The turbojet-powered Heinkel He 178, the world's first jet aircraft, took its first flight on August 27, 1939. It was flown by German test pilot Erich Warsitz.

The Heinkel He 178 was a private venture by the German Heinkel company in accordance with director Ernst Heinkel's emphasis on developing technology for high-speed flight. The design was based on the work of young engineer Hans von Ohain, who had taken out a patent on using the exhaust from a gas turbine as a means of propulsion.

The He 178 was a small, metal aircraft that ran on diesel fuel. The jet intake was in the nose and the plane was fitted with tailwheel undercarriage. The main landing gear was retractable, but remained fixed in "down" position throughout the flight trials. Maximum speed was around 380 mph for the radial-flow turbojet.

This maiden flight took place only days before Germany started World War II. The Heinkel company had kept its work secret and expected sales of the aircraft to take off once it made its work publicly known. That was not the case.

Unbeknownst to the company, the German government had also been working on its own secret projects. It was soon announced that BMW and Junkers were working on "official" axial-flow turbojet engines for the German air force.

Two weeks after Germany invaded Poland, the German air force ordered aircraft manufacturers to
reduce all development work with the exception of development work on jet-powered single seaters for fighter aircraft.

The He 187 had been moved to an air museum but was destroyed in an air raid in 1943 (see photo of a replica below).

Turbojets were used on the Concorde, the Boeing 367-80, the SR-71 Blackbird, and other supersonic aircraft, and now find use in cruise missiles. They are not as widely used today because of more efficient alternatives for subsonic flight, like turboprop and turbofan engines.

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For more moments in tech history, see this [blog](http://blog). EDN strives to be historically accurate with these postings. Should you see an error, please [notify us](mailto:notifyus@edn.com).

**Editor's note:** This article was originally posted on August 27, 2012 and edited on August 26, 2019.