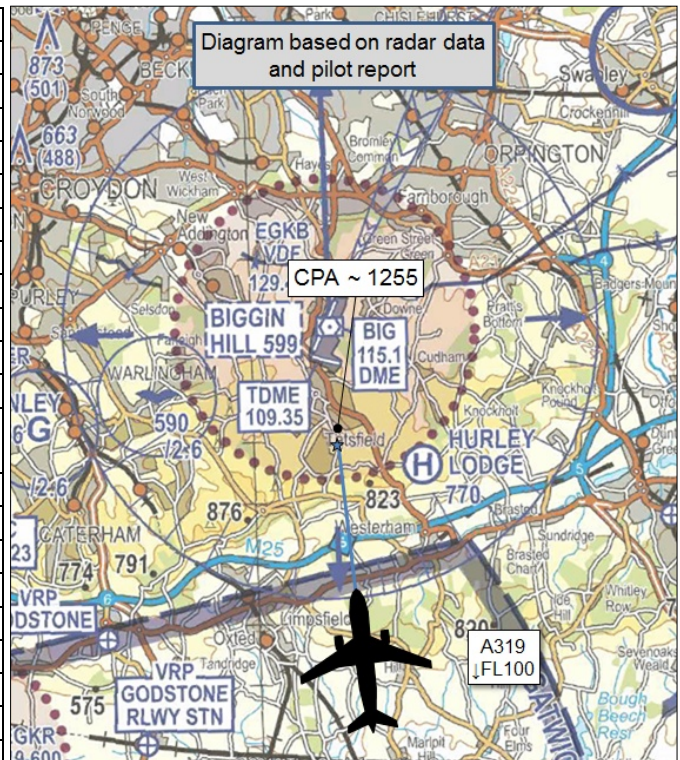


AIRPROX REPORT No 2016267

Date: 18 Dec 2016 Time: 1255Z Position: 5119N 00002E Location: 2nm SW BIG VOR

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	A319	Balloon
Operator	CAT	Unknown
Airspace	London TMA	London TMA
Class	A	A
Rules	IFR	
Service	Radar Control	
Provider	Swanwick	
Altitude/FL	FL100	
Transponder	On/C, S	
Reported		
Colours	Company	Silver, Purple
Lighting	Strobe, Nav, Beacon	Not reported
Conditions	IMC	
Visibility	Not Reported	
Altitude/FL	FL100	
Altimeter	QNH (1013hPa)	
Heading	030°	
Speed	210kt	
ACAS/TAS	TCAS II	
Alert	None	
Separation		
Reported	0ft V/0nm H	NK
Recorded	NK	



THE A319 PILOT reports that he was approaching the BIG VOR in the descent when P1 spotted a silver/purple object, possibly a helium balloon, directly in front of the aircraft at close range. The object passed by just over the top of the flight deck. Coincidentally at the same time an unusual noise was heard above the flight deck. There was no time to take any form of evasive action. A normal approach and landing was conducted. The incident was discussed during the post flight review; due to the extremely close proximity of the object and the unusual noise they concluded that there was a small possibility that the object may have hit the aircraft. Company engineering and ATC were informed.

[UKAB Note: Company engineering carried out an aircraft inspection post flight and found no evidence of impact damage].

He assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

THE BALLOON OPERATOR could not be traced.

Factual Background

The weather at Heathrow was recorded as follows:

METAR EGLL 181250Z 27004KT 250V310 3800 BR FEW003 SCT004 BKN005 07/07 Q1036 TEMPO BKN004

Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

Given the wind conditions and position of local meteorological balloon launch sites, it was felt unlikely that the reported object was a meteorological balloon. The altitude was such that a toy balloon could be ruled out as they have a maximum buoyancy altitude of about 4000ft, depending on size. It is recognised that amateur balloon launches up to an altitude of many tens of thousands of feet are conducted but these require CAA permission; there was no record of a CAA permission near that location for the date of the Airprox.

Summary

An Airprox was reported when an A319 and a balloon flew into proximity at about 1255 on Sunday 18th December 2016. The A319 pilot was operating under IFR in IMC in receipt of a Radar Control Service from Swanwick. The balloon operator could not be traced.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of a report from the A319 pilot and radar photographs/video recordings.

Members agreed that although there were difficulties in accurate range assessment, it was clear that the A319 pilot had experienced the balloon passing at high speed, especially as the crew were mindful that the balloon may have made contact with the A319. It was therefore agreed that there had been a conflict in the Class A airspace of the London TMA, and that providence had played the largest part in a collision being avoided.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A conflict in Class A airspace.

Degree of Risk: A.