsible for hunting Escobar: Steve Murphy and Javier Pena. We discussed everything from the accuracy of *Narcos*, the extreme right wing group Los Pepes, their new book *Manhunters: How We Took Down Pablo Escobar* and much more.

The first thing I wanted to know was the accuracy of *Narcos*.

Javier Pena tells Blue, "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."



Javier's character in the series was pretty bad-a**; a booze-chugging womanizer who threw policy and morality right out of the window. But I wondered how accurate that was, especially considering his role as a law enforcer.

Javier said, "If that were all true, I'd be getting out of prison right about now. 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.'"

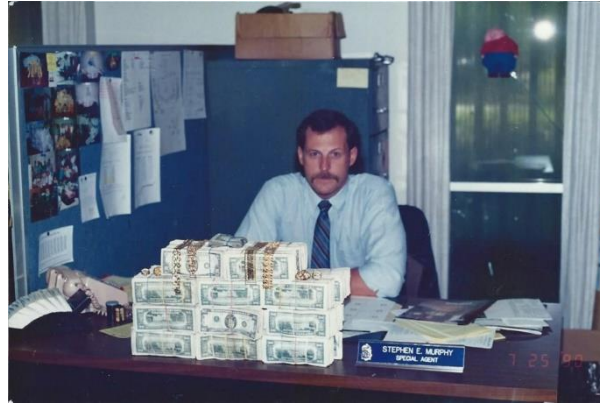
Javier laughed.



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

If you google *how many people deaths was Escobar responsible for*, it will say 4,000. But as any patrolman walking the beat knows, the situation on the frontlines is far different then what upper brass realize.

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.”



That’s a lot of souls.

Among the most well- known atrocities Escobar was credited for were blowing up a commercial airliner that killed over 100 people in an attempt to assassinate a presidential candidate. The other gruesome incident involved a bus loaded with 500 kilos of dynamite that destroyed a city block and also killed over a 100 people.

“The chassis of the bus was found on a building a couple of blocks away. A perfect example of the viciousness of Escobar.” Steve continued, “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 you!”

Escobar was not afraid to spend money to further his agenda... and his ruthless style.

Javier 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.”

The series was so successful, it lead to a 3rd fictional season and a spin-off series, Narcos: Mexico, which is just as thrilling.

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... 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.”

Steve and Javier were not alone. In addition to the Colombian police force, they were working with US Military special operations, Navy Seals and Delta Force. But much like police work today, politics got in the way of the mission.

Steve tells Blue, “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.”

Javier adds, “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 (*persecuted by Pablo Escobar*)

The subject of Los Pepes was unavoidable.

After Escobar killed his closest partner and friend, Kiko Moncada, his wife, Judy Moncada teamed up with Don Burnas and created Los Pepes. The extreme right wing vigilante group Los Pepes were funded by Escobar’s rival, the Cali cartel, and they were just as ruthless as Escobar.

Los Pepes’ main objective was to kill Pablo Escobar and everyone he was associated with. They were quite effective because they didn’t fall under the morality of the legal system.

But there was another reason they were successful. According to Steve, the Attorney General of Colombia assigned Don Burnas to help them after Escobar killed Kiko Moncada

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 then said, “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.”

“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! 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.” Steve said.

Mexican Cartels

The focus of 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 continued, "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 but there is a plan in place to curtail drug smuggling- going after the traffickers and the people that support it. But as any law enforcement officer knows, you can never stop the flow of drugs. As long as there is money to be made, crafty criminals will find a way to get it.

Steve Murphy and Javier Pena are both retired from the DEA and now spend their time doing interviews, public speaking engagements and promoting their book *Manhunters: How We Took Down Pablo Escobar*.

You can get in on the action. For a limited time you can order a signed, personalized copy of their book by visiting their website, www.DEAnarcos.com

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