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Cameron International Corp.

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Introduction

Cameron International Corporation, a name deeply intertwined with the development of America's industrial and energy heritage, stands as a testament to more than 180 years of ingenuity, resilience, and adaptation. From modest beginnings as a small Ohio foundry established in 1833, Cameron's evolution has mirrored that of the nation itself—a journey marked by relentless innovation, bold mergers, and a willingness to embrace both opportunity and challenge on a global stage.

This book explores Cameron's remarkable transformation, beginning with the pioneering days of Cooper Industries and charting a course through the technological revolutions that fueled the growth of oil, gas, and energy sectors. The arrival of the Cameron name, with its historic blowout preventer invention, set a new standard for safety and performance in an industry known for its high stakes and relentless pace. By uniting the entrepreneurial spirit of its founders with a forward-looking approach to technology and corporate strategy, Cameron became synonymous with both dependability and progress.

Our narrative is not merely a catalog of mergers and machinery, but a story of the people and ideas that shaped the company's legacy. Cameron's journey has been defined by its adaptability—surviving and thriving through wars, booms, busts, and revolutionary advances in science and engineering. Along the way, the company absorbed other innovative firms, expanded internationally, and diversified its expertise to serve evolving needs at the surface, on land, at sea, and deep beneath the ocean's floor.

Significant milestones—such as Cameron International's acquisition by Schlumberger, or its pivotal role in deepwater safety after the Macondo well disaster—offer not only moments of crisis or triumph, but also points of reflection about the responsibilities that come with industrial leadership. The themes of environmental stewardship, corporate citizenship, and long-term vision resonate throughout Cameron's history, revealing both the challenges and the importance of operating ethically in a complex global marketplace.

Today, Cameron operates as "Cameron, an SLB Company," carrying its legacy into new frontiers of scientific and technological integration. In recent years, the company has met shifting pressures within the global energy industry, balancing tradition with innovation under the umbrella of Schlumberger, the world's largest oilfield services provider.

By chronicling the rise, transformation, and continued evolution of Cameron

International Corporation, this book offers a window into the broader American industrial saga. It seeks to understand how a company could shape, and be shaped by, the era's greatest technological challenges, economic cycles, and societal expectations. In doing so, it highlights not only the past and present of an important enterprise, but its future potential to influence the ongoing story of energy and innovation worldwide.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Foundry Years: Cooper's Beginnings (1833-1900)

The story of what would ultimately become Cameron International Corporation begins not with a roar of oil rigs or the hum of sophisticated industrial machinery, but with the clank and clang of a modest foundry in the quiet, pastoral setting of Mount Vernon, Ohio. It was 1833 when brothers Charles and Elias Cooper, driven by an entrepreneurial spirit and a knack for mechanical endeavors, returned to their hometown to establish the Mount Vernon Iron Works. The initial investment was rather humble, reportedly financed by selling one of their three horses for fifty dollars, a sum that in those days could set a serious venture in motion.

Operating with a lean workforce of just two—presumably themselves—the Cooper brothers poured their first castings. Their early product line reflected the everyday needs of an agricultural society and a burgeoning nation: hog troughs, plows for tilling the soil, stoves to keep homes warm, and kettles for making maple syrup. These initial offerings, while far removed from the complex systems Cameron would later become known for, laid the fundamental groundwork of a manufacturing enterprise focused on practical solutions.

In 1836, just three years after opening their doors, the Coopers made a telling upgrade to their nascent operation. They replaced the horse-powered system, which relied on their animal named Bessie, with a small steam engine. This wasn't merely a technological upgrade; it was a symbolic leap, signaling an embrace of the nascent industrial revolution that was beginning to sweep across America. They also transitioned from charcoal to coke for fuel, further modernizing their production processes.

The Panic of 1837, a severe financial crisis, tested the young company's resolve. Yet, the Cooper brothers demonstrated their resilience, navigating the economic downturn and even expanding their reach. They managed to ship their first steam-powered compressor to Ohio's Hanging Rock district, utilizing the Sandusky, Mansfield & Newark Railroad for transport. This early foray into more complex machinery, beyond basic foundry goods, hinted at the company's future direction towards industrial equipment.

As the decades progressed, Cooper's product portfolio diversified significantly. The 1840s saw them producing carding machines and specialized power machinery, alongside their continued output of plows and hollow-ware vessels. Their commitment to national needs was also evident; during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848),

Cooper supplied war machinery to the U.S. government.

The mid-19th century marked an important shift in focus. By the 1850s, Cooper was building blast furnace blowing engines, critical for the iron industry. They even ventured into manufacturing early railroad steam locomotives in 1853, notably producing the first wood-burning locomotive built west of the Allegheny Mountains. However, dealing with slow-paying railroad companies proved frustrating for Charles Cooper, prompting him to pivot the company's attention towards the more promising realm of steam-operated farm engines.

The linkage of Mount Vernon to the national railroad network in 1851 was a boon, enabling Cooper to ship its steam-powered compressors for blast furnaces more widely. This improved connectivity was vital for a company that was increasingly moving beyond local markets.

A significant technological milestone arrived in 1869 when Cooper became the first company west of the Allegheny Mountains to produce the highly efficient Corliss reciprocating steam engine. This advanced engine, known for its superior performance and fuel efficiency, quickly became a principal product for the C. & G. Cooper Company, sold to large mills and manufacturing plants across the nation. The company even hired Julius E. Debes, an engineer closely associated with the development of the Corliss engine, to design their version.

Innovation continued in agricultural machinery. In 1875, Cooper offered the "Cooper traction engine," which is widely recognized as America's first farm tractor. This early self-propelled machine was a revolutionary step in mechanizing farming, laying the groundwork for modern agricultural equipment. An innovative "bevel gear" attachment, patented by partner Colonel George Rogers in 1875, was key to transferring power from the engine's crankshaft to the rear wheels. By 1883, they had built the first *self-propelled* Cooper traction engine, a testament to their continuous refinement.

By the late 1870s, Cooper's reputation for producing dependable and high-quality machines was well-established nationwide. The 1890s saw a strategic shift away from farm engine manufacturing, with the company instead expanding its production of the Corliss engine.

In 1895, the C. & E. Cooper Company was formally incorporated as the C. & G. Cooper Company. Frank L. Fairchild, a respected salesman of the Cooper-Corliss engine, was appointed as its first president. Fairchild was so dedicated to sales that he continued to serve as sales manager throughout his seventeen-year presidency. Charles Cooper himself, born in Mount Vernon in 1811, withdrew from active company management after the 1895 incorporation, though he remained chairman until his death in 1901.

As the 19th century drew to a close, a new energy source began to emerge as a significant force: natural gas. Developments in the natural gas industry in the early 1900s prompted Cooper to begin a gradual and wise shift towards producing natural gas internal combustion engines. This foresight positioned the company to capitalize on the burgeoning gas fields and the expanding network of primitive pipelines that were beginning to transport gas over long distances. This pivotal decision marked the end of an era dominated by steam and the beginning of a new chapter focused on the internal combustion engine, a technology that would profoundly shape the 20th century and Cooper's future.

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