

Dying hours of agony for fireman

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work in" and that he had Watroba were precariously close to an 80-foot drop.

Watroba pleaded with him to "get me out" after prolonged efforts to raise steel beams and other debris had failed, Cari said. Watroba renewed the plea after the wall next to them cracked about 4 a.m., Cari added.

"I had to crawl over his head, his body to get as low as possible," Cari said.

The light was bad and the surgeon said he had to "feel the area" to remove the leg just below the knee. The operation was done "in several minutes (and) in spite of smoke and falling debris. He withstood the amputation very well."

Watroba, who suffered from internal injuries and damage to his left leg as well, was pronounced dead after being moved to Mercy Hospital. Cari said that Watroba probably would have died of extensive abdomen and leg injuries even if he had been freed sooner.

Cari, 59, said that he was a veteran of World War II landings in Europe and the Pacific and several train and plane crashes in Chicago, but that "this was the most difficult situation I have ever encountered in 36 years."

WATROBA WAS TRAPPED when portions of a quarter-mile-long burning coal conveyor belt collapsed as he, three other firemen and a Commonwealth Edison supervisor were standing on the roof. Only Watroba was trapped.

Fire Comr. Robert J. Quinn said, "We did everything possible to save him. I even called two of our department's experts in rescues, First Division Marshal John Windle and Capt.



Fireman pours water on the burning structure. The belt helped spread flames through

Robert Sutherland of Snorkel Squad 1, out of bed from home.

"They used air hammers especially flown to the scene and a Japanese-made ladder that extends 135 feet high. I personally went up to the roof five or six times to make sure that everything possible was being done."

WATROBA'S FATHER, Walter E., was a Chicago fire Captain for 25 years, retiring in 1954 from Engine Co. 97. The elder Watroba and his wife live at 13558 S. Mackinaw.

Other survivors include Watroba's wife, Janice, and three children, Karen, 16, Cheryl, 15, and Lynn, 7.

Watroba, an Army veteran, joined the fire Department in February, 1969. He had been assigned to Engine Co. 13 since then.

THE FIRE KNOCKED out power to about 2,000 customers on the West Side, including parts of Cook County, University of Illinois and Presbyterian-St. Luke's hospitals. However, no patients' lives were endangered by the power loss, officials said. Power had been restored to all but a few customers by mid-morning, a Commonwealth Edison spokesman said.

The spokesman estimated damages would be at least \$1.6 million, plus \$200,000 for clean-up work. The plant's two generators were