RAI DUE e CLIPPER MEDIA present:

THE SQUADRON
Calabrian Hunters

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produced by

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thanks to

COMANDO GENERALE ARMA DEI CARABINIERI

A factual TV Series in four 50'episodes

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in collaboration with

Rai 2

Region of Calabria

Fondazione Calabria Film Commission

Lazio Region– Regional Fund for Cinema and Audiovisual

The Special Armed Forces, Helicopter Squadron of Calabria Hunters, was created in 1991 in the southern Italian region of Calabria, close to Sicily, in order to stop the multiple actions of what has become, the fiercest Mafia in the world, called ‘Ndrangheta. It’s members called ‘Ndranghetisti started by kidnapping people to finance the purchase of arms and became more and more powerful in the international narco-traffic.
The Squadron has been fighting a daily war on the field, penetrating the woods of a difficult region, were everyone knows each other, but “nobody has seen or heard anything”. Small poor villages where workers, farmers and shepherds, act through ancient primitive unwritten rules and rituals. An unbreakable structure of strong family ties in a tight community. Members of the ‘Ndrangheta, still living or with direct ties to the region, control a global holding company with deep connections in five continents, from Germany to Sydney, from Toronto to Johannesburg, from Dubai to Hong Kong, with money laundering from narco-traffic, recycling of toxic waste, human smuggling, prostitution, construction.

The Calabrian Hunters, are now universally recognised as a unique force to fight the ‘Ndrangheta from it’s roots. Super trained men able to survive 24/7 on the field, above 100 degrees and below 0 Fahrenheit. 8000 arrests, 275 fugitives captured, 400 bunkers discovered. We follow them in a long strenuous, continuous daily fight: the discovery and destruction of illegal marijuana plantations, the patient search and attack to capture some of it’s members. But most of all we gradually learn directly from the fighters, the techniques used to fight mobsters, like wild animals in their burrows, who are hiding all their lives, in unpretentious hidden places. The total opposite of what we saw in Hollywood movies. Apart from some action scenes and and patient search in hidden paths, we are left with the humanity of some humble hunters and the monstrous idea of the illegal work of their prey.

The **'Ndràngheta** (Italian pronunciation: [(n)ˈdraŋgeta]) is a Mafia-type organized crime group based in Calabria, Italy. Despite not being as famous abroad as the Sicilian Mafia, and having been considered more rural than the Neapolitan Camorra and the Apulian Sacra Corona Unita, the 'Ndrangheta became the most powerful crime syndicate in Italy in the late 1990s and early 2000s. While commonly tied together with the Sicilian Mafia, the 'Ndrangheta operates independently from them, though there is contact between the two, due to the geographical proximity and shared culture and language between Calabria and Sicily. A US diplomat estimated that the organization's narcotics trafficking, extortion and money laundering activities accounted for at least 3% of Italy's GDP in 2010. Since the 1950s, the organization has spread towards Northern Italy and worldwide. According to a 2013 "Threat Assessment on Italian Organised Crime" of Europol, the 'Ndrangheta is among the richest and most powerful organised crime groups at a global level.

FIRST EPISODE - PLANTATIONS

The HELICOPTER SQUADRON CALABRIA HUNTERS is presented, through the two main activities that distinguish their daily work: search for fugitives and the discovery and eradication of hemp plantations. We follow them down into an underground bunker extended for three hundred square meters, able to hide fugitives. Then, up into the Aspromonte slopes to an observation point to study the movements of a fugitive's family. Lastly in a hidden plantation of hemp of over six thousand plants, protected by traps. The three meters high plants, are then burnt in order to send a clear message to the whole district and to the ‘Ndrangeta affiliates.

SECOND EPISODE - UPSIDE DOWN

At night they go down into the sewers of the town of PLATI, looking for the fugitive from the first episode. They go back to the tunnels, bunkers and houses. At the same time, they hunt the people who helped the fugitive, on top of the mountains, inside stables and abandoned houses. In this episode, the'NDRANGHETA, is explained in its structure, its branches, in the power exercised through terror. They find hiding places and bunkers and take part in searches of houses and confiscation of war weapons.

THIRD EPISODE - THE GENIUS

The town of POLSI, sanctuary of 'NDRANGHETA, with its celebrations of liturgies that have officiated the distribution of power roles within the gangs. Searches of the homes of affiliates in San Luca. The arrest of a drug dealer. The confiscation of the "sacred cows": herds owned by the gangs, left in private land as an arrogant control of the territory. We follow the search for the fugitive.

FOURTH EPISODE - LOST HORIZONS

Capture of the fugitive. The operation is terminated successfully with the Hunters celebrating with a barbecue, where they share their experience. Then they fly in an helicopter, with new searches and the discovery of a giant plantation hidden in the thickest bush: twenty thousand plants of hemp. In Gioia Tauro arrest of a narco-trafficker, with clear ties in Colombia.

SCENARIO

Mist rises through the leaves scattered on the ground of the Aspromonte woods. We climb up into the mountain. Boots slide into the mud. Sweat dribbles through the eyebrows along the face, on the t-shirt. The Calabrian Hunters are moving quickly. Fast pace, garments of the same color of oaks. They are looking for a bunker through impervious and silent mountains. Deployed in a green hell, camouflaged in nature, they communicate with bird-like sounds. City of Vibo Valentia, in the barracks, they meet at three o'clock in the morning. Then an hour and a half journey by Jeep. Some sleep against the window, others observe abandoned residential areas through the mist and skeletons of cars chewed to the bone. A piece of Italy adrift, no lifeboat, no beacon to light the coast.
Climbing hairpin turns, the driver has to drive fast: they have to get to the collection point before sunrise. They have to avoid being seen at all costs. They reach the other members of the Squadron and share some ideas. A few push ups to stretch their back, some dried fruit and bottles of water and off they go. It’s a rough walk, a struggle for even their well trained bodies. The Squadron is divided into three research teams. They hunt for a bunker that could be buried underneath a rock, in the trunk of a tree, inside the mirror of the wizard of Oz.
The fugitives of 'Ndrangheta are like sick dogs. They totally disappear from the world, under dust and frost. The hunters hunt them, in a constant state of alert. They question people cautiously, they knock at all doors they find. They do not sleep at night, they suffer stomach pains, they search the Aspromonte mountains as if it is their only reason to live. If they do not catch the mobs, their meal tastes stale, their family is not enough to soothe the frustration.
The last rogue caught in the net is a medal of honor on their jacket, a star from a horrifying Italian circus: Ernesto Fazzalari. Boss of his own mafia clan, famous killer. A wild fugitive for twenty years, a recognized adversary for our squadron. Our guys spent every hour of overtime, canceled all days of rest and week ends, canceled the word holidays from their personal dictionary.
"I spent the last six years of my life behind him” says the Marshal, head of the Falcon Squad 11. The Squadron is divided by teams. Each team operates in its own territory. The Marshal has climbed every night into the forest. Checked kilometers of trails in an attempt to find a footprint in the mud. Stood still for hours under a bush, with a pair of binoculars glued to his eyes. He and the men of the department have increasingly tightened their grip. They are very close. They have already discovered a hidden shelter where he was hiding. It’s clear that the prey is not too far. The operational field is restricted to a tangle of trees and shrubs that do not even allow light to get through. Waiting is a tactic that always wins. Coordinating with the other departments, organizing to perfection with detailed tasks for each soldier, working with acumen and profession, and hoping that the “too sure of himself boss’ will make a mistake or does not notice that he is being followed.

The Marshall continues:”I could have been in operations in other areas, like the discovery of hemp plantations, raids, arrests: but I always came back to him. Fazzalari got into my veins ".
His weak point turned out to be his girlfriend. 41 years old, beautiful, a typical mafia woman. Always close to her Ernesto, both dammed in their lives. Always ready to reach him in the most remote places. They wanted a child but lost one.
By following her the hunters found him, one morning at sunrise, in their bed, in a hidden cottage, in the middle of nowhere, in the woods.
The Hunter Squadron surrounds the area, the Territorial Command directs the action, another special unit blows the armored door of the house and takes the boss by surprise. He will dream his hiding place for the next thirty years in prison.
"We got there deep into the night, driving with no lights on. Nobody saw us, no one heard us". The Squadron Commander remembers it like a scene in a war film… “We parked the vehicles, and continued with night vision gogglers. We did not expect that thick fog surrounding us”. Rawling in a bush, ascending the mountain in search of the damned bunker.
"You could not see a thing, walking in a single line, each one holding on the shoulder of the next one. Two miles walking like blind men ". Pride transpires from a half smile. "In those conditions, it took longer than expected to get closer to the target. On the other hand, the fog muffles any noise ". Reaching the cottage, the Squadron allows no escape route. “We reached our target". At this stage, the final action, the final step of years of tailing, cross checking, nights spent under the stars..
"I lost my son's first tooth and almost all his birthdays. Major arguments with my wife. And I feel guilty about my absence. But there is only one way to do this job. To see the mob’s face, his arms behind his back, speachless. It was totally worth it ! ”. The young commander of the Falco Team reaches his men a few yards ahead. They find a plastic pipe buried in a pile of mud where the gangs hide rifles and guns.

PRODUCTION NOTES - NARRATIVE PROJECT

A television series of great scenic impact focused on the real activities of the Calabrian Hunters Squadron, a special armed forces fighting the ‘Ndrangheta, the most fierceful mafia in the world.
Hunting for fugitives. The destruction of hemp plantations. The arrest of the affiliates to the 'ndrine (Mafia groups). The search in farmhouses. The search for hidden underground bunkers. House-to-house raids. Hiding in caves to observe actions in the towns of Platì, San Luca, Africo. The confiscation of unregistered illegal weapons. The recovery of large amounts of money buried in the countryside. The discovery of loads of drugs, both refined in Calabria and from abroad, to be distributed through the port of Gioia Tauro on the European traffic routes.
Focusing on each episode on the main characters. Discovering their private side, in order to understand the men inside the camouflage suit. Offering the viewer an opportunity to empathize with the Hunter, following his obsessive search, climbing a mountain, jumping from an helicopter, hiding along a stream waiting for the farmer when he goes to water his hemp plants.
A FACTUAL series set in a real war fought between two opposite armies within the same State. A silent fight, with rare echoes but impressive international economic, political and social consequences. All based on investigations, analysis, observation, arrests, chases, fights, interrogations, observation posts and stakeouts.
Police operations with methods similar to an army in battle.
A tense nervous story, developed on various filming levels: not only the mere observation of what happens before our eyes. But also the possibility of being inside the story, together with the Hunters, sharing their action in new events as they happen, feeling sorry for having gotten too late to a place or enjoying the success of the capture of a boss, hidden in a hole at the bottom of a vineyard.
The 'Ndrangheta is now one of the largest criminal organizations in the world, a subsidiary and partner of the great Latin American trusts.
A central element to the entire European and Asian drug trafficking chain, as well as a money laundering machine for various types of crime. The most striking fact is that this whole criminal universe, traced on the transoceanic routes clearly visible on a computer screen, is controlled and managed by a few dozen "sheperds" in tiny houses of small villages in Calabria.

“Talk about the Mafia. Talk on the Radio, talk on TV, talk on newspapers.
But talk about it.”
Paolo Borsellino
Italian Judge killed by the Mafia

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