

NOV 21 1978

# A fire fighter's final agony: 'Doc, do what you have to...'

By Edmund J. Rooney and Tom Page Seibel

Fire fighter Walter Watroba lay in agony atop the burning Commonwealth Edison So. generating plant, fully aware of his desperate predicament.

His right leg was pinned beneath fiery debris. Above him, tons of steel beams and concrete was poised to come crashing down if his rescuers were not extremely careful. He was so close to a crevasse in the roof that he had to be tied to the outside wall.

Dr. Joseph Cari, a fire department surgeon, crept close to Watroba.

"Doctor, do what you have to do," Watroba told him. "But please get me out."

**HOURS AFTER** listening to Watroba's poignant plea atop the 85-foot-tall burning building at 1111 W. Cermak Rd., Cari recalled how he amputated Watroba's right leg just below the knee in a futile effort to save him.

Shortly after the dramatic emergency operation, Watroba, 41, a father of three, died.

Fire Comr. Robert J. Quinn, explaining



Walter Watroba

why firemen did not attempt to free Watroba by lifting the tangle of precariously balanced debris that trapped him, said:

"We had to assure that in rescuing him we did not cause dangerous conditions to further deteriorate, possibly killing another 15 or 20 firemen."

**CARI SAID HE WAS** with Watroba, from 10:05 p.m. Sunday to 4:30 a.m. Monday, when he amputated the leg.

"We talked about everything while we were together, including his family and the dire situation he was in," Cari said.

Not once did Watroba cry or complain about the pain, the surgeon said.

At one point, Watroba, who was assigned to Engine Company 13 at 209 N. Dearborn, joked: "What's a fellow from Dearborn St. doing up on a roof like this?"

**CARI SAID HE HAD** only "18 inches to

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