

**Henry Phillips, 128597**  
**Parole eligible since 1981**

*Phillips was a homeless 16-year-old when he accompanied two older men on a gas station robbery that turned to murder.*

According to the pre-sentence investigator, Henry Phillips “grew up as a very lonely and very deprived boy.” He was expelled from school in 8th grade. His father was a chronic alcoholic; his mother was a semi-invalid who died when Phillips was 15. Following his mother’s death, he went to live in Michigan with an abusive uncle. After 15 months, Phillips ran away.

In October 1970, 16-year-old Phillips and Tom Grifka, a 20-year-old Job Corps acquaintance, met Ray Doerfer, age 28, in a shelter in Milwaukee. Doerfer had a long criminal record in at least two states.



*Henry Phillips*

Eventually, the three returned to Michigan, where they decided to rob a gas station in Holly. Although Phillips and Grifka knew Doerfer had a loaded handgun, they didn’t believe he would hurt anyone. Grifka was in the bathroom and Phillips was in an alcove getting coffee when they heard shots. They went into the service area and saw that Doerfer had killed the 18-year-old attendant. Doerfer held the gun on them and ordered them to drag the body into a storage area.

Arrested a few days later, all three were charged with

first-degree murder. Doerfer was convicted and sentenced to life without parole. Grifka pled guilty to second-degree murder, received 10-40 years and was paroled in 1978.

Although he had no prior record and thus had never been treated in the juvenile system (a factor judges had to consider at the time), Phillips was waived from juvenile court to Oakland Circuit Court for trial as an adult. He pled guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to parolable life. The pre-sentence investigator described him as rebellious, insolent and unremorseful for the death. No family member was present during any of the proceedings. Under current sentencing guidelines, Phillips’ recommended minimum sentence would be between 12 and 20 years.

At 17, Phillips had a hard time adjusting to prison and received many misconduct citations. Nonetheless, he earned a GED in 1973 and work supervisors found him to be cooperative and conscientious. A frequent target of sexual predators, Phillips spent a great deal of time in protective custody. He attempted suicide three times in the 1970s. In 1974 he was found with a homemade knife and pled guilty to carrying a concealed weapon. That same year, though, the warden at the Michigan Reformatory commended him for helping staff subdue a violent inmate.

By the early 1980s Phillips had earned 41 college credits and completed a course in group counseling. He says, “I finally realized I was beating my head against a wall” and decided to stop. His attitude and behavior improved markedly. He became certified in several aspects of auto repair.

Phillips has worked steadily, including nine years at prison industries, receiving good to excellent reports on all his assignments. He currently works as an ABE/GED tutor. Since 1990 he has participated

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regularly in several Christian ministries, especially witnessing and gospel music.

Over the years there were many indications that Phillips would be released while he was still fairly young. His grid term was 10 years. In 1979, the interviewing parole board member wrote:

*Could be a good lifer law case if he'd establish some kind of adjustment record.*

Interview notes from 1984 state:

*Has avoided problems over four-five years and appears very stable today. Good work reports on a responsible assignment. He has matured into a fairly responsible adult.*

That same year, the chairman wrote:

*If he continues present trend, may have interest after next interview.*

However, Phillips never obtained majority support. After a positive interview in 1994, the board ordered a psychological report. Although that report cites many factors which make him a good parole risk — his emotional stability, avoidance of assaultive behavior, his ability to persist in school and work, his lack of involvement in drug or alcohol abuse, and the support of his older brother and the brother's church in Memphis —only two members expressed interest in proceeding.

A prison chaplain who knew Phillips throughout the '90s wrote in 1999:

*[I] watched him grow as a Christian and as a human being . . . He works hard to incorporate his Christian principles into his daily duties . . . Hank is respected by his peers and enjoys good rapport with prison staff.*

Nevertheless, following Phillips' 1999 interview, the board again had no interest in his release.

In 2004, Phillips was not even interviewed. The board simply reviewed his file and sent him another "no interest" notice. His next consideration date is scheduled for 2009, when he will be 56 and will have served 39 years.

On Feb. 23, 2010, Phillips was paroled after his sentence was commuted by the governor.