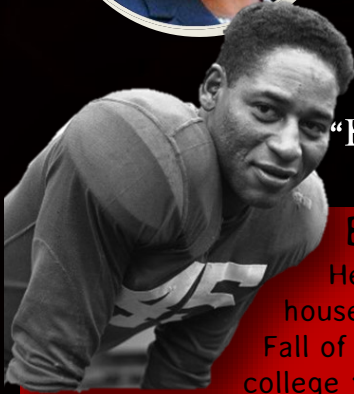


The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County Emlen Lewis Tunnell

(March 29, 1924 - July 23, 1975)

"First African-American Inducted into Pro Football Hall of Fame"
"First African-American New York Giants Football Player"

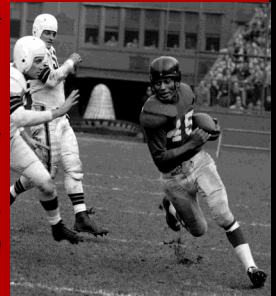


Emlen Lewis Tunnell was born March 29, 1924 in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

He was raised just north of Philadelphia, along with his three siblings, by his mother, a housekeeper. Emlen was the star half-back of the Radnor High School football team. In the Fall of 1942, Emlen enrolled in the University of Toledo and began playing college football. His college football career was quickly cut short when on October 23, 1942, he sustained a broken neck during a game. Not one to give up easily, Emlen recovered, switched sports, and went on to lead the university's basketball team to the finals just one year later. Soon thereafter, he left school to join the US Coast Guard just before the start of WWII.

Emlen served on the cargo ship USS Etamin stationed in the South West Pacific from August 1943 to July 1944. In April 1944, while unloading explosives and gasoline in Papua, New Guinea, the USS Etamin was struck by a torpedo dropped from a Japanese airplane. Emlen jumped into action and saved a fellow crew member who was set afire in the blast, beating out the flames and sustaining burns to his own hands. He carried the shipmate to safety. In the Fall of the same year he began playing for the San Francisco Coast Guard Pilots football team. In 1946, Emlen saved another shipmate who fell overboard; Emlen reportedly jumped into the 32-degree water and rescued the drowning man. Both actions earned Emlen the Silver Life Saving Medal and the Combat Action Ribbon.

In 1946, Emlen completed his tour with the Coast Guard and enrolled in the University of Iowa, playing football for two seasons. When he wasn't drafted to the NFL, Emlen hitchhiked to New York and approached the New York Giants for a tryout. On July 24, 1948, Emlen was given a \$5,000 contract with a \$1,000 bonus, making him the first African-American to play for the New York Giants. Emlen's career with the Giants lasted 11 years until 1958. During this time, he was selected as a first-team All-Pro six times, played in eight Pro Bowls, and set multiple franchise records. To this day, he remains the number two all-time recorder holder for 79 intercepted passes.



After the 1958 season, Vince Lombardi, the Giants' offensive coordinator, left New York to become head coach and General Manager of the Green Bay Packers. The next year the Packers bought out Emlen's contract from the NY Giants. Emlen played with Green Bay until his retirement in 1962. He finished with records of: 79 career interceptions; 1,282 interception return yards; 258 punts; 2,209 punt return yards; 3,421 return yards; and playing 158 consecutive games. He continued working with the Packers and Giants, first as a scout and then as Assistant Coach for the Giant's defensive backs. In February 1967 Emlen Lewis Tunnell was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, making him the first African-American and the first defensive back to be inducted.

In 1974, Emlen suffered a minor heart attack and was reassigned to the Giant's as assistant personnel director. Less than one year later, on July 23, 1975, Emlen Tunnell suffered another, but this time fatal, heart attack during a Giant's practice session in Pleasantville, NY. He was just 51 years old.

