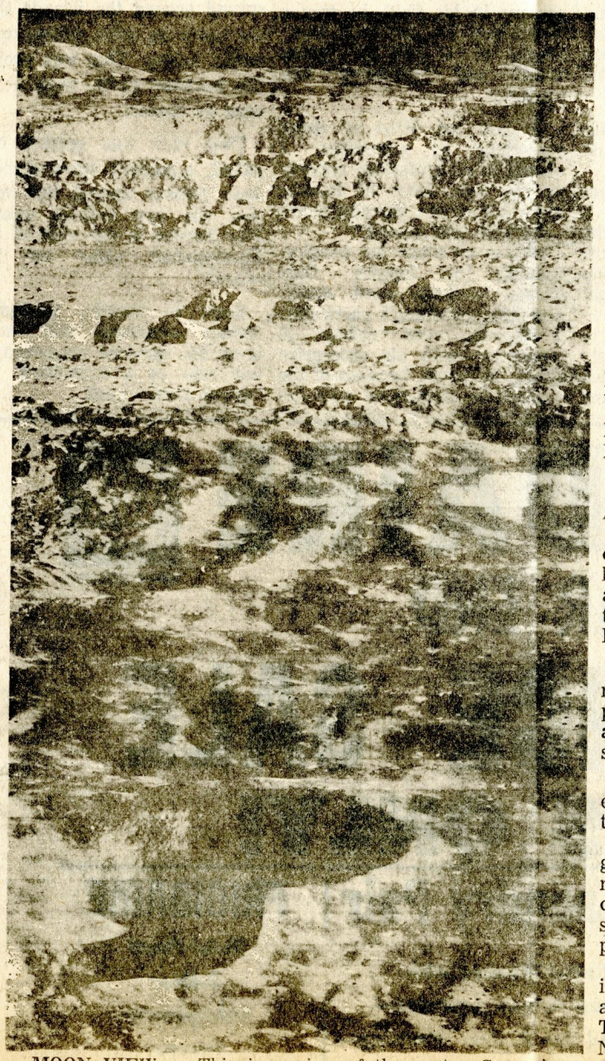
# Faison Man Studying For Astronaut Role



MOON VIEW — This is a view of the crater Copernicus on the surface of the moon, take nby the satelitte Orbiter II. Dr. William E. Thorton, an astronaut from Faison, will play a role in United States efforts to put a man on the lunar surface.

## *One Of Eleven Scientists In Space Program*

By JOHN RAINS

CHAPEL HILL — Add one astronaut to the list of former newsboys who have made good.

The astronaut is Dr. William E. Thornton, who grew up in Faison. ,

The newspaper?

Why, the Goldsboro News-Argus, of course.

Dr. Thornton was interviewed briefly this past week while he was here to undergo training at the Morehead Planetarium of the University of North Carolina.

One of the first things he recalled was delivering the paper in Faison when he was in about the eighth grade in school.

"It's good exercise," he smiled. "I started out with 10 customers and got up to 91."

Dr. Thronton is still getting good exercise, because astronauts have to stay in excellent condition. He said he has no strict exercise regimen, but plays handball regularly.

He said this game is a favorite of most of the astronauts at the space center in Houston, Tex., the headquarters of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Dr. Thornton is one of 11 scientists, all civilians, who were selected on Aug. 4 to join the Manned Spacecraft Center and train as crewmen.

They are expected to participate in lunar flight projects which will begin about 1969.

Each of the scientists has a specialty — Dr. Thornton's is space medicine.

Dr. Thornton, who holds an MD from the University of North Carolina, said one of the medical problems is weightlessness in space flights.

On prolonged flights, especially, weightlessness can have a detrimental effect on the heart and cardiovascular system.

The doctor explained that in an atmosphere without gravity, the heart will not have to work as hard as usual to power the body. Like any other muscle, the heart will suffer from lack of exercise.

"It's like going to bed and staying there," Dr. Thornton said.

The answer is a program of exercise that will keep the heart in good shape. Dr. Thornton himself has developed physical conditioning devices for use in zero or low gravity atmospheres.

He also has developed an instrument for weighing a person or object in weightless space. This took some ingenuity.

On earth, the weight of something is determined by the pull of gravity. In the absence of gravity, there is no "weight."

"What you're after is the mass, not weight," Dr. Thornton said.

His device uses a spring to determine the mass of an object or person.

When the object is attached to the spring, it oscillates. The oscillations are measured electronically and the rapidity of the movement indicates the correct mass.

The heavier an object is, i.e., the more mass it has, the slower the oscillations will be.

Dr. Thornton said the problem of weightlessness will be lessened as spacecraft get bigger, providing more room for astronauts to move around.

He said the tools that will be required in space medicine will have "very direct applications on earth."

The doctor told a press conference that there is much study to be done on the effects of space travel on the human body.

He pointed out that man's body has been developed over millions of years and is adapted to life on earth. Now, he will be taking that same body into space and into situations which will be foreign to it.

Adjusting to moon flights will be just the beginning.

"The moon is just a stone's throw away compared to some of the other places man hopes to visit."

The effects of cosmic rays on the body also have to be studied, he said.

Dr. Thornton and his colleagues were at the Morehead Planetarium to study space navigation.

Their academic studies will continue through March, when they will begin Air Force training to become qualified as jet pilots.

Dr. Thornton's schedule was so tight he did not have an opportunity to visit his mother, Mrs. W. E. Thornton, in Faison.

Immediately after their training at the Planetarium, the astronauts held a short press conference and were then shepherded on to a plane to return to Houston.

Dr. Thornton said that if he goes on a space trip, it probably will be a "biomedical,

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PRESS CONFERENCE — Dr. William E. Thornton (standing), who grew up in Faison, takes his seat with fellow astronauts at a press conference in Chapel Hill.

(Staff Photo)

# Faison

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laboratory - type mission," in which he would be in charge of equipment used to monitor and collect medical data.

He said he has been "interested in airplanes ever since I saw my first one."

He has maintained that interest over the years, and has flown during two hitches in the Air Force, but he has never been a pilot.

Dr. Thornton said he did not believe the psychological pressure on an astronaut making a moon flight would be any greater than the stress on men who already have made space flights or tested experimental aircraft.

(Another astronaut, speaking at the press conference, said the danger of space flight is something the astronauts don't think about. "I am not convinced that it is any more dangerous than being a pedestrian in Boston," the man said.)

Dr. Thornton applied for a role in the astronaut program about a year before his selection was announced on Aug. 4. He and the other 10 who were selected at the same time were among nearly 500 who applied.

Dr. Thornton was born in Goldsboro on April 14, 1929.

He received a BS degree in physics from the University of North Carolina in 1952 and an MD in 1963.

He served in the Air Force from 1948 until 1952 and from 1963 until early 1965. He was a flight surgeon.

Thornton is married to the former Elizabeth Jennifer Fowler of England.

They met at the University after his first tour in the Air Force. Miss Fowler was an electroencephalographer at the University hospital, working under an exchange program.

They were married in 1958 and today they have two sons: William Simon, who was born in 1959, and James, born in 1961.

Dr. Thornton has been a director of the Electronics Division, Del Mar Engineering Labs in Los Angeles; an instructor in the surgery department of the UNC School of Medicine; and, from 1965 until 1967, he was with the USAF Aerospace Medical Division, Brooks AFB, San Antonio, Tex.

The new astronaut said his wife is enthusiastic about his new job and he said his mother is pleased.