



Lt. Cmdr. Edward Lea Camp #2
Houston, Texas
Department of Texas and Louisiana

Historical Overview

On Saturday, July 16, 1994, five Members-at-Large of the *Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW)* living in the Houston area, along with two new members, gathered in conference room number 1 in the Julia Iverson Building at the Houston Public Library. They met to complete a document entitled *Application for Permission to Form a Camp*, in an effort to organize the first *SUVCW* Camp in Houston – and the first in the State of Texas.

Later, it was learned that two other groups in Texas - at Arlington and Round Rock - were also in the process of applying to form *SUVCW* Camps in their respective locales. Although the applicants in Round Rock actually submitted their application first, Houston was the first to obtain a *Provisional Camp Charter*. The new Camp in Houston was named *Lt. Cmdr. Edward Lea, USN, Camp No. 2*, and was a component of the *SUVCW* National Department-at-Large.

The *Lea Camp* was named in honor of Lt. Cmdr. Edward Lea of Maryland, who served during the Civil War as Executive Officer on the sidewheel gunboat, *USS Harriet Lane*. He and his commanding officer, Jonathan Wainwright, were both killed in action onboard the *Harriet Lane* during the *Battle of Galveston* on New Year's Day, 1863. Lea was buried nearby in Galveston's Trinity Episcopal Cemetery.

Right: Lt. Cmdr. Edward Lea headstone



Camp meetings were scheduled for the second Tuesday of each month in the Concourse Meeting Room at the Houston Public Library. Annual Camp dues were set at \$15 - to be assessed upon the arrival of the Camp Charter. Danial F. B. Lisarelli was elected as the first Camp Commander, and James Tune Cunningham was elected as commander of the *Lea Camp's* fledgling unit of the *Sons of Veterans Reserve*, the ceremonial uniformed military component of the new Camp.

A Camp newsletter was first issued in July 1994, which was soon named *The Harriet Lane*. It was edited by Camp Commander Lisarelli and distributed monthly for three years. After being dormant for the next few years, the publication was resurrected in 2003.

By September 1994, the Camp roster included ten members. Almost every man served as either an elected or appointed Camp officer.

On November 12, 1994, six of the seven Charter members of the *Lea Camp* participated in their first Veterans Day memorial service in Hempstead, Texas. The tradition of honoring all U.S. military veterans on Veterans Day continued each year thereafter at various cemeteries. By the end of 1994, the Camp roster had grown to twelve members.

The *Lea Camp's* first major project was researching and preserving Camp Groce in Hempstead, Texas. Camp Groce was established in the spring of 1862 as a camp of instruction for Confederate forces in the region. But soon after the January 1, 1863 *Battle of Galveston*, the camp was transformed into a Union prisoner of war camp. Union prisoners from the *Battle of Galveston*, as well as from later battles at Sabine Pass, Matagorda, and Calcasieu, Louisiana, were also interred at Camp Groce. The POW camp was abandoned shortly before the end of the war. The *Lea Camp*, in conjunction with the Waller County Historical Commission and other like-minded organizations, worked for almost two years to complete the purchase of the site of the prison camp. Unfortunately, a last minute requirement of the seller resulted in the termination of the project in late 1996.

On January 7, 1995, the *Lea Camp* conducted its 1st *Annual Remembrance Service* at Trinity Episcopal Cemetery in Galveston at the gravesite of the Camp's namesake, Lt. Cmdr. Edward Lea. This elaborate memorial event, later renamed the *Battle of Galveston Commemoration*, has been hosted by the *Lea Camp* annually through the current day - becoming the signature event of the Camp each year. The highlight of the 1995 program was a formal presentation of the new Provisional Camp Charter.

On May 13, 1995, the *Lea Camp* of Houston joined three other Camps to form the *Department of the Southwest*. This represented the first new Department organized in the Order since 1971. The other three participating Camps were *Lone Star Camp No. 1* of Arlington and *Sam Houston Camp No. 3* of Round Rock, both in Texas - and *Jeremiah Smith Camp No. 1* of Newalla, Oklahoma. The formal installation was conducted on May 15, 1995, by Commander-in-Chief Keith G. Harrison at the 1st *Annual Department Encampment* held at the *Junior League Building* in Arlington, Texas. James Dark of *Lone Star Camp No. 1* was elected as the first Department Commander. Danial F. B. Lisarelli, Commander of *Lea Camp No. 2* was elected as the first Department Sr. Vice-Commander. The new Department had an initial roster of 74 members, including four 'real sons'. Two of the fifteen Charter members listed on the new Department Charter, were from *Lea Camp #2* - Robert L. Julian and Danial F. B. Lisarelli.

The *Lea Camp* has conducted and/or participated in several annual ceremonies each year since its inception, including Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Flag Day, and the *Battle of Galveston Commemoration*. The first Memorial Day event was held on May 29, 1995 at the *George B. McClellan GAR* burial lot in Washington Cemetery in Houston. As time went by, other annual events were added to the Camp calendar, including: Wreaths Across America; Boonville Days in Bryan; Juneteenth Celebration in Galveston; Civil War Weekend at Liendo Plantation in Hempstead; and others.

The *Lea Camp* continued to recruit and organize their *Sons of Veteran's Reserve (SVR)* unit. Soon, after a sufficient number of recruits had enrolled, *Co. G, 13th Maine Vol. Infantry Regiment, SVR*, was established.

The *Lea Camp* continued to take great interest in Camp Groce near Hempstead, Texas. In the summer of 1995, the reported discovery of the location of the stockade where Union prisoners were held increased attention and focus on that Civil War era site. Camp Commander Lisarelli was the recipient of the National *Cornelius F. Whitehouse Award* as the 'Order's most outstanding member' for his research efforts on Camp Groce.

The *Lea Camp* actively participated in additional events during the following years. Besides the annual Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Battle of Galveston ceremonies, the Camp took part in: the *Watermelon Festival* in Hempstead, Texas (Jul 1995); the Treue der Union monument rededication in Comfort, Texas (Aug 1996); *Battle of Long King Creek* re-enactment in Livingston, Texas (Spring 2004 and Feb 2005); the Reopening Dedication Ceremony for Sabine Pass Battleground State Park and subsequent battle reenactment in Sabine Pass, Texas (Apr

2004 and Sep 2004); the *Battle of Crockett Springs* in Crockett, Texas (Oct 2004); multiple-year participation in the large *Civil War Weekend* battle reenactments at Liendo Plantation in Hempstead, Texas; the *Civil War Conference* in Conroe, Texas (Apr 2005); and numerous graveside and historical marker memorials and dedications.

On November 14, 1995, during the monthly business meeting of *Lea Camp #2*, the final draft of the proposed Camp Bylaws was reviewed and unanimously approved.

The *Lea Camp* successfully sponsored the formation of a local branch of the *Ladies Auxiliary to the SUVCW* on December 7, 1996. The National organization officially chartered the *Edward Lea Auxiliary No. 1*, which was later renamed *Sarah Emma Seelye Ladies Auxiliary #1*. Beginning with seven members, the *Auxiliary* gained new recruits over the years and has steadfastly supported many activities sponsored by the *Lea Camp* while faithfully championing the mission of the *SUVCW*.

On November 8, 1997, members of *Lea Camp #2* gathered at New City Cemetery in Galveston to formally dedicate a recently installed *Medal of Honor* headstone at the grave of 1st Lt. George Frank Robie, who served in *Co. D, 7th New Hampshire Infantry*. The Camp was honored to have two living *Medal of Honor* recipients, Mr. Clarence Sasser and Mr. Roy Benavidez, attend the ceremony.

Right: **George F. Robie Headstone**



In 1998, members of *Lea Camp #2* researched, restored, and re-dedicated the *Winfield Scott Hancock Post No. 2, Grand Army of the Republic* burial plot in Lakeview Cemetery in Galveston. The efforts received State recognition through a Proclamation endorsed by then Governor George W. Bush. The keynote speaker for the re-dedication ceremony was State Senator Jerry Patterson. The Camp also placed headstones on seventeen unrelated Union veteran graves in three separate cemeteries in the Houston-Galveston area that year.

On July 16, 1999, the *Lea Camp* reached their five-year-in-existence milestone. The members, in conjunction with the *Sarah Emma Seelye Auxiliary*, celebrated the occasion with a formal *Fifth Anniversary Dinner* at Allen Park Inn in Houston. The keynote speaker at the event was noted author, Edward T. Cotham, Jr.

In 2001, the *Lea Camp* restored and re-dedicated the second *Winfield Scott Hancock Post 2, G.A.R.* burial plot in Galveston's Lakeview Cemetery.

During the early 2000's, the *Lea Camp* monthly business meetings continued to be held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month, but the usual venue changed to the Spaghetti Warehouse restaurant in downtown Houston. There were no meeting during the month of August, and the January meetings were held in Galveston following the *Annual Battle of Galveston Commemoration* ceremonies.

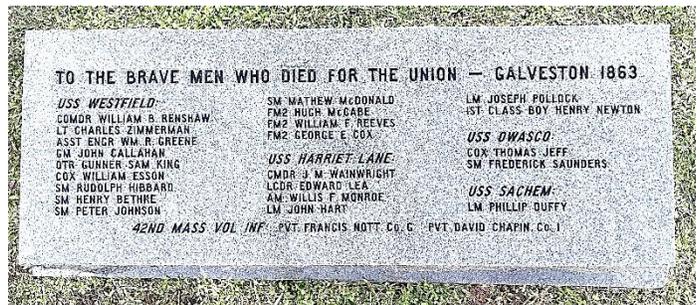
The *Harriet Lane*, the official newsletter of the *Lea Camp*, was resurrected during the first quarter of 2003 after being dormant for over four years. The new editor, Michael L. Lance, published the first reformatted issue for March 2003, using the original newsletter name and maintaining the numbering sequence as if there had been no interruption in publication. The first 14-page 'new' issue was labeled Spring 2003, Volume 10, Number 1. The contents, in addition to reporting on the recent *Lea Camp* activities, featured new member profiles, a Civil War ancestor profile, a calendar of coming events, interesting Civil War-related articles, and informational trivia items. Hard copies were mailed to all Camp members via the postal service. The *Harriet Lane* has been published quarterly thenceforth, with some issues containing as many as thirty pages. Postal delivery of hard copies

eventually gave way to internet distribution via email attachments. By 2024, the 'new' *Harriet Lane* was a 5-time recipient of the National annual *Marshall Hope Award* as 'Best Camp Newsletter' by the respective sitting Commanders-in-Chief.

On May 4, 2003, several members of *Lea Camp No. 2* traveled to the small central Texas town of Junction to participate, along with members from the other Texas Camps, in a formal graveside memorial service for 1st Lt. John William Boone, a veteran of *Co. E, 8th Reg't. Indiana Cavalry*. The highlight of the event was the presence of two of Lt. Boone's three living daughters (real daughters), Mrs. Janice Watson Kirby and Mary Augusta Boone-Watson.

On January 10, 2004, the *Lea Camp* gathered once again at Trinity Episcopal Cemetery in Galveston for the 10th *Annual Memorial Service* commemorating the 1863 *Battle of Galveston*. The focus of the program was the formal dedication of a new marble monument dedicated to the memory of the Union casualties of the *Battle of Galveston*.

Right: Top surface of the Union Monument



The monument had been recently installed a few rows distant from the gravesite of Lt. Cmdr. Edward Lea. Television and print media crews were on hand to document the event. A musket salute was offered by a 15-gun Union Honor Guard. The monument project had been initiated by the *Lea Camp* in 2002.

Over the years, the *Lea Camp* has awarded numerous *SUVCW* Certificates and badges to deserving Eagle Scouts and outstanding high school and college ROTC/JROTC cadets. Many of these awards were presented in person by Camp members at formal award ceremonies. In addition to the Eagle Scout and JROTC presentations, members of the *Lea Camp* gave educational presentations at area schools and during living history events.

On July 16, 2004, the *Lea Camp* celebrated its 10th year in existence and a roster of 47 members.

On June 18, 2005, during the 11th *Annual Encampment of the Department of the Southwest* in Round Rock, Texas, a motion was introduced to change the name of the *Department of the Southwest* to the *Department of Texas*. The impetus for the motion was the fact that during the preceding years, there had been little interaction with the Camps in Oklahoma. In addition, four new Camps had been formed in Oklahoma, and they were interested in forming their own Department. With that in mind, the motion to change the name of the Department was unanimously approved, and submitted to National for approval. And since the original Charter for the *Department of the Southwest* could not be located, a motion to order a replacement Charter was approved.



On January 14, 2006, immediately following the 12th *Annual Battle of Galveston Commemoration* ceremony at Trinity Episcopal Cemetery in Galveston, the *Lea Camp* formally dedicated a new state historical marker at the gravesite of the Camp's namesake, Lt. Cmdr. Edward Lea.

Left: Historical Marker at Lea grave

The elaborate dedication ceremony marked the conclusion of a 2-year project by the Camp's *Marker Committee*. Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson flew in from Austin to attend the event and give the keynote address.

General Order No. 8, issued by Commander-in-Chief Donald E. Darby, and dated February 3, 2006, approved the name change of the *Department of the Southwest* to the *Department of Texas* – and further stipulated that the replacement Charter would retain the names of the original Charter members and the original date of rank.

On September 23, 2007, *Company A, 8th U.S. Infantry unit of Sons of Veterans Reserve (SVR)* was established. *Lea Camp #2* members commissioned as officers of the new SVR unit included David K. LaBrot as 1st Lieutenant and Stephen D. Schulze as 2nd Lieutenant.

During the 16th *Annual Encampment of the Department of Texas* in Houston on June 5, 2010, the delegates voted to dissolve the ‘At-Large’ Camp then existing in Texas. The affected members would be assimilated into the nearest existing local Texas Camps. *Lea Camp #2* gained several new members as a result of this reorganization, including three distant transferees living in Louisiana. *Department Order #3*, issued by Department Commander David K. LaBrot on January 10, 2011, ordered the transfers to be effective as of December 31, 2010.

By June 2011, the roster of *Lea Camp #2* had reached 72 members – and by January 1, 2014, it had swelled to 100 members in good standing.

On June 7, 2014, the 20th *Annual Encampment of the Department of Texas, Louisiana and New Mexico* was held in the conference center at the Pearce Museum in the Cook Center at Navarro College in Corsicana, Texas. During the business session, an exploratory committee for hosting a future National Encampment in Texas was formed. The initial planning of this committee eventually culminated in the *Department of Texas and Louisiana* being selected to host the first ever National Encampment held in Texas.

From March 2017 through May 2017, the *Lea Camp* facilitated the awarding of 112 *SUVCW* awards to outstanding ROTC/JROTC cadets. Twenty-eight different members of the Camp personally presented one or more of those awards at high schools and colleges in Texas and Louisiana – for a total of 82 awards presented in-person.

Right: JROTC Cadet Foulk receives a SUVCW Award

During the months of March 2019 through May, 2019, the *Lea Camp* facilitated the presentation of another 89 *SUVCW* awards to outstanding ROTC/JROTC cadets at high schools and colleges. Forty-seven of those awards were personally presented to cadets by twenty different *Camp* members at ROTC/JROTC award banquets, military balls, or award ceremonies.

As of May 31, 2019, the roster of *Lea Camp #2* had grown to 112 members. Of those, eight were Life members and four were Associate members.



On June 27, 2020, the 26th *Annual Encampment of the Department of Texas and Louisiana* was conducted online via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the elections, William A. Pollard of *Lea Camp #2* was elected as Department Jr. Vice-Commander for the 2020-2021 term.

On June 26, 2021, the 27th *Annual Encampment of the Department of Texas and Louisiana* was again held virtually via Zoom due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. During the election of Department officers, William A. Pollard of *Lea Camp #2* was elected as Department Commander for the 2021-2022 term. However, a few weeks later, in

early August, he was hospitalized after contracting the COVID-19 virus. He battled the disease courageously, but passed away on August 17, 2021 at age 65. An elaborate memorial service was held on October 30, 2021 at his gravesite at Hayes-Grace Memorial Park Cemetery in Hitchcock, Texas. National Chaplain Jerome Kowalski traveled from Illinois to attend the memorial event. Past Camp Commander Michael L. Lance of *Lea Camp 2* was appointed by the Department Council to fulfill Pollard's 2021-2022 term as Department Commander.

On May 10, 2025, during officer elections at the 31st Annual Encampment of the Department of Texas and Louisiana in Houston, John C. Vander Meulen of *Lea Camp #2* of Houston was elected as Sr. Vice-Commander of the Department. National Commander-in-Chief, Kevin Martin, attended the Encampment and conducted the officer installations. His wife, Rosemary Martin, President of the *National Auxiliary to the SUVCW*, was also present and addressed the attending Delegates.

The *Department of Texas and Louisiana* petitioned for and was selected to host the 144th Annual National Encampment of the *Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War* on August 7-10, 2025 in Houston, Texas. Lt. Cmdr. Edward *Lea Camp #2* served as the local host Camp.

Today, *Lea Camp 2* still has over one hundred members, and continues to be the largest Camp in the *Department of Texas and Louisiana*. Geographically, the *Lea Camp* encompasses a vast territory, stretching from El Paso and Alpine in the west, to Harlingen and Corpus Christi in the south, to New Orleans and Hammond, Louisiana in the east, and to Etoile and Gladewater in the North.

Together with the *Ladies Auxiliary of the SUVCW*, the *Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War* (DUVCW), and the *Sons of Veterans Reserve*, Lt. Edward *Lea Camp No. 2* strives to accomplish the collective mission of honoring the memory and preserving the legacy of the Union veterans, and all veterans of our great nation.

