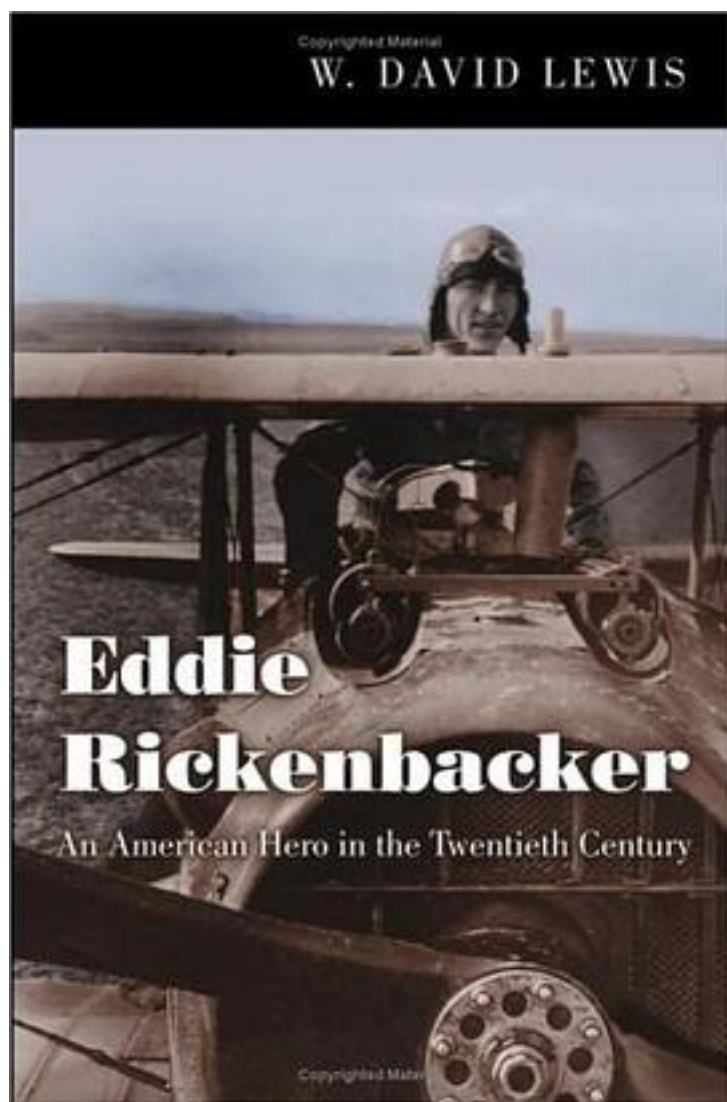


Eddie Rickenbacker



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出版者:

出版时间:2008-5

装帧:

isbn:9780801889721

Eddie Rickenbacker epitomized the American spirit in the twentieth century. Daring, skilled, and rugged-moving fast and defying death-he drove race cars in the early days of the automobile, then flew canvas-over-wooden-frame aeroplanes in the Great War, downing twenty-six enemy flyers and emerging at war's end as the nation's ace of aces. Only Gen. John J. "Black Jack" Pershing and the much-decorated Sgt. Alvin York emerged from that struggle as equally lauded American heroes. Failing as an automobile maker after the war, Rickenbacker returned to aviation, joined Eastern Airlines in 1934, and quickly reached the top of the corporate ladder. With the start of World War II, he took on special missions to theaters of combat, surviving twenty-one days adrift on a small rubber raft after his plane went down at sea. But the seemingly indestructible Eddie did not thrive well under the new competitive conditions in the postwar airline industry. Despite having built Eastern into a major carrier, he departed the company under pressure in 1963. W. David Lewis's biography of Rickenbacker reveals both the achievements and the vulnerability of this quintessential American hero. Rickenbacker embodied what was new, exciting, and romantic about the country in the postwar years. His poignant story also sheds light on the ephemerality of American success and the fragility of celebrity. Capturing Rickenbacker's life in rich and vivid detail, W. David Lewis has written the definitive biography of America's ace of aces.

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