

Opening arguments made in Summers stabbing trial

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HINTON — Obsession versus self-defense.

The state and defense cases describe 39-year-old Ralph McClure of Branchland in opposite terms.

McClure went on trial Tuesday in Summers Circuit Court on two counts of attempted murder and two counts of malicious wounding in the Jan. 17 stabbings of Heather Adkins and Timothy Wayne Ward.

"This case is about a jealous and obsessed man," Prosecutor Mike Turner said in his opening statement.

He described McClure as a violent man in violation of a protective order when Adkins found him crouching in her bathtub.

McClure's obsession culminated in a stabbing attack that left Adkins and Ward seriously injured. Despite

the altercation, McClure continued to call and write Adkins from the Southern Regional Jail, he said.

Turner held up an accordion file 6 inches thick that he said contained McClure's letters to Adkins since the incident.

Authorities tracked McClure to Louisiana after the incident and brought him back to West Virginia to face the charges.

Defense attorney Mark Underwood said Adkins and Ward schemed to provoke McClure so he would not be able to testify in a domestic battery case he filed against Adkins in Raleigh County.

"My client does not know where the knife came from," Underwood said.

When they attacked him, he tried to defend himself, the attorney said.

Turner played an audio-taped call Adkins placed to State Police after the alleged

attack. She is heard screaming and talking in shrill tones: "You've got to come and help me. I'm bleeding everywhere ... I can't breathe ... Oh God, please help me."

Adkins testified she suffered 15 stab wounds that required staples to her chest, arm, back and leg. She suffered a collapsed lung and two broken ribs, and was hospitalized three days.

A divorced mother of three, Adkins said she and McClure had been living together since 1997, when he rescued her from another violent live-in relationship. She described four episodes with McClure prior to Jan. 17:

■ Dec. 17, 1997. McClure put his hands around her throat, spat in her face and threatened to kill her and her children.

■ March 15, 1998. Under the guise of helping her leave their home, McClure

put her in his truck and drove off. Along the way, he pulled her hair and beat her head against the window. She climbed through the cab window to the back of the truck. He threw her into the cab, beat her, then left her standing by the highway. Shoeless and nearly shirtless, she walked 3 miles to a toll booth.

■ May 1, 1998. McClure violated a protective order and harassed her at home and work. He distributed photos at her workplace that looked like a wanted poster, which accused her of contaminating 28 men with the AIDS virus.

■ Jan. 12, 1999. McClure took an ax to their door and forced his way inside. He held the ax to her throat, threatened to decapitate her and run her body up a flagpole.

Testimony resumes at 9 a.m. today.