

Love Catches Up at Last With Eddie Rickenbacker's Heart

Romance of the American "Ace" Who Had Made Up His Mind to Be a Bachelor—and How He Surrendered to the Wife Who Had Found No Happiness With His Rich Rival of the Auto Track



Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, With His Bride-to-Be, the Former Wife of His Rich Track Rival, "Cliff" Durant.



Elsie Janis, a Lovely Stage Lady Whom Gossip Confidently Predicted Would Marry Elusive Mr. Rickenbacker.



Miss Priscilla Dean, the Charming Actress Whose Marriage to the Famous "Ace" Was Once Reported, but Proved to Be an Error.



Mrs. Adelaide Durant in Her Los Angeles Garden.

EVERYONE knows Eddie Rickenbacker, once speed king of the automobile tracks and later a most daring aviator in the United States forces in Europe. Eddie Rickenbacker has driven faster than any other automobilist in the world, and has shot more German warplanes out of the sky than any other American, but although he has tried hard enough, he could not drive fast enough or fly high enough to escape Cupid. Love has at last caught up with Eddie's heart, even though he had declared that never would he surrender it to any woman.

Eddie, who brought down twenty-six enemy aeroplanes at the front, has finally been brought down himself. He will marry in New York about the middle of this month Mrs. Adelaide Durant, who was until not so long ago the wife of the equally well-known "Cliff" Durant. Durant ran Eddie a close second for racing honors on the speed tracks. He did win the Liberty Sweepstakes at Indianapolis. Very wealthy, Durant found his pleasure in the same thrills by which Rickenbacker made his living.

The former Mrs. Durant, used as she is to the excitement of being a speed enthusiast's wife, will not miss any of the old-time excitement after she marries the American "Ace of Aces."

The Durant marriage, which had long been an unhappy one, ended in divorce in Los Angeles last year. Mrs. Durant comes of a very excellent family and is a conspicuous figure in the fashionable society of Los Angeles and of Oakland. The news of the approaching marriage of the famous automobilist will come as a surprise even to most of his closest friends. They had long accepted his own verdict of unchangeable bachelorhood. Eddie has long been a hero and, it is no secret, could have had his pick from a whole garden of girls.

There was very lovely Irene Tam, the actress, who telegraphed him in 1916: "I love speed and admire endeavor. If you will stop racing, you may consider this a leap-year proposal." To which Rickenbacker, who was not yet a captain, telegraphed this reply: "Your very considerate telegram received, but unfortunately I cannot abide by your wish. A woman is only a woman. My soul mate is an aeroplane."

While he was soaring in the skies above France, winging one plane after another, his friends in America were amazed and amused to hear that he had been quietly married in Paris to Priscilla Dean, another lovely actress. They even cabled their congratulations. But when Eddie returned to this country there was no bride with him.

"Where's your wife?" they asked. "I haven't any," he answered.

"Didn't you marry Miss Priscilla Dean?"

"Never saw her. Never will, if I can help it," the ace replied, somewhat ungalantly. And so afraid was he that he might not be able to keep his word that he left a hotel in Seattle by one door at the precise moment that Miss Dean came in another.

Then there was the persistent rumor that he would conduct Elsie Janis to the altar. This followed a banquet by the "Hat in the Ring Flying Squadron" when Captain Rickenbacker commanded it. Miss Janis had sung and danced to keep up the spirits of the boys of the squadron. It seemed for a time as though Miss Janis would move Eddie away from his bachelorhood—but she didn't.

And there were others, many, many of them. What follows shows how insecure is any bachelor's foothold—no matter how hard he has tried to keep his heart ahead of Cupid or how often he says to himself, "I won't! By jingo, no woman can tie and throw me!"

A full ten years ago the net that was to drop over Eddie's at last willing and eager head was already prepared. He was then on a tour of the Pacific Coast, a pink-faced stripling, the tales of whose daring driving had preceded him.

There he first met Mrs. Durant. A most casual meeting it was. Hers was one of a group of lovely California faces that were charming, but whose charm, he would have avoided. For, mark you, Eddie Rickenbacker was a serious young man even then, as behooved one who had the responsibility of being the head of a family. For he had been the head of his family since his father died. He had wanted to become an artist, but he never got farther than learning to carve designs and letters on tombstones. The one piece of professional work he did was to carve the inscription on his father's tombstone. They who stop before it in Columbus Cemetery say it is an exceedingly good bit of tombstone cutting.

Life had been very earnest after that. He was the devoted son of a doting mother. When he returned from the war the crowds on the dock formed a gaping semicircle to stare at Eddie Rickenbacker's greeting of his sweetheart. For it had been wireless that she would meet him as he crossed the gangplank.

When his tall figure and his much photographed face appeared there was a shout. It was stilled as a little woman in an old-fashioned bonnet put out trembling arms in greeting.

"My sweetheart," said the captain as he swung her off her feet in an enormous hug. The lovely face encountered that one day years back in Los Angeles had been obscured, as had all other lovely faces, by the wrinkled one in the bonnet, for Eddie Rickenbacker.

Adelaide Durant and a group of smart California women saw him again when he returned to California. But only by keyhole staring through the door of a banquet hall where he was telling diffidently to a large family of brother aviators his

experiences in the clouds above invaded France.

But the next day there was no need for keyhole peeping. There was a great demonstration for the returned hero. As much of Los Angeles as could get into the reception hall went to press Eddie Rickenbacker's hand.

Clifford Durant, the multimillionaire motorist, and his wife gave a large house party. Captain Rickenbacker was a guest. Mrs. Durant invited four, five, six Los Angeles beauties to the house party. Quite openly she executed the manoeuvres of a matchmaker. One after another she flung the enchanting maids at his head. To her surprise they rebounded.

"What a man," she sighed. "And I have selected girls of every type. If he liked a blonde there was Alyssa. If he preferred a brunette Maud is perfect. Millie is petite and Mary is stately. Julia is modern and Flora is a positive Kate Greenaway. What is the matter? Why have I failed?"

When she would have led the conversation to marriage he talked to her gravely of that time six or eight years hence at most when he believed there would be a six-hour air service to London. And of his own hope to some time fly across the Pacific Ocean from San Francisco to Tokyo with a short stop at Honolulu.

"Give it up," growled her husband. "You can't marry Rickenbacker off."

So Eddie Rickenbacker, in matter of hearts seeming invulnerable, went his way. The California coquettes gathered their skirts about their ankles and ceased talking of what he wouldn't do and repeated the story of his achievements.

Before he had become an American ace he was one of the most daring automobile

drivers in the world. He had seemed fearless, was fearless perhaps, but that was a business followed because of the little old mother and the pretty sister in the home in Ohio. Then had come the terrible business of war.

He had begun his war service as a driver of General Pershing's automobile. He had joined the Hat in the Ring Squadron. The squadron, more formally known as the Ninety-fourth, had won the greatest number of aviation victories of the war. Captain Rickenbacker himself had fired the last shot and brought down the last enemy plane of the war.

He had entered the service as a lieutenant and had come out a commanding officer. He had personally destroyed twenty-six aeroplanes, the largest number brought down by any American bird of war.

It was while he was in Detroit that Captain Rickenbacker learned of the divorce of the Durants in Los Angeles.

Mrs. Durant went to New York to try to forget the sundered ties and the long unhappiness that precedes such severing. The shops, the theatre, the daily promenade on Fifth avenue might bring her diversion. On the avenue she met a serious-faced young man who looked at her twice, three times before he was sure enough to lift his hat.

"Mrs. Durant?" he asked. A smile of recognition brightened the face that was a little sad. The prematurely gray hair had grown more gray. She gave him her hand and asked him to call. Though he hated "calls and tea and all that silly stuff," he went. It was the last day of the year. He invited her to join himself and a friend at the Commodore Hotel to dine and sup and see the old year out.

Persons who sit and look into each other's eyes at the time when the clock tells the old year out and the bells chime the new year in are apt to grow a bit sentimental. The bride and bridegroom of next week admit that that New Year's Eve tete-a-tete was the beginning of the wondrous experience, though common,

that crowning adventure of life, falling in love.

It was when Captain Rickenbacker was persuading one of his friends to accompany him on the cross-continent trip and the friend remonstrated, saying he was not ashamed to say he feared the perils of the sky, that the ace of American aces said:

"Look here. You have no ties. I have everything in the world to live for. I am engaged to the sweetest woman on earth and we are to be married in September. Why should you be afraid when I am not?"

"Good gracious, Eddie. You, the confirmed bachelor? In heaven's name, to whom?"

"To the woman whose love I am the luckiest man alive to win—Adelaide Durant."

So their engagement leaked out. But because of the bridegroom's elect's quiet tastes and his fiancée's amiable concurrence in them, the engagement has been known to but few friends.

True, the especially observant would have noticed that a beautiful woman and her woman companion visit often an apartment that is artistically decorated in the Indian Village Manor on Jefferson avenue in Detroit. The apartment's large windows overlook an Italian garden, the Detroit River and Belle Isle, with its exclusive clubs, its trim sailing vessels, its expensive yachts and flying boats. That will be the home of the American ace and his bride.

To a friend Mrs. Durant, who is soon to be Mrs. Rickenbacker, said: "Yes, I know I am to marry a man who was a confirmed bachelor. I don't know how I made him change his mind. I don't understand it myself. But I am, oh, so happy."

"We will be married quietly in New York and will sail at once for Europe. We will be gone two months. I have asked him to take me to all those places where he performed those feats for which—and himself—I love him."



Eddie Rickenbacker With the Broken Wing of One of the Twenty-six Aeroplanes He Shot Down in France.