

⁵Rhoads, "Autobiography," April 13, 1994, pp. 1-2, Rhoads Papers, SWC; Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (Tape 1, Jan. 27, 1994), pp. 12-13, SWC.

⁶Rhoads, "Autobiography," April 13, 1994, pp. 2-3, Rhoads Papers, SWC; Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (Tape 1, Jan. 27, 1994), pp. 11-14, SWC.

⁷The *Alchiba* was one of several cargo ships involved in the Solomons Campaign. On November 28, 1942, during the struggle for Guadalcanal, she was torpedoed by a Japanese midget submarine while unloading a vital cargo of aviation fuel, bombs and ammunition off Lungo Point. The *Alchiba* was beached and burned for four days as unloading and firefighting went on simultaneously, but she survived and later played a key role in the Bougainville Campaign of October and November 1943, during which she was commanded by Cmdr. James S. Freeman. William L. Mc Gee, *Amphibious Operations in the South Pacific in World War II*, Vol. 2 (Santa Barbara, CA: BMC, 2002), pp. 130, 199, 500-506, 565, 592.

⁸Rhoads, "Autobiography," April 13, 1994, pp. 9-13, Rhoads Papers, SWC; Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (Tape 1, Jan. 27, 1994), pp. 19-23, SWC. The New Hebrides, particularly the harbor of Espiritu Santo Island, had been a staging point for the Solomons-Guadalcanal Campaigns in 1942-43. See Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vols. 4, 5 and 6 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1954-1962). Today they comprise the South Pacific Island nation of Vanuatu.

⁹Rhoads, "Autobiography," April 13, 1994, pp. 14-18; *Ibid.*, April 29, 1994, p. 1, Rhoads Papers, SWC; Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcripts (Tapes 1-6, April 29, May 18-19, and September 23, 1994), SWC.

¹⁰Rhoads, "Autobiography," 1994-96, p. 3, Rhoads Papers, SWC; Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (Tape 6, Sept. 23, 1994), p. 6, SWC.

¹¹Rhoads, "Autobiography," 1994-96, pp. 3-11, Rhoads Papers, SWC; Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (Tape 5, May 18-19, 1994), pp. 11-18, SWC.

¹²Rhoads, "Autobiography," 1994-96, pp. 16-18, Rhoads Papers, SWC; Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (Tape 6, February 5, 1995), pp. 14, 17-19, SWC.

¹³Rhoads, "Autobiography," 1994-96, pp. 14-15, 21, Rhoads Papers, SWC; Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (Tape 6, Feb. 5, 1995), pp. 10-12, SWC.

¹⁴Rhoads, "Autobiography," 1994-96, pp. 12-13, 16, 19, Rhoads Papers, SWC; Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (Tape 6, Feb. 5, 1995), pp. 14-15, SWC; Harvey Rhoads Obituary, *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, November 13, 2002.

¹⁵Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (June 6, 2002), pp. 7-10, SWC.

¹⁶Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (June 6, 2002), p. 12, SWC. Clarence Pope of San Angelo, TX, referred to scouts as the "eyes and ears of the oil industry." Clarence C. Pope, *An Oil Scout in the Permian Basin, 1924-1960* (El Paso: Permian Press, 1972), pp. 9ff. See also Samuel D. Myres, *The Permian Basin*, Vol. 2 (of 2 vols.) *The Era of Advancement* (El Paso: Permian Press, 1977).

¹⁷Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (June 6, 2002), pp. 12-21, SWC.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 25-28, SWC.

¹⁹Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (June 6, 2002), pp. 29-47; *Ibid.*, (June 27, 2002), pp. 8-19, SWC.

²⁰Rhoads to Kreidler, Interview Transcript (June 27, 2002), pp. 18-19, SWC.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 19-42, SWC.

²²Harvey Rhoads Obituary, *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, November 13, 2002.

²³Sharleen Formby Rhoads, Historical Marker (Wise County, TX), in Rhoads Papers, SWC.

²⁴Harvey Rhoads Obituary, *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, November 13, 2002.

²⁵*Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1986 (Section I), pp. 13-15.

Carl G. Cromwell and Cromwell Airlines: The Dawn of Commercial Aviation in West Texas, 1928-1931

Erik Carlson

On November 4, 1970, forty-seven years after Carl G. Cromwell discovered oil on the Santa Rita lease near Big Lake, Texas, he was inducted into the Petroleum Museum of Texas Hall of Fame. In Midland that evening for the Third Annual Hall of Fame banquet, family, friends, and co-workers paid tribute to Carl Cromwell, known as the "Big Swede," along with four other men who contributed to the development of the Texas oil industry. In reality, however, Cromwell had not been alive since the Hoover Administration and sadly his wife, Luella Cromwell, passed away just nine months earlier in January. Accepting the honor at the Ranchland Hills Country Club for Cromwell was his only child -- Carlene Cromwell Peavy. During the awards presentation, the master of ceremonies spoke of the impact of Carl Cromwell's career on the Texas oil industry.¹

Despite a brief mention of his fondness for "fast cars and airplanes," conspicuously absent from the glowing tribute that night was Cromwell's pioneering work in business and commercial aviation. Unknown to most of the attendees, Cromwell had helped to introduce business aviation into the oil industry in Texas. He was also instrumental in developing a modern airport in San Angelo. And finally, Carl Cromwell founded Cromwell Airlines, Inc., the first daily non-air mail contract airline based in Texas.²

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On January 26, 1889 in Saybrook, Pennsylvania, John and Hannah Cromwell became parents for the first time with the birth of a son. The Swedish immigrants named their first child Carl. Born in the waning years of the Gilded Age, Cromwell eventually became one of six children in this first-generation American household.³ Cromwell grew to maturity in a period in U.S. history when the foundation for 20th century American material, technological, and military superiority was laid. The rise of big business and the growth of modern America with its bursts of inventions in the form of new sources of energy, machines, and modes of transportation would have a lasting impact on the life of Carl Cromwell.

Growing up near the first discovery of oil in the United States earmarked the young Cromwell for a life involved in tapping this new natural resource. At sixteen he went to work in the oil fields of Pennsylvania. During these first raw years Cromwell sharpened his skills. Eventually he found work in the oil fields of Oklahoma. By this time Cromwell was well-known for his prowess in oil drilling techniques. With America's entry into World War I in April of 1917, Cromwell joined the United States Army and served with the 358th Infantry Regiment stationed at Camp Travis in Texas. After Armistice in November 1918, Cromwell was discharged from the military and he returned to Oklahoma. In 1919, he met and married Luella Lunsford. Soon the newlyweds were living in Texas when a new opportunity appeared on the horizon.⁴

In 1921, Frank T. Pickrell, president of Texon Oil and Land Company, offered Carl Cromwell a job in the oil fields owned by the University of Texas. Cromwell accepted the position, and he and Luella moved into a barren and isolated region of Reagan County near Big Lake, Texas. Cromwell built a wildcatter's shack to live in. Soon the Cromwells had a daughter whom they named Carlene. Cromwell's initial drilling efforts were hampered by a dearth of experienced workers. Yet, Cromwell persisted and continued his exhausting work.⁵

On the morning of May 28, 1923, while the Cromwell family ate breakfast, the Santa Rita well erupted. As Carl fed little Carlene and Luella prepared food for the adults, she heard a "hissing" noise coming from outside. Cromwell looked out the window and saw a thick stream of oil rising into the air. The discovery of oil on that spring morning changed the fortunes of all involved in this risky venture. New found riches became the foundation of the vast wealth for the University of Texas at Austin. In addition, the Texon Oil and Land Company made hefty profits. On a smaller scale, Carl Cromwell became wealthy enough to buy his own oil leases and to finance other business ventures.⁶

Cromwell's discovery led to a promotion in the Texon Oil and Land Company. With increased responsibility, he searched for ways to make his job more efficient. In the Texas oil business great distances and poor roads between properties delayed communications between management and field offices. In addition, the isolated oil fields were far from repair shops in distant towns. In 1923, these problems had Cromwell searching for realistic solutions to his dilemmas. Five years later, Carl Cromwell found his answer.

In 1928, aviation enthusiasts in Texas trying to promote the use of the airplane formed the Fort Worth Aerocade. Building upon the wave of hysteria following Charles Lindbergh's flight from New York to Paris, this group of determined pilots planned a flying tour of West Texas. Twelve pilots flying a variety of post-World War I aircraft made up the Fort Worth Aerocade. The Aerocade stopped in towns such as Abilene, Midland, San Angelo, Lubbock, and Amarillo. During tour stops, additional pilots flying in from other areas of Texas and the southwest joined the Fort Worth Aerocade.⁷

While in Midland, Carl Cromwell watched the Fort Worth Aerocade perform. As airplanes roared above him, Cromwell was struck by the fact that the airplane was the answer to his corporate problems.⁸ Like many people in the 1920s, he became "air minded,"

as historian Joseph Corn describes in *The Winged Gospel*, a social history of aviation in America. This near religious-type of conversation to the belief in the unlimited potential of flight led Cromwell to help introduce the airplane into the Texas oil business and to start a San Angelo-based passenger airline.⁹

The same year, Carl Cromwell purchased a Lockheed 5-B Vega in San Angelo from Lockheed salesman Allan Loughead and Norman S. Hall of California. Loughead and Hall arrived in San Angelo on a sales call during their 2,500-mile tour of the southwestern United States. After an aerial demonstration, Cromwell was so impressed with the aircraft he purchased the Vega. Because of the unexpected sale, the Lockheed representatives returned to the west coast by train.¹⁰ Cromwell hired Gordon Darnell, a former Army Air Corps flyer, from Arkansas to be his pilot. He named the orange-colored Lockheed Vega, the *Miss Carlene*, in honor of his daughter.¹¹ Soon Cromwell would introduce the element of speed into the Texas oil business with the *Miss Carlene*.

The speedy Lockheed Vega provided executives and managers at Texon Oil and Land Company with the ability to fly quickly to distant oil fields. When a drill bit shattered or a machine failed to work at a remote site, Cromwell could fly in a new bit or repair parts the same day. In the past, providing replacement equipment took days. Most trips were within a 100-mile range of San Angelo. Runways for these flights were flat strips of land near oil rigs. In areas where landing space was limited by rough terrain, oil workers widened a straight section of a dirt road for the Vega to land.¹² The use of the airplane increased the efficiency of the Texon Oil and Land Company. Cromwell's successful application of business aviation convinced him that West Texas deserved an airline of its own to keep up with the development of commercial aviation in other regions of the United States. Ultimately, this realization led to Cromwell Airlines.

Throughout the late 1920s Carl Cromwell called for the development of a municipal airport in San Angelo. After months of intense promotion, the city heeded Cromwell's request. In June of 1928, the San Angelo Board of City Development authorized \$29,000 for the construction of a municipal airport with a hanger and an administrative building. San Angelo officials selected a site five miles south of the city near the San Antonio Highway. The Orange Car and Steel Company built the 80 x 100 foot hanger and a smaller structure. The administration building was divided in half by a lobby and office on the east side and with living quarters on the west side. In 1930, crushed stone was poured on the grass runways and the buildings were landscaped.¹³ For a city the size of San Angelo, the airport was considered by aeronautical experts of the time as quite modern. Carl Cromwell used these new facilities in San Angelo as headquarters for his new commercial passenger airline.

During the late 1920s, U. S. air carriers were divided into two types: air mail and independent airlines. Air mail carriers held a contract with the United States Post Office to fly the mail. In most cases an air mail contract guaranteed profits for the company. In addition, these airlines flew passengers to destinations along their air mail route. By September 1929, the Post Office had let 29 contracts linking many major cities by air. Despite these revolutionary connections, most medium and small cities were left out of the Post Office's air mail system. From this void emerged dozens of "air minded" entrepreneurs determined to start airlines without the assistance of the government. Known at the time as independent airlines, these carriers did not have an air mail contract and survived by carrying only passengers and small packages.¹⁴

In the late 1920s Texas was served by both air mail and independent airlines. National Air Transport flew mail and passengers from Chicago to Dallas. Texas Air Transport (later named Southern Air Transport) carried mail and passengers from Fort Worth and Dallas to San Antonio. Western Air Express flew

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into El Paso, Texas carrying mail and passengers from the west coast. Independent airlines that served Texas were Braniff Airlines, Inc., Southwest Air Fast Express, Inc., and Delta Air Service. Braniff Airlines flew from Oklahoma City to Dallas. Southwest Air Fast Express, Inc. (SAFEway) stretched from Oklahoma to Fort Worth, Dallas, and Sweetwater, Texas. Delta Air Service operated passenger flights from Birmingham, Alabama to Dallas.¹⁵

In the autumn of 1929, Cromwell Airlines faced several business factors that shaped its operations. First, one day after Carl Cromwell initiated his aviation venture, a series of stock market crashes shook the American economy. By end of the year, the entire nation was smothered by a catastrophic economic depression. Unfortunately for Cromwell his fledgling airline had to operate in this bleak economic environment. Second, Cromwell Airlines did not have an air mail contract with the United States Post Office. Because of this economic reality, Cromwell Airlines would have to make a profit purely on passenger traffic. Third, the small population base of San Angelo and the West Texas region presented problems. Despite the tremendous obstacles facing Carl Cromwell, he was convinced of the necessity and economic viability of his airline. Jimmie Mattern, former Cromwell Airlines pilot, writing in his memoirs 40 years later was convinced that Cromwell "fully believed in the future of commercial aviation."¹⁶ The "Big Swede's" business venture was risky. However, Cromwell was betting that his run of good luck, which started six years before at Santa Rita, would continue in the skies over West Texas.

On October 22, 1929, Cromwell Airlines, Inc. was officially established in San Angelo when Carl Cromwell filed for a charter with the office of the Secretary of State of Texas. Carl Cromwell, Luella Cromwell, and J. M. Dullahan were named as the company directors. Cromwell Airlines was capitalized for \$50,000 worth of stock. In reality, however, the corporate structure was organized along different lines. Carl Cromwell was the president, J. M. Dullahan was named as vice-president, and Gordon Darnell became

chief pilot. Luella Cromwell was tapped as executive secretary. Darnell hired Jimmie Mattern and James Walker as pilots for the new airline. D. D. Myers was named station manager.¹⁷

Cromwell asked chief pilot Gordon Darnell to select an appropriate aircraft for his small operation. Though Darnell had flown Cromwell's Lockheed, he was not a great fan of the Vega. During the months he flew the Vega, fellow pilots teased him of piloting a "flying pickle barrel." And some pilots spoke candidly to Darnell concerning the dangers in the Lockheed designed airliner. In the fall of 1929, Darnell traveled to Detroit to tour the Stinson Aircraft Company. While in Detroit, he chose the SM-6B Detroiter as the new aircraft for Cromwell Airlines. In October, Darnell went back to Detroit and flew the SM-6B back to San Angelo.¹⁸ The Cromwell Airlines' aircraft fleet consisted of two Stinson SM-6B Detroiters and Carl Cromwell's personal Lockheed Vega used primarily as a backup aircraft.

Built by the Stinson Aircraft Company in Wayne, Michigan, the SM-6B Detroiter was an 8-passenger, tail dragging, single engine, high-wing, monoplane with an enclosed cockpit. The Detroiter had a wingspan of 52 feet, 8 inches; a height of 9 feet, 8 inches; and a length of 34 feet, 4 inches. The SM-6B was powered by a 425 horsepower Pratt and Whitney Wasp engine with a cruising speed of 128 mph. The Lockheed 5-B Vega was a 7-passenger, tail dragging, single engine, high-wing, monoplane with an enclosed cockpit. The Vega had a wingspan of 41 feet; a height of 8 feet, 6 inches; and a length of 27 feet, 6 inches. The Lockheed 5-B was powered by a 450 horsepower Pratt and Whitney Wasp engine with a cruising speed of 155 mph.¹⁹

The paint scheme for Cromwell Airlines consisted of a red fuselage with white cheat lines starting at the engine and ending at the tail wheel. The livery was both unique and complex. The words Cromwell Airlines, Inc. sat atop and below a globe made up of latitude and longitude lines. Small white wings protruded from the

equator of the globe. Superimposed over the globe design were the capital letters C, A, and L interconnected.²⁰

To stimulate interest in Cromwell Airlines, the company advertised in local, state, and national media outlets. Advertisements in the San Angelo, Fort Worth, Dallas, San Antonio, and Big Spring newspapers posted flight routes, schedules, and fares. The smaller San Angelo and Big Spring newspapers featured many articles on Cromwell Airlines. In particular, the *San Angelo Standard* and *San Angelo Morning Times* highlighted the hometown airline. To promote a national image, Carl Cromwell ran ads in *The Official Aviation Guide of the Airways* published in Chicago by the American Aviation Publications Company. The guide included corporate, route, and fare information on all independent and air mail airlines operating in the United States.²¹

The Cromwell Airline's route structure was very basic when operations began in 1929. Roundtrip flights flew out of the terminal points of San Angelo and Dallas, with a stop in Fort Worth on both the westbound and eastbound legs. Later, Cromwell expanded his route system to include flights from San Angelo to San Antonio and Big Spring, Texas. Cromwell's passengers could then connect with a variety of airlines to fly to other regions. It cost a passenger \$15.00 to fly from San Angelo to Fort Worth, \$17.00 to Dallas, \$5.00 to Big Spring, and \$15.00 to San Antonio. In San Angelo, customers could telephone the municipal airport Monday through Saturday for flight reservations.²²

On November 1, 1929, Cromwell Airlines inaugurated its first flights simultaneously from San Angelo to Dallas and from Dallas to San Angelo via Fort Worth. Chief pilot Gordon Darnell was in command of the SM-6B that lifted off from San Angelo Municipal Airport and flew east. On board the Stinson Detroit was a delegation of prominent businessmen and city officials from San Angelo, including W. S. Pickett from the Merchant Board of Trade, Autrey Monsey, manager of the San Angelo Airport, Earl B. Smith

of the San Angelo National Bank, and Bascom Benton of the Baker-Hemphill Company. Letters of support from the Mayor of San Angelo marking this new era in air transportation between the cities were sent to his counterparts in Fort Worth and Dallas.²³

The same morning, Cromwell Airlines pilot Jimmie Mattern flew the Lockheed 5-B Vega from Love Field on a short flight to Fort Worth. When the Vega landed at Meacham Field, Mattern loaded up more westbound passengers and took off for the two-hour flight to San Angelo. When the Lockheed 5-B landed at San Angelo Municipal Airport, the aircraft was met with an enthusiastic crowd of more than 300 people. On hand to greet the distinguished visitors from Fort Worth and Dallas were Mr. and Mrs. Carl Cromwell. Included in the group were Walter Yaggy and Claude Wilde of the San Angelo Board of Development. Yaggy, Wilde, and the Cromwells took the VIPs from the first flight to a luncheon hosted jointly by the Rotary Club and the Board of Development at the St. Angelus Hotel. During the luncheon, the mayor of San Angelo paid tribute to Cromwell and his airline for connecting San Angelo to the future of America with air transportation.²⁴

On November 28, 1929, Thanksgiving Day, Luella Cromwell hosted an "aerial bridge party" on a Stinson SM-6B. Mrs. Cromwell wanted to show off their new airplane and to use the event to promote business. Inside the Detroit a table was placed in the center aisle and covered with a white linen cloth. The passenger seats were then rearranged to face the table. While Gordon Darnell circled the SM-6B over San Angelo, the ladies played bridge. Red, airplane-shaped cards were used to keep score of the bridge game. Light refreshments were served in the aircraft during the afternoon party, which lasted thirty minutes.²⁵

During the first month of flight operations, Cromwell Airlines flew more than 30,000 miles. Cromwell officials projected that during the next month they would surpass the 50,000 mile mark. This bold prophecy inspired one *San Angelo Standard* writer to

report that the San Angelo-based airline had almost flown one quarter the way to the moon. Early on Carl Cromwell considered the possibility of expanding his route structure. In late November, Cromwell was approached with an offer to extend the reach of his new airline. Local officials and businessmen from Coleman, Texas asked Carl Cromwell to fly to their town. In theory, a stop in Coleman had the potential of supplying more passengers. Cromwell sent Gordon Darnell northeast to evaluate the Coleman airport. The runways at Coleman needed some basic improvements in order to be used, but overall met with Darnell's approval. In the end, however, Coleman was not put on the airline's route.²⁶ The town's population base was too small and could not support a stop by Cromwell Airlines. Carl Cromwell did have plans for expansion, though; the cities he wanted to serve were to the south.

During the first week of December, however, disaster struck Cromwell Airlines when Hanger Number 4 at Love Field caught on fire. The conflagration destroyed aircraft belonging to Universal Airlines and Cromwell's SM-6B *Detroit*. Overall the fire caused more than \$200,000 worth of damage to aircraft, equipment, and completely ruined the hanger. For a small independent airline such as Cromwell, the loss of one aircraft was a significant financial setback. The incident, however, did not delay any flight operations because of the backup Lockheed Vega in San Angelo. With the *Miss Carlene*, Cromwell Airlines kept flights operating while another SM-6B was purchased from the Stinson Aircraft Company.²⁷

In late December, Cromwell realized that connecting his airline to San Antonio was of paramount importance to the health of his company. Linking Cromwell Airlines with this large city created more passenger traffic and allowed San Angelo citizens to connect with Southern Air Transport, which served the Alamo City. Cromwell and Darnell flew to San Antonio to discuss such a proposal with officials from the San Antonio Chamber of

Commerce. After the meetings, Cromwell decided to extend service to San Antonio in 1930.²⁸

By the end of 1929, the American economy imploded with the collapse of the banking system, soaring unemployment, and the loss of purchasing power. This was not good news for a fledgling airline, especially one without an air mail contract, and solely reliant on passenger traffic. To help stimulate additional airline business, Cromwell reduced air fares between San Angelo and all destinations during the Christmas season. This campaign was so successful that passenger traffic volume increased by 25 percent. By the end of the 1929 holiday season, Cromwell decided to extend the fare cuts throughout the upcoming year.²⁹

In 1930 Cromwell Airlines had a second opportunity to link with another city in West Texas. Southwest Air Fast Express, Inc. (SAFEway) wanted Cromwell Airlines to fly into Abilene, Texas to make connecting flights. Larry Fritz, general manager of SAFEway, flew to San Angelo to discuss this possibility with Carl Cromwell. Fritz outlined an interesting proposal for using Cromwell Airlines as an "air taxi" service between these two towns. After an early morning flight (20 minutes) from San Angelo, Fritz explained to Cromwell, passengers could fly a SAFEway Ford Trimotor to Tulsa and then to St. Louis by 4:00 in the afternoon. In the end, however, Cromwell decided that the SAFEway deal was not in his company's best interest and he declined the offer.³⁰

Flying on Cromwell Airlines in the early 1930s was an adventure. Most passengers on Cromwell Airlines were businessmen or people from the middle or upper-classes. Before take off, the pilot would carefully make a preflight check of the outside of the aircraft. Once inside, the pilot started the engine, allowing it to warm up. When the engine was ready, the pilot taxied the aircraft onto a runway (grass, dirt, or sometimes paved with crushed stone) for take off. Cromwell Airlines did not provide in-

flight service. After takeoff passengers would read, sleep, or talk to one another.³¹

Weather was the most important factor during the flight. On clear days, except for occasional turbulence, flying was good. Poor weather conditions, however, presented the pilots of Cromwell Airlines with problems. Because the SM-6B and Lockheed 5-B did not have true instrument flying capability, Walker, Mattern, and Darnell had to land the plane in the nearest flat stretch of land during times of limited visibility. Fog, rain, and thunderstorms caused significant delays for Cromwell Airlines. Jimmie Mattern claimed that the constantly changing West Texas weather forced him to learn about meteorology. In the 1980s, Mattern recalled in his memoirs, "that these were the months and years that I really learned how to read weather, rain, lightning, and particularly Texas squalls." In 1930, for example, the maiden flight to San Antonio was forced to land in San Marcos, Texas because of heavy fog. Six passengers on the plane took a bus to San Antonio while the Cromwell crew waited for the fog to lift.³²

Such impediments forced Cromwell Airlines to become inventive in promoting the use of commercial aviation in West Texas. One way to advertise the thrill of airline flight, for example, was to offer free flights to deserving young men in San Angelo. Carl Cromwell decided to reward anyone who earned the rank of Eagle Scout with a free flight. Billy Hixson received a flight in 1930. The *San Angelo Standard* even asked the young man to report on his aerial adventure for the newspaper. After takeoff the SM-6B flew over several small creeks and climbed to a cruising altitude. A jubilant Hixson described the view from the Stinson as "a large crazy quilt, with its many colors spread beneath us." After circling the busy San Antonio airport the Detroitter landed. Hixson spent a few days visiting relatives and historic sites in San Antonio before returning to San Angelo.³³

Expansion to Big Spring made economic sense for Cromwell Airlines. The airline needed more passenger traffic to help augment for lagging revenue in the spring of 1930. In Big Spring, Cromwell Airlines passengers could connect with Southern Air Transport, a larger airline system. Carl Cromwell, D. D. Myers, and Gordon Darnell flew to Big Spring to meet with the Chamber of Commerce. Over lunch Cromwell presented his plan to Big Spring's officials. Unfortunately, the addition of Big Spring to Cromwell Airlines' route structure did not help business. Nine months of costly operations, limited passenger markets, the purchase of new aircraft, weather-related flight delays, and especially America's poor economic climate combined to end Carl Cromwell's airline venture.³⁴

By July of 1930, Cromwell Airlines, Inc. was out of business. Overall, Carl Cromwell had invested more than \$100,000 into his airline. With Cromwell Airlines sidelined, Cromwell decided to sell the SM-6B Detroitters. One aircraft was sold to Lea-Mex Development Company in Oklahoma City. In the early 1930s, Lea-Mex was developing remote areas in eastern New Mexico and needed an aircraft to fly managers to and from work sites. When the SM-6B was sold, Gordon Darnell flew it north. Then, officials at Lea-Mex hired Darnell as their new pilot. In 1931 James Walker became a pilot for Bowen Airlines, a new independent passenger airline, based at Meacham Field in Fort Worth. Jimmie Mattern stayed in San Angelo and became Cromwell's corporate pilot.³⁵

Despite the failure of Cromwell Airlines, Carl Cromwell's attempt to plant the seeds of commercial aviation in West Texas must be recognized as farsighted. His business effort is an early example of airline entrepreneurship. Cromwell was correct in his belief that commercial aviation was vital to the growth of Texas; however, in the application of his vision he was several decades premature. Certainly, the sour economic conditions of the Great Depression played a major factor in the airline's demise. Realistically, San Angelo did not have the population base to

support a passenger airline in the early 1930s. Another element in Cromwell Airlines' failure was the lack of a U. S. Post Office air mail contract. A mail contract could have made a difference even in poor economic times. Unfortunately, San Angelo, Texas was not large enough to merit an air mail route. In the final analysis, the combination of these factors was an insurmountable obstacle for Cromwell Airlines.

With the failure of Cromwell Airlines, Carl Cromwell focused his attention on his other business, the Apollo Oil Company. Like Cromwell Airlines, the Apollo Oil Company suffered from the Great Depression. By the autumn of 1931, the Apollo Oil Company was in severe financial trouble. In order to refinance his business, Cromwell went to New York City to meet with new investors. In September, Jimmie Mattern flew Cromwell back east in the Lockheed Vega. On the way to New York City, Cromwell stopped to visit his parents in western Pennsylvania. On September 27, 1931 while driving near the town of Sheffield, Pennsylvania, Cromwell's car slid off the road and hit a concrete culvert. Cromwell was killed instantly. He was 42 years old.³⁶

Cromwell's body was shipped back to San Angelo by train. A stunned Jimmie Mattern flew the *Miss Carlene* back to Texas. In San Angelo, the train carrying Cromwell's body was met by a military honor guard. Services were held at Robert Massie Chapel and Cromwell was buried in the Fairmount Cemetery. In January of 1970 at the age of 74, Luella Cromwell died of a sudden illness in a Garland, Texas hospital. After funeral services in the First United Methodist Church of Garland, her body was sent to San Angelo for burial next to her husband, 39 years after he was interred.³⁷

News of Carl Cromwell's untimely death filtered throughout West Texas. Besides his family, the hardest hit by the tragedy were his former and present employees. Workers at Texon and Apollo Oil Companies expressed sorrow and shock. Friends spoke fondly of the passionate and generous "Two Fisted Giant." Gordon Darnell

was grief stricken. Letters between Mrs. Marie Darnell and Luella Cromwell indicated that he was "crushed" by the death of his former boss.³⁸

Though Cromwell's remaining aviation assets were sold after his death and nothing tangible remained of Cromwell Airlines, his influence on the airline industry endured. After flying for several small airlines in the early 1930s, Gordon Darnell and James Walker went on to long careers as pilots with Braniff and American Airlines. And Jimmie Mattern, after his 1933 around-the-world flight attempt, became an aviation legend. In 1995, Carlene Peavy, now an elderly woman, remained in contact with former Cromwell Airlines pilot James Walker. Walker wrote to her in a note that he still thought of her father. In particular, Walker was very thankful for the opportunity that Carl Cromwell gave him many years before with Cromwell Airlines, which started his long career in commercial aviation.³⁹ This six-decade old loyalty is a testimony to Carl G. Cromwell's vision, accomplishments, and legacy in U.S. commercial aviation history.

Notes

¹During research for this article the author located the grandchildren of Carl G. Cromwell. Grandson Carl Peavy lives in the Dallas area. Mr. Peavy provided a picture of the *Miss Carlene* and contact with his sister. Cromwell's granddaughter, Judy Boreham, Ph.D., lives in Arkansas. Dr. Boreham gave me photocopies of her files. The Judy Boreham Collection proved to be a wealth of information on Cromwell genealogy and Cromwell Airlines. In addition, I located Gordon S. Darnell, Sr.'s family in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. Gordon Darnell, Jr.'s wife, Rubyann T. Darnell, is the family historian. Mrs. Darnell has an excellent file on her father-in-law and Cromwell Airlines. In 1995 she conducted an oral history with the elder Darnell. Her sources and pictures were vital to writing this article. Suzanne Campbell of the West Texas Collection at Angelo State University and Lois Harrington of the Petroleum Museum in Midland, Texas provided materials. Thanks to Jodi Foor and Fern Short for photocopying issues of the San Angelo newspapers. Tom Koch of the McDermott Library at the University of Texas at Dallas edited a draft of this article. Thanks to Tai Kreidler, Ph.D. for his support. Special thanks to Monte Monroe, Ph.D. for editing this article. Both these historians work in the Southwest Collection at Texas Tech University. Carl G. Cromwell, Biographical File, Archive, the Petroleum Museum, Midland, Texas.

²Ibid. Business aviation is defined as the non-scheduled use of aircraft by corporations.

³"Carl G. Cromwell," undated, Judy Boreham Collection, photocopies in possession of author. Hereafter cited as Boreham Collection.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Martin W. Schwettmann, *Santa Rita* (Austin: The Texas State Historical Association, 1943), pp. 29-32.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Florence Hester Wood, "Early Commercial Aviation in Texas, 1904-1934," M.A. Thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1957, p. 101.

⁸"New Plane Will Serve Ft. Worth," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, October 31, 1929.

⁹See Joseph J. Com's, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900-1950*, for a detailed explanation of this phenomenon.

¹⁰Richard Sanders Allen, *Revolution in the Sky: Those Fabulous Lockheeds, The Pilots Who Flew Them* (Brattleboro: The Stephen Greene Press, 1964), p. 125.

¹¹Rubyann T. Darnell, "It Was All Such Fun: Some Memories of Gordon S. Darnell," unpublished, mss., 1995, p. 19, Rubyann T. Darnell Collection, photocopies in possession of author. Hereafter cited as Darnell Collection.

¹²Darnell, "It Was All Such Fun," p. 10, Darnell Collection; Jimmie Mattern, "The Diary of Jimmie Mattern: Pioneer Airman," unpublished, mss., 1991, pp. 104-106, Box 2, Jimmie Mattern Collection, History of Aviation Collection, McDermott Library, the University of Texas at Dallas; "Airplanes Aids in Oil Fields," *San Angelo Standard*, October 2, 1929.

¹³"San Angelo Municipal Airport (1928-1941)," Boreham Collection.

¹⁴Erik D. Carlson, "The Origins and Development of the Civil Aeronautics Board and the Economic Regulation of Domestic Airlines, 1934-1952," Ph.D. Dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1996, pp. 32-35.

¹⁵Florence Hester Wood, "Early Commercial Aviation in Texas, 1904-1934," pp. 103-106; "Survey of Civil Aviation in the Southwest - Part 1: Air Transport Operations," *Aero Digest*, August 1930, pp. 35-37, 58, 176, 178.

¹⁶Mattern, "The Diary of Jimmie Mattern: Pioneer Airman," p.109, Box 2, Jimmie Mattern Collection, History of Aviation Collection, McDermott Library, the University of Texas at Dallas.

¹⁷Corporate Charter, No. 5-5-495, Texas Secretary of State, October 23, 1929, Texas Secretary of State's Office, Austin Texas; "New Plane Will Serve Ft. Worth," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, October 31, 1929.

¹⁸Darnell, "It Was All Such Fun," pp. 19-20, Darnell Collection.

¹⁹Joseph Juptner, *U.S. Civil Aircraft Vol. 3 (ATC 201-ATC 300)* (Fallbrook, California: Aero Publishers, Inc., 1966), pp. 53-55, 80-83.

²⁰The author used photographs from the Darnell Collection to describe the appearance of the aircraft flown by Cromwell Airlines.

²¹*The Official Aviation Guide of the Airways, Vol. 1, No. 10*, (Chicago: American Aviation Publications, 1930), p.38.

²²Promotional flyer, Cromwell Airlines, 1930, the author's collection.

²³"Cromwell Line, Angelo-Dallas, Opened Friday," *San Angelo Standard*, November 2, 1929.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Darnell, "It Was All Such Fun," p. 21 Darnell Collection; "Mrs. Cromwell Is to Be Hostess Thursday at Bridge, Aboard Ship Flying Over City," *San Angelo Standard*, November 28, 1929.

²⁶"Cromwell Adds Two Planes For New Air Route," *San Angelo Standard*, December 6, 1929; "Coleman May Be Put On Airline Out of Angelo," *San Angelo Standard*, November 19, 1929.

²⁷"12 Ships Are Destroyed in Fire Saturday," *San Angelo Standard*, December 8, 1929; Darnell, "It was all Such Fun," p. 20, Darnell Collection.

²⁸"Angelo To Get New Airline," *San Angelo Standard*, December 5, 1929.

²⁹For a good survey see Anthony J. Badger's, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (New York: Noonday Press, 1989); "Rates Are Reduced by Cromwell Airlines," *Southern Aviation*, March 15, 1930, p. 34.

³⁰"Cromwell Rejects Proposition to Install Shuttle Route," *San Angelo Standard*, December 22, 1929; "Safeway System Will Send First Plane Here Jan. 1," *San Angelo Times*, December 24, 1929.

³¹"Flight Reward Thrills Eagle Scout of Angelo," *San Angelo Times*, January 26, 1930.

³²Mattern, "The Diary of Jimmie Mattern: Pioneer Airman," pp. 109-110, Box 2, Jimmie Mattern Collection, History of Aviation Collection, McDermott Library, the University of Texas at Dallas; "Cromwell Pilot Makes Safe Landing in Field," *San Angelo Times*, January 2, 1930; "Air Travel Here Again is Held Up By Weather," *San Angelo Times*, January 28, 1930.

³³"Flight Reward Thrills Eagle Scout of Angelo," *San Angelo Times*, January 26, 1930.

³⁴"Cromwell Schedule Announced," *Big Spring Daily Herald*, May 6, 1930; "The Fort Worth-San Angelo Route," *Southern Aviation*, August 15, 1930.

³⁵Darnell, "It Was All Such Fun," pp. 21, 23, Darnell Collection.

³⁶"Cromwell Lived Intense, Active Life," *San Angelo Morning Times*, September 29, 1931.

³⁷"Rites Today For Carl Cromwell," *San Angelo Standard*, October 1, 1931; "Cromwell Rites Today in Garland," *San Angelo Standard Times*, January 2, 1970.

³⁸"Cromwell Lived Intense, Active Life," *San Angelo Morning Times*, September 29, 1931; Marie Darnell to Luella Cromwell, undated, Darnell Collection.

³⁹Darnell, "It Was All Such Fun," pp. 23, 39, Darnell Collection; James Walker to Carlene Peavy, December 17, 1995, Boreham Collection.