

FIRST-DEGREE MURDER TRIAL

Jury deliberates case of fatal shooting near Adel

Did Jill Waite intend to kill her former lover — or was it an accident?

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Adel, Ia. — On a warm summer morning, Jill Waite stood on her front porch and fired a .25-caliber automatic handgun at her ex-boyfriend, authorities say.

The question at Waite's Dallas County murder trial is whether she meant to kill.

Defense attorneys said during closing arguments Thursday that Waite was



Waite
"Bad shot"?

only firing warning shots at Ronald Howell, a man they describe as abusive. The bullet that slammed into his chest on July 20 hit him by accident, they said.

But a prosecutor described Waite as a malicious woman bent on killing. The couple, never married, had a daughter who was 18 months old at the time.

Waite faces a first-degree murder charge in Howell's death. Jury deliberations began Thursday following closing arguments.

"Terrified"

"It's a tragic event, but it's not cold-blooded murder," said Jane Rosien, an attorney for Waite. "Jill Waite was a terrified woman. She has suffered physical abuse at the hands of Mr. Howell."

Howell had driven out to the two-story farmhouse about a quarter-mile off U.S. Highway 6, Rosien said. The two had fought in the past over custody of their daughter, who was at the house with Waite at the time

of the shooting.

Waite fired a gun from the front porch, Rosien said, in an effort to ward off Howell when he refused to leave. The first bullet hit his car, she said, and the second accidentally hit Howell.

The prosecution, however, told a different story — describing Waite as a woman who shot Howell as he tried to retreat.

"He was 40 feet away," said prosecutor William Byers, describing the shooting as "cold-blooded murder." "That's a long way away. That's a long way away to feel threatened, and to feel threatened by someone when they're unarmed."

Called 911

After the shooting, Waite called 911 and described it as an accident.

Defense attorneys said her efforts to get help show the shooting was unplanned. The prosecution, however, described the call as a cover-up.

Throughout much of the closing arguments, Waite sat motionless or wiped tears from her eyes. Her parents sat quietly in the courtroom's front row.

Defense attorneys described Howell as a man who had terrorized Waite, trying to force her car off Interstate Highway 80 and breaking into her home.

"Jill Waite was a very scared young woman who was a bad shot," said D. William Thomas, an attorney for Waite. "She is not a predator on society."

The prosecution argued that Waite could have called for police instead of grabbing a gun after Howell arrived.

"She was tired. She was hateful," Byers said. "She was thinking about it, and she was thinking about it the worst way you can . . . with a gun."

Jury deliberations will continue today in the case. If convicted of first-degree murder, Waite faces life in prison without parole.