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# Wetzel denied parole

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Frank E. Wetzel, convicted in 1958 for the killing of two North Carolina highway patrolmen, has been denied parole for the eighth time.

Wetzel, who is now being held in close custody at Odom Correctional Institution near Jackson, was informed of the Parole Commission decision by letter. Signed by Cecelia Swindell, Parole Case Analyst, the letter reads:

"The Parole Commission has carefully considered your case and concluded that parole should not be granted at this time. The Commission, in reaching its decision, considered the amount

of time which you have served for your crimes.

"The period of time which you have served could unduly depreciate the seriousness of the crimes which you committed and promote disrespect for the law. Your case has been scheduled to be reviewed again for parole on or about April 3, 1987."

Bianca Brown Wetzel of the Airlie Community near Littleton, wife of the inmate, expressed her disappointment in the Commission's action calling the prerequisites for release "antiquated." The Commission, she said, "does not look at how custody status came about but relies

solely on the word of the unit superintendent."

Mrs. Wetzel said her husband has been in close custody status since 1981 when he was transferred to the Caledonia Prison Unit near Tillery from Raleigh's Central Prison. Shortly thereafter, she said, he was accused of plotting an escape. No formal charge in that accusation was filed after an investigation by former District Attorney W. E. Murphrey III failed to uncover sufficient evidence.

The Inmate Grievance Committee recommended that Wetzel be restored to medium custody since no proof of the accusation had been established and no charge had been made. However, Mrs. Wetzel said, James Woodard, secretary of DOC at the time, "chose to ignore the Committee's recommendation" and Wetzel has remained on close custody status since then.

Swindell, asked to explain how Wetzel's parole would "unduly depreciate the seriousness" of the crimes and "promote disrespect for the law," declined to elaborate. "We just feel like... not enough time has been served on those sentences," she said. "Each case is viewed differently" and the "past record of the individual" is considered.

### I.D. Uncertain

Last March 13, Robert Terry Jr. of Norman, the state's star witness in the trial for the murder of Patrolman Reece, signed a sworn statement saying he could not positively identify Wetzel as the killer.

Terry stated "a tremendous amount of pressure was exerted upon me by the police... I am unsure that Frank Wetzel was the driver in whose car I was riding the night of Nov. 5, 1957." He also said: "I was used by the

state and police and Wetzel became their scapegoat. I could not definitely identify Frank Wetzel beyond the shadow of a reasonable doubt in 1957 and I cannot do so now."

The day after the notarized statement was received, Mrs. Wetzel presented it to James Trotter, legal counsel to Gov. James Martin. She requested the governor issue a pardon of innocence for Wetzel based upon Terry's statement. She said she was advised to have an attorney file a Motion for Appropriate Relief through the courts system.

Wetzel is serving two consecutive life terms for the murders of Patrolmen Wister Lee Reece and James Thomas Brown the night of Nov. 5, 1957. The site of the killing of Officer Reece was near Ellerbe and Officer Brown, near Sanford — a distance of 47.43 miles between the scenes. Court testimony set the killings as occurring within about 20 minutes of each other.

Renee McCoy, special assistant for public information with the state Department of Corrections, said Wetzel has been considered annually for parole since March 22, 1978. She said on a life sentence — which carries no release date — inmates must serve a minimum of 10 years before becoming eligible for parole review. In Wetzel's case, since his sentences were to be served consecutively, the time before review was 20 years — 10 years on each sentence.

McCoy said DOC records indicate Wetzel began serving his terms on March 22, 1958. She said he has been in the state's prison system "one of the longest — but not THE longest" time of any inmate. The name of the inmate who has served longer than Wetzel was not available.