



AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

May 2021



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History repeats itself

Airprox are down, but there's rarely anything new...

There's certainly been an upturn in the number of reported Airprox since GA flying resumed at the end of March, however I want to put this into perspective by comparing the increase with 2019 which can be considered a representative year.

To date there have been 59 airprox reported in total, 38 of these since 31 Mar 2021. By comparison, in 2019 there were 132 reported with 77 between 31 Mar and 31 May. The ratio of aircraft-to-aircraft and those involving SUAS remained constant at approximately 62%.

There is normally a seasonal peak which begins in late spring and lasts throughout the summer and I see no reason to expect anything different this year. That said, there was an expectation that the numbers would approach or even exceed previously reported

historic norms – yet the data does not suggest this at the moment.

Regardless of the exact numbers, the areas of concern still revolve around currency, recency and expectation management of both ground and air actors. Those able to fly during the National lockdown have enjoyed drastically reduced air traffic densities where perhaps that eagle-eyed lookout, attention to detail and thorough Threat & Error Management has not seemed quite so critical.

A welcome observation has been the increase in drone (technically known as RPAS, Remotely-Piloted Aircraft System) reported Airprox where the RPAS operators have demonstrated an astute appreciation for, and awareness of, the traffic they may encounter while operating.

Finally, the military launched the trial of the VHF Low Level Common frequency (130.490)

on 1 June, 2021 for one year. This frequency has been introduced to augment situational awareness and to aid the deconfliction of aircraft operating between ground level and 2000ft. Military operators, who are used to operating UHF frequencies are to use the VHF LL Common frequency for the duration of the trial and the CAA has undertaken to raise awareness of its existence and to encourage its use for civilians. This trial has real value and presents a great opportunity to increase awareness and understanding for all.

I have taken the opportunity to use an historic example this month, written by a distinguished and esteemed colleague – I've chosen it because it is a reminder that there's rarely anything new... This may seem a little depressing and fatalistic, but as long as one person has the opportunity to learn from the experiences of others, then we are winning.

PHANTOM FRIGHT

In September 2020 a Cat B Airprox occurred when a DA42 broke off its approach at a late stage with a Jet Provost lined up for take-off and then flew directly down the runway centreline. As the Jet Provost lifted off and accelerated it came into proximity with the overtaking DA42.

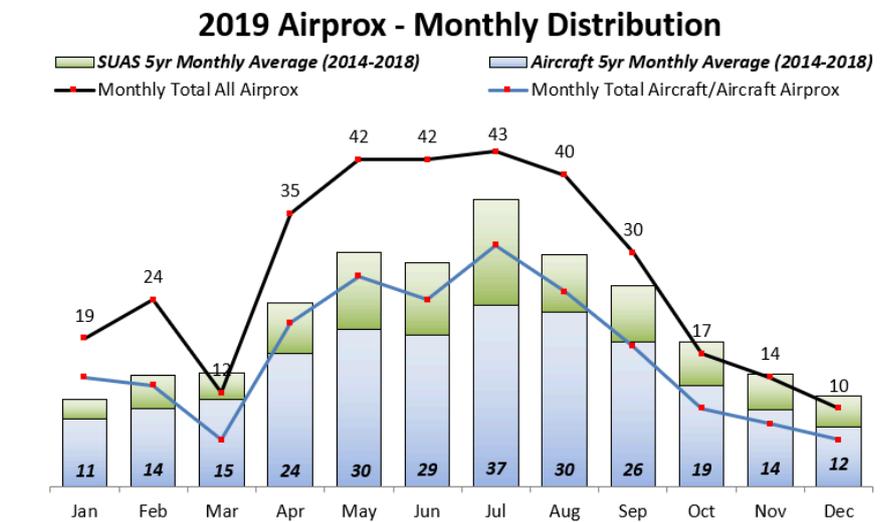
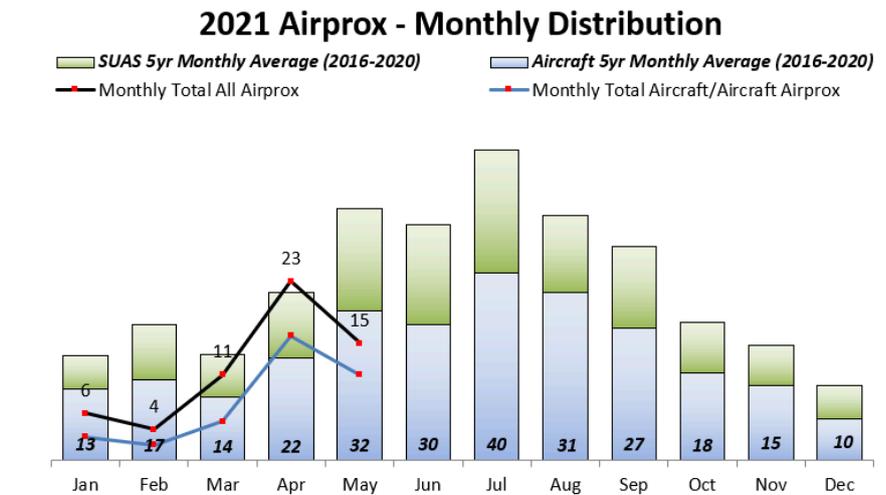
Some years ago, I was lucky enough to participate in Exercise Red Flag at Nellis Air Force Base near Las Vegas, flying the Phantom FGR2. The operational training was exceptional but even 'routine' flying could be quite demanding.

At the end of training missions up to 60 fast jets would flow from the ranges and down through an initial point (IP) about four miles on approach to the parallel runways at Nellis. When you arrived at the IP at 300kt you would be told whether to turn to the North or the South when overhead, and which formations you needed to fit in behind. It was not unusual to see 12 aircraft ahead. With two runways, there was no dead-side and the circuits were simultaneous left- and right-hand. Local orders required a minimum 3000ft separation between landing aircraft on touchdown and there was a 'Runway Monitoring Unit' that would send you around if you were too close.

I led a four-ship formation on our mandatory pre-exercise range familiarisation flight. At the briefing I reminded crews of the unusual visual circuit and told them if their brake parachutes didn't deploy (not uncommon) they should roll immediately and go back to the IP for another approach. You can guess what's coming: I touched down first and almost immediately the nav called 'no chute', so I applied full dry power and got airborne again, per my own brief.

As I was cleaning up the gear and flaps, the world went very dark as another Phantom passed close over the top of us. We soon achieved some separation through my bunt to avoid his slipstream, and his greater speed, and we both landed safely a few minutes later.

The other pilot had a photographic memory and could tell you the book, page and location of any specific instruction or piece of information, so when I asked him politely in the debrief why he had gone around, he recited verbatim the instruction on the minimum 3000ft runway separation. I pointed out that the Runway Monitoring Unit would have intervened if the separation was unacceptable. He replied



that the rule was 3000ft and he thought he would be just inside that, so he complied with the instruction. I congratulated him for sticking to the rules.

I then asked him why he had flown straight down the middle of the runway. His answer was there was no dead-side, so he thought it best to stay on the centreline; he admitted he was unable to see the runway or me after he went around. Our half-mile separation had been eroded very quickly (in ~ 15 secs) by a combination of his early acceleration and my loss of airspeed on the runway. Up until this point in the discussion he had been unaware of how near we had come to each other or that he had flown directly overhead us.

We tackled the problem by briefing all our own team and getting the Nellis staff to brief other participants; an addition was to be made to local orders reminding pilots on go around to side-step sufficiently to maintain sight of the runway until clear.

We also advised our own HQ of the event, though I did not submit a formal Airprox report. Sorry, I know better these days.

To summarise, two combat-ready fighter crews came close to having a needless mid-air collision because a direct overflight of the runway meant neither crew could see the other aircraft. And the airmanship lesson?

If you go around from an approach because there is someone on the runway, **offset** so you can keep sight of the runway and anyone departing from it. Even a 100ft side-step might be enough to keep you alive.

**Air Cdre (Retd) Dai Whittingham,
UK Flight Safety Committee**

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