

Lost Sheep Returns

Magruder's Sincerity Praised

By William Greider
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Watergate senators preached over the witness Magruder-like church elders welcoming home a lost sheep, a sinner redeemed from the dark business of wiretapping and perjury.

Weicker of Connecticut blessed the sincerity of his confession. "I think you really squared with us on that one," he said.

Talmadge of Georgia read from the book of Woodrow Wilson. "If there's nothing to conceal, then why conceal it? If it's a public game, then why play it private?"

And Ervin of North Carolina offered poetry in encouragement.

Each night I burn the records of the day. At sunrise, every soul is born again.

The object of their solicitude nodded solemnly in agreement. At 38, Jeb Stuart Magruder still has the clear blue eyes of a choir boy, but is handsome as a movie star. He of the knockout blue

SCENE, From A1

The crimes ranged from campaign burglary and wiretapping, which Magruder said former Attorney General John Mitchell personally authorized, to a grand cover-up of the guilty, a plot which he said reached all the way up to the President's chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman.

The breath-taking recital was such strong stuff that the audience found relief in the small bits of humor which Magruder dead-panned in between his startling disclosures.

They laughed when Magruder told how G. Gordon Liddy, the campaign's top spy, was sitting in the Attorney General's office at the Department of Justice — proposing the kidnaping of radical leaders and the use of hired women to coax secrets out of the Democrats. The Attorney General

eyes, the strong chin and the perfect brow offered his own thoughts on where he went wrong—led astray by the bad example of the anti-war movement, which broke laws to obstruct the President. So Magruder did, too, to protect him.

"Now that is absolutely incorrect," he acknowledged. "Two wrongs do not make a right."

"There are countless cliches that come to mind," said Baker of Tennessee, "that I could use to try to describe that state of mind or that attitude—fighting fire with fire, two wrongs don't make a right and all the rest. But they all seem inadequate."

Indeed, all the senatorial platitudes did not diminish the sensational nature of what Magruder had to tell the Watergate investigating committee. In the course of an hour, the former deputy director of President Nixon's 1972 campaign implicated at least a dozen people in crimes.

See SCENE, A16, Col. 1

turned down the idea, but he didn't summon a U.S. marshal to arrest anyone.

Sen. Sam Ervin, the chairman, banged his gavel. "I am going to ask the audience to please refrain from laughter or any kind of demonstration," the senator warned.

Magruder, whose wife, Gail, was seated behind him, seemed reluctant to discuss the bizarre propositions. "I think all three of us were appalled," he said. When pressed, he sheepishly explained about the women: "I think you could consider them call girls."

The gallery laughed again when he told about the cash discovered on the Watergate burglars. His mouth curled in a small smile and Magruder explained: "We had hoped it was money that had been found at the Democratic National Committee, but unfortunately it was our money."

Magruder won the com-

mittee members' sympathy, however, with his careful account of how the top men of the best-financed presidential campaign in history could commit \$250,000 to illegal espionage.

"It was a throwaway decision," Magruder said candidly, a small item on the agenda of a busy meeting, a tiny fraction of the \$50 million which the campaign leaders were spending.

"A decision really that is going to affect history that was made in almost a casual way," Sen. Baker observed. "Yes, sir," Magruder agreed.

"But it was a reluctant decision," the witness added. "I think that is important to note. It was not one that anyone was overwhelmed with at all. But it was made and he did make it."

"I can think of a thousand reasons why it was a reluctant decision," Baker remarked dryly. "But why was it?"

"You probably have all the good reasons, as I do," Magruder replied. "We knew it was illegal, probably inappropriate. We didn't think that probably much would come of it. But, on the other hand, something may come of it and I think it was one of those decisions that unfortunately—we had 30 decisions, as I recall, at least 30 decisions we made that day about, even greater sums of money than the \$250,000."

But the explanation went deeper than that and Magruder was anxious to provide it, something he clearly had been thinking about for a long time.

As a White House aide for more than two years before his political role, Magruder had watched with increasing frustration as anti-war groups opposed President Nixon's Indochina policies, sometimes with illegal activ-

ities, bombing, violent demonstrations, burning draft cards.

"I saw people I was very close to breaking the law without any regard for any other person's pattern of behavior or belief," Magruder said. "I believed as firmly as they did that the President was correct in this issue. So consequently . . . we had become inured to using some activities that would help us in accomplishing what we thought was a cause, a legitimate cause."

In particular, Magruder singled out the Rev. William Sloan Coffin, the Yale chaplain who was indicted for obstructing the Selective Service System. An anti-war leader, Coffin had taught Magruder in an ethics course at Williams College some 15 years ago and recently disparaged his former student in public comments.

"He tells me my ethics were bad," Magruder said sharply. "Yet he was indicted for criminal charges"