

AIRPROX REPORT No 2012166

Date/Time: 2 Dec 2012 1256Z (Sunday)

Position: 5551N 00406W
(GOW 090 11nm)

Airspace: Glasgow CTR (Class: D)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: A320 Unknown

Operator: CAT NR

Alt/FL: 4000ft NR
QNH(1015hPa) QNH(NR)

Weather: VMC NR NR

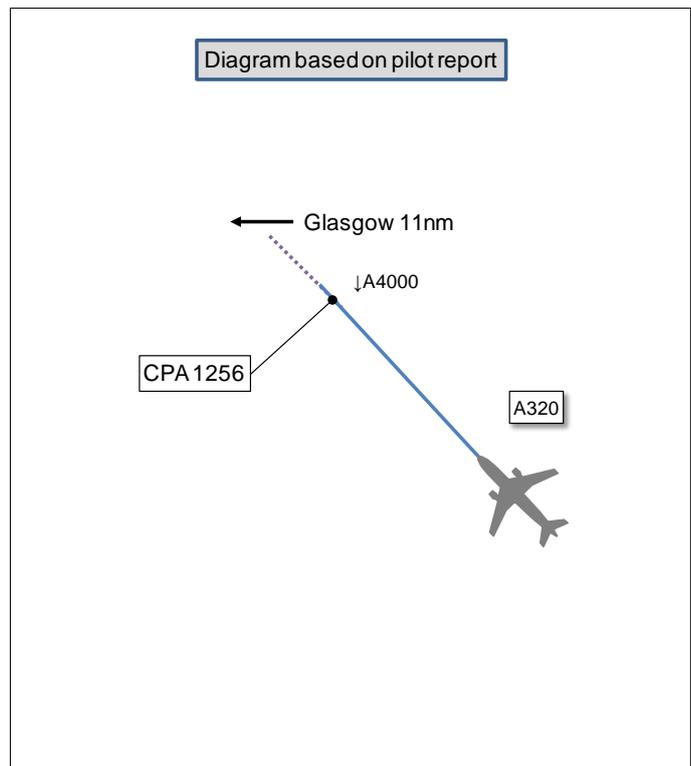
Visibility: >10km NR

Reported Separation:

300ft V/0m H NR

Recorded Separation:

NK



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE A320 PILOT reports descending on final descent into Glasgow, operating under IFR in VMC with a RCS from Glasgow APP. The landing lights were selected on, as was the SSR transponder with Modes A, C and S; the ac was fitted with an ACAS. Passing altitude 4000ft (QNH 1015hPa) at 240kt, in clear conditions with the sun behind them, both he and the PNF saw an object 'loom ahead' at a range of about 100m. The object passed directly beneath before either of the crew had time to take avoiding action or had 'really registered it' although they were both agreed that it appeared blue and yellow (or silver) in colour with a small frontal area but that it was 'bigger than a balloon'. The estimated mis-distance was 300ft.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

THE GLASGOW INTERMEDIATE APPROACH CONTROLLER reports that an A320, about 11nm E of Glasgow at altitude 4000ft under a RCS, was being vectored for a ILS approach to RW23 when the pilot asked if he was 'talking to anything in the area' as he had 'got quite close' to a blue and yellow ac, travelling in the opposite direction, which had passed just below him. The controller stated that he was not talking to anyone else in that area and that nothing was seen on radar. Search action was taken with no result and the A320 pilot stated his intention to file an Airprox.

ATSI reports that an Airprox was reported by the pilot of an Airbus A320 when the ac, inbound to Glasgow, passed an object in the vicinity of Baillieston (13nm east of Glasgow) at an approximate altitude of 3500ft.

Meteorological data for Glasgow was recorded as follows:
METAR EGPF 021250Z 06002KT CAVOK 01/M00 Q1015=

Factual History

At 1249:30 an A320 pilot called Glasgow Approach on track LANAK in the descent to FL070. The A320 was 47nm from touchdown via an ILS approach to RW23. At 1251:40 the A320 pilot was instructed to continue on his present heading and descend to altitude 5000ft (QNH 1015hPa). Further descent to 3500ft was given 2 min later.

At 1255:20 the following exchange between the A320 pilot and Glasgow APP took place:

A320: "Glasgow Approach [A320 C/S]"

EGPF: "[A320 C/S] pass your message"

A320: "Er yeah we just had something pass underneath us quite close [1255:30] and nothing on TCAS have you got anything on in our area"

EGPF: "Er negative er we've got nothing on er radar and we're n- not talking to any traffic either"

A320: "Er not quite sure what it was but it definitely er quite large [1255:40] and it's blue and yellow"

EGPF: "OK that's understood er do you have a an estimate for the height"

A320: "Maybe er [1255:50] yeah we were probably about erm four hundred to five hundred feet above it so it's probably about three and a half thousand feet."

Figure 1 below shows the Prestwick (ACC) Multi Tracking Radar picture at 1255:20. The A320 is transponding Mode A code 4226. The distance between each marker in the replay trail history is equivalent to 4sec. The Figure shows no other track histories within the immediate vicinity of the A320 at this time. There is an unidentified track history 1.3nm E of the A320's position 28 seconds earlier, but no surveillance data to suggest a detectable object passing underneath the A320.

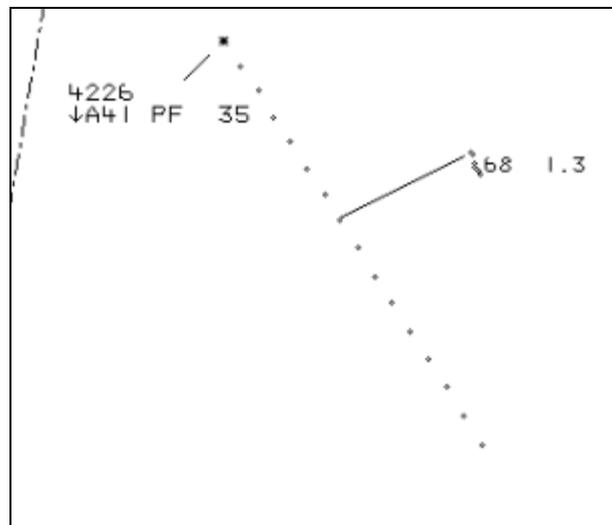


Figure 1: 1255:20 UTC (Prestwick MRT)

Additionally, a further detailed review of individual radar sources did not yield any conclusive radar data that matched the A320 pilot's description of the encounter. The ATC unit's own radar replay also showed no surveillance traces in the immediate vicinity of the A320 at the time.

Once on the ground the A320 pilot gave a further description of the event to the Glasgow Aerodrome Controller:

A320: "...we seemed to only miss it by a couple of hundred feet it went directly beneath us ... wherever we were when we called it in it was within about ten seconds"; "... couldn't tell what direction it was going but it went right underneath us"

EGPF: "do you suspect it might have been a glider or something like that"

A320: "well maybe a microlight ... it just looked too big for a balloon."

Conclusion

The pilot of an A320, inbound to Glasgow, gave a contemporaneous account of his ac's encounter with an untraced object at 3500ft. Investigation of the available surveillance sources was unable to trace any activity matching that described by the A320 pilot. Additionally there was no other information to indicate the presence or otherwise of activity in the area.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included a report from the A320 pilot, transcripts of the relevant RT frequencies, radar photographs/video recordings, reports from the air traffic controllers involved and reports from the appropriate ATC authority.

The Board initially considered likely candidates for the untraced ac. The A320 crew had not been able to assimilate any information regarding the shape of the untraced ac in the fleeting glimpse they had, reporting only a likely colour. Members were of the opinion that, in the absence of a primary radar return, it was unlikely that the untraced ac was a fixed-wing or rotary-wing ac or man-carrying balloon. It was considered that a meteorological balloon would be radar significant and unlikely to be released in the area of the Airprox. A glider could not be discounted but it was felt unlikely that one would be operating in that area, both due to the constrained airspace and the lack of thermal activity due to the low temperature. Similarly, The Board considered that a hang-glider or para-motor would be radar significant and that conditions precluded them, as they did para-gliders or parascenders. Members were unable to reach a conclusion as to a likely candidate for the conflicting ac and it was therefore felt that the Board had insufficient information to determine a Cause or Risk.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Sighting report.

Degree of Risk: D.