

The first man to fly a delta-winged jet was Consolidated Vultee chief test pilot, Ellis D. “Sam” Shannon, an Alabama native with nearly two decades of flight experience, more than half of them as a test pilot. After six years with the Glenn L. Martin Company, Shannon had come to Consolidated Vultee in 1943 around the time the merger became effective, where he served as head of the company’s Flight Research Department. He was the first to fly nearly every new model produced in San Diego, including later B-24 variants, the XB-32, and the XB-46. He also tested the company’s successful postwar series of ConvairLiner commercial transports.

Shannon began working with the XF-92A in high-speed taxi tests at Muroc, and the first “flight”—actually an inadvertent hop—

occurred during this process. On 9 June 1948, coincidentally just four days after Capt. Edwards was killed, Shannon was piloting the XF-92A when it lifted briefly from the runway. Over the following weeks, the J33-A-23 engine was installed.

The official first flight came on 18 September 1948, the first anniversary of the U.S. Air Force becoming an independent service. This began Phase I, the Consolidated Vultee phase, of the flight-test program. By the end of the year, Shannon had made 10 flights in the aircraft, reporting it easy to handle, albeit “a little sensitive”—his choice of words—on the controls. The second man to fly the XF-92A was Consolidated Vultee’s Bill Martin, who made his debut flight on 21 December 1948. What Lippisch had planned in Germany during



By late April 1948, when the U.S. Air Force inspected this mock-up in San Diego, the XP-92 design had evolved from swept wings to delta wings. (Convair via Robert Bradley)



As shown in the 1948 mock-up, this proposed XP-92 located the cockpit within the spike in the center main ducted-rocket intake! (Convair via Robert Bradley)



As envisioned in 1948, the XP-92 pilot entered through the canopy’s top panel. Bailing out in an emergency without being sucked into the ramjet presented a greater challenge. Convair proposed a system whereby the entire forward fuselage would be jettisoned. The turbojet engine was contained within the winged center section. (Convair via Robert Bradley)



Here, the XP-92 is dwarfed by its own auxiliary fuel tanks. Convair proposed this arrangement for the early part of a mission when a great deal of fuel would be used, pushing the interceptor to high altitudes at great speed. (Convair via Robert Bradley)

World War II came to fruition in the high desert of postwar California.

When Phase I of the flight testing wrapped up on 26 August 1949, Shannon and Martin had made 47 flights for a total of 20 hours and 33 minutes of flying time. The aircraft, now designated as XF-92A, was turned over to the Air Force for Phase II testing.

The first Air Force test pilot to fly the Convair delta was Maj. Charles E. "Chuck" Yeager, who made his XF-92A debut on 13 October 1949, the day before the second anniversary of his record-breaking first supersonic flight in the Bell X-1. The second Air Force pilot assigned to the XF-92A program, 1st Lt. Jim Fitzgerald, was killed in the crash of a Lockheed T-33 and was replaced by Maj. Frank K. "Pete" Everest.

Yeager would later recall that he found the aircraft to be an enjoyable one to fly, but Everest disagreed. In an interview with Barry DiGregorio, published in *Aviation History* magazine, he recalled that from his perspective, the XF-92A "wasn't a very stable airplane because they didn't attempt in those days to run stability tests on it, per se."

Though Everest completed what was the final Phase II U.S. Air Force test flight on 28 December 1949, Air Force pilots would continue to fly the aircraft intermittently for several more years.

Testing the XF-92A at supersonic speeds was always on the minds of the engineers who designed it, but those who test flew it found the aircraft incapable of piercing the sound barrier, so it was sent back to the factory to be re-engined with an afterburning Allison J33-A-29, delivering 7,500 pounds of thrust, and a lengthened fuselage.



The XF-92A during auxiliary power testing on the shores of San Diego Bay. It was here that Consolidated flying boats made their first flights. The XF-92A, however, would be trucked to the Mojave Desert for its debut. (Convair via Author's collection)