

Engine 13 fireman dies bravely

Continued from Page 5

thing except where we were and what we were doing.

"He was brave, understanding, extremely tolerant and extremely patient.

"At one point he said, 'Who would ever think that Walter from Engine 13 at Dearborn would end up on a roof like this?'

rescuers punched and pried to uncover Wat-

"He was cheerful, but I think he knew."

Cari said he had at first been optimistic as rescuers punched and pried to uncover Watroba's left leg, then his right leg down to the knee.

They didn't know it then, but the left leg already was so badly damaged that it would have had to be amputated even if Watroba had lived. And his right foot had been severed by the steel beams.

"I was optimistic until about 2 o'clock," Cari said. "All his vital signs were stable and good.

"Then they found that our huge hydraulic jacks, built to lift 40 tons, couldn't budge it (the beams).

Furthermore, the rescuers saw, the hydraulic jacks pushing off the brick wall were threatening to collapse the wall instead of moving the beams.

Finally, at 4:15, I told him, Walter, we're at a standstill here, and things look quite serious. We have to make a decision about amputating your leg to get you out.

"I told him that we might lose six, seven, eight firefighters if we continued the way we

were going.

"He said, 'Go ahead and do what you have to do, but get me out of here.'"

Cari leaned down over Watroba into the darkness underneath the roof and swabbed his knee with alcohol. Then, with a medic passing him instruments over his shoulder, he used a scalpel to amputate the leg at the knee.

"It took about two minutes," Cari said. He had to stem the bleeding by using clamps placed where his fingers could feel blood spurting.

Watroba, who had received several shots of morphine, showed no sign of feeling pain.

"I told him, 'Walter, you're free.'

"He said, 'I'll try to turn'" and tried to twist his freed body out of the hole.

A little while later, Cari added, Watroba said, "Let me move."

Those were his last words. Watroba went into shock as he was being carried in a litter down the ladder and died in Mercy Hospital, Cari said.

"He was outstanding," Cari said. "One of the bravest fire fighters that Chicago has been blessed with."

Watroba, the son of a firefighter, had been at the Engine 13 station at Dearborn and Lake since he joined the department in 1969. His father, also named Walter, was a firefighter for 25 years until he retired in 1954, a Fire Department spokesman said.

Watroba is survived by his widow, Janice, and three daughters, Karen, 14, Cheryl, 12, and Lynn, 5.