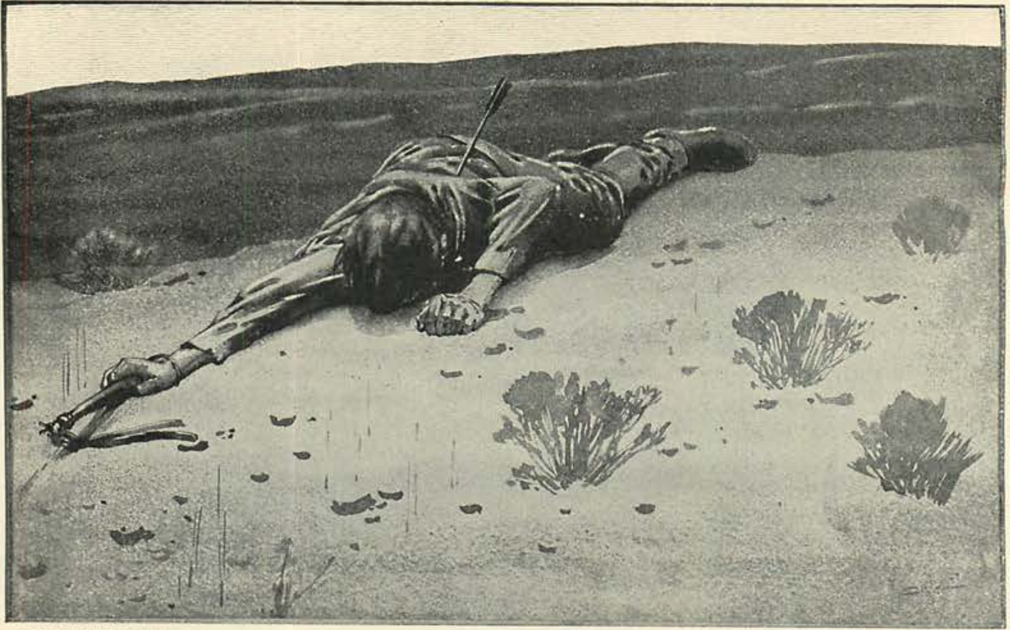


DRAWN BY FERNAND LUNGREN.

WHY ONE RIDER WAS LATE.

THE PONY EXPRESS.

BY W. F. BAILEY.

IN the fall of 1854, United States Senator W. M. Gwin of California made the trip from San Francisco east en route to Washington, D. C., on horseback, by the way of Salt Lake City and South Pass, then known as the Central Route. For a part of the way he had for company Mr. B. F. Ficklin, the general superintendent of the freighting firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell.

Out of this traveling companionship grew the pony express. Mr. Ficklin's enthusiasm for closer communication with the East was contagious, and Senator Gwin became an untiring advocate of an express service via this route and on the lines suggested by Mr. Ficklin. In January, 1855, the senator introduced a bill in Congress looking to the establishment of a weekly letter express between St. Louis and San Francisco, the schedule to be ten days, the compensation not to exceed $5000 for the round trip, and the Central Route to be followed. This bill was referred to the Committee on Military Affairs, but was never heard of afterward.

During the next five years the attention of Congress and the East was largely taken up by matters pertaining to the "irrepressible conflict"; but at no time did the people of the West, and more particularly of the Pacific coast, cease to agitate for increased and accelerated mail service with the East. The representatives of the South in Congress, by their concentrated votes, were able to prevent legislation favorable to the routes north of the slaveholding States, and to confine government aid to the Southern routes.

While at this time there were three transcontinental mail routes to California, the great bulk of the mail was sent via Panama on a twenty-two-day schedule from New York to San Francisco. The Butterfield Route carried some through mail, while the Central Route and Chorpenning lines carried only local mail.

California by this time held a large and enterprising population. While the Union men were in a majority, the Southern sympathizers were numerous and aggressive, and were making every effort to carry the State out of the Union. To the Union men the existing arrangements were far from satisfactory; for it was evident that both the

Southern Stage Route and the Panama Route would be liable to interruption upon the opening of hostilities, and, besides, it was of the utmost importance that quicker communication be had with the Washington authorities.

Called to Washington in connection with their government contracts, Mr. Russell, the head of the firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell, met Senator Gwin, and was approached by him on the subject of increased mail facilities via the Central Route. The senator laid before him the probable closing of the present Southern mail routes, and the necessity of finding some other not liable to interference by the South; also the vital importance of quicker communication between the Unionists on the Pacific coast and the Federal authorities. Strange to say, this stalwart Union senator afterward entered the Confederacy, lost his prestige and large fortune, and, at the close of the war, drifted into Mexico and the service of the unfortunate Maximilian, by whom, in 1866, he was made Duke of Sonora.

Won over by the senator's arguments, and with the prospect of a government contract for the handling of virtually all the transcontinental mail in the event of being able to demonstrate the feasibility of keeping the Central Route open during the winter, and also of surpassing the time between New York and San Francisco made by the Panama Route, Mr. Russell hurriedly returned West. Meeting his partners, Mr. Majors and Mr. Waddell, at Fort Leavenworth, he laid the project before them. These gentlemen, while appreciating the force of the arguments advanced, could not see even expenses in the undertaking, and consequently objected to it. But Mr. Russell still insisted that the project would eventually lead up to a paying proposition, and, further, said that he was committed to Senator Gwin and his friends.

This latter settled the matter, for the word of this firm, once given, was to them as binding as their written obligation, and they unitedly threw their whole energy and resources into the carrying out of the pledge made by one of their members.

The methods of this firm can best be illustrated by the pledge they required every employee to sign, namely: "While in the employ of Russell, Majors & Waddell, I agree not to use profane language, not to get drunk, not to gamble, not to treat animals cruelly, and not to do anything incompatible with the conduct of a gentleman," etc. After the war broke out, a pledge of allegiance to the United States was also required. The

DRAWN BY FERNAND LUNGREN.

WIPING OUT A STATION.

DRAWN BY FERNAND LUNGREN.

AN INCIDENT BETWEEN STATIONS.

company adhered, so far as possible, to the rule of not traveling on Sunday and of avoiding all unnecessary work on that day. A stanch adherence to these rules, and a strict observance of their contracts, in a few years brought them the control of the freighting business of the plains, as well as a widespread reputation for conducting it on a reliable and humane basis.

Committed to the enterprise, the firm proceeded to organize the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company, obtaining a charter under the State laws of Kansas.

In addition to Messrs. Russell, Majors & Waddell of the firm, they associated with them as incorporators B. F. Ficklin, their general superintendent, and F. A. Bee, W. W. Finney, and John S. Jones, employees of the firm. The stage line from Atchison to Salt Lake City was turned over by the firm to the new company, who purchased Chorpenning's mail contract and stage outfit, then operating a monthly line between Salt Lake City and Sacramento, and the franchise and equipment of the Leavenworth and Pike's Peak Express, organized in 1859, and operating a daily stage line between Leavenworth and Denver, via the Smoky Hill Route, now covered by the Kansas Pacific division of the Union Pacific. Arrangements in the East were left with Mr. Russell. Mr. Ficklin went to Salt Lake City to make necessary arrangements there, and Mr. Finney went to San Francisco.

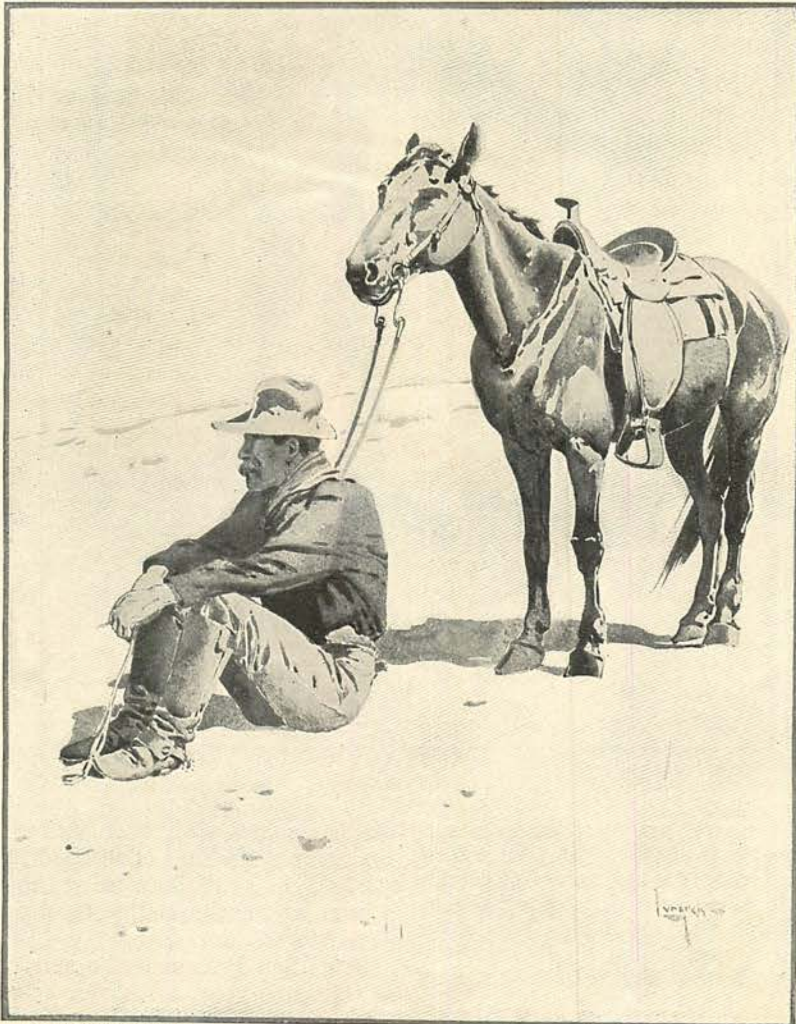
On arriving at Salt Lake City, Mr. Ficklin called in J. C. Brumley, the resident agent of the company, whose practical knowledge of the route enabled them to figure the schedule, designate relay and other stations,

compute the number of men and horses required, etc.

The company had an established route with the necessary stations between St. Joseph and Salt Lake City. Chorpenning's line west of Salt Lake City had few or no stations, and these had to be built; also some changes in the route were considered advisable. The service comprised sixty agile young men as riders, one hundred additional station-keepers, and four hundred and twenty strong, wiry horses. So well did those in charge understand their business that only sixty days were required to make all necessary arrangements for the start. April 3, 1860, was the date agreed upon, and on that day the first pony express left St. Joseph and San Francisco. In March, 1860, the following advertisement had appeared in the "Missouri Republican" of St. Louis and in other papers:

To San Francisco in 8 days by the C. O. C. & P. P. Ex. Co. The first courier of the Pony Express will leave the Missouri River on Tuesday, April 3rd, at —— P. M., and will run regularly weekly hereafter, carrying a letter mail only. The point on the Mo. River will be in telegraphic connection with the east and will be announced in due time.

Telegraphic messages from all parts of the United States and Canada in connection with the point of departure will be received up to 5:00 P. M. of the day of leaving and transmitted over the Placerville & St. Jo to San Francisco and intermediate points by the connecting express in 8 days. The letter mail will be delivered in San Francisco in 10 days from the departure of the



DRAWN BY FERNAND LUNGREN.

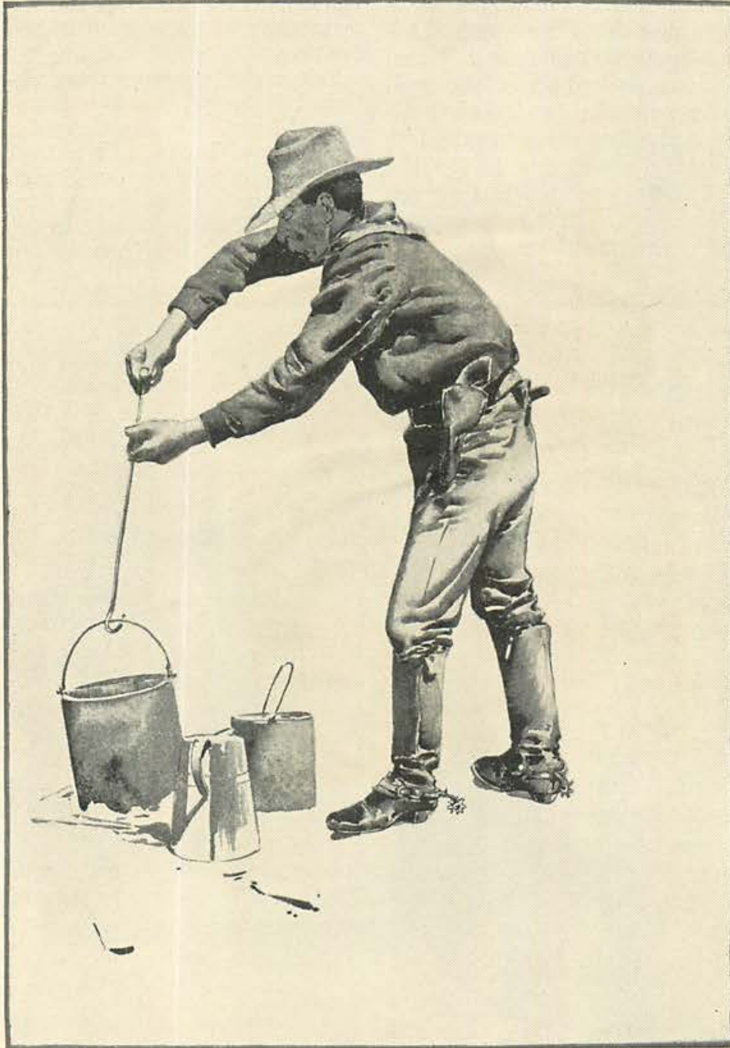
WAITING ON THE TRAIL WITH A RELAY PONY.

express. The express passes through Forts Kearney, Laramie, Bridger, Great Salt Lake City, Camp Floyd, Carson City, The Washoe Silver Mines, Placerville and Sacramento, and letters for Oregon, Washington Territory, British Columbia, the Pacific Mexican ports, Russian possessions, Sandwich Islands, China, Japan and India will be mailed in San Francisco.

Special messengers, bearers of letters to connect with the express of the 3rd of April, will receive communications for the courier of that day at 481 10th St., Washington City, up to 2:45 P. M. of Friday, March 30th, and in New York at the office of J. B. Simpson, Room No. 8 Continental Bank Building, Nassau St., up to 6:50 P. M. of 31st March.

Full particulars can be obtained on application at the above places and from the agents of the company.

From St. Joseph the start was made at 4 P. M. from the office of the United States Express Company, immediately upon the arrival of a special train over the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad. A ferry-boat was in waiting to carry the mail across to St. Joseph, where it was placed in a leather saddle-blanket with four locked pockets. Promptly at the time advertised the express started, Henry Wallace being the rider, and a large and enthusiastic crowd having collected to see him off.



DRAWN BY FERNAND LUNGREN.

THE COOK.

From San Francisco the start was made at the same hour, a steamer being used to Sacramento, where the pony service really began. From here the first rider, Harry Roff, leaving at twelve midnight, made the

first 20 miles, including one change of horses, in fifty-nine minutes, changing horses again at Folsom's. At Placerville, 55 miles out, the express was turned over to the second rider, "Boston," who carried it to Friday's Station, crossing the summit of the Sierra Nevada en route. Sam Hamilton, the next rider, carried it to Fort Churchill, 75 miles. The distance from Sacramento to Fort Churchill, 185 miles, was made in fifteen hours and twenty minutes, notwithstanding that the trail across the summit had to be kept open by trains of pack-animals breaking down the snow-drifts.

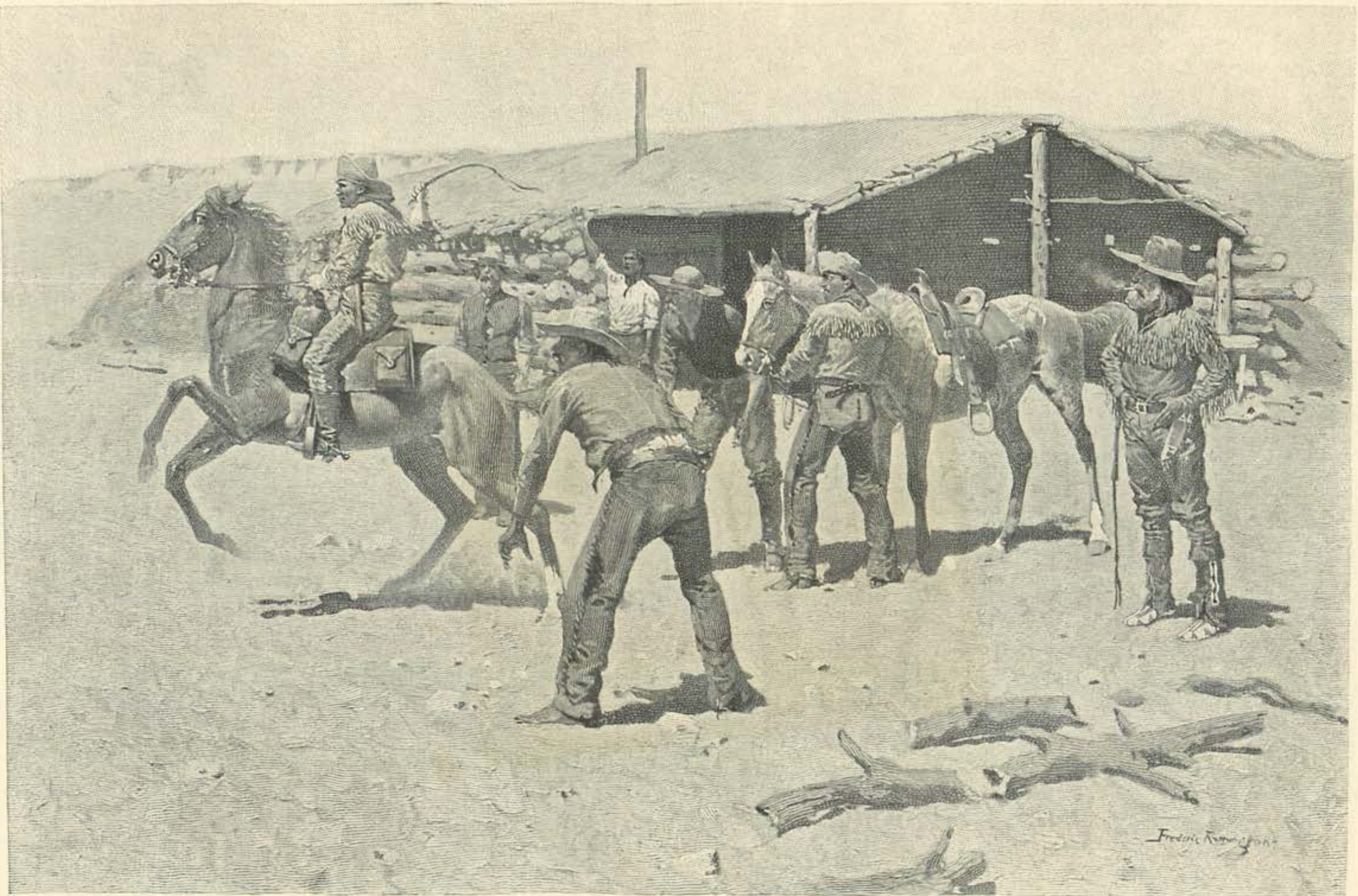
From Jacob's Station to Ruby Valley, H. J. Faust, now a prominent physician of Utah, was the rider; Josh Perkins from Ruby to Shell Creek; Jim Gentry from Shell Creek to Deep Creek; Let Huntington from there to Simpson's Springs; and John Fisher to Camp Floyd, where Major Egan took it, bringing the express into Salt Lake City at 11:45 P. M., April 7. The season was extremely unpropitious for fast time, it being the early spring, the weather stormy, and the roads heavy. Notwithstanding this, the schedule was maintained, the last 75 miles into Salt Lake City being made in five hours and fifteen minutes.

From Placerville and Carson City, the eastern terminus of the telegraph lines, the news was sent of the passing of the pony east and on time, on the 4th. Then came a week of anxiety until, on the 12th, from the same terminus came the welcome tidings of the arrival, on schedule time, of the first express from the East, and with it a summary of Eastern news only nine days old. As might be expected, the Californians were far more enthusiastic over the service than the people of the East.

Both Sacramento and San Francisco were afire with enthusiasm, and elaborate plans were set on foot to welcome the first express. At the former point the whole city turned out with bells, guns, bands, etc., to greet it. Making only a brief stop to deliver the mail for that point, the express was hurried aboard the swift steamer *Antelope*, and sent forward to San Francisco. Here its prospective arrival had been announced by the papers, and also from the stages of the theaters, so that an immense as well as enthusiastic crowd awaited its arrival at midnight. The California Band paraded; the fire-bells were rung, bringing out the fire companies, who, finding no fire, remained to join in the jollity and to swell the procession which escorted the express from the dock to the office of the Alta Telegraph, its Western terminus. The following schedule covers the west-bound trip:

As planned.			*As made on first trip.*
	St. Joseph, Missouri	Left	6:30 P. M., April 3
124 hours	Salt Lake City, Utah	Arrived	6:25 P. M., " 9
218 "	Carson City, Nevada	"	2:30 P. M., " 12
232 "	Sacramento, California	"	5:30 P. M., " 13
240 "	San Francisco, California	"	1:00 A. M., " 14

All the riders were young men selected for their nerve, light weight, and general fitness. No effort was made to uniform them, and they dressed as their individual fancy dictated, the usual costume being a buckskin hunting-shirt, cloth trousers tucked into a pair of high boots, and a jockey-cap or slouch-hat. All rode armed. At first a Spencer rifle was carried strapped across the back, in addition to a pair of army (Colt's) revolvers in their holsters. The rifle, however, was found useless, and was abandoned. The equipment of the horses was a light riding-saddle and bridle, with the saddle-bags, or *mochila*, of heavy leather. These had holes cut in them so that they would fit over the horn and tree of the saddle. The mochilas had four pockets, called *cantinas*, one in each corner, so as to have one in front and one behind each leg of the rider; in these the mail was placed. Three of these pockets were locked and opened en route at military posts and at Salt Lake City, and under no circumstances at any other place. The fourth was for way-stations, for which each station-keeper had a key, and also contained a way-bill, or time-card, on which a record of arrival and departure was kept. The same mochila was transferred from pony to pony and from rider to rider until it was carried from one terminus to the other. The letters, before being placed in the pockets, were wrapped in oiled silk to preserve them from moisture. The maximum weight of any one mail was twenty pounds; but this was rarely reached. The charges were originally $5 for each letter of one half-ounce or less; but afterward this was reduced to $2.50 for each letter not exceeding one half-ounce, this being in ad-



FREDERIC REMINGTON.

CHANGING HORSES.

dition to the regular United States postage. Specially made light-weight paper was generally used to reduce the expense. Special editions of the Eastern newspapers were printed on tissue-paper to enable them to reach subscribers on the Pacific coast. This, however, was more as an advertisement, there being little demand for them at their necessarily large price.

At first, stations averaged 25 miles apart, and each rider covered three stations, or 75 miles, daily. Later, stations were established at intermediate points, reducing the distance between them, in some cases, to 10 miles, the distance between stations being regulated by the character of the country. This change was made in the interest of quicker time, it having been demonstrated that horses could not be kept at the top of their speed for so great a distance as 25 miles. At the stations, relays of horses were kept, and the station-keeper's duties included having a pony ready bridled and saddled half an hour before the express was due. Upon approaching a station, the rider would loosen the mochila from his saddle, so that he could leap from his pony as soon as he reached the station, throw the mochila over the saddle of the fresh horse, jump on, and ride off. Two minutes was the maximum time allowed at stations, whether it was to change riders or horses. At relay-stations where riders were changed the incoming man would unbuckle his mochila before arriving, and hand it to his successor, who would start off on a lope as soon as his hand grasped it. Time was seldom lost at stations. Station-keepers and relay-riders were always on the lookout. In the daytime the pony could be seen for a considerable distance, and at night a few well-known yells would bring everything into readiness in a very short time. As a rule, the riders would do 75 miles over their route west-bound one day, returning over the same distance with the first east-bound express.

Frequently, through the exigencies of the service, they would have to double their route the same day, or ride the one next to them, and even farther. For instance, "Buffalo Bill" (W. F. Cody) for a while had the route from Red Buttes, Wyoming, to Three Crossings, Nebraska, a distance of 116 miles. On one occasion, on reaching Three Crossings, he found that the rider for the next division had been killed the night before, and he was called upon to cover his route, 76 miles, until another rider could be employed. This involved a continuous ride of 384 miles without break, except for meals and to change horses. Again, "Pony Bob," another noted rider, covered the distance from Friday's Station to Smith's Creek, 185 miles, and back, including the trip over the Sierra Nevada, twice, at a time when the country was infested by hostile Indians. It eventually required, when the service got into perfect working order, 190 stations, 200 station-keepers and the same number of assistant station-keepers, 80 riders, and from 400 to 500 horses to cover the 1950 miles from St. Joseph to Sacramento. The riders were paid from $100 to $125 per month for their services. Located about every 200 miles were division agents to provide for emergencies, such as Indian raids, the stampeding of stock, etc., as well as to exercise general supervision over the service. One, and probably the most notorious, of these was Jack Slade, of unenviable reputation. For a long time he was located as division agent at the crossing of the Platte near Fort Kearney.

At first the schedule was fixed at ten days, an average of 8 miles an hour from start to finish. This was cut down to eight days, requiring an average speed of 10 miles. The quickest trip made was in carrying President Lincoln's inaugural address, which was done in seven days and seventeen hours, an average speed of 10.7 miles per hour, the fastest time for any one rider being 120 miles, from Smith's Creek to Fort Churchill, by "Pony Bob," in eight hours and ten minutes, or 14.7 miles per hour. Considering the distance and the difficulties encountered, such as hostile Indians, road-agents, floods and snow-storms, and accidents to horses and riders, the schedule was maintained to an astonishing degree. The service created the greatest enthusiasm not only among the employees, but also in the ranks of stage employees, freighters, and residents along the route. To aid a "pony" in difficulty was a privilege, and woe be to the man who would so much as throw a stone in the way.

For instance, on the initial west-bound trip the rider between Folsom's and Sacramento was thrown and his leg was broken. A Wells-Fargo stage finding him in this plight, a special agent of the Wells-Fargo Company, who was on the stage, volunteered to ride for him, and triumphantly brought the first mail into Sacramento only one hour and thirty minutes late. The special agent in question, Mr. J. G. McCall, now Pacific coast agent of the Erie Railroad, still tells with great pride of the ride, and how the whole town turned out to welcome him, and of the re-

ception tendered him by the enthusiastic citizens.

The service also created great interest among Eastern newspapers, which largely availed themselves of it. The more prominent of them kept representatives at St. Joseph to collect news, Henry Villard, afterward president of the Northern Pacific, so representing the New York "Tribune."

The riders were looked up to, and regarded as being "at the top of the heap." No matter what time of the day or of the night they were called upon, whether winter or summer, over mountains or across plains, raining or snowing, with rivers to swim or pleasant prairies to cross, through forests or over the burning desert, they must be ready to respond, and, though in the face of hostiles, ride their beat and make their time. To be late was their only fear, and to get in ahead of schedule their pride. There was no killing time for them, under any circumstances. The schedule was keyed up to what was considered the very best time that could be done, and a few minutes gained on it might be required to make up for a fall somewhere else. First-class horses were furnished, and there were no orders against bringing them in in a sweat. "Make your schedule," was the standing rule. While armed with the most effective weapon then known, the Colt revolver, they were not expected to fight, but to run away. Their weapons were to be used only in emergencies.

Considering the dangers encountered, the percentage of fatalities was extraordinarily small. Far more station employees than riders were killed by the Indians, and even of the latter more were killed off duty than on. This can be explained by the fact that the horses furnished the riders, selected as they were for speed and endurance, were far superior to the mounts of the Indians. There is only one case on record where a rider was caught, and that was owing to his having been surrounded. This occurred in Nebraska, along the Platte River. He was shot, and several days later his body was found. His pony, still bridled and saddled, was also found, with the mail intact. It was transferred to another horse, and soon forwarded to its destination. In laying out the route through the Indian country, pains were taken to avoid everything that would afford cover for an ambushed foe. One of the greatest dangers encountered by the pony-express riders was from immigrants and others who mistook them for Indians. In those days it was shoot first and investigate afterward, provided the shooter survived to make an investigation. A number of the riders met their death in this way, being mistaken for Indians, horse-thieves, or road-agents. It is a strange but notable fact that the Indians often stood and saw the daring riders fly past, without offering to molest them. There was a mystery about it that made it "bad medicine" to interfere with them. Superstitious as they were, they seldom bothered with anything that they could not understand.

Many of the most noted of the frontiersmen of the sixties and seventies were schooled in the pony-express service. The life was a hard one. Setting aside the constant danger, the work was severe, both on riders and station employees. The latter were constantly on watch, herding their horses. Their diet frequently was reduced to wolf-mutton, their beverage to brackish water, a little tea or coffee being a great luxury, while the lonesome souls were nearly always out of tobacco and whisky.

The correspondence carried by the pony express was mainly official and business communications, the extra cost acting as a bar to ordinary letters, on which the saving of time was not of much importance. One of the principal patrons of the service was the English government, the official communications of which were, as a rule, forwarded by this route. A report of the operations of the English squadron in China waters required $135 to cover the pony-express charges. The most important service rendered by it was the carrying of communications between Washington and the government officers and Union men on the coast. To it may be attributed the information that enabled them to forestall the plans of the Southern faction to carry California out of the Union. The events then taking place, foreshadowing our Civil War, were of overwhelming interest, and for this reason public attention was directed more to the service than would have been the case under ordinary circumstances.

The government extended virtually no aid to the company. It is true that the War Department issued to the express-riders army revolvers and cartridges with which to defend themselves, and that troops in the field, as well as those at the military posts along the route, could be depended upon to extend assistance in cases of emergency; but no financial aid was given in any way.

The expenses of the line for the sixteen months during which it was operated by

the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company were approximately:

Equipping the line	$100,000
Maintenance, $30,000 per month	480,000
Nevada Indian War	75,000
Miscellaneous	45,000
	$700,000

While it is true that the receipts did reach as high as $1000 per trip, in all they did not exceed $500,000, leaving a net loss of $200,000.

The great expense of establishing and maintaining the pony express was not to be wondered at, taking into consideration the condition of the country west of the Missouri at that time. In all that territory there was virtually no settlement excepting Salt Lake City and the occasional government posts. Relays of horses were necessarily kept at each station, and feed for them had to be hauled enormous distances, and riders employed at each third station. In addition to the wages of the riders, station agents, and their assistants, their board had to be furnished; and as the country produced nothing, provisions had to be hauled by wagons from the Missouri River, Utah, or California.

At first the service was weekly; beginning June 10, 1860, it was semi-weekly. This was in the face of a constantly increasing deficit, and without recognition on the part of the federal government. Were it not for the necessity of demonstrating the feasibility of the route during the winter, it is quite probable that the line would have been abandoned in the fall of 1860, when Congress refused to pass the bill authorizing the service as a mail-route; but buoyed up by the hope that it must meet with substantial recognition in the end, the company continued the service during the winter of 1860–61 and the following spring.

Owing to the heavy losses, not only in connection with the pony-express service, but in other directions, caused by the depreciation of currency and the inability to make collections from the government, because of the failure of Congress to make necessary appropriations, the company became involved in debt to the amount of $1,800,000.

In February, 1861, Congress authorized the Postmaster-General to advertise for bids for a daily mail over the Central Route, and on March 2 it was further enacted that, in consideration of an annual subsidy of $1,000,000, the Overland Mail Company should be required to change from the Southern to the Central Route, and that they should run a semi-weekly pony express, carrying five pounds of government mail matter free, charging the public $1 per half-ounce. The outbreak of hostilities between the North and the South brought out an order for the suspension of the daily mail service by the Southern Route early in April. The company found that they could not make the transfer from the Southern to the Central Route in less than two months, and it was July 1 before their first stage left St. Joseph. By an arrangement between the two great contracting parties, the pony-express service remained in the hands of the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company, the Overland Mail Company running only the daily stage.

In August, 1861, the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company was forced to the wall by its financial difficulties. The pony-express service was continued by others until October 24, 1861, when the line of the Pacific Telegraph Company was completed. During the construction of the telegraph line the pony express was running only between the ends of the wire. Much of its prestige and glamour was lost in the transfer, and it was supposed that when the telegraph was completed its usefulness would be gone. It was found that the daily stage schedule of eighteen days, together with the telegraph service, did not fully fill the want. The California legislature protested against its discontinuance, and the press clamored for its reëstablishment, but unsuccessfully.

The great feat of the pony-express service was the delivery of President Lincoln's inaugural address in 1861. Great interest was felt in this all over the land, foreshadowing as it did the policy of the administration in the matter of the Rebellion. In order to establish a record, as well as for an advertisement, the company determined to break all previous records, and to this end horses were led out from the different stations so as to reduce the distance each would have to run, and get the highest possible speed out of every animal. Each horse averaged only ten miles, and that at its very best speed. Every precaution was taken to prevent delay, and the result stands without a parallel in history: seven days and seventeen hours—one hundred and eighty-five hours—for 1950 miles, an average of 10.7 miles per hour. From St. Joseph to Denver, 665 miles were made in two days and twenty-one hours, the last 10 miles being accomplished in thirty-one minutes.

The most serious interruption, and one

that it was feared would result in the abandonment of the enterprise, occurred in May and June, 1860. At this time there was a formidable outbreak on the part of the Indians in Oregon, and the troops of the Department of the Pacific were called on to quell it, thus leaving the Overland Route unprotected. The absence of the troops, and sympathy with their Northern brethren, resulted in the Pah-Utes, Shoshones, and Bannocks going on the war-path. This affected the route from Salt Lake City to Carson City. Nearly, if not all, the stations between these two points were burned or otherwise destroyed, the stock was run off, and the station-men were either killed or driven out of the country. Several riders were also killed, and one mail was destroyed. As a result, the service was suspended for several weeks. These disasters, coming as they did in the infancy of the undertaking, and before it had fully gained the confidence of the public, came near resulting in the abandonment of the whole enterprise, and, had it not been for the energetic efforts of the agent of the company, would have done so; but he, with the aid of the newspapers, and backed by the general sentiment of the country, raised a body of volunteers, and soon settled the outbreak, replacing the stations, and restoring the line to its original condition, at an expense to the company of more than $75,000.

Naturally the service met with many delays and interruptions. A solitary rider was liable to accidents and encounters that would unavoidably result in the loss of time. A deep fall of snow, the laming of a horse, the presence of a band of hostile Indians in the way, were common occurrences. Or, again, the Indians would attack and destroy a station, run off the stock, and kill or drive off the station employees. We can better realize the danger and liability of delay to the service from the constant appearance of items such as the following in the newspapers of the day:

> The pony-expressman has just returned from Cold Springs, being driven back by the Indians.
>
> The men at Dry Creek Station have all been killed, and it is thought those at Robert's Creek have met with the same fate.
>
> Eight horses were stolen from Smith's Creek on last Monday, supposedly by road-agents.
>
> Bart Riles, the pony-rider, died this morning from wounds received at Cold Springs, May 16.
>
> Six Pike's Peakers found the body of the station-keeper horribly mutilated, the station burned, and all the stock missing from Simpson's.

Once behind time, it was almost impossible to make it up, so fast was the schedule. Thus, on the trip with President Lincoln's inaugural address several hours were lost by one of the riders in a heavy snow-storm.