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Skylab's return joins list

United Press International
WASHINGTON — A Soviet satellite fell to Earth nine years ago scattering charred steel debris over the American southwest including a 640-pound steel plate that is the heaviest known piece of space junk to have been recovered.

Some time in late June or early July, America's abandoned 78.5 ton Skylab space station will re-enter Earth's atmosphere, disintegrate and drop an estimated 500 chunks of metal along a 4,000 mile long belt 100 miles wide.

Forty-three Skylab pieces are expected to weigh more than 200 pounds with a section of an airlock module weighing 5,000 pounds, a lead-lined film vault weighing 4,000 pounds and six oxygen tanks weighing 2,700 pounds apiece.

In addition to Skylab, there are now more than 4,600 man-made objects the size of golf ball or larger in space. All but 114 are in orbit around the Earth and most sooner or later will return.

Thousands of man-made objects already have fallen out of orbit since the space age began in 1957 and the

North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) reports space debris is now falling on the average of more than one a day.

NORAD said it knows of no one being hit by a man-made object from space and it said chances are greater of being struck by a meteorite.

According to a study for NASA by the Battelle Columbus (Ohio) Laboratories, there have been only seven verified incidents of injuries caused by a meteorite during the past 200 years and no verified fatalities.

There have been some close calls, however, during the past decade. Among 12 separate incidents reported since 1968 were:

—A 1.5-pound meteorite penetrated the roof of a barn near Murchison, Australia, Sept. 28, 1969, narrowly missing two men who were stacking hay.

—A farmer in Ucera, Venezuela, saw a fireball and heard an explosion when an 11 pound meteorite struck the ground 240 feet from his house on Jan. 16, 1970.

—A meteorite weighing 12.3 ounces struck a home in

Wethersfield, Conn., April 8, 1971, and lodged in the ceiling of the living room.

—A meteorite struck a garage at a home located two miles north of Canon City, Colo., Oct. 27, 1973, penetrated the roof and shattered when it hit the floor. Fragments

weighing more than three pounds were recovered.

—A 2-pound meteorite fell through the roof of a carport in a trailer park in San Juan Capistrano, Calif., March 15, 1973.

Of the satellite debris that fell over the Southwest on Aug. 28, 1970, six

pieces of steel were recovered in rural areas near Beaver, Okla., Tex., and Pratt, Kan. The pieces were oblong chunks to two and one-half feet long, weighing about 150 pounds. The largest piece was a flat steel weighing 640 pounds.

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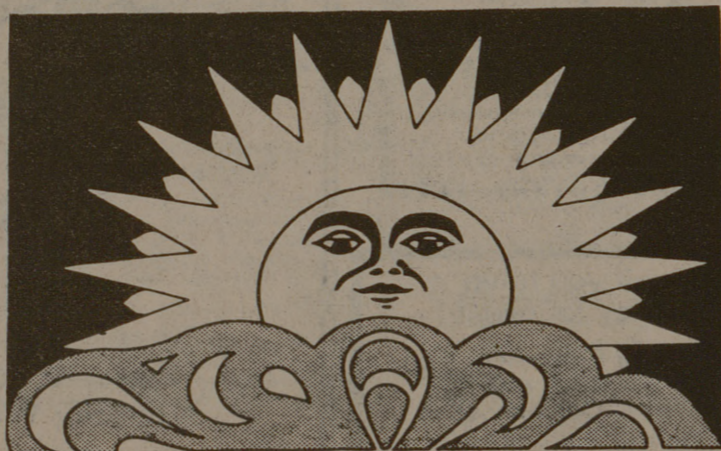
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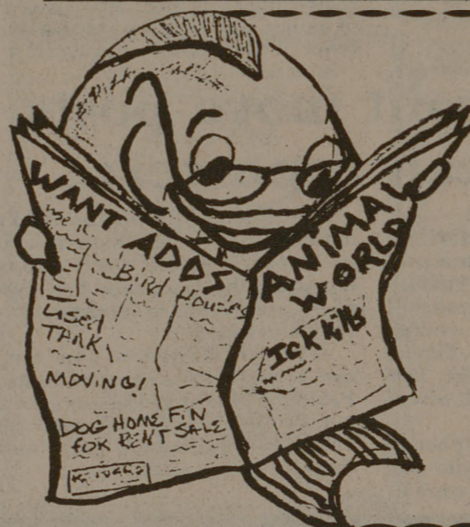
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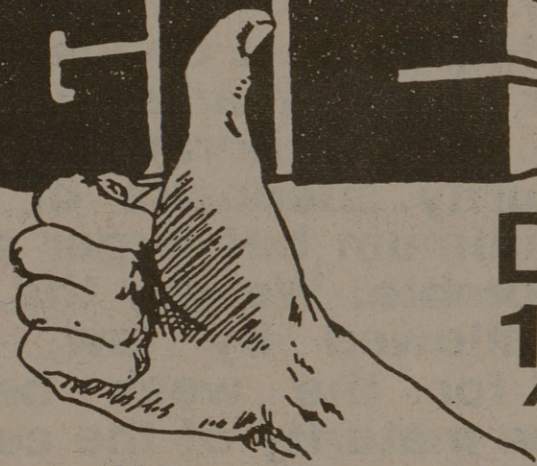
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