

# A Reasonable Explanation for the Shooting that Killed Vollie Belle Haston Raymond

By Wayne Haston

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## June 1, 1948 Charge to the Circuit Court Jurors

(Second State of Tennessee v. Clarke Raymond Trial)

*The rule of circumstantial evidence, as given in this case, must govern and control and there must be no other reasonable conclusion the jury can reach than the guilt of the defendant.*  
(page 186)

*...it [the State] insists that the circumstantial facts are such, the surroundings there at that time are such, that it is shown to your satisfaction beyond a reasonable doubt the guilt of this defendant, but circumstances that are inconsistent with the innocence, and that in addition thereto there can be no other reasonable conclusion or explanation which you can reach than the guilt of this defendant.* (page 187)

*...the State says that any other attempted explanation or hypothesis of how this killing occurred than the guilt of this defendant would not only be unreasonable but would be absolutely absurd and ridiculous and such could not be considered in the mind of any fair-minded juror.* (page 187)

I understand why, in 1948, the court would have assumed that ALL possible explanations and hypotheses had been considered in the trial. But I believe there was one very possible (and extremely important) explanation that was overlooked, and overlooked even though there were hints of it in the testimonies of the witnesses. Today, this explanation would not be overlooked. In fact, it would probably be the defense's main argument from the beginning of the trial.

I think these clues were overlooked because the defense attorneys wanted them to be overlooked. I think attorneys for the defense even manipulated the witnesses to steer clear of evidence the defense did not want to surface.

In order to see these clues that lead to an alternative **reasonable** explanation or hypothesis, it is helpful to read the entire transcript of the April 1948 (second) Circuit Court trial that was conducted in Spencer—the transcript that was reviewed by the Tennessee State Supreme Court. If you are *really interested* in understanding this case, I recommend you download and read the docket of the State Supreme Court's assessment of the April 1948 trial—or at least the most pertinent parts of it:

[https://danielhaston.blog/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/State\\_v.\\_Clark\\_Raymond.pdf](https://danielhaston.blog/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/State_v._Clark_Raymond.pdf)

But to simplify and document this alternative *reasonable* explanation, I will cite the locations in the court transcript and quote the *clue statements* that were overlooked. I refer to these

statements as *clue statements* because they were revealing statements made by witnesses during the trial that would have led *away from* a “not guilty” plea. In fact, these statements would have led *away from* a “first degree murder” charge. A plea of guilt by temporary insanity of (“involuntary manslaughter”) would have been the most reasonable and most valid plea, but the defense attorneys were aiming for a better (for the defendant) plea—“not guilty.” And it appears that the prosecution attorneys (the “State”) were oblivious to this alternative and reasonable explanation for Clarke Raymond’s actions. All they could imagine was “murder in the first degree” or accidental death. The two shots by a pump shotgun understandably made the idea of an accidental death *unreasonable, ridiculous, and absolutely absurd* to the State’s attorneys. So, overlooking or ignoring the possibility of a third explanation, they charged Clarke Raymond with first degree murder.

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### Death by “War Neurotic” Temporary Insanity

It’s been known from ancient times that traumatic experiences in war often have long-term mental effects on war veterans.

Jean Froissart (1337?–1400/01) was the most representative chronicler of the Hundred Years' War between England and France. He sojourned in 1388 at the court of Gaston Phoebus, Comte de Foix, and narrated the case of the Comte's brother, Pierre de Béarn, who could not sleep near his wife and children, because of his habit of getting up at night and seizing a sword to fight oneiric [in-dream] enemies.

Source: “From Shell Shock and War Neurosis to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A History of Psychotraumatology by Marc-Antoine Crocq and Lous Crocq” ([Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience, Volume 2, Number 1](#))

The term “shell shock” was used in the past, but since 1980 the term “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) has become the more popular term to describe unusual behaviors caused by traumatic stress in war experiences. In the World War II years, the term “war neuroses” was commonly used to explain these post-war effects.

A November 4, 2012 article in *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, “PTSD as a Criminal Defense: A Review of Case Law,” investigated 47 cases which involved a criminal defense based on PTSD. Many of these cases involved veterans of war, some of which involved circumstances similar to the death of Vollie Belle Haston Raymond.

*In Houston v. State, a 1979 Alaska Supreme Court case, the defendant, an army sergeant, shot and killed a man he perceived to be reaching for a weapon.*

*At trial, a defense expert testified that Mr. Houston had traumatic neurosis of war and severe alcoholism and that the shooting took place while he was in a **dissociate state**. The trial court denied his request for a bifurcated trial with an insanity phase, and he*

*was found guilty of second-degree murder. The appeals court reversed and remanded, finding that he had provided substantial evidence to support an insanity defense.*

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*In State of New Jersey v. Cocuzza, the defendant, a Vietnam veteran who assaulted a police officer was found to be not guilty by reason of insanity. Mr. Cocuzza maintained that he believed he was attacking enemy soldiers, and his claim was supported by the testimony of a police officer that Mr. Cocuzza was holding a stick as it were a rifle.*

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*In State v. Heads, the defendant, also a Vietnam veteran, was charged with the shooting death of his sister-in-law's husband .... Although he was found guilty in the first trial, the conviction was reversed on several grounds. In a subsequent trial, he was found not guilty by reason of insanity after testimony about PTSD was offered. The expert gave testimony that Mr. Heads had PTSD, that he had experienced at least one prior **dissociative episode**, and that there was a resemblance between the scene of the shooting and Vietnam.*

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*In the case State v. Wood, a 1982 Illinois Circuit Court case, the defendant, again a Vietnam veteran, was found not guilty by reason of insanity in the shooting of the foreman in the factory where he worked.*

*The defense presented expert testimony about PTSD, about Mr. Wood's combat exposures, and about the ways in which the factory environment was reminiscent of combat, contending that the shooting took place while Mr. Wood was in a **dissociative state**.*

**The Vietnam War:** The late and delayed effects of combat exposure in the form of PTSD were a significant source of suffering and disability among veterans in the United States. Almost a quarter of all soldiers sent to Vietnam from 1964 to 1973—required some form of psychological help. The prevalence of delayed and chronic PTSD in spite of the careful prevention of psychiatric casualties in Vietnam itself, was a rude awakening.

This post-Vietnam syndrome, increasingly diagnosed in veterans in the seventies, ultimately led to the adoption of PTSD as a diagnostic category in 1980.

Most modern textbooks concur in describing this syndrome as comprising three groups of symptoms. (The first symptom is “the recurrent and distressing reexperiencing of the event in dreams, thoughts, or flashbacks.”)

The first symptoms of PTSD are often delayed and they are separated from the trauma by a latency period.

Source: "From Shell Shock and War Neurosis to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A History of Psychotraumatology by Marc-Antoine Crocq and Lous Crocq" ([Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience, Volume 2, Number 1](#))

## Dissociative State and Dissociative Flashbacks

I emboldened the text in the terms *dissociative state* and *dissociative episode* in the cases above. Here's how that concept is defined in *Wikipedia*:

**Dissociative disorders (DD)** are conditions that involve disruptions or breakdowns of memory, awareness, identity, or perception. People with dissociative disorders use dissociation as a defense mechanism, pathologically and involuntarily. The individual experiences these dissociations to protect themselves. Some dissociative disorders are triggered by psychological trauma, but depersonalization-derealization disorder may be preceded only by stress, psychoactive substances, or no identifiable trigger at all.

Source: [Dissociative disorder - Wikipedia](#)

"Various PTSD phenomena have been presented in courts as bases for criminal defenses, including **dissociative flashbacks** ...." ("PTSD as a Criminal Defense" article)

A **flashback**, or **involuntary recurrent memory**, is a psychological phenomenon in which a person has a sudden, usually powerful, vivid, and 'new' re-experiencing of a past experience, or elements of a past experience. The term is used when the memory is recalled involuntarily, and/or when it is so intense that the person 'relives' the experience, unable to fully recognize it as memory, and not something that is happening in 'real time': When they occur, the survivor is experiencing the past as if it were happening today.

Source: "Understanding flashbacks, dissociation, flooding, and numbing," ([Living Well](#))

"It has been suggested by some that dissociative flashbacks should be the only legitimate basis for insanity."

Source: "PTSD as a Criminal Defense: A Review of Case Law" by Omri Berger, Daniel E. McNiel, and Renee L. Binder (*The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, Volume 40, Number 4, 2010).

## Application to the State of Tennessee v. Clarke Raymond Case

With the above information in mind, allow me to present an explainable and reasonable hypothesis (or even a *theory*) that was never seriously considered in the Clarke Raymond case. Although, as I will show later, it appears that the defense attorneys were aware of Clarke Raymond's *war neurosis* and cleverly squelched any attempt for witnesses to surface it.

Hypothetical *war neurosis* (PTSD) argument:

### **My (Wayne Haston's) Theory**

Yes, there were some hawks hovering over the Raymond farm that Sunday morning. Vollie Belle saw them and alerted Clarke. Clarke called out to Vollie Belle to bring the shotgun, which she did. She was heading to meet Clarke with the shotgun. As he turned into the yard through the garden gate, there was Vollie Belle with the shotgun.

He wasn't expecting her to be right there, so it surprised him enough to initiate a dissociative flashback. *Maybe* he had experienced some flashback nightmares the night before and those images were lingering in his subconscious that morning and easily triggerable. All he could see was someone with a shotgun—the very kind of shotgun he had been trained to use in combat. His mind flashed back to the kind of experiences he faced on Omaha Beach, in the Battle of the Bulge, and other significant battles where he was confronted by German soldiers.

He responded like any soldier in combat would respond—he attacked his “enemy,” trying to wrestle the gun away from “him” (her, in this case). A scuffle ensued and one of the buttons from Vollie Belle's housecoat was snapped off near the garden gate. The struggle continued, as Vollie Belle was being pushed backward. Near the well and five to seven feet (or so) from the back porch, Clarke managed to wrestle the shotgun away from his wife, the perceived German enemy. Realizing she was in danger of being shot, she raised her right hand to try to protect herself. Clarke fired the gun, thinking he was doing so in a combat zone, to defend himself and to kill the enemy. Some pellets from the first shot grazed her right wrist, some hit the pulley on the well, and most of the blast hit the window and weatherboarding on the west side of the porch. In some way, Vollie Belle whirled around, Clarke pumped the shotgun, and shot his wife in the chest at close range. She landed about twelve feet from the steps, and a pool of blood collected there in the brief time before Clarke removed her body.

Clarke threw or lay the shotgun on the grass about two feet away from the corner of the steps and saw his wife lying on the ground, bleeding profusely. At that point, not realizing clearly what had happened, he picked her up and took her inside and placed her on the bed. When he discovered that she apparently was dead, he ran out of the front door and over to tell Perry Smith to go get a doctor.

Clarke was as confused and depressed as the witnesses seemed to imply. I suspect he, at point, did not recall killing her and he probably really believed she must have tripped and accidentally shot herself.

***So, why did he say he only heard one shot?***

Becky Hitchcock Harris, added this observation which makes a lot of sense: *When Clarke was asked about not hearing the second shot, he mentioned the slamming of the toilet door. He responded by referencing his war experiences:*

*“When we were overseas we even slept within ten feet of howitzers; slept right through the fire.” (Clarke Raymond)*

Becky, concluded: *I think that door slamming and his falling may have been the trigger that put him in a dissociative state.*

***How long do dissociative states last?***

*“Periods of dissociation can last for a relatively short time (hours or days) or for much longer (weeks or months). It can sometimes last for years ....”*

Source: “Dissociative Disorders,” [NHS](#).

Clarke told his brother Dan that he had spent a lot of time, while in jail, trying to remember the events of that morning. It’s possible he never clearly remembered his actions that killed his wife. Amnesia sometimes accompanies a dissociative event.

### **Clarke Raymond’s WWII Service Record**

When I was first exposed to the story of Vollie Belle’s death and learned about Clarke Raymond’s military service, my mind went to the possibility that he might have killed her as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder. But I was unable to find a record of his experiences in the war to determine if or how much combat action he was involved in.

As it turns out, Clarke experienced some very bloody combat duty. An announcement of his 1954 wedding in Montana states that he fought in the European theater, part of which was under General Patton. That says a lot. But when I discovered the following November 23, 1945 article in *The Madisonian* (Virginia City, MT) about his discharge from the army, it revived my suspicion that maybe my initial thinking was correct—maybe his combat service did lead to the death of his wife.

Consider what he had endured within the three and a half years prior to that Sunday morning, October 5, 1947.

- He landed at Utah Beach on D-day – June 6, 1944
- He fought in the Battle of the Brittany Peninsula – Between August and October 1944

- He fought in the Ardennes [aar-den-z] Counteroffensive (Battle of the Bulge) – December 16, 1944 – January 25, 1945 (Clarke was nicked by sniper's bullet)
- He fought in the Reduction of the Ruhr Pocket – April 1-18, 1945 (Clarke received shrapnel wounds, for which he received a Purple Heart medal and cluster)
- But that was not all – he fought in other engagements in the European Theater

He received campaign stars for Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes, Rhineland and Central Europe.

### **Clarke Raymond Returns With Honorable Discharge After 56 Months In Service**

Sheridan, Nov. 21—Clarke Raymond, veteran of 56 months in the service, and wife arrived in Sheridan this week to visit until after the holidays with his mother, Mrs. D. W. Raymond.

Entering the service from Sheridan, Feb. 26, 1941, Raymond left San Francisco the following Dec. 5, bound for Manila. When the Japs struck Pearl Harbor two days later, his ship was ordered back to this country.

Raymond spent the next 2½ years in training in the U. S., serving as an instructor in heavy artillery. He went overseas to England March 31, 1944, and landed on Utah beach on the Normandy coast July 18, 1944, D-day plus 42.

A member of the 965th field artillery, he was attached at various times to the First, Third and Ninth armies during the campaigns that followed. He took part in the conquest of the Brittany peninsula, the Ardennes campaign, known as the "Battle of the Bulge," and the reduction of the Ruhr pocket, in addition to other engagements.

He was nicked by a sniper's bullet in the "Battle of the Bulge" and received shrapnel wounds in the reduction of the Ruhr, for which he wears the Purple Heart medal and cluster.

In addition to the Purple Heart, Raymond is entitled to wear the following ribbons: Good Conduct, Pre-Pearl Harbor, American Theater, Asiatic-Pacific, and European Theater with campaign stars for Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes, Rhineland and Central Europe.

Raymond received his honorable discharge at Camp McCoy, Wis., Oct. 17 and joined his wife at Spencer, Tenn., before returning to Sheridan.

## Possible War Neurosis Clues from Clarke and Trial Witnesses

When the issue of a “mind test” came up (pages 63-67), defense attorney Lewis Pope tried to get Deputy Sheriff Claude Baker to admit it was a “lie detector test” that Clarke’s brother Dan had suggested to Clarke. Claude could not be shaken about the “mind test.”

“They [Dan Raymond, in particular] wanted to test his [Clarke’s] mind.” -Claude Baker (page 66)

“Mind business was brought on the first, said he [Dan, I assume] would carry him to have his mind tested, or test his mind.” -Claude Baker (page 67)

Note: A Highway Patrol Sergeant at the jail suggested a lie detector test, which Clarke agreed to. He even asked the jailor, the White County Sheriff, to take him to Chattanooga for a lie detector test, but the Sheriff wouldn’t take him. (page 122) His brother Dan also suggested a lie detector test, which Clarke agreed to. (page 157)

Attorney General (for the State’s prosecution case) C.D. Lamb examination of Van Buren County’s Clifton McCoy, revealed some significant testimony. (pages 161-166)

Lamb: “I will ask you if the defendant’s brother and you and the defendant and anyone else had any discussion about this young man [Clarke Raymond] having his mind test?”

Sheriff McCoy: “We did.”

Lamb: “Who made that suggestion, Sheriff?”

Sheriff McCoy: “It was his brother.”

Lamb: “I will ask you to state whether or not he made any arrangements with you to take him to some doctors, specialists in mental diseases?”

Sheriff McCoy: “He made arrangements with me, we was over at Sparta when we had the talk, he [Dan] asked me if I would take him from Spencer and take him over to Sparta to be with him when he had his conversation.”

Lamb: “Was anybody with you?”

Sheriff McCoy: “I believe Mrs. Anderson [wife of White County Sheriff] and Mr. [Claude] Baker.”

Cross examination by attorney for the defense, Jim Camp:

Sheriff McCoy: “Well, he said – it was the same time\* [at the jail] – **talking about this mind business, that the war, being in the army, might be affected so it would go off –**

\*“Same time” = conversation in which Claude Baker claimed that Dan told Clarke “he might as well confess.” Which, by the way, no one in that setting other than Claude Baker claimed to hear that remark.



**Note:** At this “mind...might be affected to go off...” point, attorney Camp abruptly interrupts the Sheriff’s response, seemingly not wanting the discussion to shift to the possibility of a *war neurosis* kind of motive for Clarke having killed his wife.

Camp: “We’ll get to that directly, that was a different time.”

**Note:** Attorney Camp never did “get to that [mind business]” issue, as he said he would.

Sheriff McCoy: “No, it was that same time.”

Camp: “Now, you know what a lie detector is, don’t you?”

Sheriff McCoy: “I have never seen nary’n.”

Camp: “Have you heard of them?”

Sheriff McCoy: “Yes, I have heard of them.”

Camp: “Could you be mistaken, Sheriff, about the ‘mind’ business, they wouldn’t be talking about a lie detector?”

Sheriff McCoy: “No.”

At that point Camp, changes the subject.

Attorney for the State, Lamb, then examines Sheriff McCoy again:

Lamb: “And I will ask you if Dan said anything there to you, in your presence, of his brother or to his brother about how that thing looked to him after he [Dan] had investigated it.”

Sheriff McCoy: “He said looked like he [Clarke, I assume] would have to prove out of it.”

Lamb: “What did the defendant say, if anything, or do you recall?”

Sheriff McCoy: “**Well, he said if he done it he didn’t know anything about it;** that’s when the mind detector business started right there.”

**Note:** I emboldened the text, thinking it was an issue that needed to be noted, investigated, and presented as evidence in the trial for war neurosis.

Lamb: “That what started?”

Sheriff McCoy: “That’s what started the mind detecting business.”

Lamb: “I will ask you to state whether or not Dan, his brother, made a statement about how it looked to him from the investigation he [Dan] had made?”

At that point, Attorney Camp “excepted” the question (made a formal objection). The judge sustained the exception, meaning he agreed to the exception and did

not allow Sheriff McCoy to respond to the question. Again, it appears that the defense attorneys did not want the “mind test” issue to be discussed in the trial.

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### Some of My Conclusions

1. I think the defense attorneys knew of Clarke’s dissociative disorder and that he killed Vollie Belle in a dissociative flashback. But, they figured, since Claude Baker had handled the shotgun and there were no eye witnesses, they could get Clarke off as not guilty, so they steered away from every suggestion of a mind test or a mental disorder.
2. I think Clarke’s brother Dan was aware of Clarke’s (PTSD-type) mental issues. That’s probably why he was the one who suggested the mental test. If the sheriffs had taken Clarke to a specialist in mental problems, the entire outcome of the trial might have been different. Even Clarke may have realized that he possibly killed his wife in a dissociative flashback. He stated something like, **“If I did it I didn’t know anything about it.”**
3. The defense did not have to prove innocence, including explaining the *two* shots from the pump shotgun. As they stated, the onus was on the State to prove that Clarke used the shotgun to kill Vollie Belle. Key statement by Attorney for the defense, Pope: “It’s not up to us to show how it was done [two shots from pump shotgun in an accidental death], it’s up to the state to prove that.” In other words, Clarke Raymond is innocent until the attorneys for the state prove him guilty.
4. The defense probably knew they could easily get an involuntary manslaughter decision based on temporary insanity because of his combat experience. But a temporary insanity decision would land Clarke in a mental institution, possibly even with some prison time. “Not guilty” was the path to complete freedom.
5. Defense pleas based on war neurosis were rare at that time. Thirty years or so later the defense might have chosen to build the defense around a PTSD kind of argument.
6. Regarding the diary: Clarke had very probably had exhibited neurotic behavior around Vollie Belle. After all, they had lived together for two years before she was killed. Clarke probably knew she had recorded some of these events in her diary. When the attorneys chose to use the not guilty plea, the diary was a potential problem. Someone had to get rid of it! The first trial, which ended in a hung jury, was held on November 25-26, 1947. Consequently, Clarke Raymond was neither convicted nor acquitted at that point. Thus, he was released from custody in time to be home in Montana on December 6, 1947. This was a few months before the second (April 1948) trial.

Before leaving Tennessee, did he go back to his house and rip pages out of the diary and hide it, with the bloody sheets, in a lard can under the floor of the smoke house? Surely he must have gone back to the house to gather some clothes and perhaps other items needed for his trip to Montana (and from there to San Diego to visit his mother and sisters). Obviously, he knew that he would never again return to Van Buren County, Tennessee. Also, according to a November 27, 1947 story in the *Sparta Expositor*, Clarke's mother, brother, and an uncle were in Spencer for the first trial. Where do you suppose they stayed while there? *Maybe* they stayed in the Cummingsville house where Clarke and Vollie Belle were living before her death. And *just maybe* the family did some "house cleaning" while they were staying there!

7. Growing up, Clarke lived in a small Montana area, served by *The Madisonian* newspaper. As is true with small community newspapers, relatively unimportant events make it into the newspapers. There are numerous mentions of Clarke Raymond in that paper—an injury playing basketball, an injury from riding a horse, an automobile accident that wasn't his fault, his participation in high school sports, his graduation from high school, participation in a wedding, etc. I found no newspaper article about him that reflected poorly on his character—no crimes or anything like that. And Clarke was discharged from the military with an excellent record.
8. One of the major obstacles the prosecution had to overcome was his stellar reputation, around Van Buren County as well as back home in Montana. And even those close to Vollie Belle and him apparently observed no significant schisms in their marriage. If there had been problems, you would think she would have discussed them with her parents or Mrs. Perry Smith, her closest friend and neighbor. Dissociative flashbacks are involuntary and cause people to lose total sense of reality and even, in some cases, a *trance disorder* and/or *dissociative amnesia*. In a dissociative flashback, the person someone loves the most can appear to be a threatening enemy to be disposed of.
9. The court's charge to the jury failed to realize there was another explainable answer for what happened on that October 5, 1947 in the backyard of the Clarke and Vollie Belle Raymond house in Cummingsville, TN.
10. As far as I know (from Montana newspaper research), Clarke led a respectable life back in Sheridan, Montana after the incident in Tennessee. He married a sophisticated college graduate in 1954, was a successful rancher, and was elected in 1966 and again in 1972 to be a County Commissioner.

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### **A Personal Story About a Friend with PTSD**

Earlier in my life I had an older, very intelligent, friend who had PTSD from his experiences in the Korean War. I first learned of this when I shot some firecrackers while he was visiting our house. He fell apart emotionally.

Several years later, he came to me one night holding his arm and told me he had been shot. Sure enough, he had been shot in the arm. I took him to the hospital. Then later, he came to me and told me that someone had shot at him while he was sitting on the sofa in his mother's house. Sure enough, someone had shot through the front window of the living room of his mother's house. Then later, he came to me and told me the trailer in which he lived had burned and everything in the trailer had burned, except a Bible. As it turned out, all three of these incidents (and who knows how many more) were self-inflicted. His wife left him and he asked me to go to her and plead with her to return, which I did. She wouldn't share any details with me, but I am confident that she had seen, and probably been the victim of, some of his threatening behaviors. I'm also quite confident that, in his own mind, he was convinced that someone was trying to kill him. And this was several years after his war experiences.