

NYTimes
Death for Sale

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On Memorial Day Harvey Glenn McLeod walked into Thorne's Hardware and Sporting Goods Store in Raleigh, N. C., selected a .22-caliber automatic rifle and the necessary ammunition, and paid \$54. From there he went straight away to a crowded shopping center where he used the weapon to kill three persons, wound eight others and put a last fatal bullet through his own head.

For the clerk in the gun shop it was a routine transaction. McLeod satisfied the legal requirements by stating on a National Firearms Transaction form that he had not been convicted of any crime within the past year and was not otherwise ineligible for the purchase of the deadly weapon. It was simply a matter of good customer relations which consider a man in search of a gun to be as good as his money and his word.

As it turned out, McLeod had a police record that included two assaults with a deadly weapon. His last brush with the law on lesser charges had taken place within the past week.

All these facts are merely incidental to yet another appalling proof of the deadly consequences of this country's refusal to institute effective gun controls to prevent the escalating civilian slaughter. The tragedy of the Raleigh shopping center, which also endangered the life of Senator B. Everett Jordan during a campaign appearance there, came two weeks after the assault on Gov. George C. Wallace under similar circumstances in Maryland. Arthur H. Bremer, Governor Wallace's alleged assailant, had found it equally easy to buy his weapon, even though he had only recently been arrested on a concealed-weapons charge.

The risk incurred by a society that puts guns within such easy reach, without concern for their abuse by the lawless, demented, disgruntled or careless, is nothing short of criminal folly. The statistics of "routine" fatalities, though less visible, are no less shocking than the proliferation of political assassinations.

The gun lobby, which blocks effective legislation by its skillful use of political power and by publicly distorting the meaning and the intent of the constitutional "right to bear arms" shoulders a heavy share of the guilt for the consequences of uncontrolled civilian fire power in a violent society.