

# Scannings

(continued)

PACIFIC NORTHWEST,  
CR: TIM TOKARYK DEC, '82

## Encounters of the Disappearing Kind

**What do you suppose  
happened to the UFOs?**

**N**early a decade has passed since the last wave of U.F.O. reports swept the country, and Robert J. Gribble is getting nervous. Gribble, whose 30-year interest in extraterrestrials led him to form the National U.F.O. Reporting Center and hotline in Seattle in 1974, works the phones alone now. His staff has dwindled to one from a maximum 12 people in the mid-'70s, when 4,500 sightings were called in during one four-month period.

"I am down to maybe three reports a day," he said, "and 99 percent of those are just lights in the sky. I can't remember the last time somebody reported that a wingless vehicle was hovering over their home or chasing their car."

While Gribble may not be able to recall the last major sighting, he will never forget the first one: Ken Arnold's 1947 report of nine "boomerangs" skipping over Mount Rainier, which launched the modern craze and the term "flying saucers," too. But those days are gone.

Gribble, retired from the Seattle Fire Department, says that even popular movies such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.* have failed to stimulate flying saucer reports. "When those movies hit the theaters," he recalled, "several analysts predicted a new surge of reports. All I got was a bunch of college students calling for information."

In an effort to understand the coy behavior of the extraterrestrials, Gribble has gone back and studied his records — 125,000 phone reports and thousands of interviews. He has looked for answers in the orientation of the planets. He has tried to estimate travel time from other galaxies. ("Maybe it just takes them time to fly home and back again.") He has even approached several national U.F.O. organizations, seeking sponsorship of a worldwide U.F.O. outreach. ("People everywhere could flash H - I ['hi'] in Morse code with flashlights and car headlights at night.") Every effort has failed.

Still, Gribble reluctantly admits that the next move is up to "them." "They have far better surveillance equipment than we do," he says. "They know what we are and who we are, and they have doubtlessly observed our behavior — which lately is nothing to brag about. In this time of international strife, maybe they just don't want to have anything to do with us."

Scott Forslund