

Cornwell Obituary

J. Leighton Cornwell, known as "Count" Cornwell to hundreds of long-time Venetians for his many civic endeavors, died Sunday, April 25, 1982, at Venice Hospital following a lengthy illness. He was 79.

County Cornwell, who developed "Cornwell on the Gulf," the area's first beachfront subdivision south of the city limits following his retirement here in 1948, devoted the next 30 years to local civic causes.

Using his considerable influence with state and national officials, Cornwell is credited with spearheading efforts to speed the construction of Interstate 75 through Sarasota County. He also is credited with organizing the first Venice School Safety Patrol and later served as the city's first director of civil defense. He also spearheaded the four-laning of U.S. 41 from Sarasota to Venice.

One of his favorite civic projects was the annual children's Christmas party at the old Gulf Theater on West Venice Avenue, during which the youngsters of the area were given toys and candy and treated to a free movie.

In 1973, he was appointed chairman of the Sarasota County Bicentennial Action Committee which brought the Freedom Train to Venice on its national tour. He also was a director of the Government Employees Benefit Association for 10 years and was awarded the first lifetime membership in the No-Vel American Legion Post in Venice.

The "Count" also had devoted his career in the U. S. Government to public service and served two presidents as an assistant attorney general, as well as dedicating his retirement to civic activism.

Cornwell began his career as a reporter with the old International News Service, but left journalism to pursue a law degree at George Washington University. He rose through the ranks of the Department of Justice to become an assistant to Attorney General Robert H. Jackson and in 1940 assumed responsibility for the national civil defense program in the eventuality of war.

Cornwell served in the U.S. Army Air Corps during the World War II and was discharged with the rank of major. He returned to the Justice Department under President Harry Truman to

specialize in juvenile delinquency problems.

As a veteran himself and because of his concern for other veterans, he assisted many area veterans with problems they encountered regarding health care, pensions, benefits and other questions.

He leaves his wife, Mable W. Cornwell of Venice; two daughters, Eloise C. Morgan of Tampa and Catherine C. Boyette of Burlington, N.C.; a sister, Aleen Milstead of Washington, DC., and five grandchildren.