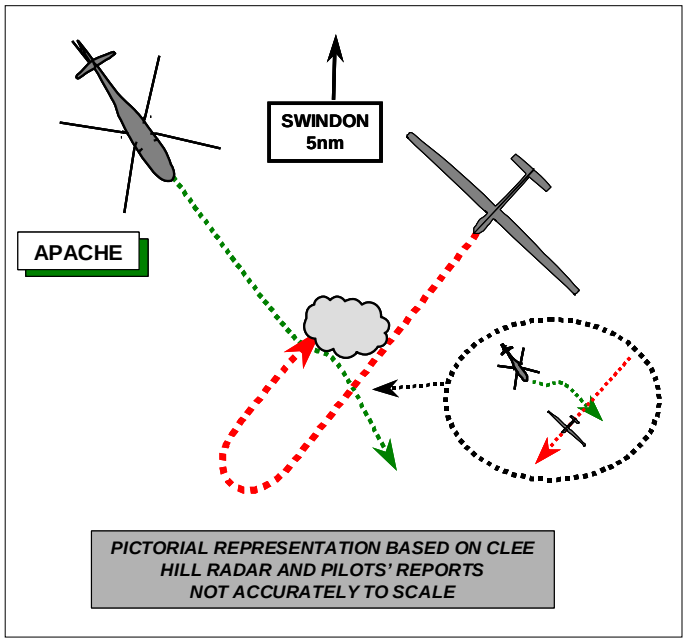
AIRPROX REPORT No 2010060

Date/Time: 21 May 2010 (Friday) 1332Z

Position: 5127N 00144W (5NM S SWINDON - elev 297ft)

Airspace:	Lon FIR	(*Class: G*)
	Reporting Ac	*Reported Ac*
Type:	AH64 APACHE	GLIDER
Operator:	HQ JHC	NK
Alt/FL:	FL020	NK
Weather:	VMC CLBC	NK
Visibility:	20km	NK
Reported Separation:	V 100ft/H 250m	NK
Recorded Separation:	NK	



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE APACHE PILOT reports flying a singleton IF training transit sortie from Lyneham to Middle Wallop in receipt of a TS from Lyneham APP, squawking as directed with Modes C and S. The student was the handling pilot from the rear seat and the captain in the front seat was conducting the lookout and operating the radar in the air/air mode; TCAS was not fitted. They were heading 130° at 110kt and at FL30 in good visibility but just below the base of the scattered cloud when a white glider appeared from behind a cloud less than 300m away tracking from L to R in front of them and at the same level. They took avoiding action in the form of a left turn descending to FL20 but the glider continued, its pilot apparently not having seen them.

He informed Lyneham APP of the Airprox and continued the sortie. He assessed the risk as being high.

UKAB Note (1): Despite extensive procedural tracing action the glider could not be identified.

UKAB Note (2): The recording of the Clee Hill radar shows the incident clearly. The Apache approaches the CPA from the NW tracking about 140°, level at FL030. The glider paints as a primary only contact tracking about 210°. At 1331:56 the Apache commences a rapid descent to FL028 and a left turn when the glider is in its 12 o'clock at 0.2nm, before recovering to FL030 and a Track of 140°. After the CPA the glider turns right onto a reciprocal track.

The Lyneham APP Controller provided a report containing the same information as in the Supervisor's report below. For brevity it has not been included.

THE LYNEHAM SUPERVISOR reports that he was in the ACR at the time of this incident monitoring the traffic flow from the Supervisor's console. The Watchman Primary Radar was deselected and undergoing a flight check but the SSR supplied via Brize MSSR was operational. The weather was colour code BLUE with 30km vis (although on the surface it appeared slightly hazy) and SCT cloud at 4000ft.

The APP/DIR task was bandboxed with 2 ac on separate frequencies, one on departure being provided with a TS (reduced - SSR only) outside the Lyneham CTR [the Apache] and one requiring

an ILS against the stream to RW24. Pending departures and arrivals initially negated the requested ILS approach being permitted and a substantial amount of chatter was experienced as the aircrew pressed for the IRT profile to be granted. Coincident to this the reporting ac was on an IFR departure and given a reduced TS after leaving the CTR. The Airprox was reported at 1333Z, when the Apache was about 3.5nm SE of Marlborough tracking SE descending from FL35 to FL30, immediately after the glider was seen as it emerged from cloud close to the Apache.

The initial Airprox transmission was confused with transmissions from another ac and, due to the immediacy of the incident and the pilot's reaction, only scant details were provided about the direction of travel/markings etc of the glider they encountered; however the minimum separation distance was reported as 300ft. At the time there were no SSR returns in the reported position of the conflicting traffic.

Since the glider did not show on the Lyneham radar [at the time SSR only], therefore the controller was not able to provide any TI to the Apache pilot.

HQ AIR BM Safety Management reports that they recognises the difficulties of providing an effective radar service to ac when the unit is restricted to SSR only. The tape transcript and reports provided indicated that, although the ac was departing from a previous approach and had already been under a reduced TS, this service and restrictions were not reinstated fully on climb out. That said, it is not considered the causal factor. The controller was effectively unaware of the presence of the glider and therefore, SM Spt ATM believes the controller did not contribute to the Airprox.

HQ JHC comments that flying just below the base of scattered cloud is inappropriate, especially when in receipt of a reduced service from ATC. Even with excellent lookout skills, operating in the vicinity of cloud hampers the ability to see other aircraft early. ATC were unable to provide TI on an unseen aircraft and collision avoidance was the pilot's responsibility. The Apache pilot took avoiding action when he came into conflict with the glider and it is assumed that the glider was blissfully unaware of the conflict! This Airprox is another reminder to aircrew to be extra vigilant when operating in Class G airspace without primary radar cover.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the Apache pilot, transcripts of the relevant RT frequencies, radar recordings, reports from the air traffic controllers involved and reports from the appropriate ATC and operating authorities.

The Board noted the difficulty controllers face when operating with reduced radar coverage; although the glider contact showed clearly as a primary-only contact on the recording of the Clee Hill radar, it did not show on the controller's SSR-only picture and therefore he was not able to give the Apache crew any warning of its presence. This has been a feature of several Airprox recently, particularly involving gliders, and is the subject of staff action at HQ Air.

The Board was concerned regarding the apparent high incidence of gliders not being able to be traced by the Radar Analysis Cell (RAC). Members were briefed on the process used and the difficulties encountered; it was pointed out that modern gliders routinely fly long, often very long, cross country flights and can be encountered, largely in Class G airspace, almost anywhere in the overland area of UK. The gliding specialist Member undertook to research the problem and another Member agreed to brief RAC staff on gliding activity.

It was pointed out that, although gliders do sometimes operate in cloud, it was most likely that the glider involved had been just below the cloudbase and had probably been obscured or not visible to the Apache safety pilot until a late stage. That being the case, Members agreed that the pilot could not reasonably have been expected to see the glider any earlier and therefore the incident had been a conflict between 2 ac operating legitimately in Class G airspace. Since the Apache pilot saw the glider in time to react and build in some vertical and lateral separation there was no risk of collision and the conflict was resolved.

Members endorsed the HQ JHC comment that the Apache pilot had been unwise in operating at FL30 just below the cloudbase, therefore restricting the time available to see and avoid other ac.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Conflict in Class G airspace resolved by the Apache pilot.

Degree of Risk: C.