

Death penalty sought in slaying of Dixie captain

Suspect John Kalisz pleaded not guilty in court appearance



Karen Voyles/Staff

John Kalisz, the man accused of fatally shooting Dixie County Sheriff's Capt. Chad Reed, made his first court appearance in the case on Thursday morning and pleaded not guilty.

By [Karen Voyles](#)
Staff writer

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CROSS CITY - The man accused of killing a Dixie County sheriff's captain in January made his first court appearance in Dixie County on Thursday morning.

His attorney entered a plea of not guilty on his behalf.

An unshaven and disheveled John Kalisz, 55, was ushered into the courthouse shortly after 9 a.m. by Hernando County sheriff's deputies. He moved slowly with his feet shackled and his arms handcuffed to a chain around his waist.

Under an agreement between Dixie County Sheriff Dewey Hatcher and the Hernando County Sheriff's Office, the Hernando County deputies provided security for Kalisz, while Dixie County deputies provided all other courtroom security to avoid the potential for claims of conflict of interest.

The Hernando County deputies had backed their van up to the courthouse and cleared the hallway to the courtroom before moving Kalisz in and out.

During the arraignment, Kalisz was notified that 3rd Judicial Circuit State Attorney Robert "Skip" Jarvis would be seeking the death penalty in the case. Third Judicial Circuit Judge James Roy Bean also scheduled Kalisz's trial for June so that it could begin within 175 days of his arrest as required for a speedy trial. However, that date is expected to be moved at least into 2011 or 2012 because of the complexity of the case and because Kalisz is being prosecuted simultaneously on murder charges in a related case in Central Florida.

Adding to the complexity of the case will be figuring out who will represent Kalisz. The public defender's office has been removed from the case because of a conflict of interest. Defense attorney Dan Clark, of the Office of Regional Conflict Counsel, represented Kalisz during Thursday's arraignment but said his office would file paperwork to withdraw from the case because it has no lawyers who meet the requirements to handle a death penalty case.

Kalisz had little to say during the arraignment and limited his answers to most direct questions to yes or no.

At the courthouse entryway after the 10-minute hearing, Capt. Chad Reed's widow, Holly Reed, told State Attorney Robert "Skip" Jarvis she could not believe Kalisz had pleaded not guilty.

Jarvis told her that was a common occurrence in serious felony cases.

Capt. Reed, 33, was fatally shot in Cross City on Jan. 14. A Dixie County grand jury subsequently indicted Kalisz on a charge of first-degree murder in the case.

He is accused of firing one round, hitting Reed in the mouth. Kalisz then was critically wounded when other Dixie County deputies returned fire. After being treated at Shands at the University of Florida, Kalisz was taken to Hernando County and then transferred to the Hillsborough County jail, where there is a medical unit inside the county jail.

Kalisz also was indicted on murder charges in connection with a shooting incident in Hernando County that immediately preceded the one involving Reed. Kalisz is accused of killing two women and injuring two others in Hernando County.

The shootings began on the afternoon of Jan. 14 in Hernando County. Kalisz is accused of killing his sister, Kathryn Donovan, 61, and co-worker Deborah Tillotson, 59. He also was indicted on two counts of attempted first-degree murder in the shootings of his niece, Manessa Donovan, 18, and Amy Wilson, 33, an employee at Donovan's home business.

Kalisz is accused of fleeing to the north after those shootings. As he entered Dixie County, Reed and several deputies began following him. When Kalisz pulled into a Cross City gas station, the deputies pulled into the station as well.

Dixie County Sheriff Dewey Hatcher said Reed had exited his car and was walking south toward Kalisz, who was in the driver's seat of the car. Kalisz faced north, lifted a gun, pointed in Reed's direction and fired once, hitting Reed, according to reports.

Deputies fired at Kalisz, hitting him several times.