

RICKENBACKER'S HEROISM TOLD

The rescue of Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker and six companions, after more than three weeks at the mercy of the weather and waves in tiny rubber rafts on the South Pacific, was told.

The tale of death, suffering and starvation staved off with the help of raw fish and seagull was brought to Pearl Harbor from an atoll somewhere in the South Pacific where the rescued men were first brought to safety and hospital treatment.

But at no time during the ordeal did Rickenbacker doubt that he and his companions would be rescued. The spotting of one of the little rafts by a pilot of a searching navy seaplane, the night of Nov. 11, was merely a vindication of the famous flier's faith in the Golden Rule, his "own religion."

When the big army plane in which Rickenbacker was flying on an inspection trip for Secy. of War Stimson went down for lack of fuel Oct. 21, the eight men in the plane took to the rubber life rafts.

The three rafts became separated Nov. 9. Meanwhile, one of the party had died and was buried at sea. One raft sighted land Nov. 11, and they rowed for the island, wondering whether it was occupied by Japanese.

That same day a plane sighted one of the rafts which was occupied only by Capt. William T. Cherry, of Abilene. Cherry had been the pilot of Rickenbacker's plane.

Cherry was flown back to an island base, and the next day acting on information supplied by the rescued man, undertook search for the other survivors.

That night, with the aid of flares, Rickenbacker's raft was located some 40 miles from the island. Rain squalls swept the sea and Rickenbacker was afraid he'd be unable to guide surface ships to the scene, so landed

on the water and attempted rescue with his plane.

One of the party was seriously ill so was put into the cockpit of the plane. The 52-year-old Rickenbacker and a private were lashed to the wing, and the pilot, unable to get his light plane off the water with that load, started the long 40-mile taxing back to his base.

It was early Nov. 13, when Rickenbacker was landed and he said to the private: "You'd better thank God for your testament, son. You can see now what faith can do for you."

Rickenbacker, premier American ace in World War I through downing 21 German planes, and survivor of many a narrow escape, corroborated a story that a seagull had alighted on his head during the days on the raft.

"However, I didn't eat much of the raw bird, nor of the raw fish we caught," he said, but explained that it was dislike for raw meat and fear of illness that made him abstain.

The others ate the fish and gulls, he said, but didn't get sick because "no one had anything on his stomach."

Rickenbacker said his faith in eventual rescue never wavered.

"I have my own religion," he said. "I hold to the Golden Rule and I believe most firmly that if a man just follows what he truly knows and feels in his heart, then he cannot go wrong and is possessed of religion enough to get by in any man's land."

All survivors who were hospitalized are recovering and gaining in strength.