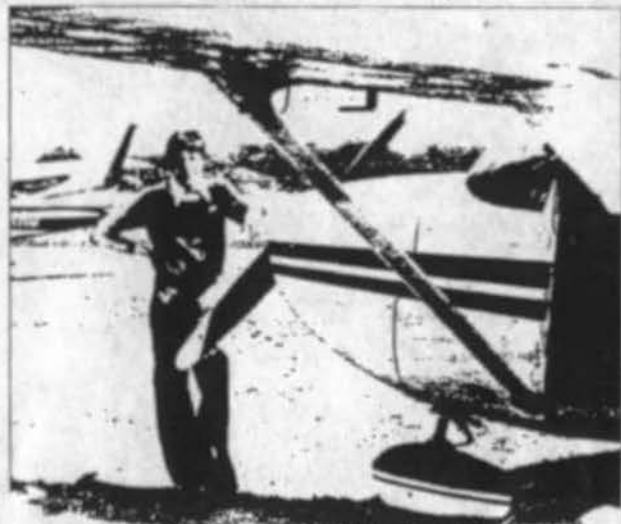


Sea search planned for vanished plane

Fresh light on UFO riddle



Missing: Frederick Valentich was a keen flyer.

By MARK DUNN

NEW evidence in Australia's most controversial UFO mystery has identified the likely spot a young pilot's plane may have crashed into Bass Strait.

Researchers have gained what they claim are fresh eyewitness accounts of an eerie green light that surrounded Frederick Valentich's ill-fated Cessna almost 22 years ago.

Valentich's dramatic disappearance off the Apollo Bay coast in Victoria's south-west on October 21, 1978, was recorded in radio transmissions he sent from his rented Cessna 182L to Melbourne airport.

Speculation about Valentich's disappearance has ranged from freak weather conditions and pilot disorientation to UFO abduction.

Former NASA scientist Richard Haines, who studied the case, includes in his theory the possibility of a secret military weapons test.

Now, new witness accounts of the plane and its position have sparked calls from the Valentich family and investigators for an undersea search for the aircraft wreck.

Valentich's mother, Alberta, has for two decades maintained hope for some resolution of the mystery.

Mrs Valentich, who lost her husband Guido this year, yesterday issued her plea for assistance with the planned ocean search.

She said famed oceanographer Jacques Cousteau had before his death sought government permission several times to look for the aircraft but was refused.

Mrs Valentich also revealed she received a call from an unidentified man in Russia shortly after her son's disappearance who said he would visit them but the phone call was cut off mid-conversation.

Her dying husband had expressed a belief that Frederick Valentich may not have been killed.

"I don't think I'll see him where I am going," Mr Valentich told his wife shortly before he died.

More than 50 people reported seeing bright lights in the Cape Otway region on the night 20-year-old Valentich disappeared en route to King Island.

FINAL FLIGHT PATH



IM - Herald Sun 11/10/2000

But the latest information comes from a man and his two nieces who are believed to be the last to see the Cessna.

They support the description of a green light hovering above the plane as detailed by Valentich to Tullamarine airport radio controller Steve Robey.

"They saw both the lights of a small aircraft and a very large green light travelling directly above it," said Paul Norman, of the Victorian UFO Research Society, after interviewing the trio.

Mr Norman said the Apollo Bay man, aged 47 at the time, had initially told his wife but she didn't believe him.

He failed to raise it until now because he feared

being ridiculed, Mr Norman said.

"We have tracked it as far as we can without an underwater search," he said.

The society and the Valentich family are appealing for help in mounting the sea search using sonar or video equipment.

They can be contacted on 9506 7080.