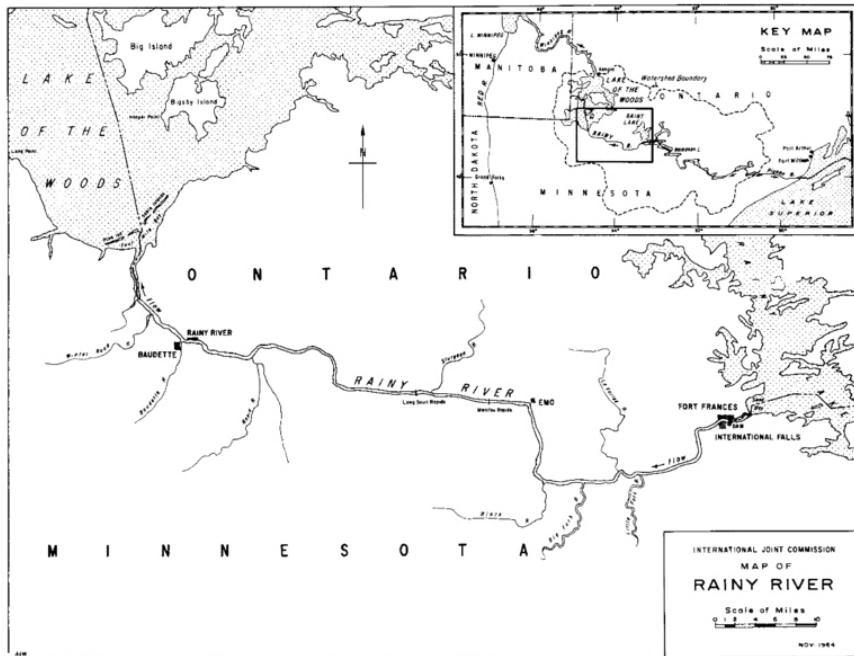


On The Rainy River

from *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien



above: a detail of the Rainy River

“In June of 1968, a month after graduating from Macalester College, I was drafted to fight a war I hated.”

In On The Rainy River the narrator, Tim O'Brien, tells a story that he's "never told before," (40). As he tells us this story, he recounts he drive from his home, through the Midwest, and to the Rainy River. On one side of the water is America, and a certain trip to Vietnam. On the other side is Canada, freedom, and a virtual guarantee of a lengthy exile, apart from friends and family. After several days on the river, with Canada "twenty yards" (56) away, Tim realizes that "Canada had become a pitiful fantasy" and that he "would not do what [he] should do," (57). Strangely, rather than celebrate his courage for staying, he claims that "I was a coward. I went to war," (61).

O'Brien claims that he is embarrassed by this story, that it hurts to tell. What, then, is his purpose in telling us this story?

In your response, please be sure to address the following:

- What memory O'Brien has chosen to make "forever" by turning it into a story.
- How this story might help to shape (or perhaps reshape) O'Brien's reality.
- The potential significance of his "hallucination" at the end of the story.