

AIRPROX REPORT No 2010074

Date/Time: 19 Jun 2010 (Saturday) 1353Z

Position: 5158N 00031E (Vicinity of Wethersfield glider launching site cct)

Airspace: London FIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reporting Ac

Type: Viking T1 Glider Hispano Form

Operator: HQ Air (Trg) Civ Comm

Alt/FL: 1200ft 1200ft
QFE QNH

Weather: VMC CLBC VMC CLBC

Visibility: 7km 10km

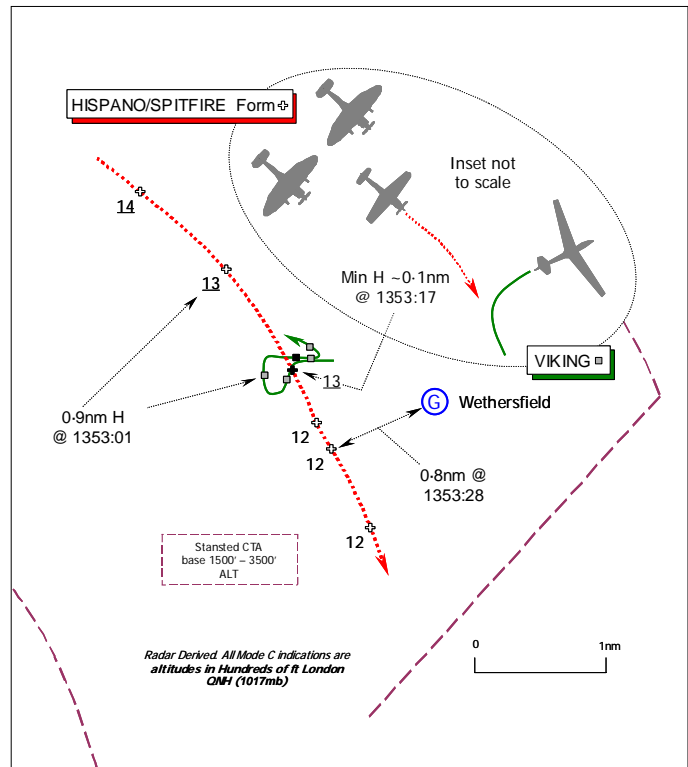
Reported Separation:

200-250ft V/Nil H 400-500ft V

500-1000m H

Recorded Separation:

~0.1nm H



BOTH PILOTS FILED

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE VIKING T Mk1 GLIDER PILOT, a gliding instructor, reports launching from Wethersfield on a basic training sortie in VMC and at the time of the Airprox was teaching a cadet the effects of controls, rolling R into a gentle R turn. Crosswind for RW33 in a LH cct at 50kt, at a height of 1200ft aal, the ac Captain spotted what appeared to be some birds in the distance. Only seconds later, as the glider turned through 050°, it became apparent that the birds were actually a formation of ac heading towards their glider at a range of about 1nm. To avoid confusing the other pilots about their intentions, they continued their right turn with the intention of steadying on 090° to maintain sight of the approaching aircraft while flying away from their flightpath. Unfortunately the formation approached much too quickly to be able to manoeuvre the glider off any collision course and they passed the glider only 10secs after the instructor first spotted them. The formation ac lost some height and passed about 200-250ft beneath the glider with a 'very high' Risk of collision. There was no indication that the pilots of the other ac had attempted to take avoiding action. No RT call was made during the Airprox as the ac Captain's primary concerns were to fly the glider and watch the conflicting ac. However, another pilot from Wethersfield made a call on 129.975Mhz to warn of the formation ac flying through. The student felt nervous after the Airprox and the Captain was also feeling unsettled, so they returned to the airfield as soon as the conflicting formation was clear. The Airprox was reported immediately to the OC, who had also observed the incident from the control caravan.

UKAB Note (1): The UK AIP at ENR 5-5-1-7 promulgates Wetherfield Glider Launching Site as active from Sunrise to Sunset (HJ) on Saturdays. Glider launching by winch may be encountered up to 2000ft above the site elevation of 321ft amsl.

THE HISPANO HA-1112 MIL (BOUCHIN) [LICENCE BUILT MESSERSCHMITT BF109] PILOT reports leading a dissimilar formation of three camouflaged historic fighter ac, which, in addition to his ac, included two Supermarine Spitfires. They were not in receipt of any ATS but a squawk of A7010 was selected with Mode C on.

Departing from Duxford under VFR at 180kt, he was leading the formation around the Stansted CTR. Flying at an altitude of 1200ft beneath a cloud-base of 3000ft there were heavy showers around but he was maintaining VMC and was some 5km clear of cloud with an in-flight visibility of 10km. Turning his formation to fly through the gap between Wethersfield and the Stansted CTR, heading 150° the white glider was seen in a gap above and ahead of the formation at a range of about 1000m. The formation was turned slightly R and descended to increase the separation. Minimum vertical separation was 400-500ft; horizontal separation was 500-1000m as the glider passed to port (E). He assessed there was 'no threat' and the Risk 'none'.

THE VIKING GLIDER PILOT'S unit added that subsequent to the Airprox, Essex Radar and Farnborough Radar were contacted by telephone in an attempt to trace the other ac involved, but it could not be confirmed whether they were in receipt of an ATS from either Unit. Southend ATC confirmed that a formation was routeing from Duxford to the S Coast for an airshow.

One of the formation pilots contacted the VGS to explain that they had to avoid a rain shower near Finchingfield [about 1½nm SSW of Wethersfield] which lead them to fly closer to Wethersfield glider launching site than they had intended. The formation had been aware that the VGS was active and had seen the glider. It was suggested that the Spitfire in the leader's 7 o'clock had moved away from the glider towards the Spitfire in the 5 o'clock position. The operating frequency of Wethersfield was given to the formation pilot so that a call can be made; they will in future avoid the site by a bigger distance.

UKAB Note (2): The Stansted Radar recording displays the track of a glider intermittently that is perceived to be the subject Viking glider, as the Hispano/Spitfire mixed formation leader approaches the vicinity from the NW indicating 1400ft unverified Mode C London QNH (1017mb). The Viking contact manoeuvres in a similar manner to that reported – turning R easterly – and passing ahead of the formation lead from R – L as the latter descends to 1300ft London QNH passing 0.1nm SW of the Viking at a position about 1nm WNW of Wethersfield Glider Launching Site when the Airprox occurred at 1353:17. The formation lead, now indicating 1200ft London QNH, makes a slight alteration of course before passing 0.8nm abeam Wethersfield at the closest point and clearing to the SE.

HQ AIR (TRG) comments that as the formation planned to fly close to the Wethersfield glider launch site it was disappointing that they did not have the Wethersfield operating frequency that would have given them an opportunity to make a call about the formation's weather avoid and enabled information to be exchanged. As the crews involved saw each other with sufficient time prior to the CPA they could formulate their actions to reduce the actual risk of collision. It is worthy of note that a member of the formation contacted the VGS to discuss the incident and explained first hand what they were trying to do. This has enabled those involved to have a better understanding of the occurrence and the formation now has the Wethersfield operating frequency.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac, radar video recordings and a report from the appropriate operating authority.

Although momentarily mistaken, it was apparent from the Viking glider pilot's report that she had realized the true situation almost immediately when the 3ac formation was acquired approaching from the NW about 1nm away. The radar recording reflects that this was probably as soon as could reasonably be expected given the glider's right turn and overall geometry of the situation, but it gave the glider pilot little opportunity to manoeuvre away from the historic ac formation. Pilot Members agreed that the decision to stay predictable was a sensible reaction; however, it was stressed that it is often helpful to apply bank in these circumstances to display the largest possible aspect to the approaching pilot and thereby enhance the white glider's conspicuity against the background terrain. Nevertheless, the glider pilot's R turn through 050° onto E had some value as avoiding action and

expeditiously displaced the Viking glider away from the formation's flightpath. The Board concluded therefore that, despite the close quarters and limited ability to fly away from the threat, the glider pilot's actions had contributed to resolving the conflict.

Constrained in his ability to manoeuvre by the CAS above and the CTR to the SW, the Hispano HA-1112 formation leader had placed his formation in a difficult situation whilst avoiding rain showers in the vicinity. Whilst the formation had flown closer to Wethersfield Glider Launching Site than the leader might have wished under normal circumstances, it was clear he was entirely cognisant of his formations proximity to the Glider Launching Site and associated flying activity. It is never a good idea to fly close to a glider site where the winch cable provides an additional danger, but the Board agreed that, having spotted the Viking glider 1000m away, the Hispano HA-1112 formation leader took prompt and appropriate action to avoid it, by descending and turning to pass astern. The Board concluded, therefore, that this Airprox was the result of a conflict in the vicinity of Wethersfield Glider Launching Site, resolved by the Hispano HA-1112 formation leader and the Viking glider pilot.

The absence of any Mode C data from the Viking glider prevented determination of the actual vertical separation that obtained here and the pilots' accounts differed somewhat: the Viking pilot estimated it was 200-250ft, whereas the formation leader suggested it was 400-500ft. It might be that the formation pilots had the better view whilst they descended astern of the Viking glider, as it cleared to port. With the Viking glider in view the formation elements took action to maximise what horizontal separation there was by closing up it would seem; however, the radar recording reflected that the formation leader was somewhat over optimistic about the actual horizontal separation, which measured against his ac, was in the order of 0.1nm – broadly 200yd. Although it might have been a close call, the Board agreed unanimously that the avoiding action taken by the Hispano HA-1112 formation leader, coupled with the Viking glider pilot's predictable flight path ensured that any Risk of a collision was effectively ameliorated.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Conflict in the vicinity of the Wethersfield glider launching site resolved by the pilots involved.

Degree of Risk: C.