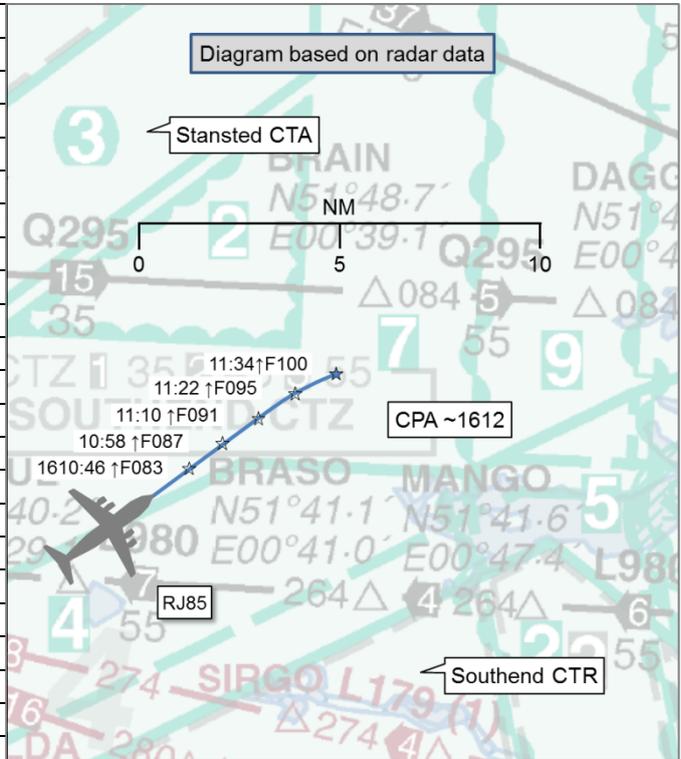


AIRPROX REPORT No 2015060

Date: 3 May 2015 Time: 1612Z Position: 5146N 00038E Location: 12nm N Southend (Sunday)

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	RJ85	Met balloon?
Operator	CAT	Unknown
Airspace	London TMA	London TMA
Class	A	A
Rules	IFR	
Service	Radar Control	None
Provider	London	
Altitude/FL	FL100	
Transponder	A, C, S	
Reported		
Colours	White	
Lighting	Nav, strobes	
Conditions	VMC	
Visibility	10nm	
Altitude/FL	FL100	
Heading	050°	
Speed	265kt	
ACAS/TAS	TCAS II	
Alert	Nil	
Separation		
Reported	100ft V/0m H	
Recorded		NK



THE RJ85 PILOT reports passing FL100 in the climb when his aircraft passed about 100ft directly below a white ‘untethered met balloon’. He stated that there was insufficient time to take avoiding action.

He assessed the risk of collision as ‘Medium’.

THE MET BALLOON: Extensive tracing action established that no met balloons were notified as being released in the area. This did not of course preclude releases by other operators which were un-notified.

THE LONDON CONTROLLER reports the RJ85 pilot reported passing close to a balloon. Nothing was seen on radar. As the aircraft had already passed the balloon and it was not visible on radar no avoiding action could be given.

Factual Background

The weather at Southend was recorded as follows:

EGMC 031620 23023G33KT 9999 FEW035 18/09 Q0997

Analysis and Investigation

CAA ATSI

The nearest met office site for launching balloons is at Shoeburyness, but these are only launched Monday to Friday – the prevailing wind also would have taken such balloons to the east.

A further possibility is a site at Cardington but this is some 40 miles to the west and, although the wind was strong, it is unlikely any launch from this site would still be at 10000ft in this vicinity. There were no met balloon launch NOTAMs in this area.

Summary

An Airprox was reported when a RJ85 and a reported Met balloon flew into proximity at about 1612 on Sunday 3rd May 2015. The RJ85 pilot was operating under IFR in VMC in receipt of a Radar Control Service from London Control.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of a report from the RJ85 pilot, radar photographs/video recordings, a report from the air traffic controller involved and a report from the appropriate ATC authority.

Members noted that investigations had been unable to ascertain the release source of the reported 'met balloon', or indeed whether the reported object was a 'met balloon' at all. In discussing the incident, it was noted that previous analysis had indicated that the stabilising altitude for a typical toy balloon was well below that reported by the RJ85 pilot and so it was unlikely to be a toy balloon. The Board were informed that there were commercial sources for 'weather balloon kits', which enabled balloon launches to high altitude, typically to the region of 100,000ft and even up to 145,000ft. These usually carried a small payload such as a camera or video recorder, with the total package amounting to a few kilograms in mass. It was also noted that CAA permission was required 28 days prior to launching such a high altitude balloon, and that this could be obtained from the CAA Airspace Utilisation Section¹.

After further discussion the Board agreed that, whatever the type of balloon, the RJ85 pilot was clearly concerned by its proximity, but that, regrettably, the paucity of information meant that no meaningful assessment of risk was possible.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: The RJ85 pilot was concerned by the proximity of the balloon.

Degree of Risk: D.

¹ <https://www.caa.co.uk/default.aspx?catid=7&pagetype=90&pageid=45>, and contactable at ausops@caa.co.uk