

The Bandera PROPHECY

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Today in Texas History

By Bandera Spirits of Texas

On this day in 1865, pioneer aviator Jacob Friedrich Brodbeck may have made the first flight in an airplane-almost 40 years before the Wright brothers-in a field about three miles east of Luckenbach.

The Württemberg native settled in Fredericksburg in 1847. He had always had an interest in mechanics and inventing; in Germany he had attempted to build a self-winding clock, and in 1869 he designed an ice-making machine. His most cherished project, however, was his air-ship, with a propeller powered by coiled springs. The 1865 model featured an enclosed space for the aeronaut, a water propeller in case of accidental landings on water, a compass, and a barometer. The machine was said to have risen 12 feet in the air and traveled about 100 feet before the springs unwound completely and the machine crashed to the ground.

Another account, however, says that the initial flight took place in San Pedro Park, San Antonio, where a bust of Brodbeck was later placed. Yet another account reports that the flight took place in 1868, not 1865. All the accounts agree, however, that Brodbeck's airship was destroyed by its abrupt landing, although the inventor escaped serious injury.

After this setback, his investors refused to put up the money for a second attempt, and he embarked on a unsuccessful fund-raising tour of the United States. Brodbeck returned to Texas and lived on a ranch near Luckenbach until his death in 1910.