

Merry-Go-Round**Public Funds for
Rifle Association****Jack Anderson**

UNDER PRESSURE from the National Rifle Association and members of Congress, Secretary of Defense Melvin 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 Senator Robert F. Kennedy's assassination.

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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.

The backstage maneuvering began last spring when the association submitted a huge shopping list of requested assistance to the Pentagon.

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 even conducted off a military installation.

"Austere funding and reduction of programmed resources by the department . . . preclude the provision of either sup-

port 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 Representative George Mahon's mighty Appropriations Committee had urged Pentagon support for the shooting contest.

For another, Representative John J. Rhodes and Senator Barry Goldwater, both Arizona Republicans, were asking military assistance for the event. It will be held at Black Canyon in their home state from October 12 to 26.

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

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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. "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.

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