

# Air crashes mystify searchers

MELBOURNE, Mon, AAP — Searches continued today for aircraft which disappeared in unusual circumstances in different areas of the South Pacific at the weekend.

One is a Solar Britten Norman Islander with 11 people on board which is believed ditched in the Solomon Sea off Guadalcanal.

The other is a Cessna 182 which lost communications in Bass Strait after its 20-year-old lone pilot reported being harrassed by a UFO on Saturday night.

The twin-engined Norman Islander ope-

Norman Islander operated by Solair, the Solomon Islands subsidiary of PNG's Talair was on a routine flight between the islands of Rennell and Bellona.

The pilot, captain Michael Maynard, sent a radio signal that he was being forced to ditch in the sea.

He gave no reason, but it was stormy at the time, and the plane is believed to

plane is believed to have run out of fuel.

Other Solair aircraft (the airline has a fleet of five) began an immediate search and continued today without success.

Solair managing director, Mr Paul Brown, said chances of finding survivors were very slight.

A royal Australian Air Force Hercules arrived from Queensland about midnight last night and joined in the search today.

A French Air Force plane from New Caledonia was also expected to help.

Captain Maynard, 34, a Queenslander joined Solair only recently.

He is married with a three-year-old daughter, and his wife is expecting their second child.

The Japanese visitor was believed to be an archaeologist. His name has not been released.

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The accident was the first in Solair's 10 year history.

The Bass Strait search for 20-year-old Frederick Valentich was stepped up today.

Valentich reported being buzzed by a mystery craft minutes before having engine trouble and losing radio contact with Air Traffic Control in Melbourne.

The young but experienced pilot was on a lone flight to King Island via Cape Otway from Moorabbin Airport on Saturday night.

Guido Valentich believes his son may have been taken by an unidentified flying object.

Mr Valentich junior told air traffic control he was being circled by a strange flying craft as he flew round trying to identify it.

Later he reported that the object had vanished, then that he was having engine problems. Then radio con-

blems. Then radio contact was lost.

Valentich had been hand picked as an air training instructor "because he was no fool," the man who chose him said today.

Squadron - Leader Ronald Grandy said Valentich was level-headed and could hold his tongue.

Squ-Ldr Grandy said Valentich was "commonsense on legs" and this is why he had chosen him to instruct at the Air Training Corps headquarters in Melbourne.

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