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JEB MAGRUDER ON THE STAND
His Watergate testimony lasted 5½ hours

Attitudes That Spawned the Plot

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Government officials he respected had done it. The university professor of ethics he admired had done it. So Jeb Stuart Magruder had done it too, he told the Senate's Watergate investigating committee yesterday. He had let the end justify the means.

The former deputy director of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President was unusually nervous and more than a little apologetic as he sat at the witness table describing in detail how he and an assortment of high officials — from the attorney general to the President's lawyer — had planned, executed and then vainly sought to cover up the Watergate affair.

He popped a lozenge in his mouth and told how they had not been all that eager to approve a \$250,000 master plan for breaking and entering and bugging, had in fact whittled it down from a \$1 million extravaganza. But they had "signed off" the plan — approved it — because it might,

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just might, provide some helpful data about the President's 1972 political opposition.

He shifted in his chair and fidgeted with his shirt collar and kept repositioning an ashtray on the table as he said that when the whole thing went awry with the arrest at the Watergate, they began almost by instinct to destroy documents and concoct a cover and plan perjury.

There never was any consideration that they should tell the truth because their concern, after all, was to prevent a fatal blow to the President's bid for a second term.

Magruder was gravely handsome as he spelled it all out. His tanned cheeks had what seemed to be a permanent blush, but he was otherwise cloaked in somber gray — the chalktoned suit, the pale striped shirt, the subdued print tie. It came across like Machiavelli in pinstripes.

Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. (Rep-Tenn.) kept asking why. Why, if they all knew it to be illegal, why, if they had personal reservations, why had they gone ahead and done it?

The reply from Magruder, in sum, was that his sense of integrity had become tattered — but no more than that of anyone else.

At Williams College, he said, he had taken a course in ethics from William Sloane Coffin, "whom I respect greatly," and yet, in the three years Magruder worked at the White House he had seen "continuing violations of the law done by men like William Sloane Coffin" in the movement against the Vietnam war. Coffin, who later became chaplain at Yale, had told a rally on the grounds of the Washington Monument, Magruder said, that students should burn their draft cards and demonstrate against the government.

Furthermore, the witness went on, his cleft chin bobbing beneath the two microphones in front of him, there had been "a certain atmos-

phere" in the White House, a feeling that if the dissenters could break the law then the defenders of the President could reply in kind.

"Let me just say," Magruder said, "when these subjects came up and although I was aware they were illegal and I am sure the others did, we had become somewhat inured to using some activities that would help us in accomplishing what we thought was a cause, a legitimate cause."

He was, all the same, properly penitent as he made his disavowal of his super-pragmatism. He cleared his throat, he rubbed his face with his hand, he told the Senate committee — and the nation — that "two wrongs do not make a right," that he now understands that his was "an absolutely incorrect decision," that the President "had confidence in his aides and I must confess that some of us failed him."

More important, perhaps, he told what he knew, sowing a virtual mine field of testimony for future witnesses at the hearings to try to inch through on tiptoe. He implicated a dozen others in the plot or the coverup, giving dates and details of the key events in response to the gentle prodding of the committee's chief counsel, Samuel Dash.