



Edward “Eddie” Rickenbacker

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

Introduction

Born in Columbus, Ohio, to German-speaking Swiss immigrants, Edward Rickenbacker (1890-1973) only completed grade seven of school before dropping out to help provide for his mother after the untimely death of his father. Wanting to work with automobiles, Rickenbacker learned as much as he could about engineering before ultimately becoming an accomplished racecar driver. Rickenbacker drove in the Indianapolis 500 four times, but only finished once (1914). When war was declared on Germany in 1917, Rickenbacker enlisted in the Army with ambitions to become a pilot. He initially wanted to recruit a squad of racecar drivers as fighter pilots due to their familiarity to tight spaces and high speed, but the idea was rejected. Through hard work and perseverance, Rickenbacker was eventually assigned to the 94th Aero Squadron where he would go on to record 26 confirmed kills, earning him the status of “ace” and making him the most successful American fighter pilot during World War I. Rickenbacker earned several medals during his time, including a belated Medal of Honor that was awarded in 1931.

Important Dates

- October 3, 1890: Edward Rickenbacker is born in Columbus, Ohio.
- 1912: Rickenbacker races for the first time in the Indianapolis 500.
- 1917: Rickenbacker joins the United States Army.
- April 29, 1918: Rickenbacker shoots down his first plane.
- October 30, 1918: Rickenbacker records his 26th confirmed aerial victory.
- 1920: Rickenbacker starts his own motor company. The business ultimately fails years later.
- 1922: Rickenbacker marries Adelaide Frost Durant.

Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following terms in combination (as an “all” word search), proximity or as phrases: Ed, Eddie, Edward, Rickenbacker, ace, pilot, 94th Aero Squadron, driver, race, captain, automobile.
- Search newspapers in all states, not just Ohio.
- During World War I, Rickenbacker wanted to make his name sound less German. To find articles about him prior to the war, try searching for “Rickenbacher.”

Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- [“Omaha Driver Wins 300-Mile Race at Home”](#) *Omaha Daily Bee* (Omaha, NE), July 6, 1915, Image 1-2, col. 1, 3-4.
- [“A Born Hero”](#) *New-York Tribune* (New York, NY), May 2, 1918, Image 17, col. 2.
- [“Cite Rickenbacker Seventh Time For U.S. Valor Medal”](#) *Evening World* (New York, NY), November 5, 1918, Image 3, col. 1
- [“Rickenbacker and the Gods”](#) *New-York Tribune* (New York, NY), March 9, 1919, Image 67, col. 2-6.
- [“Rickenbacker to Judge Indianapolis Auto Race”](#) *Washington Herald* (Washington, D.C.), May 11, 1919, Image 26, col. 1-5.
- [“Dorothy” \(comic strip\)](#) *Evening World* (New York, NY), June 25, 1919, Image 24.