

American Forces Press Service

September 4, 2002

Space Camp Scholarship Honors Young Sept. 11 Pentagon Attack Victim

By Rudi Williams American Forces Press Service

"Robbed of your time, the world lost your love. Go forward into God's hands, little dude." -- Patrick Mulligan, in a letter to CNN about 11-year-old Bernard Curtis Brown's death in the terrorist attack on the Pentagon.

WASHINGTON, Sept. 4, 2002 -- His voice cracked and lips quivered as he fought back tears and tried to control his heartbroken emotions about the loss of his 11-year-old son in the Sept. 11 terrorist attack on the Pentagon.

Struggling to speak recently to more than 350 attendees at the Military Child Education Coalition™ conference in San Antonio, Texas, Navy Chief Petty Officer Bernard Curtis Brown thanked the coalition for endowing the 2002 Bernard Curtis Brown II Memorial Space Camp Scholarship.

The Military Child Education Coalition™'s Bernard Curtis Brown II Memorial NASA Space Camp Scholarship is named for an 11-year-old Washington, D.C., area military-connected child who was killed aboard American Airlines Flight 77 when terrorists crashed it into the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001. Photo courtesy Navy Chief Petty Officer Bernard Curtis Brown.

He announced the first scholarship recipient, Buck A. Tanner, 14, an 8th grader at the Department of Defense Education Activity's Central High School in London. Tanner won based on his essay stating why he should be selected; he was unable to attend the conference.

MCEC established the annual scholarship for a military child to attend the NASA Space Camp and the Brown family agreed to allow the organization to name the scholarship in memory of their son. The coalition and the family felt the scholarship is a fitting honor.

At the time of his death Brown was en route to California to participate in Sustainable Seas Expeditions, a National Geographic Society-funded marine research project at the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, near Santa Barbara.

Brown was in a Washington area party with two other students, three schoolteachers and two National Geographic Society staff members. They and the other 51 passengers and crew aboard American Airlines Flight 77 died when terrorist hijackers crashed the plane into the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001.

Teacher James Debeuneure and student Rodney Dickens were representing Ketcham Elementary School. Teacher Sarah Clark and student Asia Cottom were from Backus Middle School. Teacher Hilda Taylor and Brown were from Leckie Elementary School. All the students were 11-year-old sixth graders.

"My wife breaks down more than I do, and I thank God for the little strength he gives me," Brown told the audience of principals, teachers, counselors, parents, military personnel and others. "It's truly difficult for me to be able to say his name in the same breath without tears falling out of my face."

After thanking MCEC® officials for using his son's name to start the annual Space Camp scholarship program, Brown said he lost a lot of friends, co-workers and his son on Sept. 11. He works in the chief of naval operations' graphic shop, which was devastated in the attack.

"My wife and I have bad days," he told the audience. "My wife would have more really bad days if I'd been at work that day."

"My son was going into the sixth grade and Miss Hilda Taylor was going to be his teacher," Brown said. "She met him in the fourth grade while he was out fighting one day. She told him when he got to the sixth grade, she wanted him in her class."

The Browns were joyful when Taylor told them Bernard had been selected to represent his middle school on the California trip.

"Miss Taylor, who was from Sierra Leone, Africa, thought my son was the best candidate at his school for the job and I was really proud of him," Brown said. But there was mixed emotions when the family sat down on Sept. 9, 2001, to talk about the trip.

"I knew he was a strong swimmer and I was sure he could do all the things they wanted him to do," Brown said. "The two kids from the other schools were selected because the teachers thought they could do whatever was expected of them, too.

"It's just so happened that on that date, we talked about death," he recalled. "They're going to do kayaking and things inner city kids don't normally do. So I said, 'Son, be careful.' They'd put a disclaimer in the paperwork that said death could happen. But not in my wildest dreams did I think he'd die before he could get there."

U.S. Space Camp is a five-day program that shows youngsters firsthand what it takes to be an astronaut. Activities include simulated Space Shuttle missions, training simulators, rocket building and launches, scientific experiments, and lectures on the past, present, and future of space exploration.

There are three Space Camp locations: Huntsville, Alabama; Mountain View, California; and Titusville, Florida. Tuition ranges from \$550 to \$875 and includes meals, lodging and program materials, but not transportation.

Application deadline for the 2003 Bernard Curtis Brown II Memorial NASA Space Camp Scholarship is May 15, 2003. The Military Child Education Coalition™ endowment covers the winner's tuition and travel. Applicants must be a child of an active duty military parent. The student must be in grades 6 through 9.

For online application forms and more information, visit the Military Child Education Coalition™ Web site at www.militarychild.org/index.cfm. The 2003 application form is scheduled to be posted soon, coalition officials said.

The winner of the 2003 Bernard Curtis Brown II Memorial Space Camp Scholarship will be announced at the 2003 MCEC® national conference in Connecticut.

Ileen Rogers of the Military Child Education Coalition™ introduces Navy Chief Petty Officer Bernard Curtis Brown at the annual coalition conference held recently in San Antonio, Texas. Brown's son is the namesake of the MCEC®'s new Bernard Curtis Brown II Memorial NASA Space Camp Scholarship. The young Brown, 11, died aboard American Airlines Flight 77 when the terrorists slammed the plane into the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001.