AIRPROX Insight

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE March 2020

AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

Look once, look twice...

For illustrative purposes only

Before crossing any operating surface here's why you need treat it as active at all times

An Enstrom pilot, a regular visitor to Enstone and familiar with the airfield, had just refuelled and was hover-taxying to his departure point which meant crossing one of the grass strips. As he'd never seen anyone use it he had likely become habituated to thinking it was never used, or even desensitised to its presence at all. But on this day a Robin had just landed on the strip as the Enstrom approached it.

Both pilots saw each other at about the same time and the Enstrom pilot rapidly came to a halt at the edge of the strip before reversing backwards and upwards as the Robin pilot slewed away from the helicopter and ended up going-around through the long grass on the other side of the strip.

This Category A incident (**Airprox 2019256**) could have been a very nasty accident that was only just avoided by about 50ft or so according to the Enstrom pilot's estimate.

Enstone is an air/ground airfield and, although both pilots say they made the appropriate calls, it was clear that neither heard, or assimilated, the calls of the other. The lesson is clear, treat every operating surface as active at all times, and always assume you've missed a radio call from someone who might be using that surface (or who may be non-radio or radio-failure and making a 'blind' approach).

Before crossing any operating surface (in an aircraft or vehicle) make a positive visual check of the surface itself and the approach/departure paths (both ways in case someone is landing in the other direction) as a last-chance defence.

This is particularly relevant to mixed-type airfields where all sorts of approaches might be being made that could be unfamiliar. For those operating with gliders, think too about potential approaches by gliders that might have had a winch-launch failure, which could mean they have to make an approach to grass areas from any direction.

Full details of this incident can be found at the link within this note 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

TWENTY-THREE Airprox were reviewed at the Board's February meeting, of which two were SUAS incidents. Of the 21 manned aircraft-to-aircraft incidents, four were risk-bearing; two were Category A (where separation was reduced to the bare

minimum and only stopped short of an actual collision because providence played a major part), and two were Category B (where safety margins were much reduced below the norm through either chance, misjudgement or inaction; or where emergency avoiding action was only taken at the last minute).

Although still early days as yet, 2020 has started reasonably quietly for Airprox notifications and we are currently slightly below our expected five-year averages for both manned and SUAS incidents. This is just as well because we are still trying to process the backlog from 2019's much greater than average number of incidents.

In dealing with the tail-end of the summer's incidents the most common theme was again late- and non-sightings (11 incidents) in recognition of the higher rates of GA flying over the summer period.

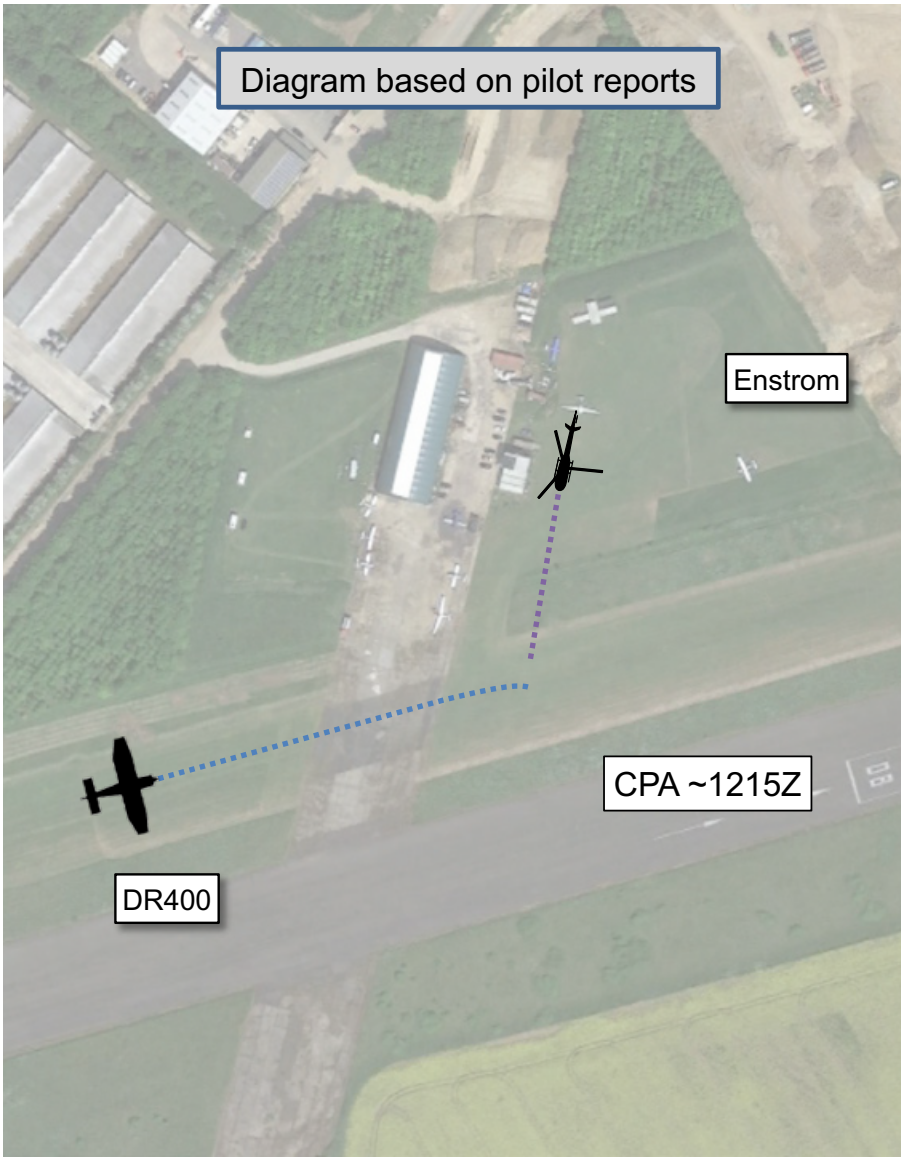
Sub-optimal pilot planning, decision-making or execution of the plan was the next most common theme (eight incidents), often associated with penetrations of ATZ, failure to integrate with other aircraft in the visual circuit, or flying too close to glider sites and minor airfield circuit patterns.

In three incidents one or both pilots could have requested a more suitable Air Traffic Service (ie, a Traffic Service rather than a Basic Service), and in a further three, pilots either did not assimilate instructions or hear the radio calls from other pilots.

Finally, inaction was the key factor in three other incidents where the pilots could have done more to resolve the issue rather than rely on the other pilot or ATC taking action. These incidents were a timely reminder of the need for defensive flying (even when it's the other pilot that is the one who is required to give way: don't just sit there until the last moment, consider taking action yourself if it looks like the other pilot isn't doing so), and don't assume that others will be as content with the achieved separation as you might be when you are overtaking or in converging situations.

The Board made three recommendations. The first was a military-focused issue regarding their acceptance of responsibility for safe separation within internal formations (MARSA stands for 'Military Accepts Responsibility for Separation of Aircraft').

The Gloucester recommendation resulted from a discussion about IFR traffic around Gloucester Airport; although



Gloucester cannot see SSR returns on their radar (which is only used for situational awareness purposes anyway), it was felt that allocating this busy and complex airfield a dedicated squawk would at least allow other ATC radar units to identify that aircraft displaying such a squawk were likely to be conducting IFR approaches at Gloucester.

The third recommendation concerned a helicopter and a fixed-wing aircraft that were in their respective circuit patterns at Goodwood but these patterns had a number of crossing points and were separated by only 300ft height.

Given the recognised PPL tolerance on height-keeping of +/- 150ft, there was potential for conflict to occur (although in this particular event the error in height keeping was minor and it was more a case of perception than actual conflict). Other airfields with geographically co-located or crossing circuit patterns might also wish to consider whether they have sufficient vertical separation between their circuits.

Airprox Recommendations

2019238

The Military Aviation Authority ensures that military operators fully understand the definition and application of the term 'MARSA'.

2019257

Gloucester to consider applying for an SSR transponder conspicuity code.

2019264

Goodwood to review fixed-wing and rotary-wing circuit deconfliction.