

AIRPROX REPORT No 2013091

Date/Time: 23 Jun 2013 1235Z (Sunday)

Position: 5114N 00108E
(10nm NNW DVR)

Airspace: Lon CTA (Class: C)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: A330 Unknown

Operator: CAT Unknown

Alt/FL: FL225 NK

Weather: VMC CLOC NK

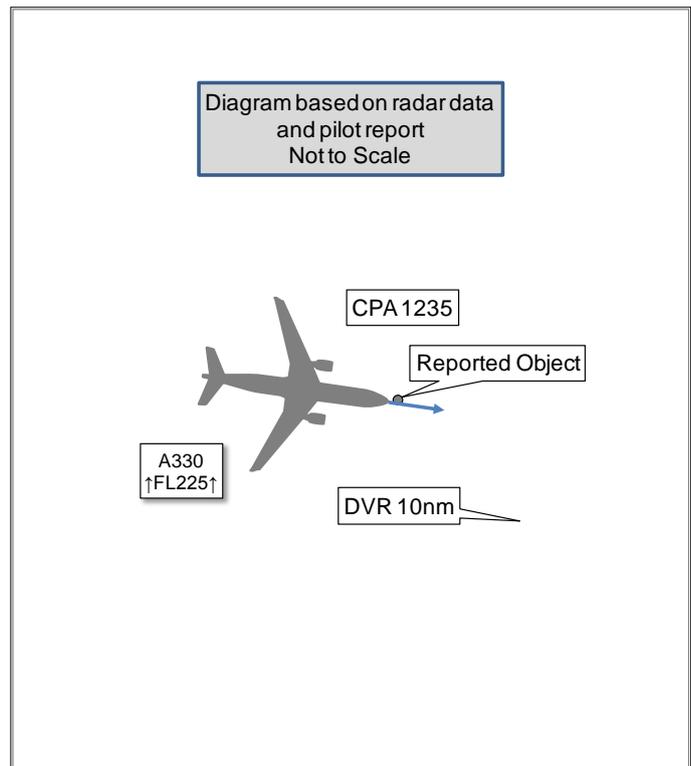
Visibility: 10nm NK

Reported Separation:

80ft V/0ft H NK

Recorded Separation:

NK



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE A330 PILOT reports in the climb at 300kt, passing FL225. He was operating under IFR in VMC in CAS. The predominantly white aircraft had the SSR transponder selected on with Modes A, C and S. The aircraft was fitted with TCAS II. The pilot was operating under IFR, in receipt of a RCS from London LAS S. He saw a blue/black object ahead which passed just below them, based on a 'very high relative speed', less than 2 sec later. Based on the time from visual contact to CPA, he assessed that the object was not an aircraft, and had a volume of about 3m³. He did not observe any TCAS alert, and ATC confirmed there was no other traffic within a 10nm radius.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

THE LONDON CONTROLLER reports [the A330] was approaching DVR eastbound passing about FL200 when [the pilot reported] a bright blue object passed underneath the aircraft in close proximity. The pilot was unable to describe it further. The met wind at time was give as 280° at 30kt.

Analysis and Investigation

CAA ATSI

At 1235:30, an eastbound A330, climbing through FL228, reported to London Control that a foreign object had passed, "*head on... just below*". The object was reported as blue in colour, of approximate size 3m³ and not more than 1nm distant from the aircraft when first sighted. The A330 was 10.3nm west-northwest of DVR at the time of the report. Prevailing winds over Kent between FL200 and FL250 were recorded as westerly at 32-35kt. Extensive review of multiple surveillance sources did not detect any object in the vicinity of the A330 as reported. Additionally no other aircraft in the vicinity made similar reports. There were no notified meteorological or Radiosonde balloon releases in the area.

NATS Ltd

An Airprox with an object was reported by the pilot of [the A330]. Swanwick Safety was advised of the Airprox report 6 weeks after the event; however, the unit had filed an observation on the encounter at the time of the event.

At 12:35:25, 23rd of June 2013, the aircraft was under the control of the LAC DVR sector, passing FL225 when the pilot made the following report:

A330 "London [A330 C/S]"

LAC "Pass your Message"

A330 "We just ah, we just um, foreign object, unable to identify. It was head on, it went just below us, on our current track. We're passing now Flight level two two eight."

LAC "Ah [A330 C/S], thank you, so what kind of size was it?"

A330 "Well, it looked blue and it didn't look like an airplane, I have no idea what it was."

LAC "[A330 C/S], okay, thanks for your information, there are no... there are no aircraft in your vicinity for about ten miles actually and I can see no unusual primary returns in your area."

A330 "Roger."

Upon receipt of the traffic information from the A330 pilot the controller passed a warning to an aircraft following the approximate profile of the A330 (see Figure 1 below). The trail pilot acknowledged the warning but did not report a sighting of the object reported by the A330 pilot.

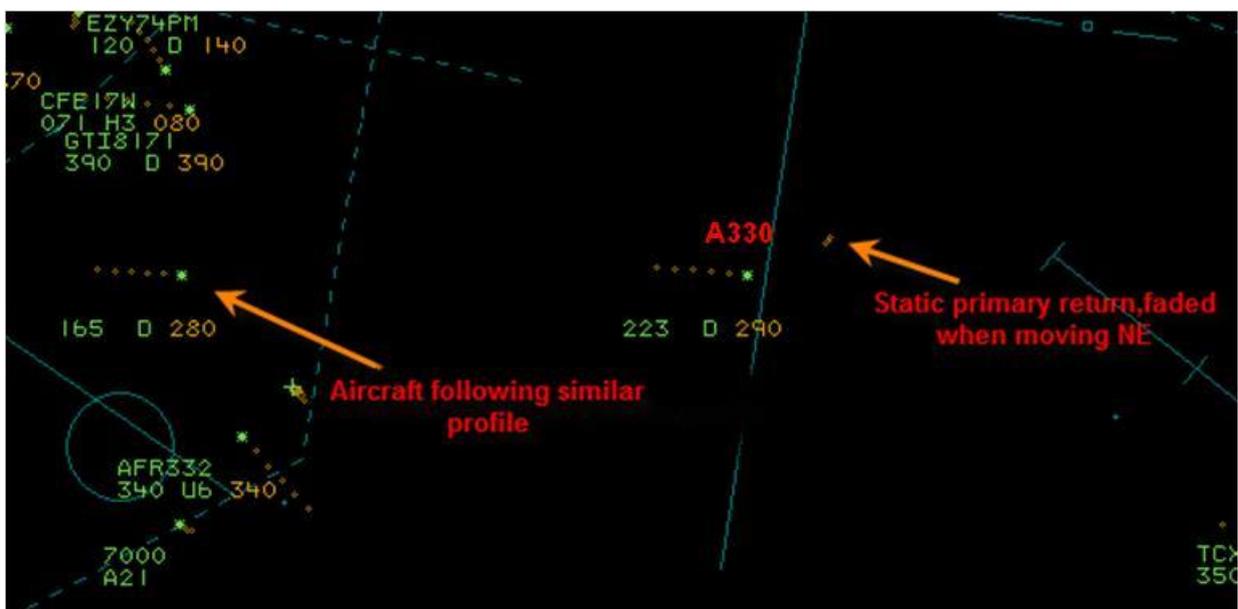


Figure 1

The investigation reviewed data from all radars capable of scanning the area around [A330 C/S] at the time of the reported event. There were no returns visible that correlated with the pilot report. Given the reported size of the object, if it had been of a significant mass, it would normally be expected to have produced a radar return given that NATS Ltd radars are calibrated to show objects with a radar reflecting cross-section of 1 square metre.

An Airprox was reported by the A330 pilot after the crew observed an object, which they perceived not to be an aircraft, in close proximity. There were no radar returns correlating with the reported object in the vicinity at the time of the event and no other supporting report from an aircraft following a similar flight profile and route behind the A330.

Summary

An Airprox was reported by an A330 pilot after an encounter with an object, reported as not being an aircraft, in the DVR area. The investigation has not been able to identify the reported object.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included a report from the A330 pilot, a transcript of the relevant RT frequency, radar video recordings, reports from the air traffic controllers involved and reports from the appropriate ATC authorities.

Members discussed the possible nature of the object as perceived by the A330 crew and, in their experience, it was felt that it may have been a toy balloon or similar. However, after some discussion it was decided that the dearth of information available regrettably rendered any meaningful finding impossible.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Sighting report.

Degree of Risk: D.

ERC Score¹: N/S

¹ Although the Event Risk Classification (ERC) trial had been formally terminated for future development at the time of the Board, for data continuity and consistency purposes, Director UKAB and the UKAB Secretariat provided a shadow assessment of ERC.