

Sentencing disrupted

■ **Phillippi overturns table in protest of sentence, courtroom closed to public.**

BY JAKE BLEED
Senior staff writer

The sentencing of a Lincoln teenager convicted of several crimes including assault was interrupted Tuesday by friends of the teen-ager who disagreed with the stiff sentence he received.

Eric Phillippi, 19, pleaded guilty Aug. 12 to assault and use of a weapon to commit a felony and no contest to attempted robbery and making terroristic threats.

Charges against Phillippi and another teen-ager, Justin Gonzales, 18, are in connection with a pair of armed robberies that took place the nights of April 5th and 6th, 1998 in which a convenience store clerk was shot in the face and back.

Friends of Phillippi erupted in protest after Lancaster County District Judge Karen Flowers sentenced the 19-year-old to 20 years in prison for the assault charge, the first of four charges.

The protest of Phillippi's friends interrupted the sentencing and forced sheriff's deputies and Lincoln police officers to close the courtroom to the public, removing Phillippi's friends and members of the press.

A chair and other furniture in the hallway outside the courtroom were overturned, apparently by supporters of Phillippi.

Flowers then sentenced Phillippi to 16 to 35 years in prison for the remaining three convictions. Phillippi's violent and verbal reaction could be heard from the hall outside the courtroom.

Deputies inside the courtroom at the time said the 19-year-old flipped the table he was sitting at after hearing his sentence.

Phillippi was later removed from the court and restrained by three officers. The sentencing came after arguments from prosecuting and defending lawyers.

"What is so troubling to me is the total lack of respect for society and human life that was manifested not only on the evening in question but leading up to it," Assistant County Attorney Jim Rocke said.

Phillippi later asked Flowers to consider his troubled background when making the sentence.

"I never had the chance to be a kid," Phillippi said. "I was constantly moving. Everything we had, we had to hustle for it."

Phillippi said his first firearm-related charge came in California when he was 12.

"I was born into a process," Phillippi said. "I don't like doing what I do. There's two Eric Phillippis: the loving and the thug-

ging." Flowers responded that Phillippi should know that she would have to sentence him to prison.

"It's obvious that I have to send you to prison. The bottom line is that, even by your own admission, you are a dangerous person," Flowers said.

Phillippi, along with Gonzales, allegedly robbed Kwik Shop at 33rd and Holdredge streets just before midnight April 5, then a Gas 'N Shop at 5560 S. 48th St. early April 6.

Gonzales was convicted of assault, felony use of a firearm, robbery and making terroristic threats. Flowers sentenced the 18-year-old to 30 to 55 years in prison Tuesday.

The clerk at the Gas 'N Shop was shot in the cheek and back during the robbery.

Rocke said in court that the pair had bet a dollar before entering the Kwik Shop of who would shoot first.

"That's just so outrageous, it has the ring of truth," Rocke said.

Phillippi and Gonzales allegedly fired several shots in the ceiling of the Kwik Shop. Police were able to link shell casings taken from both robberies to a March 14, 1998 drive-by shooting in the 1300 block of N. 26th Street.

Both teen-agers are currently serving 5 to 8 years for their role in an escape attempt from the Lincoln Detention Center March 22, which hospitalized two detention center employees.

UNL researchers study battleship

BY MICHELLE STARR
Staff writer

A war memorial and former U.S. battleship that has been slowly leaking oil since it sunk decades ago has been drawing the attention of UNL researchers.

The USS Arizona, resting at the bottom of Pearl Harbor, is being studied by three researchers from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's department of mechanical engineering.

Two of the UNL researchers returned Saturday from a week-long trip to Hawaii. Another will return within the next few weeks with more samples.

The USS Arizona was the first ship bombed by the Japanese in World War II and has been slowly leaking oil ever since.

The research team is collecting samples to determine how the sea life living in the ship and the pollutants in the harbor are affecting the ship's rate of corrosion.

They also want to know what extent, if any, the leaking fuel inside the ship could have on the environment.

"We accomplished everything we wanted to and then some in terms of samples," said William N. Weins, associate professor of mechanical engineering at UNL.

The three-man research team consisting of Weins, professor emeritus Donald Johnson and research specialist John Makinson, have been working in conjunction with marine archeologists from the national park service.

"They were the history and archeology. We were more on chemistry and the corrosion side of it," Makinson said.

Marine biologists from the University of Hawaii are also aiding in the research.

The research team was gathering sea life living on the ship, to explain the cause of the corrosion and what it will do in the future.

They have not yet answered their questions, but Weins was not concerned. It's a long-term study because there isn't an immediate environmental problem, he said.

"We're not talking about gallons of oil a day. It's ounces of oil per day," Weins said.

Although the environmental concern is low, if the hull cracks in the future, it might spill oil into the ocean.

"What we do know is that several thousands of tons of oil were on board at the time of the attack. Several thousand tons, not gallons. That's a lot of oil," Weins said.

Makinson said it was a good experience to work firsthand with the

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WILLIAM WEINS
mechanical engineering professor

project in Hawaii after working on it for more than a year. Until last week, most of the research was done in Nebraska.

The researchers, who were certified as divers in Nebraska last summer, found the murk of Nebraska lakes helpful, Weins said. The lakes' poor visibility of up to 20 feet was similar to the harbor because of the pollutants and the silt stirred by tour boats, he said.

The researchers, led by the marine archeologists, used maps to navigate around the large ship.

They were careful not to bump into the ship or touch the bottom of the harbor to not disturb the monument.

"The real experience was to dive on the USS Arizona and the USS Utah. The USS Arizona sunk during the same time. It also contains oil and is leaking. But USS Arizona was the main focus of the study for its history," Makinson said. "The Arizona was more important for the number of people that died on it."

Graham Johnson, co-director of the UNL environmental resource center and a graduate student, who was not involved with the project, said researchers' work on the ship's hull could possibly lead to easier containment of leakage in modern ships.

The next step is to receive more samples and continue their research, Makinson said. They also plan to core through the hull to find its thickness and durability.

"In the future we hope we will understand what is happening down there and what is going to happen," Makinson said.

There are no immediate dates scheduled for another trip to Hawaii, Makinson said.

Weins said he hopes their data could help aid future decisions concerning other sunken ships containing fuel.

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