

AIRPROX REPORT No 2014152**Date/Time:** 22 Aug 2014 1208Z**Position:** 5153N 00326W
(N Pen-y-Fan)**Airspace:** Lon FIR (Class: G)**Aircraft 1** **Aircraft 2****Type:** Sea King LS6c Glider**Operator:** HQ Air (Ops) Civ Pte**Alt/FL:** 3000ft NK**Conditions:** VMC VMC**Visibility:** >10km >10km**Reported Separation:**

150ft V/200yds H 0ft V/300m H

Recorded Separation: NK**PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB**

THE SEA KING PILOT reports flying a yellow helicopter with strobes, nav lights, hover and flood lights all illuminated. The SSR transponder was selected with Modes 3A, C and S; the aircraft was not fitted with a TCAS. He was mountain training in the Brecon Beacons and was orbiting Pen-y-fan to set up for a peak approach. On rolling out from a right hand turn just under a cloud base of 3100ft, the co-pilot called a glider in the 12 o'clock. Immediately afterwards the PF saw the glider and initiated a left turn: this put the two aircraft on a reciprocal heading with a spacing of approximately 200yds. The glider pilot showed no sign of having seen the Sea King and continued to climb through the same level. The Sea King crew were monitoring UHF low-level common frequency throughout and, shortly after the incident, selected the glider common frequency but received no response.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'Medium'.

THE LS6C PILOT reports flying a white glider with conspicuity markings on the nose and wing tips. The aircraft was not fitted with a transponder but was fitted with FLARM. He reported that he saw the helicopter from several miles away whilst he was approaching the Beacons. He used the up-draught from the windward side (NW) of Pen-y-fan to gain height, and continued the flight along the Beacons with the Sea King in sight the whole time to make sure he didn't get in his way; because the Sea King appeared to be doing a search, he vacated the area as quickly as possible so as not to distract the crew. The flight paths were divergent so he perceived that no avoiding action was necessary. A short while later he could see the Sea King had vacated the area so he returned to Pen-y-fan to regain some height. He noted that to a non-glider pilot his route may have appeared unusual, he was trying to search the local area for a lift "hot spot" to transition into some mountain wave that was forecast that day. He wasn't able to contact the helicopter by radio as they both use different frequencies.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'None'.

Factual Background

The weather at Cardiff was reported as:

METAR EGFF 221150Z 30011KT 9999 FEW032 16/08 Q1013

UKAB Secretariat

Both pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance and not to fly into such proximity as to create a danger of collision¹. If the incident geometry is considered as converging then the Sea King pilot was required to give way to the glider pilot².

Comments

HQ Air Command

This incident highlights the requirement for robust lookout and appropriate actions to avoid collision. Due to the nature of SAROPS and training for rescue situations, SAR crews are often exposed to a high workload, often in demanding conditions, and the intentions of the crew are not always obvious from outside the aircraft; an appropriate division of responsibilities amongst crew members should ensure that sufficient attention is focussed on lookout. Additionally, the temporary absence of the aircraft at a particular location does not necessarily imply that the crew will not intend to return to that position. As a result, appropriate steps should be taken to maintain safe separation until well clear of an area of known operations.

Use of a common safety frequency, accessible to all users, may have allowed for greater deconfliction in this instance. A VHF safety frequency, accessible to all aviators operating below 2000ft agl, is soon to be trialled in Scotland. It is intended for this procedure to be widened to the remainder of the UK subject to the successful completion of the assessment.

BGA

See-and-avoid clearly worked in this case. This case again highlights the potential benefits of FLARM as a low cost situational awareness tool for all aircraft operating in Class G airspace.

Summary

An Airprox was reported on 22nd Aug 2014 when a Sea King and an LS6c flew into proximity at 3000ft over Pen-y-Fan in the Brecon Beacons. The Sea King was mountain training and the glider was looking to gain lift in the mountains. Neither aircraft was receiving an ATS at the time and both were operating VFR in VMC.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both aircraft, radar recordings, and reports from the appropriate operating authorities.

The Board first discussed the LS6c pilot's actions. Whilst he reported that he saw the Sea King from some distance, he still flew close enough to cause the Sea King pilot concern. The glider members of the Board explained that, when ridge soaring in the mountains, the pilot would have had limited options; once committed to one ridge he has to seek the lift there, and turning back is often not an option. Notwithstanding, the Board commented that such operations still needed to be conducted in a safe manner and not at the expense of other aviators who may not be comfortable with gliders unexpectedly flying close to them. Consideration and courtesy for other aviators applied to all, especially when committing oneself to a course of action with no other options.

As for the Sea King crew, the Board thought it likely that they were initially surprised by the sudden proximity of the glider and, having seen it relatively late, correspondingly judged the severity of incident more highly than had the glider pilot who had them in sight well before CPA. The Board

¹ Rules of the Air 2007 (as amended), Rule 8 (Avoiding aerial collisions).

² *ibid.*, Rule 9 (Converging).

noted that both aircraft were operating above a 2900ft mountain with a reported cloud base of 3100ft; accepting that there may have been variations in cloud base and coverage due to orographic effects, this may have left little room for manoeuvre by the Sea King pilot.

The fact that both pilots were on different frequencies was then discussed at length. It was noted that there are a number of different gliding frequencies, which could explain why the Sea-King pilot still couldn't raise the glider pilot when switching to what he thought was 'glider-common'. Given that his options may have been severely limited by availability of lift, it was mooted that if the glider pilot thought he would affect the Sea-King (and especially if, as he reported, he believed it was undertaking SAROPS) then he could usefully have transmitted briefly on the VHF guard frequency, to say that he was visual with the Sea King but was committed to this location and would attempt to keep clear. In this vein, the Board noted the HQ Air Command comments regarding the trial that is about to begin in Scotland using a common VHF low-level frequency available for all users; mindful that the intention should not be to lure GA aircraft away from use of LARS where available, the Board broadly welcomed this initiative's subsequent roll-out to the entire UK should the trial prove successful.

It was agreed that the root of this Airprox was one of differing perceptions: the glider pilot was visual with the Sea King at some distance and thought he had given it a wide enough berth by his standards; the Sea King pilot was suddenly confronted with the glider when he was conducting a task-intensive phase of flight and was concerned by its proximity. In looking at the cause, the Board quickly agreed that both pilots were entitled to be where they were, and that this was best described as a conflict in Class G. They assessed the risk as Category C; effective and timely actions were taken.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

<u>Cause:</u>	A conflict in Class G.
<u>Degree of Risk:</u>	C.
<u>ERC Score</u> ³ :	4.

³ 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.