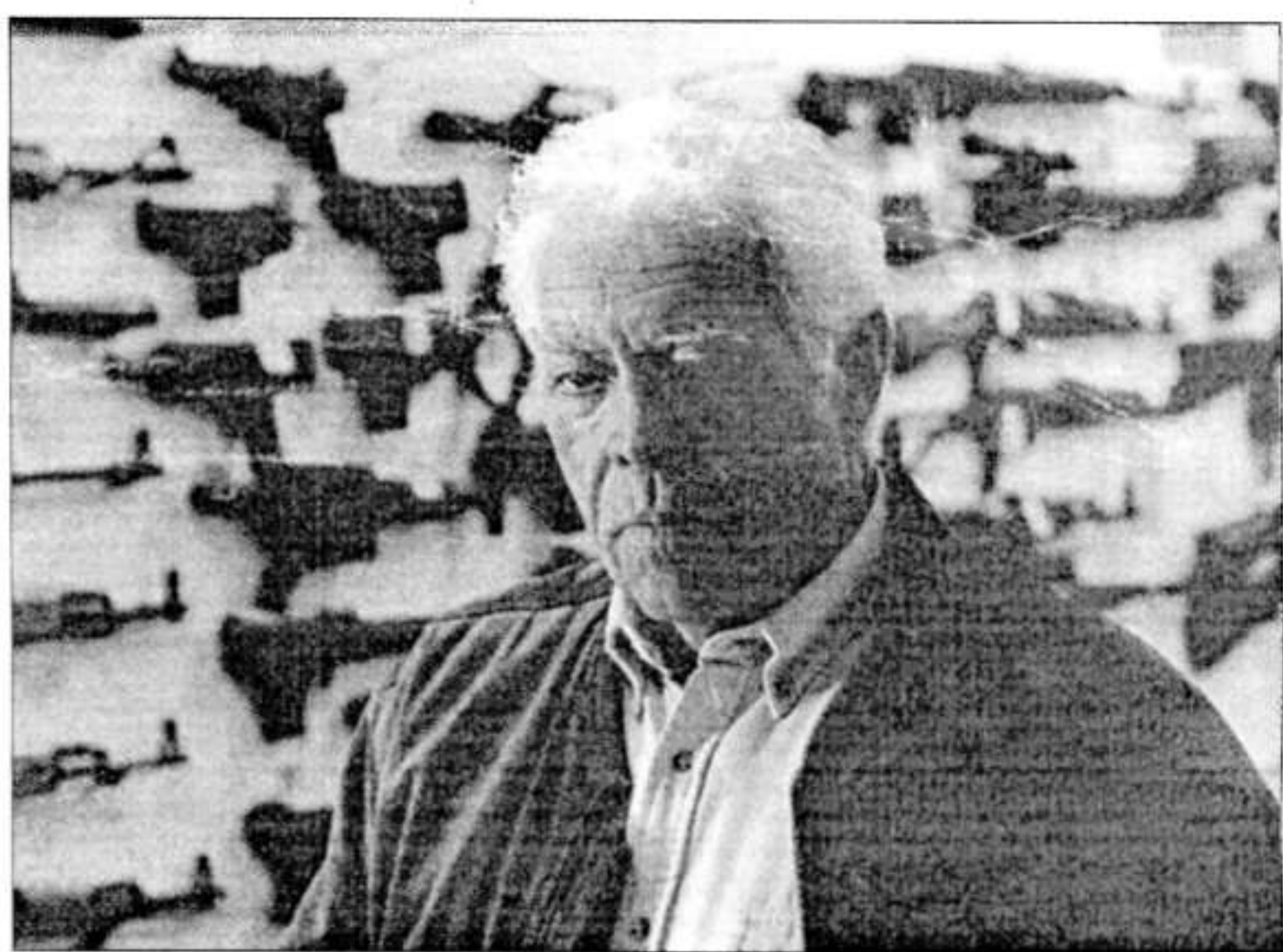


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STRAIGHT SHOOTER: *James Coburn stars as a father whose daughter was killed in "American Gun," written and directed by Alan Jacobs.*

AMERICAN GUN

An Escalon Film Partners production. Produced by Brent Morris. Co-producer, Elyse Eisenberg.

Directed, written by Alan Jacobs. Camera (B&W/color), Phil Parmet; editor, Paul Millsbaugh; music, Anthony Marinelli; production designer, Don De Fina; set decorator, Shelagh Talbot; costume designer, Elaine Montalvo; sound (Dolby), Bob Gregory, Scott Koue; sound designer, Ann Kroeber; associate producers, Jeanne Gore Roberts, William Hassell; assistant director, John Bennett; casting, Richard Pagano. **Reviewed at Seattle Film Festival**, June 10, 2002. Running time: **89 MIN.**

Martin	James Coburn
Anne	Barbara Bain
Penny	Virginia Madsen
Mia	Alexandra Holden

With: Ryan Locke, Jason Winther, Niesha Trout, Walter Jones, Anthony Harrell, Toby Smith, Paula O'Hare, Jesse Pennington, Andrea C. Pearson, Jayson Argento, David Fontani, Lorna Paul, Steve Pratt.

Variety June 29-30, 2002 pg. 27
By **KEN EISNER**

Thoughtful, complexly structured "American Gun" gets the U.S. national culture of violence in its sights and rarely lets it get away. Sober-sided pic from helmer-scripter Alan Jacobs also reps one of the most serious perfs ever from topline James Coburn, who's in almost every scene as an aged father trying to retrace steps leading up to the death of his daughter. Low budget and austere settings may limit commercial potential, but a committed distributor could successfully target the "In the Bedroom" constituency.

Remarkably, members of the National Rifle Assn. helped advise makers of this critical yet carefully balanced look at the six-shooter's place in American life and history. In one of lenser Phil Parmet's many

beautifully shot black-and-white flashbacks, pic starts with Coburn's character, Martin Tillman, having a childhood encounter with his grandfather's service revolver, a worshipfully preserved relic of the Spanish-American War. Later, the lad will have traumatic experiences with weapons in World War II, especially during an ambiguous encounter with a boy sniper in a German farmhouse.

With Martin himself only a teenager at the time, these events — which we see in the form of recurring and gradually changing nightmares — eventually color the fate of his only offspring.

In the recent present, daughter Penny (a restrained Virginia Madsen) has returned, after a long absence, for Christmas at the Vermont homestead of her gruffly affectionate father and somewhat distant mother, Anne (Barbara Bain, in a sketchier role). The young woman is struggling with the disappearance of her own teenager (Alexandra Holden), when a chance encounter with a street thug leads to Penny's brutal demise.

As in "Bedroom," the parents have discordant responses: Mom dives into all-forgiving succor of the church, while dad wants to take action. Somehow retrieving the murder weapon from local law enforcement, he sets off on a cross-country odyssey to investigate the life of that particular pistol, a .357 magnum with, it turns out, a 20-year history of mayhem.

More intriguing than the vignettes re-creating the gun's uses for good and evil are the ambivalent responses of police, gun shop owners and even a worker in the factory where the gun was assembled.

For all this activity, the helmer leaves viewers free to draw their own conclusions about the country's violent origins. Unfortunately, this meditation is clouded by a twist ending that, in contrast with everything that has come before, is clumsily handled and logically troubling. This sudden shift means a change in the nature of Martin's mission, and some auds may feel overly manipulated.

Also stretching credulity is the simple math implying that Martin and Anne, adolescent sweethearts during the war, would wait almost two decades after marrying to have their first child.

Tech credits are solid, with special attention due editor Paul Millsbaugh, for seamlessly blending highly disparate elements, and designer Don De Fina, for remarkably unclipped period segs. Anthony Marinelli's smoky, jazz-laden score is another plus.