

Pushing into the Future



Photo courtesy Robert F. Dorr

Northrop's XP-56 was one of several "pusher" fighters tested at Muroc AAB (now Edwards AFB), Calif. Called the "Black Bullet" because of its stubby shape—it was less than 30 feet long with a wingspan of 42.6 feet—it had a number of unique features, including the ability to jettison its contra-rotating propellers to enable the pilot to bail out. Two Black Bullets were built and tested in the early 1940s,

but flight test results were disappointing. Subsequent wind tunnel tests enforced the conclusion that the design was not air-worthy, so the project was abandoned—a decision influenced by the arrival of the jet engine.