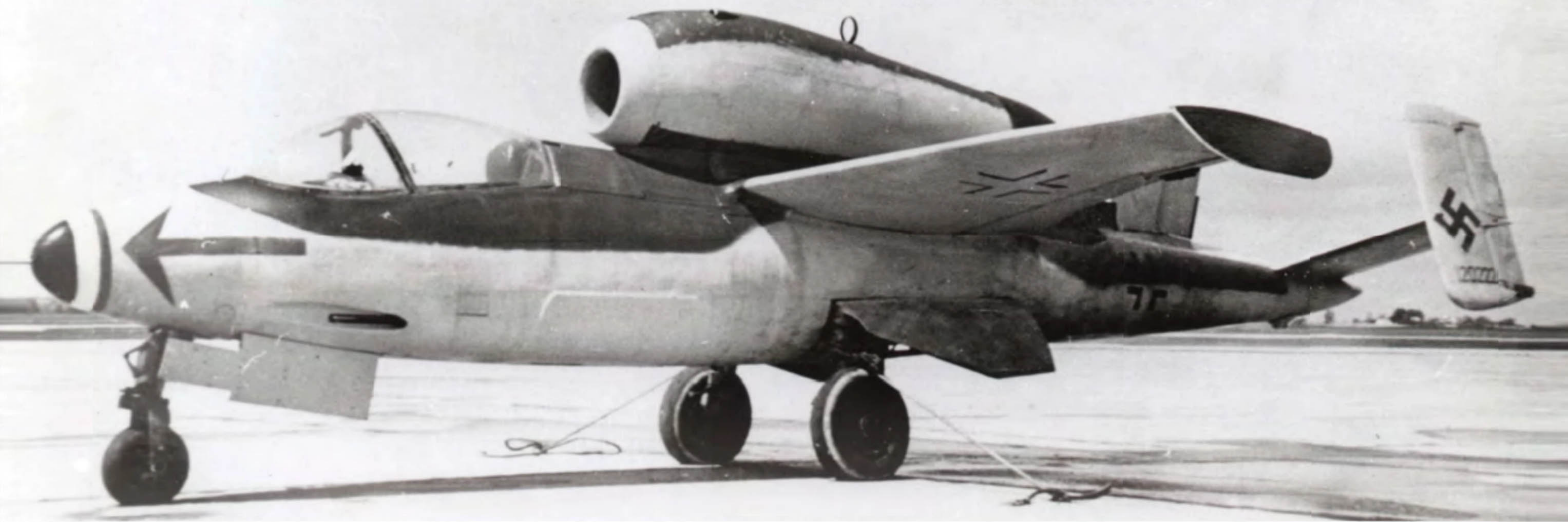


LUFTWAFFE'S FORGOTTEN JET FIGHTER

Chris Goss details a revolutionary jet fighter which arrived on the front line just weeks before the end of the war.



By September 1944, Germany was on the back foot in the war and looking for wonder weapons to turn the tide. On September 10, the Reichsluftfahrtministerium (RLM-Air Ministry) issued a requirement for an emergency lightweight fighter to be powered by the new BMW 003 turbojet. This engine had yet to be tried on other jet aircraft.

Of the eight companies approached to produce what was called the Völkjäger (People's Fighter), Heinkel was the successful manufacturer with its He 162. In addition to the engine, the RLM's specification called for the aircraft to be capable of 466mph (750km/h) at sea level with a take-off run of 1,870ft (600m). It had to be constructed from non-essential materials (such as wood) and be able to be mass-produced at the optimistic rate of 1,000 per month. The RLM also specified what armament was to be carried and that it should be available by the start of January 1945.

The He 162 was created by Siegfried Günther and Karl Schwärzler, who completed the initial designs by the start of November 1944. The prototypes were built at Wien-Schwechat (now Vienna International Airport) but due to allied bombing, production was also undertaken at four other facilities including one underground at Hinterbrühl near Wien.

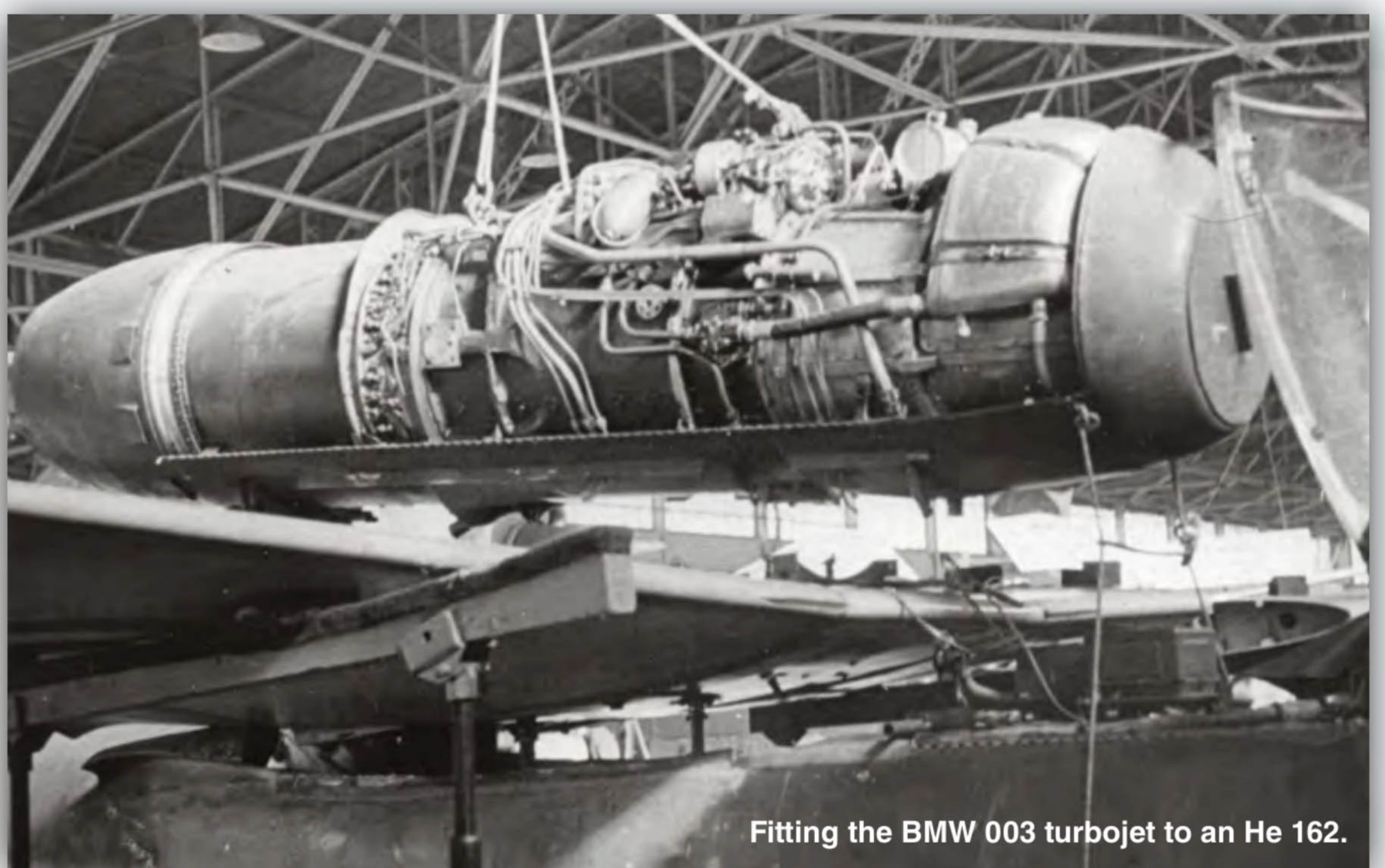
There has been some confusion among researchers as to what the Germans called

Main photo: He 162 A-2, Wk Nr 120230 White 23 of 1./JG 1 fitted with the tail unit of 120222. The aircraft was captured at Leck and is in the possession of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum but not currently on display. All photos Chris Goss Collection

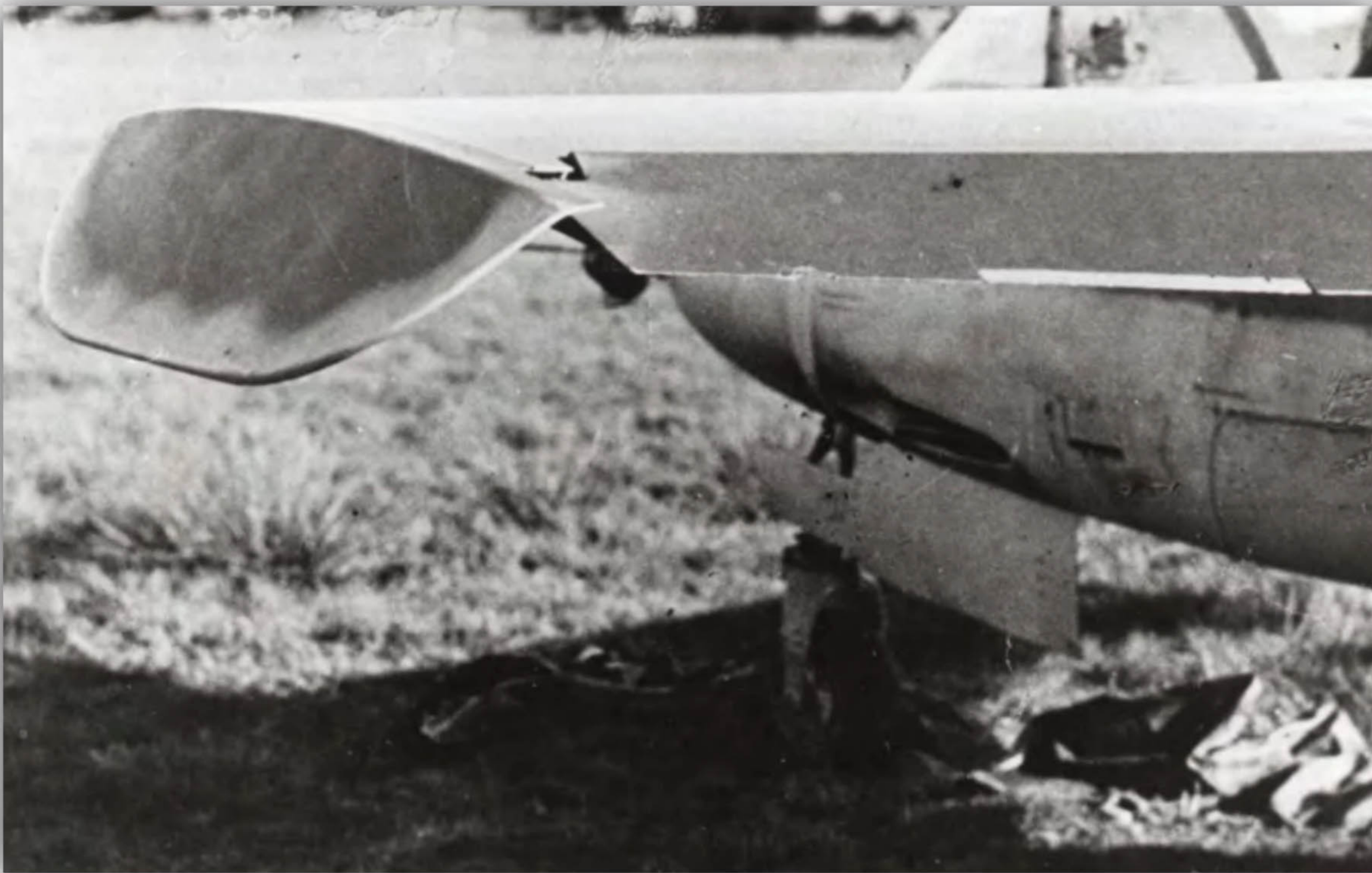
the He 162 during the early phases. The construction programme was codenamed Salamander, while the construction site at Hinterbrühl was referred to Languste (Crayfish). Heinkel unofficially nicknamed the He 162 Spatz (Sparrow), which was widely adopted.

Amazingly, the first prototype was ready for its maiden flight on December 6, 1944 just 90 days after the specification was

issued. However, if things had been smooth until that point, problems soon arose. As Heinkel's chief test pilot Flugkapitän Gotthold Peter became airborne an undercarriage door broke away, apparently due to the wooden door being inadequately glued. He also reported that the He 162 tended to pull to the left, though the engine performed well and the aircraft climbed to just under 20,000ft and achieved a speed of 522mph ▶



Fitting the BMW 003 turbojet to an He 162.



Close-up of the Lippisch Ears which improved the He 162's lateral stability.

(840km/h). Buoyed by what was deemed a success, four days later Peter demonstrated the aircraft to high-ranking Luftwaffe officers and party officials at Schwechat.

After a successful display, Peter decided to finish with a low-level high-speed pass over the airfield. During the flyby the starboard wing leading edge broke away, the upper skinning began to roll back and the aircraft went into a roll. The aileron broke off and the He 162 hit the ground just outside the airfield boundary, killing Peter. Heinkel again blamed the glue – apparently the manufacturer's factory had been bombed resulting in it producing a sub-standard alternative.

PRODUCTION

The crash of the first prototype did not stop development, such was the dire situation Germany was facing in the war. The wings were strengthened, the speed restricted and full control limitations put in place. Due to the instability of the aircraft around the vertical and horizontal

axes, aerodynamicist Alexander Lippisch proposed wing tip extensions which became known as Lippisch Ears. These moved the aircraft's centre of gravity further forward and changes to the tail meant the initial instability problems were resolved.

However, problems still arose. In January 1945 the third and fourth prototypes were damaged in accidents. Then on February 4 that year Georg Weydemeyer was killed when the sixth prototype's rudder jammed and the aircraft crashed. On the 25th of the same month Flugbaumeister Full died when the third prototype was destroyed, the cause yet again being attributed to instability and a possible engine fire.

Initially two 30mm MK108 cannons were installed, but after the seventh prototype a pair of 20mm MG151 cannons was the standard fit.

Development continued and soon resulted in the pre-production version – the He 162 A-0. Minor changes led to the A-1 and then the A-2. The Sparrow was now ready to fight.

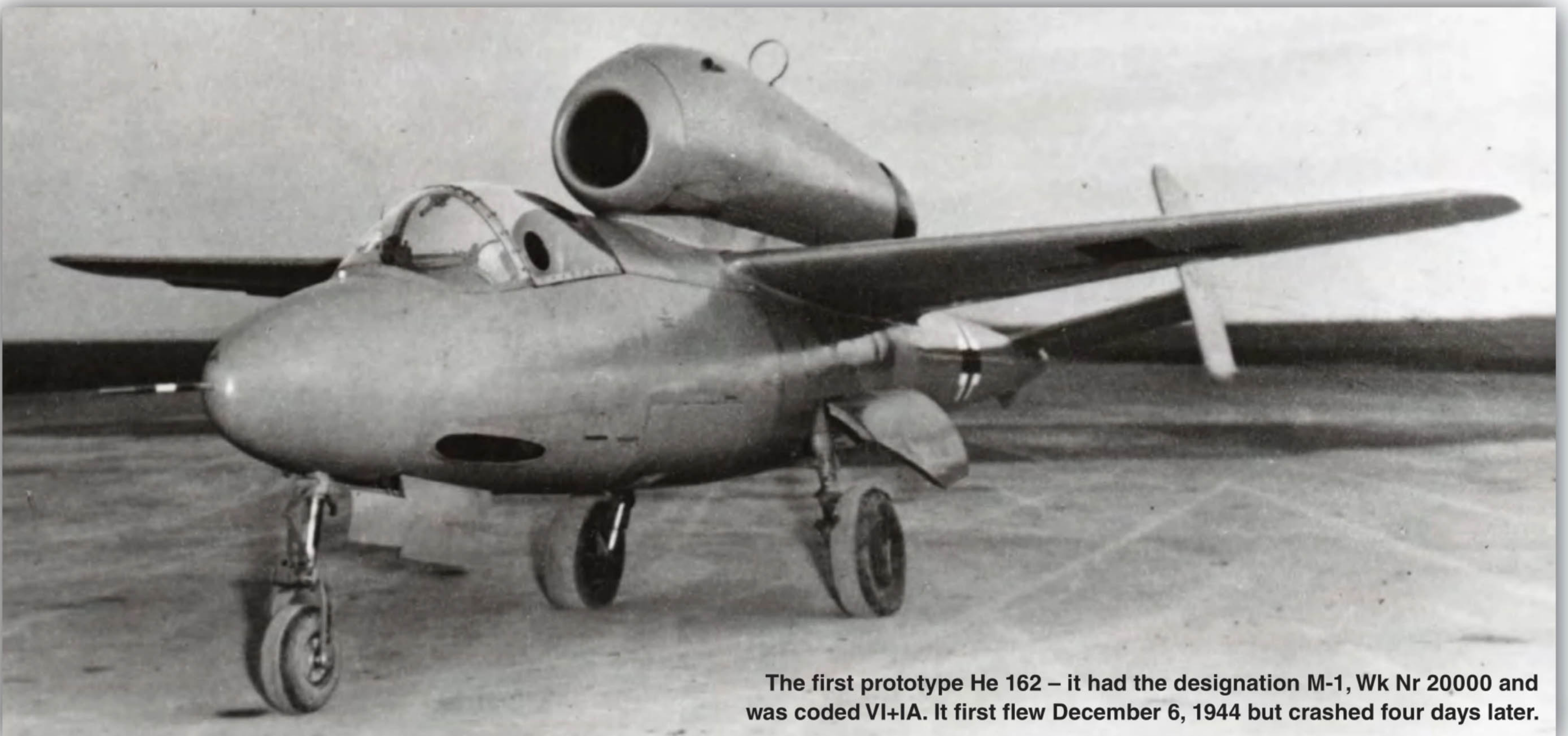
INTO ACTION

Operational testing of the He 162 was given to Erprobungskommando 162 at Rechlin, formed in January 1945 and commanded by the highly experienced and decorated fighter pilot Oberstleutnant Heinz Bär. Most of the initial flying was led by another experienced Bf 109 pilot Hauptmann Horst Geyer. However, it soon became obvious that the concept of less capable pilots, glider pilots or suitably qualified Hitler Youth pilots flying this 'simple' aircraft was flawed; the intended formation of the He 162-equipped I./JG 80 at Goslar was cancelled. Instead, it was decided to withdraw I and II Gruppe/JG 1 from the front line and to convert the pilots from the Fw 190 A-8 to the He 162 A-2.

Oberstleutnant Herbert Ihlefeld commanded JG 1, but, having been wounded in action on January 1, 1945, it is believed he left the flying to Major Werner Zober's I./JG 1 and Hauptmann Paul-Heinrich Dähne's II./JG 1. The two units were ordered to Parchim in northern Germany for training. However, first they had to pick up aircraft and, due to the chaotic state of the country, the initial pilots from I./JG 1 did not arrive at Schwechat, Marienehe and Bernburg (sites where the He 162s were being assembled) until the end of February. Meanwhile, training for groundcrew was taking place at Parchim.

It was not long before JG 1 suffered its first accidents flying the He 162. Indeed, no less than three mishaps occurred at Schwechat on March 12. Feldwebel Wanke's eighth prototype suffered an engine failure, crashed and caught fire, while Feldwebel Gerhard Gleuwitz had an accident in prototype 26 – both pilots survived but were injured. Unteroffizier Siegfried Tautz was at the controls of the 19th prototype, which hit oil drums when landing causing the aircraft to overturn and catch fire, killing him. All three pilots were from 2./JG 1.

On March 31, I./JG 1 flew into Parchim with their new mounts to continue training,



The first prototype He 162 – it had the designation M-1, Wk Nr 20000 and was coded VI+IA. It first flew December 6, 1944 but crashed four days later.

while II./JG 1 moved to Rostock to convert to the He 162 at the Heinkel factory. Eventually, I./JG 1 arrived at Leck in Schleswig-Holstein on April 16, but by this point there were only three weeks before Germany surrendered. On April 19, JG 1 lost its first He 162 in combat. Eight Hawker Tempests of 222 Sqn, led by Flt Lt Harry Turney, set off for a fighter sweep of the airfields at Neumünster, Schleswig and Husum. At Schleswig, they damaged a total of eight He 111s, Ju 87s and Ju 88s, while Flt Lt Vic Berg shot down a Ju 88.

Fg Off Geoff Walkington reported he saw an unusual aircraft in his combat report: "I was flying as Blue 1, strafing Husum airfield, when I sighted an aircraft flying in a northerly direction away from the aerodrome. I immediately broke off my attack on the airfield and chased this aircraft which was camouflaged mottled green with a yellow underside and appeared to have twin fins and rudders and one engine. The nose of the aircraft had a drooping appearance and the wings (plan view) resembled those of an Me 109. Due to my loss of speed on turning, the enemy aircraft pulled away to about 1,500yds [1,372m]. Having recognised this aircraft as hostile by its camouflage, I gave chase, but was unable to close, my IAS being 360mph [579km/h]. The enemy aircraft did a 360 degrees turn to starboard which I followed, turning inside. During my turn I managed to close to 1,000yds [914m]. Being unable to gain further I trimmed my aircraft carefully and allowing about three quarters of a ring [gun sight] above enemy aircraft I fired short bursts. Enemy aircraft then pulled up through cloud which was 8/10ths at 3,000ft; I followed through a gap and passed enemy aircraft spinning down out of control from approx 3,500ft. I then watched enemy aircraft explode on the ground near Husum aerodrome."

Walkington reported his combat as taking place at 1220hrs. Around this time a pair of He 162s from Oberleutnant Emil Demuth's 3./JG 1 flown by Leutnant Gerhard Stierner and Feldwebel Günther Kirchner had scrambled from Leck to intercept enemy fighters reported in the vicinity. Having only just become airborne, they were attacked by what they thought were P-47 Thunderbolts. Stierner looked behind to see the canopy of Kirchner's aircraft blow away and the pilot's ejection seat shoot into the air: "We had hardly reached an altitude of 50m, when we were attacked



The cramped and basic cockpit of an He 162 photographed by the RAF in August 1945.

from the rear. Though Kirchner succeeded in ejecting his seat, the lack of altitude was not sufficient to allow his parachute to open and my comrade fell to his death. I was much luckier and managed to escape, but then I could not lower my undercarriage! I approached the airfield flying at the lowest altitude and landed as quickly as I could."

This was the first known incident of a pilot deploying what was termed a 'catapult seat' installed in the He 162. This form of ejection seat had been perfected by Heinkel, which also used it on the He 219. The parachute was stored in the ejection seat pan and it would be fired by cartridge as opposed to the modern way of using compressed air

to ignite the jets. Kirchner fell at Klintum just south of Leck, which does not match with Walkington's location of Husum, even further south. However, there were no other recorded claims that day in that approximate area and at that time. Furthermore, Walkington's description of what he attacked appeared to match an He 162.

In the days that followed, Leutnant Rudi Schmitt of 1./JG 1 ejected near Leck whilst Feldwebel Erwin Steeb of 6./JG 1 became the first II./JG 1 pilot to bale out, although it is not known if he ejected.

The next casualty was Gruppen Kommandeur Hauptmann Paul-Heinrich Dähne, a Knight's Cross holder with 99



At least 20 He 162s of JG 1 lined up at Leck in May 1945.

victories. On a training flight, he encountered problems, tried to eject but the canopy failed to detach and he was killed in the subsequent crash.

Some records also state that before his death on April 19 Feldwebel Günther Kirchner had shot down a Tempest whose pilot was captured – but no allied aircraft appear to have been lost in that area at that time.

Similarly Unteroffizier Helmut Reichenbach of 2./JG 1 claimed he shot down an aircraft on April 26 before he crashed in unknown circumstances and was killed but again no allied records correlate this. Then on May 4 Leutnant Rudolf Schmidt of 1./JG 1 claimed a Typhoon, though the RAF denies such an aircraft was lost.

On May 2, II./JG 1 arrived at Leck. Two days later, due to a shortage of aircraft, pilots and logistical support, I./JG 1 was restructured to be 1 (Einsatz) Staffel commanded by Major Werner Zober and 2

Below: **Three He 162s were flown for trial purposes by French forces, Wk Nrs 120223, 120015 and 120093. They painted two grey and the third in a khaki scheme.**



MUSEUM He 162s

Werk Nr	Variant	Unit	Location
120015	He 162 A-2	JG 1	Musée de l'Air et de l'Espace, Paris, France
120076	He 162 A-2	JG 1	Deutsches Technikmuseum Berlin, Germany
120077	He 162 A-2	JG 1	Planes of Fame Air Museum, Chino, California, USA
120086	He 162 A-2	JG 1	Canada Aviation and Space Museum, Ottawa, Canada
120227	He 162 A-2	JG 1	Royal Air Force Museum Cosford, Shropshire
120230*	He 162 A-2	JG 1	Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, USA (not on display)
120235	He 162 A-1	JG 1	IWM Duxford, Cambridgeshire

Note: *Aircraft 120230 has the tail unit of 120222.

(Einsatz) Staffel led by Hauptmann Wolfgang Ludwig. On May 8, Germany surrendered and when British troops arrived at Leck they found JG 1's pristine He 162s, proof of what could have been but never happened.

EVALUATION

The RAF had at least 11 airworthy He 162s to choose from but the lack of documentation or pilot's notes made it a daunting prospect to get into one, start it up, take off and land but that is exactly what test pilot Capt Eric 'Winkle' Brown did on September 7, 1945. Brown reported after the war in the June

1972 edition of *Air Enthusiast*: "It would certainly have been an effective gun platform and its small dimensions would have rendered it difficult to hit. Even if somewhat underpowered, it had good performance – it could certainly have run rings around the contemporary Meteor. However, it was no aeroplane to let embryo pilots loose on and it would have demanded more than simply a good pilot to operate it out of a small airfield."

Despite the plethora of He 162s captured at Leck and in factories, most were scrapped after evaluation, seven complete examples still exist in museums. **AN**

The next issue will be a Boeing 777 special and be on sale on May 16, 2019*

*UK scheduled on sale date. Please note that the overseas deliveries are likely to be after this date.



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