

# Parole denied again for Frank Wetzel

ADRIENNE COOPER IVEY  
Herald Staff Writer

## Odom inmate comments on custody level

It's "no go" again for Frank Wetzel, convicted in the 1957 killings of two North Carolina Highway patrolmen.

Wetzel has consistently been denied parole since he first became eligible for release. The state Parole Commission wrote the inmate in a letter dated April 29, 1987: "It is the opinion of the Parole Commission that parole for you at this time should be denied for the following reasons:

"Your continued presence in the correctional system as well as other additional training or program participation that may be offered you will substantially enhance your capacity to lead a law-abiding life when you are released at a later date." He will again be reviewed for parole around April 3, 1988.

The inmate drew two life sentences for the double-murders of Patrolman Wister Lee Reece and Patrolman James Thomas Brown on the same night during

a headlong flight across North Carolina. Wetzel had escaped from a New York state mental hospital which he said he had entered voluntarily to improve his chances for escape from police custody. He had been scheduled for confinement in Attica Prison for parole violation.

Wetzel, now incarcerated at Odom Correctional Institution in Jackson, married the former Bianca Brown of Airlie near Littleton in a ceremony at Caledonia Prison Unit in Tillery in 1982. Since that time, Mrs. Wetzel has dedicated her time and resources to securing her husband's release.

### He Comments

Wetzel commented on the denial of his latest request for parole. He said, in part:

"For the last few years, the Parole Commission has used the following reasons for parole denial: 'Your continued correctional treatment and other

training will substantially enhance your capacity to lead a law-abiding life. Further, we want to observe you in minimum custody programs for a period of time prior to parole.'

"My, how nice that sounds! First, my 'continued correctional treatment and other training' consists of me swinging a bush-axe, pick and shovel, at 40 cents a day in the Odom Prison farm fields, presumably 'training' to be a migrant worker.

"During the rest of my time, I am housed in an overcrowded dormitory built for 24 men but housing 34 men. The TV and radios blast from 5:45 a.m. until 3 a.m. the next morning when things start all over again. We have three showers that work and one mop-bucket sink. Nothing here is conducive to training a person or for peace of mind...

"I will be 66 years old in a few months. I have an I.Q. of 143. I keep myself neat and clean. I am

polite to staff and other inmates and I am aware of their problems. I read the paper each day and read magazines and books so as to keep myself aware of current events...

"Custody level is archaic, a leftover from the chain-gang system, and it should be reviewed or abolished."

As the result of Mrs. Wetzel's attempts to win freedom for her husband, Robert Terry Jr. of Norman, the state's witness in the 1958 Reece murder trial, recanted his testimony in a sworn deposition in March 1986. Mrs. Wetzel presented Terry's notarized statement to James Trotter, legal counsel to Gov. James Martin on March 14, 1986, asking Wetzel be granted a pardon of innocence based on the statement.

No action was taken on that request and the next month, Wetzel was once more refused parole.

Terry, age 30 when he testified in the case, is now 60 years old

and is unemployed. He was taken into custody at the scene of the shooting of the patrolman and subsequently testified that the man (said to be Wetzel) who gave him a ride as he hitchhiked to his home in Hamlet had killed the officer, but was unsure in identifying Wetzel as the man.

A second deposition by Terry given on Oct. 13, 1986, reads, in part: "At the time I was questioned (in the Reece killing), I was under a lot of pressure and felt as though I was being tried for my life. A Captain Welch pulled his blackjack on me and tried to make me accept the police's version of the story.

"It was a pure torment for me to live at that time. At this time, I cannot describe the man with whom I rode from Asheboro. The man was not Frank Wetzel."