

AIRPROX REPORT No 2012035

Date/Time: 11 Mar 2012 1043Z (Sunday)

Position: 5058N 00052W (E Abm
S. Harting - elev ~700ft)

Airspace: LFIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: Paraglider PA28

Operator: Civ Pte Civ Club

Alt/FL: 1100ft 1800ft
aal QNH

Weather: VMC CLBC VMC CLBC

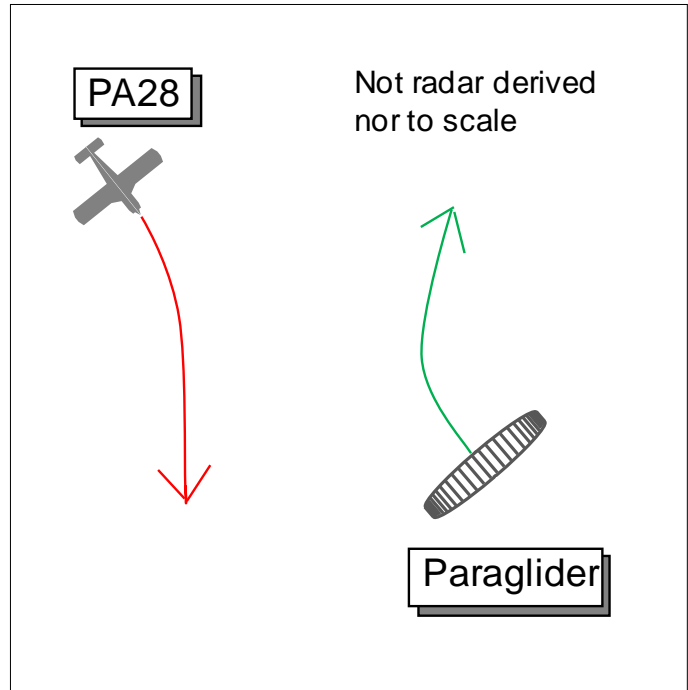
Visibility: 'Good' 5nm

Reported Separation:

Nil V/200yd H 500ft V/500m H

Recorded Separation:

NR



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE PARAGLIDER PILOT reports flying a local sortie from Harting Down, just S of South Harting, [8nm NW Goodwood] VFR beneath a red/white/blue canopy. He had been unable to find his altimeter/vario so all times and heights were approximate. He took off at 1000 and started thermalling straight away and there were 3 other paragliders, he thought, already airborne. He thermalled up, flying all around the local area for something like 45min before the Airprox. As he had never flown to the cloudbase before he was quite surprised, and very pleased, to find himself flying through wispy bits of the base of what was a fairly over-developed and cloudy sky. He flew over another paraglider and asked the pilot his altitude and was told 1100ft above the take-off point. He turned towards Harting and was just 50ft under the cloud but in clear sight of the ground and Harting Down; in flight visibility was 'good'. The cloud was very thick in front of him and it was then he heard the sound of an aeroplane engine getting louder and louder. He did not move and waited for visual contact heading 310° at 25kt. Suddenly, out of what was quite thick cloud, a low-wing single-engine ac, possibly a Piper Cherokee type, appeared about 700ft away, flying straight at him. Both he and the other ac's pilot immediately turned sharply R in accordance with normal collision avoidance procedure, estimating they passed by 600ft (200yd). He assessed the risk as high.

He was in no doubt that if the other pilot had not been looking out carefully there was a high likelihood of a collision as the ac was at exactly the same altitude and it was just off to the L of his course. Another paraglider pilot on Harting Down took a photograph just after the Airprox and, using the printed picture and scaling from his parafoil dimension of 10m, he calculated separation was about 187m at the CPA. The photograph was attached to the CA1094.

THE PA28 PILOT reports en-route from Benson to Abbeville via the Goodwood O/H, VFR and in receipt of a BS from Farnborough, he thought, on 125.25MHz, squawking an assigned code with Modes S and C. The visibility was 5nm flying below cloud in VMC and the ac was coloured blue/white with nav lights switched on. Approximately 10nm NW of Goodwood heading 120° at 110kt and 1800ft QNH he encountered a lowering cloudbase so he made a decision to divert to Goodwood. Another ac appeared out of cloud so he turned L to avoid it. After he turned, he looked down and L and saw 3 paragliders so he took avoiding action by turning R estimating they passed 500ft below and 500m to his L assessing there was no risk of collision.

ATSI reports that the Airprox occurred at 1042:52Z, approximately 0.8nm SE of South Harting village, within Class G airspace, between a Paraglider and a PA28.

The Paraglider was operating VFR together with other paragliders, from the Harting Down paragliding site, which is situated just to the S of the reported Airprox position. Harting Down paragliding site is not promulgated in the UK AIP or shown on AIS Aeronautical charts. The Paraglider pilot reported operating in the area for approximately 45min prior to the Airprox and provided 2 photographs.

The PA28 was operating on a VFR flight from Benson to Abbeville but diverted to Goodwood due to the descending cloudbase. The PA28 pilot reported in receipt of a BS from Farnborough.

CAA ATSI had access to NATS area radar recordings together with written reports from both pilots. The registration of the PA28 was not determined until after 30 days and no RT recordings were available to ATSI.

The weather for Farnborough and Southampton is provided:
METAR EGLF 111020Z 34008KT 300V360 9999 BKN015 10/07 Q1038=
METAR EGHI 111020Z 34007KT 310V020 9999 SCT020 11/07 Q1038=

The exact time of the Airprox and the identity of the other ac were initially unclear. The written reports from both pilots indicated that the incident occurred at 1030 UTC. Radar recordings did not show any ac in the area at this time.

At 1031:35, radar shows the PA28, to be 14nm NW of South Harting, displaying a Farnborough LARS-W squawk 0433 and indicating an altitude of 1900ft.

At 1038:36, the PA28 is shown 1.7nm NNW of South Harting, commencing a RH orbit, indicating an altitude of 1800ft. The PA28 left the Farnborough frequency at 1039. Farnborough ATSU reported that no en-route frequency was annotated on the fps.

At 1040:22 the PA28 completed the orbit, setting course on a S'y heading. Radar shows that the ac had retained the Farnborough squawk 0433. It was not known if the PA28 had contacted Goodwood before the Airprox occurrence.

At 1041:04, the PA28 commenced a second RH orbit, 0.6nm NW of South Harting, indicating an altitude of 2000ft, before setting course again at 1042:28 on a track of 160°.

At 1042:35, the PA28 approached South Harting, indicating an altitude of 1800ft. Radar shows the PA28 commencing a L turn to track 120°. The PA28 pilot, in his written report, indicated sighting another ac and turning L to avoid it. The PA28 pilot then reported sighting 3 Paragliders and turning R.

At 1042:52, radar shows the PA28 turn R 40° at a position 0.8nm SE of South Harting village. At the same time the transponder code of the PA28 changed from 0433 to 7000.

The Paraglider pilot thought that there were 3 other Paragliders airborne and reported sighting a Cherokee type ac coming towards him already banking R. The Paraglider pilot also reported turning R.

Radar did not show any other contacts in the vicinity of South Harting. The PA28 continued to Goodwood, landing at 1051 UTC.

An analysis of the prominent features in the photograph provided by the Paraglider pilot, overlaid on a geographical mapping tool, showed that the position of the paraglider correlated with the radar fix of the PA28 at the reported Airprox position at a time of 1042:52.

The PA28 flight left the Farnborough frequency at 1039 prior to the Airprox, probably whilst the PA28 carried out the first RH orbit to the N of South Harting village.

It was not possible to establish the time the PA28 contacted Goodwood. However it was very unlikely that the FISO at Goodwood would have been able to provide information to the PA28 pilot about the paraglider activity.

The PA28 carried out a second orbit prior to setting course for Goodwood. The PA28 pilot then reported sighting another ac and turning L. This may have been the turn shown on radar at 1042:35 and shortly afterwards the PA28 made a R turn shown on radar at 1042:52, to avoid 3 paragliders.

CAP 774 Chapter 1, Page 1, Service Principles, states:

‘Within Class F and G airspace, regardless of the service being provided, pilots are ultimately responsible for collision avoidance and terrain clearance, and they should consider service provision to be constrained by the unpredictable nature of this environment. The Class F and G airspace environment is typified by the following:

It is not mandatory for a pilot to be in receipt of an ATS; this generates an unknown traffic environment;

Controller/FISO workload cannot be predicted;

Pilots may make sudden manoeuvres, even when in receipt of an ATS.’

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, reports from the appropriate ATC authorities.

As this Airprox occurred in Class G airspace, both pilots were responsible for maintaining their own separation from other traffic through see and avoid. Members questioned the wisdom of flying VFR at the cloudbase as this can reduce the likelihood of pilots visually acquiring other ac early enough to assimilate the situation and then take the appropriate action, particularly if the cloudbase is in any way variable. This was borne out in this incident as the Paraglider pilot reported seeing the PA28, appear out of cloud 700ft away heading straight towards him, and turning R to avoid, estimating separation as 600ft (200yd). Meanwhile the PA28 pilot reported seeing another ac and turning L to avoid it and then seeing 3 paragliders to the L of his ac's nose and 500ft below, before turning R to avoid them by 500m. A GA pilot Member advised the Board that the paragliders were where they might be expected given the wind direction over the ridge. Since paragliders are hard to see, he emphasised the importance of anticipating where paragliders might be encountered during sortie planning. Given the Wx conditions at the time, Members thought that both pilots had seen each other as early enough as they could be expected to. Because of the disparate reporting distances, Members wondered whether the PA28 had seen the reporting Paraglider. This could not be resolved for sure although a photograph provided by the Paraglider pilot taken from the launch site looking N and viewed by Members, showed the PA28 tracking S'ly to pass W of the launch site and passing to the W of 3 paragliders, the W'ly Paraglider being that flown by the reporting pilot. Given that the Paraglider pilot reported seeing the PA28 turning R at the same time as he turned R, Members agreed that both pilots had taken appropriate action to resolve this conflict in Class G airspace and the combined actions had been effective in removing any risk of collision.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A conflict in Class G airspace resolved by the pilots of both ac.

Degree of Risk: C.