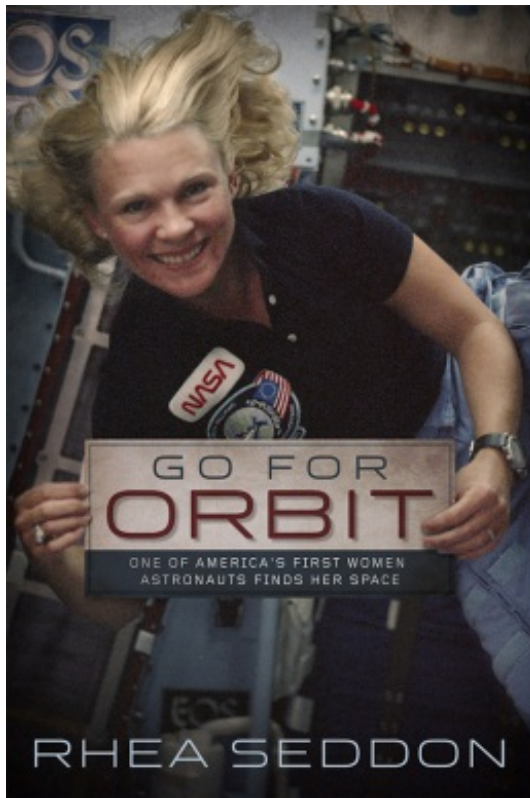


## PRESS KIT—2016



### **Go For Orbit: One of America's First Women Astronauts Finds Her Space**

In a small town in Tennessee, a young girl stood with her father and gazed at the Russian Sputnik in the night sky. She knew that she was witnessing the beginning of a new era for the human race. Would she play a part? That little girl was 10-year-old Rhea Seddon.

As years went by, she witnessed humans departing from Earth and walking on the moon. The astronauts were men but she felt that would change. At Berkeley in the tumultuous late 1960s, in medical school and a surgery residency Rhea learned that the world no longer belonged solely to males. When NASA announced a selection of new astronauts for the space shuttle program in 1977, she knew: this was her chance.

As one of the first female astronauts in 1978 her quest for space began. But she would do this job her own way, blazing a new path for others to follow.

In 1985 she stood on the launch pad, looked up at the rocket that would take her to space and thought, "The fullness of my life has brought me to this moment. All the unlikely roads taken, the risks addressed, the difficulties overcome has led to this. The ride up the clanking rusty elevator which had withstood the blast of Apollo and earlier shuttle flights will be my first upward push today. Across the narrow Orbiter access arm and into the belly of the beast or butterfly the men and I will clamor, brave or feigning bravery, with the bravado of the fighter pilots we are or have come to emulate. We will sit atop the harnessed bomb until its fuse is lit. This is the culmination of years of preparation; there can be no turning back now."

Rhea Seddon's memoir captures the unlikely story of a young girl with a dream whose hard work, perseverance and willingness to take risks prepared her to become part of the history of space travel.

Venturing into space on three spectacular missions, working on important projects for NASA, weathering the story of Challenger, marrying a fellow astronaut, and bearing Astrotots, that child who looked skyward long ago is now an inspiration to all who aim high to find their own orbit.

## BIOGRAPHY:



### AWARDS:

- 2005
  - Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame
- 2015
  - Tennessee Women's Hall of Fame
  - Astronaut Hall of Fame
- 2016
  - National Football Foundation Nashville Chapter's Fred Russell Distinguished American Award
  - Independent Book Publishers Association Ben Franklin Gold Award for Best Autobiography/Memoir
  - Athena International Leadership Award

RHEA SEDDON, M.D. is a veteran of three space shuttle flights and spent 19 years with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). In 1978 she was selected as one of the first six women to enter the Astronaut Program. She served as a Mission Specialist on flights in 1985 and 1991 and as Payload Commander in charge of all science activities on her final flight in 1993. This brought her total time in space to 30 days.

After leaving NASA in 1997, Dr. Seddon was the Assistant Assistant Chief Medical Officer of the Vanderbilt Medical Group in Nashville for 11 years. There she led an initiative aimed at improving patient safety, quality of care, and team effectiveness by the use of an aviation-based model of Crew Resource Management. She worked with LifeWings Partners, LLC which teaches this concept to healthcare institutions across the United States.

A graduate of the University of California at Berkeley with a degree in physiology, Dr. Seddon received her M.D. degree from the University of Tennessee College of Medicine in Memphis, where she completed her residency in General Surgery. She was inducted into the Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame in 2005, the Astronaut Hall of Fame in 2015 and the Tennessee Women's Hall of Fame in 2015. In 2016 she was awarded the National Football Foundation Nashville Chapter's Fred Russell Distinguished American Award, the Independent Book Publishers Association Ben Franklin Gold Award for Best Autobiography/Memoir – *Go For Orbit* and the Athena International Leadership Award (Rutherford County)

## **Narrative Interview with Rhea Seddon, M.D.**

### **In “Go for Orbit”, what is the message you want to share with readers?**

It’s being the first woman in a man’s world, and what it was like to want a woman’s life along with it and trying to figure out how to be able to do all those things. My husband (Robert L. “Hoot” Gibson) was also an astronaut. He’s a macho man, a man’s man, and that’s another part of the story. It’s also a circular story because after I went away and did all of those things, I came back to my hometown to raise my children and returned to the sort of the life I had started out to lead. It’s a personal journey but in some ways typical of women my age.

### **Who encouraged you to be a physician?**

I had support from my parents, who told me, “You can do anything you want.” I had some practical advice from my father about what various careers entailed. I wanted to live an independent life. I wanted to have my own job, my own money and my own career. I was fascinated by medicine, by physiology, by living creatures. I went to medical school because I could imagine myself a part of the medical world, day after day, taking care of ill people. But it was also the fact that there were so many opportunities for a physician.

### **Where did the desire to be an astronaut come from and how did you learn about NASA’s astronaut program?**

From the time I watched Sputnik blink across the sky through watching the early days of human space flight, I thought that this was the new field of discovery for my generation and I hoped to someday play a part in it. Serendipitously a friend of mine heard that NASA would be accepting applicants for astronauts to fly on the Space Shuttle in 1977. The application process would be open to women and minorities for the first time. I knew I had to apply.

### **Can you describe the pressures you felt in 1978 beginning in a male-dominated program?**

The world of NASA, aviation, computers and space flight was certainly a great leap for me. I had been in a male predominated world in medical school and my surgery residency but the astronaut job was very much a more visible position. All six of the women felt we had to succeed so other women would be given the opportunity.

### **When you were in orbit, describe an expericene that you like to share the most?**

The two most amazing thing about being in orbit are weightlessness and the view. It takes a few days to learn how to work and live without gravity. You can fly everywhere and things tend to float away if you aren’t careful. Eating and sleeping feel very different. The view of Earth takes your breath away. It is like drifting in a hot air balloon – but you go around the earth every ninety minutes. There are 45 minutes of daylight and 45 minutes of night in every orbit. Pictures can’t can’t fully capture how magnificent our planet is.

**Looking back, how do you think you were able to accomplish your NASA career, marry, and have children?**

I wasn't afraid to ask for help! My husband did his share of housework and child care. We had a wonderful nanny who took care of all of us. Other astronaut spouses and neighbors were willing helpers. I couldn't have done it alone and was blessed that angels appeared just when I needed them. It was truly a team effort.

**What were your other favorite assignments at NASA?**

I was part of the Search and Rescue team that was ready for potential accidents for the first few shuttle flights. It was an honor to work with the helicopter crews and parajumpers who had been in Vietnam. I also love being a CapCom in Mission Control. It is the next best thing to actually being in space.

**What did you pursue after you left NASA?**

I came back to healthcare. I didn't want to practice medicine and so became the Assistant Chief Medical Officer at Vanderbilt Medical Center. I helped the medical group improve safety, efficiency and quality of care. After that I became a partner in a business that taught those same skills to hospitals and medical groups around the U.S.

**What was it like, putting your story down on paper?**

Essentially, I had the chronology and major parts of the story handwritten on yellow legal pads before I left NASA in 1996, so I could still go and ask the people I was working with, "Do I remember this right?" In technical fields, you have to be very factual. I was having a difficult time trying to figure out how to make it into a story that people would want to read, rather than just a technical paper on my experience. So the yellow legal pads sat for years. After my career at Vanderbilt, I had more free time, and I started thinking about it again. Of course one of the wonderful resources here in Murfreesboro is Middle Tennessee State University. I found a program called The Writer's Loft, now known as MTSU Write. I thought, How perfect would that be? Have some class time, assignments in writing, and a mentor to help me build a lively story. Later I found a terrific word editor and then a great fact checker at NASA. A team of experts in Nashville then helped me get the book to print.

**You mention that you always strive to pass along encouragement. Can you recall a time when encouragement was given to you?**

I happened to give a talk at a conference where famous Presidential Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin gave the keynote. At a reception afterward, I had a chance to speak with her. I mentioned my background and told her that I hoped to write a book. She simply said, "Oh you **must** write your story!" Thank you, Doris. Here it is.

## QUOTES ABOUT RHEA SEDDON, M.D.:

- "As one of the first female astronauts, Dr. Rhea Seddon was a pioneer in every sense of that word. Many books have been written by the men of the space program, but only a rare few by the women and fewer yet by the original six and NONE by their own hand."
  - Astronaut Mike Mullane, Author, *"Riding Rockets, The Outrageous Tales of a Space Shuttle Astronaut"*
- "Rhea Seddon and I embarked on a remarkable journey together in 1978, when we became two of the first six women astronauts in U.S. history. The unique bond that formed among us as we weathered the intense media storm following our arrival on the scene and navigated the complex challenge of joining such a tightly-knit, all-male community has seasoned over the years into a very special friendship. So I'm delighted that Rhea has stepped forth as the first of our six to tell her story first-hand."
  - Kathy Sullivan, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administrator
- Rhea Seddon's book "Go For Orbit" is wonderfully done! It is so effective in portraying the experience of training to fly on the shuttle and the experience of flight. So many of the things are treated so clearly and personally. The candid personal aspects of her experience are captured with insider truthfulness and aplomb. She shows the ability and willingness to let the reader see inside her heart and mind as she makes life-determining decisions. Throughout the story, I found myself impressed by the underpinning of careful logic that guides her and her family's choices—a logic that is always tempered with the influence of the heart, recognizing the importance of both thinking and feeling when one has chosen a life of exploration and has committed to do things that no one has ever done before.
  - Rick Chappell, Former Chief Scientist, Marshall Space Flight Center

## Book Price/Information

**Title:** Go For Orbit

**Subtitle:** One of America's First Women Astronauts Finds Her Space

**Publisher:** Your Space Press

**ISBN:** 978-0-9962178-1-1

**Prices:**

- \$40.00 autographed/personalized copy
- \$29.95 hard cover copy
- \$14.99 Kindle version



## **MEDIA:**

Use this information to learn more about Dr. Rhea Seddon's NASA career, via YouTube videos and her official NASA biography. Please use the links provided and give proper photo credits where provided.

**For more of Rhea's events and happenings click [HERE!](#)**

**Astronaut Rhea Seddon:** <https://youtu.be/6BXTzePnrWY>

In this 60 second video experience Rhea's story firsthand. This video is a great example of what you can expect at her speaking engagements.

**Astronaut Rhea Seddon:** <https://youtu.be/ce7ucUYK-rI>

In this 3 minute video experience Rhea's story firsthand. This video is another great example of what you can expect at her speaking engagements.

**U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vrXHY5iQas>

On May 30, 2015, Rhea Seddon, M.D. became the eighth woman inducted into the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame during a public ceremony held at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex's Space Shuttle *Atlantis* attraction. Watch the USLaunchReport's coverage of Dr. Seddon's induction into the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame.

**NASA Ames Research Symposium Rats, Folks and Jellyfish: Studying Life in Space:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qtab-G\\_WU\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qtab-G_WU_k)

NASA Ames 2015 Summer Series. Astronaut Dr. Rhea Seddon was key to the early life sciences research conducted on the Space Shuttle. She was a mission specialist for STS-51-D (Discovery) and STS-40 (Columbia; Spacelab Life Sciences-1), and a payload commander for STS-58 (Columbia; SLS-2). Dr. Seddon describes her experiences and insight gained from being a physician, astronaut and educator.

## **Tennessee Explorers:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guYGLBZYRAU&feature=youtu.be>

This episode of the Nashville Public Television show focused on the work of Bioarchaeologist Tiffany Tung, Astrophysicist Keivan Stassun, and Physician Rhea Seddon. View the entire show.

## **Storytellers Interview:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kGc1U6bYlw&feature=youtu.be>

CityTV's John Hood interviews former astronauts Robert "Hoot" Gibson and Dr. Rhea Seddon for Storytellers on City TV. View the program.

**MAKERS: Women in Space:** <http://www.makers.com/documentary/womeninspace>

*Women in Space* aired October 14 on PBS. Produced by Michael Epstein and Sara Wolitzky, directed by Michael Epstein, *Women In Space* traces the history of women pioneers in the U.S. space program, including Dr. Seddon. Watch the entire program.

**Rhea Seddon's NASA Biography:** <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/htmlbios/seddon.html>

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