

AIRPROX REPORT No 2012049

Date/Time: 16 Apr 2012 1236Z

Position: 5305N 00350W
(30nm SE RAF Valley)

Airspace: UKDLFS/Lon FIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reporting Ac

Type: Tornado GR4 Schleicher ASW27

Operator: HQ Air (Ops) Civ Pte

Alt/FL: 1500ft 2500ft
RPS QNH (1022hPa)

Weather: VMC CLBC VMC CLBC

Visibility: 30km >50km

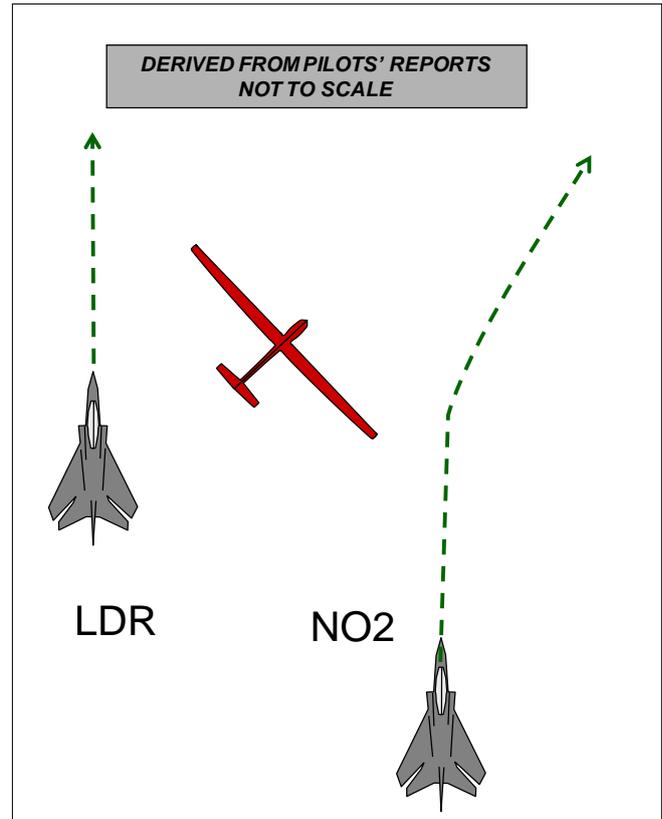
Reported Separation:

20ft V/50ft H 50ft V/30m H

Recorded Separation:

NK

BOTH PILOTS FILED



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE TORNADO GR4 PILOT reports flying a grey ac as No 2 of a pair on a tactical low-level sortie, squawking 7001 with Mode C. While heading 061° at 430kt conducting a rejoin after a simulated attack, they were flying at about 1500ft agl, in a 'sanctuary level', with much of their lookout focussed on regaining visual contact with their leader in the 30sec up to the CPA; they became visual with him as his ac passed below and in front of them. Upon looking out to turn L for the rejoin, the pilot saw a white glider in level flight about 400m away in their 12 o'clock position, co-height and flying from their L to R. He took immediate avoiding action by bunting and rolling to the R.

Once clear of the glider they positioned to confirm the glider was unaffected and re-acquired the ac about 2nm to the S in the vicinity of the Airprox location. The sortie was then continued without any further incident. Although he assessed the risk as being high, he did not report it on the radio at the time as he was unsure of what frequency the glider would be operating on.

After landing the nearest gliding clubs to the incident location were contacted to find out if one of their ac had been involved.

THE SCHLEICHER ASW27 PILOT reports flying a white glider on a cross-country task from Lleweni Parc, Denbigh listening out on a glider common frequency; SSR and TCAS were not fitted. Initially soaring conditions were good with a cloudbase of about 5500ft alt but were forecast to deteriorate mid-afternoon with an approaching warm front. Approaching his first turn point at Blaenau Ffestiniog at about 1200 the soaring conditions were deteriorating with the approaching front so after rounding the turn point he retreated to better conditions across the Conwy Valley, with a downwind track of about 045° at 65kt. When he was S of Betws y Coed at an alt of 2500ft he became aware of a fast jet passing R to L behind and below his left wing immediately followed by another passing much closer (first seen about 100m away) and below his right wing while in a right turn; he estimates that at the closest point it was 30m away.

He took no avoiding action as there was no time but assessed the risk of collision as being high.

He reported the incident on landing.

UKAB Note (1): The Valley METAR was:

EGOV 151250Z 34019KT 9999 FEW028TCU 10/02 Q1020 BLU NOSIG

UKAB Note (2): One of the Tornados can be seen on the Prestwick combined radar. The other ac and the glider do not show at any stage, although another very intermittent primary contact shows about 5nm to the E of the reported incident position. Two other RAF Valley recoveries can be seen in the area.

HQ AIR (OPS) comments that this Airprox highlights the need for military pilots to continue to lookout in all sectors during a formation rejoin; lookout must not be concentrated solely in the sector where the other formation member is expected to be.

This part of LFA 7 is an area of intense low level military flying training; on any given day many fast jet aircraft will be operating in the area where this Airprox took place. Military aircrew conducting training in the area are aware of the glider site at Lleweni Parc and tend to plan not to operate as far E as the glider site, but recognise the possibility of encountering gliders almost anywhere. Equally, glider pilots must understand where military aircraft activity is concentrated and where their chance of an encounter with a military fast jet is significantly increased. Recognising that the main risk will be from a Valley-based Hawk, it has been suggested by members of this Board that a representative from the gliding club visits RAF Valley where he might see at first-hand the level of activity that takes place on the area known as the 'northern plain'; advice may then be considered for glider pilots flying from the club during weekdays, on the best way to manage their risk. Increased liaison between the Station and the club would be welcomed and improve awareness and safety for all users of the airspace. The use of a Transponder in this case would not have helped the Tornado crew with an earlier detection of the glider as TCAS is not yet fitted to Tornado, although it is under consideration. However, the use of Mode C by gliders should be encouraged given that most Valley-based fast jet ac have TCAS II fitted.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac, radar recordings and reports from the Tornado operating authorities.

Members were briefed that the Tornado station and the gliding community co-operated well and quickly identified the glider involved in this incident, facilitating speedy and accurate reporting.

The Board noted that this incident took place in a busy part of Class G airspace where pilots have a responsibility to see and avoid other ac. The gliding Member informed the meeting that Lleweni Parc is a regenerated site and that visitors who might not be familiar with local conditions are frequent. Even in deteriorating weather he was surprised that a glider would be operating at such a low altitude; that being the case he opined that the Tornados too would not have expected to see a glider at that alt and position where the terrain in Snowdonia (10nm to the W) is over 3500ft.

Nevertheless 'see and avoid' pertained and the (unpowered) glider had right of way under the RoA. Although the No2 Tornado crew did see the glider, they recognised that the sighting was late and the Lead crew, who also had a lookout responsibility, did not see the white glider at all. The Tornados were approaching the glider from the rear quarter at about 400kt closing speed and it would have taken about 2sec to cover 400m, the estimated range that the No2 pilot saw the glider. That being the case, the Board agreed that the effectiveness of the avoidance taken by the Tornado would have been marginal. The glider pilot, understandably due to the geometry of the incident, did not see either Tornado until after they had passed.

A majority of Members believed that due to the high closure rate and uncertainty regarding the small separation extant, there had been a risk that the ac would have collided.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Late sightings by the Tornado crews.

Degree of Risk: A.