Email Interview with Jim Tukey
Questions by Justin Brummer
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(Q1) Could you share your biographical details - where and when were you born? Where are you based now?

(A1) Born: Waterville, Maine, Feb. 7, 1939. However, Damariscotta, Maine I consider my home town. I have been a resident of Pownal, Maine for the past 36 years., address is: Jim Tukey, 91 Sweetser Rd. Pownal, Maine 04069

(Q2) When did you start getting into playing music? Who are your influences?

(A2) Can not recall a time I was not humming, whistling, singing. Began playing guitar and writing about age 13. First big musical hero was Hank Williams Sr., then early Elvis., Buddy Holly, Johnny Cash, John Denver, Gordon Lightfoot. My songs and guitar style sound folkie with a country edge.. Who would have thunk it huh.

(Q3) What inspired you to write "A Place Called Viet Nam"? What were you hoping to convey with the song?

(A3) I was a hospital corpsman at the U. S. Coast Guard Search and Rescue Air Station, in Elizabeth, City, NC in the mid 1960's. There were rumors and speculation bandied about concerning the role the USCG would play as conditions were heating up in Vietnam. The song naturally evolved out of conversation and remarks I heard, responding in song, to what lots of us were wondering and talking about. Basically, how would it effect us? At the time I wrote this song, my intuition was telling me I would serve there one day.

(Q4) What is the background to the recording of the song? eg. where was it recorded, who featured on the record, the recording session?

(A4) A Place Called Vietnam... was recorded the summer of 1966, the B side Morning Light during the same session. The recording session took place at Rockland Recording, in Rockland, Maine. The owner and audio eng. was Jim Deans, a retired naval officer. The studio was located in the back part of the American Legion Hall. Jim also lived in a small apartment connected to the studio. Bobby Giassion, lead guitar, Ray Lipschitz, drums, Dean Fernald on bass, and me on rhythm guitar. The two tracks went to tape quickly. I had previously recorded with Zeke Clements of Gold Standad Records in Nashville. So Jim sent the master out to Zeke at my request. Record was pressed and came back to Rockland Recording via Greyhound bus. Zekes' Area Records was evidently a 2nd. Line title he used if he did not want to release on his primary label Gold Standard. He had previously released two non-Vietnam songs of mine on Gold Standard while I was In the USCG. At that time he said " it was not a good time to put out a War Song " So after I was discharged I recorded it at Rockland Recording in Maine.

(Q5) Were you drafted to Vietnam, or did you volunteer?

(A5) Volunteered... Accepted a direct commission in the USAF, Nurse Corps as a 2/Lt., in 1969. Completed the Flight Nurse program and was assigned to the 903rd Aeromedical Evacuation Sq., Vietnam. I flew 150 medical combat missions in country during my tour of duty. The 903rd. was an all volunteer unit. My Vietnam service was from Dec. 1970 to Dec. 1971.

(Q6) Were there any specific experiences of the war that you wanted to convey in the song?

(A6) Not especially... Other than already noted above.

(Q7) Are there any others songs about the war that you find personally resonate and why?

(A7) I was in Vietnam to help and heal the sick and wounded, not to kill and harm. Much of what is out there, particularly in film, is steeped in death doom and destruction... In my opinion. There was certainly plenty of it going around, and it is what the real guts of war is about. Just too over done. Also, had no idea the extent of songs about the war that exist, perhaps I should listen more.

(Q8) What did you think about the war at the time?

(A8) My Vietnam experience was not typical. I was 31 when I served there. By that time I had been an Army medic, Coast Guard Corpsman, Emergency Room RN, and Veterans Admin. RN. So I was no stranger to what metal and trauma will do to the human body and psyche. I did not have any strong political position regarding Vietnam. I wanted an independent duty experience with as much autonomy as possible. Flight Nursing in Vietnam certainly provided that in spades. I was there to do a job. I did it well, helped more than harmed., and for me and most of the flight nurses and flight techs I served with... It was arguably, a positive and seminal experience of a lifetime.

(Q9) How do you feel about the war looking back now?

(A9) I would do it again in a heartbeat... It was exciting, and challenged me, many young men... American, ARVN, ROK, are alive today, and able to live their lives because of the Medical Air Evac system in Vietnam. I was fortunate enough to see it in real time, and play a small part.

(Q10) How do you feel about the fact that new music is still being made about the war, often by people too young to remember it?

(A10) It does not anger or irritate me. If the music is good, and the song makes sense... Keep making music man!!

(Q11) Are you involved in Vietnam veteran activities these days?

(A11) From 1979 to 1986, I was the Team Leader of the Portland, Maine Vet Center (VA Operation Outreach, community based small facilities staffed by Vietnam Veterans, providing outreach and readjustment counseling to Vietnam Era Veterans). Today I am a life member of the VFW, and a member of the American Legion.

(Q12) Are you still writing and performing music?

(A12) Still writing and performing... Mostly coffee shops, local community events, open mic, when time avails from a busy schedule of grandchildren, great grandson, dev. delayed niece, my beloved German Shepard Dog, Nashoba. My three children, my loving wife Candace and extended family. So Justin, I am still caring for people and doing the best I am able. And there was a time in my life... called Vietnam.