

## Swanson

Just before sunrise on May 18, a small twin-engine reconnaissance aircraft from the Oregon National Guard flew east to west over Mount St. Helens. Once the Mohawk OV-1 had cleared the volcano, it turned and flew back on a parallel course. It was 5:30 A.M. In just three hours, St. Helens would explode in its biggest eruption in four thousand years. Again and again, the plane flew one leg, turned back, and flew a course slightly south of its previous path. An infrared imager in the belly of the aircraft pointed straight down and scanned the mountain's flanks. Any hot spots on the surface of St. Helens would be painted on the five-inch strip of film that moved continuously through the imager. The data from the Oregon National Guard flight would show a new line of hot spots had appeared just beneath the surface of the bulge, but like Friday's infrared survey, these too would not be processed before the eruption.

The new infrared images meant magma was high within the volcano's visible cone, perhaps only a hundred yards from the surface. At such a shallow depth, the incandescent, plastic rock was foamy and expanding. All that was needed was one good jolt and St. Helens would pop like a bottle of champagne.

Before the sun fully rose above the horizon, Dave Johnston pulled his lanky body out of his sleeping bag. He may have heard the buzz of