

'He had no idea what he'd done': Expert says man who killed wife qualifies for insanity defense



Larry Lotz



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A Barrington man charged with killing his wife in a dispute over a coffeepot meets the criteria for an insanity defense, an expert witness testified Wednesday.

Dr. Vijayta Bansal, a neurologist at Advocate Condell Medical Center in Libertyville, said Larry Lotz was having a dissociative episode related to his post-traumatic stress disorder for a matter a seconds when he shot Karen Lotz three times on Jan. 14, 2016.

"He had no idea what he'd done," said Bansal, who testified Lotz suffers from degenerative brain diseases along with PTSD. "He hadn't realized

what he'd done until he looked down at the body."

Lotz, 69, is charged with first-degree murder in his wife's slaying. A bench trial in his case opened this week before Lake County Judge Daniel Shanes.

When Lotz was interrogated by Barrington police hours after the shooting, he told investigators he and his 59-year-old wife had been arguing because he'd forgotten to turn off a coffeepot. He retreated to a room in his garage and tried to shoot himself in the head, but the gun wouldn't discharge, he said.

As his wife continued yelling at him, he told police, he pointed the gun at her and fired four shots, striking her three times.

Cross examination of the doctor by Assistant Lake County State's Attorney Lauren Kalcheim-Rothenberg became heated at times, prompting Shanes to repeatedly ask them to stop speaking over each other so the court reporter could type what they were saying.

Bansal testified Lotz likely wouldn't have remembered what he'd done during a dissociative episode, but Kalcheim-Rothenberg noted that he was able to recall for police that he'd shot his wife three times.

When Bansal testified that one reason she believes Lotz was in a dissociative episode was his random aim when shooting, Kalcheim-Rothenberg pointed out that he hit his wife once in the head and twice in the torso.

Lotz served in the Vietnam War and was traumatized by his exposure to combat, including a time when a grenade exploded five feet from his head, Bansal said. She said she believes Lotz was able to cope with his

PTSD symptoms for decades until other diseases related to his trauma -- including chronic traumatic encephalopathy, commonly referred to as CTE -- weakened his brain.

Several members of his extended family attended the trial Wednesday afternoon, including Mary A. Kobinski, the older sister of Karen Lotz. Kobinski testified Tuesday that she and other family members believe Lotz would not have shot her sister if he had been in the right frame of mind.

Lotz is free on \$3 million bail but has been on electronic monitoring since May 2016.

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