

ACCUSATIONS HEARD IN DE LA ROCHE CASE

Prosecutor, at Trial Opening, Says
Defendant Is Seeking to Accuse
Brother of Multiple Murders

By ROBERT HANLEY
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HACKENSACK, Jan. 5—The murder trial of Harry De La Roche Jr., the former military-school student accused of murdering his parents and two younger brothers in their Montvale home over the 1976 Thanksgiving weekend, opened here today, with the prosecutor asserting that the defendant sought to accuse his brother, Ronald, of the crimes from the moment he led a police officer to three of the bodies.

"That's when the game began," the assistant Bergen County Prosecutor, Richard E. Salkin, asserted in his 15-minute opening statement to a jury of seven women and five men. "He was trying to frame his brother."

"Where's Ronald?" he asked," Mr. Salkin, his voice rising, quoted the suspect as asking a Montvale police officer, Carl Olsen, the first policeman on the scene. Mr. Salkin also quoted the suspect as saying "He had a fight with my father. Where's Ronald?"

Mr. Salkin's concentration on Mr. De La Roche's alleged attempt to direct police suspicions toward his 15-year-old brother, Ronald, was viewed as an attempt to deflate the 19-year-old defendant's anticipated trial defense that Ronald committed three of the murders after arguing with his father about a cache of marijuana found in the house, and that he, in turn, killed Ronald in a fit of momentary rage after discovering the bodies.

That contention differs radically from an alleged confession the defendant gave to Montvale police soon after the murders. In that alleged confession, Mr. De La Roche is thought to have admitted fatally shooting all four family members because he was upset over family insistence that he return to The Citadel, the military school he attended in South Carolina.

Extensive Press Coverage

Ronald De La Roche's body was found stuffed in a trunk in the attic about noon on Sunday, Nov. 23, 1976, about eight hours after Officer Olsen had found the defendant's mother, Mary Jane, 50, on a bed in one second-floor bedroom, and the bodies of his father, Harry Sr., 44, and his brother, Eric, 12, in Ronald's bedroom.

In the immediate aftermath of those discoveries, the defendant told police officers searching the house that it did not have an attic, Mr. Salkin asserted. But, he added, the "truth began to unravel" when Ronald's body was found in

the attic.

Mr. Salkin's opening statement made no reference to Mr. De La Roche's reported confession to all four murders. The defense attorney, John R. Taylor, also made no direct mention to the jury in his 11-minute opening statement of Mr. De La Roche's expected defense that Ronald committed the crimes.

"I can assure you of this, ladies and gentlemen, there is a defense in this case. It will be presented at a proper time," Mr. Taylor said. "Please do not form hasty judgments."

The trial started in early afternoon, after the jury and four alternates had been taken by bus to Hackensack from Camden. All 16 live in Camden County. They were chosen there in attempts to find jurors who had not been prejudiced by the extensive press coverage the murders and the trial have generated in northern New Jersey.

Throughout the opening statements and initial testimony from Officer Olsen, Mr. De La Roche sat quietly at the defense table. He alternately rested his chin in his hands, doodled on a yellow legal pad carefully examined the prosecution exhibits as they were introduced, and leafed through stacks of defense documents.

Officer Olsen recalled how he had flagged down Mr. De La Roche about 4 A.M. on Nov. 23 for allegedly driving through a stop-sign in downtown Montvale. Officer Olsen said the youth jumped from his car, yelling: "They're dead, found my family dead."

After Officer Olsen had returned to the De La Roche home with the teen-ager found the bodies, and issued an alarm for Ronald after the defendant had claimed any knowledge of his whereabouts, Officer Olsen asked the youth to empty the contents of his pocket on a kitchen table. The contents alleged included \$579.76 and a plastic bag containing a substance later proven to be marijuana.