

Try and Stop Me

By BENNETT CERF

IN WORLD WAR II, Nazi General Rommel was raising all kinds of trouble in North Africa, and the Allies were determined to stop him at all costs. A very insignificant unit in the Allied forces consisted of one scout, one submachine gun and one middle-aged camel. The scout had been out on a reconnaissance mission for some days when an Arab turned up at headquarters with an electrifying message. "Scout say," he reported, "he returning at once. Rommel captured!"



A great reception was planned for the hero, with a regimental band and a couple of field marshals (all of whom have since penned their reminiscences) whipped up for the occasion. When the scout and camel stumbled into camp, alone, everybody felt pretty much let down.

"Where's Rommel?" demanded the C. O. "Rommel?" repeated the scout. "How should I know?" "Didn't you send back a message, 'Returning at once, Rommel captured!'" "Heck, no! What I said was, 'Returning at once. Camel ruptured!'"

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Matter of Fact

By Joseph Alsop

ABOUT GALLUP—AND ROCKEFELLER

New York — Investigation here strongly confirms the dark suspicions of Vice President Richard M. Nixon and his staff. New York's Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller has given up his active candidacy for the Republican nomination, but he has not given up all hope of being nominated.

The lingering Rockefeller hope is based on an entirely possible, though improbable, future sequence of events: The public opinion polls of the inquiring Dr. George Gallup just may begin to show the Vice President being beaten by Sen. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, or some other Democratic candidate, by such wide margins as 55-45, or 57-43, or even 60-40. After all, the Kennedy margin over Nixon was 61-31 in the Gallup poll of July 1959. Can it not be the same in July 1960?

If the bottom falls out of the polls in this manner, the Republican organizations just may panic to the point of forgetting their oft-repeated pledges to the Vice President. After all, politicians have panicked before. And in that event, where can they turn for a winner except to Governor Rockefeller?

There is slightly more foundation than might be supposed for this projection. In brief, Senator Kennedy's lead over the Vice President reached at least the 55-45 mark in Dr. Gallup's last completed sampling. This has been confirmed by the staff of the Gallup poll in Princeton.

DR. GALLUP'S published results, released on April 1, showed Kennedy leading Nixon by the less dramatic margin of 53-47. But once again, according to the Gallup staff, an oddly unavowed change has been made in the Gallup method of preparing published results. What is published is not the naked outcome of the last nationwide sample. It is a composite, or average, of the most recent sample and the immediately preceding sample.

Thus the sample taken in March by the Gallup poll-takers showed Kennedy ahead of Nixon by at least 55-45 and perhaps a little more. But this represented a major improvement on the Kennedy showing in the February trial heat (published as 50-50, but clearly somewhat different in reality because January results were averaged in). When the February sample was averaged with the March sample, Kennedy had what Dr. Gallup, again somewhat oddly, called a "current" lead of 53-47.

The hitherto unavowed new method of preparing Dr. Gallup's published results was adopted last October. It has many interesting conse-

quences, too, which all politicians will wish to ponder.

For instance, suppose that Dr. Gallup's April sampling, now being completed, shows a steep, four-point drop in Senator Kennedy's lead over the Vice President. This may conceivably be the case, because of the inflammation of the religious issue. But under the new system, an April sample showing a Kennedy lead of only 51-49 will be averaged with the more favorable March sample. The published result will then be precisely what it was a month ago, 53-47.

In this manner, while losing ground, Senator Kennedy may seem to be holding even. If he merely holds even in the April sample, on the other hand, the published result will be 55-45, and it will therefore appear to show a two-point gain. In sum, unless Dr. Gallup's new method is well understood, it can be remarkably, although impartially misleading.

IT WOULD have been a good deal better, therefore, if the new method had been announced when adopted. It would be a good deal better, too, if the real value of the polling techniques were also more generally understood. As an industrious spot-poller, this reporter has concluded that it is an exceedingly valuable but decidedly limited technique.

The technique will identify beyond doubt any truly massive and deep-rooted political phenomenon, like the high proportion of Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey's West Virginia support which he owed to anti-Catholic prejudice. When the Charleston, W. Va., "Gazette" challenged the facts on this point that had been printed in this space, this reporter made the "Gazette" editor a fair offer. The editor was to be convinced of the accuracy of the facts by only two days of joint doorbell-ringing, or the reporter would correct the record. The offer was not taken up, but it still stands.

By the same token, the polling technique will accurately identify a decided, measurable political trend. If a reasonable sample shows that large numbers of persons who voted Republican last time mean to vote Democratic this time, one can be sure the outlook for Democrats is surely good in that area. Then too, the polling technique will usefully show whether the current political atmosphere is broadly favorable to this or that candidate. But their technique will not do what is most often claimed for it. It will not reliably forecast, within a point or so, the outcome of any hard-fought, ever-changing political contest.

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