

'68 RIFLE MATCHES DROPPED BY ARMY

Step Seems to Be Directed at Gun Law Opponents

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The Department of the Army announced today the cancellation of next year's national rifle and pistol matches at Camp Perry, Ohio, ostensibly on economy grounds.

The move, however, appeared to be directed at the National Rifle Association of America and other elements of the so-called gun lobby, which has consistently prevented the Administration from achieving Congressional passage of gun control legislation.

A Pentagon announcement said Secretary of the Army Stanley R. Resor had decided to cancel next year's matches as "part of the Department of Defense effort to reduce expenditures and limit spending to only the most essential programs."

Senator Edward M. Kennedy,

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Democrat of Massachusetts, the leading Senatorial proponent of a gun control law, immediately praised the decision as "a victory for reason and good government and a vivid demonstration that the interests of all the people can prevail despite the well-financed shouting of special interest lobbies."

Senator Kennedy, who tried unsuccessfully last summer to get this year's matches canceled, called upon the Defense Department today to "permanently" eliminate all its subsidies to the rifle association.

Under the Army's civilian marksmanship program, the Government provides approximately \$5-million in support annually to the association for the national matches, for ammunition and the loan of rifles to affiliated shooting clubs and for the sale of surplus weapons to association members at bargain prices.

Senator Thomas J. Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, another advocate of gun control legislation and the sponsor of the Senate version of the Administration bill, also praised the cancellation of the matches.

He said in a statement that the matches had "repeatedly been used by the gun industry to advertise its wares, and by the opponents of effective firearms laws to proselytize shooters with propaganda in the



Franklin L. Orth, executive vice president of the National Rifle Association.

form of literature and posters to oppose firearms legislation."

The rifle association's immediate reaction to the decision was restrained. But preservation of the matches has become a highly emotional issue for gun enthusiasts and for their influential friends in Congress, and the cancellation was considered certain to arouse strong protest in coming weeks. Franklin L. Orth, the associa-

tion's executive vice president, said the organization "recognizes that the crisis in Vietnam is imposing a severe burden on the national economy and military manpower requirements."

If the cancellation "is a real necessity, then we go along enthusiastically," he said.

The national matches have been held each year since 1903, with 10 exceptions during wartime and in the Depression, with the majority of the matches taking place at Camp Perry.

Army officials said the five-week event in 1966, the last year for which precise figures are available, cost the Government \$2.8-million for ammunition and matériel costs and in salaries for the Regular Army and Active Reserve troops who provided housekeeping services and acted as scorekeepers and target pullers.

This year's matches in late July and August, estimated to have cost approximately the same amount, were attended

by about 6,500 contestants, 1,675 of whom were members of the armed services representing military rifle and pistol teams.

In addition, 1,150 Army officers and men and 1,830 reservists fulfilling their summer active duty provided the manpower to run the matches.

Officials estimated that the Army would save about \$1.1-million in ammunition and other material by canceling next year's contest.

The annual event consists of contests for five major Army trophies and of 85 rifle association matches that are held simultaneously. Army rifle and pistol experts also give instruction to civilian and police competitors at small arms schools set up during the matches.

The rifle association announced today that it would hold its own national matches "on a reduced basis" next year despite the cancellation of the Government's role.