

pair of grappling arms strong inaut's booty from the ocean terests.

suburban atmosphere. We really



Miami News Photo by Charles Trainor

Raymond Morris . . . He Can't Forget

## Tragic Hartford Circus Fire Still Blazing For Usher

By JEFF REYNOLDS  
Reporter of The Miami News

J. Raymond Morris this week recalled a sight indelibly branded on his mind 22 years ago.

Although Nazi robot bombs were targeting in on London 3,700 miles away, July 6, 1944 began peacefully in Hartford, Conn.

In fact, the horrors of war were fartherest from Hartford residents' thoughts as they watched the acrobats, clowns, and animals perform under the big top of the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus.

Then tragedy struck.

"It was about 3 p.m.," said Morris. "I was assistant chief usher and I noticed a blaze eating its way up the canvas on the opposite side from me.

"I ran over there, grabbed pails of water and threw them on the blaze. But it was no use. She was going."

In the panic that followed, Morris was knocked down several times. But he managed to save three elderly women. One had broken both legs jumping from the top of the bleachers.

"My uniform was burning, but I just threw it off me. I got burned a little, not badly. No scars."

The greying, balding little man's blue eyes clouded as

he recalled the holocaust in which 169 people lost their lives.

"There were about 3,000 people at the matinee. All those killed were spectators. I remember the elephant trainer took 47 elephants and ran them through a nearby residential area so they wouldn't panic in the fire.

"It would have been a lot worse if they had," he said. "And it was bad enough as it was."

Morris, now 68 and in the outdoor advertising business, lives at 912 NW 80th St. He's nearing retirement but doesn't know if it will stick.

"I tried it three times before but I couldn't make it work. Always something to do," he laughed.

Three years ago Morris married. "My first sweetheart. We met during World War I, in Chattanooga, Tenn. Sometimes she tells me I'm not the same man she met 100 years ago." And Morris laughed again.

Morris said the circus returned to Sarasota after the fire and never used a tent again. He rejoined the circus again "but it was never the same. Working for the circus used to be a wonderful thing. You really felt you were doing something," he said.

"But something went out of it after the fire. It was never the same again."