

## Philip Walter Nicholson

(1862 – 12 Sep 1958)

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**Nicholson, Philip Walter.** On Friday, September 12, 1958, at his residence, 5504 13th st. n.w., Philip Walter Nicholson (retired Deputy Fire Chief), husband of the late Caroline Nicholson, father of Mrs. George J. Dryer, Miss Hattie E. Nicholson and Philip C. Nicholson, all of Washington, D.C.; brother of Charles N. Nicholson and Albert B. Nicholson, sr., of Washington, D.C. Services at the S.H. Hines Co. Funeral Home, 2901 14th st. n.w., on Monday, September 15 at 1 p.m. (parking facilities). Interment Congressional Cemetery.



**PHILIP W. NICHOLSON**

**Nicholson, Philip W.** Members of the Retired Firemen's Association of Washington, D.C. are requested to assemble at the S.H. Hines Co. Funeral Home, 2901 14th st. n.w. on Monday, September 15, 1958, at 1 p.m. to attend the funeral of our late brother. Philip W. Nicholson.

Webster Frye, President  
E.J. Atzrott, Secy.

*The Evening Star, September 13, 1958, p. A-6*

### **Philip W. Nicholson, 96, Former Deputy Fire Chief**

Philip W. Nicholson, 96, former deputy chief of the District Fire Department and a fire fighter here for almost half a century, died of a cerebral hemorrhage yesterday at his home, 5504 Thirteenth street N.W.

Chief Nicholson, known as "Old Nick" to the men with whom he worked, had an outstanding record during his long career.

He was injured on five occasions in line of duty, and commended five times for courageous action. He was awarded a ribbon decoration on February 27, 1923, for his service at the collapse of the Knickerbocker Theater in which 98 persons died.

### *Injured in 1896 Fire*

He also saw action at the five-alarm wharf fire at Twelfth and Water streets S.W. on September 29, 1897, where he was in charge of all the apparatus used in fighting the blaze. Chief Nicholson was injured at the 1896 Louisiana avenue fire, in which 22 buildings were destroyed, when a mass of debris fell on him while he was trying to rescue another fireman who had been caught under a falling wall.

### *Wrote Book on Department*

A lifelong resident and the son of a Metropolitan policeman, Chief Nicholson joined the Fire Department when he was 21. He served as fire marshall before becoming deputy chief. When he came to the department there were only six engines and two trucks in service, all of them horse-drawn.

Chief Nicholson was the author of a history of the Washington Fire Department up to 1931, the year of his retirement.

He was a member of the Oldest Inhabitants and the Rhode Island Avenue Methodist Church. A Mason he belonged to St. John's Lodge, No. 11.

Chief Nicholson's wife died in 1934. He leaves two daughters, Mrs. George J. Dreyer, 4915 Sargent road N.E., and Miss Hattie Nicholson, of the home address; and a son Philip C., also of the home address. Also four grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren and two brothers, Charles N., 10404 Brunskick drive, Silver Spring, and Albert N., sr. 2800 Terrace road S.E.

Services will be at 1 p.m. Monday at the S.H. Hines Funeral Home, 2901 Fourteenth street N.W., with burial in Congressional Cemetery.

*The Evening Star, September 6, 1918, p. 1*

#### **P.W. Nicholson Is Deputy Chief of Fire Fighters**

#### **Commissioners Prepare to Put Two Platoon-System in Operation**

#### **G.S. Watson Marshall, E.R. Pierce Head Clerk**

#### **Other Promotions Provide Four New Battalion Leaders --**

#### **Men From Camps for Department**

Appointing an additional deputy chief and four battalion chiefs, the District Commissioners today made extensive changes in the personnel of the fire department, in preparation for the installation of the two-platoon system authorized by Congress.

Philip W. Nicholson, fire marshal, becomes the new deputy chief. George S Watson, chief clerk of the fire department is promoted to fire marshal, and Edward R. Pierce, clerk to the position to be vacated by Mr. Watson.

#### *New Battalion Chiefs*

The new battalion chiefs are to be Capts. T. O'Connor, No. 1 engine company; P.R. Davis, No. 11 engine; J.J. Hanlon, No. 2 engine, and Sergt. C.W. Gill of the department repair shop.

Lieuts. W.M. Green of 7 truck, Woolard of 16 engine and A.S. Haight of 24 engine are promoted to captains, vice O'Connor, Davis and Hanlon.

Sergts. R.C. Tegeler, 28 engine; C.C. Filing, 6 truck, and C.A. Wells, 10 truck, are promoted to lieutenants, vice Green, Woolard and Haight.

P.T. Leahy, C.W. Rice, S.M Gould, J.R. Dutton and C.C. Meeks, privates of class 2, are promoted to be sergeants, vice Gill, Tegeler, Fling and Wells, and one to fill a new position provided by the District appropriation act.

All the promotions are made in recognition of meritorious service and with the object of maintaining the high efficiency of the department.

Fire Marshall Nicholson has been in the department since 1883, when he enlisted as a private in class 1. Chief Clerk Watson has been Chief Wagner's right-hand man for many years.

Sergt. Gill hurdles the ranks of lieutenant and captain to become battalion chief. This is understood to be in line with the Commissioners' policy to get young men to the front in the department. Gill has had a brilliant record in the District's fire-fighting service, and formerly was aid to Chief Wagner, with whose successful methods of handling fires he probably is more familiar than any member of the department.

Indications are that the two-platoon system will be put into effect within two or three weeks. It is a question of getting the men, and this problem appears to have been solved.

#### *Needs About 140 Men*

The adjutant general of the Army has authorized the commanders of several camps to furlough indefinitely men now in the Army and on the limited service list who are physically unfit for overseas

duty and to permit these men to accept positions in the District fire department. While furloughed they will not be paid Army salary, but will be put on the fire department pay rolls at \$80 or \$95 a month, plus \$10 per month.

The department has several vacancies in its personnel now and will require about 140 men in addition to the normal force to put the two platoon system into effect.

The Commissioners today appointed as privates in class 2 W.G. Jenkins, J.R. Gray, R.C. Carter, G.E. Stevens, Byram E.A. Powell and F.M. Fritter. This is the first time since 1906 that privates have gone into class 2 without serving in class 1. Class 2 positions pay \$1,260 and class 1, \$1,080 per annum. There are still vacancies in class 2, which means that the next few applicants to be appointed will receive quite an advantage in salary.

### *Day and Night Shifts*

Under the plan worked out for the two-platoon system there will be a day shift of ten hours and a night shift of fourteen hours. Captains and lieutenants will alternate in being in charge of the two shifts. In the absence of either, sergeants will be in charge.

The present deputy chief, who will continue in that capacity, is A.J. Sullivan. Present battalion chiefs, whose status likewise will not be changed by the new order, are James Keliher, Samuel R. Henry, Charles B. Proctor and Timothy Donohoe, respectively first, second, third and fourth battalion chiefs.

During his administration as fire marshal Mr. Nicholson has brought about many changes in the District's fire regulations. He was appointed to this position in 1905. Since that time there have been such developments in the theatrical business through the advent of the "movies" and in the handling of inflammable materials through the greater use of motor cars that the fire regulations have called for many amendments in order to be efficient for the protection of life and property in the District. The Commissioners uniformly have supported Mr. Nicholson's recommendations.

### *Has Risen From Bottom*

The new deputy chief has risen from the lowest grade in the department without soliciting any of the promotions that have come to him. He was the first man in the department to be made an aid to an acting battalion chief. After a series of promotions he organized No. 4 truck company, then known as truck D, March 1, 1896. He remained with this company as foreman and acting battalion chief until 1908 when he was detailed to the office of chief engineer as assistant to the fire marshal. Two years later he became the fire marshal.

George S. Watson, who is to be the new fire marshal, formerly was secretary to Dr. Wm. C. Woodward, former health officer of the District. He went into the fire department, July 1, 1906, as chief clerk and has held the position ever since. In addition to his fire department duties he is chairman of District draft board No. 8 and a member of the general committee of three which is arranging for the next registration, September 12.

To the untiring energy of Mr. Watson almost as much to the efforts of the Commissioners themselves members of the department owe the successful outcome of the petitioning of Congress to enact a pension law for the fire department. He was a member of the legislative committee of the fire association which engineered the bill through Congress.

### *Mr. Watson Well Equipped*

Mr. Watson has been intimately associated with Fire Chief Frank J. Wagner throughout his service in the department and thoroughly in accord with that official's policies. He also helped materially to bring about passage of the two-platoon system. Chief Wagner is credited with being the first chief of a fire department in the United States to recommend this system.

Promotion of Edward R. Pierce to be chief clerk will be a popular one with the rank and file of the department. Since the draft has been drawing upon much of the time of Mr. Watson, Pierce has been discharging largely the duties of chief clerk. He came into the District service as assistant secretary to the Commissioners in 1911. A year later he was made a clerk in the fire department, which position he now occupies.

*The Evening Star, September 1, 1905, p. 16*

#### **Takes Effect Today**

#### **Change In The District Fire Department**

Capt. P.W. Nicholson Becomes Fire Marshal and Sidney Bieber Retires -- Their Records  
Changes in the District fire department became effective today whereby Sidney Bieber, former fire marshal is placed on the retired list with a pension of \$90 a month and Capt. Philip W. Nicholson is promoted to be fire marshal at \$1,600 a year. Throughout the department the rank and file and the officers express regret at Mr. Bieber's retirement, while the advancement of Capt. Nicholson is received with general favor as a well-merited promotion. Capt. Nicholson is not new to the duties of fire marshal, as he has been acting in the position during the past ten months and has been assistant fire marshal for two years.

Capt. Nicholson was appointed private in the department June 6, 1883. In April, 1893 he was promoted to be assistant foreman, which corresponds to the position of lieutenant under the recent reorganization of the department. He served as assistant foreman until March 1, 1896, when he was promoted to be captain. September 2, 1903, the Commissioners detailed Capt. Nicholson to be assistant to the fire marshal, and

*The Washington Post, September 13, 1958, p. D2*

#### **Fireman Nicholson Dead at 96**

Philip W. Nicholson, 96, who had an outstanding fire fighting record in almost a half century with the District Fire department died of a cerebral hemorrhage yesterday at his home, 5504 13th st. nw.

He was injured on five occasions in the line of duty and commended five times for courageous action. On Feb. 27, 1923, he was awarded a ribbon decoration for his service at the collapse of the Knickerbocker Theater in which 98 lives were lost.

Another major fire at which he saw action was the five-alarm wharf blaze on 12th and Water sts. Sw. on September 29, 1897. He was in charge of all the apparatus combating that blaze. At the Louisiana ave. Fire of 1896 when 23 buildings were destroyed, Mr. Nicholson was burned seriously.

Known as "Old Nick" to the men with whom he worked, Mr. Nicholson joined the Fire Department when he was 21. He became Fire Marshal in 1905 and Deputy Chief Engineer in 1918.

He was a member of the Masons, Oldest Inhabitants and the Rhode Island Avenue Methodist Church.

Mr. Nicholson I survived by two daughters, Mrs. George J. Dreyer, 4915 Sargent rd. ne., and Hattie Nicholson, of the home address; a son, Philip C., also of the home address; 4 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

The funeral service will be held at 1 p.m. Monday at the S.H. Hines funeral home, 2901 14th st. nw. Burial will be in Congressional Cemetery.