

Large Solar Flares Erupt Anew

HOLLOMAN AIR FORCE BASE, N.M., March 12 (AP) — A series of large solar flares, each with the potential to disrupt radio transmissions, have erupted in a wake of an unusually large blast, researchers at this base say.

A blast 36 times the size of Earth that occurred Thursday on the sun's northeast quarter was possibly the largest ever recorded, the researchers said.

Staff Sgt. Leroy Kirkegard said Saturday that the huge eruption of gas from the surface of the sun was followed by another large explosion Friday morning and three more on Saturday. The flares were all big enough to disrupt long-range communications on Earth, like shortwave transmissions and satellite links.

"That's uncommon — to have that many big flares in the same region in the same day," Sergeant Kirkegard said.

"It's a very disturbed area — prob-

ably two to three Earths in diameter," said Tom Folkers, a technical specialist and telescope operator at Kitt Peak National Observatory near Tucson, Ariz.

The solar flare on Thursday extended about 70,000 miles into space, said researchers at Sacramento Peak, just east of Holloman.

Tom Duvall, an astronomer at Kitt Peak, said researchers at Sacramento Peak told him that "it's the largest one they've seen — ever." He added, "This is pretty exciting for us up here."

Air Force Maj. James B. Near Jr., commander of Holloman's solar observatory in the Sacramento Mountains, said Friday that the flare was the size of 36 Earths.

Mr. Folkers said ultraviolet radiation and X-rays hit the Earth's upper atmosphere at noon Thursday, just eight minutes after the solar blast. Such radiation travels at the speed of light, he said.