

## AMAZING CAREER OF PEMBERTON-BILLINGS, M.P.

Has Had Many Adventures—Was a Soldier, Actor, Mason, Journalist, Seaman, Policeman, Train Conductor, and Aircraft Builder—Ran Away From Home When He Was Fourteen Years Old.

Mr. Pemberton-Billings, the member for the air and East Herts, and who has been hailed as a new driving force in air politics, has had a more remarkable career than the general public knows. The "Daily Chronicle" in a detailed article, with many pointed references, says:—

"He has had an amazing career; he has tried his hands at many things; he has been everything by turns, but nothing long. He has been a seaman, a bricklayer, a labourer, an actor, a stonebreaker, a soldier, a mounted policeman, a theatre manager, a chauffeur, a stoker, a journalist, an editor, a yacht dealer, a social reformer, a train conductor, an aviator, an aircraft builder.

**For Africa at Fourteen.**

"Mr. Billing is quite young. He was born in Hampstead in 1881. His father, Charles Eardley Billing, was a stove manufacturer. Hampstead soon proved too slow for Mr. Billing. He started life on his own account when he was fourteen by setting out for the conquest of South Africa. He has recently given an account of this thrilling chapter in his life in an interview which appeared in 'South Africa' of April 1.

"When I was fourteen years old," he says, "I ran away to sea in a wind-

jammer. They tried to haze me, but I fought the mate and one of the crew, and the difference between the skipper and myself was left undecided when I got a compound fracture of the leg, which laid me up for six weeks in a bunk, with oil-sheet splints to help the bone-setting. I was landed at Delagoa Bay, wearing a smile and a lump over the broken jointing. I limped about on crutches through the sand-smothered streets for a few days until I threw away the sticks to stow myself away on a steamer.

I worked as a cabinet-maker's assistant. I did odd jobs in any craftsman's yard. I hustled and planned continuously. I've been conductor and driver on those old horsed trams in Durban, I've stoked and driven old Hunter's 'Mallet' engines. I've battled around old 'Tekwin' at every sort of job that a man might do. But the horizon above the Berea beckoned and beckoned till I foot-slogged myself over its crest, as far as Pinetown, whence I broke away through Stanger and Eriulam, to Rorke's Drift. From the drift I came round in a wide circle to Maritzburg, hobnobbing my way back to Durban.

"He worked as a bricklayer, and

took up any job that came to his hand: I've battled in Natal, barefooted sometimes, and I've broken stones for the new prison at 'Nlumbeni' (Undeen). I've tramped around on Kaffir tracks, and once I was lost for a couple of days in the bush of the Upper Tugela. When at length I found a kraal the Zulus gave me condensed milk on yellow porridge—impuphi—and I wish I could rub some Whitehall noses in it.

**Soldier and Journalist.**

"The natives gave Mr. Billing a new name. He says:—

You know the Zulu habit of giving special names to every white? Well, my name was 'Tsumatish,' which means 'the little hawk' which is always hunting-trouble. I got it through fighting and outing a big buck nigger. I used to be in the boxing ring in Maritzburg.

"He joined the Natal Mounted Police, and was in the force when the war broke out. He was on 'Penn-Symons' staff as galloper and despatch rider. He helped to lead Yule's brigade to Ladysmith. He was one of Buller's despatch riders and gallopers, and he was 'in the donga' when young Roberts was wounded. Finally, he saw hot work at Spion Kop, where I was sent after a few squadrons of the B.M.L., who had to be brought back from some M.I. enterprise. I was mentioned three times in despatches before the relief of Ladysmith, and my greatest pride is connected with the occasion when six of us were sent out separately with a message at midnight from Buller to the O.C. troops holding the ridge beyond Pieters' Hill the night after the battle. I was the only one of those six to reach his objective."

"The member for air was then only eighteen.

**Boer War and After.**

"Mr. Billing told an audience at East Herts that he fought for eighteen

months in the Boer war, and was wounded twice.

"After the war he edited several newspapers in South Africa. One was devoted to motoring. He holds the first certificate issued in South Africa

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to a driver of a public motor-car. He introduced the taxi to Natal.

"Having mastered Journalism and motoring in South Africa, he then conquered the stage, and toured all over South Africa with several companies.

"Mr. Billing returned from South Africa in 1903, and began a new romantic career in England. He lived near East Grinstead for a time, and was the first man to fly a man-carrying kite. He married the daughter of Mr. T. Schweitzer, a retired ship chandler.

After several other references, the "Daily Chronicle" continues:—

"While he was thinking out aviation problem between 1906 and 1911 he figured in various capacities.

"Mr. Billing's attention was turned to air, and his friends say that he was the first man to fly in England, but there is no evidence in support of this claim. It was not until November, 1913, that he obtained a pilot's certificate.

"Mr. Billing's inventiveness began to assert itself in the form of patents in 1913, and the Patent Office records show that he has applied for patents for various inventions connected with aircraft, flying boats, motors, and gramophones."

### His Flying Record.

As regards his flying record, it is not claimed that Mr. Pemberton-Billing is now a flying man. The weekly technical journal "Aeronautics" states that Mr. Pemberton-Billing has never flown in active service and that he has not been connected with the active service at the front. In its issue of March 29, 1916, dealing with Mr. Pemberton-Billing's claim to be a practical aviator, this journal says:—

The true facts of the case are these:—One morning, at Brooklands, for a bet, Mr. Pemberton-Billing succeeded in passing the childish simple tests required to obtain a pilot's certificate, a feat which could be accomplished by any averagely intelligent and active schoolboy, and makes a man a practical aviator as much as the possession of a driver's licence vouches for the competency of anyone to drive a motor-car.

The "Times" of September 18, 1913, states that Mr. Pemberton-Billing won his wager. He "entered his machine yesterday morning at 5.40, and by 9.15 had performed his task."

The "Southampton Times" of May 23, 1914, describes the Pemberton-Billing super-marine manufactory on the Woolston bank of the Itchen as an up-to-date factory for constructing machines, which are bound in course of time to revolutionize "travelling across the sea." There are two launching places and a huge shed capable of accommodating a small fleet of machines.

This remarkable development, says the paper, is due to the courage and enterprise of Mr. Pemberton-Billing. The war interrupted the proposed scheme for the air passenger service between Southampton and the Isle of Wight, and the only machine delivered before the war was one seaplane, called a "bat-boat," which was built for the German Government and underwent its trials at the Pemberton-Billing works.

**Designer and Inventor.**

Mr. Pemberton-Billing gets the credit, which he deserves, of being a very good designer, and his gifts in this direction are best exercised when he is working under direction. His talents as an inventor are unquestioned, but if not restrained would design

machines more original than practical in the present stage of flying.

Mr. Pemberton-Billing's reputation as an air-strategist is based chiefly on things which he has said, not on things which he has done. His friends claim that he organized the raid on Friedrichshafen, on the Zeppelin sheds, which took place on November 21, 1914.

He did nothing of the kind. He was a junior officer, and had only recently joined the Service; he was not flying. What he did was to make reconnaissance preparatory to the raid. He kept observation on Lake Constance, and, it is said, even penetrated in disguise into Germany. At any rate, he gathered information for the raiders which was of the utmost value.

One of the challenges which he has thrown out is that, seeing that we were able to undertake that raid in November, 1914, why had it not been repeated?

**The Friedrichshafen Raid.**

The remark is quite pertinent, but the question has become one primarily for our Allies the French. A raid on Friedrichshafen must go over the French lines and be carried out in co-operation with the French aviators. There is no doubt, however, that when another raid is planned, Mr. Pemberton-Billing's services, as an observer, could be utilized as on the former occasion, if he is not too busy making speeches. He has not, therefore, proved his ability as an air-strategist up to now, but he freely tells us that he has "the names of the men ready" to undertake an aggressive air policy, and "to clear away the present muddle."

**A New Version.**

Full many a violet born to blush unseen  
And hide in distant places, dark damp  
And many a timely three-base hit  
I weep.  
Must waste its sweetness in a  
training camp.