Round and Round:
The story of Eddie Rickenbacker, an American "Automotive" Hero
Brent Mulgrew, December 18, 2007

Webster's Dictionary defines the term "Hero" as "a man admired for his achievements and noble qualities, one that shows great courage." Are all heroes also great men? Is the individual I will discuss tonight simply a "hero" or a "great man" according to the criteria established last year in Rich Simpson's essay, "Where Have All the Great Men Gone." Did the exploits I detail tonight have "a lasting impact on the world?" Did they meet Rich's standard of "history changing, world-class greatness." I believe this individual's legacy is "world class." I believe his life had a positive impact on the world, even beyond Columbus.

But before we can apply Rich's criteria to determine whether he was a "great man", we must learn more about this American hero. Tonight I will present the first twenty-seven years of his life for your evaluation. His later life triumphs and failures are well known, but are not the subject of tonight's review.

I want you to go back with me to the turn of the last century. Travel back to Columbus, Ohio in the years 1900-1917. Your points of reference are the development of the horseless carriage, automobile racing and our hero's involvement with both during those seventeen years.

He was born in 1890 of Swiss immigrant parents. In 1893 his family moved to a small house at 1334 East Livingston Ave., ½ mile beyond the end of the horse car tracks. His father, a day laborer, had decided that year to start his own contracting business because he believed the USA was a land of limitless opportunity and promise. He instilled in his eight children a fundamental and absolute belief that loyalty and a tireless willingness to work will lead to personal success. And work they did—all of the children worked around the house, grew their own food on their small lot and tended a small herd of goats for milk.

Unlike his siblings, however, our hero was not a "good boy". He was smoking at five, committing petty thievery and general youthful mayhem at seven that led the Columbus police to stop by his house more than once. Although slight for his age he became an effective "scrapper". His fighting

skills resulted in him leading a local group of boys. His "Horsehead Gang" was named after a picture on a sign at the entrance of the nearby Driving Park, a horseracing track.

While our hero's worldview was fairly limited to events within a few blocks of his East Columbus home, a new mode of transportation and entertainment-- the driving and racing of horseless carriages was literally crashing into his neighborhood!!

At the end of the nineteenth century Columbus was already a major carriage-manufacturing center. There were 18 companies employing 3,000 workers.

A local mechanic, Perry Okey is reported to have driven the first gasoline-powered car in Columbus on January 13, 1900. He designed it in the basement of 303 E. Town Street and assembled it on the third floor of the light plant at 89 West Street near the Ohio Pen.

By 1901 there were eight horseless carriages in Columbus and their owners met regularly for lunch. Those meetings resulted in the formation of the Columbus Automobile Club, the sixth oldest in the country. The Auto Club helped the City Council establish the first speed limit at 6mph in 1901. By 1902 there were 75 automobiles in Columbus. Franklin Park was a favorite place to learn to drive and Greenlawn Avenue was known as the Speedway, where the owners let their car run wide open!

In the following decade there were no fewer than 27 different automobiles assembled in Columbus, including the Ford Model "T."

The first Annual meet of the Columbus Auto Club was held on July 4, 1903 at Driving Park. Barney Oldfield, a former bicycle racer from Toledo, set a new world record for the flying five-mile and declared that Columbus had the "Fastest Track in America." At that event eleven cars raced in various events and trials before a crowd of 10,000 "speed bugs". Two years later Columbus was again the center of the racing universe when it held the first 24-hour race in history. A combination of races and trials were scheduled with a silver cup valued at $500 offered by the Hoster-Columbus Brewing Company for the winner of the 24-hour race.

Louis Hoster owned and raced a Peerless. A Columbus built air-cooled Frayer-Miller, was driven by Lee Frayer. It was lighter than the other cars, giving it an advantage in the long race because lighter weight meant less stress on fragile mechanical parts. The Frayer-Miller finished second to a Pope-Toledo and beat the third place Hoster Peerless by only two miles after 24 hours. The 1905 Columbus race predated the famous 24 hours of Le Mans by two decades.

Frayer- Miller cars were built by the Oscar Lear Automobile Company of Columbus from 1904-1910. The Lear dealership opened at 4th and Gay then moved 288 E. Long St. The company was one of the first in the country to draw a connection between racing and sales. They began racing their four cylinder car in 1904. When it placed second in the Columbus 24-hour race in 1905 they committed to racing. The next year they entered three cars in the 1906 Vanderbilt Cup Race. While only one Frayer-Miller car qualified for the 1906 Cup race, their successful participation in other racing events established a reputation of reliability in a time when merely running at the finish was a major achievement.

During the next four years Frayer-Miller cars, manufactured in Columbus, were delivered throughout the Midwest. During the same period an even more aggressive manufacturer expanded both their manufacturing and distribution of Columbus built buggies and autos.

In an article for the Columbus Dispatch in 1912, C.D. Firestone discussed the transportation products of The Columbus Buggy Company. "We have manufactured and sold over 250,000 buggies and carriages throughout the United States...About eight years ago we realized the rapid growth and oncoming demand of the automobile…and seeing the electric and gasoline cars were rapidly taking the place of the horse and shay we commenced the manufacture of electrics in a small way…today as the sales of horse drawn vehicles have been decreasing sales of the electric vehicle have been increasing until today the electric is one of the largest branches of our business...(As for the gasoline cars) we have an engine, which will develop all the speed that is required; we have thoroughly tested them out on some of the most prominent courses in the United States. In numerous of the races our cars have been driven from 60 to 75 miles per hour. Our gasoline automobile business is doubling each year."

Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century all types of automobile activities occurred in Columbus. New automobile manufacturing shops were started and also failed. Columbus was a primordial soup of mechanical creativity. And our hero was growing up in the middle of it.

Our hero recalled his father said, " You're a lucky boy to be born when you were. There are a lot of things in the making and you ought to be ready to have a hand in them." His father also told him never to get involved with a machine he didn't know how to control!!

While his father counseled him to control machines, his father could not control the world around him. In August 1904 our hero's father was killed by accident. The next morning our hero became a man. In the first of series of impetuous yet understandable moves he lied about his age and got a day laborer's job at a glass factory where his older brother had worked. Twelve hours a day for $3.50/week. He also dropped out of school, never completing the 7th grade. His job helped pay the bills and keep the family together. After a few months as a laborer he got a job at the Buckeye Steel Casting Company on Parsons Avenue. There he earned a dollar a day/$6 dollars a week.

He remembered," I stayed at the foundry for about three months. Then I quit to take a job capping bottles at a brewery. I quit without hesitation. No worries, no fretting, no indecision. If I didn't like what I was doing or if another pursuit offered greater opportunities or more advantages, I acted immediately, without fear of the future." The ability to make quick but correct and decisive decisions was one of the critical character traits our hero exhibited throughout the rest of his adult life.

When the first Ford Model C runabout visited town, our hero asked for a ride. He never forgot the thrill of riding in the sporty little Ford. That ride "sparked" his love of the new machines. He was working as a machinist apprentice in the shop of the nearby Pennsylvania Railroad repair facility when he first appreciated the beauty of the machine. "After my exposure to the creativity of machine design and production, I had a much better idea of what beautiful, functional and precision made parts were under the hood of that Ford. I decided I wanted to be part of the automotive industry

A few weeks later he quit the railroad and then asked for a job at the Evans Garage, a former bicycle repair shop on Chestnut Street. He took a pay cut

to take the job but thought, " It was the future that counted and the meaning of my labor At Evans Garage he learned the basic operation of the steam, electric and gasoline buggies stored there. But after six months he was bored again. To challenge himself he registered for an ICS correspondence course in mechanical and automotive engineering.

The course material was over the head of this seventh grade dropout, but he struggled to master it. As he began to understand the ICS course materials, his desire to work on automobiles became even stronger.

Nearby was the Frayer-Miller factory, where they assembled about one car a month. After hanging around the factory on Sundays for several weeks he finally met the chief designer and engineer, Lee Frayer. Our hero convinced him to hire him by cleaning the factory's shop without being asked. Later, when Frayer discovered he was taking the ICS correspondence course he gave our hero the opportunity to work in every aspect of the factory, from assembly to design.

Lee Frayer replaced his lost father, became his mentor and gave him the opportunity to create and build parts for the Frayer-Miller cars. He also gave our hero the ability to contribute without consideration of his lack of age, social status or education. Like many others of his generation, our hero's work ethic was forged in the fire of experimental trial and failure rather than formal education.

When our hero joined the company, Lee Frayer was building three racecars for the 1906 Vanderbilt Cup. The race was to be held on new roads in Long Island, New York. It was intended to be the premier international automobile race in the United States. "Willie K" Vanderbilt and his sporting friends wanted to challenge the domination of European racing cars that were faster, stronger and better built that their US counterparts. The race prize was intended as an incentive for fledging US manufacturers to build their best autos and test their "metal" in the heat of international competition. Unfortunately, French cars had won the first two events. Willie hoped 1906 would be different.

At the last minute our hero was invited to travel with the three-car team to New York. There Frayer surprised him again by inviting him to ride in the qualifying time trials as his "riding mechanic". Racecars in 1906 were basically a bare chassis, drive train, two bucket seats and a minimum body

shell. No seatbelts were attached. They also carried several spare tires, as the tires would wear out quickly on the rough courses. The "riding mechanic" had four critical jobs: 1) Hand pump the oil pump to keep oil pressure in the engine, 2) monitor the gauges, 3) watch the tires and change them when they went flat and 4) watch behind the car for oncoming competitors—there were no rear view mirrors!! In the qualifying race their car overheated and they did not finish. One of his other cars did start the big race but failed when it snapped a crankshaft.

A year's worth of effort and close to $50,000 dollars spent and they didn't have a single car finish. In his memoirs our hero reported the life lesson that is a mantra to most race car drivers: "Try like hell to win, but don't cry if you lose."

Upon his return to Columbus Frayer was offered the opportunity to design and build a new auto from scratch for the Columbus Buggy Company. He took our hero with him. The owner of CBC, Clinton D. Firestone wasn't sure about the future of the gasoline automobile in 1907. He was already successfully producing small electric buggy runabouts. But he didn't want to miss being part of the changing transportation landscape, so he commissioned Frayer to design a new gasoline powered car.

As the "experimental engineer" it was our hero's job to try to break what the others had designed. The chance to work on a new car from the first drawing to tightening the last nut was an opportunity that meant more than any other in his entire life. He said, "I had been fatherless for four years. Now someone I respected for his ability and knowledge was interested in me…it was an inspiration and incentive to prove that his confidence in me was deserved."

When they finished their first car, the Firestone-Columbus, they drove it to the 1909 Chicago Auto show in January. They planned ten days for the trip, but made it in five days notwithstanding needing several tows by local farmers and their horses. The "roads" were merely rutted muddy trails. There was no "gps", "mapquest" or even maps.

When they arrived in Chicago they were met with great enthusiasm, especially by the attendees from rural Illinois who appreciated a car that could go in the fields!! The Firestone-Columbus also was the first American production car with the steering wheel on the left side. Their success in

Chicago spawned orders from CBC agencies throughout the country. Our hero was promoted from "test engineer" to chief "roving mechanic" and he was sent throughout the Midwest to fix problems with the new car. Today only 4 Firestone-Columbus cars exist. One is still seen in Columbus parades driven by Gary Baas, son of the original owner.

Later that year our hero was asked to help expand an existing Columbus Buggy dealership in Omaha. Omaha was still a fast growing pioneer town in 1910, and automobiles were still rare items of wonder. Our hero had seen the positive impact of racing on sales, so he took the latest Firestone car and prepared it for local racing. He painted it white to stand out from the other cars and wore white coveralls. They didn't stay white for long.

His first race was in Red Oak, Iowa on a flat half-mile dirt horseracing track. According to a flyer of the time: "You'll see the crowd of one lungers, pop wagons, palace cars, fog shooters and jackrabbits. The liveliest Merriest Thriller of a time Red Oak ever saw!!!"

Although he crashed in his first race, he was hooked. The next week he raced in the nearby town of Atlantic and won a fifteen-mile free for all in his first of many victories. He won $700 but more importantly the victory led to the sale of the car on Monday to a local restaurant owner.

" Race on Sunday, Sell on Monday" is a slogan that even today justifies millions of dollars of racing sponsorships.

Throughout the summer of 1910 he raced a Firestone-Columbus on dirt tracks near Omaha. In October he won eight races in two days and $1500—a great sum to a young man earning $150 a month.

Lee Frayer and the CBC boys were so impressed with his racing successes that he invited him back to Columbus to "swap dust" with the most important driver of the decade, Barney Oldfield. Oldfield had just set the land speed record of 131mph at Daytona, driving the "Blitzen' Benz", one of the most powerful racecars of the era. To race against Oldfield at Driving Park in front of his hometown was an opportunity our hero couldn't ignore.

Frayer had a strategy to win with his less powerful car: our hero would act as the rabbit, driving his lighter car as fast as he could, knowing Oldfield's ego would not let him let "the kid" get away. Oldfield would push his much

more powerful but heavier car so hard that he'd use up his tires and Frayer in his newly designed Red Wing special would overtake him in the time it took Oldfield to change his numerous flats. The plan almost backfired when the lighter car of our hero stayed ahead of Oldfield through 75 miles. But it finally broke and Frayer's Red Wing special passed both Oldfield and our hero to win!!

Our hero didn't win but had the pleasure of leading most of the race in front of his hometown cronies. More importantly he learned that **strategy and thoughtful planning could often overcome horsepower and experience.** After the race Oldfield praised our hero as a "clean square racing man"…He took his share of the track and no more. The sole of his right foot is as heavy as lead. These two would soon meet again.

Later Frayer invited him to be his relief driver for the first 500-mile at the new Indianapolis Speedway. Scheduled for Memorial Day, 1911 the event was intended to be the biggest racing event in the world. It is difficult today for us to imagine the impact of the first race at the Indianapolis Speedway. Books have been written about the social transformation that the creation of the Speedway exemplified. For tonight's purpose suffice it to say that the creation of the Speedway established a new standard for race events that exists to this day. It created a venue for racing that was safer and more professional. It attracted large crowds and provided manufacturers with the ability to compete and also to test new technologies.

Ray Horroun won the first 500, driving his Marmon Wasp, in part because he **alone** raced without a riding mechanic. He used his newly designed rear view mirror to keep his competitors in view. Frayer finished the race 11th in his Red Wing Special.

Our hero raced at Indy 4 more times but never won the race. For the rest of that summer our hero spent his weekends on the county fair circuit with a group of second-rate drivers participating in auto trials, races and shows.

That fall our hero made another decision that looked questionable at the time. "I walked out of a $150/month sales job, bought a one way ticket to Des Moines and asked Fred Duesenberg for a job. "He hired me as a mechanic at $3 dollars a day…But I was on my way to becoming a 'professional' automobile racing driver."

Like many "automotive geniuses" of the period, Fred Duesenberg had started his career as a bicycle racer then raced motorcycles. He and his brother opened a bicycle and automotive repair shop but soon they were building 2-cylinder runabouts. A local lawyer, Edward Mason financed the development of a new car, and not surprisingly they called it the "Mason". They built three "Mason" racecars for the 1913 Indianapolis race. Our hero was the chief mechanic, not a driver.

The cars were competitive and many were impressed with their engineering. Soon after Indianapolis our hero was given the opportunity to drive in a race in Columbus on Independence Day with Ralph Mulford as a teammate. Ralph Mulford was almost as famous as Barney Oldfield. Our hero was once again the rabbit enticing the favorite, Ralph DePalma, to chase him thereby giving Mulford the opportunity to save his car for a push for the win. Like Frayer before him, Mulford won the race. **Strategy and experience combined to win the day.**

Throughout the rest of the summer the Mason racers traveled by train throughout the country working out the cars' "bugs". Our hero drove in races in Galveston, Texas, Elgin Illinois and in early 1914 in Santa Monica for the AAA's Grand Prize.

After Santa Monica he was named the head driver/manager for the newly formed Duesenberg Racing Team. For the 1914 Indianapolis 500 the Duesenberg brothers risked everything on the possibility of winning part of the purse. Thirteen of thirty cars finished with a Duesenberg finishing 5th and our hero 10th, but out of the money.

The name Duesenberg would someday represent the finest in American automotive design, engineering and technology. But in July 1914 the Duesenberg racing team was down to its last six dollars as they prepared to race in Sioux City, Iowa. The team slept with their cars at the track and negotiated with the hamburger stand for food on credit until the race. It was at Sioux City our hero tied the heart of a bat to his finger with red silk. It was his mother's Swiss folk talisman for good fortune.

In the feature race his riding mechanic was knocked unconscious by a piece of flying track "gumbo" but our hero still won first place collecting a $10,000 purse. Mulford placed third winning an additional $2500. In one day our hero had saved the Duesenberg Company from financial disaster.

He raced successfully for the rest of the year, placing sixth in the year-end professional driver standings. And he wore the heart of a bat on his finger for every race!

In late fall our hero decided the Duesenberg cars were not meeting his expectations and he switched to drive a French Peugeot. When he didn't finish in his first two races he uncharacteristically blamed the car, decided the engineering was hopeless and moved to the Maxwell team. Peugeot hired the American engineering genius Harry Miller to reengineer the car. Miller, who later produced some of auto racing's most winning designs, worked his magic on the Peugeot. Its next driver, Dario Resta won both the driver's championship and the Vanderbilt Cup.

Joining the Maxwell team early in 1915 he became number two driver behind Barney Oldfield. After not finishing several races our hero came in 4th in Tucson, Arizona. He won a short 25-mile race in Columbus on May 16, 1915, but then crashed in the following 100-mile sanctioned race. Two weeks later at the Indianapolis 500 he designed and used a "traction improvement" system that delivered a small amount of oil on his outside tires early in the race to improve their wear on the brick track. Unfortunately his engine failed and his trick system was discovered. A complaint was filed, but he was not suspended because there was no rule against the traction control devices.

Later that year he initiated a more successful strategy for winning by training his pit crew on specific tasks and practicing pit stops. The speed training and job specialization during the pit stops helped him win two close races.

Even as he was winning, his team's owners were struggling with the cost of maintaining the racecars. In July the Maxwell Company announced it would not continue to sponsor the team. Our 7th grade dropout racing driver convinced two of the most successful entrepreneurs of the day to buy the Maxwell cars and place him in charge of the team. Carl Fisher and Fred Allison formed the Prest-O-Lite Racing Team. The primary reason for their commitment was their desire to sponsor a winning American Team with American drivers. Fans attending automobile races were potential customers and they believed more fans would attend races if an American team was in contention.

Our hero spent the next six months in Indianapolis rebuilding the cars and team. This time he had total responsibility for all aspects of the team and the financial support to do it right! He hired only unmarried men, so he didn't have to worry about leaving families without a father. He devised a strategy to share the winnings among all team members, an unheard of practice in 1915. He even promoted a team mechanic, Pete Henderson, to be a driver in the same way he had been promoted by Frayer.

In addition he established rules for the team:

"If you don't like the way we do business, if you don't like your teammates, don't grouse and don't go around with a long face. Quit this job and get another somewhere else. The trouble with a lot of people is that they are not willing to begin anywhere in order to get a fighting chance. My advice is: Throw away that false pride. No honest work is beneath you. Jump in and demonstrate your superiority. Once you get on the payroll, make up your mind to master everything about your own job, and get ready for the job on top. Your particular task is merely one end of a trail that leads to the driver's seat. That is my philosophy of success. It works, I have tried it and proved it."

An impressive manifesto for a 7th grade dropout!!

The 1916 season was a good one for the team. They won seven of thirteen major races entered and our hero made the astounding sum of $60,000 even after dividing the winnings with his teammates.

More significantly, our hero had taken his first airplane ride during Vanderbilt Cup Race week in Santa Monica. A local pilot, Glenn Martin offered him a ride in his newly designed airplane, a two-seat Navy "bomber".
After the ride our hero confessed he'd always been afraid of heights but not while flying. Miller commented, "There's no edge to look over."

Later that week he saw a military plane in a field. It's pilot, Major T.F. Dodd, was not happy that the engine had stopped, an uncomfortable situation in a car—a critical situation in an airplane. Our hero looked at the engine, diagnosed the problem, fixed it and the engine ran smoothly. These two chance events planted a seed that would bear fruit in the very near

future. Although he failed to finish the Vanderbilt Cup races, he won later that month at Ascot Park in L.A. to finish 1916 a winner.

After Thanksgiving our hero was invited to England to consider new Sunbeam racing cars for the 1917 racing season. That decision ended his association with the American Team of American Cars driven by Americans. After some adventures in England including visiting the famous Brooklands Racing Track, then being used as an Airdrome to train pilots, our hero returned to the United States when the Germans declared unrestricted submarine warfare.

On his return trip the seed planted by his chance encounters with pilots in California matured. He decided to organize his fellow race drivers as volunteer pilots for the Army Signal Corps. Several agreed to volunteer to be trained as pilots including Ralph DePalma, Ray Harroun, Ralph Mulford and a host of others. The call never came.

In an irony of arrogance the Signal Corps declined the offer of racing drivers to be trained as pilots. Our hero remembers on officer saying, "We don't believe it would be wise for a pilot to have any knowledge of engines and mechanics. Airplane engines are always breaking down and a man who knew a great deal about engines would know if his engine wasn't functioning correctly and may be hesitant going into combat." In addition most racing drivers were not college educated and could not qualify as officers and gentlemen.

Soon after those fruitless meetings America declared war. President Wilson authorized and expeditionary force be sent to France under the leadership of John J."Black Jack" Pershing. The AAA was asked to recommend a racing driver as a chauffeur for the general. Our hero got the call and left on May 28, 1917.

He enlisted as a sergeant as he set sail and was assigned to travel in steerage. A chance encounter with the same Major Dodd he had met in California, improved his situation when he learned, to his chagrin, that there were several ranks of sergeant. Our hero requested and was granted an immediate promotion to sergeant first class and moved into a cabin! But he didn't forget his former mates in steerage and took them fresh food every day.

There is some discrepancy how often our hero drove for Pershing. It was reported that Pershing didn't like the way his reckless racing driver handled the staff car!! More often than not he drove for his new friend Major Dodd who often traveled with his commander, William (Billy) Mitchell. During the previous three years Mitchell had become an expert on aeronautics and aerial combat. As the strongest advocate of a separate branch for air power in an Army that had only recently moved from the backs of horses he had many enemies on Pershing's staff. Mitchell liked to get away from staff headquarters and travel to the front by car. On these forays Mitchell learned to appreciate the mechanical skills of our hero. On several occasions their staff car broke down and our hero was able to fix the problem.

His racing contacts again worked to his advantage when a fan was placed in charge of the first American Flying School in France. Needing an engineering officer he asked our hero to be in charge of servicing the French airplanes used to train the Americans. After several weeks of delicate personal negotiations he was commissioned a first lieutenant. By act of the U.S. Congress our hero officially became an "officer and a gentleman." Still, his lack of formal education worked against him in his new role. Most American pilot trainees were university educated. But they had little desire to understand the mechanical operations of the planes in which they were to fly and often die. Our hero ultimately overcame their prejudices by exhibiting the same sense of fairness and organizational skills he had used managing his racing team. He never asked his men to do anything he hadn't done first.

His chance encounter with yet another racing friend and his determination to achieve a goal no matter what the obstacles gave our hero the opportunity to start a new career in aviation at the age of 27. During the rest of the war he proved to be a good engineering officer and an even more talented pilot. Ultimately he was promoted to Captain and became the leader of the most famous American squadron in World War I.

After the war our hero returned to the United States and traveled the country selling war bonds. He wasn't very successful. He declined several job offers including an opportunity to race again. He committed himself to developing his own automobile and organizing the financing for his car's company. After almost a year of testing by our hero the company introduced three models at the 1922 New York Auto Show: a touring car priced at $1485, a coupe at $1885 and a sedan for $1995. The cars had a number of

new design advances including a high power six-cylinder engine and a body mounted lower on the chassis giving it a better handling and eye appeal. The company's slogan was: "A car worthy of its name." The radiator emblem was "the hat in the ring", his squadron's insignia.

The company received thousands of orders and established dealerships throughout the US, including Columbus.
In 1925 the company introduced four-wheel brakes before anyone in the industry had them. The company was not prepared for the unified opposition from the rest of the manufacturers. The public failed to embrace the technological advancements and in the difficult economic times of 1926 their sales weakened. The company went bankrupt in 1927 after producing 34,500 cars. A 1925 sedan still resides at Motts Military Museum in Groveport.

In his last automotive investment our hero purchased the Indianapolis Speedway in 1927. If he couldn't win there, at least he could save it from becoming a housing development like the Driving Park racetrack had become in Columbus.

Our hero quickly discovered that running the Speedway was a job he only enjoyed during May when the racecars were on the track. So he turned the management of the Speedway over to his brother. By then his desire to be a captain of commercial aviation had become his primary passion and his new career was ready to "take off."

So now you have heard the story of my Columbus automotive icon. While I don't believe the events I related tonight alone meet the criteria of Rich's "Great Man Test", I ask you to consider whether you can see from my presentation the foundation of a man who could become "A Great Man"? By now most of you have deduced my hero tonight is "Captain Eddie" Rickenbacker. A man who, in my opinion, was and remains not only a great American Automotive Hero, but also may even meet Rich's tests of a "Great Man."

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