

Carter Cuts Sentence of Gordon Liddy

Washington

President Carter yesterday cut 12 years off the prison sentence of G. Gordon Liddy, mastermind of the Watergate burglary, making Liddy eligible for parole on July 9.

A White House spokesman said Carter commuted Liddy's 20-year sentence "in the interests of equity and fairness based on a comparison of Mr. Liddy's sentence with those of all the others convicted in Watergate-related proceedings."

Liddy, 46, has served nearly four years of sentences imposed for the Watergate burglary, contempt of a federal grand jury and Congress, and the break-in at the Beverly Hills office of the psychiatrist for Pentagon Papers figure Daniel Ellsberg.

Alone among Watergate defendants, Liddy never broke his silence.

George Higgins, an attorney for Liddy, said yesterday that unlike many other Watergate principals Liddy does not plan to write a book.

Asked if Liddy would maintain his silence, Higgins said: "I'd bet on it. He's a standup guy. That's how he got into this mess in the first place."

Carter's action did not make Liddy's release automatic. He must apply to the U.S. Parole Commission, which a Justice Department spokesman said could consider his application at its late June meeting. It was considered highly likely, however, that Liddy would be freed.

The executive clemency was Liddy's final chance to win early release. The Supreme Court refused to review his conviction, which had been upheld unanimously by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals here.

U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica then refused to reduce the 20-year sentence he imposed, saying Liddy had shown no "remorse or regret...contrition or sorrow" for his break-in role.

Liddy first petitioned for presidential intervention last Septem-

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ber, but President Ford did not act.

Deputy White House press secretary Rex Granum said yesterday that Attorney General Griffin B. Bell had recommended that Liddy's sentence be reduced to eight years but that a \$40,000 fine be left standing.

Liddy, informed of the commutation, was described by a prison official as "smiling and looking better than I've seen him." The official quoted Liddy as remarking: "Now I've got what the rest of them have got," apparently referring to court-shortened sentences of other Watergate figures.

Grace Liddy, 17, one of five Liddy children, said she had seen Carter's pardon of draft evaders as a hopeful sign for her father.

Liddy, the most enigmatic Watergate defendant, was convicted of burglary, wiretapping and conspiracy in January, 1973, along with James W. McCord Jr., the break-in squad's leader.

McCord later ripped the lid off the Watergate coverup with a letter to Judge Sirica, and wound up serving an abbreviated sentence of only four months. But Liddy — standing ramrod straight before Sirica and refusing to cooperate at all — received the harshest sentence of six years and eight months, to 20 years.

The only other person currently in prison for Watergate-related crimes is John Ehrlichman, an assistant to Nixon for domestic affairs, who has been serving an eight-year term in Arizona since late last October.

It was Ehrlichman who hired Liddy as a White House assistant after he was discharged from a job at the Treasury Department. Ehrlichman was convicted for planning the burglary of the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Ehrlichman, former White House aide H. R. Haldeman and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell all received maximum sentences of eight years in the Watergate coverup. Mitchell and Haldeman have appealed their convictions.

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