

VANISHED? — THE VALENTICH AFFAIR

RE-EXAMINED

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In FSR Vol. 24, No. 5 (1979) we published the author's first article on this case, *The Missing Cessna and the UFO*. Bill Chalker is a Director of UFO Research and lives at Lane Cove, New South Wales, Australia.—EDITOR.

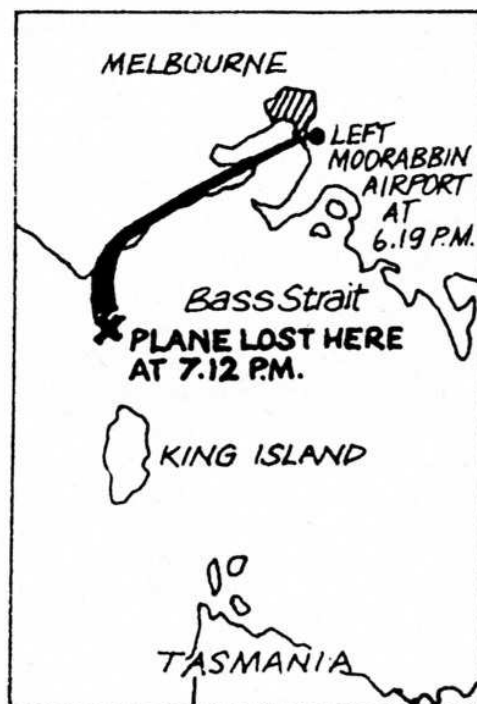
FOR more than five years now, what has become known as the Valentich mystery has endured as an insoluble enigma. The crux of the mystery is just what happened to a young Australian pilot named Frederick Valentich and his 182 Cessna light aircraft — VH-DSJ (*Delta Sierra Juliet*) — during the evening of October 21st, 1978. The circumstances behind the total disappearance of both pilot and plane have since been elevated into one of the premier mysteries of aviation and for many one of the most intriguing elements of that controversy we call the UFO phenomenon.

The fact that the mystery has lasted so long is a direct result of the incredible aspects at the heart of the affair. Simply put (as the public story is familiar to most *) the young pilot, 47 minutes into what should have been a routine 69-minute flight from Moorabbin, Victoria, to King Island, reported an unidentified "aircraft" near him. From 1906 to 1912 hours Eastern Standard Time, October 21st, 1978, Frederick Valentich described to Melbourne Flight Service Unit controller, Steve Robey, what has been called a "radio encounter of a weird kind".†

The sequence of events described, in the officially released transcript of conversation (in itself an extraordinarily unprecedented action), revolved around the apparent observation of "a large aircraft" which had "a long shape", "a green light", ostensibly bright metallic lustre and four bright lights, travelling variously at high speed, approaching the Cessna, apparently hovering in a stationary manner and also "orbiting" above the plane.

At 7.12 p.m. and 28 seconds, immediately in the wake of reporting engine trouble and the object hovering on top of the plane again, Valentich uttered his final words: "*Delta Sierra Juliet, Melbourne . . .*", which were followed by some 7 seconds of transmission during which time "a long and loud metallic sound" was heard.

Assuming maintenance of his lodged flight plan, Frederick Valentich's last transmission would have ostensibly occurred when his aircraft may have been about 50 kilometres SSE of Cape Otway, or about 70 kilometres NNW of King Island. This puts it close to the reported position of "the outline of a submerged aircraft" allegedly sighted at 12.31 p.m. on November 21st, 1978 (a month later) by the pilot of a Cessna 337 from Hawk Flying Service. He located the "outline"



The route taken by the Cessna.

some 77 kilometres (48 miles) north of King Island. The pilot circled the area but on the second run was unable to confirm his observation. Aviation authorities dismissed the sighting because seas were rough and the water too deep (some 30 fathoms) for anything to have been seen on the sea floor from the air.

The account of the flight controller

In the absence of Valentich, we have only one other witness, albeit indirect, to this "radio encounter of a weird kind", namely Steve Robey. In the *Melbourne Herald* (December 9th, 1980), he is quoted as saying:

"Last light was about 12 or 13 minutes past seven; (Valentich) was at 4,500 feet, so he would not have been in darkness, although beneath him would have been deepening twilight."

Of his conversation with Valentich, Robey recalled:

"I think at first he was a little concerned about this other aircraft flying around him, and of course I had to assume that it was another aircraft until it developed and became a little mysterious."

"Towards the end I think he was definitely concerned for his safety; I considered that he would have had to have been a good actor to have put it all

together the way he did.”

Robey, however, did not believe he talked to a disorientated pilot.

“It was as though he was looking around for this thing as he was speaking on the radio . . . a young fellow with little experience, it’s getting dark, and visual reference to the ground is fading.

“In a situation like this, if this is what happened, it is understandable he is getting a little bit uptight.”

“It was a kind of rushed communication . . . it was as if he was startled . . . he was definitely concerned . . . it sounded as though it was rattling him.”

Robey noted of Valentich’s last recorded words:

“You can tell he was concerned because he put his call sign before ‘Melbourne’, he was a little mixed up . . .”

“Then there was this open microphone, with just this metallic pinging sound, like someone rapidly pushing the press-to-talk button . . . It started for about 5 to 6 seconds, then broke briefly and started up again.”

Analysis of the tape by Dr. Richard Haines

We are now fortunate that analyses of the taped conversation, independent of the Australian Department of Aviation, are slowly percolating into the UFO literature, through the excellent work of Dr. Richard Haines, who has long had a specialist interest in aircraft/UFO cases. He acquired a copy of the pilot’s conversation from Guido Valentich, the father of the missing pilot. Guido acquired his copy direct from the Department of Aviation, who originally supplied it to him on confidential humanitarian grounds.

As far as the original tape is concerned, it was “returned to service”, i.e. erased and reused by Melbourne Flight Service. Mr. A. R. Woodward, Assistant Secretary (Air Safety Investigation) further advised me that no further copies of the tape existed. This seems extraordinary given the unresolved nature of the Valentich incident, but stranger things have happened in the name of bureaucracy!

Richard Haines’ initial findings — “*Results of sound spectrum analysis of the metallic noises of a tape-recorded radio transmission between Cessna VH:DSJ and the Flight Service of Melbourne, Australia*” — have now been published in the Journal of the Centre for UFO Studies. He points out that in the 17-second period of “metallic” noises, containing “36 separate bursts with fairly constant start and stop pulses bounding each one, there are no discernible patterns in time or frequency to these bursts . . .” Dr. Haines concludes that the effect was similar to that produced by rapid keying of the microphone, but he points out that control tests using the same technique were noticeably different from the original sound.

Although this is frustratingly inconclusive, other segments of the six-minute-long original tape have

also been analysed by Dr. Haines and associates and hopefully their findings will be published shortly.

Dr. Haines has also written about a 400-page manuscript on the Valentich mystery. Included in the book are four hypothetical “eye-witness” accounts of what might have happened to Valentich: “pilot disorientaton/crash/death”, “deliberate pilot hoax”, “actual UFO in-flight abduction”, and “military weapons test”. From what Dr. Haines has told me about the manuscript, I sincerely hope it finds a publisher. Many people have conducted investigations into the Valentich mystery, but few have been as thorough and exhaustive as Dr. Haines. Paul Norman, of the Victorian UFO Research Society, has also doggedly pursued the trail of clues in this extraordinary mystery, unearthing a number of interesting details.

Although hardly definitive, but certainly highly readable, “*The Devil’s Meridian*”, by Australian journalists Kevin Killey and Gary Lester, gives a broad insight into the magnitude of the mystery. The book makes a somewhat strained attempt to liken (God forbid) Bass Strait to the infamous “Bermuda Triangle”. Other provocative mysteries (some seemingly involving UFOs) litter the history of Bass Strait trafficking, but these are beyond the scope of this article. Instead I refer you, for example to a cautious reading of “*The Devil’s Meridian*” or, for a summary of these aspects, to my own entry in R. Story’s “*The Encyclopedia of UFOs*”: “Valentich-Bass Strait (Australia) Affair”.

The Government Report

During May, 1982, the Bureau of Air Safety Investigation, operating within the Australian Department of Aviation, released a Government report on the incident. That report — an Aircraft Accident Investigation Summary Report, reference No. V116/783/1047 — was made available “only to parties having a bona fide interest in the occurrence”.

The official report does not resolve the mystery. Indeed, it is alarming what it does not address. Apart from supplying basic facts and the tape transcript, it gave the following extraordinary items:

“Location of occurrence: not known”,

“Time: not known”,

“Degree of injury: presumed fatal”,

“Opinion as to cause: The reason for the disappearance of the aircraft has not been determined.”

Apart from a very early attempt to suggest that Frederick Valentich may have been flying upside down, totally disorientated, with lighthouse lights producing his perception of an “unidentified aircraft”, the Australian Department of Aviation has never officially addressed the question of what Valentich may have been observing prior to his disappearance. I have tried to extract from the Department their opinions, but results have been far from satisfactory.

At first the then Assistant Secretary (Air Safety Investigation), Mr. G. V. Hughes, advised me that he was not clear as to what was meant by my expression, "... the stimulus of Valentich's apparent UFO observation . . ." "However, a great deal of consideration has been given to what Mr. Valentich might have been looking at when he described his observations. A considerable number of suggestions have been put forward by persons inside and outside this Department. All have been examined. The Department is not aware of any other official body having undertaken such an investigation into this occurrence," Mr. Hughes said.

However, when it came to an official investigation of a possible UFO connection, a veritable bureaucratic "Catch-22" loomed large.

Mr. Hughes advised me, "As you correctly state . . ., the RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force) is responsible for the investigation of reports concerning 'UFO' sightings, and liaison was established with the RAAF on these aspects of the investigation. The decision as to whether or not the 'UFO' report is to be investigated rests with the RAAF and not with this Department".

The Royal Australian Air Force Files

At that time I was fortunately in a position to have been given officially sanctioned, direct access to the RAAF UFO files in Canberra. During 1982 over four separate visits, totalling six days, I was able to examine what was ostensibly the entirety of the official UFO files held by the Directorate of Air Force Intelligence (DAFI). There was no extant documentation on the Valentich incident in the RAAF files I examined. The Intelligence Liaison Officer — DAFI explained to me that the RAAF did not investigate the affair because they were not asked to by the Department of Aviation! The RAAF saw it as more appropriately in the domain of an "air accident/air safety" enquiry. The ILO-DAFI also volunteered that he felt pilot disorientation was the explanation for what happened to Valentich, but indicated that this was only a personal assessment of publicly available data.

The Department of Aviation's Files

In November, 1982, I was finally given official permission to examine the Department of Aviation UFO files, but was specifically denied access to the Valentich files on the grounds that they were Air Accident Investigation files and not UFO files. Mr. Hughes of Air Safety elaborated to me, as follows:

"The file concerning this occurrence is no more or less restricted than any other accident investigation file.

"As a signatory to the International Convention on Civil Aviation, we subscribe to the Standards and Recommended Practices contained in Annex 13 to the Convention, in respect of aircraft accident investigation, specifically, when it is considered that the disclosure of records, for purposes other than accident prevention, might have an adverse effect on the availability of information in that or any future investigation, such records are considered privileged."

While in Melbourne examining the Aviation Department's UFO files, I was able to have a lengthy discussion on the Valentich affair with Mr. A. Woodward, the signatory on the official Aircraft Accident Investigation Summary Report. He largely reiterated the official Department line, emphasising that they were treating the matter as only an "air accident" investigation. He dwelt on a long list of prosaic explanations ranging from disorientation, suicide, to the unlikely prospect of the plane being struck by a meteorite, but conceded that the affair was still unresolved.

Some pretty bizarre prosaic explanations have been offered up to account for the Valentich mystery.

The theories of the "anti-UFO school"

Some of the more grandiose, if not the most improbable of these expositions, are those given by "anti-UFO crusader" Harley Klauer, a retired radio engineer, resident at Seaford, Victoria. With obvious open-mindedness he has been quoted as saying, "UFOs — bah! You should call them third encounters of the absurd kind — psychotic drivel".

In "*People*" (Australia) magazine, September 3, 1980, Klauer initially offered two explanations of what happened to Valentich. His first option has the pilot being brought down by drug-runners, not UFOs. The second has the plane being "zapped" by an electrical discharge from a UFO-look-alike lenticular cloud.

Klauer contended that drug-smugglers used Bass Strait to bring drugs into Australia, suggesting they used big helium-filled balloons, with nylon fishing lines, from which the drugs could be hung, floating two or three miles above the water, towed by a power boat. If apprehended the felons could cut the line. The evidence then floats away. Klauer suggests an invisible nylon line in just such an operation could have struck the wing of Valentich's Cessna. The balloon becomes the UFO and the line would have pulled down the aircraft out of control, in much the same way barrage balloons acted in World War Two. After the plane crash, Klauer contends the power boat crew located the wreckage by radar, picked it up or made sure that anything floating sank without trace!!

Klauer, in his second option, points out that on the

same evening of Valentich's disappearance, at sunset, from Seaforth, he saw in the south-west, a line of lenticular-type clouds, stretching right away into the horizon and going towards Cape Otway — Valentich's last land call. Klauer suggests that Valentich could have fallen victim to a sudden electrical discharge from one of these clouds!!

The photographs by Roy Manifold

Later, in "On Parade" (Summer/Christmas, 1981/82), Harley Klauer had clearly thought more deeply on the whole affair. Gone were the drug-smugglers. Now he had the evidence of a series of photos taken of the sunset view at Cape Otway, on October 21, 1978, by one Roy Manifold, who, according to Klauer, had "by a staggering fluke caught the actual explosion of the (Valentich) aircraft on film". One of the Manifold photos shows a strange shape, cloud, smoke, or whatever, above the water. A previous photo in the series shows what appears to be something in the water beneath the position of the "aerial artifact". Some researchers speculated that the photo series showed a UFO coming out of the water — indeed, perhaps the same UFO that they feel swallowed up Valentich. Klauer, of course, sees it differently and goes on to conclude from an analysis of the photos that the plane wreckage is located about 11 kilometres south-west of Cape Otway Lighthouse. To explain why the plane was photographed exploding, Klauer suggests either a spark from a loose or frayed engine lead, igniting petrol fumes, *or*, you might have guessed it by now, electrical discharge from those sinister lenticular clouds he claims were lurking off Cape Otway, lying in wait for the unsuspecting aircraft!!

There are a few *minor* problems for Klauer's theories. For starters, the Manifold photo series were taken of the sunset off Cape Otway, which occurred at 6.43 p.m. Valentich reported Cape Otway at 7.00 p.m. — 17 minutes after Manifold's photos were taken! Valentich's last transmission occurred at 7.14 p.m., some 29 minutes after Klauer has his aircraft exploding!! As for Klauer's stormy discharging lenticular clouds, the weather conditions at Cape Otway at about the time of the incident were clear, with 35 kilometer visibility, calm winds, temperature 17 degrees centigrade and smooth seas!

Incidentally the Manifold photos were analysed by the Ground Saucer Watch computer enhancement technique, which concluded rather unashamedly that "the images represent a bona fide unknown flying object, of moderate dimensions, apparently surrounded by a cloud-like vapour/exhaust residue"!!

Aviation mysteries have a strange habit of coming

back to haunt us, sometimes literally (if John Fuller's "The Ghost of Flight 401" and "The Airmen who would not Die" are of any validity), but more often than not, prosaically. Events originally surrounded in evocative mystery may, many years later, be resolved in prosaic terms that are usually rooted in tragedy. A chance discovery in the years to come may lay the whole mystery to rest.

Indeed the Valentich mystery has, at various intervals over the last five years, been given new leases of life with the chance discovery of various pieces of debris in Bass Strait. But on every occasion, be it metal strips, cylinders and the like, prosaic explanations have prevailed.

Cessna wreckage allegedly found

However, if Ron Cameron's story develops to full fruition, we may have more than mere bits of prosaic debris, rather, we could have a UFO "retrieval" story with a difference.

In December, 1982, and January, 1983, newspaper headlines such as "UFO Plane Finding" and "Missing Plane Puzzle 'solved'", were to be seen. The stories all revolved around the claim made by Mr. Ron Cameron, an independent film producer working on a Valentich documentary, that he had been approached by two divers who told him they had found the wreckage of Valentich's aircraft, then missing for over four years.

Cameron told me that the two divers related to him a story of having stumbled across two aircraft during a salvage search for a boat that had gone down in the area. These two aircraft ostensibly had prosaic causes for their watery fate, but the divers were encouraged to look further for the missing Valentich plane. Within two weeks, they claimed, the Cessna was found. In all it seems that four light aircraft were found lying within relatively short distances of each other in a boomerang pattern, near ridges on the sea-bed off Cape Otway!

The divers claimed that they had 16 photos of the plane wreck and offered them to Cameron along with the plane's position, for \$10,000. Cameron balked at this offer in the absence of any authentication, but tried to continue negotiations along lines more consistent with his own terms. The divers showed him five photos which allegedly featured a Cessna, with correct identification marks, largely intact, but a bend in the fuselage. In response to a query from Cameron, the divers claimed that there was no body inside the plane.

The news of a \$10,000 Valentich plane offer got back to Guido Valentich, who was understandably upset. He was quoted in the *Sydney "Sun"* of January 11th, 1983, as saying:

"It is disappointing that these people (the divers) try to sell such things when they haven't got the dignity or the courtesy to come along and show them to me:

"It indicates they are so cold-hearted that they don't care about people's feelings."

Plans for salvage

Meanwhile, a salvage operation was contemplated. The Department of Aviation contacted Cameron, stating that they had to be involved, in view of the fact that the aircraft was still the subject of an open air accident investigation, but insisted on a low profile. A meeting was arranged, but in the wake of more publicity, the DoA shied away, ostensibly fearing a media circus. The divers too backed away from Cameron, after they felt that statements he had made on radio suggested that they might have been lying. Cameron claims he assured the divers he had uttered no such innuendo, but eventually the two divers, predictably some would say, "became scarce", to the extent that Cameron has now lost contact with them both. One has apparently joined the Coast Guard in California as a diver. The other still seems to be resident in Victoria, Australia, but Cameron has been unable to contact him again, despite locating relations. There the story rested near enough to oblivion.

Cameron moved on to concern himself with yet another major mystery, again featuring a bizarre disappearance, namely that of Azaria Chamberlain — the baby who disappeared at Ayers Rock, Central Australia, and whose mother was subsequently convicted of her murder, despite the absence of a body. This time, Cameron says he is involved with others planning a feature film on the whole affair.

More recently, Cameron tells me he is attempting to resurrect the idea of attempting to salvage the Valentich aircraft.

My initial reaction to all this is one of scepticism, but it is necessary that we wait to see what develops. It is unfortunate that such a situation imposes still further hardships on the Valentich family. If it is within the power of anyone to solve the mystery, surely they must be morally obliged to do so.

A medium claims contact

Perhaps sadly and yet inevitably, the Valentich mystery has attracted the fringe element, some ostensibly well meaning, but since some of these claims contradict each other, the Valentich family must bear the brunt of further, perhaps, unnecessary invasions on their private attempts to cope with the disappearance of their son.

At this point there enters one Colin Amery, variously described as clairvoyant, occultist, author, and

eccentric (!!). He lives now in New Zealand, where in recent elections he stood for Parliament. He polled 79 votes. Back in April, 1979, as leader of a Dunedin-based psychic group, Amery claimed contact had been made with Valentich during a séance.

Captured by space beings

During an alleged eight-minute "conversation" via Amery as a "channel", Valentich is said to have told the séance that he was safe, but no longer had a physical body. He is claimed to have said: "*I am in light. I can move to wherever I need to be*". "Valentich/Amery" also alleged that more than 60 seconds of the missing pilot's radio transcript had been suppressed and withheld from the public. Further still, Amery has Valentich saying that he has been taken by a community in Space, that there were people who had come to do certain work and they needed his skill. They were not from Earth, but from a place in the Galaxy he could not locate. And another account has him working with people from Ursa Major, the Great Bear Constellation. Finally, asked if there were others with him, Amery has Valentich replying: "Yes, many people with technical skills have been chosen to help, and these people are my colleagues. They come from the planet Earth."

"Hollow-Earth" theory

One month later, Amery was convinced that Valentich had been kidnapped by "Ufonauts", but taken to "an inner, or hollow-Earth, colony under the Tasman Sea".

Amery was quoted by "*The Australian*" newspaper (May 30th, 1979) as saying; "They're survivors of an earlier civilisation which was destroyed. They've only been coming up lately because they're worried about what we're doing to this planet. This time they've taken someone quite openly — and there's no need for anyone to panic. They're obviously quite friendly, and communications I've had with Frederick suggest that he is not unhappy with his present situation".

Mercifully, this story seems to have slipped into oblivion, where it perhaps belonged in the first place.

The impressions of an American medium

During July, 1979, Guido Valentich co-operated with Boston-based psychic, Ron Halteri, about whom I know little more than was claimed in newspaper reports, namely that he was "a qualified psychic consultant and ESP teacher, with what he claims is 'a vast experience of UFOs'". Perhaps some readers may be able to enlighten us further about Mr. Halteri's background.

The Melbourne "*Truth*" newspaper of July 28th, 1979, attributes to Guido the following account of

Halteri's experiment in an aircraft Valentich frequently used:

"Mr. Halteri climbed into the cockpit and immediately said he was getting strong feelings from the plane. He began talking about what happened to Frederick that night.

"He said Frederick had first encountered a white mist or cloud. And then there were blue and white lights, from a fleet of UFOs in a V-formation. Frederick's plane went in through the entrance of one of the saucers, where he was met by two humanoid aliens.

"One of them was a doctor, and the other a technician. They were smaller than humans, and one had an instrument in its hand. It began waving the instrument across Frederick's face, and was getting telepathic information on him.

"Frederick wasn't experiencing any trouble, while this was happening. It was as if a miracle was happening to his mind."

Guido was sceptical about this information but stated, "I don't want to ignore anything that could lead me to my son. I just don't know . . ."

Woman medium predicts Valentich return

During the latter half of 1979, a Newcastle (New South Wales) housewife, Mrs. Beryl Smith, briefly ascended to psychic stardom, when the "*Daily Mirror*", one of Sydney's afternoon daily newspapers, gave considerable prominence to her alleged predictive skills. Prior to this blaze of publicity she was credited with successful predictions, made at public meetings in Newcastle, of various major events including the Westgate Bridge disaster (major Melbourne bridge which collapsed during construction killing many workers), President Kennedy's assassination (hasn't every psychic), the Aberfan mine disaster, the Watergate scandal, the Indian cholera plague, the sacking of Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, Cyclone Tracey (which devastated Darwin) and the Granville Train Disaster (major fatal rail accident in Sydney).

Journalist John Pinkney, who writes extensively on UFOs and paranormal subjects, said in the "*Daily Mirror*" on August 24, 1979: "Before long, there will be some remarkable new developments in the Valentich case. I will be first to break the story." In retrospect it is unclear what the "remarkable new developments" were, however, perhaps Pinkney was talking about his blockbuster two-page spread in the "*Mirror*" three days later (August 27) which was headlined:

"He's alive, says the amazing Mrs. Smith.

'UFO KIDNAP PILOT WILL RETURN'

Captured in space-ship by aliens."

John Pinkney goes on to describe Mrs. Smith's psychic skills, concluding "Beryl Smith to be the most dazzling gifted seer" he has met. He attributed to Mrs.

Smith the prediction that "missing pilot Frederick Valentich will return before Christmas (that is December, 1979! — B.C.) — 'in a different form' — with world-shattering news about UFO". Mrs. Smith said to Pinkney, "When Frederick returns it will be to a shelly beach on an island. He will give the world an intricate description of what he saw".

Well, the fact is, Valentich, himself or "in a different form", did not return by Christmas, 1979, and for that matter, has not done so for any Christmas since then.

Beryl Smith went on to predict that during 1980, Australia would be struck by a number of earthquakes, all along the eastern seaboard, and a number of other equally dramatic events. She saw Prime Minister Fraser resigning due to ill-health and the Labour Party coming to power led by Bob Hawke, during 1980. She predicted that an aircraft would crash into one of Sydney's tallest buildings. None of these events occurred! Sure Mr. Fraser was plagued by illness, but he was defeated at the ballot box in early 1983, in an election that finally did bring Bob Hawke to power, two years after Beryl Smith's predicted date. This is not the place for an in-depth review of the accuracy of Mrs. Smith's predictive skills. The main point is that her prediction central to the subject of this article, namely the return of Valentich, did not come to pass.

John Pinkney went on to produce a best-selling book, called "*Alien Honeycomb — The First Solid Evidence for UFOs*". Unfortunately for him, the "honeycomb" turned out to be made of fibreglass!! Undaunted, he now writes a weekly paranormal column — "*The Pinkney Report*" — in the Australian "*People*" magazine.

Another psychic says Valentich "planned it"

Quentin Fogarty, one of the principal witnesses to the famous New Zealand UFO sightings of December 31st, 1978, describes, in his own book on those events, "*Let's Hope They're Friendly*" (Angus & Robertson, 1982), another "psychic experiment", undertaken in an attempt to resolve the Valentich mystery.

Acting on recommendations from Dr. Allen Hynek, Director of the American Centre for UFO Studies, Quentin Fogarty got Guido Valentich to supply a U.S. psychic, Pat Gagliardo, with some personal effects of his missing son. Dr. Hynek subsequently told Fogarty that Mrs. Gagliardo's findings were disturbing and placed a completely different light on the affair.

After handing Frederick's effects, Mrs. Gagliardo reported she did not feel any "alien contact", nor did she receive any impressions of the plane being in the water. Fogarty quotes Mrs. Gagliardo as saying, "I felt that Fred Valentich had planned this episode. My feeling was that the plane had safely landed on land and has been camouflaged. I feel it is in an area not far from the water's edge. It is between a grove of

large trees with pastures on the east and west. My impressions lie mostly with King Island and Tasmania."

With Guido Valentich's co-operation, Quentin Fogarty continued the experiment personally in the U.S., with Mrs. Gagliardo. This second session provided a locality on the north-west corner of Tasmania, on a property known as Woolnorth Station, near Montagu.

Following subsequent Australian rumours, that Valentich had been seen working at a service station (gas station) in Tasmania, Pat Gagliardo alleged she had recently "felt" a service station had featured in her "impressions" about Valentich.

Eventually in February, 1981, Fogarty and a friend went to the indicated locality. As it turned out, Woolnorth Station was a large area, and no one knew of any information that would suggest a light aircraft had landed there back on October 21st, 1978. The possibility was not ruled out, but there was no evidence for it. Fogarty, however, states, "I was struck by the fact that the physical features of the area corresponded accurately with what Mrs. Gagliardo had told me, but I soon realised that it would take an enormous search, involving many people, to cover the huge property. We left Woolnorth, disappointed that the task was proving too formidable for our limited time and resources". No definite confirmation was forthcoming and none has occurred to this date.

Opinion of contactee Bill Herrmann

Even a so-called UFO "abductee" — that largely recent and peculiar manifestation of UFO weirdness — has also claimed a Valentich connection. Bill Herrmann of Charleston, Carolina, whose "experiences" are described in "*UFO Contact from Reticuli*" by Wendelle Stevens, alleges that during his second abduction (!) the "aliens" told him, "the pilot (Valentich) of the aircraft is safe . . . with our "network" . . . at his own desire and wish. It is up to him to decide his return".

Jim Lorenzen of the Aerial Phenomena Research Organisation (APRO) asked me to assist in an experiment to test the possibility raised by Herrmann that he might have been able to meet Valentich during his own future "abductions". Although decidedly sceptical, I contacted Guido Valentich, who supplied a list of confidential details. I then framed questions to correspond to these details and passed them on to Jim Lorenzen. Herrmann, however, backed away from his "UFO abduction" experiences, allegedly partly due to family pressure (he might have not come back, you see!) and partly due to his apparently growing conviction that "evil forces" were involved. As a result the "experiment" never took place.

Enigma unsolved

It is evident that the Valentich affair is punctuated with haunting, or rather more appropriately, taunting clues, that set us off in all sorts of conflicting directions. Did a UFO abduct Valentich? Did Valentich contrive the whole affair, or are other prosaic explanations involved? A multitude of various lines of enquiry radiate out in all sorts of directions. Most take us away from the facts of the matter, namely that no trace of pilot or plane have yet been found.

My basic sentiments are admirably echoed in Quentin Fogarty's final words about his own brief flirtation with the Valentich mystery:

"No trace of Valentich or his aircraft has been found and until some concrete evidence turns up, the Valentich family must wait, trying to come to terms with Frederick's mysterious disappearance.

"For their sake, I hope that the final chapter to the story will one day be written and that, whatever the outcome, it will finally bring them some peace and comfort."

Delta Sierra Juliet — where are you?

* * * * *

REFERENCES

* See also FATE, March, 1979, "*Close Encounter off Australia . . . DID UFO ABDUCT AIRCRAFT?*" by Rocky Wood, and R. Story's "THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF UFOs", Doubleday, 1980, pgs. 379-380, "*Valentich — Bass Strait (Australia) Affair*" by Bill Chalker.

† "*The Melbourne Herald*" (newspaper), December 9th, 1980.

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THE FAMOUS SALANDIN SIGHTING

Reference was made on page 9 of FSR No. 29/5 to the "classic" case of Flight-Lieutenant J. R. Salandin, which was Editor Derek Dempster's lead-story in FSR's very first issue, Vol. 1, No. 1, of Spring 1955, and because so many of our younger, newer, readers will not be familiar with it, we now reprint it below, precisely as it appeared in our pages almost thirty years ago. (Moreover, there is an interesting new tail-piece to it, which we shall add.)

LET'S TALK SPACE WEEKEND PILOT IN NEAR COLLISION WITH FLYING SAUCER

IF Flight-Lieutenant J. R. Salandin, a week-end pilot of No. 604, County of Middlesex Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, had not been sceptical about Flying Saucers before his near-collision with one last October (1954), the Air Ministry might have had one of the first authentic ciné records ever taken and been closer to solving the riddle of the unidentified flying objects than ever before.

Reporting for duty after lunch on October 14, 1954, Jimmy Salandin climbed into a *Meteor Mk. 8* jet fighter and at 4.15 took off from North Weald, Essex.

The sky was blue and cloudless, and as he climbed in a southerly direction towards the Thames Estuary he spotted two *Meteors* in formation high above him leaving vapour trails behind them.

As his aircraft climbed, Salandin kept his eyes on the two fighters and every now and then checked his instruments and position.

The altimeter was reading just over 16,000 ft. and Southend was just looming up beneath him when he saw two circular objects streaking between the two *Meteors*, travelling in the opposite direction.

He watched them until they reached nine o'clock high — a position high on his port beam — when they disappeared beyond his range of vision. Reporting the incident later, Salandin said: "One was silvery and the other gold in colour."

But the shock was yet to come. When he turned to look through his windscreen he was horrified to see another object coming straight for him at his own level.

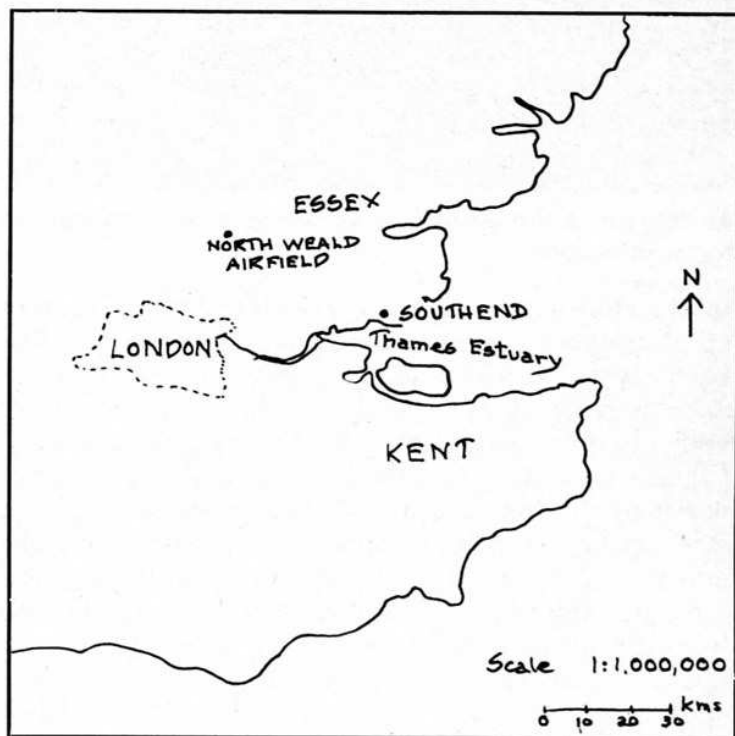
"The thing had a bun-shaped top, a flange like two saucers in the middle, and a bun underneath", he said, describing it later. "It was silvery in colour and could not have been far off because it overlapped my windscreen."

A *Meteor* fighter's 37-ft. span wings just fill the windscreen at 150 yards.

As it closed in, the object changed direction and passed Salandin on his port side.

"It was travelling at a tremendous speed", he reported, and added: "I was so shaken I had to fly around quietly for about ten minutes to recover. I told Control over the R/T (radio/telephone) what had happened."

What gripes Jimmy Salandin now is that he did not



press his camera-gun button. "The thing was right in my sights", he says wistfully. "Next time, I'll be on the ball."

Such, then, was the exciting aerial close encounter with which FSR's first Editor, Derek Dempster (himself a former Royal Air Force pilot, who knew Salandin) kicked off, on page 2, immediately after his Editorial, in the very first number of our now famous journal. (As we all know, we have had the solemn word of Officialdom, many times repeated during these thirty years, that "flying saucers" *do not exist*. But FSR still exists, and during these thirty years, how many good journals have we not seen go to the wall and vanish without trace — *journals devoted, all of them, to subjects that do exist!*)

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And now for our delicious little tail-piece.

The Salandin case is of course well known and it has its place in the annals of British Ufology, but we had never thought that we might one day hear echoes of it.

However, as chance decreed, I was recently invited