

It only takes 60 Minutes to ban freedom

It only takes a liberal dose of journalistic opportunism to corrupt the truth and enslave citizens.

Does that sound a little harsh? Do you think such talk is not constructive? Read on!

On the evening of Sunday January 9, 2005, in the CBS program "60 Minutes", Ed Bradley ran a segment titled "The Big Gun". He ran with a theme called long ago by Tom Diaz of the Violence Policy Center (VPC). He ran with it for over 17 minutes of Sunday evening prime time broadcasting. What was so critical in this story that a significant amount of story telling was necessary?

It appears that Tom Diaz, the antagonist in this story, along with his VPC, is afraid of Big Guns. Ronnie Barrett, of Barrett Firearms company, is the protagonist and he answered the questions and charges. To Tom and Ed, the Big Gun today is any rifle that will fire the .50BMG round. Tomorrow it may be a lesser gun, but right now it is the .50BMG, a cartridge nearly 100 years old. To Ronnie the .50BMG is quite a different thing.

The CBS Big Gun story is about fear, and because CBS is willing to accept what they are told by VPC, and accept it without checking the facts or the perception of the issue presented in the story, they have a made for prime time fear drenched story for the public.

More to the point, CBS can also put itself in the position of trying to do something about these fearful things, because it is now law making season. Right now, across the country, almost all of the state legislatures are meeting to begin an annual legislative session. Laws like the recently enacted California ban on Big Guns, which opened the story, may be on the minds of many anti-gun legislators - or so they should be according to VPC and CBS. You'd think CBS would be careful about taking politically motivated stories like this from some outside source and running with them. Look at Dan Rather, he is still running, but not where he or CBS would like.

If CBS, or anyone else for that matter, thinks that being "fair" is accomplished by giving the "other side" in a story a chance to speak, they are wrong. They are especially wrong when the protagonist in this case, Ronnie Barrett, can not provide a point by point rebuttal to the antagonist.

One case in point stands out. It was near the end of the Big Guns show. Tom Diaz was stating, forcefully and repeatedly, that Big Guns should at least be controlled, they should be "registered" as should their owners. He says that the government needs to know where the Big Guns are, to assure that they are not being used by terrorists. Those he might register are the lawful purchasers, the same ones who went through a NICS check to purchase the firearm.

We are reminded that California had just jumped clear over registration and went straight to a "ban" of future purchase and possession of this particular Big Gun in that state. Ed Bradley asks Diaz, "Aren't records kept when a gun is sold?". Tom starts to answer. He

delays a second, he looks pained, he fidgets and moves in his seat and then he stumbles through his short answer by saying, "The answer - is no!".

Now Ed may not know the federal law and he may not know the laws of the states, but by the way the question was asked and by the way the answer was presented, by saying "The answer - is no!", it was clear that Tom Diaz was uncomfortable, or at least he was cleverly disguising the truth (perhaps that makes it not a lie). You expect his response to be followed up by an expansion and an explanation in a more lengthy and detailed answer. You'd expect the questioner to dig into the answer and ask for an expansion.

That never happened and a cut to a comment by Ed about the NICS background check records and how they used to be kept for a long time but now had to be erased within 24 hours, implies to the audience that the NICS records is what is meant by registration. If Ed arrived at that by his conversation with Tom, then he was misled.

Every time a firearm is purchased from a dealer, yes even the Big Gun that Tom claims is as easy to buy as a .22 rifle, a Federal ATF Form 4473 is completed with full information about the firearm and purchaser. In some states for some Big Guns, additional state paper work and thereby "registration", is required. The forms are kept by the dealer, and in some cases by the state, and the data is accessible to any law enforcement officer when ever it may be needed for investigation of suspected crime. Ed didn't ask about form 4473.

Case in point. You may recall that there was a shooting incident in the Washington DC area a while ago, loosely called the Beltway Sniper case. In the four weeks that the criminal activity was ongoing and being investigated, law enforcement officers visited the area gun shops and copied the ATF form 4473 for every potential firearm that COULD have been used in that crime. They searched the de-facto registration files. They were not looking for a particular firearm, but for EVERY one that COULD have been used in the crime.

They then contacted the owners of the firearms and attempted to inspect and test the firearms. Many were tested, but the crime gun and the criminal was not found. The effort was 100% ineffective, a waste of time. But, had they been looking for all Big Guns, because some law had been changed and Big Guns are now prohibited and they are to be confiscated, their efforts would have been 100% effective. They would have found all the owners of the legally purchased Big Guns, those who went through NICS checks and forms 4473, would now be required to surrender.

This is no hypothetical argument. Post-facto bans and confiscations have already occurred in California and New York City. Criminals, however, would not be threatened or found by such efforts, they generally do not purchase firearms from licensed dealers, they do not fill out paperwork or they find illegal ways around providing true information for such paperwork. Why do you think they are called criminals? They do not obey the law.

Now back to the question and Toms reply, "The answer is no!". Ed Bradley did not ask the obvious followup questions. Did he not know the questions and just forget them, or did he not have enough time? That's sloppy work. Did he know the question and the answer and know that Tom Diaz was lying or disguising the truth and just go along with Toms story? That's dishonesty on Ed's part.

The full answer is; By the letter of the law, there is no all encompassing federal firearms registration program. The law prohibits such a registry. However, there are federal and

state "registrations" for Class III and other regulated and taxed firearms, a small percentage of firearms. There is de-facto "registration" in the federal and state paperwork that is kept on file in various locations, as it has been since 1968. Those records have significant information on the purchaser and firearm purchased from any licensed seller.

Then, there is the NICS system Ed Bradley mentioned. It allows interested parties to check the criminal background on purchasers, to be assured they are not criminals, so that a firearm can be sold. It was not designed to be a registration file. Indeed, federal law PROHIBITS the collection of information for the purpose of "registration" of firearms and their owners.

The concept of registration of firearms and owners, is NOT an effective tool for general crime investigation. It is so ineffective and wasteful of genuine resources that registration can easily said to be counterproductive to crime prevention. Registration would collect millions or records from law abiding citizens, not criminals. The criminals will just ignore it and will be hidden, if at all present, in the growing hay stack of data. Cases in point are the Maryland and New York Ballistic Fingerprint programs. But that is another story.

Registration is only useful for confiscation and Tom knows it. Ed probably knows it too. England and Australia and Canada surely know it because they are now experiencing the cost of registration and confiscation. The cost is measured in time, money and lives. The registration call was made by Tom, over and over. 'If we can just register these Big Guns and their owners'. It is his planned first good step.

Then Ed asks his question, 'aren't they already registered', and Tom is caught. He can answer yes, effectively they are, but then he would have no fear to sell. Instead, he says, "The answer is no!" and implies there is no registration. He ducks the truth. Ed blithely blends into a short comment about NICS and thereby camouflages the actual answer and deflects the question.

There are many other problems with the 60 Minutes Big Gun story, and I'll get to them another day. To be fair, Ed Bradley asks Tom if other rifles, something less than Big Guns, are also dangerous? Ronnie Barrett has made this point when he said, 'it is not good to shoot anything at airplanes, and it's illegal too'. Tom just sticks to his points about terrorists and Big Guns doing harm. Did Ed really want to ask the fair question and clarify the issue about any gun being potentially a tool for harm? Did Tom want to say no, the Big Guns are the problem regardless of who has them? Perhaps Tom and Ed both realize that they can only take one small step at a time and that doing away with Big Guns today, and then lesser guns tomorrow is the right course of action. It works for boiling frogs.

You'd think CBS would be more careful about things like this.

This is just one item in the world of gun owners, there are a million others. I'll get to more as time goes on.

Bob Culver, MCSM; January 11, 2005

See the 60 Minutes program "The Big Gun" on the web at the web site;

<<http://www.wsu.edu/~ryjones/60minutes-50cal-lieslieslies.wmv>>