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SHOW: 60 Minutes

DATE: January 9, 2005

THE BIG GUN

ED BRADLEY, co-host:

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger decided there's a weapon that's too dangerous to be in the hands of private citizens. This past week a law went into effect in California banning that weapon. It's the .50-caliber rifle, the Rolls-Royce of sniper rifles. It's a big gun, a favorite of armies around the world, and it's still available in 49 states in this country to anyone with a clean record over the age of 18. It is, without a doubt, the most powerful weapon you can buy--powerful enough to kill a man or pierce armor from more than a mile away.

(Footage of people shooting rifles)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) Here's the .50-caliber rifle in action. As a Senate report put it, a bullet from this gun, even at one and a half miles, crashes into a target with more energy than a bullet from Dirty Harry's famous it was invented 22 years ago in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, by Ronnie Barrett.

This gun was your idea?

Mr. RONNIE BARRETT: Yes, sir.

BRADLEY: You invented it.

Mr. BARRETT: Yes sir, when I was 20...

BRADLEY: Where'd you come up with the idea?

Mr. BARRETT: Well, I was just a 26-year-old kid and didn't know any better.

(Footage of a gun workshop)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) He knew enough to design a weapon that today is used by the armed forces of 35 different countries.

Are these the guns here that we're talking about?

Mr. BARRETT: Well, this is one of the .50-cals.

BRADLEY: Uh-huh.

Mr. BARRETT: This is the semi-automatic. This is

BRADLEY: Mm-hmm.

Mr. BARRETT: This was the--the first--the first rifle that I designed.

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Docket No. <u>50/413/414-02A</u>	Official Exh. No. <u>SEC-A</u>
In the matter of <u>Duke Cataula</u>	
Staff _____	IDENTIFIED <u>1/13/05</u>
Applicant _____	RECEIVED _____
Intervenor <u>✓</u>	REJECTED <u>1/13/05</u>
Cont'g Off'r _____	
Contractor _____	DATE _____
Other _____	Witness _____

Reporter \_\_\_\_\_

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BRADLEY: Mm-hmm.

Mr. BARRETT: And--and has been our most popular mo--rifle. This is the one that the U--United States Army ordered. Matter of fact, this is a US Army rifle here.

BRADLEY: Mm-hmm.

(Footage of a rifle being made; Barrett in his office)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) Even though the .50-caliber rifle is a military-grade weapon, federal gun laws treat it like any other hunting rifle, and Barrett can sell the gun to civilians. He says he needs to, because military sales vary widely from year to year.

Mr. BARRETT: If it weren't for the civilian sales, I wouldn't be here. There's a lot of defense contractors that would not be here.

BRADLEY: If you couldn't sell to civilians, you'd be out of business.

Mr. BARRETT: Would never have been in business.

(Footage of Barrett working in his office; rifles)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) Barrett has sold thousands of .50-caliber rifles to private citizens, who, he says, want the guns for target shooting and big game hunting. Barrett scoffs at critics who claim that all those .50-caliber rifles are too dangerous in the hands of civilians.

Mr. BARRETT: As a matter of fact, the .50 has an excellent record. You know, if--as far as the abuses with .50-caliber rifles, they are so few, if any, that all other calibers ought to aspire to--to be--to have as good a record as it has.

And it's a long rifle as you can see. It's not--that's why when you hear people say it's a criminal's weapon...

BRADLEY: All right.

Mr. BARRETT: This is five and a half feet tall, or something like that. This is not a rifle that a criminal would use.

BRADLEY: Someone is not going to go into a 7/11 and rob them with this.

Mr. BARRETT: No. No sir. And as a matter of fact, they haven't.

(Footage of Tom Diaz with a rifle)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) It's not convenience store robberies that worried Tom Diaz, a gun control advocate who was an expert witness in the California campaign to ban the gun. He says the .50-caliber rifle made by Barrett and other manufacturers is a menace in the hands of terrorists.

Mr. TOM DIAZ: This gun is designed and built to smash things up and to set things on fire. It's a battlefield weapon, and yet it is sold as freely on the American civilian market as--a .22 bolt-action rifle.

BRADLEY: We met Ronnie Barrett, the inventor of the .50-caliber. He's a very good business man.

Mr. DIAZ: No doubt.

BRADLEY: He--he makes a good product.

Mr. DIAZ: Absolutely.

BRADLEY: It's legal, and he's doing a good job at selling it. What's wrong

with that?

Mr. DIAZ: I'm glad Ronnie Barrett makes his rifle for our military forces. I think it's a great thing on the battlefield. I just think that there are certain occasions when we say in our society, 'This product is such a threat to our health and safety, and in this case, our national security, we will not allow it.'

BRADLEY: But isn't any gun in the hand of a terrorist a threat?

Mr. DIAZ: Well, of course any gun is. This is a gun that is unparalleled by any other small arm available to civilians. We control every other kind of weapon of war you can think of--machine guns, plastic explosives, rockets. This thing has flown under the radar for about 20 years.

BRADLEY: Why do you need a weapon this powerful if you're not fighting a war?

Mr. BARRETT: It's a target rifle. It's a toy. It's a high-end adult recreational toy.

BRADLEY: And those people who say that your gun in the hands of terrorists is a deadly weapon?

Mr. BARRETT: Any rifle in the hands of terrorists is a deadly weapon.

Unidentified Man: Are you ready? All right. The range is hot!

(Footage of reporter and Ray Kelly at shooting range)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) But New York City's Police Commissioner Ray Kelly says the .50-caliber rifle is in a class by itself.

How far away are the targets?

Man: Three hundred yards.

(Footage of reporter, Kelly and others at shooting range)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) Kelly agreed to show us just how powerful the sniper rifle at a steel target.

Man: You clear?

(Footage of reporter and Kelly approaching target)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) Down range, three football fields away...

These are the three shots that were fired?

(Footage of reporter and Kelly looking at target)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) ...the three shots from the .30-caliber rifle bounced off the half-inch thick steel.

Mr. RAY KELLY: You can see it hasn't penetrated.

(Footage of reporter, Kelly and others at shooting range)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) Then the sharpshooter fired three rounds from a Barrett

Mr. KELLY: It went right through.

BRADLEY: Wow.

Mr. KELLY: Yeah. It--it is clearly a weapon of war, a--a round to be used in a wartime situation. It's appropriate for the military.

BRADLEY: And the effective range of this thing is what?

Mr. KELLY: The effective range is about 2,000 yards. Now, it's a very formidable weapon, no question about it.

(Footage of reporter and Kelly looking at holes in target; shooter aiming rifle)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) In other words, if the NYPD's range had been 20 football fields long instead of just three, the .50-caliber rifle, firing ordinary ammunition, still would have been devastatingly effective.

Mr. KELLY: Clearly, it is a very powerful weapon. We saw what it could do as far as going through armor.

BRADLEY: This would be a significant weapon in the hands of a terrorist?

Mr. KELLY: It would be a weapon that could do a lot of damage, no question about that. Yes.

(File footage of Waco, Texas, siege; complex burning)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) Which is exactly what the FBI learned in 1993 at Waco when Branch Davidians fired a Barrett .50-caliber sniper rifle at them. In response, the FBI deployed Bradley fighting vehicles for protection, but even that wasn't sufficient, and heavier armor was brought in. What happened at Waco was one of the arguments made for banning the weapon in California. Other states are now considering a similar ban for fear of potential terrorist attacks.

Mr. DIAZ: If you go through virtually any industrial state, you'll see right off the highway all kinds of highly toxic and/or flammable materials stored in big tanks. These are ideal targets.

BRADLEY: But wouldn't those also be targets for a smaller gun?

Mr. DIAZ: The point is that you can plan your attack from a longer distance. It's the combination of range and power.

(Footage of rifle and shells; various bullets)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) And look at this for power. That's the standard bullet in the middle and 10 times heavier than the M-16 bullet on the left. In addition to the standard .50-caliber bullet, some bullets are designed to pierce armor, some to set things on fire. Those are all legal to buy. But the most devastating .50-caliber bullet is an armor-piercing, incendiary and explosive round sometimes called Raufoss, after the company that makes it. Ronnie Barrett says he's not concerned about Raufoss because it's illegal.

Mr. BARRETT: It's a high-explosive round. It's not available commercially. I can't even buy it.

(Footage of Web sites; various Internet sites selling Raufoss bullets)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) In fact, we found a number of sites on the Internet that claimed to be selling the explosive Raufoss ammunition. On one site we witnessed someone making an apparent purchase of the illegal bullets.

Would it surprise you to know that we went on the Internet and within minutes and found Raufoss ammunition for sale?

Mr. BARRETT: Yes, it would surprise me.

BRADLEY: That is true.

Mr. BARRETT: Yeah. And if it is out there and if someone other than our military has it, then it is stolen and those people need to be prosecuted. We

have laws against that. Passing additional laws, you know, is just a redundancy.

(Footage of traffic at airport; man talking on phone; airplanes taxiing)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) But, according to Tom Diaz, the threat posed by legal ammunition is frightening enough. He says there are many potential targets but the most obvious is commercial aviation.

Mr. DIAZ: Do I believe you can shoot an aircraft at altitude? Of course not. But on take off and landing? I can take take you to places in Washington, DC, where I am absolutely certain you could shoot an aircraft with one of these guns.

Mr. KELLY: Clearly, with the range that it has and the impact capability that it has, it would put an airliner or an airplane at risk if it hit that plane. Yes.

BRADLEY: Could that gun be used to shoot down a commercial airliner?

Mr. BARRETT: It would be very difficult. It would--if it were a tactic that were even--even ha--remotely possible, then our military, who happens to use the--the rifle also, would be training their troops to do such.

BRADLEY: In--in your own sales brochures, you advertise the .50-caliber as a weapon that--that--that can take planes down.

Mr. BARRETT: There's some military brochures that we had early on that would show that you could damage aircraft on a runway or Scud missiles and things like that. Yes, you could if you have a parked target.

BRADLEY: You're talking about them parked on the ground, not in the air?

Mr. BARRETT: That's correct.

(Footage of LAX airport; Diaz in his office)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) Just this past year, the Rand Corporation released a report identifying 11 potential terrorist scenarios at Los Angeles International Airport. In one scenario, a sniper using a .50-caliber rifle fires at parked and taxiing aircraft. The report concludes, 'We were unable to identify any truly satisfactory solutions for such an attack.' Tom Diaz told us about other much more specific scenarios in which terrorists might use the weapon, which we chose not to broadcast.

Mr. BARRETT: I consider some of the stuff that Tom Diaz lays out irresponsible. I know a lot of things, you know, but I'm not going to go on the television and--and tell people what the capabilities of equipment are and possibly give ideas to people.

BRADLEY: So what he says is irresponsible.

Mr. BARRETT: Yes, it is.

BRADLEY: Is it accurate?

Mr. BARRETT: Yes, it could be. But it's also seeming begging someone to commit this crime: 'Somebody please commit this crime so I can validate what I've been saying so long.' And--and--and it's repeated over and over, and I fear that somebody will answer that call.

Mr. DIAZ: It's kind of a classic gun industry argument. First they deny there's a problem, and then when something happens, they point the finger at people who tried to warn about it and say, 'You guys caused this and you just hoped it would happen.'

(Footage of Capitol building; newspaper cover page; excerpts from article)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) Federal agencies responsible for preventing terrorist attacks declined to be interviewed about the .50-caliber rifle. But last June, the Department of Homeland Security told The Dallas Morning News, "We remain concerned about any weapon of choice that could potentially be used by a terrorist, including a .50-caliber rifle."

Mr. BARRETT: Any rifle could be used to engage a target that--that it might stand a chance of hitting, of course. You know, you don't want to shoot any high-speed projectile at an airplane. It's illegal. You--you shouldn't do it. You'll damage the airplane.

BRADLEY: A terrorist is not concerned about what's legal or not.

Mr. BARRETT: That's correct. And a terrorist is not concerned if you pass, or Tom Diaz passes, another law.

(Footage of Capitol Building)

BRADLEY: (Voiceover) Diaz does want Congress to pass a law requiring, at a minimum, records to be kept of who's buying .50-caliber rifles.

Mr. DIAZ: The real question here is we do not know who has these terribly destructive rifles. No one in the United States Government knows who has these guns.

BRADLEY: But aren't--aren't records kept when a gun is sold?

Mr. DIAZ: The answer is no.

BRADLEY: Under the Brady Bill, sales records of guns used to be kept for 90 days, which enabled the FBI to check the names of gun purchasers against terror watch lists. Then, a year ago, at Attorney General Ashcroft's initiative, Congress reduced the period of record keeping from 90 days to 24 hours. And that's the policy that's in effect today.

(Announcements)