

TEST PILOTS

(Wolfgang Späte)

Including over 100 rare photographs, this book provides a fascinating glimpse into the lives of those who have made aviation history and is a unique and absorbing treatise on aviation by Wolfgang Späte, whose own flying career took him from the early gliders right through to post-war jets. Over a period of many years, Späte collected the memoirs and papers of pilots which emanate from the very earliest years of aviation to the modern test pilot age. The subjects are equally diverse: from the first tests of parachutes, to rocket-propelled explosive gliders to the 'ground-effect' flying boat.

The book includes the writings of Kurt Zwickau, Hanna Reitsch and Jean Marie Saget and many other renowned aviators. Dealing as it does with many subjects which have never been explored. It is a refreshingly new approach in a field of reading which is often found wanting in originality.

The author was born in Dresden in 1911 and after a short period working for a regional newspaper, first flew gliders in 1927. From 1934 he competed in numerous national and international competitions sometimes flying gliders he had built himself. By 1938 he had joined the élite of German glider pilots by becoming overall winner of the Rhöne Glider Competition and bearer of the Golden Achievement Award.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, Späte first served as an army reconnaissance pilot, mainly in the Polish and French campaigns, before enlisting as a fighter pilot when he saw active service in the East. In 1942 he became head of the *Erprobungs-Kommando 16* (Trial Group 16) and in charge of the development of the famous Me 163 Rocket Fighter. He was appointed Commander Flying Group in 1944, and later Commander of a Fighting Wing. He was credited with a total of 99 aerial victories in the 2nd World War, rose to the rank of Major and was awarded the Knights Cross with bar.

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