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President Obama Awards Presidential Medal of Freedom to Sally Ride

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Washington, D.C., November 20,



2013: Today, President Obama awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously to Sally Ride, the first American woman in space.

As a role model to generations of young women, Ride advocated passionately for science education, stood up for racial and gender equality in the classroom, and taught students from every background that there are no limits to what they can accomplish. Ride also served in several administrations as an advisor on space exploration.

On June 18, 1983, Sally Ride made history, becoming the first American woman to go space. In this image, Ride stands on Challenger's middeck, wearing light blue flight coveralls and communications headset, as she floats alongside the middeck airlock hatch.

"Dr. Sally Ride was more than an astronaut — she was an American treasure. Thanks to Sally's work throughout her lifetime, young women and girls, can now aspire to fly in space. That is primarily because of the way Sally lived her life and dedicated it to future generations," said NASA Administrator Charles Bolden. "There are only a handful of names in the history of human spaceflight that are widely known – and Sally's is certainly one of them. Sally's legacy in encouraging young women and girls to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics is work that will continue through Sally Ride Science, along with the inspiration she will always provide as a role model and a true citizen of the world."

Ride's contribution to America's space program continued until her death at age 61 in 2012. After two missions aboard the shuttle, she went on an award-winning academic career at the University of California, San Diego, where her expertise and wisdom were widely sought on matters related to space. She was the only person to serve as a member of both investigation boards following NASA's two space shuttle accidents. She also served as a member of the Review of U.S. Human Spaceflight Plans Committee, also known as the Augustine Committee, in 2009, which informed many of the decisions about NASA's current human spaceflight programs.

The Medal of Freedom is the nation's highest civilian honor, presented to individuals who have made especially meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, to world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors.

This year marks the 50th Anniversary of the Executive Order signed by President John F. Kennedy establishing the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Since that time, more than 500 exceptional individuals from all corners of society have been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, including 14 NASA astronauts and leaders.

Previous recipients of the Medal of Freedom include:

- Apollo 11 astronauts Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, Neil Armstrong, and Michael Collins; Awarded with Distinction; 1969.
- Apollo 13 astronauts Fred Haise, Jim Lovell, Jack Swigert; 1970.
- Apollo 13 Mission Operations Team including Thomas O. Paine, Gerald D. Griffin, Kranz, Glynn Lunney, Edgar Mitchell, Sigurd A. Sjoberg and Milton L. Windler; 1970.
- John Glenn, first American to orbit Earth; 2012.