

THE SOCORRO UFO CASE, AND ITS "MULTIPLYING MISSING TOURIST WITNESSES"

Four days after police officer Lonnie Zamora reported seeing a UFO on the outskirts of Socorro, N.M. on Apr. 24, 1964, the local newspaper (El Defensor Chieftain) carried an account of an itinerant tourist witness whose story seemed to confirm Zamora's story and to dispell doubts that it might be a hoax:

"At least one other person -- an unidentified tourist traveling north on U.S. 85 -- saw the UFO just before it landed in the gully. Opal Grinder, manager of the Whiting Brothers' Service Station on 85 north, said the man stopped at the station and remarked that aircraft flew low around here.

"Grinder replied there were many helicopters in this vicinity. The tourist said it was a 'funny-looking helicopter, if that's what it was.' The man said further the object had flown over his car. It actually was headed straight for the gully where it landed moments later. The tourist also commented that he had seen a police car heading up the hill. This was Zamora's car."

When Dr. J. Allen Hynek visited Socorro, at USAF request, on Apr. 26-27 to investigate the incident, he personally talked with Lewis A. Reddell, publisher of the local newspaper, who had interviewed Grinder and had written the article about the alleged "itinerant tourist-witness." Hynek noted in his trip report to the USAF that Reddell "had gone into this thing quite thoroughly."

Sgt. David Moody of Project Blue Book, who had been on temporary duty assignment at Kirtland AFB, N.M. at the time of the Socorro incident, and had visited the area for an on-site investigation several days later, made a telephone call on May 18, 1964, to talk to Opal Grinder about the alleged "itinerant tourist-witness." Moody wrote a memo, now in the Project Blue Book files, reporting the highlights of his conversation with Grinder:

"He (Grinder) could give no information other than that appearing in the newspaper article. He did not remember the type of car or license. He assumed the occupant [NOTE use of singular] was going or returning from vacation due to the luggage and clothing in the car. The car had a single occupant. He stated that the witness said the object came from the East... He will be on the look-out in case the witness returns to Socorro." (Emphasis added.)

On Aug. 15, 1964, Dr. Hynek returned to Socorro for further investigation and he personally interviewed Grinder about the "itinerant tourist-witness." Hynek's official trip report to the USAF contained the following account of his interview with Grinder:

"We heard the story of the tourist from Grinder himself. The time was shortly before 6 o'clock because Grinder said that he was hurrying to get to the bank before it closed at 6 p.m. on that Friday. He stated that this was one of the reasons why he did not pay more attention to the tourist's story. However, he said that the tourist said something to this effect: 'your planes fly awfully low here -- one of them liked to knock me off the road just about when I was passing your Whiting sign coming into town.' The Whiting gas sign is almost in line with the gully where the craft landed...The tourist said that he thought that it might be a craft in trouble, and figured this was so because he saw a police car going out toward where it had landed. This would place the time of the craft over the tourist's car at approximately 5:35 or 5:40 p.m. This coincides, as well as we can see, with the time that Zamora was chasing a speeder." (Emphasis added.)

During the period immediately following the Socorro incident, the record shows that when Opal Grinder was interviewed by the local newspaper, by Sgt. Moody and by Hynek, he reported only a single "tourist-witness" and he could not recall any more details about the man or his car.

YET ON JAN. 8, 1967, NEARLY THREE YEARS LATER, GRINDER SEEMINGLY HAD A MIRACULOUS ENHANCEMENT IN HIS MEMORY. ON THAT DATE, GRINDER SIGNED A SWORN STATEMENT IN WHICH HE CLAIMED THERE WERE REALLY FIVE (5) UFO WITNESSES IN THE CAR THAT STOPPED AT HIS STATION:

"I, the undersigned, do solemnly swear that on Friday, April 24, 1964, at around 5:50 to 6:00 p.m., there arrived at the Whiting Bros. service station... what I am positive was approximately a 1955 model greenish Cadillac, which was driven by a fairly tall man of medium build, sandy hair. His wife, and, I think three children (all boys, the oldest of which appeared 11 or 12 years of age) were in the car with him... My son, Jimmy, also saw the afore-mentioned five persons, overheard the conversation, and thinks he remembers their car had a Colorado license plate. [Recall that two years earlier, Grinder was quoted as saying that he deduced that the man was "going or returning from vacation due to the luggage and clothing in the car." If the car contained bags and clothing in the passenger compartment where would the five passengers find space?]

"Jimmy and I did not think too much about the man's report, because we had not yet heard of Lonnie Zamora's [UFO] report. As soon as we heard what Lonnie had seen, we knew the tourists who had stopped by our station must have seen the object Zamora saw heading for a landing in the ravine.

"That is why I reported the incident with the tourists -- because I wanted people to know that other persons saw the same object Lonnie Zamora saw. Lonnie wasn't just 'seeing things.'"

THERE IS PHYSICAL EVIDENCE TO DISPUTE GRINDER'S STORY THAT A LONE TOURIST, OR A CAR WITH FIVE TOURISTS, STOPPED AT HIS STATION "AROUND 5:50 to 6:00 P.M." on April 24, 1964, as he allegedly was "hurrying to get to the bank before it closed."

THAT EVIDENCE IS THE LOG OF IMPORTANT RADIO MESSAGES RECEIVED BY POLICE RADIO OPERATOR NEP LOPEZ, WHICH I PERSONALLY INSPECTED WHEN I INTERVIEWED LOPEZ IN SOCORRO IN DECEMBER, 1966.

The radio log showed that Lopez did not record the first call from officer Zamora when he called in to say he was going to investigate flame and smoke atop the mesa south of town, near the Mayor's dynamite storage shack. Nor did Lopez log the second call from Zamora when he had arrived atop the mesa and called in to say he thought he saw a white over-turned car in the distance.

But Lopez did log the third radio message from Zamora, because of its importance. This was when he called in to report that an egg-shaped object had flown off and when Zamora asked that State Police Sgt. Sam Chavez be sent out to the site. THE LOPEZ LOG SHOWS THAT THIS ZAMORA MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED AT 5:22 P.M.

The log also shows another radio message was received about two minutes later, logged in at 5:24 p.m., indicating that Chavez, FBI Agent Arthur Burnes (who had been in Chavez office when the 5:22 p.m. message came in) and Deputy Sheriff James Luckie, had all reached the "UFO site."

Lopez estimated that the first radio call from Zamora had been received at approximately 5:17 p.m. This would allow five minutes from the time that Zamora reportedly abandoned his chase of a speeding motorist until he arrived at the "UFO site," after making one intermediate stop and radio call-in. Having personally re-traced Zamora's path and reported actions during my visit, the Lopez estimate seems quite reasonable.

But if Zamora's account is true, and he called in at approximately 5:17 p.m. to report seeing flame-smoke atop the mesa, roughly one-quarter mile west of highway 85, then it is clear that if there really was a "tourist-witness," that his encounter with the UFO flying over his car as he drove north on highway 85 must have happened no later than 5:17 p.m.

The distance from the spot on highway 85 where the alleged UFO would have flown over the alleged tourist-witness car to the Whiting Brothers station is less than two miles, with only a single stop light along the route. IF THIS ALLEGED TOURIST-WITNESS WERE DRIVING AT ONLY 20 MPH., IT WOULD HAVE TAKEN HIM NO LONGER THAN FIVE (5) MINUTES TO REACH THE WHITING STATION--OR NO LATER THAN 5:22 P.M.

Considering that the only bank in Socorro is less than five minutes drive from the Whiting station, it could not be true that the alleged tourist-witness stopped at the station "shortly before 6 o'clock because Grinder said he was hurrying to get to the bank before it closed at 6 p.m. on that Friday," as Grinder reportedly told Hynek; nor "around 5:50 to 6:00 p.m." as Grinder states in his sworn statement.

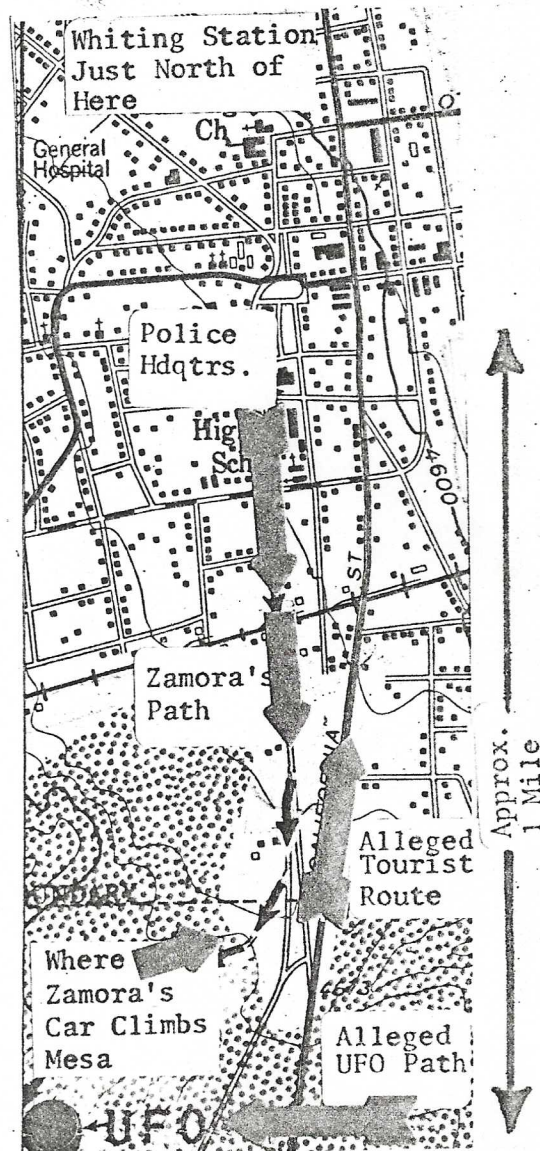
There are other reasons to question Grinder's story of the alleged tourist-witness(es). Examination of the map below shows that the road on which Zamora reportedly was driving in pursuit of a speeding motorist in a south-southeast direction, intersects highway 85 near where a UFO would have passed enroute to the "UFO site." If the tourist-witness story were true, the UFO would have flown directly across Zamora's line-of-sight as he looked SSE toward the alleged speeding motorist.

YET ZAMORA NEVER REPORTED SEEING A UFO FLY ACROSS HIGHWAY 85 TOWARD THE MESA.

One possible explanation for this discrepancy could be that the alleged tourist sighting occurred a minute or two before Zamora arrived on the scene and before he called Lopez to say he planned to drive up atop the mesa.

But if this were the case, then another part of the alleged tourist-witness story cannot possibly be true. Grinder, in his sworn statement, says the alleged tourist witness said "I saw a police car head off the road and up a hill in that direction. Coming on into town I met another police car heading that way..."

If Zamora had not yet arrived on the scene, the alleged tourist-witness could not have seen his car heading up the mesa, nor could he have seen the Chavez or Luckie car heading out until some time after 5:22 p.m., by which time the alleged tourist-witness would already have reached the Whiting station.



As of Dec. 14, 1966, Ray Stanford, who would later write a book entitled "Socorro 'Saucer' In A Pentagon Pantry," accepted Opal Grinder's original tale that a single tourist had stopped at his gas station. This is known from a letter dated Dec. 14, 1966, that Stanford wrote to Daniel Cohen, Editor of Science Digest magazine. In this letter Stanford said: "Anyone making a thorough investigation would know that... Grinder Opal [SIC], service station manager on the north side of town on Hwy 85, reported that an unidentified tourist who stopped at his station (while heading toward Albuquerque) complained that some strange craft which almost took the roof off his car flew from east to west...." Less than a month later, Grinder would make his sworn statement claiming that there really were five persons in the alleged car!

Stanford's book reveals that he readily accepts Grinder's revised tale and does not feel uncomfortable about the four additional tourist-witnesses that seemingly "materialized" out of thin air. Perhaps the reason is that Stanford himself claims to have had first-hand experiences with strange creatures that also "materialize" and "de-materialize" out of thin air, according to a verbatim question/answer interview with Stanford that appeared in the April 1974 issue of Psychic magazine. A portion of the interview is quoted below:

"In 1958 in Phoenix, another of the Brothers ("entities") had materialized in a brightly lighted backyard in the presence of fourteen people. We all saw him. He was about six feet tall, white robed, with long blond hair parted in the center. His robe was blowing in the wind just as physical as the rest of us. We were all shocked out of our wits. After a while he began to glow a pure golden light, swirling from the area of his solar plexus. The light grew brighter and his body seemed to be transmuted into gold, then it melted into a vapor of gold and condensed onto the ground and spread out to a fourteen foot diameter circle. We walked around testing this, kicking it into the air. It was physical -- just like golden fog."

In the "Psychic" magazine interview, Stanford also described his three experiences in being "teleported." One of these is quoted below:

"I was driving with my wife in our station wagon in heavy traffic on Interstate 10 very near where the other teleportation had occurred, heading west toward Columbus (Texas). I began to sense a silvery-blue metallic glow that I see in Uri's (Geller) aura when something paranormal is about to happen, and it seemed to be around me and the car...I said to Mary Kathryn (wife), 'I wish they would teleport us. I'm sick of this traffic..Instantly it seemed we were thirty-seven miles away, approaching the outskirts of Columbus. There was no scene in between, no time, no nothing. Since beginning that journey, we had covered 86 miles in 43 minutes, which means an average of 120 miles per hour -- although one couldn't go faster than 60 in the heavy traffic. We didn't use nearly the amount of gas we normally do to make that trip."

When Dr. J. Allen Hynek visited Stanford in the summer of 1976, Stanford asked if Hynek might provide an endorsement that could be used to promote his book on the Socorro case. On July 6, 1976, Hynek complied with an endorsement which is quoted in part below:

"The Socorro case has always been a thorn in the side of UFO detractors who have tried to dismiss it either as a deliberate attempt by the town fathers of Socorro to promote the tourist trade -- or as an atmospheric phenomena. Ray Stanford has shown these attempts to be patently untenable. Stanford has transformed the case from a one-witness matter to a multi-witness case and thus has accomplished what the Air Force failed to do..."

Philip J. Klass

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