



HANGAR TALK

A book review by Kevin Barker

IN TERMS of aviations pioneers, a few key names are always sure to get a mention. However, a sphere of aviation development often overlooked by the history books is that of the world's first jet engine by the Germans in the run-up to World War II.

The *First Jet Pilot* written by the son of test pilot Erich Warsitz, rips the cloak off a chapter in aviation history that has remained shrouded in secrecy for nearly 80 years.

Penned by Erich Warsitz's son Lutz, the book is written in the first person, compiled from diaries and notes of the time, and vividly captures the Halcyon days of German aviation research and development, shining a light on the rich history of the German aviation sector.

Very little is known of this pioneering period, as all aviation development projects of the time were shrouded in strict secrecy, and what Warsitz manages to achieve with this book, is to portray the pioneers of the time, not as Nazi sympathisers, or Reich's men, but as young adventurous aviators and scientists, eager to get their new projects into the air.

In fact, the book has very little to do with the war, focussing on the development team's strife with the Government of the day for funding, the incidents and accidents – that if they were not so serious, would be considered laughable by today's standards, and the gut-wrenching tension of developmental test flying in the days before modern test flight methodologies and simulations were available.

Each day was a case of strapping yourself into/on to a machine that might, or might not, explode at any second, highlighting the ex-

treme bravery found in those young pioneers.

As the pilot to first fly the rocket-powered Heinkel He 176, as well as the real first jet, the He 178, Warsitz was quickly noticed by those in positions of power, and was promoted through the ranks, and handsomely rewarded for his bravery and flying skills – skills which saw him team up with Wernher von Braun, Hans Pabst von Ohain, and Ernst Heinkel, to extend the frontiers of aviation, in speed, altitude and propulsion technology.

Needless to say, Warsitz also experienced a number of life-threatening situations, and the book takes a somewhat jaded, very humorous look at some of these incidents.

Having been translated from German by Geoffrey Brooks, *The First Jet Pilot* makes for extremely easy reading of a somewhat difficult subject, and the personal interludes and introspection add a great touch for being able to gauge the mental make-up of the test pilots of a bygone era.

Including many previously unreleased photos, diagrams and drawings, Lutz Warsitz has managed to uncloak a period that was hidden in sinister secrecy, and managed to bring the reader out to the icy fields of Germany in the late 1930s to be an integral part of the flight test teams that paved the way for the future jet technologies that we all enjoy today.

More than just a good read, *The First Jet Pilot* makes it as an historical document of inestimable value in the aviation pioneering field.

The book was first published by Pen and Swords Books Ltd., and is priced at just under £20 in the UK.

RADIALS VERSUS TURBINES

Ed Hirsch, our Miami-based US editor, obviously has a love-hate relationship for aero engines – he loves radial engines and hates those turbines. He sent in this piece to prove his point.

Round engines are commonly known as radial engines. The piston jugs are placed in a circle, hence "round" engines. Turbine engines

are known as jet engines. We gotta get rid of those turbines, they're ruining aviation and our hearing.

A turbine is too simple-minded, it has no mystery. The air travels through it in a straight line and doesn't pick up any of the pungent fragrance of engine oil or pilot sweat.

Anybody can start a turbine. You just need to move a switch from "OFF" to "START" and then remember to move it back to "ON" after a while.

My PC is harder to start. Cranking a round engine requires skill, finesse and style. You have to seduce it into starting. It's like waking up a horny mistress. On some planes, the pilots aren't even allowed to do it. Turbines start by whining for a while, then give a lady-like poof and start whining a little louder.

Radial engines give a satisfying rattle-rattle, click-click, *BANG*, more rattles, another *BANG*, a big macho *BURP* or two, more clicks, a lot more smoke and finally a serious low pitched roar. We like that. It's a GUY thing.

When you start a round engine, your mind is engaged and you can concentrate on the flight ahead. Starting a turbine is like flicking on a ceiling fan: Useful, but, hardly exciting.

When you have started his round engine successfully your Crew Chief looks up at you like he'd let you kiss his girl, too! Turbines don't break or catch fire often enough, which leads to aircrew boredom, complacency and inattention. A round engine at speed looks and sounds like it's going to blow any minute. This helps concentrate the mind.

Turbines don't have enough control levers or gauges to keep a pilot's attention. There's nothing to fiddle with during long flights.

Turbines smell like a Boy Scout camp full of Coleman lamps. Round engines smell like God intended machines to smell.

Ed Hirsch has asked us to pass this on to a WWII guy (or his son, or anyone who flew them, ever) in remembrance of that "Greatest Generation".

