

## Paul Elder's Book Forum

# Mark Lane on Vietnam

**Conversations With Americans**, by Mark Lane (Simon and Schuster, \$6.95)

Mark Lane, a lawyer who carried his training into investigative reporting, first came into prominence as the author of "Rush to Judgment." In it, reporting his investigation of JFK's assassination, he presented facts and arguments so compelling as to convince many people of the fallacies of the "Warren Report."

In "Conversations With Americans" he reports verbatim his interviews with 32 veterans of the war in Vietnam, half of them deserters. None of the deserters seemed to be misfits. One, for instance, had received a Bronze Star, Army Commendation Ribbon, Distinguished Service Medal for Gallantry from the Vietnamese government, the Presidential Citation (awarded to his team), several Vietnamese ribbons, campaign ribbons and five Purple Hearts. One, when asked why he deserted, answered, "For the same reason that I joined the Army and volunteered for Vietnam — to serve my country." One was an officer; one was a Green Beret.

Those interviewed who were on active duty or honorably discharged had earned well over 100 medals, ribbons and citations.

Lane interviewed many more veterans than are reported in the book. Those that do appear, says Lane, were selected because they were typical of the entire body of interviews or because they also offer some unique fact or insight. All bear witness to a nightmarish parade of atrocities committed by American soldiers, and their training in torture tactics which transformed them, according to Lane, "from boy-next-door types to men capable of murdering unarmed women and children in Vietnam." They give terrible testimony that the My Lai incident, with court-martial proceedings under way, was no isolated incident.

Lane believes that "the war in Vietnam is in many respects unprecedented in the extent to which its over-all strategy encourages brutality . . . The tactics of the war are dictated by the basic strategy. Children (and women) may indeed carry weapons, and booby traps do abound, and much of the atmosphere is hostile. It is the war and its objectives . . . that constitute the evil."

In the introduction, Lane writes, "If you convince your soldiers that the enemy is less than human . . . and inform them that their mission is to score high in the

body-count exercises, you cannot feign surprise when you discover what the war has become." Cost? "The real price (to America for its adventure) is the sacrifice of an entire generation trained in savagery, sadism, torture, terrorism and murder."

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*Reviewed by Sydney Kossen*  
**Old-Age Politics in California**  
Richardson to Reagan, by Jackson  
nam (Stanford Press, \$7.50)

As an alternate title  
have chosen Power  
California is  
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