

"Give me a broom and let me start sweeping up this floor. It needs it."

"How many times must I tell you that we're not taking on any . . .," but Eddie checked him.

"I'm not asking you to put me on the payroll," he said, "I'm just telling you that I'm working here!"

And from then on he was working there. Within a few days, his perseverance resulted in his name being handed in to the cashier. It was a turn in his life that was to carry him far. It wasn't long before he had mastered all there was to learn about automobile construction.

When Lee Frayer went to the Columbus Buggy Company, then building the Firestone-Columbus car and the Columbus Electric, Eddie accompanied him as his assistant engineer. The company later sent him into the South as a mechanical expert, next shipping him to Omaha, where he became a salesman as well as mechanic.

Eddie was only 20 when he turned to racing, making his debut in a stock car contest at Council Bluffs, Iowa. That was in 1910. In 1911, he was in the first 500-mile race ever staged at Indianapolis as a relief driver. From that day his success and fame steadily mounted.

From 1910 until 1916, Eddie was engaged in speed contests throughout the greater part of each year, carrying to victory the colors of Firestone, Duesenberg, Mercer and Maxwell. One of his feats was his win over Barney Oldfield, who was driving a 100 h.p. Knox. Lee Frayer was piloting a 50 h.p. Firestone-Columbus, while Eddie was behind the wheel of a 20 h.p. car of the same make.

Just before the cars were lined up to await my starting signal, Eddie took Frayer to one side, and said:

"Oldfield will race his head off to pile up a big lead over us. We'll let him go. He will tear his tires to pieces, and then we will eat him up."

And so it worked out. Barney had to change rubber three times, and lost the contest to the smaller cars.

It was late in May, 1917, shortly after his return from England where he had spent several months training the Sunbeam's racing team, that Eddie dashed off to New York, and boarded the ship that was to carry General John Pershing to France. He was without even a toothbrush, but he did have with him a certificate of enlistment in the United States Army dated two days earlier.

Eddie had piled up a bank account totaling more than \$80,000 from his speedway earnings. He was at the top of his class in the sport. Yet, he had tossed everything aside to get into uniform.

There is a definite likeable quality about Rickenbacker that appeals to everyone he meets, and General Pershing was no exception. Before the vessel had been at sea for 48 hours, he had been elevated from private to sergeant and assigned as Pershing's chauffeur.

There is no doubt that some of the greatest thrills the commander of Uncle Sam's A.E.F. experienced in France were those provided him by Sergeant Rickenbacker. The general had picked a racing driver, and he got that kind of service.

Eddie wanted to get into the Air Corps, and he took advantage of his close association with Pershing to wrangle a transfer. Rick will tell you that he used only gentle persuasive methods. The General, however, even now makes no secret of the fact that he shifted Eddie to save his own nerves!