

Report printed in the Southport Visiter. Saturday May 15th 1937

**SOUTHPORT - NEW YORK IN A DAY
MERRILL AND LAMBIE'S GREAT TRIUMPH
Record-Breaking Trip
ATLANTIC CROSSED IN 16 HOURS
SOUTHPORT TO NEW YORK IN A DAY!**

This great triumph has been achieved by Dick Merrill and Jack Lambie the United States fliers. Taking off from Ainsdale Sands at 9.13 on Thursday night in their twin-engine Lockheed Electra monoplane, they landed at the Floyd Bennett Field, New York at 9.35 (B.S.T.) last night. Sixteen hours after leaving England they were over Newfoundland-a record time for the crossing. They were then 1,100 miles from New York.

After flying for 22 hours and 27 minutes they came down at Quincy, a naval airport south of Boston, Massachusetts because of fog. Almost immediately afterwards they took off for New York. At 9.34 the 'plane was sighted a mile away from the Floyd Bennett Field and a minute later-24 hours 22 minutes after leaving Southport - it made a perfect landing. Merrill is the only flier to do the round trip twice.

The fliers

Lambie was the first to clamber out of the cockpit-received a rousing welcome from a crowd which included the Mayor of New York.

"Most Tiring Flight" says Merrill

Merrill, in a broadcast said they were very, very glad to be back again. They had had bad weather all the way over, and landed once to check the petrol supply, he said. It had been the most tiring flight they had ever had. He thought that for future flights over such a distance a crew of at least three was needed. "Two are not enough. It is much too tiring" he said. Merrill, replying to the announcer said that he was going back to his old job with the Eastern Air Lines.

"I want to do it again"-Lambie

Lambie also broadcast, and said he wanted to do the trip again. The manager of Eastern Airlines said he believed it was now practicable to run passenger trips across the Atlantic, but he agreed with Merrill that a bigger crew was needed, and that it was essential to have a good landing grounds and the co-operation of ground crews. Merrill handed over Coronation photographs carried in the 'plane to the Customs authorities.

Mayor Cables Congratulations

The Mayor of Southport cabled to Merrill as follows: "Southport sends hearty congratulations. You have made history."

Log of the Flight

A radio message was received from Merrill at 1.14p.m. (B.S.T.) announcing that the 'plane was over Central Newfoundland. It passed over the village of St. Albans on the South coast of Newfoundland at 1.30 p.m. The weather was fine.

At 3.5 p.m. Merrill radioed "Just passed Cape Breton Island." The earlier progress of Merrill and Lambie was reported in the messages below; times are given in British Summer Time.

3.20 a.m. - "800m miles West of the Irish Coast. Everything okay".

9.a.m. - "475 miles from Newfoundland. Petrol for 13 hours".

10a.m.- "340 miles from Newfoundland".

11.25 a.m. - "Plugging along. Everything okay. Still over water". Estimated 250 miles from Newfoundland.

Fighter sights 'plane 110 miles from Newfoundland.

Fog and Rain

The 'plane was averaging only 140 m.p.h. owing to headwinds and her heavy fuel load. The fliers had to rely on their instruments earlier, flying blind in fog and rain. A fee of £20.000 awaits them for their there-and-back flight with news photographs, it is stated.

Merrill's Fourth Crossing

This was Merrill's fourth Atlantic crossing and he has been dubbed the Atlantic aeroplane "tripper" No 1. He and Lambie have made the two Atlantic flights in 120 hours - both commercial charter jobs – thus demonstrating the possibilities of express ocean aerial services.

Merrill staged his two-way Atlantic flight as a commercial proposition. He planned and budgeted accordingly. His machine was selected for its long range and speed. Merrill's two-way trip is the nearest approach to an Atlantic air service timetable working yet. He endeavours to stage all his flights on a comparable schedule to the airliners he normally pilots. His previous successful Atlantic flight was in company with Mr Harry Richman. They flew from Southport to Newfoundland in 18 hours 44 minutes - a record time for the crossing, now surpassed by yesterday's time of 16 hours.

Broadcast from German Station

The world wide interest to the flight is indicated by the fact that it was broadcast from the German station Zeesen last night in their English broadcast which was heard by a Visiter reporter listening on his short-wave set. The German station stated that Merrill and Lambie left the Southport aerodrome-without the films. The reason the films were not taken, said the broadcast, was stated to be that the financial terms were not satisfactory.

THE TAKE OFF - A Thrilling Sight

An excited cheering crowd of about 15,000 people saw Merrill and Lambie take off from Ainsdale sands at 9.13 on Thursday night. With engines roaring at full throttle and blue flames streaking out of its two exhausts, the huge, silver gleaming 'plane moved slowly off the sleepers on which its wheels had rested to prevent it sinking into the sand with its load of 1300 gallons of petrol. "They're going now" shouted the crowd and pressed forward. For a brief moment the streamlined 'plane halted at the start of the runway. A wave of hands from the fliers clearly seen through the windows of the cockpit, and then, with ever increasing speed the 'plane raced along the sands towards Southport, the crowd rushing in its wake. Before it had travelled a mile, it lifted perfectly from the shore to cries of "It's up" from the crowd. Gracefully it rose into the air like a giant bird banking on reaching Birkdale and circled out over the sea. The crowd cheered as the 'plane travelled in line with the coast at a height of 1500 feet flying steadily silhouetted against a sky flushed with the rays of the setting sun. The plane could be seen for fully five minutes, the crowd now hushed, straining to catch a last glimpse of it. Finally it vanished....."I hope they get there safely" said everyone, a hope gratified by yesterday's news.

Although the take-off had not the dramatic qualities of the departure of Merrill and Harry Richman from the lantern lit runway on Birkdale shore in the darkness of the night last September it was a thrilling sight. Once again Southport has shared in an event focussing world attention.

SHORE DRAMA "Plane with Films Comes Too Late

Drama came shortly after Merrill and Lambie had gone. They were to have taken back with them film of the Coronation-it was stated that the fliers would receive £20,000 each if they got the films to New York in time for showing in the cinemas on Thursday night - and it was because these had not arrived that the take-off was not made early in the morning as planned. Various reasons and rumours were in circulation throughout the day as to why the films were held up. Merrill was frequently in communication with London about them, and an hour before he and Lambie took off it was stated that a 'plane was on its way from London with the films. "I'll give them another five minutes" Merrill kept saying as time went by, and when all was ready for the trans-Atlantic trip and news had been broadcast in America that the departure was imminent, there was still no sign of the 'plane. "If you don't go now, you'll never get off" said a Motor Club official to Merrill a minute or two after nine o'clock. "That's so, we'll go right now" he replied, and the American fliers left without the films, taking only some still pictures.

But less than a quarter of an hour after they had gone, a 'plane alighted on the sands with the films and the pilot was extremely disappointed to find that he had made a fruitless trip. He was told that Merrill and Lambie had delayed their departure as long as possible and that if they had stayed on it would have meant putting out flares. He only remained a few minutes taking off and making some inquiries and having a 'phone talk from the beach hut. It was disappointing of course that the films did not go, but nothing more could be done about it at Southport.

BROADCAST TO AMERICA - Merrill and the Mayor on Radio

Two broadcasts were made over the N.B.C. system by Merrill and the Mayor of Southport (Councillor. H.W.Barber) in the final half-hour, one from the ambulance hut at the end of Shore-road and the other from close to the 'plane. Members of Southport Post Office engineering staff erected the apparatus to link up with the N.B.C. system. When the second broadcast had been in progress the best part of a minute, it was found that it was not going through, and another start had to be made. This, however,

enabled an error by the radio announcer to be corrected. He had stated that the 'plane was on the sands at Southport "on the North-east coast of England." A police inspector put him right and Southport was given its proper geographical position when the broadcast went through. "Post office engineers have put in some snappy work this afternoon installing the lines for this hook-up" said the announcer, and then called Merrill to the microphone. "Well, here we are, all ready for the take-off," said Merrill. "We have been waiting all day to get a favourable wind and at last we have got it. It is just about dark and we are just about to go." Replying to questions by the radio announcer, Merrill said they expected to take from twenty to twenty-two hours in crossing. "The winds are not very good and the weather is kind of bad too. There are strong head winds all the way over. We have had a very bad cross wind all day. We hope to do it in the same time as it took coming over," he said. Merrill stated that they were making for the Floyd Bennett Airport and that their wireless signal was K.H.M.E.R. Asked if he had seen anything of the Coronation celebrations in London, Merrill said "No, we have not. We were too busy getting the aeroplane in condition for the return flight." "Why did you choose Southport for the take-off?" asked the announcer. "Because the beach is very smooth and the best place I know for a take-off of this kind," said Merrill. "It offers a lot of room which is very necessary."

AN EPOCH MAKING FLIGHT

The Mayor of Southport broadcast cordial greeting to the citizens of America from Southport and its residents many of whom, he said were on the beach where the 'plane was nearly ready to take off. "We have had a perfect summer day" he said "and we wish Mr Merrill and Mr Lambie bon voyage. We look upon this as an epoch making flight and hope it will bring the United States into closer contact with Great Britain and strengthen the bonds of friendship between us." "This is the second occasion Mr Merrill has departed from our sands and we are hoping to welcome him again in August after his New York to Paris flight. I have had the pleasure of entertaining Mr Merrill and Mr Lambie today and have been much impressed with their unassuming manner and quiet confidence in their ability to make the return trip successfully." Turning to the flyers the Mayor said "I wish you God-speed, a safe journey and the best of luck," and the crowd endorsed the sentiments with a rousing cheer.

There had been a big crowd around the 'plane and in the vicinity of the runway throughout the day, and in the evening the beach was black with people and cars. They watched the fuelling of the 'plane superintended by Lambie, with keen interest. The petrol was pumped from a wagon with extreme care, the precautionary measures included an earth wire from the wagon. Appeals to the crowd not to smoke and to keep their matches and petrol lighters in their pockets when in a radius of sixty yards of the 'plane were broadcast from time to time. Excitement grew as the preparations proceeded. In the afternoon Merrill and Lambie had tea with the Mayor of Southport and others in the Lido cafe and there received a bulky package of cables and other documents, brought specially by train from London. It was then that Merrill announced he would be back again in Southport in August, after taking part in the New York to Paris air race. "I hope to be able to spend some little time here then" he said, "and see a lot of your beautiful town."

BLACK CAT MASCOT

When they returned to the 'plane, specially franked mail, several big card-board boxes and personal luggage were placed in the cockpit, by the door of which could be seen a little black cat mascot. Later on the fliers had a meal of ham and eggs in the cafe, and returned to the 'plane with a parcel of sandwiches and flasks of coffee. The crowd was now pressing about the barricade, many coming into the enclosure and the fliers were besieged by people of all ages requesting their autographs. They courteously obliged, but both of them looked rather tired though Lambie was rarely without a smile and Merrill was keen eyed as he strode about, hands in pockets waiting for news of the films, watching those engaged in preparing the 'plane. At least a dozen times during the day Merrill went by car over the mile long runway on the sands which had been flagged out under the direction of the officers and members of the Southport Motor Club, Mr W.H. Stephenson J.P. (President), Councillor M.D. Ball (Secretary), Mr D.S. Brereton and G.H. Highley - who had worked in close co-operation with Mr H.L. Bunting, Deputy Borough Engineer and Mr S.X. Giroux, the Southport aviator, in the many details connected with the take-off. Merrill and those who accompanied him, were very surprised to find when they made their final inspection of the track that the guiding flags had been removed by order of someone, but not by anyone in authority on the shore, and they were hurriedly replaced. The chief concern throughout the day was the wind. It was blowing from the North-West, almost dead across the runway and Merrill said it would be impossible to take off with the heavily loaded 'plane until the wind came from the North or dropped. Anxious eyes were cast at the "wind sock" fluttering in the sand dunes as the hours went by, and there was a sigh of relief when it gradually hung lower. About eight o'clock it was drooping alongside its mast - the wind had gone and the start could be made.

EXCITED CROWD Scattered by "Sandstorm"

Lambie, clad in Eastern Airlines pilot uniform climbed into the cockpit and then the engines began to chatter and then to roar as they were warmed up. The crowd behind the 'plane were warned to leave space, but like all crowds their eagerness got the better of them. However, they scattered quick enough when they were caught in the sandstorm caused by the airstream, which had such force that it sent bicycles spinning. Despite the efforts by the police and the rangers the crowd swarmed onto the runway and valuable assistance was given by the Motor Club Emergency Squad in clearing the track and controlling the indiscreet spectators. Readjustments were made to the springing of the wheels and the 'plane and the engines responded perfectly to the tests. Chock blocks were removed. The wind had gone, the broadcast was over, farewells were said. Merrill donned his flying kit and joined Lambie in the 'plane and the door was closed. The crowd surged forward as the engines roared into life.

"Keep back!" "Keep back!" rang out the urgent warning. The 'plane bumped off the sleepers, paused, and skimmed along the sands; another trans-Atlantic flight had started from Southport.

As announced in the Visiter, Merrill and Lambie had planned to take off from the beach at seven o'clock on Thursday morning and though the wind was not in the right direction for the take-off they would probably have made a start then if the films had arrived. It was a glorious morning, in fact the sun shone brilliantly throughout the day. But when Merrill went down to the beach having learned at the hotel that the films were not on the way, he decided there and then that it would be an evening take-off. "It looks to me as though it will have to be done when it is just going dark, say about nine o'clock," after consulting those who could advise him from experience about the state of the sands and the prospects of the wind changing.

"Of course" he said "I shall try to take-off as soon as possible after the films arrive if the wind is favourable."

Even at this early hour there was a crowd of people round the enclosure. Some of them, like the police on duty, had been there all night. Merrill then returned to the hotel to snatch some sleep and Lambie, after giving directions about fuelling, followed suit later, but in a few hours both were back on the beach again.

FILMS HOLD-UP

The films were to have come by road, it was originally stated, leaving London about midnight. After the invitation breakfast at the hotel to which the airmen and other guests, including over a score of Pressmen and photographers were entertained by the Mayor. Merrill had a 'phone call to London and later said he was told three 'planes had attempted to leave London with the films, but owing to the fog and bad weather they had crashed, and that attempts were being made to get another pilot to make the trip. He also said that one reason for the delay might be that a special film was being prepared for a private viewing. The day wore on without any definite news of what was happening to the films and then came the evening newspapers' story of the conference of the film companies about "cutting" the film to ordinary newsreel proportions. Merrill's last news, as has been mentioned, was about an hour before he aimed to take-off-that the 'plane was on its way, but with no further information, and as dusk was gathering, he decided to get away without them. He would have waited a little longer but this would have meant flares and it would have taken quite forty minutes to put them along the runway.

Merrill and Lambie were very grateful for the help they had received from the Southport Motor Club in laying out the runway, and from Mr Giroux who flew them to Speke on Wednesday night and guided their 'plane from Speke to Ainsdale; from the Mayor and members of the Publicity Committee, Corporation officials and workmen, and the police, who had no easy task in dealing with the crowds at night.

SPECIAL BREAKFAST - Entertained by the Mayor

The Mayor displayed a very keen interest in all that took place and, like the fliers and others associated with the arrangements, had little sleep. He presided at the special breakfast at the Prince of Wales Hotel, went down to the beach immediately afterwards, stayed there a couple of hours, went to Manchester on business, returned early in the afternoon, went to the beach again and remained there until the 'plane had taken off. Among others at the special breakfast in addition to the Mayor's private guests were the Deputy Mayor (Councillor T Ball) who gave a similar breakfast before Merrill and Richman took off from Southport; Alderman E Wood (Chairman of Publicity and Attractions Committee) and Mrs Wood, Councillor W Geldard (Vice-Chairman) and Mrs Geldard, Mr W H Stephenson, Councillor and Mrs M D Ball, Councillor S E Charlton, Mr S N Giroux, Mr Thomas Quinn (Massachusetts Chief Mechanic), Mr G V Rankin (Western Union Telegraph Company), Mr F John (Southport Postmaster), Mr T E Wolstenholme (Publicity Manager), Mr L H Bunting (Deputy Borough Engineer),

Mr B A Nelson (Outside Engineering Assistant) and Mr Douglas Lee (Manager of the Prince of Wales Hotel) who had prepared a special menu for the occasion superimposed on the menu of the hotel's Coronation dinner. Autographed copies of the menu were taken with them in the 'plane by the fliers, together with Visiter photographs taken at the breakfast and several copies of Thursday's Visiter which contained the story of the projected flight and a photograph of the fliers standing by their 'plane on the shore. The Visiter was, therefore, among the first English newspapers giving an account of the Coronation to reach America. There was a little speechmaking after the breakfast.

BEST WISHES

I feel sure you will join me in wishing Mr Merrill and Mr Lambie to best of good fortune on their journey back to the United States," said the Mayor. "It is particularly pleasing to us to know that the purpose of their visit is to take back the films of the Coronation, and I am sure the people of the United States will see these films with great pleasure. We know yesterday was one of the most eventful days in the history of this country, and it is very gratifying to know aviation will make it possible for people as far away as the United States to see those films almost as quickly as we do ourselves. We offer Mr Merrill and Mr Lambie our best wishes for a successful and happy flight."

Mr Merrill, in replying, said he was very happy to be back in Southport once again. "I shall never forget the marvellous reception we had here before. Everyone has been wonderfully kind, wherever we have been. We expect to be back again shortly. I do appreciate very much all you have done for us." Mr Lambie said "The way you people take us to your hearts sort of chokes me up and I feel I can't say anything at all, but we do appreciate it very much." Mr W H Stephenson, on behalf of the guests, thanked the Mayor very heartily for his very kind services to the town, to the flight and for all present for the very handsome breakfast he had provided to send the fliers off to New York. "I know," he said "I am expressing the wishes of all of you when I say we wish them God-speed and the best of luck."