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ONE WEEK, TWO MASSACRES (PART II)

*A troubled Colorado man buys a “pistol.”
Six days later ten innocents lie dead.*



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. [“No family should ever have to go through this again in the United States.”](#) Imagine waiting with your adult son and two granddaughters in a Covid vaccination line when a shooter in a tactical vest bursts in and unleashes a fusillade, gunning down a patron only steps away. By the time that 21-year old gunman Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa surrendered, [ten lay dead](#) in and around a Boulder, Colorado supermarket. Among them was police officer Eric Talley. A father of seven, the fifty-one year old officer [was first to arrive on scene](#), and as he burst in to save lives he suffered a gunshot wound to the head.

And no, that’s not too much information. Officers and ordinary citizens are often imperiled by [inordinately lethal projectiles](#) discharged by weapons thoughtlessly marketed for civilian consumption. According to police, Alissa had been armed with two weapons: a 9mm. handgun he apparently didn’t fire and the Ruger AR-556 “pistol” (see image above) [he discharged during the assault](#). Purposely configured by its manufacturer to skirt bans on assault weapons and such, the AR-556 is essentially a short-barreled AR-15 [with a brace instead of a stock](#). Chambering the same powerful 5.56/.223 cartridges as the weapon it mimics, it fires a bullet whose mass and extreme velocity enables it to penetrate walls and doors as if they didn’t exist. [Ditto the protective vests](#) typically worn by cops on patrol. Here’s an outtake from our [2019 op-ed](#) in the *Washington Post*:

California, six other states and the District “ban” assault weapons. But these laws skirt around caliber. Instead, they focus on a weapon’s physical attributes. For example, California requires that semiautomatic firearms with external baubles such as handgrips have non-detachable magazines and limits ammunition capacity to 10 rounds.

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As we argued, those characteristics aren't the real reason why assault-style weapons are so dangerous. That's fundamentally a matter of ballistics. High-energy, high-velocity .223-, 5.56- and 7.62-caliber projectiles have unbelievable penetrating power. And should these bullets strike flesh, they produce massive wound cavities, pulverizing blood vessels and destroying nearby organs. Rifles can deliver the mayhem from a distance. That's what happened in 2017 [when an ostensibly law-abiding gambler](#) opened fire with AR-15-type rifles from his Las Vegas hotel room, *killing 58 and wounding more than four-hundred.*

We're not just concerned about rifles. The muzzle energy of ammunition fired by today's 9mm. pistols can be twice or more that of the .38's and .380's that were popular when your writer carried a badge. While ordinary police vests are able to defeat most 9mm. rounds, should they strike an unprotected area their wounding capacity makes their old-fashioned counterparts seem like toys.

Alissa's brother [worried that his sibling was mentally ill](#). He complained about being followed and ranted online that his phone had been hacked. Alissa frequently displayed an aggressive side. His high school wrestling career ended the day he lost a match. Exploding in fury, [he threatened to kill his teammates](#) and stormed out. His only known criminal conviction stemmed from a classroom incident in which he "cold-cocked" a student who had supposedly "made fun of him and called him racial names." Alissa was convicted; he drew community service and a year's probation.

Unfortunately, that was only a misdemeanor. As in [Federal law](#), prohibitions on gun purchase and possession in Colorado only extend to those [convicted of felonies and misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence](#). Bottom line: Alissa was legally entitled to buy that so-called "pistol." And just like Georgia, where [mass killer Long](#) resided, Colorado [doesn't impose a waiting period](#). So once Alissa cleared the background check he was free to take his treasure with. And promptly did.

In Part I we mentioned that Georgia [got an "F" from Giffords](#). In contrast, [Colorado was awarded a "C+"](#). The Mountain State does offer a few more safeguards. While Georgia relies solely on the FBI background check, Colorado also runs a State check. Colorado police and family members [can also petition courts to disarm potentially dangerous gun owners](#). Alissa, though, wasn't a felon. Neither was he ever formally accused of presenting an armed threat. And as far as that AR-556 goes, Colorado law [doesn't address assault weapons](#).

Admittedly, it would take a highly restrictive statute to ban the AR-556. Even California, whose gun law strength is rated by Giffords as [number one in the U.S.](#), allows versions of the AR-556 with longer barrels and fixed magazines (click [here](#) for an

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example.) But [the 2018 massacre at Florida's Parkland High School](#) led the City of Boulder to [virtually ban such weapons](#) altogether. In a bizarre coincidence, [that law was nullified](#) this March 12 by a Boulder County judge who agreed with pro-gun advocates that when it comes to guns, state laws rule. In any event, Alissa purchased the AR-556 [at a store in Arvada](#), the Denver suburb where he and his parents reside.

As we carped in [our op-ed](#) and in ["Going Ballistic,"](#) <GC19 Going Ballistic> firearms lethality is, first and foremost, about ballistics. And those of the AR-556 are truly formidable. Yet not even California, which Giffords [ranks #1 in law strength](#), pays any attention to this pressing issue. And while the Golden State has enacted much of what Giffords calls for (its full wish list is [here](#)), California citizens are still getting gunned down. On March 31st., just as we were trying to put the wraps to this essay, a middle-aged Southern California man burst into a local shop with whom he had a "business and personal relationship" and opened fire with a 9mm. pistol, [killing four and critically injuring one](#). Among the dead was a nine-year old boy. His killer, Aminadab Gaxiola Gonzalez, 44 had locked the gates of the complex when he went in to carry out the massacre. He was seriously wounded by police.



Unlike Georgia's Robert Long or Colorado's Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, Gonzalez had a criminal record. In 2015 [he was charged by Orange County, Calif. authorities](#) with multiple counts including cruelty to a child. He ultimately pled guilty to misdemeanor battery and served one day in jail. Our court record search confirmed that two criminal cases were filed against Gonzalez within a two-day span in April 2015: one was an "infraction," the other a misdemeanor. According to authorities, his conviction for the latter was expunged in 2017 after he successfully completed probation. Alas, even tough ol' California doesn't prohibit persons with expunged records from having a gun. So by all appearances, Mr. Gonzalez was free to gunsling to his heart's delight.

Where does this leave us peace-loving folks? Would we be safer if background checks were required for private party transfers? If waiting periods were the rule? If cops and family members could petition for gun seizures? If rifles couldn't have removable magazines? If there were strict limits on ammunition capacity? If manufacturers couldn't use nonsensical tweaks to magically transform assault rifles into handguns? Gun-control advocates say yes, absolutely. Stronger gun laws, they're convinced, reduce gun violence. And they insist that the data bears them out.

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Is that true? We'll have a look at the numbers next time in, alas, Part III.