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Garda McCabe's killers again refused parole for Christmas

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THE four convicted killers of Det Garda Jerry McCabe, who was shot dead during a post van hold-up in Adare, Co Limerick, will again spend Christmas behind bars.

The four have been refused seasonal parole by Justice Minister Brian Lenihan on the advice of the prison authorities.

But one of the country's longest serving prisoners, killer Malcolm Macarthur, is to be allowed out for a few hours on Christmas Day. He is

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being set free for five hours to sit at the Christmas table with his family in Dublin.

He is serving a life sentence for the murder of nurse Bridie Gargan in the Phoenix Park in Dublin in 1982.

After dinner he will return to the open prison at Shelton Abbey in county Wicklow.

This is the third Christmas in a row that Macarthur has been allowed out for a few hours since his conviction. His initial release followed his transfer to the open prison in 2003 on the recommendations of the parole board.

However, there is no Christmas cheer for the Provisional IRA killers of Det Garda McCabe. Kevin Walsh, Patrick Sheehy, Pearse McAuley and Michael O'Neill will remain in their bungalow in The Grove complex within the grounds of Castlerea prison.

The IRA men have been let out of jail for limited periods of temporary release in the past, partly as a result of negotiations on a cessation of terrorist violence and the disbandment of their organisation.

But the authorities have taken a tougher line in the last few years and they have consistently been denied Christmas parole.

Wayne O'Donoghue, who is serving a four-year sentence for the manslaughter of schoolboy Robert Holohan, did not apply for parole. O'Donoghue was jailed on January 24, 2006, after admitting to manslaughter -- and with remission for good behaviour he is due for release early in the New Year.

Among those spending their first Christmas behind bars will be Joe O'Reilly, who is serving a life sentence for the murder of his wife Rachel at their home in The Naul in north county Dublin.

As a "lifer", O'Reilly will not be eligible to apply for temporary release to the parole board for seven years.

Overall, it is understood that Mr Lenihan will sanction a much smaller group of temporary releases than in the past when the numbers are finalised and announced tomorrow.

The drop in releases is partly as a result of the growth in the number of prisoners serving lengthy jail sentences for serious offences.

Last year, the then Justice Minister Michael McDowell allowed 230 prisoners out for varying periods over Christmas.

A small group of them failed to return to jail at the end of their parole period and some have yet to be recaptured.

Most of the released prisoners are nearing the end of their sentences.

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