

Son, 18, charged in mother's death

By Dean Terrill
Southeast Nebraska Bureau

Crete — Scheduled to start a new job Monday following several weeks of unemployment, Dennis D. Stofer instead found himself in court facing a first-degree murder charge.

The 18-year-old youth is accused of shooting his mother, Mrs. Antonie Stofer, 55, about midnight Sunday. She was found dead at her Crete home after her husband, Roland, called the local rescue squad.

Saline County Atty. Robert Conner said the son was taken into custody a short time later at the scene and that he did not resist arrest. Police recovered a .22 caliber rifle allegedly used in the shooting.

Making a brief appearance Monday afternoon before Saline County Judge Clarence Kunc, young Stofer was ordered held without bond pending a preliminary hearing tentatively set for 3 p.m. Thursday. The court will appoint an attorney Tuesday to represent the defendant.

A PFC and mechanic in the Nebraska National Guard (Co. D, 67th Support Bn. at Lincoln), Stofer wore an Army fatigue shirt and light-colored corduroys at the hearing. His only words were polite affirmations, made with apparent calm, that he understood his rights.

He also displayed no emotion when the judge pointed out that the only punishment alternatives for first degree murder are death or life imprisonment.

Meeting with reporters, Conner declined to suggest a possible motive for Mrs. Stofer's death or to say whether she had been shot more than once. Asked if the husband or anyone else was present at the time of the

alleged incident, Conner would not comment.

Police Chief Jim Ruberson also declined to elaborate on the case, saying Conner alone was releasing information. The county attorney said the case might be jeopardized in court "if too many details are disclosed.

"I like the English system, where they don't say anything until the trial is over," he explained.

Both Conner and Ruberson said they understood the suspect was scheduled to begin work Monday, but felt the employer should not be identified.

Mrs. Stofer, who has been a cleaning lady since mid-July at a newly opened Crete restaurant, was described as congenial and well-liked. Known as "Toni," she had told fellow employes that her son was having trouble finding work.

"She was a real nice lady who got along with everybody," said Steve Novak, manager of Sam's Self-Service Restaurant.

The husband commutes to his maintenance job at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dennis is their only child in 24 years of marriage.

According to Crete assistant principal Willis Luedke, young Stofer dropped out of school about two years ago. He would not reveal any of the reasons.

The suspect reportedly returned last December from six months' active duty with the National Guard. Novak said Mrs. Stofer had told fellow employes he "wanted out really bad."

Funeral services for Mrs. Stofer will be at 2 p.m. Wednesday at Kunc Funeral Home at Crete, the Rev. Grant Story of Crete United Methodist Church officiating. Burial will be at Andrews Cemetery at Friend.



Staff photo by Dean Terrill

Deputy Sheriff Anton Vejraska (right) with Stofer.