

ADMITTED KILLER COULD GO FREE COURT CHANGES DATE THAT CONFESSED SERIAL SLAYER COULD BE RELEASED

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Detective Earl Field was jolted to learn that confessed **serial** murderer Coral Eugene Watts, admitted **killer** of former newspaper reporter Jeanne Clyne, will be eligible for parole in less than four years.

"I'm just sick to my stomach," Field, 61, a 39-year veteran of the Grosse Pointe Farms Police Department, said of last week's news last week from Texas.

Watts, 35, has admitted killing 13 women, including three in metropolitan Detroit. **Michigan** law enforcement officials say he is a suspect in the slayings of at least 18 women in the Detroit area.

He also is the prime suspect in the 1980 "Sunday Morning Slasher" slayings of three Ann Arbor women and the 1974 stabbing death of a woman in Kalamazoo.

Since 1982, Watts has been in a Texas prison serving a 60- year sentence after pleading guilty to burglary with intent to commit murder in Houston.

But on March 1, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals issued a ruling that shocked Field and police officers in at least three other states.

Originally, Watts was not eligible for parole until 2002. As a result of the ruling, he now could be released in 44 months.

"I am disappointed that whatever the technicality was, he's not going to go for the full fall," Field said.

The technicality was bath water.

Watts pleaded guilty to breaking into the apartment of two Houston women, tying one up with coat hangers and assaulting the other woman in a bathtub, officials said. Each time the woman tried to protest, Watts held her head under water, the officials said.

When Watts was entering his guilty plea in the case, Texas District Judge Doug Shaver ruled that he had used bath water as a deadly weapon, which meant a longer prison sentence. But the appeals court overturned the deadly weapon portion of Watts' plea, ruling that he had never been formally notified that the prosecutor would seek the deadly weapon finding against him.

Immediately after his arrest, Watts began confessing to killings and police officers from other states were invited to Houston to question him.

One of them was Field, who carried with him a letter from then-Wayne County Prosecutor William Cahalan that guaranteed Watts that nothing from a confession would be used against him.

"I spent seven hours with him . . . and he told me he had killed three women," Field said.

Among those was Jeanne Clyne, 44, a former food writer for the Detroit News; Field had spent three years trying to find her **killer**.

"He told me he did it, how he did it and what he used," Field said.

Watts said he was "just driving around" Grosse Pointe Farms about 6 p.m. on Halloween 1979 when he noticed Clyne, who was walking home after an appointment with a psychiatrist. Watts said he used a sharpened 14-inch screwdriver to stab Clyne before leaving her to die on the sidewalk.

"It was my belief when I left to come home that that man was going to be in prison for 60 years and that was one of the reasons we didn't demand extradition" to **Michigan** to face charges, Field said.

Watts' attorney, Michael Charlton, said he doubts that Watts will be paroled in 1992 because of the seriousness of the Houston crime. But if Watts is paroled, it is questionable whether enough evidence exists -- without his confessions -- to charge him with any homicides in **Michigan**.

"If we had a triable case against him, we would try him. But we'd have to have admissible evidence," said Richard Padzieski, chief of operations for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.

Asked if he has enough evidence to seek a murder warrant against Watts for Clyne's slaying, Field said:

"No."

Washtenaw County Prosecutor William Delhey said Watts is a suspect in the Sunday Morning Slasher slayings in Ann Arbor, "but we had insufficient evidence to charge him at the time, and I have no indication that's changed."

Field called Watts' parole date change "a terrible thing to bear for the prosecutor down there, the police officers, everybody. But I can't help wondering about those two women in Houston.

"Can you imagine how they must feel right now?"

CUTLINE

Coral Eugene Watts, 35, who admitted killing 13 women and is a suspect in at least 18 slayings of Detroit area women, will be eligible for parole in less than four years.

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