

WHAT FREEDOM MEANS TO ME

Freedom means "civil liberty, as opposed to subjection to an arbitrary or despotic government." Am I free; have I been free? No, for in the past I have been subjected to an arbitrary - to say the least - government and continue to be.

In 1963-1964 who was the government? To me primarily it was my "big boss" Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. I was a young army lieutenant helicopter pilot sent to Vietnam by my government to fight and possibly die in a war our government suppressed the truth about and never intended to win never mind that 58,191 of my comrades never returned.

In The Story We Never Saw In Vietnam by David Halberstam, The Washington Post, Sunday, May 14, 1995, Halberstam stated: "If there was ever a moment when McNamara-Taylor repression of information showed itself, it came in mid-1963 when the not-yet-famous Lt. Col. John Paul Vann, already the most impassioned of the senior advisers in Vietnam, came back to the Pentagon and gave a vividly pessimistic briefing about what was happening in the Delta. He kept giving it at ever higher levels until one day he was permitted by the vice chief of staff of the Army to give it to the Joint Chiefs themselves. On July 8, 1963, he showed up, bright and eager to brief. Then the phone rang. It was a call from the office of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Max Taylor. Could Vann's briefing be scratched at the chairman's request? "Looks like you don't brief today, buddy," the aide who took the call said. To anyone looking back, this is the smoking gun. To me and to my colleagues in Saigon this story,

when Vann repeated it to me a few months later, was an epiphany: We had always thought the problem was Harkins in Saigon misleading his superiors in Washington. It was only then that we realized how controlled the entire system was, that Harkins was giving Washington what it not only wanted, but what it demanded."

That constitutes subjection to an arbitrary government does it not? No, more, that is subjection to a despotic government.

On October 3, 1993, a young Army Ranger Casey Joyce and Ranger and Delta Force comrades were in Mogadishu taking off in helicopters en route to a raid that was about to change the course of American involvement in Somalia. Casey Joyce died that day; he was shot in the back. President Clinton called Casey's death an "unfortunate loss." Casey's father Lieutenant Colonel Larry E. Joyce (ret.), a Vietnam veteran, sent a hand delivered letter to President Clinton including Casey's eulogy so he could put a face on one of those "unfortunate losses" - eighteen died altogether. On November 10, 1993, the President called Colonel Joyce and said he wanted to meet with him. As of April 11, 1994, that meeting had not taken place. Colonel Joyce said he didn't think President Clinton was serious about wanting to meet him. He believes President Clinton wants the nation to forget about those eighteen brave young men who died trying so courageously to accomplish the frivolous mission he gave them.

Are we increasingly becoming subject to an arbitrary or despotic government? Ask the northwest rancher who was threatened with jail for killing a wolf that killed his cattle. Ask a farmer who is badgered by government wetland regulations when he attempts to

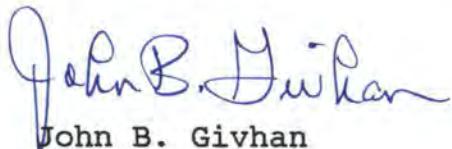
build a catfish pond on his farm. That farmer is me - remember - the young lieutenant boss McNamara sent off to Vietnam to die in 1963.

I wonder if Uncle Ho - Ho Chi Minh - had wetlands regulations administered by bureaucrats in the rice rich deltas of Vietnam. I doubt it.

Is this what our founding fathers foresaw? Anybody ready for a "tea Party"?

It's not what freedom means to me. It is what losing it does to me. Gives me the shakes.

By the way, on July 8, 1963, I was at home on leave waiting to go to Vietnam.



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