

# THE SOCORRO CLASSIC

**The landing at Socorro may prove to be a turning point in the history of UFOs. The *FLYING SAUCER REVIEW* in its July-August and September-October issues printed brief newspaper reports of the incident, but this account, reprinted by kind permission of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP) is taken from the July-August issue of its bulletin, the UFO INVESTIGATOR, and gives a much more detailed survey of this remarkable occurrence.**

**P**HYSICAL evidence of the UFO seen at close range by New Mexico policeman Lonnie Zamora is in the possession of NICAP and plans are underway to have it analysed by a high-ranking metallurgist in the laboratories of a Government scientific agency in the Washington area.

Metal scrapings, reportedly left by one of the landing gears of the object, were taken from the scene by Ray Stanford, Phoenix, Ariz., a NICAP member authorized to investigate this case. During questioning at the scene, Ptm. Zamora pointed out a rock which he said had been struck by part of the object, leaving traces of metal. Stanford took the rock while Air Force investigators were busy in another part of the site. Other hitherto little known information given to NICAP includes the statement that Zamora heard what sounded to him like a door slamming, between the time he saw two small figures near the UFO and his closest approach, at which time the figures could no longer be seen.

## Well attested

Intensive on-the-spot investigations by NICAP and the Air Force have resulted in one basic agreement: That the object seen by a highly reliable witness cannot be explained as any known device or phenomenon. Dr. J. Allen Hynek, chief civilian consultant to the Air Force's Project Bluebook, told the Associated Press after completing his investigation at Socorro, "I am more puzzled now than I was when I arrived here."

The well-publicised incident began shortly before 6 p.m. MST, April 24, when Ptm. Zamora heard what he thought was an explosion, as he was chasing a speeding car about a mile south of Socorro. Thinking it might be a dynamite shack blowing up, he abandoned the chase and hurried to investigate. When he first saw the object, from some 150 yards, he thought it might be an overturned car, but quickly realised the smooth, metallic, oval device with stilt-like landing gears

was something unusual.

As he drove toward it, he could see two small figures (later estimated to be about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet tall) dressed in "white coveralls" standing close to the object. He said both had their backs to him, but that the one farther away turned around and looked right at him. Zamora reported seeing no details (hands, feet, face, etc.) of the figures and assumed they were completely covered by the suits. He said they were the same height as the bottom of the craft which just cleared a bush, measured at  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet.

No details were visible on the machine, but the officer reported seeing what looked like red markings on the side,  $1-1\frac{1}{2}$  feet high.

Zamora drove to within about 100 feet, got out and proceeded on foot. When he was about 50 feet from it, the UFO began to roar and spew flame and smoke from its underside. Thinking it was about to blow up, the scared patrolman ran back toward his car. The roaring suddenly stopped and he looked up to see it take off. He later said, "it was so quiet you could hear a pin drop."

The machine rose to about 10 feet and flew down the draw, clearing the 8-foot dynamite shack by about 2 feet. After skimming along for two or three miles, it rose up over a perlite mill and climbed away into the sky.

## Radio call

When Zamora first thought he saw an overturned car, he put out a radio call for assistance. The first person to answer his call was State Police Sgt. Sam Chavez, who arrived shortly after the UFO took off. The two officers then proceeded to the landing site.

They found five rectangular depressions in the ground, grouped around the area where the egg-shaped object was, and in the right locations to have been made by the landing gear, according to Zamora. Each was about 12 in. long,  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. wide

and several inches deep, with a wedge-shaped cross-section. Two other depressions—smaller, shallower and rounded—were found near what was the far side of the object, as seen by Zamora.

The officers also saw bushes (snakewood and greasewood) and clumps of grass which appeared to have been seared by a flame. The ground, too, looked as if it had been scorched. Much of the marking, unfortunately, was obliterated by the hundreds of curiosity seekers who flocked to the scene.

The first official investigators arrived: Capt. Richard Holder, White Sands Missile Range, that evening; Maj. William Connor, of Kirtland AFB, Albuquerque, N. Mex., and T/Sgt. David Moody of Project Bluebook, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio on April 26. They took soil samples and checked the area for radiation with a Geiger Counter. On April 29th, Dr. Hynek arrived and spent a day-and-a-half interviewing witnesses, photographing the landing site and checking possible explanations.

### Extensive reports

Not until June 8th did the Air Force have an official statement. A two-page summary of the case covered the main points and concluded by saying it was unexplained but still open.

NICAP-Member Stanford was in Socorro while Dr. Hynek was investigating and was with him at the landing scene. There, Stanford took detailed measurements of the reconstructed markings, photographed the area and took the metal scrapings, supposedly from the UFO's landing gear. He sent extensive written and taped reports to NICAP Headquarters, which have been incorporated in this article.

The seriousness with which the Air Force took the Socorro sighting is indicated by some of the remarks attributed to Dr. Hynek by local newspapers and the wire services. ". . . it is one of the soundest, best substantiated reports as far as it goes. Usually one finds many contradictions or omissions in these reports, but Mr. Zamora's story is simply told, certainly without any intent to perpetrate a hoax. The story, of course, was told by a man who obviously was frightened badly by what he did see. He certainly must have seen something."

While the June 8 statement of the Air Force did not specifically rule out any possible explanations, Maj. Maston Jacks, Project Bluebook Pentagon spokesman, said the facts eliminated any chance of it having been a fixed-wing aircraft. When asked if the Air Force was, therefore, still considering that it might have been a rotary-wing craft (e.g., a helicopter), he said this was still being investigated, but was unable to explain how any known machine could have taken off so silently. At last report, the

case was still "being investigated".

About 36 hours later, at 12.30 a.m., April 26, there was a reported UFO landing near La Madera, N. Mex., about 100 miles north of Socorro. Orlando Gallegos saw an object resembling a "butane tank", about as long as a telephone pole, about as big around as an automobile and about 14 feet high. The case was investigated by the New Mexico State Police, who confirmed the details to NICAP.

Gallegos told the State Police that the object, estimated to be some 300 feet from his home, seemed to be spewing bluish-white flames from its sides. He thought it was stationary, and said he had watched it for about one minute. Gallegos said the flames suddenly went out, he heard no noise and he saw nothing more of it.

Police Capt. Martin E. Vigil arrived on the scene at 7.30 p.m. that day and talked with Officer Albert Vega, whom he had detailed to stand by until his arrival. "At that time (7.30), the ground was still smouldering and badly scorched," he wrote NICAP. "Officer Vega advised that he had observed four depressions on the ground, one of which was quite clear, the others having been obliterated due to windy weather conditions. Officer Vega stated that this depression was approximately eight-by-twelve inches in size, about three or four inches deep, and sort of 'V' shaped at the bottom." (Note similarity to markings at Socorro.)

"There were also numerous oval shaped, or 'cat-paw-like' markings around the scorched area. These were approximately three and one-half inches in diameter," he added. (Again, note similarity.)

"Upon arrival at the scene, I personally interviewed Mr. Gallegos about his story. He insisted that he had observed this object, and that the reason he had not reported it sooner, was that when he had told his family, they had laughed about it, and that he had figured everyone else would do the same. Mr. Gallegos . . . is obviously not the type of person that would make up such a story."

Dr. Hynek, upon his arrival in Socorro, indicated an interest in the La Madera sighting, but returned to Northwestern University without having looked into it. The Air Force later explained the report as a rubbish fire. The only Air Force representative known to have investigated the report was Maj. Connors, of Kirtland AFB.

### Postscript

Copies of NICAP's documentary, *The UFO Evidence*, are available to the general public at \$5.00 each. Address: 1536 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., U.S.A.