

DE LA ROCHE TESTIFIES BROTHER WAS KILLER

He Says He Slew Ronald After Discovering the Other Bodies— Repudiates His Confession

By **ROBERT HANLEY**
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HACKENSACK, Jan. 19—Harry De La Roche Jr. testified today at his murder trial that he shot his brother repeatedly after returning home from a discothèque and finding his parents shot to death and his youngest brother, Eric, dying in a pool of blood on his bed.

He said he thought he heard Eric "moan (and groan.)"

"That flipped me out a bit because Eric was always trying to be just like me," he said. "It was like seeing a part of me die."

Mr. De La Roche said he noticed a pistol lying on a bedroom window sill as his other brother, Ronald, sat at the foot of his bed, asking Harry to help him.

"I just picked it up and started pulling the trigger," he said. "I just kept pulling the trigger."

Mr. De La Roche's account today of the four murders in the De La Roche family home in Montvale on Nov. 18, 1976, directly contradicted his confession, which was read to the jury last Friday, that he killed his parents, Harry and Mary Jane, and Ronald and Eric because his father would not let him quit his military studies at the Citadel in South Carolina.

As he repudiated his earlier admissions, Mr. De La Roche spoke in a firm and steady voice and showed little emotion as he described the scene he said he had encountered, except for his brief digression about Eric's envy of him and attempts to emulate him. Mr. De La Roche, who usually tilts slightly and rests his chin in his hand while testifying, sat erectly in the witness chair throughout his 60-minute, detailed account of his movements the night his family was murdered.

Vague on Later Events

As the defense attorney, John R. Taylor, led the defendant, a gaunt and pale 19-year-old, through the narrative, Mr. De La Roche was explicit about all his actions until the time he said he discovered the bodies.

He remembered driving around early in the evening with a friend in his car; returning home and taking his mother's car to the discothèque in New City, N.Y.; being embarrassed about his Citadel T-shirt, which was adorned with a Mickey Mouse figure dressed in a military uniform; drinking three bottles of beer; talking to a discothèque patron about mili-

tary life, and overhearing someone in the men's room say it was 2:15 A.M.

Once Mr. De La Roche's narrative brought him back home and into the death scene, he became vague about his recollections after shooting Ronald as Eric lay dying.

Before about 200 spectators that filled a county court room here, he said he first noticed Ronald sitting at the end of his bed, "looking a little dopey or shocked or something."

"I said, 'Hey, what's up,' or something like that," he recalled asking after entering Ronald's bedroom.

He said he saw Eric in the pool of blood. Then he said he went to his parents' room "wondering what's happening."

Felt for Father's Pulse

"I saw my parents and the blood and I reached for my father and tried for a pulse," he said. "I've had extra first aid," he added, explaining how he was once instructed on pulse detection. Realizing both parents were dead, he said, he went back to Ronald to find out "what happened and why."

"He spoke to me, but it wasn't his normal voice. It was a little slurred," he said. Mr. De La Roche then quoted Ronald as saying his father had discovered Ronald's "pot paraphernalia" and was going to "turn him in to the police."

"My father was the type to hit first and ask questions later," he said, adding that his father was "extremely" opposed to drug usage.

He quoted Ronald as saying that his father had threatened to shoot both the brothers if he ever caught them with drugs.

"He told me he did it and he told me how and he told me why, because he was afraid of the drug bit," Mr. De La Roche testified.

At that point, he said, he heard Eric's moans, which, he said, touched off his shooting Ronald.

Immediately after dropping the gun, he said it "took a minute to come anywhere close to being calm. I realized he was shot. And I said, 'what have I done? Now I'm going to be blamed for all four, which I didn't do?'"

Once Mr. De La Roche concludes his testimony tomorrow and undergoes cross-examination by the prosecutor, Richard E. Salkin, a psychiatrist, is expected to testify for the defense about the defendant's mental state immediately after the murders.