



Our Old Bookcase, Oct. 19, 2017 Eddie Rickenbacker Flying Ace of Aces, A Century ago!

Photo caption: Edward Vernon Rickenbacker, Flying Ace of Aces during World War I, wearing the highest award given by its military men by the United States, his Congressional Medal of Honor. Photograph Credit: U.S. Army Air Force.

OUR OLD BOOK CASE

By Joyce L. Alig, President, Mercer County Historical Society

Edward Vernon Rickenbacker, better known as Eddie Rickenbacker, lived an exiting life, during his years between 1890 and 1973. Being a native of Columbus, Ohio, Eddie did not have an easy life at the turn of the Century. He was twelve years old when his father died, leaving his wife and seven children. Eddie worked nights in a factory to help with expenses at home. Eddie was like a lot of young boys as he was fascinated by motors. As a young man, Eddie took correspondence courses in engineering and drafting. By the time that Eddie was 20 years old in 1910, people were driving automobiles.

Eddie wanted to drive automobiles and Eddie wanted to drive fast! With his knowledge of motors, he had a natural talent to become involved in automobile races. Eddie's skill not only contributed to his winning automobile races in the United States, but also in Europe. That skill stayed with him the rest of his life.

While people were driving automobiles on the ground, the dreamers were looking to flying airplanes. A Century Ago, when Eddie turned 27 in 1917, he had a dream to not only to fly his own airplane, but also to have a squadron of flyers, who were also automobile racers. If automobile racing was exciting, just imagine how exciting it would be to race airplanes! Eddie joined the Army as a Sergeant-Driver for General John J. Pershing's staff. It was not long before Eddie requested to transfer to the Air Service. Eddie was sent to "Tours in France," for his first flight training in August 1917.

The hat-in-the-Ring Squadron was the first American-trained air unit to go into action against the enemy. Edward Rickenbacker was named by Gen. William Mitchell to be Chief Engineering Officer of the fledgling Army Air Corps. Eddie assumed command of the 94th Hat-in-the-Ring squadron in September, at the peak of the St. Mihiel offensive. The next day, Eddie shot down two German planes, as he had also challenged his fellow pilots to compete as a team against all of the other squadrons of the American Service. The Hat-in-the-Ring Squadron served longer in combat than any other air service squadron. It

was credited with shooting down the first and last German airplanes shot down by the American Air Service. The Squadron shot down 69 planes. During Eddie's actual combat flying, Eddie shot down twenty-two German planes and four observation balloons, in his effort to protect the United States Citizens from the Enemy.

Eddie Rickenbacker returned to Columbus to a hero's welcome after World War I. Eddie went on to become a major businessman with Eastern Air Lines. During World War II, Eddie was making an inspection tour of World War II bases in the Pacific, and the B-17, in which he was riding, had to make a crash landing in the ocean, 12 hours out from Honolulu. Within minutes the plane sank and its eight passengers and crewman took to the rubber rafts. For twenty-two days, Eddie gave orders with rationing rain water and food they caught, before they were rescued. The survivors owed Eddie their lives!

Most of you Senior Citizens read Al Capp's comic strip, "*Dogpatch*," when you were younger. Capp honored Eddie Rickenbacker by creating a character, known as "*Eddie Rickettyback, the owner of Dogpatch Airlines*." Al Capp wrote and drew the comic strip about "*Dogpatch*" from 1934 until 1977. I checked the Internet about Al Capp and "*Dogpatch*," and laughed to myself as I saw Al Capp's long list of "*Dogpatch Characters*," and their descriptions.

Eddie Rickenbacker finally retired at his death in 1973. Eddie Rickenbacker believed in the United States ethic of work and high standards. Eddie dedicated his work in protecting American Citizens and their Freedom for a life of Democracy. Yes, Eddie Rickenbacker was truly an American Hero! A Biography of Edward Vernon Rickenbacher is a great inspirational history book to read!

On Sunday afternoon, October 22, 2017, 1:00 – 4:00, visit the World War I Military Exhibit hosted by the Museum of the Soldier from Portland, Indiana, at the Mercer County Historical Museum, Celina.

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