

How Nixon Men Rigged a Poll

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President Nixon's reelection committee rigged Washington television station WTTG's poll on the public's response to the President's decision to mine Haiphong Harbor last year by sending in between 2000 and 4000 phony ballots to the station.

The Metromedia station asked its viewers last May to send in a card indicating whether they agreed or disagreed with the mining decision and placed a sample ballot in newspaper ads. The final result of the poll as announced by the station was 5157 viewers agreeing with the President and 1158 disagreeing.

One former Nixon committee official said yesterday that committee employees sent in at least 4000 of

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the responses agreeing with the President which would have completely distorted the poll's results.

Another official, DeVan L. Shumway, spokesman for the Nixon reelection committee, confirmed the effort but said the committee sent in only "about 2000 ballots and responses."

James Dooley, the former head of the mail room at the Nixon committee, said yesterday that committee workers were sent to buy about 1000 newspapers from which the ballots were clipped and sent to the television station. In addition, Dooley said, 2000 postcards were filled out and mailed in — all showing total support of the President.

"Work ground to a halt in the press office while everyone filled out 5 post cards," Dooley, 19, said in an interview. "Ten people worked for several days buying different kinds of stamps and postcards and getting different handwriting to fake the responses."

Asked to comment on the tampering with the poll, Ed Turner, news director for Metromedia, said yesterday: "I think it's a most unfortunate abuse of an honest attempt to survey public opinion."

Nixon committee spokesman Shumway said: "When you're involved in an election, you do what you can. That type of voluntary poll is the most stackable type thing. We assumed the other side would do it also. On that assumption we proceeded. I don't know if the other side did."

Frank Mankiewicz, a top official in the Democratic presidential campaign of Senator George S. McGovern, said that "we didn't do it. It didn't occur to us. Jesus, these guys (the Nixon committee) are something. They assume we have the same sleazy ethics as theirs."

The Washington Post reported yesterday that the Nixon committee also conducted a campaign last May to distort the overall view of the American public's response to the mining.

That effort included paying for telegrams supporting the President to be sent to the White House and the placing of a deceptive \$4400 advertisement in the New York Times. The ad, which also supported the President's Haiphong mining decision and which criticized a Times editorial, had appeared to have been sent by a group of citizens, rather than the reelection committee.

When WTTG reported the results of its Haiphong mining poll the week of May 15, the station qualified the results by noting that it had received several thousand post cards that were of a suspicious nature, because they had apparently been typed on the same typewriters and used the same phrasing in many cases.

Dooley, the former head of the Nixon committee mail room, said that after the

WTTG ballots were clipped from the 1000 newspapers, campaign officials were afraid the newspapers might be discovered at the committee headquarters, so they had the newspapers shredded.

Convicted Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr., then the head of security for the Nixon committee, "was upset about a ton of newspapers all over the shredder room," according to Dooley. "But all the newspapers, including the Washington Post and the Evening Star, were shredded as directed."