



The Forgotten War: Members Who Served in Korea

The Korean Conflict lasted from June 25, 1950 until July 27, 1953. Ending in a cease-fire rather than a peace treaty, the conflict is often referred to as the "Forgotten War." More than 5 million American soldiers fought in the conflict, and more than 50,000 died. In this issue we are highlighting just a few of the brave men who served their country in the Armed Forces during the conflict, as well as their state, from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.



**Walter Francis Layer,
1947-1948
Delaware County**

Walter Francis Layer graduated from the Pennsylvania Military Preparatory School in 1928 and the Pennsylvania Military College in 1932. During World War II he served at the U.S. Embassy in London, as well as in the 3rd Battalion, 6th Regiment, Marine Corps Reserve.

During the Korean Conflict, Layer was a commanding officer of the 1st Marine Regiment. He received the Legion of Merit award for his service. For his service as a senior advisor to the Republic of Korea Marine Corps, he received the Military Order of Ulchi with Gold Star.

In addition to his distinguished military career, Layer was a mathematics instructor at the Pennsylvania Military College and vice president of the Bordentown Military Institute. He is interred at Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia.



Colonel Walter F. Layer, U. S. Marine Corps, former PMC football and boxing great, last week was promoted to present rank at Camp Lejeune, N. C.

Right: *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 25, 1951, page 25.



**Merle H. Phillips,
1980-2010
Montour,
Northumberland,
and Snyder Counties**

Merle H. Phillips enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1947, and served until 1951. He continued to serve in the Reserve for an additional two years.

Following his military service, Phillips was a successful businessman. He eventually became president of Irish Valley Food Processing, Inc.

Phillips was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in a special election on March 11, 1980, and served continually until his retirement in 2010. While in office, Phillips served as Majority and Minority Caucus Administrator for many years. Following Phillips' death, then Majority Leader Mike Turzai noted, "... service to the Marines was at the core of who he was as a person."



Right: Image courtesy of the Phillips family and Representative Culver's office.

The Forgotten War continued...

Daniel B. Strickler, 1931-1932, Lancaster County



Daniel B. Strickler served in the Pennsylvania National Guard from 1916 to 1959, with most of his service under the 28th Infantry Division. During that time he participated in the Mexican Border Campaign, World War I, World War II, and the Korean Conflict.

Throughout his distinguished military career, Strickler earned a Bronze Star, a Silver Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, a Legion of Merit, a Combat Infantry Badge, and a Purple Heart.

After serving a single session in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Strickler served as the Lancaster County Solicitor for nearly a decade. In 1946, Strickler was elected Lieutenant Governor of

Pennsylvania. When the 28th Infantry Division was called up in 1950, he was still in office. Though he did not officially resign, Strickler took leave to serve as Major General of the division which was mobilized and deployed to Europe as part of the NATO command defending western Europe from Soviet threats.

He remained on active duty following the Korean Conflict, serving as chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group in Rome and as assistant chief of staff for civil affairs with the Far East Command in Tokyo until his retirement.



Joseph R. Zeller, 1971-1980, Lehigh County

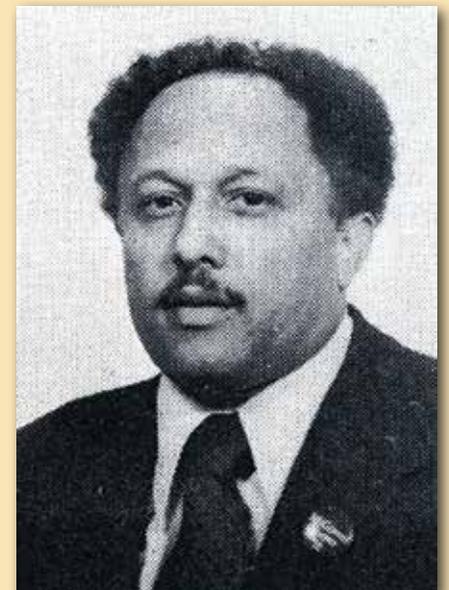
Joseph Zeller was born in Campus, Illinois in 1918. Following the death of his mother, he and his brother were sent to live with an aunt on her farm in Indiana. His aunt made bootleg whisky during Prohibition, and when her farm was raided, Zeller and his brother fled to Chicago. He began studying to become an electrician, but his plans were interrupted. At the beginning of World War II, he enlisted in the United States Navy. He continued his service in the Korean Conflict with a bomber squadron.

Following his time in the Navy, Zeller earned an electrical engineering degree from Penn State University. Settling in Emmaus, Lehigh County, Zeller served as mayor and later State Representative. He is interred at Indiantown Gap National Cemetery.

Lucien E. Blackwell, 1973-1975, Philadelphia County

Blackwell was born in Fayette County, but grew up in Philadelphia. In his youth, he pursued a boxing career, and won a novice Diamond Belt Championship in 1949. Blackwell also took a job as a dockworker before being drafted. He entered the United States Army and served during the Korean Conflict. During his service he was awarded a Unit Commendation, two Bronze Stars, and a Good Conduct Medal.

Following his time in the Army, Blackwell resumed his work as a longshoreman. He joined the International Longshoremen's Union, and served as president of the Philadelphia branch from 1973 to 1991. In addition to his service in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Blackwell served in the United States Congress from 1991 to 1995. Blackwell's dedication to the people and community he served has been honored, and today the Lucien E. Blackwell West Philadelphia Regional Library bears his name.



Hollywood in the Pennsylvania Capitol

Pennsylvania's State Capitol has hosted countless prominent politicians, foreign dignitaries, professional athletes, and even the occasional celebrity. While these guests often visit on official business, in 1992 the Capitol was host to some famous faces for something more unique.

Hollywood Pictures selected Pennsylvania's State Capitol to film *The Distinguished Gentleman*, a major motion picture starring Eddie Murphy. Harrisburg

was selected as one of the filming locations due to its resemblance to the United States Capitol in Washington, DC. The comedy tells the tale of a con artist (Murphy) who gets elected to Congress, but once in office, has a change of heart and steps up to serve the people.

Filming locations included exterior shots such as the Irvis Office Building and outdoor staircases, the Speaker's Office, the Main Rotunda, various hallways, as well as the Senate Chamber (the scene filmed in the Senate Chamber was unfortunately cut from the film's final cut).

The filming took place over a week, and many legislative staff, as well as around 40 Members and Senators, were selected to be extras. The extras included former State Representative Dwight Evans, who made headlines for his striking resemblance to Murphy in his younger days. Evans said while he wouldn't be used as a double for Murphy, he said, laughing, that maybe he would "play me one day as chairman of the Appropriations Committee."¹

Following the filming, the film's producer sent Speaker Robert W. O'Donnell a letter thanking him for access to his office, as well as for the assistance and kindness that House Parliamentarian Clancy Myer and other House staff provided to the film crew while they worked in the Capitol.

The city of Harrisburg has been a filming location for a number of other major motion pictures over the years. However, *The Distinguished Gentleman* remains the only Hollywood film to feature the interior of Pennsylvania's Capitol.

¹ Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 16, 1992, page 17.



Above Source: *Public Opinion*, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, May 15, 1992. Page 1.



Images: Stills from the film, The Distinguished Gentleman.

Clockwise from the top: the Speaker's Office (at the time Speaker Robert O'Donnell's); the stairs under the Main Rotunda leading to the lower level; exterior, Irvis Office Building (then the South Office Building); and the Main Rotunda.



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Member Profile: Ruth Rudy: Legislator, Author, and Inventor



Representative Ruth Rudy served Centre and Mifflin Counties from 1983 to 1996. She began her career as an x-ray technician, but soon began working for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. Rudy was elected to serve as prothonotary and clerk of courts of Centre County from 1976 to 1983.

While in office, Rudy focused on issues pertaining to agriculture, as well as equality for women, and she sponsored numerous successful pieces of legislation. Rudy was the prime sponsor of the legislation that led to Act 185 of 1990 which required restrooms be provided for women on an equitable basis. The legislation gained media attention, and was nicknamed the “potty parity bill.” When reflecting on how she would like her time in office to be remembered, Rudy explained, “I was able to puncture the ‘good ole boys club’ of politics to have a voice for women, rural communities, and to truly work for the people.”

Following her time in office, Rudy continued to be engaged in politics and community affairs. She also contributed to *The Centre Daily Times* as a community columnist, publishing *Reflections of My Life in the Valley* in 2007, a compilation of her columns.



Left: In 1995 Rudy was granted a United States Patent for her design of a protective face shield aimed at protecting the face when applying hair spray.

Right: Rudy was a delegate to several Democratic National Conventions. In 1992, she wore the pictured watermelon hat inspired by President Clinton’s home state of Arkansas. The hat is now part of the collections at the Smithsonian.

Source: *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 18, 1992, page 232.



Did you know?

This year marks the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which granted women the right to vote. Pennsylvania was the 7th state to ratify the Amendment on June 24, 1919, and it became law on August 18, 1920. Since the monumental victory, women have taken their rightful place serving in Pennsylvania’s Legislature. Stay tuned for future House Archives projects highlighting other amazing women who have served the people of Pennsylvania!