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had to get all your equipment and check it--and then we went over to Waterford. The first day or so, it wasn't too bad. We were using stone dust and water. You're briefed. "Certain level, 21 East, there's a fire on the coal level and it's out of control right now." And when we went in the mine, a supervisor that was used to that section went in with us so far, to show us where to go. We were green as--you know, as far as that mine was concerned. You could use stone dust and water until it burnt the lagging out--the wood that holds up the roof, where you had your arch booms. And these arch booms hold up the wood. And when it burnt the wood out they allowed falls to come in. And with the intense heat, the arches started to bend. See, they're made in such a way the steel in them is soft enough that when weight comes on them, they bend, they don't crack--they bend. The fire was burning ahead of us. It was mostly wood and rubber belting. The stone dust was to smother the fire. But after awhile it got to where you couldn't get into the fire. It was advancing. We had to go down to the wall below and walk up the wall face and come in against all the heat and the smoke that was coming out. When we had to go down below and come in again--before you left, you were given salt tablets. And for each dragger team, there were two or three fellows carrying gallon cans of water. And when you'd get in, you'd drink an awful lot of water. But once you get into the heat, your skin would dry up for just an instant. And then the sweat would come out on you. We had to dig a keyway in the stone on the ribs and on the roof and on the bottom--18 inches deep and 18 inches wide--in order to erect a stopping. We used picks. Had to be dug all the way around, so no air could escape around it, you know. We built this stopping, and then we packed stone dust. The fire was quite a piece away. But the heat coming towards you. It's hard to explain. It was mostly smoke. When we had to go around the other way, we were taking some brattice up--brattice cloth. So instead of having to face this heat and everything, we were running some brattice along and then sealing it off so the smoke and that would go on the outside. We would still have to have our equipment on. We'd come inside that. Working with 4-inch spikes, copper hammers--that's all you're allowed to use so you wouldn't make a spark--I'd hold the spike and he'd tap them in. Then the fellows coming behind would put the boards up. The brattice would take so much of the smoke away, they could see what they were doing. And they also built a stopping on the outside end, to cut the air off. They tried putting water in. But the heat was that great that the air would bring it back as steam. (Did your stopping stop the fire?) It stopped it, yeah. I guess we were there almost three weeks altogether. Fought the fire for quite awhile, trying to extinguish it with water and stone dust and whatever. When we got organized, we were 8 hours at the fire and we were home maybe 12, then you'd go back 8. (So there'd be 3 shifts of draggers fighting the fire?) More than that. It'd take you two hours to go to the fire. And you'd be there two hours fighting it. And it would take you two hours to come out of the mine. Then you'd come up, get washed--and they had a restaurant in Waterford closed. All they were doing was making sandwiches and feeding



dragermen. Then they give you transpor? tation home, pick you up. The first three days we stayed over there, slept on the of? fice floor, cold egg sandwiches--but they weren't too long getting organized. I was a dragerman from 1940 to about 1948. (And 1943, that was your first big one?) The only big one. In 1953, I went to IB Colliery. And I was supervisor on a wall. And 1954--I'd only been there 7 months--when in Number 26 Colliery they had a fire in 3 Deep going into the south side. You go in through IB and up a stone tunnel to 26--about 480 feet roughly--the difference

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