

Magruder's Offer to Take Blame

Washington

Jeb Stuart Magruder offered to take the full blame for the break-in at Watergate at a secret meeting attended last summer by John Mitchell and John Wesley Dean III but was told that the blame should go no higher than G. Gordon Liddy, sources said.

The reason Magruder's plan was rejected at the meeting, according to one source, was that Magruder was "too close to the White House."

Magruder, who is scheduled to begin testifying publicly this morning at Senate hearings into the Watergate scandal, already has told this to the Ervin committee's investigators, according to Senate sources.

Magruder's offer to take the blame for Watergate apparently was made shortly after the break-in — at a point when it became clear that Liddy, the counsel to the Nixon organization's finance committee, would be implicated.

According to the sources, Magruder has said that Mitchell, Dean, Fred LaRue, an aide to Mitchell, and Robert Mardian, a former Justice Department official who was working on the campaign, were present at the meeting.

According to one source close to the committee, the rationale used to oppose Magruder's plan was that Magruder — the deputy director of Mr. Nixon's reelection committee — was "too close to the White House," and that the blame should be placed on low-level functionaries such as Liddy who were not closely identified with Mr. Nixon or the campaign.

A second source, however, said that Magruder did not use the precise words "too

close to the White House" — but that he gave the reason that the blame should go no higher than Liddy.

Magruder subsequently testified in court that Liddy and his men had been hired only for legitimate intelligence-gathering, and had gone off on their own and bugged the Watergate without the prior knowledge or approval of their superiors.

Liddy then went silently to jail, refusing to testify or to implicate others. He is serving a 6-to-20-year term.

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