

AIRPROX REPORT No 2013047

Date/Time: 3 Jun 2013 1640Z

Position: 5158N 00303W
(Pandy Ridge,
7nm SSE of Hay-on Wye)

Airspace: LFA7/7T London FIR
(Class: G) (Class: G)
Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: Tornado GR4 Paraglider

Operator: HQ Air (Ops) Civ Pte

Alt/FL: 250ft 1630ft
RPS (1026hPa) QNH (NK)

Weather: VMC CLBC VMC CLBC

Visibility: 20km 40km

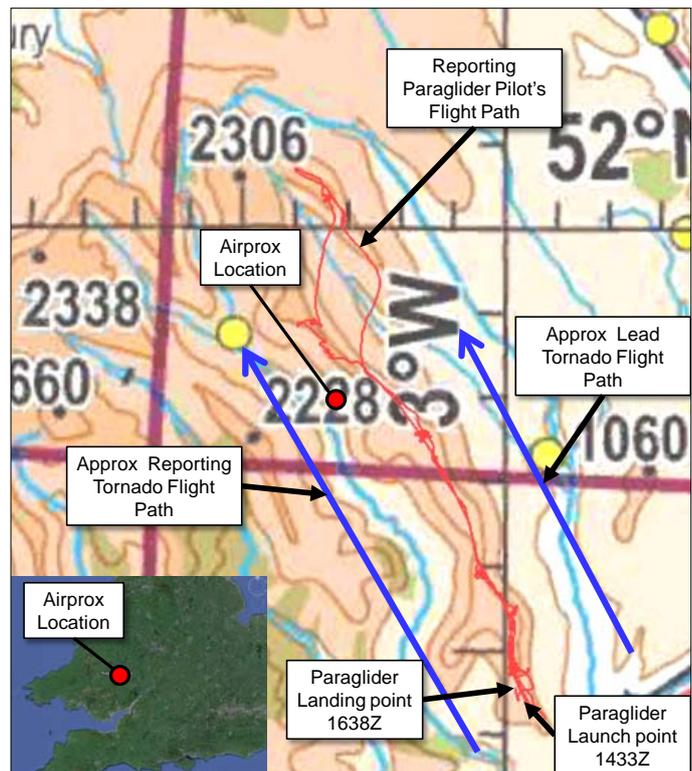
Reported Separation:

1000ft 1100ft V/1.5nm

H

Recorded Separation:

NK



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE TORNADO PILOT reports operating at low level as the No 2 of a pair of ac with navigation lights and strobes turned on, squawking Mode 3/A 7001, with Modes C and S selected. They had booked in to LFA 7 from 1630-1710Z, and the formation were flying N-bound along two valleys separated by a ridge. His ac was hdg 340°, at 250ft, with the RPS of 1026hPa set, when the pilot saw several paragliders ahead and elected to pull up to 2000ft to avoid any unseen paragliders. During the climb, approximately another 10 paragliders were spotted slightly below and, as the crew were levelling off, the WSO spotted yet more paragliders above the aircraft. The pilot estimated that he saw the first paragliders at 1-2nm distance, and achieved a minimum separation of about 1000ft on these following his climb. Once clear, the aircraft was climbed further to avoid the paragliders which were estimated to be around 3500-4000ft. No NOTAM had been issued. A call was made on the formation frequency; the crew of the lead ac saw the paragliders from a distance but had no conflicts in the valley they were following.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'Medium'.

[UKAB Note 1: The paraglider involved could not be positively identified but several pilots were identified as being airborne at the time of the Airprox; one of them witnessed a pair of Tornados passing and agreed to submit a report, his helmet-camera photos and his flight-tracker data files to help the Board's understanding of the circumstances.]

A PARAGLIDER PILOT, who was in the area, reports flying a 25km cross-country flight on his red and white paraglider and returning to 'the official launch/landing location on the Pandy ridge in Wales'. He was at 1630ft AMSL when he saw two fast jets; he believed the ac to be Tornados flying on either side of the ridge from S to N. He had the clearest view of the E'ly Tornado but both ac appeared to be below the ridge line; the E'ly ac appeared to be clear of the paragliders he could see in his area.

The paraglider pilot reports that he checked the NOTAMs in the morning before his flight but did not submit a CANP for his flight because he made the decision to fly shortly before he took off and he was planning to fly cross-country, which would mean notifying an extended and uncertain area. He commented that it was common for paragliders and sailplanes to use the launch site on the Pandy Ridge but he was not sure if a CANP had been submitted by one of the '15 or so Paraglider pilots flying that day'. Figure 1 shows a photograph from the paraglider pilot's helmet camera taken at 1633, looking N up the Pandy Valley, at 1600ft amsl, indicating the lead Tornado, which was the E'ly of the two and is labelled 'Jet No2'.



Figure 1. The Lead Tornado ac labelled 'Jet No2'

Factual Background

The SE Wales Paraglider Sites Guide indicates that the Pandy site may only be flown by members of the SE Wales Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club, and by members of the Welsh Free Flight Federation. (http://www.sewhgpgc.co.uk/sites/sites.php?site_name=pandy).

There is no record of a CANP being submitted for paragliding activity in this location on the day of the Airprox.

HQ AIR (OPS) comments that the Tornado crew were presented with a difficult situation when they encountered such a large number of paragliders over a relatively wide area and range of heights. Whilst they would have been likely to sight any canopy directly in their flight-path, it was nevertheless an uncomfortable situation. Had any of the paragliders involved submitted a CANP, the Tornado would have received a specific warning of the NOTAM'd area. The proliferation of launch sites around the UK has led to the removal of site locations from the military Low Flying Chart in favour of the CANP system and a general warning of paragliding activity. This decision will be reviewed in due course by LF Ops and RAF Flight Safety.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available to the Board consisted of the reports from the crew of the Tornado and a paraglider pilot who was not involved in the Airprox but was in the area and agreed to assist the Board. A radar recording was available but the paraglider involved in the Airprox could not be identified.

The Board first discussed the fact that no CANP had been submitted by any of the paraglider pilots using the Pandy site. The CANP system normally records paragliding activity with a 1nm surrounding circle, which is not a mandatory avoidance area. Notwithstanding, the Low-Flying Booking Cell (LFBC) advisor informed the Board that free-text could be used to warn crews of activities happening over extended areas, and that information on filing CANPs is promulgated on the British Hang-gliding

and Paragliding Association (BHPA) web-site. The Gliding member opined that, if this activity had been notified by CANP, then the Tornado crew may have adjusted their route, or at least had early warning to improve their lookout. He would like to see more use of the CANP system, and welcomed the use of more modern and intelligent systems to help predict and notify active areas.

A discussion then ensued about LFBC and HQ Air(Ops) working together to find ways of using modern planning systems so that NOTAMS and CANPs can be displayed more easily and effectively to military crews. The Gliding member noted that activation of notified hang-gliding and paragliding sites could be predicted very accurately by reference to the wind direction at those sites. He also thought that a consolidated list of gliding, hang-gliding and paragliding sites would be useful to other airspace users. The HQ Air(Ops) member commented that he is involved in the early stages of a project aiming to use Met Office data to predict and map areas where gliding, hang-gliding and paragliding activity is likely; this will take some time, but it could be published with CANPs to give wide distribution.

The Board then discussed the cause of the Airprox and, because the subject paraglider could not be traced, some felt it would be difficult to assess accurately. This Airprox was unusual as the Tornado crew reported avoiding several paragliders. The Board were clear that there had been a risk of collision but, because the Tornado crew reported achieving 1000ft separation from all of the other ac, they concluded that the crew's timely action had been effective and allocated a Risk Grading of C.

The safety barriers pertinent to this Airprox were: 'aircrew rules and procedures', 'visual sighting' and 'aircrew action'. The Board concluded that these barriers had been effective and allocated an Event Risk Classification score of 2.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Conflict in Class G, resolved by the Tornado pilot.

Degree of Risk: C.

ERC Score: 2.