

Electronic Mt. Rushmore

By JOYCE ILLIG

TWO CBS NEWSMEN, Dan Rather and Gary Paul Gates have a behind-the-scenes book on the Nixon White House, *The Palace Guard*, coming out in October from Harper & Row. They get in allusions to Hamlet, Camelot and Don Quixote before the book begins to move.

H. R. Haldeman is revealed as a man who "loved" Nixon but who was a stingy, no-nonsense person who didn't "give candy" to the White House telephone operators" and never enjoyed a look at the ladies. His personal rigidity went so far, the authors say, that once a request came to Haldeman to urge Nixon "to telephone a mortally ill Republican senator." Haldeman "decided that since the senator was in that bad a shape he probably wouldn't be able to talk very well over the phone anyway, and thus it would make more sense to hold off and place a call to his widow—later. So, instead of passing the request on to Nixon, he sent it back down through the channels with the memorable command: "Wait until he dies."

Rather and Gates end their story ironically, by revealing that it was Haldeman who, in 1970, persuaded Nixon to install the White House taping system. "Haldeman's idea was that, after Nixon completed his time in office, the tapes would be carefully edited—the expletives and all other 'image defects' being deleted—

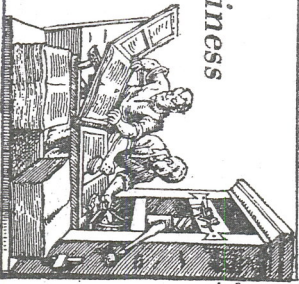
JOYCE ILLIG writes frequently on the publishing scene for Book World.

and the selected conversations would be left to stand as a towering monument to Richard Nixon and his presidency—a sort of electronic answer to Mount Rushmore."

NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY's leading September title, Alan Lelchuk's *American Mischief*, is being brought out under patriotic red, white and blue covers. They say it'll flag more display space that way. What NAL hasn't said is that there's a cover peephole, and if you flip inside you see a lot more of Miss American Mischief.

Book

Business



She was discovered by NAL's sales force, and her glossy picture has been tacked into the first printing (750,000 copies) of the \$2.25 book. The gimmick may be a first in the high-quality paperback field.

Alan Lelchuk, who was sponsored by Philip Roth when the novel was published in hardcover by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, has written a second novel, *Miriam at Thirty-Four*. It will be released by FS&G the same time that *American Mischief* is out in paperback. Miriam is a divorcee with two children who has a story to tell about being squeezed in marriage.

FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS, Neil Sheehan, the former New York Times investigative reporter, has been researching a book on John Paul Vann, the sensation-ally controversial ex-Army lieutenant-colonel. A dove when he went to Vietnam in the '60s, Vann eventually quit the Army because he was critical of their tactical program. He remained in Vietnam, though, as a pacification advisor, and at the end of his career, it's said that Vann was a devoted hawk who spent his time issuing orders to the generals.

In a recent issue of *New Times*, Kevin Buckley, a former Newsweek bureau chief in Saigon, reports that Vann "told visitors that when the wind blew in the right direction from the hills it often brought him good news—the smell of many rotting bodies." Vann died in 1972 when his helicopter was shot down over B-52 target areas in the hills around Kon-tum and Pleiku.

Sheehan is writing the book for Random House but the publication date is said to be a long way off.

EVEN THOUGH THERE was a major auction for Hedrick Smith's book about life in Russia, *Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co.*, turned out to be the highest bidder for their Pulitzer Prize-winning Moscow correspondent.

One editor, who said he dropped out when the advance got over \$40,000, described the proposed book as a popular attempt at a serious book on the way you buy things and get things in Russia. It's said to dwell on the fact that there really is a hierarchy and shows how it works. □