

## AIRPROX REPORT No 2011080

Date/Time: 15 Jul 2011 1830Z

Position: 5117N 00117E (Ash -  
4½nm SW of Manston)

Airspace: London FIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: EC135 T2 Bell 206B

Operator: Civ Comm Civ Comm

Alt/FL: 1000ft 1000ft  
RPS amsl

Weather: VMC CAVOK VMC Haze

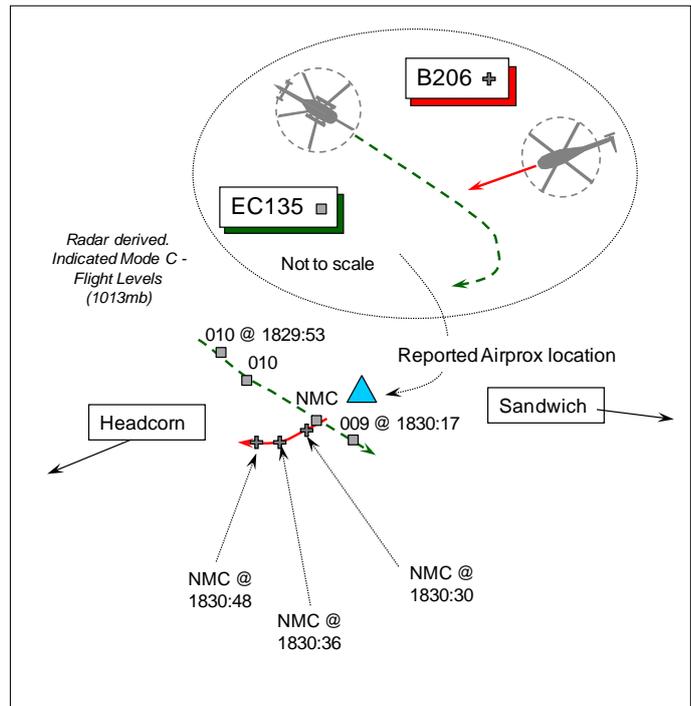
Visibility: 20km 5km

Reported Separation:

20ft V/400m H Not seen

Recorded Separation:

Not recorded



## PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

**THE EUROCOPTER EC135 T2 HELICOPTER PILOT** reports he was operating VFR under a BS from Manston on 132.45MHz and also in contact with Sandwich RADIO, established for the temporary HLS at Sandwich for the British Open Golf Championships. A squawk of A0046 was selected with Mode C; Mode S and TCAS are fitted but the latter was noted as 'faulty'.

Over Ash village on a direct track from Whitstable to the Southern tip of Sandwich village, heading 120°, level at 1000ft Chatham RPS, and 130kt he observed a contact out to port in their 10 o'clock position after it had lifted out of Sandwich about 3nm away. The helicopter contact remained on a constant bearing and both he and his observer were monitoring it – a red and white Bell 206 JetRanger - for signs of the pilot having sighted their EC135 to starboard in his 1 o'clock. He expected the B206 pilot to turn at any moment, given the B206 pilot's obligation to take avoiding action to go behind his EC135 if seen, which he opined, given his helicopter's size, blue and yellow colour-scheme, lights and position in the other pilot's field of view, at most 50ft above the B206's altitude, should not have been difficult. Whilst working two frequencies, he was unsure which frequency the B206 pilot was using, or his callsign, as there appeared to be two ac talking to Sandwich RADIO, which he had expected to be busy. As the B206 closed to a range of about 400-500m, it appeared that the pilot had not seen his EC135 so he elected to take his own avoiding action by turning to the R and diving ahead of the B206. Minimum separation was about 20ft vertically and 400m horizontally and after he crossed ahead of the B206, he turned back towards it. Now off its port quarter, they used his helicopter's camera to view the B206's registration - which was given. He assessed the Risk as 'high'. He stated that he called Sandwich RADIO to ask if they knew the B206's registration, but they were only aware of company callsigns. Nav lights, strobes & white HISLs were on.

**THE BELL 206B JETRANGER HELICOPTER PILOT (B206)** reports he had departed the HLS at Sandwich golf course VFR, bound for a private HLS to the S of Headcorn. Flying level at an altitude of 1000ft in VMC at 90kt 'in CAVOK weather', he believed this was his 8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> flight of the day, to and from the same two locations, which he flew at the same altitude in the same two directions all day. Throughout he was under a BS from Manston APP on 132.450MHz or in communication with Sandwich RADIO; a Manston squawk was selected, Mode C was 'off'. On this particular flight he was westbound into bright sunlight with all the ac's lights switched on – the in-flight visibility was

quoted as '5km in haze with moments of glare'. Although he did hear the pilot ask for details of his callsign and another helicopter was known to be in the vicinity, he did not see the EC135 helicopter flown by the reporting pilot is unable to provide any more information about the Airprox. TCAS is not fitted. His helicopter has an orange and white livery; the HISLs were on.

UKAB Note (1): This Airprox is not shown on the LAC radar recording. The EC135, identified from its Mode S ac identity, is shown intermittently from 1829:53 approaching the reported Airprox location some 4½nm SW of Manston Aerodrome on a steady SE'ly course indicating level at 1000ft (1013mb). No significant deviation in the EC135's course is evident before the ac's Mode C indicates a descent through 900ft (1013mb) and then 800ft before fading from coverage, but perhaps indicative of the EC135 pilots reported avoiding action descent. The B206 is not shown until later when an A4250 squawk is displayed with NMC immediately to the SW of the reported Airprox location following a track similar to that reported by the B206 pilot toward Lashenden/Headcorn. A turn to the R is subsequently evident before the contact fades; NMC is displayed throughout this period. The SSR code A4250 is assigned to Manston and noted in the UK SSR Code Assignment Plan as an unvalidated and unverified code for conspicuity.

**ATSI** reports that Approval of an 'Air Ground Communication Service RTF Aeronautical Radio Station' had been agreed, by the CAA, relative to 'The Open Golf Championship' at Sandwich Helipad in Kent. This was valid from the 10th to the 18th July 2011. The site included a Final Approach and Take-Off area (FATO) aligned 11/29, with dimensions 250mx30m, at 12ft amsl.

General information regarding an A/G Service is stated in CAP413 (Radiotelephony Manual) Chapter 4 Page 32:

'An AGCS (Air/Ground Communications Service) radio station operator is not necessarily able to view any part of the aerodrome or surrounding airspace. Traffic information provided by an AGCS radio station operator is therefore based primarily on reports made by other pilots. Information provided by an AGCS radio station operator may be used to assist a pilot in making decisions, however, the safe conduct of the flight remains the pilot's responsibility'.

The Sandwich Air/Ground operation was not recorded. Consequently, no information is available from the allocated frequency. The Airprox was reported to have occurred at Ash, some 3nm away from the Sandwich site. The site operator, coincidentally the A/G operator at the time, made the following comments:

'The B206 had departed from Sandwich on a positioning flight back to a private landing site at Wingham (about 7nm W of Sandwich). The first he knew of this was when the EC135 pilot asked for details of B206, which he said he would pass by phone when he was back on the ground. The EC135 was operating from a Command Centre HLS in the local school and not from the Sandwich site. Normally the EC135 pilot called for traffic information when getting airborne, but he did not recall that the pilot did so on this occasion nor that he had noted it down; however it is possible that the EC135 pilot did call to operate along the coast in a southerly direction towards Deal and well away from the Sandwich circuit; the crew did normally listen out on their No2 box for traffic information and he is surprised that they did not pick up on this. He was not aware that the EC135 was in the position that it was as, had he known it was in the general area, he would have passed it to the B206 pilot as traffic information, who by this time had cleared the Sandwich circuit and had switched to his en-route frequency, either Manston or Lydd'.

The Manston Controller was performing both TOWER and APPROACH duties. The EC135 pilot contacted Manston at 1823. (Unfortunately some of the transmissions from the helicopter broke up on the RT recording.) The EC135 pilot reported routeing from Boreham, near Chelmsford, and approaching Whitstable from the W for Sandwich (Whitstable is 12nm W of Manston). The EC135 pilot requested a BS, which was agreed by the controller and he requested the pilot to report approaching Sandwich. He informed the EC135 pilot that there was a frequency for the Sandwich helicopter golf site. The EC135 pilot commented that he would be routeing S of the helicopter site.

At 1826:56, the EC135 pilot was asked to contact Sandwich on 121.75MHz on his number 2 box; the pilot acknowledged the request.

Just less than 1 minute later the pilot of the B206 contacted Manston, using its issued helicopter callsign for the golf event. The pilot reported having lifted from Sandwich en route to Wingham. He was requested to report visual with the landing site. The controller then issued TI about the EC135, which was approaching the Sandwich area, last reported at 1000ft, W of Sandwich. (There is no recording of the EC135 pilot's reported altitude, possibly it occurred during the break-up of the frequency during its initial call.) The B206 pilot reported looking. The controller then passed TI the EC135 about the B206, which had just lifted from Sandwich en route to Wingham. No response was received from the EC135 pilot.

At 1830:36, the B206 pilot reported letting down. Two minutes later the EC135 pilot reported letting down at Sandwich. Shortly afterwards he asked, using the ac's registration, if a particular helicopter - the subject B206 - was on frequency. The controller commented that he only had the callsigns of the helicopters and not their registrations. No further comments were made on the frequency about the Airprox.

UKAB Note (2): NOTAM H3197/11 was issued for the event at Sandwich, promulgating intense helicopter activity within a radius of 2nm centred on 5117N 00122E, from the surface to 1500ft amsl, from sunrise to sunset during the period 11 to 18 Jul.

## **PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS**

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac, RT and radar video recordings, reports from the A/G Operator and reports from the appropriate ATC authority.

The ATSI report shows that the Manston controller had issued TI about the EC135 to the B206 pilot, who advised he was looking for the other helicopter thereby confirming that the B206 was definitely aware that the EC135 was in the vicinity. Whilst it was unclear if the EC135 pilot had received the TI about the B206, because there was no reply to the controller's transmission recorded, with the advantage of looking down sun in CAVOK conditions he was able to spot the B206 3nm away and recognise the potential for a conflict.

Both the EC135 pilot and his observer monitored the B206 closely as the ac converged, expecting the B206 pilot to turn away at any moment as he was required to do under the 'Rules of the Air'. However, 'the Rules' can only work if the pilot who is required to 'give way' sees the conflicting ac, and the B206 pilot, flying westbound into bright sunlight did not see the EC135 helicopter to his R at all. In other circumstances Members suggested that obtaining a radar service from a suitably equipped ATSU could have helped the B206 pilot to fulfil his responsibilities to 'see and avoid' other ac, although here the Manston controller was providing a procedural APPROACH service combined with TOWER without access to radar it would seem. The EC135 pilot watched the B206 as both helicopters closed to a range of about 400-500m, realised that the B206 pilot had not seen his EC135 and wisely elected to take his own early and positive avoiding action, thereby safely resolving the conflict. This convinced the Members that the Cause of this Airprox was a conflict in Class G airspace resolved by the EC135 pilot.

Early avoiding action by the EC135 pilot ensured minimum horizontal separation of 400m was maintained as he crossed ahead of the B206 and turned onto the latter's port quarter. Although the Airprox was not shown on radar recordings and the reported separation could not be confirmed, there was no reason to doubt the veracity of the EC135 pilot's report. Whereas the EC135 pilot assessed the Risk as 'high', presumably this is his assessment of what might have occurred had no avoiding action been taken. As it was, 400m horizontal separation was preserved at the closest point and visual contact with the B206 was maintained throughout. Therefore, the Members agreed unanimously that there was no Risk of a collision in the circumstances conscientiously reported here.

**PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK**

Cause: A conflict in Class G airspace resolved by the EC135 pilot.

Degree of Risk: C.