



Mysteries of Aviation – Frederick Valentich and VH-DSJ

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The Mystery

At approximately 1819 hours on the 21st October 1978, a Cessna 182L, registered VH-DSJ piloted by Frederick Valentich, departed Moorabbin Airport for a flight to King Island. Nearly an hour later, communication with the plane was lost and no trace of the plane was found. So what happened to VH-DSJ?

The Flight

After obtaining meteorological information from the Moorabbin Briefing Office, Valentich duly submitted a flight plan for a night VMC flight from Moorabbin to King Island and return. The flight required a Class Four Instrument rating, allowing night operations in visual meteorological conditions (VMC) for which Valentich was licensed and therefor authorised to undertake.

The cruising altitude was planned at below 5,000 feet via Cape Otway thence direct to King Island with an estimated total time interval of 69 minutes. The return flight would be on the reverse track with a similar time interval. The aircraft was refueled to capacity at Moorabbin and was shown to have an endurance of 300 minutes.

The pilot reported at Cape Otway to Melbourne Flight Service (FSU) at 1900 hours and the next transmission received from the aircraft was at 1906:14 hours requesting knowledge of any known traffic below 5,000 feet to which the FSU advised at 1906:26 there was no known traffic.

Taken from the official Air Transport Accident Board report, for the next 6 minutes and 26 seconds communication between Valentich and the FSU consisted of Valentich's continued comments that a large aircraft had just passed over him at least a thousand feet above the Cessna. He further transmitted, quote:

VH DSJ "He seems to me that he's playing some sort of game he's flying over me two of three times at a time at speeds I could not identify."

During this period Melbourne FSU confirmed that there were no aircraft civilian or military in the area and that Valentich could not identify the aircraft. When asked if he could describe the aircraft, quote:

VH-DSJ "As its flying past it's a long shape // open mike for three seconds // cannot identify more than (that it has such speed) // open mike for three seconds // before me right now Melbourne."

Melbourne FSU then asked how large the object would be to which Valentich replied, quote:



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MYSTERIES OF AVIATION – FREDERICK VALENTICH AND VH-DSJ

VH-DSJ “It seems like it’s stationary what I’m doing right now is orbiting and the thing is orbiting on top of me also it’s got a green light and sort of metallic (like) it’s all shiny (on) the outside.”

FSU – “DELTA SIERRA JULIET what are your intentions”

VH-DJS – “my intentions are to go to King Island Melbourne that strange aircraft is hovering on top of me again // two seconds of open mike //it is hovering and it’s not an aircraft”

FSU – “Delta Sierra Juliet”

VH-DSJ - “Delta Sierra Juliet Melbourne // 17 seconds open mike //”

The final transmission from the aircraft occurred at 1912:28, no record of any further transmissions occurred.

The weather at Cape Otway area was clear with a trace of stratocumulus cloud at 5,000 to 7,000 feet, scattered cirrus cloud at 3,000 feet, excellent visibility and light winds. The end of daylight at Cape Otway was at 1918 hours.

The alert phase of SAR procedures was declared at 1912 hours and, at 1933 hours when the aircraft did not arrive at King Island, the Distress Phase was declared, and search action was commenced. An intensive air, sea and land search was continued until 25 October 1978, but no trace of the aircraft was found.

What Happened to VH-DSJ?

Proposed explanations are numerous but inconclusive.

One proposal was that Valentich staged his own disappearance. After taking into account the 30–45 minute trip to Cape Otway, the Cessna had enough fuel to fly 800 kilometres. Despite ideal conditions, the aircraft was not plotted on radar, casting doubts as to whether it was ever near Cape Otway. Melbourne Police did receive reports of a light aircraft making a mysterious landing not far from Cape Otway at the same time as Valentich’s disappearance.

A further proposal suggested the pilot became disorientated and was flying upside down and that the lights he thought he saw were his own reflected in the water.

A further suggestion put forward was that the aircraft may have entered a spiral dive, which as it tightened, would decrease fuel flow thus the rough running of the engine.

Valentich was an ardent believer in UFO’s, (according to his father, Guido Valentich), and had been worried about being attacked by them. Ufologists raised claims that extra-terrestrials



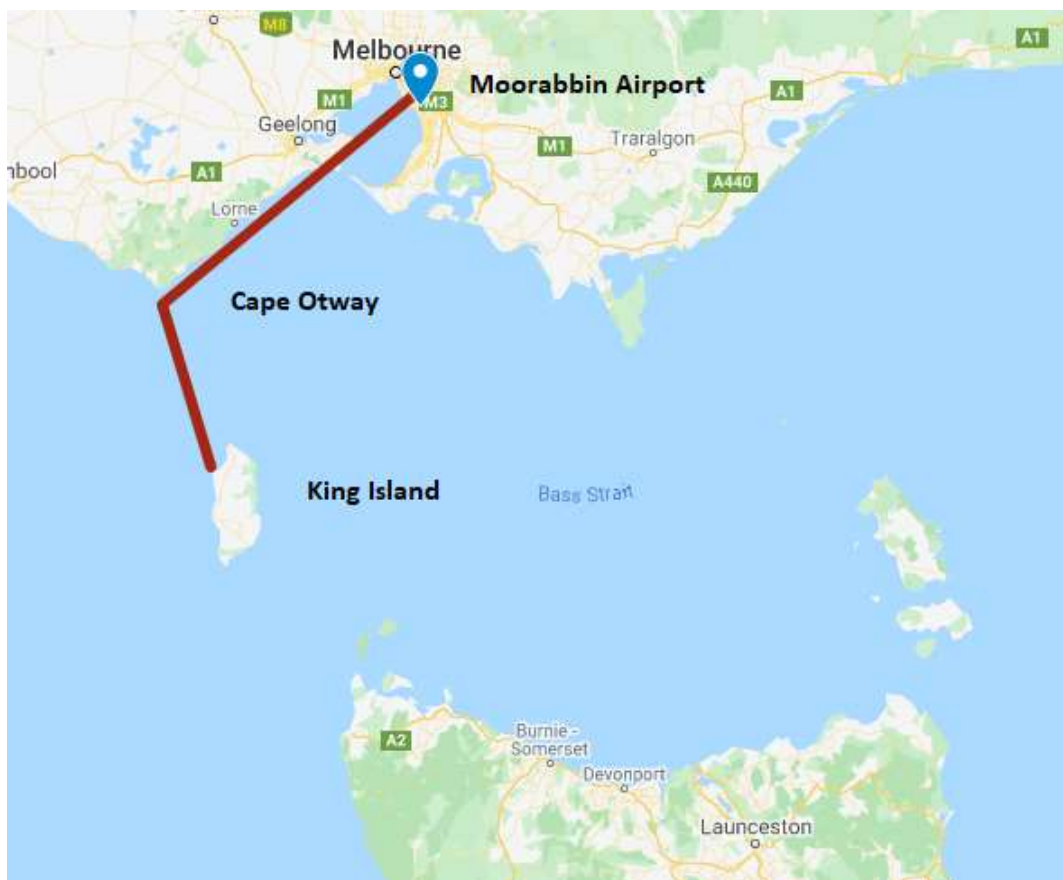
either destroyed his aircraft or abducted him. Claims asserting that some individuals reported seeing “an erratically moving green light in the sky” were received.

Some 36 years to the month after the aircraft’s disappearance, a South Australian farmer claimed he witnessed a 30-metre craft hovering over his property with a Cessna aircraft, that was leaking oil, stuck to its side. He even had time to scribble the aircraft’s registration down but, for fear of ridicule after telling friends, declined to be identified and remains anonymous to this day.

Five years after the disappearance an engine cowl flap was found washed ashore on Flinders Island. In July 1983 the Bureau of Air Safety Investigation asked the Royal Australian Navy Research Station about the likelihood of the cowl having “travelled” to Flinders Island from the region where the aircraft disappeared. Nothing conclusive was reported except that the bureau noted,

“the part has been identified as having come from a Cessna 182 between a certain range of serial numbers.”

That serial number range was within the range for Valentich’s aircraft.



The Intended Flightpath