

AIRPROX REPORT No 2010176

Date/Time: 9 Dec 2010 1432Z

Position: 52.52N 000.10E
(Holbeach AWR)

Airspace: D 207 (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: Tornado GR4 C120

Operator: HQ AIR (OPS) Civ Pte

Alt/FL: 200ft NR
(Rad Alt)

Weather: VMC NR NR

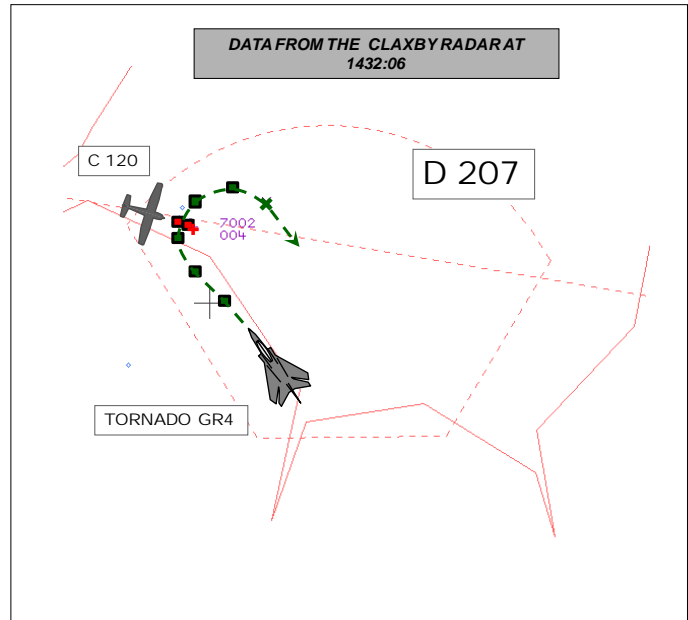
Visibility: 30km NR

Reported Separation:

V 800ft/H 200ft NR

Recorded Separation:

NR



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE TORNADO PILOT reports flying a grey ac with all lights switched on, on a practice weaponry sortie in Holbeach AWR, squawking 7002 with Mode C. They had joined Holbeach AWR from Marham and on initial RT contact they were advised of a light aircraft just outside the AWR to the W of the targets. Following a level attack at 200ft, heading 330° at 480kt, they were in a shallow climb and turning right onto a reciprocal heading, in a medium workload situation, when they saw a light coloured (possibly orange) high-wing, light ac flying straight and level on an opposite track, about 800ft above them and 200ft laterally spaced; they continued the turn to increase the separation.

They assessed the risk as being Medium and reported the Airprox to Range Control.

Despite being contacted several times, although confirming that he was in the area, but [he thought] outside the range, the C120 pilot did not provide a report.

THE RANGE SAFETY OFFICER (RSO) reports that range traffic consisted of a single Tornado GR4 which was conducting low level bombing runs on target 7 at about 150ft amsl. At 1435Z after pulling off target the pilot reported a light civil aircraft inside the Range Danger Area tracking from N to S. Neither this ac or any other had called reporting in the vicinity of the range so he immediately contacted both RAF Coningsby and Marham radar; both confirmed they could see a radar return inside the range danger area but had no height information. He asked Marham radar to track the ac and inform him if the pilot contacted them.

The ac continued to operate in the local area clearing the range to the S and after some time it routed towards Fenland airfield and disappeared from radar. He contacted Fenland and explained the situation to the pilot who agreed that he had been operating in the area but did not believe that he had infringed the range. The RSO then explained that he would be reporting the incident and took his contact details for future reference.

About 2hr later the Tornado pilot contacted the RSO and it emerged that he had seen the ac about 500ft directly above him.

HQ AIR (OPS) comments that comments that the dimensions of an Air Weapons Range are not designed to protect the aircraft operating within them; crews must remain vigilant to the potential for

incursions from other air platforms. Good airmanship, however, should make the avoidance of notified danger areas by non-users a priority.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the Tornado pilot, radar recordings, a report from the RSO involved and from the Tornado operating authority.

Members observed that the investigation had been hampered by the C120 pilot not providing a report. They were informed that anecdotally he had thought that he had remained clear of the Danger Area but the radar recording showed clearly that he was over 1nm inside the Western boundary. It was pointed out that, while there was no Statutory Instrument covering the Holbeach Range Danger Area (D207) (therefore penetration is not actually 'illegal') it remains poor airmanship and in some circumstances could endanger the penetrating ac. The HQ Air Ops Member went on to say that the Tornado crew would have been in a high workload situation, manoeuvring their ac aggressively in two planes as they came off the target, making range RT calls, checking and changing weaponry switches and analysing their attack and would have not expected an intruder.

While accepting that lookout by aircrews flying Range details is most important (as stated by HQ Air Ops), Members agreed that in these circumstances, due to their focus on the bombing attack until coming off the target, the Tornado crew could not have reasonably been expected to see the C120 any earlier, despite that they had previously seen it in the vicinity of the Range. Although the Tornado crew saw the C120 well above them it was fortuitous that they had not been climbing more rapidly, say for a subsequent dive attack, and this, Members agreed, had prevented any conflict of flightpaths and therefore any risk of collision.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: The C120 pilot entered a notified and active danger area.

Degree of Risk: C.