AIRPROX Insight

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE May 2019

AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

Tale of the unexpected…

You never quite know what's going to happen during a flight — or what twist there might be at the end of it

A PA-28 pilot was turning from base to final at Southend when his radio acted up. Although he'd been told he was number one to an EC155 on an ILS approach, after failing to hear any of the controller's subsequent calls and fearing that he wasn't cleared to land, he decided to orbit on final and turn up the approach path while resolving the radio issue.

Meanwhile, the EC155 on the ILS approach was already quite tight on the PA-28 and, aware that the pilot wasn't responding to radio calls, suddenly saw it turn towards them on final.

Although they came reasonably close, the EC155 crew had seen the PA-28 early on and were ready to take action if necessary, so it was felt there was no risk of collision. That said, this Category C incident (**Airprox 2018310**) raises a number of issues worth highlighting. For the PA-28 pilot, Southend's local radio-failure procedures were that in his circumstances he should have followed his last clearance and landed as soon as possible while watching for visual signals from the tower. He had previously been given Traffic Information about the EC155 but probably became task-focused on his radio problem and might not have remembered it.

Aviate, Navigate, Communicate remains a well-recognised mantra for prioritising activities and avoiding distractions.

Even if he wasn't fully aware of the radio-fail procedures in the circuit, rather than turn back up final towards the instrument approach, the pilot would probably have been better advised to have simply gone around early onto the deadside at circuit height, or simply continued through the final approach track, departed the circuit, and then conducted a full radio-failure join. For the EC155 crew, aware that the other pilot was having problems, it might have been better to have made an early decision to go-around and take the pressure off everyone rather than carry on to see how things unfolded, only to be surprised when the PA-28 turned towards them.

The messages from this incident are: know your airfield's procedures and what to do when unexpected things such as radio failures happen; expect the unexpected and always have a Plan B; and give those experiencing difficulties a wide berth, not just out of consideration but also to avoid you being put in a difficult situation if they do something you don't anticipate.

Full details can be found by following the link left or at airproxboard.org.uk in the 'Airprox Reports and Analysis' section

within the appropriate year and then in the 'Individual Airprox reports' tab.

UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP

Poor procedures or procedures not being followed and poor tactical planning and execution by pilots (ten cases) were this month's predominant theme.

Instances ranged from the selection of transit heights that needlessly exposed aircraft to extra risk in the GA flight band of 1000-2000ft; flying non-standard procedures or poor compliance with procedures, and the lack of a 'Plan B' when things went wrong or changed.

Other headline topics at the Board's April meeting included inaction by either controllers or pilots in seven events; late- or non-sightings featured in six; sub-optimal ATS selection was a factor in five and insufficient or late Traffic Information from controllers was noted in four cases.

Overall, 26 Airprox were discussed: seven were drone/sUAS incidents, while 19 were aircraft-to-aircraft. Six of the latter were assessed as risk-bearing (three were Category A, where providence played a major part, and three were Category B, where safety was much reduced through serendipity, misjudgement, inaction, or late sighting).

After a busy start to the year, March was relatively quiet for aircraft-to-aircraft Airprox notifications, but April saw a return to historic norms and so overall numbers of aircraft-to-aircraft incidents for 2019 are still tracking the expected five-year average (43 actual vs 43 expected).

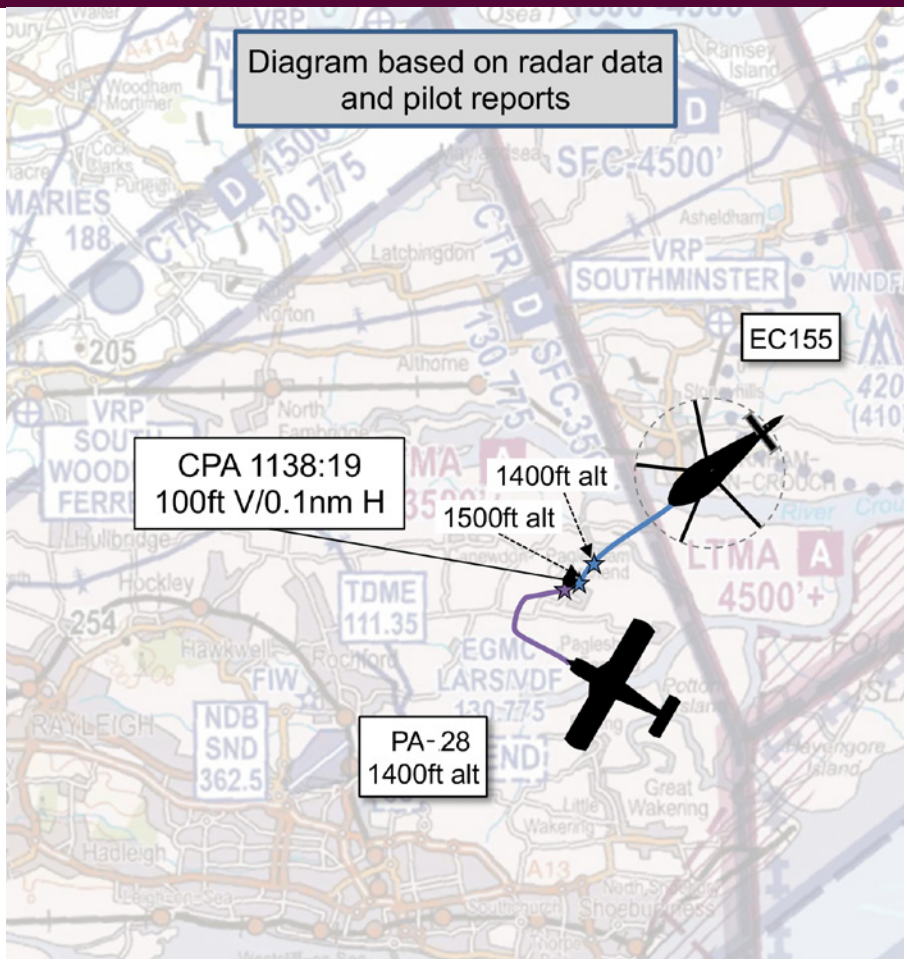
On the other hand, 'drone' incidents remain well above expectations (28 actual vs 15 expected).

As well as the incident in the Airprox of the Month, aircraft-to-aircraft clashes in the visual circuit seemed to be a common scenario — there were eight events where aircraft came into conflict either in the circuit, joining it or flying though.

The key lessons from these are the need to follow procedures, be clear to others about one's intentions and, above all, maintain a robust lookout at all times even when conducting visual circuits in case others might lose (or have flawed) situational awareness or ineffective lookout.

Other quick-wins would be for pilots to avoid the 1000-2000ft transit height block whenever possible, and to seek a Traffic Service if conducting simple transits.

It seems to be a feature of some helicopter operations in particular (air-taxi, emergency helicopters, etc) that pilots choose to transit at about 1000ft by default when off-task. This means they risk passing unknowingly through, or near, the circuit patterns of small strips where aircraft might be getting airborne and climbing, or encountering GA aircraft either routing to or from airfields themselves or conducting training activities such as PFLs.



The Board made two recommendations.

2018312
The CAA develop guidance for aerodrome operators regarding complexity of operations versus the level of ATS provision.

2018319
The CAA investigate options for the cost-effective and straightforward means to afford additional protection of traffic operating in the immediate vicinity of busy minor airfields.

The first recommendation resulted from an incident at Leicester where a Cabri G2 and an SR22 came into conflict while conducting circuits to different runways. Although concurrent multi-type, multi-runway circuits are perfectly acceptable when everyone knows what's going on, it seemed that it would be advantageous for the CAA to provide some guidance as to how to conduct such operations safely and with what level of ATS provision.

The second recommendation resulted from an incident at Beverley where a Tornado flew through the circuit pattern and into conflict with a Cessna 172 that was turning final.

Although it's clear that the Rules of the Air require other aircraft to avoid the pattern of traffic formed at any airfield, this relies on other pilots knowing where that pattern of traffic might be, and coming to their own conclusions as to how much to avoid it by. Hence the reason for ATZs at busy airfields to protect those in the circuit pattern.

While recognising that the deregulation of airfields in recent years has somewhat incentivised some operators to remove ATZs and/or let their licences lapse, it seemed to the Board that an unintended consequence was that we have lost a level of protection at some busy airfields, and it might benefit from CAA reviewing options for cost-effective and simple ways of applying for such protection. ■