

# Tom Lea Historical Timeline

JULY 11, 1907 – JANUARY 28, 2001

**JULY 11, 1907** Born in El Paso, Texas, to Tom and Zola Utt Lea

**1915-1917** Father is mayor of El Paso during the Mexican Revolution.

**1912-1924** Attends El Paso public schools.

**1924-1926** Studies at the Art Institute of Chicago. Marries fellow art student Nancy Jane Taylor.

**1926-1933** Serves as apprentice to muralist John Warner Norton. Travels to Europe.

**1933-1935** Works in Santa Fe at Laboratory of Anthropology. Illustrates New Mexico Magazine. Paints for Works Progress Administration (WPA). *Conquistadors* and *Old Mesilla* murals for New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Las Cruces, N.M.

**1936** Returns to El Paso. Nancy Lea dies. Centennial murals for Hall of State, Dallas State Fairgrounds. Enters juried competitions for Section of Fine Arts, U.S. Treasury Department. Paints *The Nesters* mural (lost), Ben Franklin Post Office, Washington, D.C. Meets printer Carl Hertzog and writer J. Frank Dobie.

**1937** Paints *The Baptism of Christ* mural, First Baptist Church, El Paso (lost). Competes for San Antonio Post Office murals. Loses competition.

**1938** Paints *Pass of the North* mural in Federal Courthouse, El Paso. Marries Sarah Catherine Dighton of Monticello, Ill. One son, James Dighton.

**1939** Paints mural in Burlington Railroad Station, Lacrosse, Wis. Paints *Back Home, 1865* mural in Pleasant Hill, Mo. Illustrates *Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver* and *John C. Duval: First Texas Man of Letters* by J. Frank Dobie. Competes for St. Louis, Mo., Post Office murals. Loses competition.

**1940** Paints *The Stampede* mural in Odesa Post Office. Illustrates *The Longhorns* by J. Frank Dobie.

**1941** Illustrates children's book *Hills of Gold*. Writes and illustrates *Randado*,



designed and printed by Carl Hertzog.

**1941-1946** Paints *Comanches* mural, Seymour, Texas. Awarded Rosenwald Fellowship. Declines fellowship to join *LIFE* magazine as World War II artist correspondent. Travels over 100,000 miles on four tours. Work printed in 10 issues: *Top Sergeant: Bruce Bieber Makes Soldiers out of Citizens* (July 7, 1941); *Soldiers at Work: Tom Lea Catches Their Absorbed Expressions* (April 27, 1942); *Tom Lea Paints the North Atlantic Patrol* (May 25, 1942); *Hornet's Last Day – Tom Lea Paints Death of a Great Carrier* (August 2, 1943); *Sinking of the Wasp* (April 5, 1943); *Tom Lea Aboard the U.S.S. Hornet* (March 22, 1943); *China's War Anniversary* (May 29, 1944); *John Hersey, Three Airmen* (May 29, 1944); *LIFE's Artists Record a World at War* (April 30, 1945); *Peleliu: Tom Lea Paints Island Invasion* (June 11, 1945). Writes and illustrates *Grizzly from the Coral Sea* and *Peleliu Landing*, designed and printed by Carl Hertzog. Submits *The Shining Plain* to "All-Texas Show" at Dallas Museum of Art. Painting rejected. Travels to Mexico documenting history of beef cattle in the Americas for *LIFE* Magazine. Learns about black fighting cattle.

**1944-1946** Begins work on a novel. Completes painting *Sarah in the Summertime* and gives it to Sarah.

**1947** Writes and illustrates *The Brave Bulls* published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1949). Novel becomes bestseller

and movie starring Mel Ferrer and Miroslava. Paints portrait of Benito Juarez for Pan American Round Table of El Paso (1948). Painting sent to President Harry Truman at Blair House.

**1952-1959** Writes and illustrates *The Wonderful Country* published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1952). Novel becomes bestseller and movie starring Robert Mitchum and Julie London. Writes and illustrates two-volume history of *The King Ranch* (1952-1957). Completes *Southwest* mural for El Paso Public Library with Sarah, a gift to citizens of El Paso (1956). Designs Steuben glass bowl, *Trail Driver* (1958) and stained glass window for entrance of First Presbyterian Church, El Paso (1959). Writes and illustrates *The Primal Yoke*, published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1960).

**1960-1965** Paints and writes about Mexican character Juan Sanchez. Illustrates *Knight in the Sun* for fellow El Pasoan. Book published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1962). Writes and illustrates *The Hands of Cantu*, published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1964). Paints *Ranger Escort West of the Pecos* for Texas Gov. John Connally (1965). Paints portrait of Sam Rayburn for Rayburn Building, Washington, D.C. (1966).

**1967-1968** *Western Beef Cattle: A Series of Eleven Paintings by Tom Lea* published by Encino Press, Austin (1967). Writes and illustrates *A Picture Gallery*, published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1968).

**1974** Writes and illustrates *In the Crucible of the Sun*, published by King Ranch, Inc., Kingsville (1974).

**1974-1997** Works as studio painter in El Paso. Records *Tom Lea, An Oral History* with Adair Margo, published by Texas Western Press, El Paso (1995). El Paso Museum of Art establishes Tom Lea Gallery in new museum (1997).

**JANUARY 29, 2001** Tom Lea dies in El Paso. First Lady Laura Bush attends his funeral at First Baptist Church on February 1.

Tom Lea  
INSTITUTE



and the

Army Historical Foundation • Bullock Texas State History Museum • Air Force Historical Foundation  
El Paso Museum of Art • The Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin  
Humanities Texas • Naval Historical Foundation • El Paso Inc.  
National Trust for the Humanities • National Museum of the Pacific War  
Texas A&M University Press • El Paso Times • University of Texas at El Paso

PRESENT

## The Two Thousand Yard Stare: Tom Lea's World War II

A discussion of Tom Lea's art in the LIFE Collection of World War II,  
U.S. Army Center of Military History

Thursday, September 25, 2014  
Officers' Club, Fort Belvoir, Virginia



This program is supported by the National Trust for the Humanities in connection with the National Endowment for the Humanities' newest initiative, *Standing Together: the Humanities and the Experience of War*, with additional support from the Brown Foundation, Wells Fargo Bank, the Hunt Family Foundation, Billy Bob Crim (USMC, ret.), and Ann and Bill Kiely.



**T**OWARD the end of World War II, when Tom Lea returned home for the last time after spending four years as an Accredited Artist Correspondent for LIFE magazine, he corresponded with the chaplain he met on Peleliu, writing that “the least war like people I know are those who have seen the most of its actuality.” Lea saw much of war’s actuality from land, sea and sky while traveling over 100,000 miles to different theaters. He went aboard a Navy destroyer in the North Atlantic, covering the fight against wolf packs of German U-boats. He saw it aboard the carrier Hornet in the South Pacific, witnessing the sinking of the Wasp. He saw it in England, North Africa and China while recording Army Air Forces transport, fighter and bomber crews; and he experienced it when he landed on the bloody beaches of Peleliu with the 7th Marines. Between tours, he came home to paint a trustworthy record. Many of his paintings were published in ten issues of LIFE between 1941 and 1944. Over eighty were given to the United States government and are housed in the U.S. Army Center of Military History at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.



Tom Lea was a LIFE artist correspondent; he chronicled the landing on the island of Peleliu with the 1st battalion 7th Marines. On the easel is *The Price*, 1944.

9:00 a.m.

## Welcome



**Micki Costello,**  
Chairman,  
the Tom Lea Institute



**BG Creighton Abrams,**  
Executive Director,  
Army Historical Foundation

9:15 – 10:45 a.m.

## Tom Lea as a WWII Artist Correspondent:

*What can eye-witness artist accounts tell us?*



**Sarah Forgey,**  
Curator,  
U.S. Army Center  
of Military History



**Melissa Renn,**  
Art historian and author  
of the forthcoming book  
*LIFE Reconsidered: Rethinking LIFE Magazine's  
Role in the American Art World*



**Brendan Greeley Jr.,**  
USMC (ret.),  
editor, *The Two Thousand Yard Stare:*  
*Tom Lea's World War II*

## Questions

11:00 – 11:30 a.m.

## Can Beauty Exist in War?

*Tom Lea's WWII Artist Sketchbook  
at the El Paso Museum of Art*



**Dr. Michael Tomor,**  
Director,  
El Paso Museum of Art

## Questions



*Hitting The Beach*, 1944. Oil on canvas, 22 x 42. LIFE Collection of Art WWII, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

12:30 – 1:30 p.m.

## Peleliu Landing – A Personal Story



**Dr. Tom Hatfield,**  
Director,  
Military History Institute,  
Briscoe Center  
for American History,  
University of Texas at Austin



**Adair Margo,**  
author of *Tom Lea, An Oral History;*  
and President,  
the Tom Lea Institute

## Questions



*Sickbay in a Shellhole*, 1944. Oil on canvas, 27 x 32.  
LIFE Collection of Art WWII, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Fort Belvoir, Virginia

11:45 a.m.– 12:15 p.m.

## Tom Lea: Realism and Patriotism in the Life of a Great American Artist



**Dr. Maceo Dailey,**  
Director of African American Studies;  
and Associate Professor,  
Department of History,  
The University of Texas at El Paso

## Questions

### ON THE COVER:

*That 2,000 Yard Stare*, 1944  
Oil on canvas, 36 x 28  
LIFE Collection of Art WWII, U.S. Army Center of Military History,  
Fort Belvoir, Virginia.