

EXCLUSIVE
BY PETER SWINDON

THE former Royal Marines Commando behind a new Channel 4 documentary series about South American drug cartels has revealed how he persuaded cocaine-snorting narcos and Pablo Escobar's favourite hitman to appear in front of the cameras.

Aldo Kane, from Ayrshire, was tasked with setting up meetings between some of the most trigger-happy drug traffickers in the world and Jason Fox, the star of Meet the Drug Lords: Inside the Real Narcos, a three-part series which began on Thursday.

Kane and Fox, who served in the Royal Marines together, had to contend with armed helicopters, gun-toting marines, bloodthirsty sicarios and headless corpses during their tour of Mexico, Colombia and Peru.

And Kane, 40, who runs Vertical Planet – a safety company for film crews in remote, hostile and extreme environments – was sent in before filming began to make contact with killers and convince them to appear on the show.

He said: “For each of the countries, I would fly out early with the director, meet our local fixer and then start to make contact with our contributors. That would involve clearing routes, checking hotels, meeting hitmen for lunch and cartel capos for dinner.

“Everything we did in every country was always 100 per cent under the watchful eye of the cartels. One step in the wrong direction and we would be killed. Once everything was set up, Jason and the cameraman would arrive in the country and we would start filming.”

Fox and Kane have been friends for more than two decades, with both men joining the Royal Marines at the age of 16. They served together in Afghanistan, where Kane was a sniper. Fox said: “We sat down every day before going to film a sequence to assess the risk, figure out what could go wrong, and what we could do to mitigate any risks. Myself and Aldo, who was behind the scenes – a very good friend of mine, an ex-Marine who does a lot of this stuff – would work out where we would hide or take cover if we needed to, what to do with the rest of the crew, that sort of thing.

“We wanted to push this thing a little bit further than most series, but without making it to the point where we would all die and everybody would be sad and we’d have no series.”

Kane said: “Over a period of 20 years we have developed a special friendship, one that’s been built on trust in extreme environments. That’s why Jason asked me to watch his back.”

The first episode saw Fox meet a Sinaloa cartel lieutenant in the jungle as low-flying armed helicopters full of marines hovered overhead looking for movement.

“It wasn’t long before we were seen and the marines were on their way,” said Kane. “As this happened a huge electrical storm broke, it separated Foxy [Jason Fox] and me on separate

Lunch with hitmen, dinner with cartel capos, corpses, copters and gun-toting maniacs: Meet the Scot who fixed it with the narcos

sides of the lake. Foxy and the crew were on the safe side in our vehicle, I was left on the side with the narcos.

“We were all hiding in a truck and they were doing huge amounts of cocaine while they waited for the rain to stop. It was so heavy that I couldn’t leave and had to sit in the truck with them.

“The storm broke and I was able to escape to the other side of the river and meet up with Foxy and the crew. Ten minutes down the road we bumped into eight Humvees, each with eight marines on board. The same storm that trapped me on the wrong side of the lake had also blown a tree down and stopped them in their tracks. It

probably saved us being caught up in a firefight.”

Many of the narcos appeared on camera with face coverings but others didn’t wear masks. Kane explained that these criminals are so feared they are “above the law”. Others were motivated by their over-inflated egos, said Kane.

Kane and Fox also shadowed the authorities in the first episode, joining Mexican police at the scene of a brutal murder. Kane said: “We were called out to a boy who had been chopped up and dumped on a roundabout. He was young and had been completely dismembered. Foxy and I were just a few feet away when the head rolled

“I could sleep well at night knowing we had two elite soldiers who had survived plenty of scrapes together on location

out the bag and came to a stop. The morgue in Acapulco had space for 15 bodies. When we were there, there were more than 100 bodies and body parts crammed in, and the fridges were not working. You could smell the death from two blocks away.

“Mexico is a full-on warzone with thousands of people being killed every month, all in the name of drugs.”

The next episode, to be broadcast on Thursday, will see Fox come face-to-face with Pablo Escobar’s hitman. Escobar was the boss of the Colombian Medellin Cartel, which was responsible for the deaths of thousands of people, including hundreds of police officers, before he was killed in 1993.



Top, Kane takes Jason Fox, left, to meet narcos, gets familiar, above, with Pablo Escobar's former hitman, the gun-toting John 'Popeye' Jairo Velasquez, and survives a 15-ft metal shutter that stopped inches from the Scot's head, above right. Cocca leaf farmers in Colombia haul the crop, right



Kane said: “Foxy and I spent three weeks in some of the most dangerous areas. We were led there by Popeye, Pablo Escobar’s trusted general and personal assassin. He has killed over 250 people himself and was responsible for many thousands more.

“In the main square in one of the locations we were filming in, we heard shots fired and a man hit the ground. This happened just a few feet away from our hotel, in the same restaurant where we had just had breakfast.”

The closest Kane came to death in South America was when a 15-foot metal shutter was catapulted at a car he was travelling in.

He said: “It stopped two inches from

my head. It would have decapitated me in an instant. It shook us up, but we were on our way to a meth lab and had to keep going.”

Kane has previously appeared on screen alongside naturalist Steve Backshall and the pair are working together on a new series called Expedition, which will see them take on unclimbed peaks in Greenland and try cave diving in the Mexican Cenotes.

He will also be seen in the Discovery Channel series First Man Out later this year. He said: “It’s a no-holds-barred survival race through the mangrove swamps of Borneo – one of the hardest challenges this year and one of the most inhospitable places on the planet.”

“Everything we did was always 100% under the watchful eye of the cartels. One wrong step and we would be killed

Kane’s work with Vertical Planet has taken him to more than 100 countries this year alone and he has previously worked with A-list actors Tom Hardy, Henry Cavill and Adrien Brody.

Stuart Cabb, executive producer of Meet the Drug Lords: Inside the Real Narcos, said Kane was the “ideal choice” for the show.

Cabb explained: “When you are making a series about drug cartels where most of your contributors are criminals, probably high on their product and packing guns, situations can easily get out of hand. So we needed someone to watch Jason’s back while he focused on presenting.

“Aldo was the ideal choice. Jason

knew him from their military days and they trust each other completely. As the executive producer and the person liable at the end of the day for the safety of this production, I could almost sleep well at night knowing we had two elite soldiers who had survived plenty of scrapes together on location.”

Kane has survived war zones, abseiled into live volcanoes and taken part in a record-breaking row across the Atlantic, but he admitted Meet the Drug Lords: Inside the Real Narcos was “was one of the most dangerous” challenges he’s faced.

He joked: “After filming Narcos, it may be a while before I accept another invitation from Foxy.”