

Flight in Starfighter Jet Said Fast, Astonishing Page in History

(Editor's note: From the waspish Messerschmitts of Hitler's Air Force to American-built Starfighter jets flown by West Germany's 1962 ace is a fast—and astonishing—page in the history of our times. In this dispatch a UPI reporter tells of a flight with one of the new German military pilots in a Starfighter, in which he took over control of the plane for a time, and what German fliers think of the plane.)

By CAY BROCKDORFF
United Press International
Noerwien, Germany—UPI—Lieut. Hermann Sengen, confident, crewcut and 24 years old, gunned the jet engine. Quietly, as if about to take his automobile around the corner, he said "Let's go."

He unlocked the brakes and with a roar the Luftwaffe jet shot forward. Barely 90 seconds later the American-designed jet fighter, its iron cross glinting in stark contrast to its silver fuselage, was gliding smoothly above the Rhine river at an altitude of 26,000 feet.

Found Out
I had always wondered what it was like to fly in a supersonic jet. I found out in those 90 seconds.

At takeoff the plane had moved a few feet down the runway when something happened that slammed me, strapped into the co-pilot's seat, back into my seat with nearly crushing force.

Pushing the throttle to its most forward position, Sengen had ignited the two-stage afterburner in split second intervals. Then, long flames spouting from its tailpipe, the needle-nosed F104 "Star-

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fighter" raced screaming down the runway. After a short, 1,700-foot run, it was airborne. Sengen retracted gear and flaps and nosed it up into the sky like a rocket.

There was continuous acceleration as the plane zoomed up and up, increasing speed like a race car on a flat road.

The altimeter needle, indicating the plane's climb, circled madly as the jet crashed the sound barrier even before reaching the peak of its skybound trajectory.

Leveling off in a deep blue sky, Sengen, his even breathing through the supersensitive communication system, announced "You have just witnessed what we call a full afterburner climb out."

The Lockheed-designed F104, picked by West Germany to become its standard jet interceptor and tactical nuclear strike bomber, established a world record with its incredible one and one-half minute performance from standstill to 26,000 feet.

The airplane was chosen by German Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Joseph Kammhuber for its outstanding performance and ability to carry an enormous quantity of electronic gear.

The young pilots of the new Germany call it a "pilot's plane."

"She handles beautifully

and when it comes to performance there is nothing, just nothing like it," Sengen said.

Germany's still fledgling Luftwaffe will eventually fly 12 interceptors, fighter-bomber and reconnaissance wings equipped with the bullet-shaped Starfighter, whose short trapezoid wings feature razor-sharp edges protected on the ground by felt-lined metal covers.

Sengen, one of the best supersonic pilots of the Luftwaffe, was picked to check out German pilots with experience on slower jets and get them used to the hot new plane.

Mach Two Run

Our jet had hardly leveled off at 26,000 feet when Sengen's voice was again over the intercom. "Here comes the Mach two run," he announced. Hardly had he spoken before the afterburner,

spouting more flames, kicked the F104 through the sky in another fantastic burst of acceleration.

The Machmeter, indicating the plane's velocity relative to the speed of sound, hit Mach 1.6 and Mach 1.8 in barely a few seconds.

"Mach two (twice the speed of sound)," Sengen said through his microphone. "I'll cut out the afterburner."

Hurting through the wild blue yonder at 1,400 miles per hour, we might have been sitting in a glider as far as comfort and sense of motion was concerned.

Climb More

"We'll use our speed to climb some more," said Sengen. And again we nosed upward until the plane's altimeter needle indicated 50,000 feet.

"If you want to take her now go ahead," said Sengen. "And don't worry. I'll help

you before you get into trouble."

Timidly, but with a feeling of immense exhilaration, I "took her." With Sengen giving tense attention I guided the plane through several careful banks.

My confidence built up by Sengen's encouraging "try some more," I rolled the Starfighter, first slowly, then faster. The plane responded smoothly under my inexperienced hands.

"Now climb," Sengen ordered. At the same time he indicated that I should jerk the stick back. I did—and the stick started bucking wildly.

Sengen later explained that the "bucking" was a built-in automatic warning.

"It tells us in time of a full power stallout common in some of the very fast jets," he said.

The plane, meanwhile, had slowed under Sengen's guidance.

ance to just under the sound barrier.

"We must not go through the sonic barrier at under 36,000 feet or hell is breaking loose when we get back," Sengen said. "We will have complaints over windows broken by the sonic boom."

It was the smoothest landing I had ever experienced, scores of airline landings included.

Major Hans Ulrich Flade,

the squadron leader, was waiting as the canopy was opened and our oxygen masks unfastened for the first gulps of fresh air. We had been up and down in just 45 minutes.

"The men we need to pilot this airplane must stay on top of it," the major said. "This is a psychological prerequisite to which pilot skill is secondary. Never must the pilot let this extraordinary

plane run away with him." his plane, grinned. And I Lt. Sengen, standing beside think he winked.

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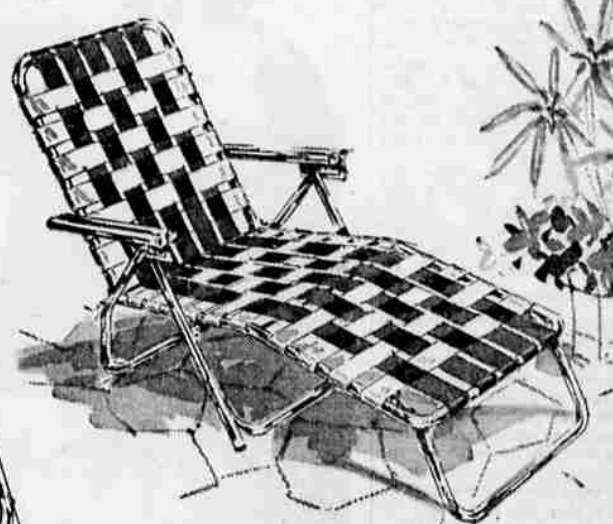
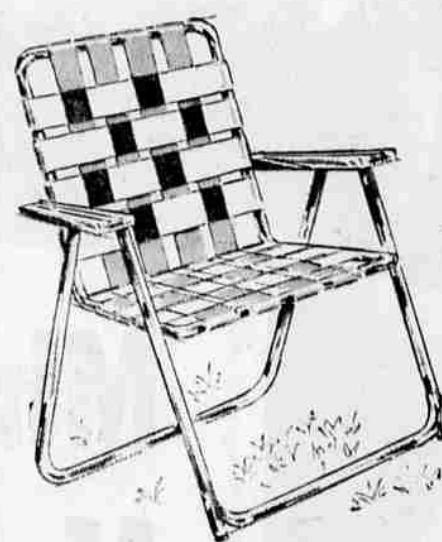
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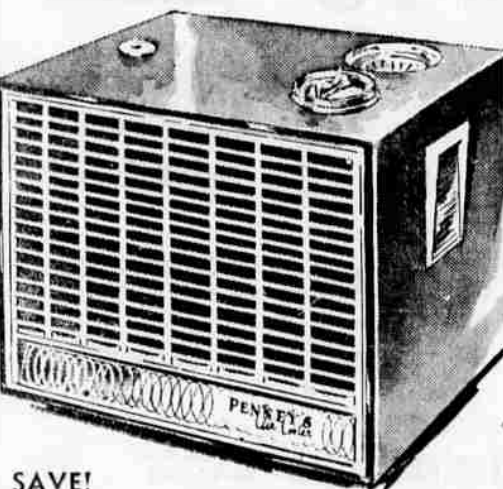
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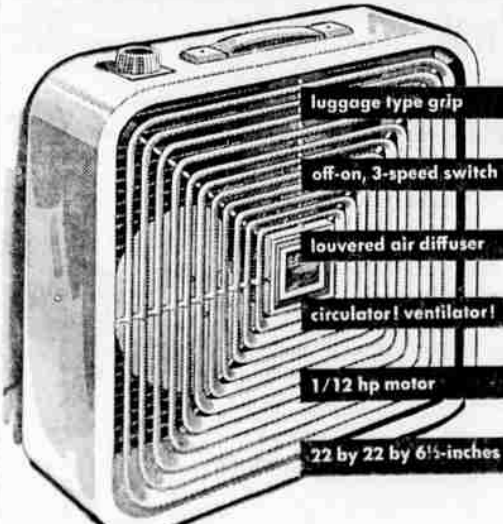
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