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Paul Studenski Collection - Other Aviation Organizations

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Henry Tindall Merrill

May, 1937, began with a dismal aviation record: Hindenburg exploded at Lakehurst, N.J., marking the death of large dirigibles. While some corners of the world were already making war, millions of people were more concerned with the upcoming pomp and pageantry of the May 12, coronation of George VI, in London. Hearst newspapers wanted something special, and they hired "Dick" Merrill to deliver the goods: photographs of the great affair, the day after. Merrill, an Eastern Air Lines pilot, flew to London in 19 hours, and returned in 24 1/2 hours, in a twin-engine Lockheed. It marked the first round-trip commercial flight of the North Atlantic. John S. Lambie, another Eastern pilot, was Merrill's second seat companion.

"But I'm still remembered for the ping-pong balls," Dick muses. The year before, with stage personality Harry Richman, he flew the Atlantic in a single-engine Vultee, with 40,000 white balls as protection against sinking, in case of a forced landing. It was one of those happy publicity stunts, "and everyone thinks the ping-pong bit was my idea. Not so. That's how they used to ferry planes between England and Australia."

Dick's stunts delighted everyone; a crack air mail pilot, he used to fly with a lion named Princess Doreen, a chimpanzee named Josephine, and a nameless flying squirrel. When he retired from Eastern, he had over 40,000 flying hours in his log, believed to be the world's record.

[[image - small drawing of a propeller]]

Henry Tindall Merrill: born Iuka, Mississippi, February 1, 1894.

[[image No. 102 - black & white photograph of Henry Merrill in front of Pitcairn Mailwing plane]]

[[image No. 103 - black & white photograph of Henry Merrill and "Jack" Lambie in front of plane]]

[[image No. 104 - black & white photograph of Frank Downs holding up lion "Princess Doreen" in front of a plane]]

[[caption]]"In front of my Pitcairn Mailwing at Richmond, Va., before a May, 1928, flight to Atlanta. What a beautiful plane" (102). Merrill, left, and "Jack" Lambie, at Floyd Bennett Field, New York City (103), after record flight from London, with George VI coronation photos. Princess Doreen and Frank Downs, Merrill's mechanic (104).[[caption]]

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