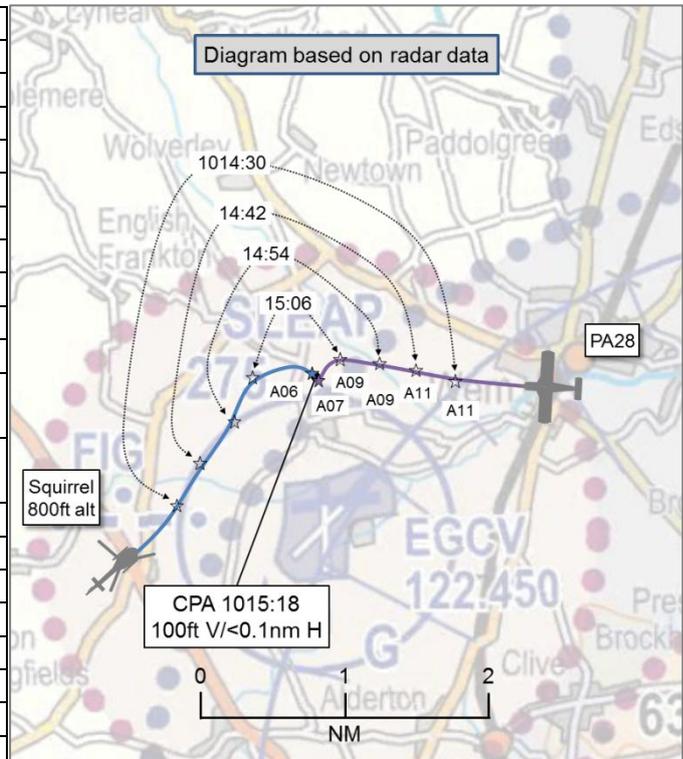


AIRPROX REPORT No 2015128

Date: 10 Aug 2015 Time: 1015Z Position: 5251N 00246W Location: Sleep ATZ

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	Squirrel (AS350)	PA28
Operator	HQ Air (Trg)	Civ Trg
Airspace	Sleep ATZ	Sleep ATZ
Class	G	G
Rules	VFR	VFR
Service	A/G	A/G
Provider	Sleep	Sleep
Altitude/FL		
Transponder	A, C, S	A, C, S
Reported		
Colours	Black/yellow	White/dark blue/red
Lighting	Landing, HISLs, LED position	Strobes
Conditions	VMC	VMC
Visibility	20km	>10km
Altitude/FL	350ft	~300ft
Altimeter	QFE (1007hPa)	QFE (NK hPa)
Heading	100°	180°
Speed	70kt	85kt
ACAS/TAS	TAS	PowerFLARM
Alert	TA	None
Separation		
Reported	~75ft V/140m H	Not seen
Recorded	100ft V/<0.1nm H	



THE SQUIRREL PILOT reports instructing a conversion sortie for a new staff member, the handling pilot (HP). The HP called Sleep A/G station to request a join from the west. Sleep A/G said they were just in the process of changing runways to RW23. He acknowledged RW23 and QFE 1004hPa; Sleep A/G then broadcast to all callsigns that the runway in use was now RW23. The HP set up at 500ft downwind to RW23 (right hand pattern for helicopters). The crew saw another Squirrel operating on the western part of the airfield and a fixed wing aircraft downwind in the circuit, east of the airfield. As the HP started a descending right hand turn to finals for RW23, the instructor was talking to him about operating at Sleep. As they flew through the approach lane for RW18, the instructor looked up to see a fixed-wing aircraft in the 11.30 position, about 100-150m away, slightly above, in a descending left hand turn. He called it to the HP who stopped the turn and increased the rate of descent to avoid the other aircraft. The fixed-wing aircraft did not appear to change its flight path and continued to line up on RW18. Once the helicopter was clear, Sleep A/G was asked to confirm which runway was active. Sleep A/G confirmed that it was RW23. The fixed-wing aircraft pilot then transmitted that he had not heard the runway change. After some consideration, the instructor transmitted to Sleep A/G that he was going to file an Airprox.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'Medium'.

THE PA28 PILOT reports instructing 'an early circuit session'. They joined the circuit on the deadside at 1300ft because of a low cloudbase, and the student reported deadside for RW18 left hand. The A/G Operator confirmed the active runway and gave information on, the instructor believed, one Squirrel operating low-level. They flew several circuits and, every time the student reported downwind, he included the runway (18) in the call. The runway was also included in every final call. After about 3 circuits, the instructor noticed a helicopter depart to the south from the right of RW18.

Shortly afterwards he heard the helicopter pilot report an Airprox. The PA28 instructor then asked the A/G Operator to confirm the runway in use and was told RW23. The instructor commented that at no time during the flight did he or the student hear the change of runway. After landing, he spoke to the A/G Operator, who confirmed that he had made a transmission advising of the change. However, the pilot of a second aircraft also telephoned to say that he had not heard the change either. The instructor stated that, because the helicopter pilot was operating non-radio, he was not aware of his position, and he did not see the helicopter in proximity.

THE SLEAP A/G OPERATOR did not file an Airprox report but in subsequent conversation with a UKAB Inspector he reported that he had twice advised circuit traffic of a change of active runway, from RW18 to RW23, due to his perception of a change of wind direction as indicated on a display in the Tower. He was satisfied that the 3 aircraft's pilots, 2 Shawbury based helicopters and a PA28, had assimilated the change of active runway, and left the Tower to change the signal square. On his return to the Tower, it was apparent from RT transmissions that an Airprox had occurred. He noted that Shawbury based helicopters operate to the west of the active runway and listen out on the Tower frequency. He reported that the other Shawbury helicopter pilot subsequently telephoned to report that he had heard the two changes of active runway calls and had moved his operating area appropriately. The A/G Operator also reported that the student in the PA28 had subsequently reported that the cockpit workload was very high shortly before the Airprox was reported. The A/G Operator noted that, in hindsight, his perception of the PA28 pilot's acknowledgement of runway change may have been part of their downwind call.

Factual Background

The weather at Shawbury was recorded as follows:

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EGOS 100950Z 17015KT 9999 FEW015 SCT023 BKN090 20/16 Q1013 WHT TEMPO 7000 SHRA WHT
EGOS 101050Z 19015KT 9999 FEW017 SCT023 20/16 Q1013 WHT TEMPO 7000 SHRA WHT
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The UK AIP entry for Sleaf states:

'4 Warnings

...

(b) Military helicopter flying training occurs within the Sleaf ATZ to the west of the active runway during weekdays from 07:00 to 16:30 summer and 08:00 to 17:30 winter, except on public holidays. The hours of military helicopter flying training do not correspond with the airfield's normal operating hours, therefore pilots must exercise caution at all times.

(c) Military helicopter flying training occurs within the ATZ to the west of the active runway up to a height of 1000 ft QFE outside of airfield operating hours, as well as during normal operating hours.

...¹

...

'3 Circuits

(a) Circuits height 1000 ft QFE.

(b) Civil fixed wing aircraft, helicopters and gliders should fly circuits to the EAST of the aerodrome during military helicopter operating hours (AD 2.20, paragraph 4b refers).

(c) Outside of military helicopter operating hours ie in the evening and during weekends fixed wing aircraft and civil helicopters should fly left hand circuits. Gliders should fly right hand circuits.²

Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

The Squirrel and PA28 pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance and not to operate in such proximity to other aircraft as to create a collision hazard³. An aircraft operated on

¹ AD 2.EGCV-5, EGCV AD 2.20 LOCAL TRAFFIC REGULATIONS, dated 5 Feb 2015.

² AD 2.EGCV-6, EGCV AD 2.22 FLIGHT PROCEDURES, dated 7 Mar 2013.

³ SERA.3205 Proximity.

or in the vicinity of an aerodrome shall conform with or avoid the pattern of traffic formed by other aircraft in operation⁴. CAP452 (Aeronautical Radio Station Operator's Guide) states:

'1 Introduction

1.1 Air Ground Communications Service (AGCS) is a service provided to pilots at specific UK aerodromes. However, it is not viewed by the UK as an Air Traffic Service because it does not include an alerting service as part of its content.

1.2 AGCS radio station operators provide traffic and weather information to pilots operating on and in the vicinity of the aerodrome. Such traffic information is based primarily on reports made by other pilots. Information provided by an AGCS radio station operator may be used to assist a pilot in making a decision; however, the safe conduct of the flight remains the pilot's responsibility.

...⁵

Comments

HQ Air Command

This incident highlights the confusion that may arise at aerodromes employing an AGCS and the responsibilities of both the A/G Operator and the crews operating at the aerodrome. This occurrence appears to have been caused by miscommunication of in-use runway to traffic within the visual circuit and the subsequent interaction with the Squirrel joining from the west. Although the A/G Operator made best efforts to inform all parties of the change of the in-use runway to RW23, this was missed by the crew of the PA28 who were operating to RW18. As a result, the flight path of the Squirrel joining right-hand downwind for RW23 conflicted with the PA28, on final approach for RW18. It was questioned whether the decision to change the in-use runway was within the remit of an AGCS; however, the last remaining barrier of lookout resulted in the Squirrel crew taking sufficient avoiding action to prevent a more serious incident from taking place.

Summary

An Airprox was reported when a Squirrel helicopter and a PA28 flew into proximity at 1015 on Monday 10th August 2015. Both pilots were operating under VFR in VMC, in communication with the Sleep A/G Operator.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of reports from the pilots of both aircraft, radar photographs/video recordings and a telephone report from the A/G Operator.

Members first considered the role of the A/G Operator and commented that there appeared to be a conflict between an A/G Operator providing information, as per CAP452, and, as in this event, directing a runway change. Members agreed that the runway change was done for the correct reasons, but wondered what the regulatory situation was with regard to the apparent conflict. Some members felt that because an A/G Operator could not direct traffic and could only advise the most suitable runway given the wind direction, it was therefore the joining helicopter pilot's responsibility to integrate with existing circuit traffic, whichever runway that traffic happened to be using. If that was true then they opined that it could be said that the helicopter pilot flew into conflict with the PA28. Other members strongly disagreed, and argued that whatever the status of the A/G Operator's declaration of active runway, it was common sense and good airmanship that all aircraft conform to the declared active runway if possible. After much debate, it was agreed that a pilot operating at an airfield with an A/G Service was free to make an approach to any landing surface he chose, but that that freedom carried with it the responsibility to ensure that he and other airfield users were not unnecessarily endangered. In this case, the Squirrel pilot had to ensure he would not fly into conflict with other traffic, which may not be making an approach to the active runway, but, equally, the PA28 pilot had to ensure that his flight was conducted without endangering others in the circuit.

⁴ SERA.3225 Operation on and in the Vicinity of an Aerodrome.

⁵ Chapter 4 (Air Ground Communication Service), dated March 2013.

The Board felt that the Squirrel pilot had not unreasonably assumed that the PA28 was downwind left-hand for RW23 when he saw it 'to the east'. It was then unfortunate that he had lost sight of it until shortly before CPA, and that he had not assimilated the PA28 pilot's reported circuit calls which included his intended runway, RW18. Some members wondered if the Squirrel pilot, trained and operating mainly in a military environment, was aware of the nuances of responsibility and freedom of action permissible under an A/G Service. Military and ex-military members expressed their belief that a change of runway would be considered as mandatory by military aircrew, and that the expectation would be for all traffic to make their approaches to the declared active runway. It was agreed that this is not the case with an A/G Service, and that this information could usefully be disseminated to the military aviation community if it was not already well understood.

Equally, the PA28 instructor had a responsibility not to fly into conflict with the Squirrel, whose pilot was making an entirely understandable approach to RW23. Again, the Board thought it was unfortunate that the PA28 instructor did not assimilate either the A/G Operator's change of runway calls or the Squirrel pilots joining calls for RW23.

Board members felt that the root of this incident lay in the requirement for all pilots operating under an A/G Service to listen carefully to the transmissions of all other operators in order to safely conduct their flight; this was the primary lesson to be drawn from the event. Given the responsibilities of each pilot, and the unfortunate lapses by both in assimilating information, the Board agreed, after much discussion, that the cause of the incident had been that the Squirrel and PA28 pilots had flown into conflict during a runway change. Members wondered whether the Squirrel pilot had had time to increase separation with his avoiding manoeuvre, especially because the PA28 pilot had evidently not seen the Squirrel before CPA. The Board agreed that, in stopping his turn and increasing his rate of descent, he had increased separation to some degree, but that safety margins had been much reduced below the normal.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: The Squirrel and PA28 pilots flew into conflict during a runway change.

Degree of Risk: B.