



Inside the 'Game Plan'

— William Hogan

"ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN" — we have a pretty good view of them in the Woodward-Bernstein book of that title. Now another view, and an equally intriguing one, in Jeb Stuart Magruder's "An American Life: One Man's Road to Watergate." It often reads as though Magruder and the Washington Post reporters who first broke and stayed with the Watergate story were on the same side.

The former White House communications aide and Nixon campaign official, now in a federal prison for his part in the complicated political drama, Magruder joined the team with enormous hopes for a man who could be, "the greatest conservative political leader of his time." Magruder is a bright, articulate young man (who writes very well), once "an ambitious man," as he notes at the outset, "a man with a craving for power."

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YET THE Nixon presidency, he was soon to discover, was a citadel of fear and suspicion, of backbiting among the staff, of Mr. Nixon's fatal flaw which, in Magruder's view, was "an inability to tolerate criticism, an instinct to overact in political combat." Then, when the Watergate coverup failed, the house of cards really came tumbling down. Nobody was anybody's friend.

The brooding President, at his insistence, was kept isolated from his staff. H. R. Haldeman ruled the roost with an iron

fist: "An order from Haldeman was an order from the President." Haldeman's major flaw as Presidential assistant: "He lacked any independent vision that might have helped Nixon to avoid mistakes." And Press Secretary Ron Ziegler? "I see the President all the time, Jeb: it's important for you to get good grades with people like me . . ." So far as Magruder was concerned, Ziegler was no more than a "ventriloquist's dummy."

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WIRETAPPING? Magruder did not fully consider how wrong the act of wiretapping was until he learned that Haldeman, Dean and Ehrlichman — "my FRIENDS, had secretly taped their talks with me."

"John Dean is an example of a sophisticated young guy we could use." Magruder wrote in a PR Memo to Haldeman in an effort to publicize the administration's well-educated youngsters who "care." But the administration's image continued to be that of bland, middle aged and, for the most part, inept businessmen.

There is more than just good gossip value in this book. It is basically a sad account of power in the process of corrupting, corrupting even the charming Magruder, the "all-American boy" of his generation, and others who might have contributed vigor and style to the Nixon "game plan" if their elders would have allowed it (Atheneum; \$10).