

Magruder Had Big Plans for Himself

Jeb Stuart Magruder for California Secretary of State?

It may sound preposterous now, in view of the Watergate scandals, but it was only two months ago that the White House aide himself floated rumors he might return to California to run for office next year.

It was after the Nixon inaugural ceremonies in January, which he managed, and before the Watergate affair had built into a fullblown scandal.

The 37-year-old Magruder, now identified as the witness who told a federal grand jury that it was former Attorney General John Mitchell who helped plan the Watergate bugging, took soundings out here.

He felt that with the proper buildup, he could become a leading Republican candidate for the post now held by Democrat Edmund G. Brown Jr.

"But the funny thing about Jeb is that he had the idea he could come back to California, tour the state and never once talk about the Watergate affair," recalled one of his associates.

"He seemed to feel he could get the press to question him only about how well he handled the President's inaugural ceremonies, and never ask him about his part in the Watergate thing."

Magruder went to the White House from California after Mr. Nixon's triumph in 1968, but he is not considered a California political figure by most Republicans who worked with him then.

His only prior political experience in California had been in the Nixon presidential campaign in 1968, although he had worked for Richard Ogilvie, later to become governor of Illinois, in 1966.

"Jeb was very pleasant, soft spoken, a bright young man in the right place at the right time," the campaign

figure said. "He was tremendously impressed by a man's position and importance, so much so that if he hadn't shown some finesse he would have been considered a fawning sychophant."

He went to Washington, came under the aegis of H. R. Halderman, the Nixon chief of staff, and in 1969 was named a special assistant to the President.

And he became a "super yes-man," recounted a former Nixon administration appointee. "He was what we called a 'loyalty freak,' one of those sincere, button-down types who overdo the 'I'll-do-anything-for-the-boss' thing."

Operating under Halderman's direction, Magruder was sent into the office of Herbert G. Klein, Mr. Nixon's director of communications, to handle administrative chores.

When the 1972 presidential campaign was being organized, Magruder was one of the first of the White House aides to be transferred to the committee to reelect the President staff.

It wasn't long before he apparently enjoyed the confidence and support of both Haldeman and former Attorney General Mitchell, who had taken over the Nixon campaign leadership.

When the campaign ended, Magruder was put in charge of the inaugural ceremonies, a big undertaking for a 37-year-old whose prime function up to then had been to take order from higher-ups.

One of the national leaders of the Republican party, who had never been one of Magruder's warmest allies, commented to a friend when he learned of the aide's appointment as director of the inaugural:

"Well, that's his reward for doing such a good job on Watergate."

L.A. Times Service