

# THE MAP

by John Irving  
(ex-CW2), Alpha Troop, 7/17th Cav  
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## The Map

Time passes,  
Wounds close,  
pain dulls,  
As scars heal.

Once again  
I'm tricked  
Into believing  
It's Finally Over.

Then my eyes, unbidden,  
Grasp that 'J' shaped  
Coastline in Asia,  
On a map of the world.

Where were you  
when the first man died?  
Where were you  
when his family cried?

Once again these names  
Draw me closer, ever closer,  
So close I can't see them  
Without my glasses.

Once again these places,  
That time, jump out  
Clutching my back  
Thrilling my neck.

Whoa ! Stop ! Once again,  
again the room spins  
as I flash back anew to that huge  
airport where I first came to the  
Nam.

Senses assaulted, hot Hot  
HOT, burned dung smell.  
Humid as a steam bath,  
Fetid as a swamp.

Where were you,  
when an 18 year old boy left for  
Vietnam and returned with eyes 10  
years older than his 19 year old  
body?

Can you understand  
what those eyes reveal  
about places and things  
you who are protected  
never have to know?

CRACK ! 'Incoming!' Sonic boom  
122 mike mike Katushkas  
streak inches overhead, 50 pound  
warheads explode so hard my soul  
is shaken.

Where were you  
when we began taking rocket fire  
casualties just 10 minutes  
after arriving in South Vietnam?

Where were you  
when one of my men  
on his second day in-country was  
killed on his 18th Birthday?

An Kke, Quin Nhon  
First fire fight.  
Top says 'Your buddy's dead !'  
That can't be right !

Where were you  
when my best friend  
triggered a landmine  
then died in my arms,  
covering me

with body parts,  
and bone fragments?

Where were you  
when I arrived  
in that war torn land,  
age just twenty-one?

Doing what my government  
asked me to do  
and what my fellow Americans  
expected me to do.

Pleiku, Kontum,  
'Enemy in the Wire !!'  
Outgoing, incoming,  
'The Nam's on fire !'

There! on the map  
The A Shau Valley ! GOD!  
Grunts're dead at A Shau,  
We fought all week.

Where were you those long,  
dark, and frightening nights  
when we sat in the mud and the rain  
waiting for the enemy?

Ban Me Thuot, Nha Trang,  
Got shot down,  
I flew again that afternoon,  
Got shot down again !

Where were you when our men  
turned up missing, became POWs?  
Seventy-nine Prisoners of War have  
been seen in Asia since 1972.

2,096 Americans  
are still missing, un-account-ed for.  
Why aren't you there now, searching  
while our men are STILL missing?

Khe Sanh, Quang Tri,  
Hue, Phu Bai.  
Marble Mountain, Đà Nẵng  
Nui Ba Dinh.

Vinh Long, My Tho,  
'He's shot through the head !'  
Rach Gia, Chi Lang,  
So Many Friends Dead !

Where were you when we arrived  
back on American soil?  
Did you curse and throw  
rotten eggs at us?

Why aren't you at the funerals  
we go to for our comrades  
who poisoned, continue to fall  
to dioxin and Agent Orange?

58,229 Americans died in Vietnam.  
Since the war ended 150,000 vets  
have committed suicide.  
Why aren't you howling in pain?

Why do starving homeless Vets  
sleep in cardboard boxes,  
while criminals get free medical  
care, wholesome food and shelter?

Why do prisoners have huge law  
libraries and get to sue the  
government? Why do we spend  
billions on foreign aid while denying  
Vets adequate medical aid care?

Where are you as Veterans' rights  
are threatened every day?  
Where are you when the V.A. man  
denies our benefits and claims?

I held myself together and kept  
the wolf so far from your door,  
that you and others can pretend  
that the wolf never existed.

Where are you now when a sound,  
or a smell, or a dream  
touches that part of me buried so  
deep that I wake up screaming?

Whoa ! Stop !

They're just names  
On a stupid map and It was so long  
ago....

Why can't I stop crying?

John Irving ex-CW2,

Alpha Troop, 7/17th Cav

*We Take Care of Our Own*

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