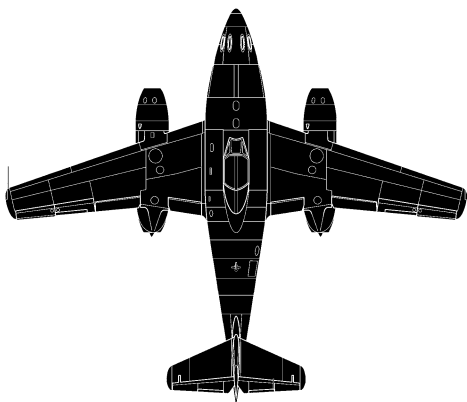


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

Me 262 Schwalbe



Unquestionably the most advanced fighter aircraft to reach operational service in World War II, the Me 262 featured blazing 540 mph speed—the result of jet engines. It had heavy, even if not ideal, armament. The all-metal Messerschmitt fighter, with its single spar wings, under-slung engines, and tricycle landing gear proved to be more capable than its main World War II competitor, the RAF's Gloster Meteor, and equal in many ways to the US Lockheed P-80, which debuted late in the war.

Initial production of the jet engine suffered from a shortage of exotic alloys. This eventually was offset by German ingenuity, but the necessary research effort delayed full production of the Junkers Jumo 004 engines until 1944. That power plant proved to be the fighter's Achilles' heel. Without extremely careful handling, it would flame out, and it had a service life of no more than 50 hours. After many arguments and delays, the Luftwaffe committed

to mass production, and Messerschmitt produced nearly 1,500 before the end of the war. Only about 300 saw active combat.

The Me 262's first victory came on July 26, 1944 when it engaged an RAF Mosquito, which was put out of action. Moreover, the superior performance of the aircraft was compromised by inadequate training of many pilots. However, in the hands of Luftwaffe veterans, the Me 262 was a formidable warplane. Had Germany done the necessary R&D on the jet engines, the Me 262 could have been introduced in the spring of 1943, and the air war in Europe might have turned out differently.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: Me 262A-1a, W. Nr. 112385—*Yellow 8*—as it looked on April 15, 1945. This fighter, assigned to Jagdgeschwader 7, flew in the final defense of Berlin. It was found by US troops in Stendal.



The Schwalbe was formidable.

In Brief

Designed, built by Messerschmitt ★ first flight on jet power alone July 18, 1942 ★ crew of one or two ★ number built 1,430 ★ **Specific to Me 262A-1a:** two Junkers Jumo 004 engines ★ armament four Mk 108 30 mm cannon; 24 R4M rockets; two bombs (on F/B model) ★ max speed 540 mph ★ cruise speed 400 mph ★ max range 652 mi ★ weight (loaded) 14,101 lb ★ span 40 ft 11 in ★ length 34 ft 9 in ★ height 12 ft 7 in.

Famous Fliers

Acers: Heinz Bar, Gerhard Barkhorn, Georg-Peter Eder, Heinrich Ehrler, Adolf Galland, Walter Krupinski, Walter Nowotny, Gunther Rall, Erich Rudorffer, Franz Schall, Walter Schuck, Johannes Steinhoff, Kurt Welter, Theodor Weissenberger. **Notables:** Harold E. Watson and others in famed US group "Watson's Whizzers."

Interesting Facts

Credited with 502 victories vs. 102 losses ★ started with non-swept wings ★ made first flight with one piston engine in nose ★ built in 30 variants, including reconnaissance, night fighter, and rocket-boosted types ★ used in attacks on Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen ★ nicknamed "Schwalbe" (Swallow) in fighter version, "Sturmvogel" (Stormbird) in bomber version ★ called "Turbo" by most pilots ★ influenced design of USAF F-86 fighter.