Maynard L. Pennell

1910-1994

By Philip M. Condit

Maynard L. Pennell, who played a leading role in the design of the Boeing 707 and many other landmark aircraft during his thirty-four year career, died on November 22, 1994.

Maynard was born in Skowhegan, Maine, in 1910. The harsh Maine winter had contributed to the fatal illness of an older brother, and in 1919 the family decided to move to a more temperate climate. Seattle was chosen because the University of Washington at the time offered a nearly free college education, and the Pennell's had high academic aspirations for their four children.

Maynard was fascinated by flying at an early age and enrolled in the aeronautical engineering program at the University of Washington. After graduation, he worked for the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics and Douglas Aircraft in Los Angeles, where he showed his flair for structural design as part of the team that created the DC-3. In 1940 Maynard returned to Seattle, where he would spend the next three decades as one of the most influential and respected engineers in the history of Boeing.

During World War II, Maynard made substantial contributions to the B-29 project. After the war, when the company was struggling to develop new products for the commercial market, he headed up the initial studies to determine the feasibility of jet transports.
Maynard soon became the company's leading advocate for designing its own commercial jet despite the huge cost and risk. He went on to serve as senior project engineer on what was called the "367 Dash 80," the prototype for the Boeing 707, which would help revolutionize the air travel industry. A remarkably small work force (300 designers and technicians and 300 shop workers) turned out the Dash 80 in the remarkably short time of twenty-six months. About one quarter of the company's net worth ($16 million) was riding on the airplane's success.

After 1954, when the 707 prototype first flew, Maynard held a series of management positions, including that of chief engineer for the transport division, and then director of engineering, where he sought to persuade Boeing management to build a "family" of airplanes to serve various market needs. The enormously popular three-engine Boeing 727 followed, and the strategy of creating an airplane family proved to be a key element in establishing the company's market leadership.

In 1963 Maynard was appointed manager of Boeing's SST proposal team, engaging in a government-sponsored contest against Lockheed for the right to manufacture the airframe for the nation's first supersonic jetliner. By mid-1966 he had unveiled the model of the 300-passenger, 330-foot-long aircraft designed to fly at 1,800 miles an hour, with a range of about 4,000 miles. Boeing won the competition against Lockheed, but the SST project lost support in Congress and the plane was never built.

In 1969 Maynard became vice-president of product development and went on to serve the company in a number of senior executive positions before his retirement in 1974.

For his achievements at Boeing, Maynard was honored with the 1965 Elmer A. Sperry Award for distinguished engineering. He was a member of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1968.

In 1989 Boeing established the Maynard Pennell Professorship in Structural Analysis at the University of Washington in his honor.
Maynard was not only a talented, visionary engineer but also an exceptional leader and manager with that rare ability to motivate and inspire the people who worked for him and to keep them focused on achieving a common goal.

He was known for his calm, quiet assurance and for his ability to steer people through a crisis without losing his composure or his sure grasp of what needed to be done. Maynard was also known as a manager who believed that everyone on a project had something to contribute. And like all superior leaders, Maynard was always willing to listen but never afraid to lead.

Maynard embodied the highest standards of his chosen engineering profession. And he has left his mark, not only on the history of The Boeing Company, but on the history of aviation.