

AIRPROX REPORT No 2011087

Date/Time: 14 Jul 1100Z

Position: 5117N 00122E (FATO area
Sandwich Helipad – elev 12ft)

Airspace: LFIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: Bell 206 Bell 206
JetRanger(A) JetRanger(B)

Operator: Civ Comm Civ Comm

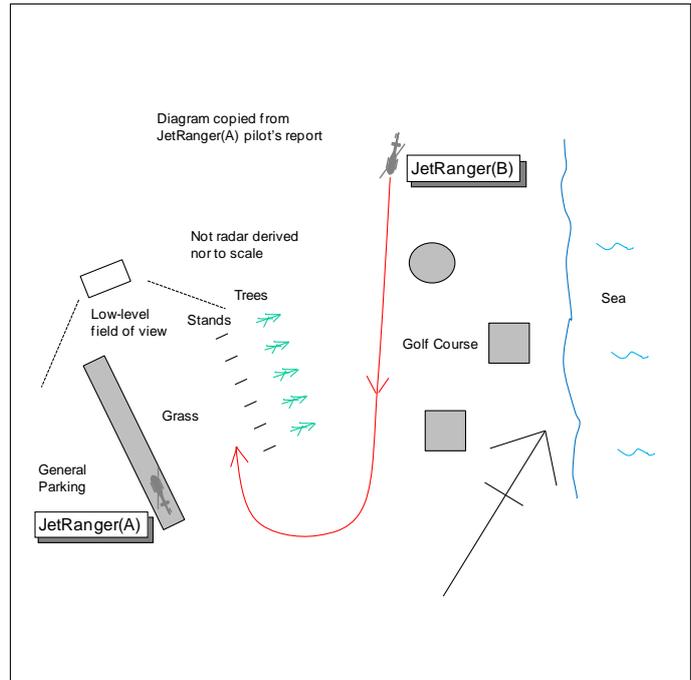
Alt/FL: 0-6ft 50-70ft↓
agl Rad Alt

Weather: VMC CLBC VMC CLBC

Visibility: 10km 10km

Reported Separation:
100-150ft 50m

Recorded Separation:
NR



BOTH PILOTS FILED

THE BELL 206 JETRANGER(A) PILOT reports departing Sandwich helipad VFR using the Final Approach and Take Off (FATO) area and in communication with Sandwich Radio on 121.175MHz, squawking 4250 with Mode C. The visibility was 10km clear below cloud in VMC and the helicopter was coloured red/white with nav and anti-collision lights switched on. He advised A/G that he was lifting from his stand and requested to "air-taxi and backtrack RW29 for the threshold to hold" and was told "at your discretion". As he was backtracking he was able to check for other helicopters on base and final and he heard JetRanger(B) pilot call downwind. As he had only just called "downwind" he assumed he was at a considerable distance from base, let alone final approach. He stopped at the threshold and turned slowly as the flight was at near maximum AUW, called "departing RW29" and was told "at your discretion". After transitioning close to the ground for 25m, height up to 6ft agl and before climbing, he noticed JetRanger(B) about 100-150ft above and on his R, abeam, and heard its pilot call "going around". JetRanger(B)'s manoeuvre was not abrupt or worrying and did not arouse or alarm him. At the time he did not consider it to be an Airprox. Next day he spoke to the pilot of JetRanger(B), who was from the same company, and asked if he wished to discuss the incident. The other pilot wondered what had happened and thought that he, pilot(A), was holding as (B) was about to land. They subsequently discussed the incident with the A/G operator, who didn't consider it to be an Airprox but pilot (B) elected to complete a report form for consideration later. The next day they discussed the event and agreed that it was prudent to send a report and also informed the CAA FOI of their intention to file a report, albeit late owing to workload, and believed it was acceptable because no remedial action appeared to be needed. He assessed the risk as very low. The converging nature of the downwind leg caused by the need to not overfly the adjacent seaward golf course meant base leg was probably no more than 200m long. This funnelling effect definitely was a contributory factor. There was no question of fatigue or either pilot being inexperienced/low hours or any haphazard behaviour. A lesson had been learnt but he was unsure how it would best be disseminated to other company pilots.

THE BELL 206 JETRANGER(B) PILOT reports inbound to Sandwich helipad from Manston VFR and in communication with Sandwich Radio on 121.175MHz, squawking 7000 with Mode C. The visibility was 10km clear below cloud in VMC and the helicopter was coloured burgundy/white with nav and strobe lights switched on. He called "request join from the N" and was instructed by

Sandwich Radio to "join downwind R base FATO 29" which he read back. JetRanger(A) was rotors running and requested to hover-taxi for FATO 29. Information on his helicopter (B) joining was given and pilot (A) stated he would wait by the threshold of 29 for the joining helicopter (B). Sandwich Radio called JetRanger(A) flight "with that joining rotary traffic in mind, depart at pilot's discretion". JetRanger(A) had hover taxied from the stand to the threshold in such a manner that any traffic on the downwind leg or base leg would not be visible; no clearance turn was made to allow the joining traffic to be seen. JetRanger(A) pilot then elected to line-up for a 29 departure and began to transition. He, pilot(B), was now turning final and had been unable to call "final" owing to the 2-way RT exchange between Sandwich Radio and pilot(A), believing that JetRanger(A) was going to wait by the threshold. Now seeing JetRanger(A) transitioning, he conducted a go-around as he was certain that his helicopter had not been seen by pilot (A), who was unaware of JetRanger(B)'s position until its pilot called "going around". The go-around was conducted in a manner that provided sufficient clearance from JetRanger(A), vertical separation not <50ft. He landed without further incident. JetRanger(A) continued with its departure from FATO 29 following his "go-around" call. The Sandwich Radio controller spoke to him after the Airprox and apologised. He believed that Sandwich Radio was not at fault but they did have a lack of vision of any traffic on the downwind leg and only limited vision of traffic on base leg. A combination of lack of mental positioning and visibility of his joining helicopter and failure to conduct a clearing turn and the judgement of "at pilot's discretion" by pilot (A) were the main contributory factors. Following a discussion with pilot (A) the next day, pilot (A) was made aware of the close proximity of the 2 helicopters and he apologised.

ATSI reports 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 11th 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.

The Sandwich A/G operation was not recorded. Consequently, no information is available from the allocated frequency. Any investigation, therefore, relies on information received from the pilots concerned and the A/G operator (see below). Apart from the general comments in the next two paragraphs ATSI has nothing to add.

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

'An AGCS 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'.

AGCS radio station operators are reminded that they must not use the expression 'at your discretion' as this is associated with the service provided by a Flight Information Service Officer. It is noted that both pilots quoted the A/G Operator using the term 'pilot's discretion' in their respective reports of the incident.

The site operator and incidentally the A/G operator at the time made the following comments: 'The incident involved 2 JetRangers, (A) and (B). (A) had started on stand and called for taxi for a N'ly departure. The temperature was quite warm, the helicopter was full and so the hover-taxi was slower than usual, using the FATO C/L as there was no other known traffic at that time. On reaching the threshold the helicopter performed a spot turn for departure, and the pilot requested departure. By this time JetRanger(B) flight had called inbound from Manston as previously stated, having passed a reporting point at the disused Richborough Power Station chimneys [~1.5nm NNW Helipad]. JetRanger(A) flight was given a departure at his discretion, with 1 company ac inbound from the N, but he remained in a low hover. From my position in the control box, (B) was seen descending at a moderate speed on base leg, and then to turn on to final. JetRanger(A) initiated its departure along the FATO at this time, at which point JetRanger(B) initiated a go-around from approx 30ft with a marked nose-up tight 360° turn. I was surprised at this as in my opinion the pilot must have been

listening out to hear that JetRanger(A) was not airborne, and should have seen (A) at the threshold at which point could have entered a 360° turn or straight hover either on base leg or on short finals, yet he elected to continue at speed, whilst (A) could only accelerate slowly. Although the 2 helicopters came close to each other, I was surprised that one pilot decided to file an Airprox because in my opinion there was only a low risk of collision as by this time they were moving away from each other. On A/G all movements are ultimately at the pilot's own discretion and for reference I have had an aircraft closer off my own wingtip when flying practice formation.

UKAB Note (1): NOTAM H3619 was issued for the Open Golf Tournament:-

H3197/11
INTENSE HEL ACTIVITY WI 2NM 5117N 00122E (BRITISH OPEN GOLF
TOURNAMENT, SANDWICH, KENT). 11-07-0337/AS 2.
LOWER: SFC
UPPER: 1500FT AMSL
FROM: 11 JUL 2011 00:00 **TO:** 18 JUL 2011 23:59
SCHEDULE: HJ

UKAB Note (2): The Aerodrome Operating Procedures valid 11-17 July Areas to avoid states:-

‘Sandwich town to the SSW, Clubhouse and event (to S and SE of landing site).’

Arrival & Approach Procedures for RW29 states:-

‘Traffic inbound from Manston Airport call when clear of circuit with ETA and route towards Richborough power station – reporting point ‘Chimneys’.’

Landing Procedures states:-

‘Approach towards aiming point situated midway along FATO and after landing vacate FATO and proceed as advised towards the marquee area and parking spots, giving way to outbound traffic.’

Departure Procedures states:-

‘Preferential direction 29.
Engine start - call on A/G to request start-up; request runway in use and taxi as advised.
Helicopters not to lift until given ‘thumbs-up’ by ground crew.
Spot turn, then hover; hover-taxi only when safe to proceed.
Hovering not permitted on adjacent bays
Outbound traffic has priority.
Route via outbound taxiways to threshold of FATO.
When safe to do so line up on the centre line and take off at pilot’s discretion.
After take-off runway 29 for environmental reasons turn on to heading of approx 240 deg to route over roundabout on Sandwich bypass for Ash village, avoiding built up areas at Great Stonar and thence to Wingham Church at 6 miles.’

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac, a report from the A/G Operator involved and reports from the appropriate ATC authorities.

Without the benefit of an RT transcript it was not possible for Members to determine what transmissions were made during this encounter. However, from the information provided by both pilots and the A/G Operator it was clear that, irrespective of the service being provided, it was very

much down to the pilots to operate safely through good airmanship. JetRanger(A) pilot had elected to taxi and then depart, without seeing the approaching JetRanger(B), in the belief that he had plenty of time to execute the manoeuvre following JetRanger(B) pilot calling downwind and before (B) would be on final approach. On the other hand, JetRanger(B) pilot had joined the cct and flown the pattern whilst watching JetRanger(A) taxi out and then commence its transition from the threshold after its pilot had an RT exchange with the A/G operator. Members agreed that either pilot could have coordinated with each other to clarify their intentions if it was unclear what was happening. JetRanger(B) pilot had elected to continue his approach and when it became apparent that JetRanger(A), who had priority, was still occupying the FATO area, he commenced a go-around, albeit later than ideal, and then broadcast the fact on the RT. JetRanger(A) pilot saw JetRanger(B) to his R and above and continued his take-off but by then the situation had been resolved. The Board concluded that during the incident JetRanger(B) pilot had flown close enough to cause JetRanger(A) pilot concern but the actions taken by pilot(B) had been effective in removing any risk of collision.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Bell 206 JetRanger(B) pilot flew close enough to cause Bell 206 JetRanger(A) pilot concern.

Degree of Risk: C.