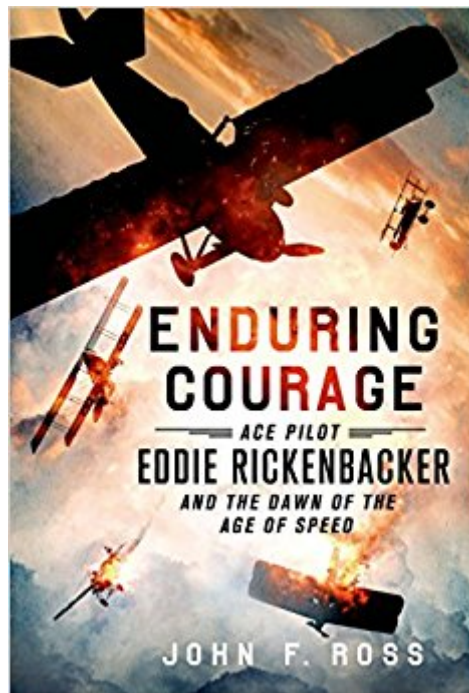




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# Enduring Courage: Ace Pilot Eddie Rickenbacker And The Dawn Of The Age Of Speed



## Synopsis

The sensational true story of Eddie Rickenbacker, America's greatest flying ace. At the turn of the twentieth century two new technologies—the car and airplane—took the nation's imagination by storm as they burst, like comets, into American life. The brave souls that leaped into these dangerous contraptions and pushed them to unexplored extremes became new American heroes: the race car driver and the flying ace. No individual did more to create and intensify these raw new roles than the tall, gangly Eddie Rickenbacker, who defied death over and over with such courage and pluck that a generation of Americans came to know his face better than the president's. The son of poor, German-speaking Swiss immigrants in Columbus, Ohio, Rickenbacker overcame the specter of his father's violent death, a debilitating handicap, and, later, accusations of being a German spy, to become the American military ace of aces in World War I and a Medal of Honor recipient. He and his high-spirited, all-too-short-lived pilot comrades, created a new kind of aviation warfare, as they pushed their machines to the edge of destruction—and often over it—without parachutes, radios, or radar. *Enduring Courage* is the electrifying story of the beginning of America's love affair with speed—and how one man above all the rest showed a nation the way forward. No simple daredevil, he was an innovator on the racetrack, a skilled aerial dualist and squadron commander, and founder of Eastern Air Lines. Decades after his heroics against the Red Baron's Flying Circus, he again showed a war-weary nation what it took to survive against nearly insurmountable odds when he and seven others endured a harrowing three-week ordeal adrift without food or water in the Pacific during World War II. For the first time, *Enduring Courage* peels back the layers of hero to reveal the man himself. With impeccable research and a gripping narrative, John F. Ross tells the unforgettable story of a man who pushed the limits of speed, endurance and courage and emerged as an American legend.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** Once upon a time, aviator Eddie Rickenbacker was the most famous man in America, the kind of hero that songs were written about and schoolchildren dreamed of emulating. In this entertaining biography, historian Ross (War on the Run, 2009) returns to the dawn of the twentieth century, when cars and aircraft burst onto the scene. Aviation aficionados and war buffs will expect Ross to focus on Rickenbacker's WWI flying-ace achievements; instead, he takes a long look at the aviator's early success in the automotive field as both a brilliant mechanic ("Put simply, engines have always talked to me," Rickenbacker explained) and a daring race-car driver. Drawing heavily on his subject's interviews and writings, while also noting areas of his personal life that Rickenbacker publicly fabricated (most notably his father's life and death), Ross peppers the text with quotes that place readers right alongside the ace through nearly every moment of his life. Obviously this is exciting material to work with—after all, Rickenbacker was a man who drove in the first Indy 500 and dueled with the Red Baron's flying circus—but Ross is never fawning in this thoroughly enjoyable and downright rollicking read. --Colleen Mondor --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"Fast-paced...With just the right amount of technical detail, Mr. Ross evocatively captures the excitement of the racetrack, where the driver had to contend with 'gumbo'-thick clouds of dust and gravel thrown up by the wheels... Mr. Ross's book does an excellent job portraying how the reality of air combat differed from the romantic notions, advanced at the time, of a noble contest between modern knights in the sky." —Wall Street Journal  
"Ross is at his best when he writes about Rickenbacker grappling with risk and adversity...the book is a riveting account of the dawn of the age of speed." —Dallas Morning News  
"A brisk and informing read... [Ross'] engaging new book, surveying the risky realms of racing and air wars, reminds the reader how fast the world changes -- and how much remains the same..."

Rickenbacker's life provides ample grist for thrilling narrative (and gruesome detail). Yet serving the good purposes of history, Mr. Ross artfully strikes resonances between eras...Portraying the ultimate daredevil in an age of daredevilry, Mr. Ross wrings out as much excitement as the material holds in describing Rickenbacker's violent worlds." —Washington Times  
"[A]

lively and engaging portrait of Rickenbacker...Ross has a real gift for sitting the reader beside "Fast Eddie" as he thunders down the straightaway of a 1913 racetrack or leans forward in the cockpit of a Nieuport 28 climbing toward a flight of Fokkers...an admiring biography...Enduring Courage offers a compelling portrait of an American hero

— Tom Crouch, Washington Independent Review Of Books

“The dawn of the 20th century saw the advent of two world-changing technologies: automobiles and airplanes. With these came new breeds of risk takers and heroes--the racecar driver and the fighter pilot. Eddie Rickenbacker was both... Rickenbacker clearly had the "right stuff" for this brave new world. But what was the right stuff circa 1918? Biographer John F. Ross grapples with this and other questions in his new book... Many books have been written about Rickenbacker... Ross writes about many of the exploits described in those works, but he also mines primary sources, including thousands of pages of transcribed interviews with Rickenbacker, to get beneath what he calls "the veneer of untouchable hero."

— NationalGeographic.com

“In 1941, he suffered serious injuries and narrowly escaped death in a devastating aircraft crash near Atlanta. ... Following his recovery, Rickenbacker was selected by Secretary of War Henry Stimson to transport and personally deliver a reprimand to General Douglas MacArthur, then supreme commander of the Southwest Pacific Area, headquartered in New Guinea.... The B-17D Flying Fortress ferrying Rickenbacker got lost in the Pacific and was forced to ditch at sea. Together with the rest of the crew, Rickenbacker spent 24 harrowing days adrift on a life raft without food or water. The story of his survival and rescue is the most gripping part of Enduring Courage. Nowadays, of course, ... we don't have national heroes remotely like Eddie Rickenbacker."

— The Weekly Standard

“Energetic... Exciting... Ross sweeps readers along in Rickenbacker's thrilling tale."

— Kirkus

“Entertaining... Ross peppers the text with quotes that place readers right alongside the ace through nearly every moment of his life. Obviously this is exciting material to work with--after all, Rickenbacker was a man who drove in the first Indy 500 and dueled with the Red Baron's flying circus--but Ross is never fawning in this thoroughly enjoyable and downright rollicking read."

— Booklist, starred review

“Ross has a knack for exciting, visual narrative, and the life-defining moments of race and dogfight... A highly entertaining portrait, which reveres its subject as a hero defined by his high-speed feats."

— Publishers Weekly

“A lively and engaging portrait of Rickenbacker....a compelling portrait of an American hero."

— Washington Independent Review of Books

“[Eddie Rickenbacker's] life has been recounted in his own autobiographies and by many other authors, yet arguably none get the telling more right than John F. Ross in his exhaustively researched and

exquisitely written biography, *Enduring Courage*.  
Magazine  
“John Ross is that rare soul who writes narrative history with the verve and timing of an accomplished novelist. *Enduring Courage*--a heroic portrait of the aviator ace Eddie Rickenbacker of Ohio--is a bona fide page turner. The Indianapolis race car scenes and World War I dogfights ripple with excitement. I couldn't put it down.”  
Douglas Brinkley, bestselling author, Professor of History at Rice University, and historian for CBS News  
“Daring, beautiful, and masterfully told, *Enduring Courage* puts you shoulder-to-shoulder with one of the great American spirits of all-time, Eddie Rickenbacker, who does in each chapter what the rest of us dream to do with our lives.”  
Robert Kurson, New York Times bestselling author of *Shadow Divers*  
“Whether it's the Indianapolis 500, a World War I dogfight, or a struggle for survival on a life raft in the Pacific, John Ross puts you there in the midst of the turbulent, often unbelievable life of Eddie Rickenbacker--the irascible, death-defying hero who helped set the dizzying pace of our modern, machine-driven age. As Ross says in the Introduction to *Enduring Courage*, 'Hold onto your seats.’”  
Nathaniel Philbrick, New York Times bestselling author of *In the Heart of the Sea* and *Bunker Hill*  
“To say *Enduring Courage* is inspiring is totally inadequate praise. It is also gripping, electrifying, insightful--and full of new information about a legendary American hero. I have seldom been so glad to read a book.”  
Thomas Fleming, New York Times bestselling author of *Conquerors of the Sky*  
“Before Charles Lindbergh, before Chuck Yeager, before Neil Armstrong, there was Eddie Rickenbacker, American aviation's first mega-celebrity. In *Enduring Courage*, John F. Ross gives readers a brilliant and compelling biography of a man who led a remarkable life, illuminating as well a more innocent and hopeful period in American history, when the common man could make for himself a very uncommon future. This is an unforgettable treasure of a book.”  
Dr. Richard P. Hallion, former U.S. Air Force Historian and author  
“Richly detailed and dramatically told, *Enduring Courage* helps us perfectly understand how Eddie Rickenbacker became one of our greatest--if not THE greatest--aviation heroes of all time. Ross's meticulous research skillfully guides this real-life tale to a magnificent, completely satisfying landing.”  
Christina Olds, bestselling author of *Fighter Pilot*

Man, what a life this guy had. He had more than nine lives for sure and you will understand why when you finish reading this book. I purchased this book because I wanted to learn about America's first Ace of Aces and what made him so good. Just about every biography starts off with the mandatory beginning of explaining the person's childhood which I always find a little boring and this

book is no exception. But once you get through that and into how he started his race car days there is not a dull moment in the book or in his amazing life. I especially ordered this book so that I could learn more about his crash in the Pacific during WWII and how he set the survival at sea record for a little while until another now famous Louis Zamperini surpassed it just a little while later in the war. The number one thing that I learned from this book was that Rickenbacker was not just a wild crazy former race car driver but also a natural born leader. My favorite high-light from the book was: Throughout history the best-prepared fighters in all of combat's endlessly changing forms have faltered, stumbled, and failed without strong leadership. I highly recommend this book.

I am giving this book three stars. Maybe it should be four but while the book was good and a well handled treatment of Rickenbacker I was left with the feeling that there was something missing. I do not know what it was but there was a lacking. I read this book on the recommendation of a GR friend and for that recommendation I am grateful. Maybe in the course of writing this review and reflecting on the book I will discover the answer to my query. Now what I did enjoy in this book is discovering that before Rickenbacker was a flyer he was a race car driver of significance. In fact what was most enjoyable about this book was reading about the advent of both automotive and aviation technology. Rickenbacker was there at the beginning of both of these modes of transport and reading about their evolution was fascinating. Of course I was also taken with the facts of Eddie's early life around the turn of the 20th century. Comparing childhoods like Eddie's to what kids today live like is shocking in their differences. The hardships are striking and it is easy to admire anybody that survived life as harsh as Eddie's. The author seems to attribute Eddie's survival to his unique ability to endure. That may be true but it may also be that he was just lucky. All biographies that depict the harsh childhoods of their subjects tend to glamorize the subject's ability to survive but none of them ever detail how miraculous survival was in the time being discussed. For every Eddie that survived there were how many that did not? How much was attributable to the individual and how much was just luck? Well I guess a discussion like that would diminish the character of the biography's subject and Eddie was definitely a survivor. What I was also interested in learning was how inept military leadership was in both WWI and WWII. They were either inept or very indifferent to the safety of service people they were responsible for leading. I take this opinion after reading about how cavalier they were regarding safety. In WWI the brass refused to purchase parachutes for the pilots of these cloth and wood contraptions called aeroplanes. The brass thought the pilots might be too quick to use these escape devices and thus let an expensive airplane crash

unnecessarily. Consequently, a lot of early pilots died unnecessarily. In WWII aviation technology had improved significantly but protocols and safety apparently hadn't. The near tragic comedy of errors responsible for Eddie and the crew of the B17 that he was on crashing into the Pacific and without the minimal supplies of an emergency kit is incredible. If this is an example of the leadership in the Air Force then Pearl Harbor is a bit easier to understand and makes our victory in that war more a tribute to the citizen soldiers and sailors than to the knuckleheads that lead them. The author closes with an epilogue that discusses Eddie's courage, heroism, and tenacity, his endurance. What is interesting to me here is that Eddie was truly a hero in its true meaning. We live in an era when the title of hero is too easily used. Every kid that enlists in the military is immediately honored with the title of "hero" simply for doing what Eddie would have said was his duty and nothing more. We have diluted that honorific to the point that we have nothing to use to designate the people that really deserve it. Eddie fought in a war in a machine of unproven design, utility, or safety and without regard for his safety. He did this more successfully than any other pilot that survived and survival alone was an accomplishment of significance. He then built a career in aviation far beyond what might have been possible for somebody of his almost minimal education. If that wasn't enough he survives 3 weeks abandoned in a rubber raft in Pacific without water or food. He does all of this because he was both lucky and because he was tenacious in holding on to life and reaching his goals. Maybe I didn't miss anything in this book after all. Maybe I just needed to think about it a little more. I think I will give this book 4 stars.

This is a terrific book. It is really three books in one: an extraordinary tale of fast race-car driving at the dawn of speed racing (Rickenbacker rode in the first Indy 500); an amazing tale of the ferocious dog-fighting in rickety and unreliable WWI bi-planes, during which Rickenbacker became America's ace-of-aces; and an incredible WWII tale of survival with a small party of men stranded on three lifeboats in the Pacific Ocean. My own personal favorite is the part about the race car driving--the races are tautly told, and the inherent danger in them nail-biting. The book is also a story of how a poor, ordinary boy from Ohio, with course language, could raise his standing in turn-of-the-century America. Eddie Rickenbacker's great contribution, as ably told by the author, was how to be bold and go fast and furious in driving and flying airplanes, but also to understand his limits and not be reckless. He measured his risk and acted accordingly. A flyer who stayed alive was worth more than one who showed great courage but foolishly got himself shot down. Rickenbacker also passed this along to his fellow flyers as a leader of his squadron. The author is an excellent writer and knows just how to use colorful language (e.g., a "Jack-the-Ripper fog" enveloped London) and the action

moves swiftly but smartly (like Rickenbacker himself). Highly recommended.

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