

UFO Book—Mind Zamora (older version) cut 11/1/24

Old version:

A more famous UFO case that provides some hints that a culturally-influenced myth may be at work is the UFO sighting reported by Socorro, New Mexico Patrol Officer Sgt. Lonnie Zamora. Zamora himself did not fall prey to the mythos, but essentially everyone around him did, including the media. He was frightened by the experience, and he didn't have the clarity of mind to carefully observe the situation. As a result, he was uncertain of what he saw, but others were happy to fill in any ambiguous details for him to satisfy their longing for confirmation of ET contact. In comparison with Lonnie's first hand retellings, many contemporaneous press reporting and later writings on the incident appear to be sensationalized versions of his story twisted to offer proof of an ET visitation.

In an interview he gave immediately after the incident to local radio station KSRC and during the investigation conducted by the US Air Force, Zamora said that at around 5:50 p.m. on April 24, 1964, he was pursuing a speeding car when he heard what sounded like an explosion. He then saw flames and smoke in the air in the direction of a local dynamite shack that was behind a hill. He turned around and drove toward the shack. When he got about a half mile away, the shack came into view, as did a white, egg-shaped object the size of a car. Concerned that a vehicle had been overturned in an accident and that someone might be injured, he phoned the state police and requested assistance, and spoke with Sgt. Chavez who said he would be there in a few minutes. Zamora then drove closer to the site of the explosion, but another hill obscured his view. Once he crested that hill, he got a better look at the white, egg-shaped object, which appeared to be supported by four pronged legs, and noticed some red markings on its side.

Throughout the KSRC radio interview, interviewer Walter Strode appeared to be trying to guide Zamora in crafting a specific story that he knew his listeners, including the crowd of curious local residents who had gathered outside the radio station, wanted to hear. The ET visitation narrative becomes especially apparent when he probes Zamora about the red markings on the object. The interviewer stated that he had heard reports that the markings were an upside-down V-shape with three lines through it—imagery that would surely stoke the imaginations of sci-fi fans. Zamora responded by saying that military officials had told him not to discuss the markings with the media. Naturally, the interviewer emphasized for listeners that Zamora had been asked by the Air Force investigators to discuss this detail.

[transition]

He got out of the car and was approaching the object on foot when there was another loud boom. At that point, he ran toward his police cruiser for cover, dropping his prescription glasses as he was fleeing.

[PBB: while next to his car, object stopped making sound. Object started to rise, saw red marking as it rose. 128-9.] [PBB AF report says he ran, dropped glasses, then crouched beside cruiser shielding his eyes.]

Observing the scene from behind his cruiser, Zamora said he saw two figures in white coveralls [Zamora says this in KSRC interview.] about the size of people near the object. When he relayed this detail in the KSRC interview, he was then asked if they were “wearing helmets like spacemen,” revealing the spin the media was hoping to put on his story. Zamora explained that he wasn’t close enough to determine if the white figures were people or objects due to how fast everything happened, but he was certain that they were not wearing space helmets. However, he did state that it seemed like one of them turned towards him. (He told the AF “one of them

seemed startled.” p. 146) Soon after, he looked on—without his glasses, as the object began to rise and then slowly move away from him. As it ascended straight up, it emitted bluish-orange flames from its underside and a loud roaring sound.¹ He told the KSRC reporter that he was afraid it was going to explode. “It happened so fast that I started running,” he said. “I was scared.” But, when the object reached an altitude of 20 ft, everything became quiet enough to hear a pin drop.² During this time, Chavez arrived on the scene, and observed the white object alongside Zamora as it receded into the distance, remaining very close to the ground as it traveled up over the perlite mines. Immediately afterward, Zamora and Chavez noticed some burning brush which was still smoking and four impressions in the ground that Zamora said were 10 inches wide, 6-8 inches deep, and 19 ft apart.³

News of the incident broke **that evening**, and a media frenzy that spanned several weeks ensued. In the decades following, the town of Socorro would even try to use the incident to boost its tourism industry, installing benches, walkways, murals depicting Zamora’s experience to mark the site. Many of the stories that related Zamora’s experience implied that he had witnessed extraterrestrials, as sensationalized headlines like “Mystifying Object Is Sighted,” (*Alamogordo Daily News*) “Sands ‘Saucer’ Landing Probed,” (*El Paso Herald-Post*, April 27, 1964, 1, 13) and “Socorro Officer Saw Two Men Step Out of Big UFO” (*Albuquerque Tribune*, April 25, 1964, 1)

¹ US Air Force, Socorro 1964 UFO Incident, Project Blue Book, available through *The Black Vault*, 128, <https://documents2.theblackvault.com/documents/projectbluebook/ProjectBlueBook-Socorro-NewMexico-04-24-1964.pdf>; “Socorro, New Mexico, April 24, 1964. Officer Lonnie Zamora is interviewed by Walter Strode on KSRC R,” interview conducted on April 24, 1964; video uploaded to YouTube by *UFO History*, October 7, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3dpJBC_IRk. (Zamora discusses the indentations on the ground at 05:30-05:51.) See also: Associated Press (AP), “Whatzit Touches Down Near Socorro,” *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, April 26, 1964, 1.

² “Socorro, New Mexico, April 24, 1964. Officer Lonnie Zamora is interviewed by Walter Strode on KSRC R,” interview conducted on April 24, 1964; video uploaded to YouTube by *UFO History* on October 7, 2018, 03:28-03:55, 04:52-05:18, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3dpJBC_IRk.

³ [KSRC Interview]

reveal. (One headline announced a year after the incident, “Socorro to Use Flying Object As Tourist Catch.”)

However, Zamora made it clear from the outset that he did not believe ETs were responsible. In fact, when KSRC interviewer asked him in that first public interview, “And what was your immediate reaction as soon as you realized this thing might be an object from outer space?,” Zamora’s response was, “Well, I don’t think it would be an object from outer space, because I don’t believe in [that sort of thing].”⁴ Zamora would later declare that he was sorry he ever reported the incident, because of all the attention it was getting and how the media frenzy interfered with his job.⁵

Sgt. Chavez immediately reported the incident to the FBI who launched an investigation, and the case was also thoroughly assessed by local law enforcement officials, the Air Force’s Project Blue Book, the US Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI), and several civilian UFO researchers like Ray Stanford. The Socorro incident continues to receive a significant amount of attention from contemporary ufologists. Although investigators did not find any trace of the object or unusual levels of radioactivity at the site, they did discover scorched vegetation and analyze the indentations in the ground. The Air Force report stated that, “No conclusion as to cause could be reached...”⁶ (PBB p. 129; David N. Moody, TSGT USAF)

⁴ [KSRC w/timestamp]

KSRC interviewer also asked Zamora, presumably to support the ET explanation of the sighting: “Did you have a chance to notice what kind of a doorway they had to this object, this flying object?” Zamora replied: “I didn’t notice any doors, no.”

⁵ Charles Richards, “UFO Witness Sighs At Reports Of What He Supposedly Said,” *Albuquerque Journal*, April 27, 1964, 1, 12; Jake Booher, Jr., “If I Can Just Forget About It, Maybe It Will Go Away,” *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, April 23, 1965, 2.

⁶ US Air Force, Socorro 1964 UFO Incident, Project Blue Book, available through *The Black Vault*, 128-129, <https://documents2.theblackvault.com/documents/projectbluebook/ProjectBlueBook-Socorro-NewMexico-04-24-1964.pdf>; “Socorro, New Mexico, April 24, 1964. Officer Lonnie Zamora is interviewed by Walter Strode on KSRC R,” interview conducted on April 24, 1964; video uploaded to YouTube by *UFO History*, October 7, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3dpJBC_IRk. (Zamora discusses the indentations on the ground at 05:30-05:51.)

[Zamora wanted to speak to a priest before discussing the incident with investigators or press. P. 134] AF deemed both Zamora and Chavez reliable, credible witnesses, noting that Zamora was a non-drinker and did not seem prone to hallucinations. (P. 134)

[No explanation; proposed explanations — transition/ AF soil analysis found “No significant differences in elemental composition between the different samples. P. 139.]

Years later, an individual who was a student at the local university in Socorro (the New Mexico School of Technology) in 1964 came forward with a humorous story. On the day of Zamora’s and Chavez’s sighting, Bruno R., who later became a mining engineer working in California, and another student were bored and drove their white car out to the dynamite shack. Once at the dynamite shack, they put on white coveralls and launched an oil drum into the air by lighting a stick of dynamite under it. After the first explosion, they decided to do it again. The dynamite fuse for the second explosion had been lit when they saw a police cruiser pull up on a nearby hill. This was the last thing they wanted to see, because they knew they’d be expelled if they were caught. So, they jumped in the car and drove in the opposite direction just as the second explosion happened.⁷ Zamora could blurrily see the white car driving up another hill away from him, and as the car drove away, it was intermittently visible, because of the hills. If the dynamite story is correct, Zamora’s account would make some sense, as opposed to being a strange outlier story, even for a UFO report. Dynamite explosions would have indeed left four impressions, with two of them smoking, and two simply being dents in the ground. The final five sentences of the Project Blue Book report are a direct quote from Zamora, which is quite revealing, given the Bruno R. allegation:

⁷ Robert Sheaffer, “Famous Socorro 'UFO Landing' A Student Prank?” *Skeptical Inquirer*, vol. 34, no. 2, Mar.-Apr. 2010, <https://skepticalinquirer.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2010/03/p25.pdf>.

“As my mike fell as I got out of car, at scene area, I heard about two or three loud ‘thumps,’ like someone possibly hammering *or shutting a door or doors hard*. These "thumps" were possibly a second or less apart. This was just before the *roar*. [Car taking off in a hurry followed immediately by explosion?] The persons were not seen when I drove to the scene area. Just before Sgt. Chavez got to scene, I got my pen and drew a picture of the insignia on the object.”

[There’s also: “Suddenly noted a shiny type object to south about 150 to 200 yards. It was off the road. At first glance, stopped. It looked, at first, like a car turned upside down. Thought some kids might have turned over. Saw two people in white coveralls very close to the object. One of these persons seemed to turn and look straight at my car and seemed startled--seemed to jump quickly somewhat.”]

[Add a myth-building conclusion]