

AIRPROX REPORT No 2011098

Date/Time: 29 Jul 2011 1131Z

Position: 5158N 00031E (0.75nm
NE of Wethersfield GLS)

Airspace: London FIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: Viking Glider AW 139

Operator: HQ Air (Trg) Civ Exec

Alt/FL: 950ft↓ 1400ft
QFE (1024mb) QNH (1023mb)

Weather: VMC CLBC VMC NR

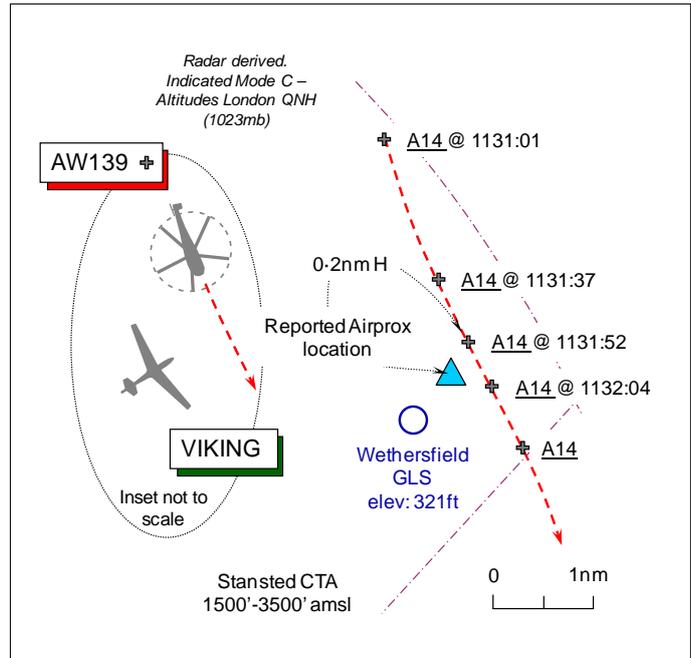
Visibility: 10km 8km

Reported Separation:

<100ft V/<100m H 200ft V/500m H

Recorded Separation:

Not recorded – see Note (1)



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE VIKING CHIEF GLIDING INSTRUCTOR reports that a white and green Agusta 139 helicopter was seen suddenly, tracking S across the eastern half of Wethersfield aerodrome at an estimated height of 1000ft beneath a 1200ft overcast. The Viking glider pilot was carrying out cadet training in the RH cct to RW04 at a height of about 950ft heading 060° at 50kt when he spotted the helicopter 2km away. However, the helicopter pilot appeared not to see the Viking glider, which was in his 1-2 o'clock position, very slightly below, and heading towards. Quickly and deliberately lowering the nose of the glider, whilst keeping the helicopter in sight, the glider pilot turned away to increase separation between his glider and the conflicting Agusta 139, which passed by less than 100m away and less than 100ft above the Viking glider at the closest point. The white and green helicopter maintained its southerly track and the glider subsequently landed without further incident. The glider pilot considered that there could have been a risk of collision had the helicopter made a slight course deviation to its R. If no avoiding action had been taken by the glider pilot, the aircraft would have passed dangerously close to one another and he assessed the Risk as 'high'. Wethersfield was NOTAM'd for operations at the time of the incident.

Farnborough LARS was contacted, and stated that a helicopter, squawking A7000 was shown on radar, but they were not in RT contact with the pilot.

THE AGUSTA/WESTLAND A139 HELICOPTER PILOT (A139) reports he was the PIC and the PF from the RH seat, whilst in transit under VFR routing from Newmarket to Braintree VRP and thence to Hicksted, S of Gatwick. Flying at an altitude of 1400ft beneath the Stansted CTA in VMC some 700ft below cloud, he had contacted Essex RADAR but due to controller workload they were unable to provide a TS. Because of Wethersfield Glider Launching Site (GLS) along their track, he had altered his course further to the E to avoid flying too close to Wethersfield; he estimates that their track passed about 2nm NE of the gliding site at the closest point heading 170° at 145kt. The HILS was on and as he approached Wethersfield he switched on the fixed landing lights to assist visual conspicuity. Aware of some gliders on the ground, both he and the PNF in the LH seat were actively scanning for any conflict with airborne gliders when he became aware of a glider to their right about 500m away in their 2:30 position and 200ft below his helicopter. They were already ahead of the glider so he maintained his course. The glider was not spotted earlier due to the thick door pillar, neither had the PNF seen the glider until he pointed it out to him. There was no Risk of collision.

When they reached Braintree they contacted Farnborough LARS for a BS, who advised them that his helicopter had flown overhead Wethersfield, which he disputed. A squawk of A7000 was selected with Modes C and S on; TCAS I is fitted.

UKAB Note (1): The LAC Stansted 10cm radar recording does not illustrate this Airprox as the Viking glider is not shown at all, therefore, the minimum separation that pertained cannot be ascertained independently. However, the A139 is clearly shown in transit beneath the north-eastern stub of the CTA, maintaining an altitude of 1400ft London QNH (1023mb). The A139 makes a slight track alteration at 1131:37, turning slightly L thereby increasing the track displacement from Wethersfield, as reported, before drawing abeam the reported location of the Airprox at 1131:52, the helicopter following a track displaced 0.2nm from the reported point. The A139 passes about 0.8nm abeam Wethersfield GLS at the closest point at 1132:04, before clearing to the S.

UKAB Note (2): The UK AIP at ENR 5-5-1-7, notifies the GLS at Wethersfield A/D as active from Sunrise to Sunset on Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays or as notified by NOTAM. Winch launching is notified to 2000ft above the aerodrome elevation of 321ft amsl. A NOTAM had been issued notifying gliding activity for this Friday.

ATSI reports that when the A139 crew contacted Essex RADAR at 1126, the pilot was asked to standby. Some 7min later the controller asked the pilot of the A139 to pass his message, if he was still on the frequency. In this intervening period the controller's workload was high. The RTF recording shows that he was controlling ten Stansted movements, which included both inbound and outbound flights. The A139 pilot reported, at 1133, that he was on a flight from Newmarket and at the time was passing Braintree at 1400ft, which is about 6nm S of Wethersfield, consequently, the Airprox had already occurred before an ATS could be established.

HQ AIR (TRG) comments that the A139 passed within 1nm of an active glider site at the operating altitude and it appears he only saw the Viking approaching the CPA. By contrast, the Viking pilot acquired the A139 at a good distance and was able to avoid it as it approached, fortunately without affecting his recovery.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac, transcripts of the relevant RT frequencies, radar video recordings and reports from the appropriate ATC and operating authorities.

Despite the close location of the Stansted 10cm radar head to the position of the Airprox, the small Viking glider with its composite structure is not shown on the radar recording. Consequently, the significant disparity between the minimum separation reported by Viking glider pilot and that contained in the AW139 pilot's account could not be resolved. The 500m horizontal separation filed by the AW139 pilot was more than 5 times the <100m perceived by the glider pilot leading some Members to contend that the AW139 pilot had not seen the glider flown by the reporting pilot. Moreover, an effective lookout regimen should include clearing areas behind 'blind-spots' regardless of airframe obstructions and a slower transit through this confined part of Class G airspace might have helped the AW139 crew to discharge their responsibilities to 'see and avoid' other ac.

It was evident that the AW139's track was closer to Wethersfield GLS than the A139 Captain's estimate. The radar recording shows that the helicopter passed about 0.8nm abeam the GLS at the closest point, level at 1400ft amsl, and would have been closer if the helicopter crew had not made their earlier course alteration. Helicopter pilot Members voiced a concern that the AW139 crew had flown closer than was prudent at an altitude below that which can be attained by gliders on the winch wire. Fortunately, the presence of the helicopter flying close by had been detected in time to enable the glider pilot to take robust and effective avoiding action. The Board concluded, therefore, that this Airprox had resulted from a conflict in the vicinity of a promulgated and active glider launching site resolved by the Viking pilot, whose avoiding action had effectively removed the Risk of a collision.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A Conflict in the vicinity of a promulgated and active glider launching site resolved by the Viking pilot.

Degree of Risk: C.