



He 162 *VOLKSIJÄGER* UNITS



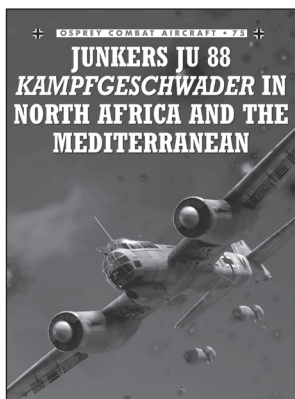
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Robert Forsyth has studied the history and operations of the Luftwaffe for many years. He is the author of *JV 44 – The Galland Circus* (1996), *Battle over Bavaria: The B-26 versus the German Jets* (1998), *Mistel: German Composite Aircraft and Operations 1942-1945* (2001), *Messerschmitt Me 264 Amerikabomber* (2006 – with Eddie J Creek) and *He 162 Volksjäger* (2008 – with Eddie J Creek). He has also written eight titles for Osprey Publishing, including *Jagdverband 44* and *Jagdgeschwader 7* (Aviation Elite Units), *Fw 190 Sturmböcke vs B-17 Flying Fortress* (Duel), *Aces of the Legion Condor* and *Luftwaffe Viermot Aces 1942-45* (Aircraft of the Aces) and *Me 262 Bomber and Reconnaissance Units* (Combat Aircraft). Robert works in publishing, having founded Classic Publications and the imprint Tattered Flag.

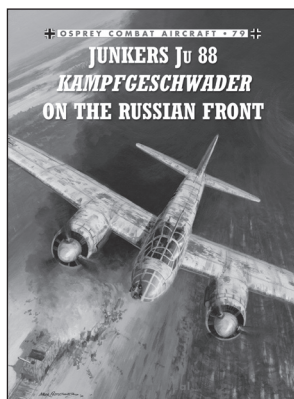
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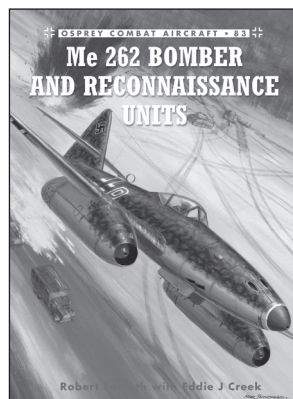
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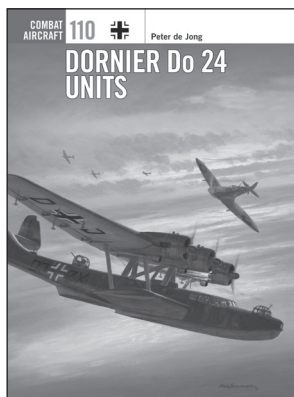
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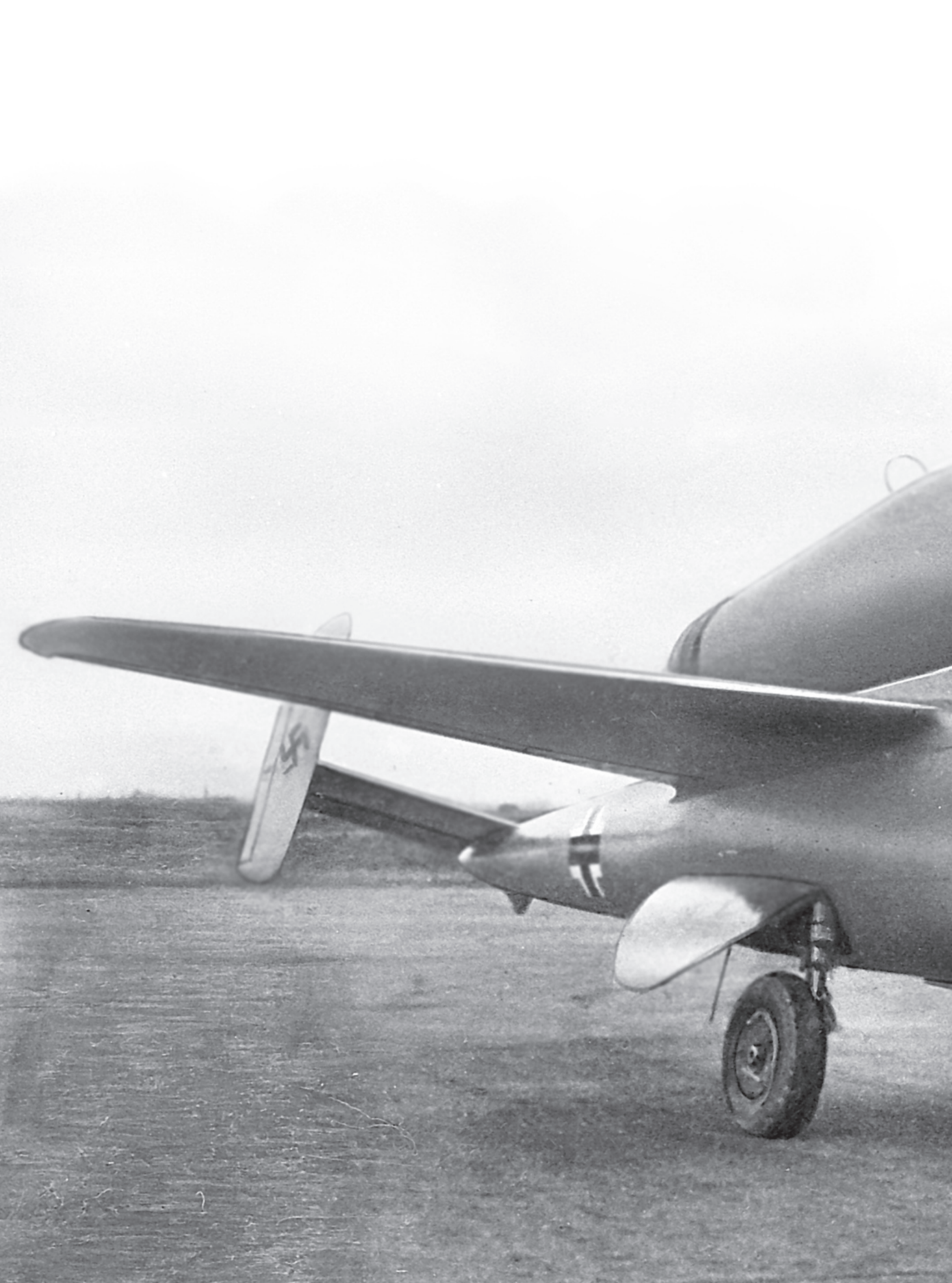


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COMBAT AIRCRAFT

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SERIES EDITOR TONY HOLMES

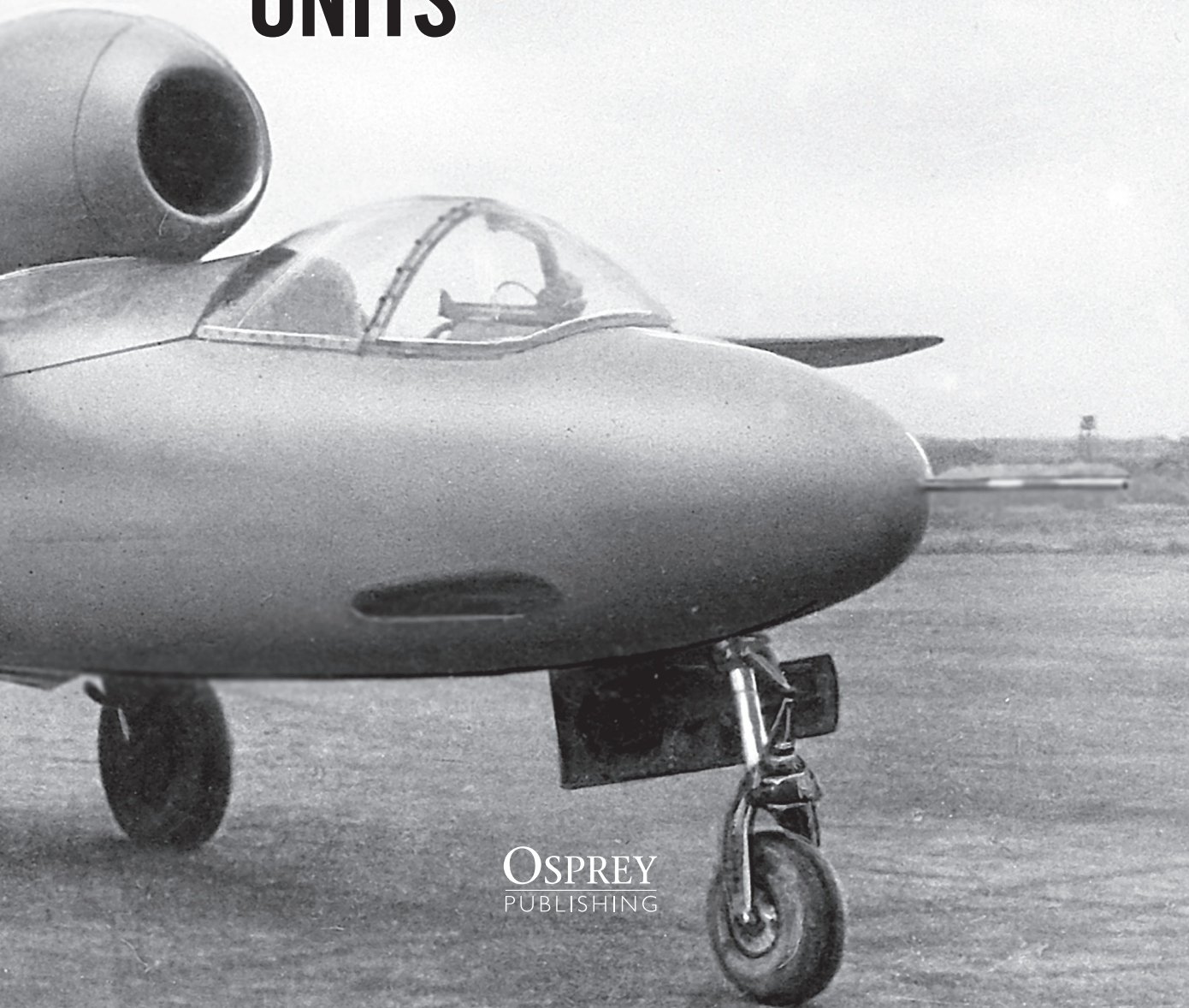
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Robert Forsyth

He 162 *VOLKSJÄGER* UNITS



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Front Cover

On the clear and bright morning of 4 May 1945, just a few hours before the German surrender in western Europe, Leutnant Rudolf Schmitt, the *Staffelkapitän* of 1./JG 1, took off from Leck airfield in northern Germany in He 162 'White 1' to search for enemy fighters that had reportedly been seen in the near vicinity. During his flight, Schmitt observed what he identified as a Hawker Tempest southeast of Husum and opened fire. He recorded in his logbook that he had 'fired upon the enemy aircraft with effect'. The low-level encounter was over in seconds, but it had been a rare meeting between the He 162 *Volksjäger* and an RAF fighter in the closing hours of the war.

Although he subsequently claimed a Tempest destroyed, Schmitt was not credited with the kill. Whilst it remains improbable that he actually shot an enemy aircraft down, Schmitt cannot be denied the likelihood that he opened fire 'with effect' on a single-engined fighter or fighter-bomber and assumed he had damaged it, perhaps even sufficiently to cause it to go down.

Mark Postlethwaite's cover painting depicts the encounter over the fields of Schleswig-Holstein in what must have been one of the last such instances during the war in Europe

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PEOPLE'S FIGHTER

As Allied forces drove ever deeper into Nazi Germany in 1945, so their progress yielded many astounding discoveries. By the end of the first week of May, as World War 2 in northwest Europe drew to a close, the British Second Army's VIII Corps had fought its way from the river Rhine, across northwest Germany to finally push north into the flat, open farmland of Schleswig-Holstein. Its light armoured units reached Kiel and then crossed the Kiel Canal, heading for the Danish border. Along the path of their advance, aside from some bitter fighting, elements of the Corps and their associated units had discovered the horrors of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and numerous other testimonies to the brutality of the Nazi regime.

It was almost at the 'end of the road', however, on 6 May that VIII Corps came across another astonishing find. That day, its vehicles reached the small town of Leck, 30 km west of Flensburg and just south of the Danish border. On the northern edge of the town was an airfield, and it was here that a considerable number of Luftwaffe aircraft had assembled, ready for the inevitable surrender and the arrival of Allied forces. As the British tanks rumbled over the airfield perimeter, there came into sight 22 distinctive and diminutive aircraft lined up in two impressive and closely ranked rows on either side of one of the taxi tracks. Distinctive because these aircraft were void of propellers and, uniquely, their power units were carried atop their fuselages, behind which was a twin tail arrangement.

The accomplished design partnership of Professor Ernst Heinkel (right) and his Senior Design Engineer, Siegfried Günter, was responsible for the production of many renowned aircraft, including the He 111 that Heinkel is referring to on the drawing board in this photograph. The two men would be involved in the commissioning of the He 162 from the outset



Hauptdienstleiter Dipl-Ing Karl-Otto Saur (right) is presented with the Knight's Cross of the War Service Cross with Swords by the German Armaments Minister, Albert Speer. The energetic and blunt engineer was the early driving force behind the *Volksjäger* project

The men of VIII Corps had stumbled across the only operationally ready unit of Heinkel He 162s. These were the Luftwaffe's last examples of mass-produced, jet-powered technology, and a paradox in design – rushed and cheap (at least compared to the other German jets, the Messerschmitt Me 262 and the Arado Ar 234), but supposedly quick and easy to build, easy to fly and fast. This was the *Volksjäger* (the 'People's Fighter'), a final attempt to overcome the Allied bomber threat with a machine available in significant numbers, which could be flown by relatively inexperienced

pilots and yet be able to outperform any fighter the enemy had. Yet, understandably, this was seen by many in Germany as an unrealistic and unattainable goal.

The *Volksjäger* concept originated with civil engineer and committed Nazi Hauptdienstleiter Dipl-Ing Karl-Otto Saur, who Hitler once described as being the 'genius in our armaments industry'. By the summer of 1944 Saur believed that the Luftwaffe fighter arm was a spent force, no longer able to conduct effective operations against the Allies. As such, a radical alternative was needed, and Saur issued a proposal for a small, cheap, high-performance jet fighter that could be mass-produced under what he termed as 'forced action'. According to the erstwhile General of the Fighter Arm, Generalleutnant Adolf Galland, 'Saur gave Göring the idea which he jumped at immediately – as he did to all proposals that were out of the ordinary and sufficiently crazy.'

Saur's idea also won support from Generaloberst Alfred Keller, the head of the *Nationalsozialistisches Fliegerkorps* (NSFK), the Nazi Party-controlled, flying training and sports association, whose auxiliary branch, the *Flieger Hitler-Jugend* (Flying Hitler Youth), offered aircraft model-building courses and glider flying to boys of school age. Keller believed that with the right type of aircraft, and following a limited period of glider tuition, boys as young as 15 to 17 years of age could be quickly trained to fly combat missions. Keller reasoned that if the simple but reliable new *Volkswagen* (People's Car) could be driven by virtually anyone with the minimum of instruction, then why not the same for an aircraft? Galland recalled;

'Good old Keller, whom we called the "Father of Heroes", was won over by this. One day he came to see me in order to discuss the preparations. He intended tackling the problem without any technical knowledge, merely aided by his NSFK *Standartenführer* and *Gruppenführer*. He thought he had found a new way of justifying the existence of his *Korps*. However, I dissuaded him after a few days.'

But by this stage the idea had already reached Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, who was becoming increasingly desperate to find a way to appease

Hitler. The *Führer* was impatient and scornful over the Luftwaffe's failure to hit back at the Allied air forces that were operating with increasing impunity over the Reich. Thus, at this dark time in the war, Göring seized upon the idea, envisaging whole units of fanatical, NSFK-trained *Hitler-Jugend* engaging the enemy's bomber formations with a new resolve. By drawing on such a vast, untapped well of manpower, the rate of supply of pilots would be equal to the number of aircraft that Saur confidently projected would roll off the assembly lines set up in underground and strategically distant factories using round-the-clock production.

The man who took the *Volksjäger* idea to initial development was Oberst Siegfried Knemeyer, the head of flight development in the Technical Equipment Office of the Reichsluftministerium (RLM). Before the war Knemeyer had worked on the development of instrument flying and had qualified as an engineer. He became a skilled pilot, and with his considerable knowledge of electronics, he later undertook test flights and operational missions in many different aircraft over Europe and North Africa. In April 1943 he was appointed Technical Officer to the *Angriffsführer England*, the command responsible for bombing raids against the British Isles, and was then assigned to Göring's personal staff, where he encouraged development of the Me 262.

However, Knemeyer was astute enough to recognise that although the Me 262 provided the Luftwaffe with a first-rate interceptor, the aircraft lacked performance at low altitude, which was where enemy fighters were now becoming an increasing threat as they attacked Luftwaffe airfields and strafed supply trains and troops on the ground. Nor did Knemeyer believe that the existing piston-engined Bf 109 and Fw 190 compensated in this regard. As he wrote shortly after the war;

'It became absolutely essential to develop a high-speed, single-seater fighter that had a sufficiently good performance which would enable it to take off when enemy aircraft were actually sighted. In addition, due to the bombing of our large airfields with long runways, these new fighters had to be able to take off in a very short distance and thus enable small landing grounds to be used. The mass production of such an aircraft had to be on such a scale as would enable the enemy to be engaged at any point and during the entire duration of their flight.

'By limiting the endurance and the armament requirement for this new aircraft, the existing jet fighter [the Me 262] would have fulfilled the requirements. However, this aircraft had to be ruled out since it was not possible to produce the numbers that would have been required for combating these low-flying attacks and, in particular, because the provision of two power units per airframe was quite beyond the capacity of industry.'

Knemeyer opined that this new, low-altitude interceptor would need to be capable of making an unassisted takeoff in less than 600 metres, and of achieving high speed at low and medium altitudes, with a minimum



Oberst Siegfried Knemeyer, an extremely experienced pilot and technician, is seen here during an inspection of the Horten H IIIe tailless glider. In 1944, while working for the RLM Technical Office, he oversaw the early development of the *Volksjäger*, envisaging a fighter able to take off from short runways and with a single jet engine mounted above the wing