

AIRPROX REPORT No 2013060

Date/Time: 30 Jun 2013 2138Z (Sunday) (Night)

Position: 5109N 00012W
(London/Gatwick
- elevation 203ft)

Airspace: Gatwick CTR/ATZ (Class: D)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: A319 MD902

Operator: CAT Civ Comm

Alt/FL: 400ft agl 1200ft
QNH (1019hPa) QNH (1019hPa)

Weather: VMC CAVOK VMC CAVOK

Visibility: NK >10km

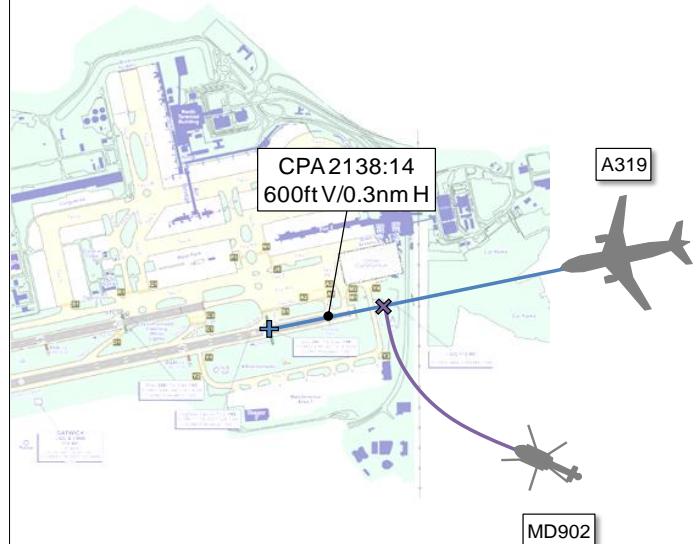
Reported Separation:

500ft V/0m H 1200ft V/200m H

Recorded Separation:

600ft V/0.3nm H

Diagram based on radar data



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE A319 PILOT reports being inbound to RW 26L at Gatwick on an IFR flight from Venice; beacon, strobes and landing lights were illuminated, SSR Modes S and C were selected. When checking into Gatwick TWR, he was informed of a helicopter 1nm S of the airport staying clear. As he came close to the RW threshold he noticed that the helicopter was crossing above his ac. As he passed 400ft agl the helicopter changed to amber on TCAS, without any audio alert. The helicopter indicated 500ft above as he passed 400ft Radalt. He was not informed that the helicopter was going to cross above his ac, and expressed concern that if he had had to go around from 600-400ft, he would have been only 500ft below the helicopter in more or less conflict. This would have made a go around from around 500ft impossible.

He perceived the severity of the incident as 'Low'.

THE MD902 EXPLORER HELICOPTER PILOT reports being on a CAT-B, VFR, local flight from Redhill Airfield. Standard navigation, HISL, white strobes and landing lights were all illuminated, and SSR Modes S and C were selected; TCAS is not carried. He had been cleared by Gatwick TWR to operate over the M23 up to 1500ft, remaining S of the extended RW centreline. Subsequently, he requested to reposition to the north side of the centreline. He was initially routed NW to the Southern Maintenance Hangar, which is used as the standard holding point just to the S of the RW, near the 26L threshold. He was then asked if he was visual with an ac on short final. This was confirmed (he had seen it at >6nm at the start of its ILS) and he was then cleared to cross above and behind that traffic. Heading 360°, he crossed some 1000-1200ft above and about 150-200m behind it, he thought. No comments about the close proximity of other traffic were made on the frequency from either ATC or pilots during the time he had been operating.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'None'.

THE GATWICK TWR CONTROLLER reports that he was operating with RW 26L at the start of a night duty. The MD902 helicopter called him from Redhill and said it wanted to operate over the M23 motorway abeam Gatwick. He cleared the helicopter across the runway from the N Terminal, using standard procedures and the helicopter subsequently held to the S of the 1nm FAT by 1nm. The

helicopter later informed him that it would like to route towards the Southern Maintenance Hangar and then cross over to the northern side of the FAT. The A319, to which he had already passed TI about the helicopter, was 3nm from touchdown. He instructed the helicopter to cross the runway, after the landing A319, over the threshold, which was read back correctly. The helicopter was then observed to carry out the instruction as cleared.

Factual Background

The Gatwick weather was recorded as follows:

METAR EGKK 302120Z 23005KT CAVOK 16/14 Q1019

Official night on 30 June 2013 started at 2104; the incident occurred at approximately 2138.

MATS Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 1, Paragraph 1.4 states 'Aerodrome Control is responsible for issuing information and instructions to aircraft under its control to achieve a safe, orderly and expeditious flow of air traffic and to assist pilots in preventing collisions between: 1) Aircraft flying in, and in the vicinity of, the ATZ'.

MATS Part 1, Section 1, Chapter 5, Paragraph 5.3 states 'Separation standards are not prescribed for application by ATC between VFR and IFR flights in Class D airspace'.

MATS Part 1, Section 1, Chapter 4, Paragraph 4.101 describes CAT-B flights connected with the operator involved in this Airprox as: 'Normal operational priority. The operation will not wish to draw attention to itself. The pilot will expect controllers to suggest a new altitude or minor changes to the flight operating area in the event that the flight would cause a delay to other traffic'.

ATSI Analysis

Both ac were receiving an ACS from Gatwick TWR who were operating from the emergency VCR to allow for planned deep-cleaning of the Gatwick VCR. All equipment was reported as serviceable.

In response to a task in the area between Gatwick and Crawley, the MD902 departed from Redhill at 2128:10. Gatwick TWR cleared it initially to the N Terminal and, with landing traffic in sight at a 2.5nm final, it was cleared to cross RW 26L from N to S after the landing traffic. The MD902 was 1.5nm N of the centreline when the inbound landed and the MD902 crossed the threshold from N to S at 2130:46.

Having reported operating on the S-side, at 2131:03 the MD902 reported that his task was now on the centreline; however, he advised that the situation did not warrant CAT-A status, and that he would continue to monitor from the south-side as a CAT-B flight.

Radar showed the MD902 holding 1.3nm to the SE of the RW threshold (1nm south of the centreline). The next two inbound aircraft were passed traffic information about the MD902 holding to the S of Gatwick at low-level.

At 2134:01, the A319 was 10.1nm from touchdown. The LTC Gatwick Radar controller advised the A319 about the helicopter, "...about a mile south of the two mile final working the tower and for further updates contact them on one two four decimal two two five callsign only". The A319 pilot acknowledged, "One two four two [2134:40] two five (A319)c/s".

At 2134:50, the A319 contacted the TWR and was advised to continue approach with TI, "(A319)c/s traffic information, helicopter one mile south of Gatwick low level remaining south at this time". The A319 pilot replied, "Okay thank you".

At 2136:45, the A319 was 3.2nm from touchdown and the MD902 pilot reported, "...I'd like to er route back to the erm maintenance hangar then cross northside to hold just north of the Gatwick Link and have a look from the north". TWR responded, "(MD902)c/s after the landing three nineteen short final, cross runway two six left from south to north over the threshold". The MD902 pilot replied, "South to north at the threshold after the one short final (MD902)c/s".

At 2137:06 the A319, at 1.25nm, was given landing clearance and at the same time the MD902, 1.5nm SE of the threshold, started to track W and then NW towards the threshold. As the two ac converged the MD902 remained in the A319's half past ten position.

At 2137:58, the A319 was 0.5nm from touchdown at an altitude of 400ft, with the MD902 at a distance of 0.4nm at 1000ft (Figure 1).

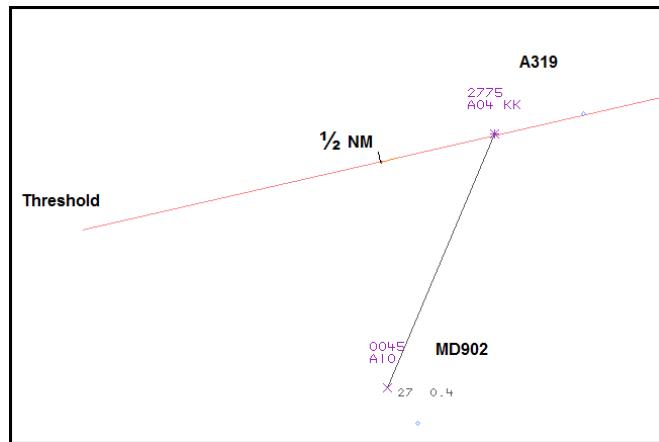


Figure 1 – MRT at 2137:58

The MD902, then started a R turn [2138:06] to position behind the landing A319, which was just crossing the airfield boundary at a range of 0.2nm from touchdown, see Figure 2 and also Figure 3, the corresponding image taken from the Gatwick SMR.

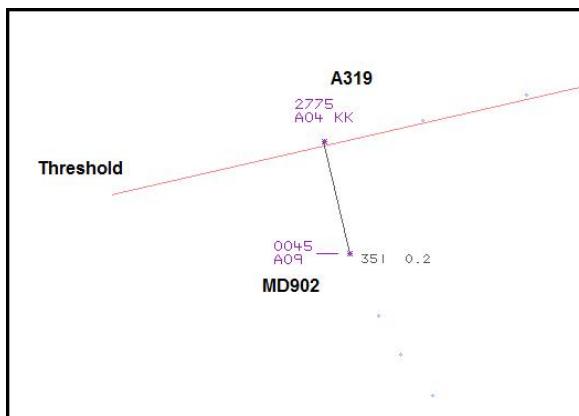


Figure 2 - MRT at 2138:06



Figure 3 – Gatwick SMR #

At 2138:14 the MD902 passed 0.3NM behind the A319 as it approached the touchdown point on Runway 26L (Figure 4).

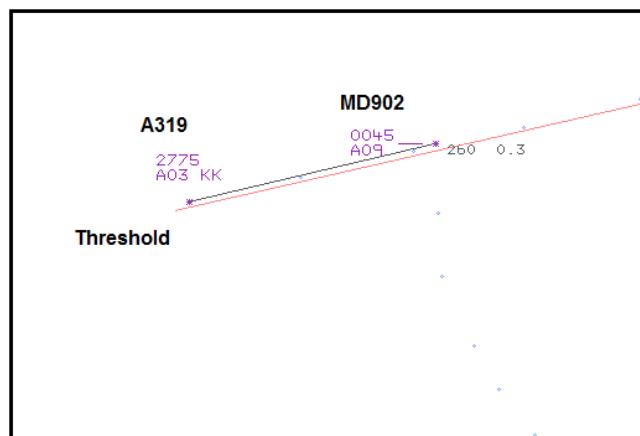


Figure 4 – MRT at 2138:14

Summary

The A319 was inbound to Gatwick IFR established on the ILS RW 26L. The pilot was informed about the MD902 operating S of the RW centreline. When the MD902, a CAT-B VFR flight, requested to cross to the N of the RW centreline it was cleared to cross at the RW26L threshold behind the A319. TWR did not update TI to the A319 about the helicopter crossing. Both ac were visual with each other. The A319 pilot, although perceiving the severity of the incident as low, reported being concerned with the helicopter crossing above if it had been necessary to carry out a go-around. Radar recordings show that the MD902 crossed 0.3nm behind the A319.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac, transcript of the relevant RT frequency, radar photographs/video recordings, reports from the controller involved and reports from the appropriate ATC and operating authorities.

The Board first considered the aspects of the Airprox from the A319 pilot's perspective. He had been informed about the presence of the helicopter both by the radar and TWR controllers during his approach. As far as he was aware, the helicopter was remaining in its southerly position 1nm to the S as he carried out his ILS approach. He was, therefore, understandably surprised to observe it routeing closer to his aircraft as he approached touchdown. Notwithstanding his surprise at seeing the helicopter in close proximity, he thought, Board members believed that his visual judgement under night conditions had perhaps given him a false impression of the helicopter being overhead relative to the A319. His subsequent filing of an Airprox was then based on what might have happened, had he carried out a missed approach..

Turning to the MD902 pilot's actions, in the Board's opinion, reinforced by the radar recordings, the pilot of the MD902 operated correctly, complying with ATC instructions to cross behind the A319.

In the ensuing discussion, Members agreed that the clearance issued by Gatwick TWR was appropriate in allowing the MD902 to cross behind the A319. The debate then turned to the ATC aspects and the lack of an update of TI to the A319 about the MD902's change of position. Most members agreed that, although this might have been helpful, it was not strictly necessary because the helicopter was always going to cross behind the A319; furthermore, the controller, rightly, would not have wished to clutter the frequency with RT during a critical stage of the A319's flight. The Board also commented that the A319 pilot could have heard the onward clearance issued to the MD902 pilot because he was on the frequency at the time; however, it was recognised that he was in a busy workload period of his approach.

The Board were unanimous in their opinion that the A319 pilot had filed an Airprox report appropriately; however, it was determined that normal procedures, safety standards and parameters pertained, resulting in the Airprox being classified as a sighting report with no risk of collision.

Considering the relevant safety barriers, the Board agreed that 'ATCO Rules and Procedures', 'Controller Action', 'Aircrew Rules and Procedures', 'Visual Sighting', 'Aircrew Action' and 'SA from ACAS' had all been relevant and effective. Although they considered that the further barrier 'SA from RT' had been reduced in effectiveness, overall, the safety barriers had been effective, which gave an Event Risk Classification score of 1.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Sighting report.

Degree of Risk: E.

ERC Score: 1.