



Warren Leyde*

2026 Pathfinder Award Recipient in the Engineering Category

The Museum of Flight's Annual Pathfinder Awards honor individuals with ties to the Pacific Northwest who have made significant contributions to the development of the aerospace industry. Pathfinder Award recipients are selected by The Museum of Flight, the Pacific Northwest Section of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and representatives of other aviation and aerospace organizations and companies throughout the Northwest.



Warren Leyde's imagination and invention are evidence that professional expertise and experimental skills can transform an industry from an exciting risk-laden activity to a safe, replicable experience for millions of people every day. As the father of the radio altimeter, Leyde possessed the expertise, skill and circumstances that provided for the invention and proliferation of the pulse radar altimeter

Leyde's life-long interest in radio technology started as a youth in Washington State and continued into his service in the U.S. Navy during World War II. His military service allowed him to attend the University of Washington. Hired by Boeing in 1951, Leyde later won the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace inaugural Engineer of the Year award. This recognized his development, design and verification of the first automatic, high-performance radar control unit—a massive leap in the technology.

In 1960, Leyde became principal engineer at Honeywell's Seattle Development Laboratory, where his most significant invention was the pulse radar altimeter. While the first radio altimeter was invented in 1924, his design was a game-changing improvement. It used pulse-radar technology, much

more accurate at low altitudes and in difficult weather conditions. This design greatly improved the safety of air travel and reduced the weight of the equipment from over 100 pounds to just 15—a vitally important advancement in the commercial aviation industry, where every ounce counts.

Ultimately, Leyde's body of work showed that technical innovation is a lifelong journey. His childhood fascination with radios led him to a successful career, and his invention of the pulse radar altimeter deserves attention not simply as a patentable refinement in avionics, but as a historically important response to a problem at the heart of aviation safety: the accurate determination of true height above the ground immediately below an aircraft.

* Posthumously Awarded