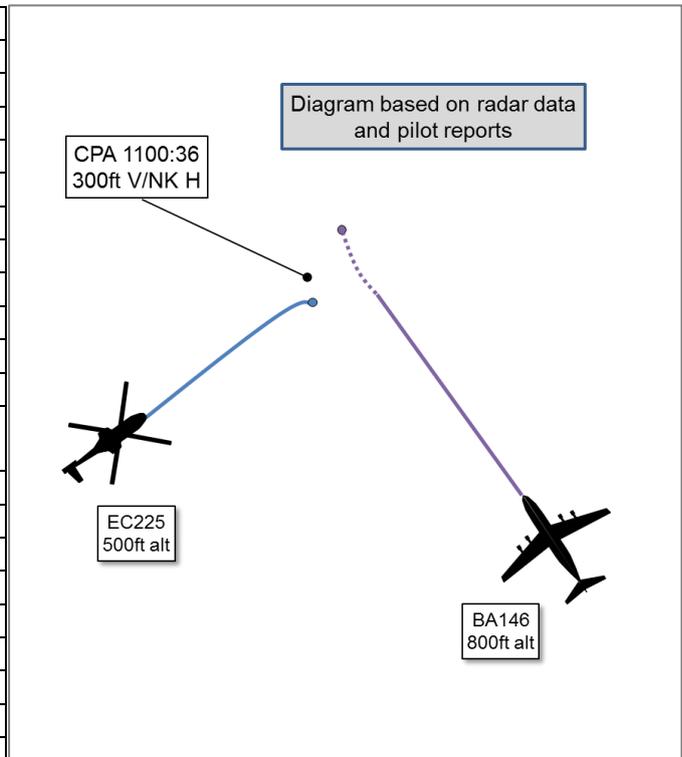


AIRPROX REPORT No 2015116

Date: 23 Jul 2015 Time: 1100Z Position: 5757N 00113E Location: North Sea

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	EC225	BA146
Operator	Civ Comm	Civ Comm
Airspace	FIR	FIR
Class	G	G
Rules	VFR	VFR
Service	None	Basic
Provider	N/A	Aberdeen
Altitude/FL	500ft	800ft
Transponder	A,C	A,C,S
Reported		
Colours	Blue/white	White/blue
Lighting	Anti collision	HISL, landing, nav
Conditions	VMC	VMC
Visibility	10K	10K
Altitude/FL	500ft	750ft
Altimeter	QNH (1008hPa)	Rad Alt
Heading	090°	NK
Speed	145kt	210kt
ACAS/TAS	Not fitted	TCAS II
Alert	N/A	None
Separation		
Reported	200ft V/0.5nm H	500ft V/1nm H
Recorded	300ft V/NK H	



THE EC225 PILOT reports being inbound to the Britannia oil platform in the North Sea. He was in receipt of an Offshore Traffic Service from Aberdeen. After descending through 1500ft he requested a frequency change and was told there was no known traffic to affect his descent. Five minutes from the rig he spotted an unknown aircraft at 1.5nm in a descending steep turn towards him at about 500ft. He turned right and descended to 300ft before then climbing back to 500ft and continuing the flight to his destination.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

THE BA146 PILOT reports performing a NOTAM'd low-level survey activity in the North Sea on north-west/south-east tracks at 750ft. At the end of a run, and in a left turn onto a south-easterly track, he noticed a helicopter. By turning right and climbing, he positioned his aircraft behind and above the helicopter.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'None'.

THE ABERDEEN CONTROLLER reports providing a Basic Service to the BA146 and an Offshore Traffic Service to the EC225. When the helicopter called for descent and a change of frequency, he informed the pilot he had no traffic to effect his descent and to continue offshore. At the time he was aware of the BA146 south-east of the helicopter some 10miles away, but it was heading south-east.

Factual Background

The Aberdeen weather at the time was:

METAR EGPD 231050Z 24010KT 9999 FEW042 16/08 Q1008 NOSIG

The BA146 NOTAM was as follows:

A) EGTG EGPX B) 1507230830 C) 1507231530
 E) MET RESEARCH FLT. BAE146 ACFT CALLSIGN METMAN OPR WI AREAS CHARLIE AND DELTA (SEE UK AIP). ACFT MAY NOT BE ABLE TO FLY SEMI-CIRCULAR FL. ACTIVITY MAINLY UNDER SWANWICK (MIL) CTL. SONDES WILL NOT BE DROPPED. ALL OPS SUBJ PRIOR ATC CLR. RTE AVBL FM 0600HR ON DAY OF FLT AT WWW.FAAM.AC.UK. 15-07-0820/AS2
 F) SFC G) FL350

Analysis and Investigation

CAA ATSI

The EC225 was en-route to the Britannia Platform, in receipt of an Offshore Traffic Service. The BA146 was flying a north-westerly track, at low-level, in receipt of a Basic Service. Prior to the Airprox, the BA146 turned in the vicinity of the Alba and Britannia platforms onto a reciprocal track (Figure 1, Area A). Another helicopter flying inbound to this area approximately 30nm ahead of the EC225 had been passed traffic information on the BA146, as had the BA146 on the helicopter. On initial contact with the Aberdeen controller, the pilot of the EC225 was advised that there was no-known traffic to affect his descent, he was instructed to report passing 1500ft and given a barometric pressure setting.



Figure 1 – 1049:45

At 1053:40, the controller terminated the service being given to the EC225 and cleared the pilot to leave the frequency, which the pilot of the EC225 acknowledged. At this time the BA146 was manoeuvring approximately 35nm ESE of the EC225 at an indicated altitude of 800ft, the EC225 was descending, passing an indicated altitude of 1800ft (Figure 2).



Figure 2 – 1053:30

At 1058:09, the BA146 had re-established on a north-westerly track back towards the area of the platforms flying at an indicated altitude of 800ft. The controller made a call to the EC225, which was now maintaining an indicated altitude of 500ft, but received no response (Figure 3).



Figure 3 – 1058:09

At 1059:50 a cursor was placed over the EC225 contact on the controller's radar display (Figure 4).



Figure 4 – 1059:50

At 1100:36, the controller measured the distance between the EC225 and BA146 contacts on their radar display. The EC225 was maintaining an indicated altitude of 500ft and the BA146 800ft with an indicated horizontal separation of 2.5nm (Figure 5).



Figure 5 – 1100:36

At 1100:44 the BA146 disappeared from radar, directly ahead of the EC225. The EC225 contact was observed making a right turn, now at an indicated altitude of 400ft (Fig 6).



Figure 6 – 1100:44

At 1101:37 the BA146 reappeared on radar now on a south-easterly track at an indicated altitude of 1000ft. The EC225 was observed making a turn to the left, with a climb to an indicated altitude of 600ft (Figure 7&8).



Figure 7 – 1101:37



Fig 8 – 1102.01

The BA146 continued on its south-easterly track and descended to an indicated altitude of 500ft. The EC225 disappeared from radar at 1104:07 having completed a 180° turn to the right within the red-dashed area on the controllers radar display.

At no time did the controller pass Traffic Information to the BA146 on the EC225. However, when this point was raised by the unit investigator, the controller stated that because he had given the BA146 pilot the offshore frequency for the Britannia Platform, he had assumed that the Britannia radio operator would pass traffic information to the BA146 pilot on the EC225 and vice-versa. The controller was relatively new to the sector and as a result of this incident was debriefed on the level of service available from the offshore radio stations, and how this scenario could have been better handled.

UKAB Secretariat

Both pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance and not to operate in such proximity to other aircraft as to create a collision hazard¹. If the incident is considered as converging then the EC225 was required to give way to the BA146².

Summary

An Airprox was reported when a EC225 and a BA146 flew into proximity at 1100 on Thursday 23rd July 2015. Both pilots were operating under VFR in VMC, the EC225 pilot not in receipt of an ATC Service and the BA146 pilot in receipt of a Basic Service from Aberdeen.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of reports from the pilots of both aircraft, transcripts of the relevant RT frequencies, radar photographs/video recordings, reports from the air traffic controllers involved and reports from the appropriate ATC and operating authorities.

The Board first considered the actions of the EC225 pilot. They noted that Aberdeen had told him that there was no traffic to affect, and they opined that the EC225 pilot would justifiably have felt some surprise when he had then sighted the BA146. Some members wondered whether this would have been reinforced by the oil platform's radio operator also telling him he had 'no known traffic' although presumably this was only based on what was scheduled to land at the rig rather than any other information of aircraft in the area. The Board wondered whether the unexpected encounter with the

¹ SERA.3205 Proximity

² SERA.3205 Right-of-way (c) (2) Converging

BA146 had therefore increased the EC225 pilot's perception of the risk given that he had seen the BA146 at 1.5nm, which ordinarily would be sufficient distance to effect a timely and effective response. They noted, however, that the EC225 pilot had felt it necessary to descend to 300ft, and that he had described the risk of collision as high.

Turning to the BA146 pilot, the Board noted that he was operating under a Basic Service, and some members questioned whether this was appropriate. The NATS member pointed out that although the radar tracks were visible in the screenshots provided, the limitations in radar cover in that area meant that tracks were intermittent and that a Traffic Service would therefore not be reliably achievable. Members then went on to examine the NOTAM that had been issued for the BA146's activities, and commented that although it was in itself very non-specific, with little of value other than to provide generic information on airspace and heights which covered most of the North Sea, important routing details were available at the website given in the NOTAM, which could have been accessed by the EC225 pilot and ATC. There was a practical issue regarding whether the EC225 pilot and ATC would have been sufficiently cued to do this, or would have simply taken the NOTAM at face-value. It was acknowledged that the nature of meteorological research work meant that mission parameters often changed at the last minute, and members wondered how pro-active the EC225 pilot would have been in searching out the additional information, whether North Sea helicopter pilots had become desensitised to the NOTAM, and how pro-active the BA146 pilot had been in providing specific routing details to the Aberdeen controller (other than the website link) either before getting airborne or in-flight, so that ATC could then inform other aircraft. Board members felt that the fact that NOTAMs could not be easily submitted in a timely manner for dynamic operations was a contributory factor to the incident because it meant that the EC225 pilot was not as well informed as he might have been had the BA146's activities been more explicitly linked to the operating area and heights of the rigs in the NOTAM itself. However, ultimately, they noted that the BA146 pilot had also spotted the EC225 in good time during his turn left, and that he had assessed there was no risk of collision as he then turned his aircraft right and climbed to position behind and above the helicopter.

The NATS representative then gave an account of the NATS internal investigation to explain what had influenced the controller's actions. The Aberdeen controller had given Traffic Information on the BA146 to another helicopter that was some 20 miles ahead of the EC225, but when the EC225 pilot requested to leave his frequency, he had not given similar Traffic Information because the BA146 was heading in a south-easterly direction away from the helicopter. When the BA146 turned back towards the EC225 some two minutes before the incident, the controller unsuccessfully attempted to call the helicopter but by then it was on a different frequency. Members acknowledged this but enquired why the controller had not given generic Traffic Information that the BA146 was operating in the area, even if it was not specifically a threat at the time the EC225 had left the frequency. They also asked why the BA146 was not told of the proximity of the helicopter; although the BA146 was in receipt of only a Basic Service, the controller was obviously aware of the potential confliction because he had interrogated the radar return and had tried to contact the EC225. The NATS member replied that the controller was relatively new to the sector and was unsure as to what service if any, was being provided by the oil platform which he assumed they were both talking to. Members felt that the lack of Traffic Information to either of the pilots were contributory factors in the incident, and also pointed out that there seemed to have been misconceptions both by the controllers and the pilots as to the level of service, if any, provided by platforms within the North Sea.

In debating the circumstances of the Airprox, the Board assessed that it had more to do with the fact that the EC225 pilot had reportedly been surprised by the sight of a large aircraft at low-level conducting a steep turn towards him, in an area that was usually the domain of oil-rig helicopters, rather than any real risk of collision *per se*. After much debate, they decided that the cause of the incident was that the EC225 pilot had been concerned by the proximity of the BA146. The discussion on risk ebbed and flowed as members noted the vastly different perceptions by the pilots; 'high' from the EC225 pilot and 'none' from the BA146 pilot. In the end, the Board concluded that both pilots had seen each other early enough that no risk of collision had existed; timely and effective actions had been taken to prevent the aircraft from colliding.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: The EC225 pilot was concerned by the proximity of the BA146.

Contributory Factor(s):

1. Aberdeen did not give traffic information to the EC225 pilot regarding the BA146.
2. Aberdeen did not give Traffic Information to the BA146 pilot despite being aware of the proximity of the EC225.
3. The NOTAM regarding the BA146 did not provide useful information.

Degree of Risk: C.