



Eddie Rickenbacker during his days as auto race driver.

How Eddie Outguessed Death on Land, in Air

(Continued from page one.)

were was one valuable asset that could not be gained overnight by even the most hawk-eyed pilot. So sensible Eddie followed his veteran comrade.

Captain Hall had seen something indeed. A speedy German Albatross scout plane was approaching from the north. Its pilot seemed not to have seen the two Americans, for Hall had skilfully maneuvered to keep between the enemy and the sun—the one sure blind spot.

"I clung as closely to Hall as I could," Eddie recalls. "With his first dive I was right by his side. We had at least a thousand feet advantage over the German, and we were two to one numerically. He might out-dive our machines, for the Albatross was a famous diver, while our faster-climbing Nieuports had a droll little habit of shedding their fabric when plunged too furiously through the air. The German hadn't a chance to outfly us. His only salvation would be in a dive toward his own lines.

"These thoughts passed through my mind in a flash, and I instantly determined upon my tactics. While Hall went in for his attack I would keep my altitude and get a position the other side of the Albatross to cut off his retreat.

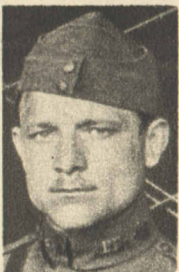
"No sooner had I altered my line of flight than the German pilot saw me leave the sun's rays. Hall already was half way to him when he stuck up his nose and began furiously climbing to the upper ceiling. I let him pass me and found myself on the other side just as Hall began firing. I doubt if the German had seen Hall's Nieuport at all. "Surprised by discovering this new antagonist, Hall, ahead of him, the Albatross immediately abandoned all idea of a battle and, banking around to the right, started for home, just as I had expected him to do. In a trice I was on his tail. Down, down we sped with throttles both full open. Hall was coming on somewhere in my rear. The German had no heart for evolutions or maneuvers. He was running like a scared rabbit. I was gaining upon him every instant and had my sights trained dead upon his seat before I fired my first shot.

"At 150 yards I pressed my triggers. The tracer bullets cut a streak of living fire into the rear of the Albatross' tail. Raising the nose of my airplane slightly, I lifted the fiery streak like a stream of water pouring from a garden hose. Gradually it settled into the pilot's seat. The swerving of the Albatross' course indicated that its rudder no longer was held by a directing hand. At 2,000 feet above the enemy's lines I pulled up my headlong dive and watched the enemy machine continuing on its course. Curving slightly to the left, the enemy circled a little to the south and the next minute crashed onto the ground just at the edge of the woods a mile inside their own lines. I had brought down my first enemy

airplane and had not been subjected to a single shot!"

Thus began the amazing string of victories that five months later made Eddie Rickenbacker America's ace of aces and the particular terror of every German aviator. Eddie had had a number of disappointments and several close shaves in aerial skirmishes before this first victory, but he was intelligent enough to profit by his mistakes and to appreciate his good luck in having survived them. After the war was over he observed:

"As I look back upon it now it seems that I had the rare good fortune to experience almost every variety of danger that can beset the war pilot before I ever fired a shot at an enemy from an airplane. . . . I can now most solemnly affirm that had I won my first victory during my first trips over the lines I believe I would never have survived a dozen combats. Every disappointment that came to me brought with it an enduring lesson that repaid me eventually tenfold."



(I. F. S. photo.) Raoul Lufbery

The story of Edward Vernon Rickenbacker is the story of a man who has tackled every problem that has ever confronted him with a mind like a steel trap and with a will that won't let him rest until he has triumphed over every obstacle.

"In boyhood, as in manhood, thought and action with Eddie were inseparable," says his mother. "I never saw his like. But his imagination—and he had aplenty—I'm sure it never soared to battles in the sky. . . . Yes, he was a very, very mischievous boy, but never a bad boy."

Eddie early developed a bent for carpentry and mechanics that was the wonder of his parents. "Neither his father nor I had the slightest turn for mechanics," his mother says. "There isn't a trace of it in the family, which came a generation ago to America from Switzerland. Yet it was only when busy with his hands making something that he stayed indoors and out of mischief."

Eddie Rickenbacker didn't like school. In 1904, when he was 14 and in the seventh grade, his father died. His mother now needed support, and it was Eddie's big chance to escape from school. He looked for a job.

His first position was assistant to a tombstone maker in his home town, Columbus, O. His second job was in a railroad repair shop.

But the climax of his youth

● Among sources drawn upon in preparation of this story is Rickenbacker's book "Fighting the Flying Circus," published by Frederick A. Stokes Co. of New York. Quotations by publisher's permission.

came when he saw his first automobile chugging uncertainly along a street in Columbus. Eddie was thrilled and grabbed his mother, who was walking with him. "That's the work for me, mother!"

Finally he got a job in a garage at \$4 a week. One day he got permission to drive an "electric" and sped as fast as it would go through his home neighborhood, paying no heed to open-mouthed spectators.

It was not more than a year before young Rickenbacker had schooled himself into being an expert mechanic, and among his other duties was the testing and selling of cars. Most of the testing was done on the automobile race track, of course, so Eddie naturally aspired to become a racing driver. After an apprenticeship of nearly three years he drove his first race in 1909.

He was a "front runner," and usually he led his winning races the whole way. Occasionally he had a blowout and rolled over or hit the fence, but it never unnerved him—and in 1914 he set the world's speed record by driving a Blitzen Benz on Daytona beach at 134 miles an hour.

This success, however, came—after many heart-breaking failures which took courage to surmount and seemed to be just so much time wasted. Years later the American ace of aces realized the character-building value of his early failures and wrote concerning his auto racing days:

"I did not possess the stability and mental equilibrium to combat the innumerable disappointments which accompanied the profession. So I deliberately started a systematic campaign to educate myself against sudden mental storms. . . . I could throw a monkey wrench or a crank farther than any one else when things went wrong.

"You can readily imagine it took concentration and courage, backed by trained will power, to overcome the tremendous disappointments of the speedway.

"The 'smile campaign,' as I called educating myself and others around me to smile in the face of defeat, demanded complete mental domination, but it proved very effective and highly successful."

In 1914 the World War began in Europe. Eddie Rickenbacker was much more interested in auto racing than in war, but he began to be involved in it in spite of himself long before America joined in. It was 1916, and Eddie had contracted with the Sunbeam Motor works, Wolverhampton, England, to build him a fleet of race cars. He was sailing the Atlantic on his first ocean voyage to see about the deal. At Liverpool he was barred by immigration officials because of his German name. In his own words:

"The sergeant roughed me into an adjoining cabin. My heart leaped with joy, for my two companions of the ocean voyage, who could ask more questions than a college professor on examination day, were present and could probably help me.

"Then the scene darkened. I was informed that I was before members of the British intelligence force. My two oceanic companions were detectives. . . . They dissected me and my clothing. My family tree was placed under the knife. The limbs and branches were grafted back into place. But down it came—this time they gave to me relatives and ancestors I never knew I possessed. They even pried off the heels of my shoes in quest of secret messages. My name was Rickenbacker. That made me a German spy. I suppose if it had been Elgin I'd have been a watchmaker. Then they decided that I was not a fit subject for the British Isles. I would have to remain aboard the ship and return to America."

The "smile campaign" had its back to the wall at that moment, but it prevailed and Eddie was finally permitted to go to Wolverhampton, accompanied by two men from Scotland Yard.

In the spring of 1917 America declared war on Germany, and Eddie, who had long been hankering to master the only vehicle in existence faster than a racing car, sought permission to

organize a flying unit with race drivers as pilots. He was turned down by the war department.

But General Pershing, newly appointed to command the A. E. F., knew Rickenbacker as an expert chauffeur and mechanic and summoned him to drive his personal car in France. Eddie accepted the offer, intending to get himself transferred into aviation at the earliest opportunity. He had taken his first airplane ride in the United States but a few days earlier, concerning which he told his mother: "For thrills motor racing isn't in it with the airplane."

Here it may be of interest to record Eddie Rickenbacker's fatalistic faith as he bade good-by to his worried mother at home in Columbus with the words: "Have no fear for me. I am as safe at the war front as I am in this old house. Might not its roof cave in and bury us all? Each waits the Master's call, and when my time comes I go."

A month later he was driving General Pershing's automobile in France. One day when taking one Major Dodd through northern France in the car they were accompanied for a time by another car containing Gen. William Mitchell, then newly appointed commander of American aviation forces. As General Mitchell remembered this meeting with Rickenbacker:

"Major Dodd had with him Captain Lewis and a tall, muscularly built young man with prominent features and big hands, driving the car. . . . As we were wending our way through the hills toward Neufchateau the engine in my motor car suddenly spluttered and stopped. My chauffeur got out, lifted the hood, and started looking for the trouble, but, although he worked over it a long time, he was unable to repair it.



(International Film Service photo.) Rickenbacker as General Pershing's chauffeur.

"Dodd suggested that his driver come up and see what he could do. So the tall, lithe young man dove into the engine and in a moment he had removed the whole carburetor assembly, which with the old twin six Packard engine was almost as big as the engine itself. He found that the needle valve had bent, and in less time than it takes to tell he cleaned it, put it back, and had the engine going. I had never seen a man do anything so quickly with a gasoline engine or who knew more about what he was doing.

"That day at luncheon I asked Dodd where he obtained his chauffeur. He was a champion automobile racing driver, Dodd told me, and had proved himself to be one of the best soldiers he had ever known. His name was Rickenbacker.

"From that time on this man

interested me greatly. Any job that he was given was done in the best possible manner. He was never late and was always well turned out, neat in his personal appearance, punctilious and gentlemanly. We gave him many missions to execute which required judgment and discretion, and, although in a strange environment, he kept doing better and better."

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A few weeks later Rickenbacker went to Mitchell at the American aviation headquarters in Paris, asking to be transferred into aviation and explaining what an advantage he would have because of his race driving experience. General Mitchell later wrote: "We were very short of good men on our staff at that time, but Rickenbacker's request so impressed me that I immediately sent him to the aviation school at Tours, where French instructors were teaching our men pending the organization of our own school at Issoudun."

Eddie worked hard at flying and learned it thoroughly and quickly, distinguishing himself from the first "in the upkeep of his engine, airplane, and armament." By the beginning of 1918 he had won his commission as lieutenant and was engineering officer of the school. The only real difficulty he had was in learning to shoot straight.

At the gunnery school in France Eddie's first lesson was firing at clay pigeons with a shotgun, hitting, as he says, "about three birds of every fifty released from the trap. One should be able to hit more birds than that with a broom. Frankly, I was worried. I didn't want to go up to the front and be shot down."

Presently he began to improve

and finally he was instructed to go up and fire at a large sleeve twelve feet long by three in diameter, towed by a 300-foot rope attached to a French plane.

Being unfamiliar with his gun sights, he took several futile dives at the target, missing it entirely, but at length he sent a bullet through the tow rope only a few feet from where it was fastened to the plane.

"I was abashed," said Rickenbacker later. "The target pilot landed and both of the Frenchmen in the plane rushed up to me, gesticulating and shouting."

"Finally, after they had cooled down, one of them walked over to the center of the field, picked up the target, brought it back, and in his best broken English said: 'It is dis which you should shoot at, and no ze plane—for I am ze pilot.'"

Probably the most exciting hour of a war pilot's life is when he faces the enemy for the first time. No matter how well or poorly he has done in flying and gunnery up to that time, he is as yet untried under fire. In his soul he still is uncertain as to whether he is really of ace caliber. When the enemy bullets actually begin to zip through his fuselage will he have the courage to fight back unflinchingly?

"I woke up one morning to find my dreams come true," wrote Eddie Rickenbacker about his first flight across the German lines. Maj. Raoul Lufbery, then the most famous of American flyers, who had seen almost four years of service with the French air service and in the Lafayette escadrille, announced at dawn that he would take Rickenbacker and Douglas Campbell on patrol across the enemy lines.

This actually was the first expedition across the lines by a made-in-America squadron. It

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