

Auto Racer, Fighter Pilot

An auto racer who set the world speed record. A fighter pilot who recorded the most aerial combat victories against the Germans in World War I. A man who survived a plane crash and spent 22 days on a raft in the Pacific Ocean.

What do these three have in common?

They are all the same person: Eddie Rickenbacker. When he was 12, his father died. So Rickenbacker quit school to become his family's breadwinner, doing Whatever It Takes And Then Some to help the family survive.

As a teen, he started working as a race car mechanic. By the time he was 22, he, himself, was racing. Two years later, he set the world's speed record at Daytona.

When World War I began, Rickenbacker tried to enlist as an aviator but was told he was over-aged and under-educated. He eventually talked his superiors into sending him to flight training. By the war's end, he had logged 300 combat hours and survived 134 aerial encounters, shooting down 26 enemy planes.

When asked the secret to his success, Rickenbacker cited courage. "Courage," he said, "is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared."

Fear is natural. It can overcome you, if allowed, or you can say, as Eddie Rickenbacker did a thousand times, "I'll fight like a wildcat!"

--Beecher Hunter