



Four would-be escapees were arraigned in Lancaster County Court Wednesday morning. The three shown here being escorted to court are Donald Routhier (left), described as the ringleader of the group; Sheriff's Deputy Arvid Monson;

Robert Bessent; Marvin Gerhardt (visible over Bessent's left shoulder); and Lincoln Police Officer Chuck Hennessey. Arriving later for his court appearance was Robert Parker.

Lahners files stiffest of charges against quartet in jailbreak case

By Dan Pedersen

Their hands and feet shackled, the four inmates allegedly responsible for Monday night's abortive jailbreak were arraigned Wednesday on multiple felony counts.

Charged with two counts of being an inmate detaining another and one count of using a weapon to commit a felony were Donald Routhier, 22, Niagara Falls, N.Y.; Robert Bessent, 28, Las Vegas, Ne.; Marvin Gerhardt, 32, formerly of Wilber; and Robert Parker, 24, no address.

Lancaster County Atty. Ron Lahners said Wednesday he is "prosecuting the defendants to the fullest extent of the law," and the charges reflect that.

Under Nebraska statutes, each of the two hostage counts is punishable by 10 to 50 years in prison. The weapon charge is punishable by an additional term of 3 to 10 years. Lahners stated there is no room for plea bargaining in the case — "not with any of the men."

As the defendants were hustled into Lancaster County Court under strict

security measures, Bessent hung his head to avoid the glare of camera lights and shouted, apparently to the assembled press, "Get out of here."

Routhier, allegedly the spokesman for the group during the hours of negotiations Monday night, filled the same role in court Wednesday morning.

As County Judge Robert Camp looked on, the defendant told Lahners, "You can't do this. According to the document that you signed, you can't charge us." Routhier apparently was referring to

Assistant Police Chief Roger LaPage's promise that charges would not be filed against the foursome. That written guarantee reportedly was crucial to the successful release of the two hostages allegedly held at knifepoint during the seven-hour crisis in the jail.

Although Lahners refused to discuss the matter with Routhier, he said later at a press conference that the promise was extracted under "extremely coercive circumstances." Routhier's

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Gary Engel collects training payoff

The week police officer Gary Engel spent in San Francisco last October may have kept Monday night's attempted breakout at the city jail from turning into tragedy.

Engel and Detective Jim Hawkins went there to attend a one-week seminar, sponsored by the International Chiefs of Police, on dealing with hostage situations. Engel got his first chance Monday to put that training into practice when he was put in charge of face-to-face negotiations with four inmates who had taken two hostages.

The one idea stressed again and again at the seminar

proved to be the key in the real-life drama.

"Time is your most valuable item," Engel said. "The longer we could prolong it, the better off we were. The key is to deescalate the situation, to bring the temperature down."

The seminar was mostly classroom training, with emphasis on the psychological interaction among law enforcement officers, hostages and their captors, he said. But just as important, he said, was the exchange of ideas with representatives of police departments from cities and towns throughout the country, some of whom had experience in hostage negotiations.

As the 6½-hour Lincoln siege dragged into Tuesday morning, the inmates' demands for a car, weapons and their freedom became less important. What they really wanted, Engel said, was a way to end the conflict.

"We gave them what they wanted — an out," he said. "All they wanted us to get out of it safe, too."

That out boiled down to a promise from police that the four would be returned to their original cells, where they could see their wives or girlfriends and that the police would bring no charges against them. The county attorney's office has filed charges against the four, however.



Gary Engel

"The training was extremely beneficial, and I'm really happy now that we went," he said. "And I think Chief Hansen is glad he decided to send us."