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Rifle Association Gets \$72,000 in U.S. Funds

WASHINGTON — Under pressure from the National Rifle Association and members of Congress, Secretary of Defense Mel Laird has quietly agreed to provide at least \$70,000 in military support for the NRA-sponsored 1970 World Shooting Championships. By allowing the private gun lobby's shooting match to be publicly subsidized, Laird overruled vigorous objections from Army Under Secretary Thaddeus Beal. The Army was being asked for most of the support. Until recently, the Pentagon provided all-out assistance to the NRA's annual national competition. But this came to an abrupt end when controversy erupted over the association's high pressure lobbying against gun control after Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's assassination.

Undaunted, the NRA and its friends in Washington again rallied to hit up the Pentagon for help during this year's worldwide event. The International Championship is being held in this country under NRA sponsorship for the first time. Contestants from 60 nations will take part.

The backstage maneuvering began last spring when the association submitted a huge shopping list of requested assistance to the Pentagon. The NRA, which is used to getting its way in Washington, wanted everything from a motion-picture detachment to a team of linguists.

The request got an icy reception from the Army.

In a private memo, June 2, Under Secretary Beal declared: "There is neither precedent nor regulatory authority for providing personnel support to a purely civilian-sponsored shooting event conducted off a military installation.

"Austere funding and reduction of programmed resources by the Department . . . preclude the provision of either support personnel or equipment to the NRA."

But Beal's argument was lost on Laird, who was feeling the heat from Capitol Hill.

For one thing, Texas Rep. George Mahon's mighty Appropriations Committee had urged Pentagon support for the shooting contest.

Goldwater's Backing

For another, Rep. John J. Rhodes and Sen. Barry Goldwater, both Arizona Republicans, were asking military assistance for the

event. It will be held at Black Canyon in their home state from Oct. 12 to 26.

So Laird's office asked the Army to take another look and consider a shortened shopping list.

On July 27, Deputy Under Secretary of the Army David H. Ward again protested that even the shortened NRA request should be flatly rejected.

Two days later, Laird's final decision was made known in a private message to

Ward from Acting Under Secretary of Defense Vice Admiral W. P. Mack. "The Secretary of Defense desires that the support . . . be furnished," it read.

The result: The Army will provide the NRA a radio communications system with two mechanics and six operators, 22 field telephones, four general purpose tents, two supply officers and eight duty soldiers, two first aid stations with two ambulances and qualified medical personnel, four small arms vans, four armorers and 68 officers and enlisted men to "command, control and operate equipment."

The total cost of the Army's share will be \$62,000. The Navy and Air Force will chip in assistance worth an extra \$10,000.

WIRETAP FEARS

Fear of an unknown eavesdropper haunts every telephone caller in official Washington. A secretary or recording device may be taking down every word. Or an entire roomful of people could be listening in on a squawk box.

Congressman John Moss, D-Calif., has ordered a probe of this insidious practice. He has demanded information from more than 50 government offices on possible telephonic eavesdropping. Moss instructed his Government Operations subcommittee staff to question each agency via a written form. The reports are to be submitted to him by September 1.

The questionnaire seeks information on which agencies allow a secretary to listen in, which use electronic "third-party" eavesdroppers, and how much it costs the taxpayer to have his calls monitored without his knowing it.

The congressman also asked what offices have regulations on eavesdropping and which ones simply allow a third ear to be summoned to the phone whenever wanted.

Moss took a similar survey in 1962 and found that of 37 agencies questioned, 33 permitted monitoring. Nine agencies could see no reason for regulating the practice. Both

the CIA and Justice Department told him explicitly that they planned to keep it up.

HEADLINES AND FOOTNOTES

The Post Office Department sent out its press releases on the signing of the postal reform bill not by special delivery mail, but by messenger service. . . . The Nixon administration, which makes much of its concern for the consumer, has left open the \$35,000-a-year post of Consumer Counsel at the Justice Department since the President took office. . . . Jessica Mitford, whose scathing book on the American funeral industry showed how much it costs to die, is now writing about prisons, a living death for many inmates. . . . Some House liberals became so incensed over President Nixon's recent veto of social welfare funds that they angrily suggested to a private Democratic caucus that they pass no bill at all and let Nixon stew in the ensuing confusion.