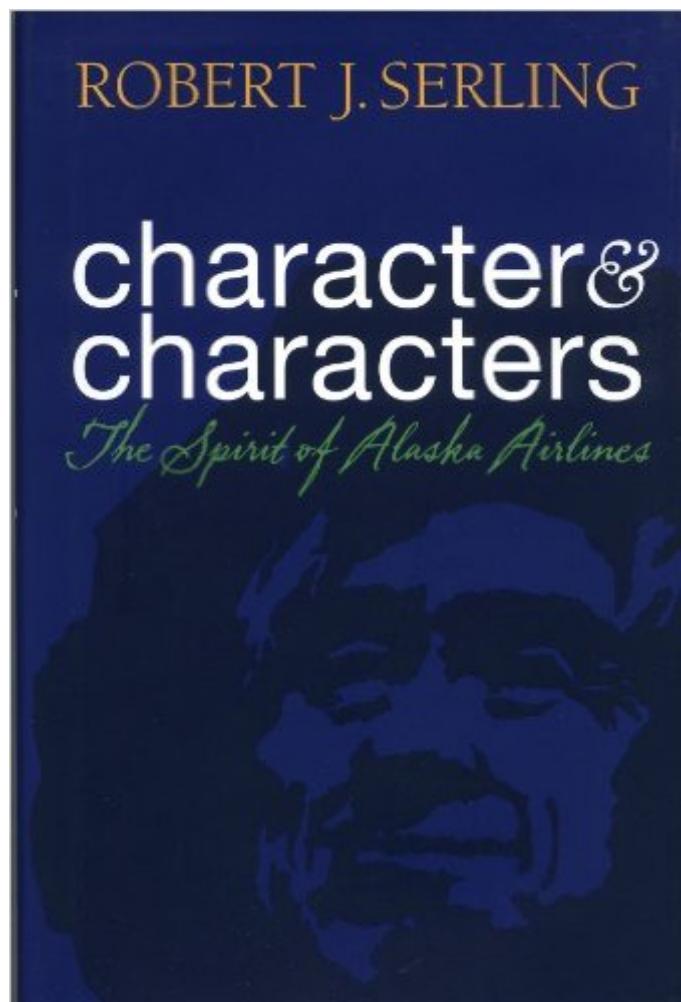


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# Character & Characters: The Spirit Of Alaska Airlines



## **Synopsis**

This is the history of Alaska's last legacy airline, Alaska Airlines. Aviation-history writer Robert Serling has documented Alaska Airlines unconventional past and titled it *Character & Characters* in recognition of those who flew the planes and marked the airline's transformation from a single-aircraft bush operator in 1932 to a major U.S. carrier. From Alaska Airlines fabled beginnings serving the far reaches of America's Last Frontier to its present-day network stretching from Barrow to Zihuatanejo and Boston to Honolulu . . . from creative promotions to its historic flights that linked the United States and the Russian Far East . . . from distinctive in-flight services to the first online ticket sales, *Character & Characters* chronicles the unusual stories and colorful people behind this uncommonly independent airline. Serling's seasoned perspective is based on his authorship of a long list of airline histories, an industry fascination that began not long after the Wright brothers first flight, and his love of a good story. His experience has resulted in a spirited telling of Alaska Airlines history of survival and success over unforgiving geographies in a remarkably competitive business. *Character & Characters* has a rhythm to it, based not so much on chronology as on Serling's innate sense of how a good story should be told. And like the airline that is the subject of his work, his book is a great aviation saga.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I enjoyed the author's writing style and stories until the book came to the story of flight 261. The author seems not to have read the NTSB report on the cause of the crash- intentionally faulty

maintenance by the airline - when writing this chapter. The airline's maint dept ginned up phony maint logs on its MD80's and ran off the one mechanic who tried to expose the problem. The book, however, has us believing it was all a tragic accident. Balderdash! 80+ people lost their lives because an airline was too cheap to put \$5 worth of grease on a part. Revisionist literature scores low with me ^

Well, how pertinent to finish this on Alaska Day! It was . . . long. Overall, it was interesting. There were some sections where it got really muddled down with business schtuff. Since this is the airline I fly the most it's interesting to read about some of the history and how it became what it is today. I think I would have gotten more out of it if I were a) in the airline business or b) much older and had more of my own memories with Alaska Airlines, but it was clearly thoroughly researched and well-written.

I was curious to know more about Alaska Airlines history, having lived in Juneau, Alaska the last 13 years and having become accustomed to either flying with Alaska Air or taking the ferry to get out of town. The book is a tale of two Alaska Airlines: the floundering, one step away from oblivion company from founding by Linious McGee to the Charles Willis era; and the modern era from Ronald Cosgrave to current CEO Bill Ayer. Serling is at his best in telling the story of Alaska's first 50 years. His research is superb, and the reader gets a good idea of what it must have been like to build the airline in such a tough climate. When Serling moves beyond Willis' reign, one begins to sense that the airline (which commissioned this book) leadership contributed a lot of detail and not as much came from outside sources. In the end, I enjoyed Serling's rather informal style, and felt that I came to know Alaska Airlines and its "characters" a little bit better. Since I know Alaska Airlines as a customer/passenger, I also felt that Serling did a nice job of boiling down all the changes that have occurred at Alaska Air over the 13 years I've been here - I've wondered about the details as they've happened. Now I know the ones the company itself shared through this book. If you're interested in American corporate history like I am, then this is a book well worth reading.

Reading this book made me proud of Alaska Airlines. The company commissioned its publication. It had some extremely interesting insight in to the management of the company, particularly post 1972. Like all firms in the aviation business, there have been several instances in the last 26 years where the survival of the firm was clearly at stake. It is made clear that Alaska Airlines only exists today as a result of some very bold decisions made at key times. Countless cases are described

where management showed great creativity, integrity, compassion, courage, and brilliance. Equally important, the book describes many instances where company management failed to uphold the values described above and in some cases engaged in behavior and made decisions that were truly shameful. Few of us in this world are saints and it is very boring when people try to portray themselves as such. If this book had failed to describe some of the low points in the airline management's history, it would not have been possible to truly appreciate the acts of greatness. My main criticism of the book is that it failed to recognize the many contributions from non-management employees. There would have been some great sub-plots in this area. A set of short stories about the exploits of some of Alaska Airlines front line employees would make for excellent reading. Alaska Airlines would really outdo themselves if they commissioned such a book.

Book arrived quickly and in perfect shape! Purchased to use for reference in a grad school project about Alaska Airlines, this book is informative and enlightening, especially regarding the history and culture of the carrier.

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