

Carter commutes Liddy's term

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Carter commuted the 20-year prison sentence of Watergate burglary mastermind G. Gordon Liddy to eight years on Tuesday, "in the interests of equity and fairness."

Thus, the 46-year-old Liddy will be eligible for parole on July 9 after having served a total of 50 months. Thirty-two months of that time counts toward his main sentence; the other 18 months were for refusing to testify before the Watergate grand jury.

"I'm grateful to the President for commuting my sentence and bringing it into line with the sentences received by Mitchell, Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Hunt," Liddy told his lawyer, Peter Maroulis.

A prison official said that after Liddy was informed of the commutation, "he was smiling and looking better than I've seen him. He told me, 'Now I've got what the rest of them have got,'" apparently a reference to the shortened sentences of the others.

Liddy's wife had just ended a visit with her husband at the Allenwood, Pa., minimum security institution and heard about the commutation on the radio while driving home.

"She told me, 'Thank God,'" Maroulis said.

Once Liddy is released, all the participants in the June 17, 1972, burglary at Democratic party headquarters in the Watergate office building will be free.

E. Howard Hunt, Liddy's lieutenant in the botched burglary, was released Feb. 24 after serving 32 months and now is on

the lecture circuit. James W. McCord, the burglary squad's electronics man, served four months and moved to Colorado. The foot soldiers in Watergate, four Cubans from Miami, served slightly more than one year each and recently received \$200,000 from Richard Nixon's re-election committee as settlement for being duped.

But John D. Ehrlichman, the second-ranking Nixon aide convicted of covering up the Watergate affair, is serving a minimum 2½-year sentence in Arizona. Former Atty. Gen. John N. Mitchell and H.R. Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff, are awaiting word from the Supreme Court on whether they, too, must serve their 2½-to-8-year sentences.

Without presidential intervention, Liddy would not have been eligible for parole until May 1, 1981.

Deputy White House Press Secretary Rex Granum said the President commuted Liddy's sentence "in the interests of equity and fairness based on a comparison of Mr. Liddy's sentence with those of all others convicted in Watergate-related proceedings."

Liddy was given the harshest sentence, six years, eight months to 20 years, by U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica. He also was fined \$40,000.

Carter's commutation order did not lift that fine, but Granum said Liddy could win parole without paying it if he is able to take a pauper's oath.

But Granum said that if Liddy's financial fortunes improve subsequently, he will have to pay all or part of the \$40,000.

The Ford administration did not act on Liddy's petition for clemency.

Sirica, piqued because Liddy steadfastly refused to talk, refused to trim the sentence, as he did for many others involved in Watergate.

The commutation news came on the 16th birthday of Liddy's son, Jim. He has four other children, Grace, 17, Sandy, 18, Tommy, 14, and Ray, 13.

Liddy's wife, Frances, is a third-grade school teacher in suburban Maryland. The family lives in Oxon Hill, Md.

A reporter asked Granum if Liddy now has agreed to cooperate. "To the very best of my knowledge, he has not," he said.

Granum was asked if Carter might now consider commuting the sentences of other Watergate figures. "As far as the White House is concerned," he said, "this is not related to any other case."

Ehrlichman has asked for commutation of sentence.

Liddy had lost numerous fights in the U.S. Court of Appeals and in the Supreme Court.

Sirica refused to release Liddy early because, the judge said, Liddy "has not given the court even a hint of contrition or sorrow."

Under federal law, a prisoner is eligible for parole once he has served one-third of his sentence. By cutting the time to eight years, or 96 months, Carter made Liddy's eligibility possible after 32 months.

The 18 months Liddy served for refusing to talk to the Watergate grand jury does not count in this arithmetic.