

Army, Marines and Navy Veteran

The war was over by the time the telegram arrived in Norfolk. Two atomic bombs had been dropped on Japan in early August. The Emperor had addressed his subjects over the radio, telling them in roundabout language that the war Japan had started in the previous decade and had recklessly widened in 1941 was lost. By the time the message arrived at the Lea residence on Runnymede Road, the Japanese had already signed the formal surrender ceremony in Tokyo Harbor.

The telegram contained the heartbreaking news that Commander James Lowry Lea—husband, father and son--had died in Okinawa from multiple injuries suffered in service to his country.

Lea was born in Charleston on July 31, 1898. He graduated from Porter Military Academy and, in 1916, enrolled in Clemson College as a chemistry. On campus, Lea was a member of the Charleston County Club, but he left the college in 1918 to serve in the Great War. According to *The State* newspaper, Lea served in both the Army and Marine Corps during the war and was wounded in action.

Following the war, Lea returned to school, earning a degree in dentistry from the Atlanta Southern Dental College. Lea moved to Norfolk, Virginia and entered into practice, eventually building a reputation as an oral surgeon. He and his wife, the former Bernice Donaldson, had two children, James L. Lea, Jr. and Mary Martha Lea. In addition to his dental practice, Lea was an amateur boatman and was a member of the Norfolk Yacht and Country Club. He was also a lieutenant commander in the US Navy Reserve.

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Lea was called back to active duty as a member of the Navy's Dental Corps. He was sent to Okinawa, site of the last major land battle of World War II. He died from his injuries on August 24, 1945, ten days after the Japanese signaled their willingness to surrender.

James Lowry Lea was survived by his wife, their children, his mother and a sister.

