

NASA Colonel shuttles PSU souvenirs to space

By Fran Hultzaple

Astronaut Colonel Guion Bluford took a bit of Penn State with him into space this month.

The Penn State graduate said in a recent *Capitol Times* interview: "I took up several objects both for the university and its aerospace department and plan to deliver them this Fall when I visit University Park."

It is NASA policy not to reveal those items for 30 days after the flight. However, according to Penn State officials, items sent to Bluford before the flight included two football jerseys with his name and year of graduation (1964); a tape of Penn State fight songs; and a copy of the Morrill Land Grant Act, a document that led to the establishment of Penn State.

As a mission specialist aboard the Space Shuttle Challenger's recent flights, Bluford's assignments included launching India's satellite and conducting experiments for two Penn State scientists: Biophysicist, Paul W. Todd; and Biochemist, Wesley C. Hymer.

The experiments required Bluford to separate live pancreas cells in zero gravity in hopes of providing cheaper methods of treating burns, blood clots, and diabetes. By doing the cell separation in space, Todd expects a 400 percent improvement on the finished product.

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Barnes McCormick, now head of aerospace engineering at University Park, had worked with Bluford when he was a student. Bluford's senior thesis was on the aerodynamics of the boomerang.

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the long run they would have lost out. Those companies neglect the fact there are many students with high potential who shine late versus early."

Bluford used his potential in extra-curricular activities as well as in military pursuits.

He participated in the ROTC program at Penn State and later Air Force stints earned him three Outstanding Unit Awards and ten Air Medals. Bluford flew 144 combat missions, 65 of which were over North Vietnam.

Now, nearly a decade later, Bluford again found himself flying for his country in a peacetime mission. On the third day of the six-day shuttle flight, 139 miles out in space, traveling 300 miles per minute, ground control woke the challenger crew with the Penn State song.

"I still consider myself a Penn Stater," he said. "After all, I learned to fly at Penn State."

"And yes, I still follow Penn State football," Bluford said.

His agenda for the next few months includes public relation tours for NASA. He is not scheduled for any of the future flights at this time, however, two other black astronauts are scheduled to fly a shuttle mission next year.

Bluford is the first black astronaut, but not the first Penn Stater to go into orbit. Paul Weite holds that distinction with his 1973 flight.

These operations are part of a long-range effort to develop new technology for commercial applications.

"The shuttle operation will be flying for hire," explained Bluford. "It's designed to pay for itself."

By 1988, 24 missions will be flown annually.

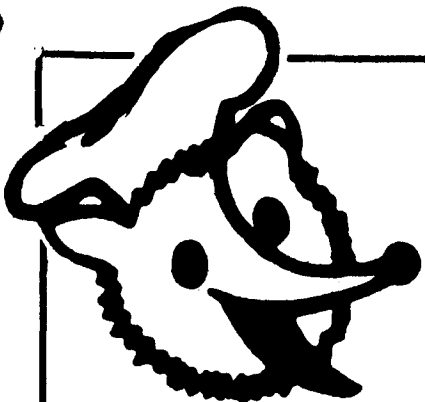
the forces on it," McCormick said. "I understand he made a movie of the flight so he could count the rotations."

McCormick remembers Bluford as the kind of student not easy to recall after 20 years.

"I found him to be a quiet student with average grades," he said, "but that didn't stop him."

When Bluford was asked what he thought of the practice of some companies interviewing only those students with 3.0 Grade Point Averages or better he said.

"I didn't have a 3.0 average when I graduated from college. That practice would have eliminated me from being considered by those companies. In



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