

Watergate--

4 More May Plead Guilty

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Washington

The Watergate bugging trial was recessed yesterday for the weekend amid strong indications that four other defendants were seeking to join former White House aide E. Howard Hunt Jr. in pleading guilty.

U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica ordered all lawyers and defendants in the case to remain publicly silent. But after a two-hour closed session in the judge's chambers, Henry B. Rothblatt, attorney for the four, said: "The conflict has been resolved."

Rothblatt did not elaborate out of fear that "it might arouse Judge Sirica." But when asked whether he would still be a defense at-

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torney in the case next week, he replied that "there is a possibility I may not."

CLIENTS

If Rothblatt is dropped when the trial resumes Monday morning, his clients, Bernard L. Barker, Frank A. Sturgis, Eugenio Martinez and Virgilio Gonzales, all of Miami, would be free to offer a guilty plea on seven counts of conspiracy, burglary and wiretapping and bugging.

All were arrested inside Democratic national headquarters at the Watergate Hotel last June 17.

None of the defendants would talk, but Rothblatt left the clear impression that his clients wished to plead guilty — and that they would have to find another lawyer if they did.

"There will be no change of pleas as long as I am on the case," he said earlier in the day.

After the conference with Sirica, Rothblatt was asked

whether he would completely rule out the possibility of a guilty plea. "Not by me," he said.

Rothblatt indicated it might become clear on Monday morning whether he will remain in the case.

If the four plead guilty and Sirica accepts the plea, only two defendants would remain: James W. McCord Jr., 53, former security chief for President Nixon's reelection campaign, and G. Gordon Liddy, a former White House aide and financial counsel for the reelection committee. Hunt pleaded guilty Thursday and was freed on \$100,000 bond.

Rothblatt conceded there were "tactical differences" between himself and Barker, Sturgis, Martinez and Gonzales, all of whom have been active in anti-Castro circles in Miami. Rothblatt said he sensed "negative things in the air."

After Hunt pleaded guilty, it became known that the these four also wanted to change their pleas.

Rothblatt would not comment, but he expressed interest in a report in Newsday, the Long Island newspaper, that a group in Miami had offered to pay the four during their prison stay and afterwards if they would plead guilty.

TAPES

The government meanwhile argued unsuccessfully before a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals to overturn Sirica's decision to suppress as evidence the tapes of about 200 allegedly wiretapped conversations of Democratic officials at the Watergate.

The appeals court said, "Both the public interest and sound administration of justice do not warrant delaying the trial in this case" of dispute over the tapes.

The government claimed the tapes were "relevant" to its case, but Morgan, representing the Democrats, argued that their disclosure would violate his clients' constitutional right of privacy.