

Missing pilot mystery: no clues

MELBOURNE: A full air, land and sea search failed to find any clues yesterday to the mystery surrounding the disappearance of a Melbourne pilot in Bass Strait on Saturday night.

Mr Frederick Valentich, 20, disappeared after he radioed to Melbourne Flight Service that he was being shadowed by a large object which he could not identify, but which was "not an aircraft".

He was on a routine flight from Moorabbin Airport to King Island.

Mr Valentich's parents, who live in the Melbourne suburb at Avondale Heights, said on Sunday night they believed their son had been taken by an unidentified flying object.

They said they did not believe the theory that he may have accidentally inverted in the dark and was flying upside down. He had been trained in aerobatic flying.

A Department of Transport spokesman said last night that the department had no official or unofficial attitude to the disappearance, but he commented, "It could have been anything".

People had speculated that Mr Valentich had inverted and was seeing lights reflected on clouds, possibly from Cape Otway or Cape

possibly from Cape Otway or Cape Wickham, King Island.

There was good visibility on Saturday night, and senior pilots had told him that Venus, which was very bright at present, tended to change

colour drastically when viewed at altitude.

An RAAF Caribou crashed yesterday in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea but an Air Force spokesman said all aboard had escaped injury.

In a statement issued in Canberra, the spokesman said the aircraft was either taking off or landing at a small airstrip called Eliptamin, about 15 kilometres north-east of Telefomin, when it crashed about 2.15pm.

The aircraft was captained by Flight Lieutenant Bob Burstall, the co-pilot was Pilot Officer Mark Freeman and the crew technician was Corporal John Young.

HONIARA, Solomon Islands, Monday (AAP). — A day-long search by aircraft and ships has failed to locate the missing Islander aircraft, of the Solair company, which went down in the sea off Guadalcanal in stormy weather yesterday.

Crashed in stormy weather yesterday.

The twin-engined Islander, with a pilot from Queensland and 10 passengers on board, was on a routine flight between the islands of Rennell and Bellona when it ditched in the sea.

Captain Michael Maynard, of Brisbane, radioed that he was being forced to ditch and it was believed that his aircraft ran out of fuel in rough weather.

