

Would Have Died Without Operation, Doctors Said

Judge Orders Amputation of Woman's Leg

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Press-Scimitar Staff Writer

Federal Judge Bailey Brown may have saved an elderly woman's life by signing his name to the strangest order ever issued from his court.

He ordered doctors at Millington Naval Hospital to amputate the woman's right leg. And he ordered the woman not to resist.

The unusual case was brought to Judge Brown's at-

tention Tuesday afternoon by Bart Durham, assistant U.S. attorney. Millington legal officers had called Durham asking for advice.

The woman, Mrs. Agnes Jeffries, 66, of Goldsboro, N.C., refused to allow the amputation. Navy doctors were in a predicament, because she had a severe case of gangrene and in their judgment would die unless the leg was removed.

Because the Negro woman

was in such a mental state as to not be in complete command of her faculties, the Navy doctors said, they feared they would be sued if they operated and sued if they didn't.

Durham dug into the law books and found two similar cases. A federal judge in Washington, D.C., and another in Connecticut had authorized doctors at federal hospitals in each case to administer blood transfusions to pa-

tients who refused them on religious grounds.

In each case the judge restrained relatives from interfering.

Federal officials called the woman's son, S. Sgt. Thomas M. Phillips, stationed with the Air Force in North Carolina. He agreed to the operation, but technically the woman was not mentally incompetent, Judge Brown said.

Early yesterday, Durham and Judge Brown, along with

an observer, Robert Andrews, Memphis attorney, drove to Millington to talk to doctors and hear the woman. Judge Brown obtained written statements from orthopedic surgeons, a psychiatrist and the internist in the case, then returned to Memphis and issued the order. Mrs. Jeffries was transferred to the Millington hospital from a North Carolina hospital, with a stop-over at Blytheville Air Force Base en route.

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