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Sentence Cut, McCord May Be Free in May

WASHINGTON, April 28 (AP)—A Federal judge reduced today the sentence of James W. McCord Jr., to four months in prison. It means that Mr. McCord, the chief wiretapper on the Watergate burglary team, may be free next month.

United States District Court Judge John J. Sirica, who had imposev the original one-to-five-year sentence, gave no reason for signing the order. He had previously reduced terms of Watergate cover-up defendants, but never any of those of the seven men convicted in the break-in itself.

Mr. McCord was working on the farm at the Allenwood, Pa., prison camp when his lawyer telephoned him with the news.

"I am very happy, I am very thankful, very grateful," Mr. McCord told the lawyer, William A. Mann.

Mr. Mann had filed a motion for reduction of sentence only last Wednesday.

Mr. McCord walked through the Allenwood prison gates March 21 after losing a two-year fight to stay ou of prison.

The 51-year-old Mr. McCord

was convicted, along with G. Gordon Liddy, in January, 1973, of burglary, wiretapping and conspiracy in connection with the break-in.

Mr. Liddy, who, unlike Mr. McCord, refused to cooperate with investigators, is serving a sentence of six to 20 years.

It was Mr. McCord's letter to Judge Sirica, read in open court on March 23, 1973, that sparked investigations of a cover-up that eventually led to the resignation of President Nixon and the convictions of many of his top aides on a variety of charges.

A spokesman for the Bureau of Prisons said that Mr. McCord had served 82 days to date, counting brief stays in 1972 and 1973, and had been credited with an additional five days for good behavior. By rough calculation, the spokesman said, Mr. McCord could be released by May 28.

Only last Monday, the Supreme Court had declined to review Mr. McCord's conviction. He had contended that disclosures since his trial showed that he had been denied information vital to his defense.

Three of the four men arrested with Mr. McCord inside the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee on June 17, 1972, were placed on probation after serving minimum terms of one year. The fourth, Bernard L. Barker, recently lost an appeal and must return to prison unless he gets a further stay.

The seventhman, E. Howard Hunt Jr., returned to prison Friday, after losing his appeal of a sentence of 2½ to eighth years.