

# Man Who Saved Pershing's Son Now Lives In Retirement Here

By CECILIA NAPOLES.

William J. Johnson, who saved the life of Gen. J. Pershing's son, Francis Warren, in a San Francisco fire in 1915 that took the lives of the rest of the general's family, is now living in quiet retirement in El Paso.

Nearly 73, Johnson then was working for the Pershing family after serving in the Army under the general with his famous Negro troops for many years, and was sleeping in his room when the fire broke out between 4 and 4:30 a. m. Aug. 27.

According to Johnson, Mrs. Pershing had come in from a social affair in the Presidio Officers' Club earlier and had written her nightly letter to the general, who had just been transferred to Fort Bliss with the Seventh Infantry.

"I heard the children running around upstairs, which woke me up," Johnson recalls. "I got up, went into the dining room and saw that it was all ablaze. I ran to the back stairway to go to Mrs. Pershing's bedroom, but the stair door was locked, so I ran back down, gave the fire alarm and went out in front.

"By that time, a neighbor had come up and boosted me up over on the front porch. When I burst the window screen open, and opened the window, the heat nearly knocked me out.

"At that time, the family of General Pershing's aide, a Lieutenant Boswell, was living in the west side of the house. I took the two Boswell children and threw them down to the firemen's net—the fire department had already arrived—and Mrs. Boswell herself jumped down to the net.

"Then I heard someone say 'Everybody is safe' and a few seconds later, 'There are four dead up here,' and I saw the bodies of Mrs. Pershing and her three daughters, Helen, Ann and Mary Margaret, being carried out."

When Johnson came down from the porch, he realized the general's only son, Warren, who was then about seven years old, according to Johnson's calculations, was missing.

"I told one of the firemen to put a ladder to Warren's room and climbed up there," Johnson continues. "We went into the smoke-filled room and I took out Warren, who was overcome by the smoke. I was barefoot and just as I was about to reach the bottom of the ladder, I slipped and fell, but neither one of us got hurt."

## JOHNSON BORN IN MARYLAND

Johnson was born in Charles



WILLIAM J. JOHNSON.

County, Maryland, and enlisted in the Army when he was only 18. During the 22 years he spent as a soldier, he saw many years of service with General Pershing's Negro Infantry troops. While in the Army, he served in different posts in the country, and in Cuba, Honolulu and the Philippines.

He has lived in El Paso since 1917, after he came back from Mexico, where he had gone with General Pershing as a civilian. He was a Government employe until he retired in January, 1945.

Johnson is the proud holder of two citations he received from the U. S. Government. One, from the War Department, commends him for his faithful 23 years of service with the department and was presented to him when he retired. The other is a citation presented to him in 1944 by the Army for 10 years of meritorious service as a civilian.

He and his wife live in 3328 Oro Street. Johnson is treasurer of Masonic Lodge 53 and treasurer of the Myrtle Avenue Methodist Church. His wife, Della, is worthy matron of Eastern Star 51.