**Eddie Rickenbacker 1890-1973**

Eddie Rickenbacker (1890-1973) was America's top-scoring [fighter pilot](http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/aces.htm) of World War One, with 26 victories (including four [observation balloons](http://www.firstworldwar.com/atoz/balloons.htm)).

Rickenbacker, then one of the world's top racing car drivers, immediately enlisted with the U.S. Army upon [America's entrance into the war](http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/usawardeclaration.htm) in April 1917.  Consequently he found himself a driver with U.S. Commander-in-Chief General [John 'Black Jack' Pershing's](http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/pershing.htm) staff in France.

Fortunately for Rickenbacker he met with U.S. air pioneer [Billy Mitchell](http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/mitchell.htm) (then a Colonel), which ended with the latter arranging for Rickenbacker to transfer to the U.S. air service in August 1917.

Technically too old to fly with the air service Rickenbacker was nevertheless given permission to join the 94th Aero Pursuit Squadron in March 1918.  With under nine months to pass until the [armistice](http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/armistice.htm) Rickenbacker lost no time in attaining for himself a reputation as a fearsome air ace: he earned his fifth (qualifying) victory on 30 May.

By the close of the war Rickenbacker had collected a set of 26 'kills', making him America's most successful fighter pilot of the war.  His notable attack upon no fewer than seven German aircraft on 25 September 1918, during which he shot down two, subsequently gained him the U.S. Medal of Honor (1930).

With the end of the war Rickenbacker elected to leave the air service.  He established his own automotive company before, in 1935, becoming General Manager of Eastern Airlines.

The advent of World War Two brought Rickenbacker renewed service, this time as Representative to the Secretary of War in the survey of aircraft installations.  After the war he returned to his former position at Eastern Airlines.

Rickenbacker's life was nothing if not frenetic; aside from his various wartime and civil aviation roles he also owned and operated the Indianapolis Speedway and survived a perilous lost at sea experience.

He died in 1973, the same year he published *Fighting the Flying Circus*.