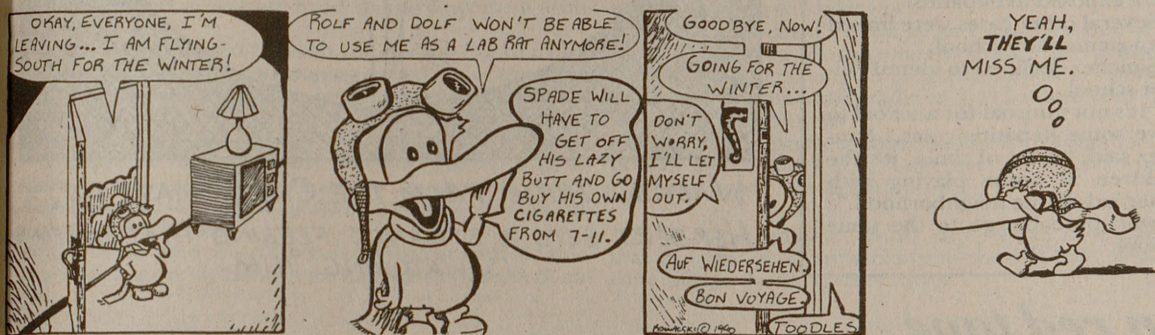
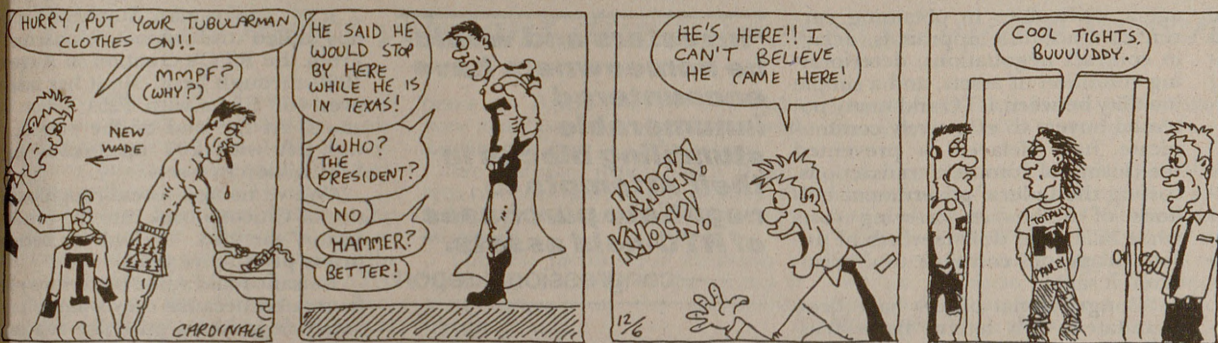




Spade Phillips, P.I. by Matt Kowalski



Tubularman by Boomer Cardinale



Shuttle problems slow progress; crew observes white dwarf star

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Columbia's astronauts got in twice as much stargazing Wednesday, but remained far behind and nowhere near full speed because of problems with the shuttle's \$150 million observatory.

"We're trying as hard as we can," astronaut and astronomer Ron Parise told ground controllers at the end of his 12-hour shift.

Parise and astronaut Robert Parker, hampered by a jittery instrument pointing system, got in 35 percent of the observation time planned for their shift. Seventeen percent was accomplished in the crew's previous work period and none before that, mission scientist Ted Gull said.

Although Gull could not say when the Astro observatory might reach peak efficiency, he was confident further fine tuning would increase viewing time. The 10-day shuttle mission ends Tuesday.

"We're starting to think science ... and that is what it's all about," Gull said.

Among Wednesday's observations were a white dwarf star — a star near the end of its life; a galaxy that's 41 million light years away and is believed to contain a black hole; and Crab Nebula, a remnant of a supernova that occurred more than 900 years ago.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration had hoped to start making scientific observations with Astro late Sunday but had to delay work because of trouble with the pointing system's star trackers.

As Astro's pointing problem dragged on, scientists removed more targets from the viewing lineup. About 250 celestial sources of ultraviolet light and X-rays were supposed to have been studied, including galaxies, quasars and a supernova.

The four astronomers aboard Columbia manually operated Astro's pointing system for the third straight day Wednesday, using a joystick and keyboard to steer the three ultraviolet telescopes toward desired stars. When possible, the telescopes were aimed automatically, normally a quicker and more precise method but impeded by a bad star tracker.

At one point, Spacelab Mission Operations Control's John David Bartoe informed the astronauts that "this is by far the most stable pointing we've seen so far."

"Except that the target isn't in the aperture" of the telescope, Parise replied.

New software was transmitted Wednesday to correct the star tracker's sensitivity to light and hopefully improve its sighting of dim stars.

Observations were briefly halted Wednesday afternoon when one of four small jets in Columbia's aft failed because of a helium bubble in a fuel line. While it was out, the telescope lenses were covered for protection.

There were moments of excitement amid the exasperation.

NASA scientist Randy Kimble was elated with observations of the white dwarf star by the Johns Hopkins University ultraviolet telescope, with which he works. The star has never been studied with such sensitivity or resolution, he said.

Because the astronauts had to manually operate the system, the observation lasted only two-thirds as long as planned.

Astro's X-ray telescope, which has its own pointing system, began operating Wednesday after falling out of alignment late Tuesday.

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