

Vacaville, the First Stop

Fred Crocker, wearing a suit of whites and with a belly chain secured to his waist, stepped out of a sheriff's van last week and walked into the recesses of Vacaville Medical Facility.

A fat youngster, who admitted he had been impersonating the ambassador of another country, Fred was arrested in a northern county on charges of forgery after he tried to hang a bogus \$200 personal check on a jaded bartender.

Crocker's case was relatively rare at Vacaville, where felons from 47 of California's 58 counties are first sent (the rest go to Chino, outside Los Angeles), in that he has never been to the penitentiary before.

He did have a long record of juvenile offenses and it was on this basis that the judge decided that perhaps a

term in the penitentiary "might help him."

The deputy who brought Fred in was given a "body receipt" as he turned him over to a correctional officer.

Once inside the pea-green walls — and virtually all California penal installations feature green, among the variety of pastels to be seen — Fred went through a routine not unlike that of a recruit being inducted into the military.

Search

Following a skin search (ears, mouth, armpits, rectum and toes are all examined) he was given a shower, was fingerprinted, and started answering the battery of questions that would continue during his six-week stay at Vacaville.

Ultimately, a committee of medical types and correctional officials will decide in which of the more than one dozen of California's penal

installations Fred will serve his time.

But in the interim, Freddy's past and his psyche will both be peeled like a tangerine.

A \$20 million facility which is a complex of concrete cell-blocks, Vacaville is the Department of Correction's main mental institution.

In addition to receiving more than 4200 convicted felons for initial evaluation last year, the plant also processed hundreds of parole violators and men committed for 90 days observation by various superior courts to determine if they are fit to stand trial.

Therapy

At the adjacent medical facility, which is at the far end of the Reception-Guidance Center where Fred and some 600 other new arrivals were being processed last week, about 950 prisoners with seri-

ous mental problems are confined.

Some live in individual cells; about 600 are involved in various therapy groups.

In the three floors of "S-Wing" are the most disturbed. Some are little better than vegetables; others, under heavy doses of tranquilizers, are given occupational therapy — repairing bicycles and the like — with the hope that eventually they can be transferred to one of the "normal institutes" housing California's some 24,000 inmates.

Evaluate

During the six weeks the average new inmate spends at Vacaville, Fred will be under the ultimate supervision of Robert Thompson, who runs the Reception-Guidance Center.

"The new arrivals spend up to ten days in a maximum security setting while we evaluate them," said Thomp-

son, a 19-year veteran of the California correctional scene.

Thompson and the battery of psychiatrists and psychologists at the facility will keep Fred on ice while they determine if he is violent; if other inmates may want to hurt or kill him because of possible previous transgressions.

Out

Unless Fred is what one officer called "a problem child" he'll be let out with the general inmate population, into one of the 150-men wings in the facility. Each of these wings has three tiers of cells, 50 cells to the tier.

While the State goes about the business of re-weighing Fred — he was weighed on the Outside and found wanting — he can buy Eldridge Cleaver's "Soul on Ice" from the inmate canteen, among other books.

He can have visits, can purchase anything from razor blades to shower shoes, and will be fed at a cost of

about 75 cents per day. The food greatly resembles that which is served in military facilities.

While Fred moves from interview to interview, a battery of letters go out to relatives, police officials, former employers, the FBI, and even the county jailer who watched him for an average of six months while he awaited trial.

Pointed

Some of the questions are routine and some are pointed.

"Was this man a good mixer?" his ex-jailer is asked?

"Does this man seem ashamed of himself for having committed an offense against society?" is the printed question put to the deputy who unlocked his belly chains.

"Do you plan divorce?" is the query put to his wife (many respond 'yes') and "What was the subject's atti-

tude toward school work?" is asked of his former school principal.

Dossier

All of the responses to these questions — plus the result of a psychiatric work-up and as battery of psychological tests — ultimately go into a thick dossier.

Called a "Cumulative Case Summary" by the State and part of the man's total institutional file which is called "the jacket" by inmates, this yellow-colored dossier will follow Fred for the rest of his life.

It includes everything from all of his prior arrests to his father's occupation. It will record a precis of why Fred in his own words, committed his crime.

It will include everything, in fact, except whether or not Fred will ever get into trouble again after he is eventually paroled.

—CHARLES HOWE