
FIELDS OF FIRE

by James Webb
Prentice-Hall, 1978
344 pp. \$9.95
L of C 78-4046
ISBN 0-13-314286-8

For the unsung American rifleman, or "grunt," the Vietnam experience varied greatly from place to place, from year to year. Novelist Webb, a former Marine officer and Navy Cross winner, depicts one of the worst places in 1968-69—the guerrilla country around Anhoa, southwest of Danang. *Fields of Fire* is no egocentric memoir-in-disguise. Webb develops a half-dozen complex characters and their changing reactions to the endless, murderous round of combat in the "bush." Even an awkward romance-on-Okinawa episode fails to derail his powerful story, which ends with a surprise confrontation between a war-crippled Harvard ex-Marine and peace demonstrators in Boston. This first novel's unspoken message is clear: Those who served in that lost war deserve better from the country that sent them to fight it.

**THE EXECUTION OF
MAYOR YIN AND OTHER
STORIES FROM THE
GREAT PROLETARIAN
CULTURAL REVOLUTION**

by Chen Jo-hsi
Indiana Univ., 1978
248 pp. \$8.95
L of C 78-1956
ISBN 0-253-12475-1

Taiwanese-born Chen Jo-hsi was a 28-year-old graduate student at Johns Hopkins when she immigrated to the People's Republic of China in 1966. Her stories were written after she was allowed to leave the P.R.C. in 1973. Though less than great literature, and somewhat narrow in scope (too often the protagonists are U.S.-educated intellectuals), they nonetheless evoke a people for whom everything has changed while much remains the same. One still can hope that neighbors and friends from one's hometown will overlook an indiscreet complaint. Ancestry still determines status ("she came from a good background—before Liberation her family had been impoverished"). But political conformity intrudes almost everywhere. When a 4-year-old, awakened for midnight interrogation, confesses to saying "Chairman Mao is a rotten egg," a young woman voices concern that the child may never escape the counter-revolutionary stigma. (Her own infant's first words were "Mao Mao," not "Ma Ma.") *The Execution* not unexpectedly was banned on the mainland. Perhaps because it tempers disillusionment with compassion, this "dis-sent literature" was also censured in Taiwan.