

16 APR 72
MAILED 17 APR

'NORMAL KILLERS' Is it possible for a normal, young man to turn "killer," to slaughter defenseless women, children, and old people as in the My Lai massacre?

Yes, declares Dr. William B. Gault, now a clinical instructor in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School who spent two years as an Army psychiatrist treating Vietnam veterans.

In his article, "Some Remarks on Slaughter," published in the American Journal of Psychiatry, Dr. Gault explains the motives and attitudes of young men who "overcame and eventually neutralized their natural repugnance towards slaughter."

The psychological factors which cause normal men to kill needlessly are fear,

contempt, vengeance, irresponsibility, and in Vietnam, the ubiquity of the enemy.

In Vietnam, Dr. Gault points out, fear is the overriding factor. The GI in the field lives in constant fear of his life. He regards any man, woman, or child as a possible enemy.

Because the enemy in Vietnam is so often invisible, inflicting casualty by mines and booby traps, the GI becomes over-anxious, frustrated, high-pressured into retaliation. He has to take out his anger and frustration on someone who is causing him such constantly mounting fear and anxiety.

The American soldier's ability to kill Vietnamese indiscriminately, Dr. Gault believes, is facilitated by his contempt for the Ori-

ental as a "gook" or a "dink," a subhuman irreconcilably different from his own kind--"more like a Martian or something," as one GI explained to him.

Finally, the GI feels little or no responsibility for the war or its victims. For the most part he has little or no understanding for whom or for what he is fighting except self-survival. He blames the government and the military command for placing him in a situation where he feels he must kill or be killed.

These are the conditions which frequently turn normal men into killers, Dr. Gault explains. Those who dominate in situations like My Lai are violent, aggressive men of blunted sensibilities, men who lack feeling, compassion, empathy--in short, psychopaths.