

## Santa Monica Astronaut Can't Fly ... Yet

SANTA MONICA — Early last week Dr. William E. Thornton received a telephone call from astronaut Alan B. Shepard Jr. notifying him that he had been selected as one of the nation's 11 new astronauts.

Since Shepard was the first U.S. astronaut sent aloft in a Mercury capsule, the call meant a great deal to Dr. Thornton, who doesn't yet know how to fly an airplane, let alone a space ship.

"But I was so happy I would have been excited even if Joe Doakes had notified me that I'd been chosen," said Dr. Thornton. "But to be told by Shepard was a nice touch."

Dr. Thornton, 38, said that exploring space has been a dream of his since his childhood.

"I guess I was like most kids," he says. "I liked Buck Rogers and anything dealing with outer space."

He will be involved in space shots where several astronauts will be aboard.

A medical doctor and physicist, Dr. Thornton, who resides in Santa Monica, has been working as a consultant in medical electronics at Del Mar Engineering Laboratories in El Segundo.

He said as a youth he used to fire his own black-powder rocket in his back yard in North Carolina and watched with great interest the development of today's space propellants.

"It was obvious that some day men would be riding rockets into the beyond and I harbored the dream of being one of those men," he said.

Thornton spent four years studying for his BS in physics at the University of North Carolina and running his own electronics business on the side.

Following graduation, Thornton did a stint in the Air Force and was officer in charge of the instrumentation laboratory at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida for three years.

He then returned to the University of North Carolina to study medicine and after graduation in 1963, took his internship at Wilford Hall Air Force Hospital in San Antonio, Tex. From there he went into the aerospace medical division at Brooks Air Force Base.

Now, Dr. Thornton can hardly wait to get into orbit so he can conduct medical experiments and studies under actual space conditions.

But before he does, he must complete a three-year astronaut training program. Included in the program is learning how to fly a plane.

He said he doesn't have any particular trip in space that he wants to take.

"Anywhere I can fit is fine with me," Dr. Thornton said.

Dr. Thornton said his wife, Jennifer, and children Simon, 8, and

Please Turn to Page 8, Col. 6



DR. WILLIAM E. THORNTON

... former Buck Rogers fan.

Times Photo

## Astronaut Can't Fly Yet

Continued from First Page

James, 6, are just as excited as he is about his selection as an astronaut.

Asked if his wife will be nervous about the possibility of traveling in space, he said that she has the "normal fears."

Dr. Thornton was selected from an original field of about 200 qualified applicants. He will begin his training in Houston, Tex., in September.

Like many of the other men selected as astro-

Los Angeles Times  
**THE WEST SIDE**

THURSDAY MORNING, AUGUST 10, 1967