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Jeb Magruder in London: On Motives and Morality

By Bernard D. Nossiter

LONDON — Jeb Magruder was in town yesterday to promote his book, and puzzled Britons did not know what to make of him.

Was the former deputy director of the Committee for the Reelection of the President a reclaimed sinner or was his "new-found morality," as one skeptic put it, a stunt to make money?

At a press conference staged by his British publisher and oiled with sherry, Magruder assured questioners that his conversion was "genuine." It is not, he said, "a change I came to because I thought it was good public relations."

Anyway, he is not making that much money, is still jobless and "barely surviving." He did look forward, however, to picking up \$1,500 a time on the lecture circuit.

But did he not "choke on a lot of that perjury?" he was asked.

He certainly did, said Magruder, looking neat and trim in a gray business suit, striped blue shirt and dark green polkadotted tie. It was the very idea of having to lie again that made him come clean, a course he would

recommend to his former boss, Richard Nixon.

"It's really quite cleansing when you can confess," he said. "Holding it within you causes internal problems. At least I processed my guilt out."

Magruder held forth for 45 minutes in Stationers Hall, once headquarters for the printing guild. The session revealed more about British attitudes toward the United States than it did about Watergate.

Isn't there something "fundamentally wrong with the American system that permits a country to slide into Watergate?" a newsman asked.

"Yes," said Magruder, who has written that he tries to get along with everyone. He is worried about the "depersonalization . . . callousness" in American life, the "failure to treat humans as equal but something to tread upon."

With the CIA operating in London under the direction of Cord Meyer, one journalist asked darkly, "Should not we take it for granted that the Ford administration has not abandoned the dirty tricks Nixon was up to?"

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Jeb Magruder at a press conference in London yesterday.

MAGRUDER, From B1

Magruder did not think he was "qualified" to talk about the CIA.

Another of Her Majesty's subjects was aroused when Magruder suggested that Watergate was the end product of a monarchical view of the presidency. Surely Magruder was not implying that "monarchy was incompatible with democracy," the reporter demanded.

Perhaps Watergate was the result of "ill-chosen subordinates," another loyal subject proposed. Magruder allowed that Nixon's aides "might have been guilty of intense loyalty to the President."

Wouldn't America be better off if the President had to submit to congressional questions like the prime minister in Parliament? Magruder thought there might be something in that.

Another reporter complained that the prison in which Magruder had served seven months looked on television "like a holiday camp . . . As prisons go, it was a pretty soft one."

Magruder replied that he would not wish that "dreary, depressing" loss of freedom on anyone who had not committed a violent crime. His jail may have boasted a tennis and basketball court, but "you do nothing of substance in your entire day."

The British press would still be questioning Magruder if his publishers, who described him as "an

ideal young American" had not had to hustle him away to some other promotional dates. They had landed him spots on several BBC radio programs, Canadian television, Irish and Austrian radio and London's commercial radio station. This media blitz will be climaxed by Magruder's appearance today on BBC television's "Midweek" show. "Midweek" is sharing half

the costs of Magruder's trip with the book publishers, Hodder and Staughton.

There is a great fascination here with Watergate and its characters.

Books on the subject sell well, and Magruder's "An American Life—One Man's Road to Watergate" is off to a nice start with substantial reviews in the leading Sunday papers, The Observer and The Sunday Times.