

BIOGRAPHY

CAPT. EDDIE RICKENBACKER

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AMERICA'S ACE OF ACES
PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1918

COMPLETE LIFE STORY by Damon Runyon and Walter Kiernan
illustrated with exclusive photographs of his spectacular career

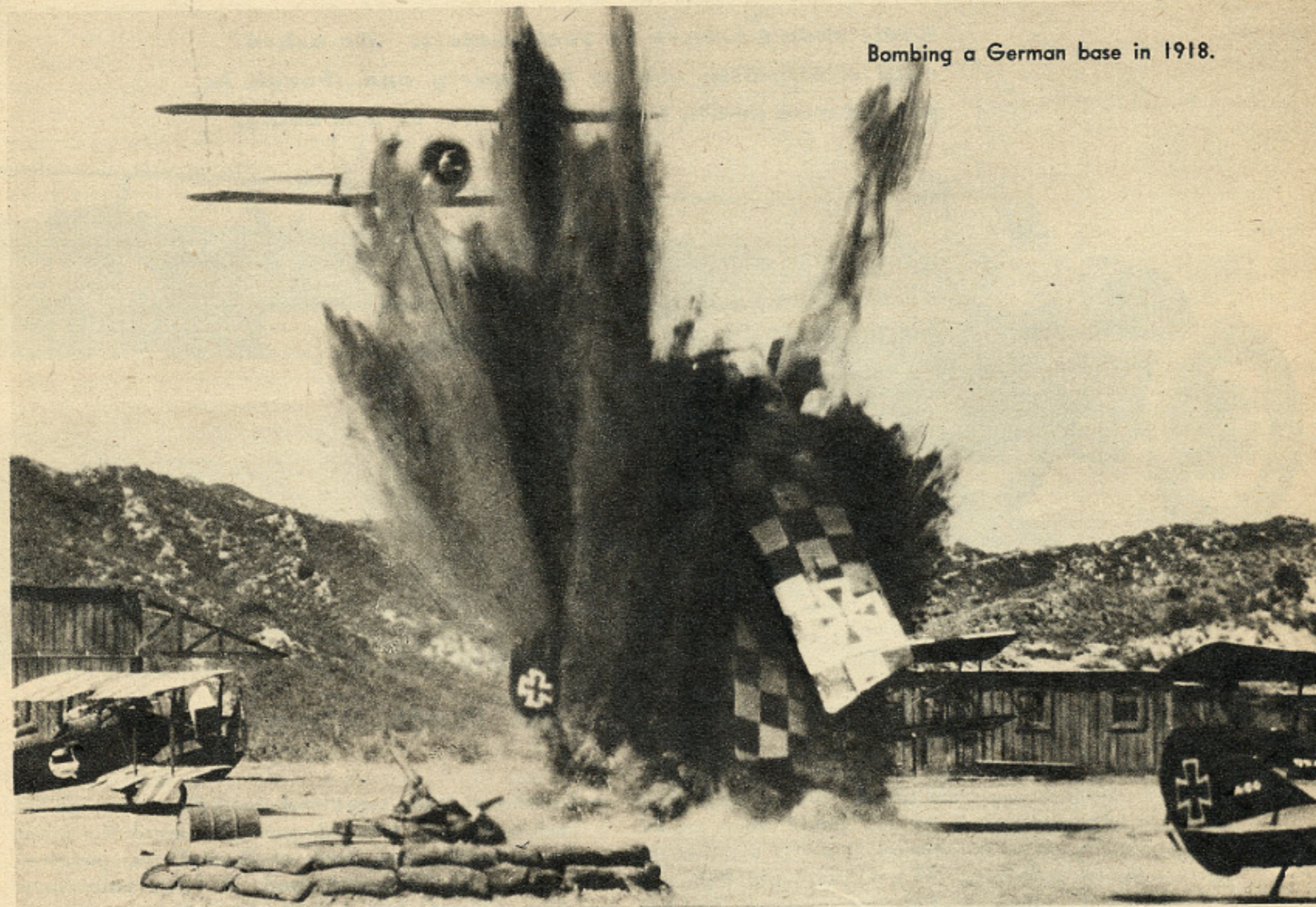


● In 1914, when anything above 20 miles on the road was either a miracle or pure recklessness or both, Rickenbacker skimmed a Blitzen Benz over the sands of Daytona Beach to a world's record of 134 miles per hour.

The Life Story of

CAPTAIN EDDIE RICKENBACKER

written by Damon Runyon and Walter Kiernan; photos by International News



Bombing a German base in 1918.

Preface "Each waits the Master's call, and when my turn comes I go," said Eddie Rickenbacker to his mother as he left for war in 1917. For a few weeks of 1942 it looked as though that call might have come for Rick far out over the blue Pacific. But those who know Rick best, who never had given up hope in his resourcefulness, courage and coolness, were justified on Saturday, November 14th, when the electrifying news was flashed from the Pacific that he had been found.

Missing since October 21st, Rick and all but one of the seven others who were flying with him in the army bomber when it ran out of gas, had been found.

To many it was a return from the grave—a watery grave—but not to those who had clung to the belief that he would come through. Somehow, Eddie the Indestructible had to come through again, smiling. He had faced danger hundreds of times before, he had had crashes before, and he had always escaped death.

And now, all America's hopes, her belief in him, was confirmed. And America celebrated, on that wonderful autumn

Saturday, in as fulsome a tribute as a hero ever had. People were electrified out of their worries, and shouted happily to strangers. It seemed that nothing except the surrender of Hitler could have cheered them more as the news went rippling along their tongues—Eddie Rickenbacker has been found alive!

Captain Edward V. Rickenbacker, who has a higher rank, but prefers to be called Captain, who is Eddie to his friends, or perhaps "Rick," fulfills all the specifications for a genuine hero. The characteristic of genuine heroism is its persistence. One brave deed makes no hero. Rick's life, from boyhood on, is studded with brave deeds.

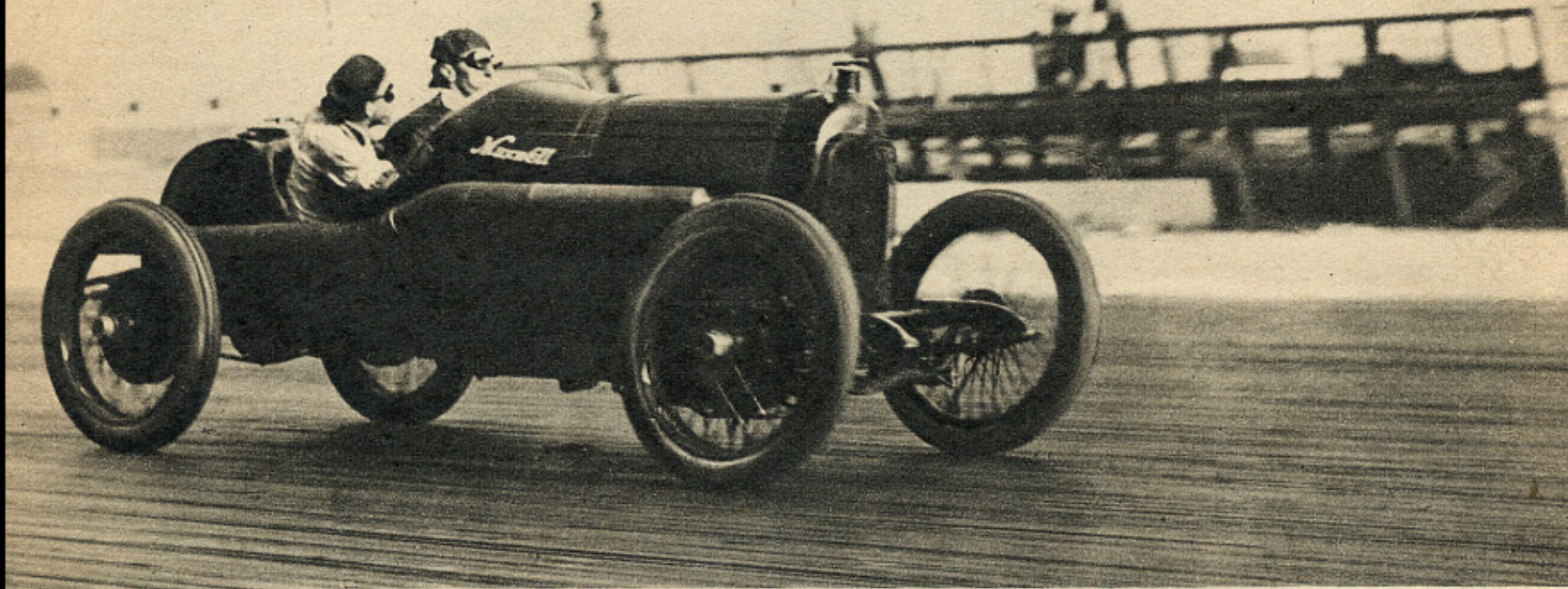
The story of his life and achievements is far less publicized than it should be; he has performed services for his country that are still unacknowledged. The record of his amazing foresight, his accurate prophecies for the future, deserve the widest circulation. Hence this book, written by men whom he honored with his confidence, and illustrated with the most complete collection of pictures of Rickenbacker and his fabulous career that has ever been assembled.

Charles D. Saxon, Editor • Albert Delacorte, Executive Editor • A. Ajay, Art Editor

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RICKENBACKER— King of the Dirt Track

Eddie didn't believe in recklessness. He asked only a fifty-fifty chance for safety and though he played with death, Eddie knew what he was doing.



Rick became a race driver at nineteen, but not for thrills or glory. He wanted to test engines and perfect cars.

● "My father died when I was twelve years old. The night he passed I changed from a boy to a man." Those are the words in which one of the greatest figures in aviation, the foremost American flying ace of the First World War, himself once described the start of his amazing career.

You who have a twelve-year-old boy—look at him now. Picture him laboring at hard, tough work for twelve hours a night, for \$3.50 a week, walking four miles to save carfare.

Eddie Rickenbacker's childhood ended with his father's death. One day he was a schoolboy. The next, gangling and immature, he was a laborer. Rick was born in Columbus, Ohio, on October 8, 1890, the third eldest of seven children whose parents were German-Swiss. (The Rickenbacker name was originally spelled Richenbacher. Eddie changed it because it proved embarrassing to him when he went to England, in 1916, to inspect some special racing jobs.)

"I didn't have to be told what we were up against," he wrote. "The day after my father's funeral I didn't go to school—I went to work."

Posing as fourteen years old—thin, frail looking—Eddie got a job at the Columbus Glass Company, carrying new-made bottles from the white-hot furnace. His back ached. His hands burned. But he stuck to it—twelve hours a night, six nights a week, he worked, walking both ways to and from the plant, turning over his \$3.50 intact to his mother.

Then he heard of a better paying—and tougher—job. Man-of-all-work at the Columbus Foundry, at a dollar a day. Six whole dollars for lugging and tugging and lifting

and straining! It was man's work, but Rick was a tough lad.

Then opportunity knocked again. Rick heard of a job in a shoe factory—putting heels on shoes. It was piecework and he took it. Work, work, work . . . faster, faster, faster . . . Eight dollars! Nine dollars! Ten dollars a week!

Rick hadn't found his niche, then. He thought possibly it lay in the field of art. Later he was to discover that those hands were made for mechanical work. Anyway, an opportunity came to see what he could do with those hands. A Columbus monumental works needed a strong boy. That was Eddie. He got the job and he got free training in carving and lettering slabs of marble and blocks of granite.

Rick never was outwardly sentimental. But there stands in Columbus in a churchyard today a shaft he chiseled and lettered in memory of his father—a boy's tribute to the dad he missed.

Sometimes one of those asthmatic cars, the marvels of that first decade of a new century, would wheeze past the monumental works; and Eddie, at work in the yard, would halt his carving until the bucking, snorting vehicle had passed out of sight. He sniffed the raw gas, the kerosene, the benzene fumes trailing behind those early horseless carriages and it was perfume to his nostrils.

For the first time since he had become the man of the family in 1902, he made a change that brought in less money. That was the day he finally yielded to an inner urging, laid down his chisel and mallet for the last time and picked up the screwdriver and the spanner wrench of an auto mechanic.

Eddie Rickenbacker, the racing driver, was born that day. Eddie Rickenbacker, the World War ace, was born that day.

Eddie Rickenbacker, the automobile manufacturer, the plane manufacturer, the air transportation executive, the man who plumped up and down the land for more and more peacetime planes and pilots so that there might be more wartime planes and pilots, America's immortal sky hero, was born that day.

Mechanics was his true love, and from his fifteenth birthday on he never again was far from the sight and sound of a motor. Most men have one successful career. Some have more than one. Eddie Rickenbacker has several.

The Columbus garage where he put in those next three years sheltered a Waverly Electric, a one-cylinder Oldsmobile and a steam Locomobile. When the boss was absent, Eddie learned to drive them. During those years, too, he became an expert mechanic and also a riding mechanic. That was the beginning of his automobile career.

He wangled a job in the Frayer-Miller auto factory and its owner, Lee Frayer, took a fancy to him. Eventually, when he learned that Eddie was taking a correspondence school course in engineering, Frayer moved him into the engineering department. Then, in 1906, Eddie was first seen on the dust-covered track where he is now a fabulous personality. In that year he rode with Frayer in the Vanderbilt Cup Race on Long Island.

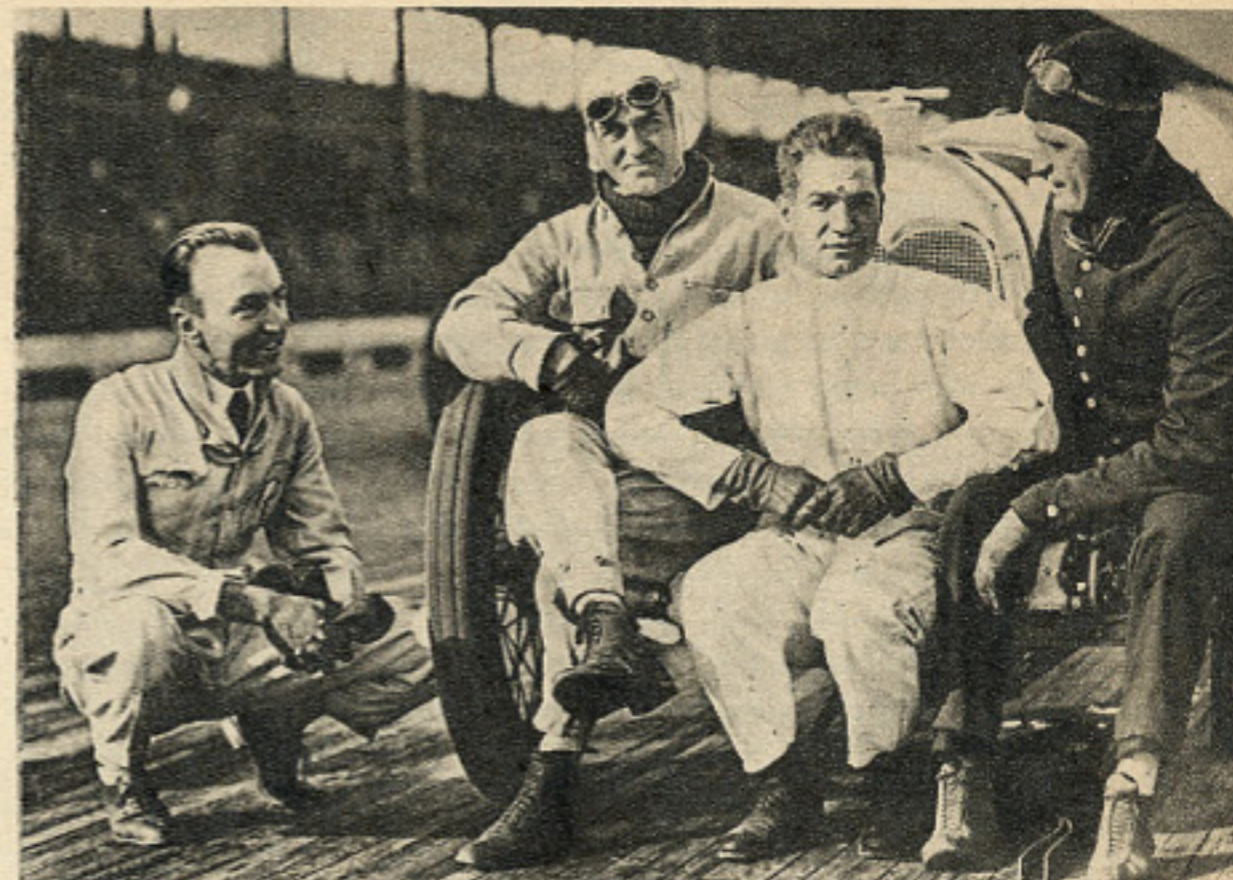
Frayer took Rickenbacker with him to the Columbus Buggy Company, which was just breaking into the auto game. Presently, young Rickenbacker was selling cars by showing how fast they could travel; the main asset in those days being speed. He drove in county fairs which used to feature auto races. He placed first in eight races in Omaha, in 1910. In 1911, Frayer had him as a relief driver in the 500-mile race at Indianapolis—a contest in which the team failed to place.

A full-fledged racing driver at nineteen, Eddie was taking his chance with the foremost drivers of the day—skidding dangerously on the turns, overturning, crashing through a fence, and somehow always coming out of it. The track was in his blood. He chucked his job and tied up with the racing game. He was with the Firestone, Maxwell and Duesenberg racing teams, all famous in their time, and he worked up until he was making as high as \$35,000 a year on his own at driving.

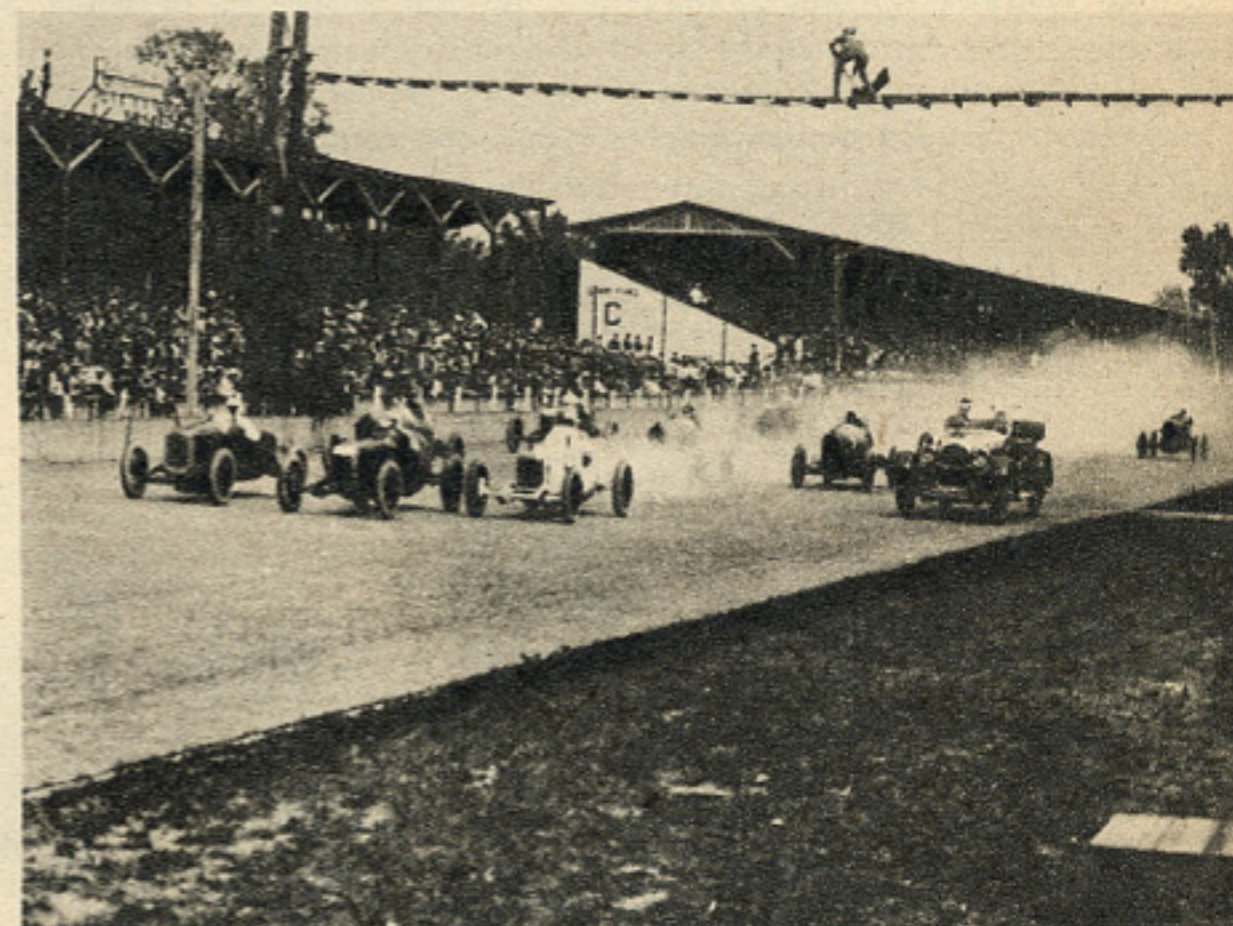
In 1914, when anything above twenty miles per hour on the road was either a miracle or pure recklessness, or both, Rick was pushing a Blitzen Benz over the sands of Daytona Beach to a world's record of one hundred and thirty-four miles an hour. Yet Eddie still claims he has never been reckless in his entire career. Remember that.

From his first race in 1909 until 1917, when he ended that career, he was known as a "front runner." This habit of getting out in front from the moment the flag dropped, and staying there as long as his car held together, made him a great crowd-pleaser. And the qualities which made him one of the youngest idols of the track were about to carry him on to far greater feats of daring in a far more significant arena of action.

This was 1916, remember. In those days—until the German government finally overplayed its hand and plunged the United States into Europe's cauldron of war—there was no such close relationship between this country and England as preceded the present conflict. In fact, almost as many indignant protests over interference with American shipping had been made to London as to Berlin.



Eddie's most famous track rivals were Dario Resta and Ralph De Palma, shown with Rick before the start of the Grand American Auto Race in Chicago in October, 1916.



Racing cars were wired together with a prayer in the early days (above). Below: Eddie and his mechanic at the wheel of one of Rickenbacker's first cars, a Maxwell.



The result was that the cautious British properly kept a watch on Americans traveling to London in 1916-1917. And particularly on any professed American who bore a German-sounding name. "Richenbacher" was certainly a German-sounding name. Which accounts for Rick's very brief but annoying career as a spy suspect.

He had no sooner stepped aboard a liner for England—where he was going to buy racing cars—than he was aware he was being watched by two well-dressed British business men. Wherever he moved about the ship, they never were far away. He was not long ashore before he had been invited to step into a police station for an inspection of his credentials.

Rick found that it was no ordinary inspection, either, but a thorough oral going-over. Why was he in England? Why at this particular time? Where was he born? Was he sure of it? How long did he intend to stay in England? Who did he know there?

By personally vouching for him, an old friend of his family—an official of the Sunbeam Automobile Company—finally got him out of the official clutches. Then Rick learned that, although there was nothing more than a general suspicion against him, he was suspected of being a spy. Assuming the affair had been cleared up to the satisfaction of all concerned, he went about his business.

To his amazement, however, the return voyage was the same sort of cat-and-mouse game the trip to England had been. Everywhere Rick went, there went the British Intelligence Officer—for all the world like Mary's Little Lamb. As many times as Rick tried to corner him to find out what it was all about, however, the man slipped away.

Arriving back in the United States in April, 1917—the month in which we entered the war—Rick was in New York briefly. So was the Intelligence Agent. Rick went to Cleveland. So did his shadow. Rick went home to Columbus. The Britisher stood across the street from his house. Dayton and Chicago and points west—everywhere, it was the same.

It got on Rick's nerves. Walking along a Los Angeles street, he could glimpse in store windows the reflection of the British Agent just behind him. He stopped short, swung around, and the Agent was on top of him. This time, there could be no ducking. But strangely enough, the Agent made no attempt to duck. He came on, smiling.

Rick scowled as Rick could when he was really angry. "When is your government going to learn that I'm not the Crown Prince of Germany?" he demanded grimly. But the Agent only grinned.

"I was just about to tell you," he said. "My government is now satisfied that you are all right. Thank you for the ocean voyage and the wonderful trip across your continent." He bowed politely, swung on his heel, and moved off.

There are a few phases of war that delight anybody. One phase of the present war that delights Eddie Rickenbacker, however, is that this major stupidity of World War Number One, is not being repeated—the popular custom of suspecting every American with a Germanic name of being a Teutonic devotee.

Rick can remember his own troubles on that score—more annoying troubles than many Americans of German ancestry had to put up with. And he is happy that, in this war, loyalties are far more inclined to be accepted on a basis of performance than on a basis of name.



When war came in 1917, Rick tried to organize race drivers into a super flying unit.



Sgt. Rickenbacker as General Pershing's chauffeur.

On his arrival in New York, he found he was to sail as a chauffeur with the rank of Sergeant. Aboard ship Eddie learned two things; that he was to drive for General John J. Pershing and that Sergeants didn't rate very fancy accommodations. So Rick went to the Commanding Officer and asked to be promoted to Sergeant First Class.

The Commanding Officer said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute! You just got in the Army. What makes you think you should be promoted?"

"I don't know," Eddie said, "but the First Class Sergeants get better accommodations."

Sergeant Rickenbacker was promoted at sea.

Despite a number of fictional legends to the contrary, Rick drove General Pershing exactly once. After that experience, he and the General parted by mutual consent. Brave soldier that he was, Pershing thought there was less hazard in enemy action than in Eddie's driving. And Rick hungered to get into the Air Service. He got there—through the back door. They made him chief engineer of the Issoudon Flying School.

He did well. He did so well that he was frozen in the job. His superiors wouldn't hear of him going into flying himself (although that had been their promise). They wanted to keep him right there, tinkering with engines. So Eddie, with full confidence in the abilities of the men under him, became ill. Terribly, terribly "ill." They had to take him to a hospital. He never has said what illness he faked; but it kept him away from that school for several weeks.

When he got back, he remarked innocently on how well the school had gotten on without him. He said it appeared

In 1914, rifles were the only anti-aircraft defense.





● Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker called the turn of aviation, military and commercial, right up to the moment. Here's what he predicts for the future:

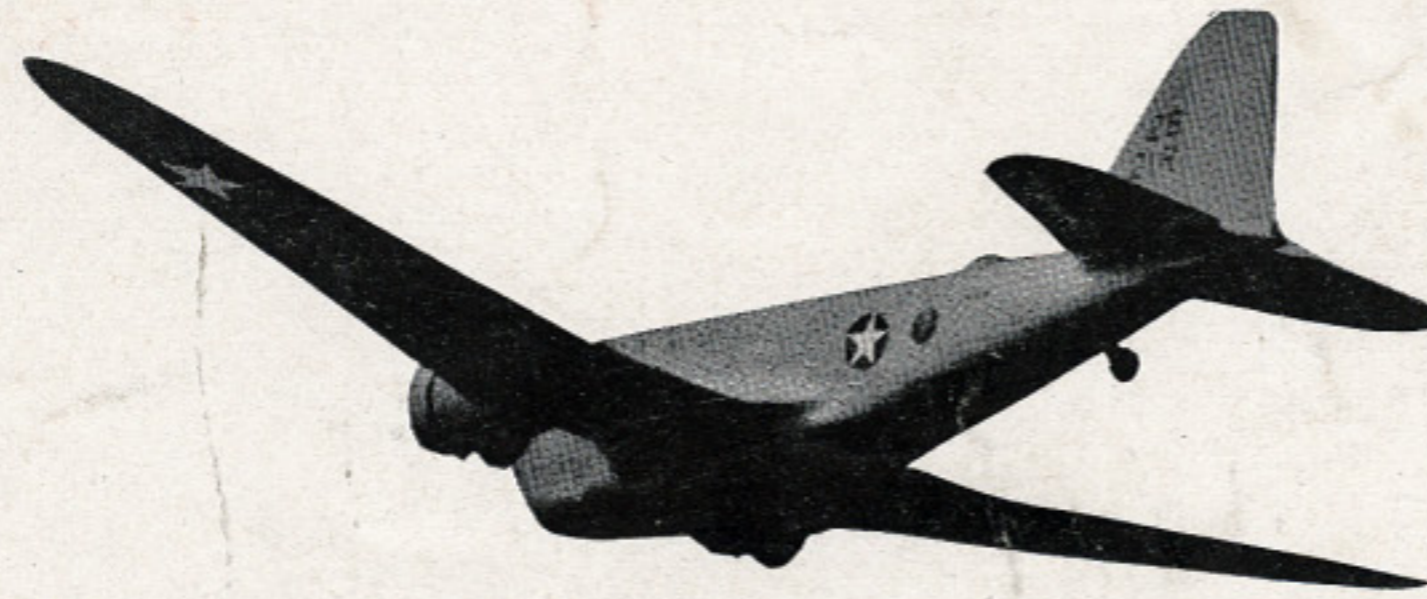
"Twenty-five years is but a moment when one looks backward; an eternity ahead. In this time we have gone from the chicken-coop to the scientific air-liner; from the era of the hack saw and the bale of wire to a machine with almost the precision of a watch. In my opinion, all the accomplishments of the last twenty-five years will pale into insignificance in the next twenty-five.

"We will fly 800 to 1000 miles per hour by 1960 in giant air birds which will pick up freight and passengers in New York and deposit them in London by mid-afternoon.

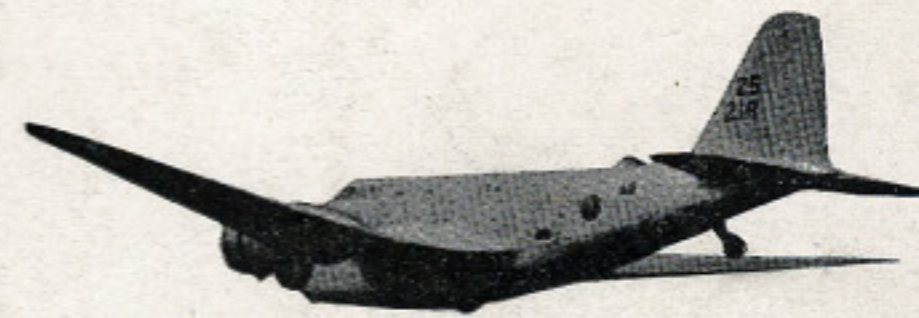
"We will have a great era of international travel when the man who could say that he hadn't been abroad either couldn't get away for a few hours or was hopelessly earth-bound.

"You will convert your plane, a deadly instrument of war, to the use of peace. With the aid of the commercial air lines, the air transport command of the army air force is already operating many thousands of miles of air-ways to the four corners of the globe.

"But that's just a starter. Every town on the face of the globe will have air-transportation in the post-war world. You will determine the future of American aviation because you will have a vital part of it. You'll have a stake in it."



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will keep them
FLYING



so America's Aces can
trump the Axis

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