

# CONVAIR GOES VERTICAL



UTILIZING CAPTURED GERMAN TECHNOLOGY,  
CONVAIR ATTEMPTED TO CREATE A UNIQUE  
POINT DEFENSE FIGHTER

BY HOWARD CARTER

Intriguing view of the XFY-1 being piloted by Skeets Coleman near Brown Field. As can be seen, the vertical tail and fuselage have been extensively tufted to obtain more airflow data. Turbulence from the contra-rotating propellers was a real problem as the aircraft neared the ground for a vertical landing. The massive vertical and dorsal tails are show to advantage in this view along with the exhausts for the XT40 turboprop.

During the 1950s, it seemed as if no aeronautical project was too radical — especially when it came to military aircraft. The Cold War was heating up and the United States had a powerful enemy in the form of Stalin's Soviet Union. To counter the Soviet threat an entirely new generation of aircraft and missiles was created — sadly, some of them just did not live up to expectations. Also, and it would not be revealed until years later, the Soviet "threat" was not real. American intelligence agencies had failed in correctly predicting Soviet strengths and advances while Soviet propaganda played upon these incorrect projections to create a near-panic in the USA. One of the fears was that advanced Soviet jet bombers would be able to attack American targets with great speed. Creating NORAD and the DEW Line was just beginning and an early Soviet first-strike could take out many fighter bases and thus leave cities and factories exposed to attack. At sea, Soviet anti-shipping aircraft posed the threat of destroying a great deal of the Navy's seapower.

How could this threat be answered? To find a possible solution, we have to go back to the closing days of the war in Europe. As Allied forces closed in on Germany, the *Luftwaffe* saw the importance of fast-rising interceptors that could protect vital assets. Experiments were undertaken to build and deploy these point-defense interceptors but it was a case of too little, too late.

These experiments included Focke-Wulf's *Triebflugel* (thrust-wing hunter) program — a vertical takeoff and landing tailsitter interceptor designed for local defense of important factories. The *Triebflugel* had reached wind tunnel testing when Allied forces overran the Focke-Wulf facility. Also, in 1944 Heinkel engineers working in Vienna drew up some concepts for an aircraft they called the *Wespe* (Wasp) that was a bit over 20 feet tall and sat on a tripod tail arrangement. The fuselage was encompassed in an annular (ring) wing that had small auxiliary flat wing stubs with a propeller rotating inside the wing. Power was to come from the Heinkel S021 turboprop, which was a derivative