RUDDY TONGG

Why would Ruddy Tongg …a very successful Chinese-American businessman who had made his name in the publishing business … decide to start an airline? It was a dream of course, and post-World War II Hawai'i was a place where dreams could come true for hard working entrepreneurs. The world had changed and Hawai'i was changing, too. Waves of returning GIs, and a changing business climate set the stage for the end of the pre-war establishment. Chinese-Americans could work their way into the business world that had been dominated by Hawai'i's big five oligopoly.

Tongg, who had been rebuffed several times when trying to fly interisland on Hawaiian Airlines decided to start his own airline. But it would be a *different kind* of airline. He wanted to create a "people's" airline that really served the needs of Hawai'i's locals. Tongg, with a hui of like-minded investors, founded Trans Pacific Air in 1946.

With thin capitalization, the airline started with a few military surplus DC-3 aircraft. In fact, at the outset, Trans Pacific could only operate charters because the company didn't have a certificate for regularly scheduled flights. TPA's applications for certification were bitterly opposed by Hawaiian Airlines. But, in the end, persistence and Tongg's entrepreneurial spirit overcame all odds, and the airline was certified for scheduled operations in 1949.

Tongg assembled a management team that built the struggling airline into a successful enterprise. Dave Benz took over the administration and was instrumental in getting the airline certified. When a lack of financing threatened the airline's existence, Tongg turned to financier Dr. Hung Wo Ching. Dr. Ching acquired the capital needed for new equipment and eventually became TPA's president and CEO.

With an infusion of cash … and supported by Hawai'i's growing tourism economy … the airline literally took off, changing its name to Aloha Airlines. Ruddy Tongg's dream became a real force for the development of interisland travel in Hawai'i.