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How the News of the War is Reported

WAR with Spain began, so far as the newspapers were concerned, when the "Maine" was blown up in Havana harbor. The explosion occurred at 9.40 o'clock on the evening of February 15, 1898. At half-past two on the following morning the first reports, filed by the correspondents in Havana, reached New York, and at daylight newsboys in every city in America were crying the extras which gave the details of the disaster. Before noon on the 16th, a tug steamed out of the harbor at Key West with three divers on board. In the few hurried hours after the news reached New York "The World" had telegraphed its representative in Key West, and divers had been roused out of bed, had collected their paraphernalia, and had embarked on the newly chartered tug for Havana.

Early in the afternoon, "The World" correspondent in Havana received the following cabled instructions:

"Have sent divers to you from Key West to get actual truth, whether favorable or unfavorable. First investigation by divers, with authentic results, worth \$1,000 extra expense tomorrow alone."

But when the divers arrived, they were not allowed to make a descent, and all that the newspaper sponsors of the enterprise derived from the expedition was a bill of expense amounting to nearly \$1,000.

This was the beginning. During the next few days scores of correspondents were rushed into Havana, and half a hundred great newspapers began to fill with news and pictures of the wreck. From the very first, the hand of the Spanish censor worked havoc with the reports. A correspondent never was certain that what he wrote would reach his paper. In a week's time the transmission of messages had become so uncertain that the newspapers of New York began telegraphing to different cities along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts to secure suitable dispatch-boats for carrying their messages from Havana to Key West, in order to avoid the censor. One paper chartered a boat in New York, another secured one in Charleston, several were hired in Florida ports, and there was a wild rush for Havana.

For a few weeks, messages flew back and forth across the troublous Florida Straits, and each newspaper found itself very well served by a single steamer. But with the approach of actual war and the attendant blockade, a more extended service became necessary, and several newspapers acquired a veritable fleet of vessels—three, four, and five—to patrol the waters of the West Indies.

All of these vessels were swift, ocean-going steamers, capable of making from twelve to fourteen knots an hour, and carrying crews of a dozen men or more, with several correspondents. At least two dispatch-boats chartered by New York newspapers were formerly private yachts, fitted with dynamos, powerful searchlights, and a hundred and one other conveniences.

Previous to the declaration of war, the sole service of these dispatch-boats was a daily trip between Havana and Key West, and the sole cargo was a little package of copy which a man might carry in the breast pocket of his coat. But it was a most expensive mission. Owing to the threatened hazards of war, ship owners exacted from \$5,000 to \$9,000 a month for the use of each of these boats, and the newspapers were required to bear the additional expense of fire, marine, accident, and war insurance, which the alarmed underwriters of New York had fixed at the enormous rate of eight percent a month—equal in a year to nearly the total value of the boat. One New York newspaper pays \$2,200 a month insurance on a single tug—and it has five boats in service in different parts of the world.

In addition to these initial expenses, the newspapers must buy their own coal and supplies, at war-time prices, and pay the salaries of the correspondents who direct the boats. One managing editor showed me his salary list for a single week, including only war correspondents. It amounted to \$1,463.51. A single correspondent, representing another New York paper, is said to receive \$10,000 a year.

Nor is this all. Every time a dispatch-boat made port in Havana harbor, a rapacious Spanish officer swooped down upon it and collected all manner of fees—health-office fees, custom-house fees, and fees for clear water to use in the boilers, to say nothing of pilotage charges—a total of from \$70 to \$125 a day for this purpose alone. At the Key West end of the voyage, there were still further charges, rendered necessary by the inevitable medical certificate and the pilot hire. Expenses are paid in cash, and the correspondents find it necessary to go loaded down with all the gold they can carry. Gold will lubricate a way out of almost any difficulty.

These figures will give some idea of the cost of maintaining the war-news service in Cuban waters, and yet they are only the initial expenses. During the height of the “Maine” excitement, and many times afterwards, the correspondents of single New York papers filed as high as 5,000 words a day at the cable office in Key West, often with supplementary censored dispatches direct from Havana. The cable rates from Key West to New York are five cents a word for press dispatches, making a charge of \$250 a day for this item alone; and after a dispatch is received, it is often crowded by more important news into a mere paragraph, the greater part of the high-priced message going to the newspaper limbo—“on the floor.”

After the correspondents were driven out of Havana and the blockade was begun, the difficulties and hazards of getting the news were immeasurably increased. The correspondents were subjected to a constant and exhausting strain on body and mind, and they knew not at what moment they might find themselves in the thick of a great battle. The blockade off Havana was 120 miles long, and, to “cover” it properly, a newspaper had to speak every ship in the line every day. No one dispatch-boat could do this successfully and get back to Key West with the news. Accordingly, several papers employed two boats on the blockade, one at each end. They patrolled the fleet and met near the middle, where they spoke across the tossing water of the straits through a megaphone; and then the steamer which was to act as messenger let down a boat and sent it across to the other. Here a package of dispatches, recounting the doings of the last half day, an illustration or two drawn by a special artist, and a number of photographs and films, were taken aboard and transferred to the messenger steamer. With its cargo complete the swift little vessel then sped northward toward Key West, the correspondents who still remained aboard of her working steadily at a long desk in the cabin. If it was at night, the crew of the messenger boat never knew at what moment there might come the shrill challenge of a blockader:

“Ahoy, there! Who are you?”

In such a case, the captain came to instantly, knowing well enough that any indecision might bring a twenty-pound shot crashing through his bows. Not infrequently there were several challenges in a single trip, showing the effectiveness of the blockade.

If the news was very important the messenger boat blew a whistle signal as it entered Key West, and the correspondent on shore hurried out with a launch to bring in the precious budget of reports. A cab was ready at the wharf, and a few minutes later the news was singing over the wires to New York.

The big, rolling men-of-war were always most friendly to the sociable little dispatch-boats, even if they did sometimes rouse a weary correspondent out of his bunk at night with a fierce challenge. If anything of importance had happened during the day, an officer was ready to shout the news. In return for the favor, the dispatch-boats brought the precious gossip of the line, letters to the men, newspapers, and sometimes light supplies. The Associated Press and the Laffan News Bureau ("The Sun") each had a man on the flagship "New York," as well as on the "Brooklyn" of the flying squadron. They were also represented on several other ships by officers who acted as correspondents. When the dispatch-boats of these organizations appeared, the men aboard had their reports all written. If it happened to be rough weather, so that the messenger boat dared not venture near the precipice of steel, the news copy was bottled up and tossed overboard, being afterwards picked up by the men of the dispatch vessel—unless some prowling shark had seen fit to swallow it.

When the outworks at Matanzas were bombarded by the "New York" and her consorts, the New York "Herald" boat lay up to the wind, and its correspondent stood calmly in the prow with his watch out, counting the shots that shrieked overhead. There happened to be no other newspaper boat in sight, and the "Herald" ran to cover with a "beat." Since then neither the "New York" nor the "Brooklyn" moves anywhere without a clustering fleet of jealous dispatch-boats puffing and snorting in her wake.

After all the excitement and hardship attending the gathering of this war news, the correspondent might arrive in Key West only to make the heart-breaking discovery that he could not get his message through to his paper. Only two cables run between Key West and Punta Rossa, on the mainland of Florida, and government dispatches, which take precedence over all others, utilize one of them almost exclusively. Correspondents for half a hundred papers were crowding to secure the early use of the other line, and, if there was some important piece of news to be reported, the wire was soon overloaded, and the poor fellow who came late, sweating and excited, had little chance of getting his message through. To escape the possibility of such a failure, one New York paper made arrangements to have a dispatch-boat run with its messages to Miami, on the mainland, but the scheme did not work successfully, owing to the time involved.

Even after the war began, newspaper readers were astonished to see almost daily dispatches from Havana, often containing matter which no censor would have passed. How did they get through?

When American correspondents left Havana, many newspapers made arrangements with some friendly Spaniard or Englishman, or in one case with an American who had lived nearly all his life on Cuban soil, to stand watch and send news messages at every possible opportunity. There was little use of employing the cable, owing to the patriotic activity of the censor, although a little veiled news came through in this way. For instance, one dispatch read, "General Gomez has retreated from A. to B. with a large force of men." This just suited the censor, and he let it go through. The telegraph editor in New York read between the lines. By consulting a map he found that B. was nearer Havana than A., and that this retreat was in reality an advance upon the

Spanish capital. But such subterfuges were uncertain and unsatisfactory, and a far more serviceable plan was formed for entirely eluding the Spanish authorities. The correspondent in Havana quietly wrote out his dispatches and sent them down by special messenger to the coast near Mariel, which is only a short distance west of Havana. One paper arranged with a country tradesman who made daily trips to Havana to act as its courier. At five o'clock on Monday, seven on Tuesday, ten on Wednesday, and so on through the week, a different hour for each day, the dispatch-boat was to approach the coast, and, upon signal that the enemy was not in sight, send a swift boat ashore for the messages. It was a highly difficult and dangerous mission, but a good many Havana dispatches have come by this roundabout route.

In addition to these secret resident correspondents in Havana itself, several newspaper men have ventured into the interior to join the insurgents, although they were well aware that they took their lives in their hands when they did it. All of these men made arrangements to return, at a specified hour, on one of two or three days, to a certain point on the coast, where a warship or a dispatch-boat had appointed to meet them.

With the earliest intimations of a declaration of war public interest, which had been centering around the "Maine" disaster, shifted to Washington and Madrid.

The newspapers of New York made elaborate preparations for spreading the first news of the war resolution. A correspondent was on watch in Congress; a score of feet away a telegraph operator sat ready with his finger on the key; the wire was wide open, and in the composing-rooms of at least two New York papers a linotype operator, who was also a telegraph operator, sat at his machine ready to tick the words into type the moment they sprung from the wire. Three minutes after the declaration of war was passed, the newsboys were struggling up out of the "Journal" delivery-room crying an extra announcing the news. In three minutes the correspondent had gathered and written the news—just a line or two of it—the dispatch had been sent from Washington to New York, had been set up in type, printed, and delivered on the street, ready for sale at a penny. This remarkable time record was rendered possible by a process known as "fudging." The type lines set by the linotype-telegraph operator are wider at the top than at the base, so that when placed together they form the section of a small cylinder. They are firmly clamped in an ingenious little supplemental machine consisting of a cylinder and an inking roll for red ink. This is attached to a revolving shaft at the top of one of the huge printing presses, and so arranged that when the paper comes rushing through from the regular type cylinders below, the "fudge" prints a big red "WAR" and a few lines of extra news in spaces left for that purpose in the right-hand columns of the edition. This is the genesis of the "Red Extra," and it is a typical development of modern journalism.

While the correspondents in Washington were busy with the liveliest kind of news, the activities of a great nation stripping for war, the newspapers were experiencing untold trouble in getting news from Spanish points. Distinctly American correspondents found little comfort in Madrid after the departure of General Woodford, but there yet remained Englishmen, Frenchmen, and friendly Spaniards who could send dispatches. However, it was impossible for them to cable any news of importance, even to London and Paris papers, owing to the strict Spanish censorship. The correspondents repeatedly filed dispatches addressed to English papers with the necessary peseta's worth of stamps attached, only to find that their work had been unceremoniously thrown into the censor's waste-basket.

"If you don't send our messages," they expostulated, "you should return the cable tolls."

But the piratical Spanish authorities, one bureau after another, shrugged their shoulders in the expressive Spanish way and returned nothing. More than one New York paper lost thousands of dollars in this manner.

Finally, Madrid correspondents devised a scheme for sending their dispatches by special couriers, a six hours' run by rail, across the Spanish border to Bayonne or Biarritz, in France, where they can cable without molestation. In every case the couriers are required to pay the cable tolls in advance, and, in the present feverish condition of the Spanish people, they must be most circumspect in their demeanor if they expect to escape with their lives, to say nothing of the money which they carry. The total expense for the Spanish news service, including couriers, tolls, and correspondence, sometimes reaches \$2,000 a week for a single New York paper.

In addition to its regular correspondence from Madrid, one newspaper engaged, by cable, British residents of Cadiz, Barcelona, and Cartagena to report the movements of Spanish war-vessels. They were instructed to send their messages in French to an alleged commercial house in Paris, in reality the Paris representative of the paper, there to be translated and forwarded to New York. By this means the Spanish censors were thrown off their guard, and for a time the doings of Spanish ships were known in New York almost as promptly as the movements of vessels in the Narrows.

Anticipating trouble at Puerto Rico, with the probability of a great naval battle not far distant, several American newspapers, together with the Associated Press, made an attempt to locate correspondents at the Spanish port of San Juan. The "World" sent Mr. George Bronson Rea, who speaks Spanish fluently and who hoped to pass as an Englishman that had long been a resident of Spain. He had made arrangements to send messages by code to a fictitious business office in London. But he met with trouble from the start. He found not only an obdurate censor, but highly suspicious officials. Upon the receipt of a cablegram containing the word "fortifications," he was immediately placed under police surveillance and threatened with instant imprisonment if he attempted to escape. A few days later, Mr. Rea, with an eye to cable tolls, sent from St. Thomas this laconic, but graphic, narrative of his adventures:

"Arrived Puerto Rico. Hot. Impossible cable truth. Since your fortification message, police surveillance. Eluded vigilance. Midnight. Bicycle. Coach. Horse. Schooner. Smuggler's boat. Here. Hope satisfactory."

Since Mr. Rea's adventures, St. Thomas, in the Danish West Indies, has been made the news base for American correspondence. Here dispatches may be sent to New York by way of the Haiti cable, at the rate of seventy-three cents a word, or they may go from Kingston, Jamaica, to the Bermuda Islands and around by Halifax, Nova Scotia, to New York, at the same rate.

At all points where correspondents are sending dispatches a newspaper must establish a credit in gold, identify its representative, and prepay the charges on cablegrams. Although this may seem a mere detail of the work, it often involves much exasperating delay and expense.

Wherever there is a censor, no dispatches in cipher are allowed. Messages may be "briefed" by the omission of unimportant words, but they must always be in "plain language," whether English, French, or Spanish. These restrictions have given rise to a number of exceedingly clever codes, whereby messages may seem to say one thing when they mean quite another. The American newspaper has learned that a Spanish censor will allow a demand for money to go through when he will blue-pencil everything else. Accordingly the codes are made to center around the transmission of money. For instance, a correspondent cables the editor of his paper:

“Send \$500 quickly. Wire instructions.” To the Spanish censor this looks like the most innocent of requests, and he is deeply interested in having money come into the country. So he lets it go. At New York it reads in quite a different way—“Battle. ‘Vizcaya’ sunk. American fleet now off Puerto Rico.” If the dispatch had read, “Send \$600” or “send \$700,” it would have meant “‘Almerante Oquendo’ sunk,” or “‘Cristobal Colon’ sunk”; and if it had been “Cable directions,” instead of “Wire instructions,” it would have meant “American fleet disabled and retreating.” And so on through infinite variations.

One New York paper arranged to protect itself still further by having its code dispatches sent by a commercial man in the Spanish port to a supposed banking house in London.

Not to be deterred from the hope of sending the first news of the anticipated naval conflict off Puerto Rico, one correspondent used his Yankee wit and chartered the Danish steamer “Tyr,” at Baltimore, and went with her at once to St. Thomas. She sailed under the Danish flag, and her captain had his Danish papers. Consequently, if she crossed the track of the Spanish fleet she could not be molested. If she was hailed she could report that she was a Danish steamer bound down from Copenhagen, by way of Baltimore, to St. Thomas, with a cargo of cheese, and the correspondent could lie quietly below and take snapshots of the Spaniards through a port-hole. If the “Tyr” blundered into a naval conflict, as she could be depended upon to do, she would be as safe from molestation as an English vessel. And yet, even with the protection of a foreign flag, the correspondent takes many desperate chances—but it is a business of chances, and its **j** success is measured in chances.

While these things were happening at the seat of war in Cuban waters, Admiral Dewey was advancing upon Manila, more than 10,000 miles away, and a great naval battle was impending. It was impossible even for a New York newspaper to place a staff correspondent either in Hong Kong or in the Philippine Islands before the action was over, and yet three of the inevitable American reporters were actually being carried with the fleet into the battle in Manila Bay. These were Mr. John T. McCutcheon, an artist and correspondent for the “Chicago Record,” and Mr. E. W. Harden of the “Chicago Post,” who were fortunate enough to be on board the “McCulloch”; and Mr. Joseph L. Stickney of the New York “Herald,” who accompanied Admiral Dewey on the “Olympia.” Several unrepresented papers succeeded in securing the services of correspondents of London papers at Manila and Hong Kong. Others cabled the United States consul at Hong Kong, requesting him to engage a suitable person to cable early news of the movements of Dewey’s fleet. After the cable was cut, a New York paper, in its eagerness to be the first to tell the tale of victory, chartered a dispatch-boat at Hong Kong and ordered it to sail at once for Manila. Some idea of the expense involved in all of these inquiries and instructions, with the resultant dispatches, may be formed when it is known that for every message received by cable from Hong Kong the newspapers pay \$1.60 a word.

At the Cape Verde Islands, the Canary Islands, Martinique, in the West Indies, Rio de Janeiro, and other points from which war dispatches have been received, the newspapers of America may have had no regular correspondents, but so well organized is the news service of the world that there is always some man, be his nationality what it may, who is the authorized correspondent of some paper or news association. If he reports to any city in the world, his news finds its way within a few hours to the newspapers of the United States. This was strikingly illustrated by the prompt and definite news which American papers received from the far away Cape Verde Islands the moment the Spanish fleet touched port, the messages coming by way of the Madeira Islands, Lisbon; and Penzance, England, and so to New York, at a cable toll of eighty-six cents a word.

The organization of the news service for reporting the great events at Santiago, and the ingenuity and bravery of the correspondents who attended the land and naval forces through their historic achievements there, call for separate treatment, and cannot be gone into here. It must suffice to say that they form one of the most interesting chapters in all newspaper history.