



AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

April 2019

AIRPROX OF THE MONTH



KEITH WILSON/SFB PHOTOGRAPHIC

It's all about focus

Aviate, Navigate, Communicate – an unexpected technical problem might not in reality be too bad, but getting distracted by it might be

As a Piper Twin Comanche was climbing out of Blackbushe the passenger-side door sprang open when both catches failed, unsurprisingly causing a certain amount of alarm in the cockpit. Sensibly, the pilot and passenger decided to return to land as soon as possible.

They ended up flying a crosswind join into the visual circuit but, much distracted by the open door, the pilot allowed the aircraft to descend 300ft or so, nearing the single-engine circuit height. Unfortunately, a PA-28 was approaching downwind at the same time following a touch-and-go.

The Comanche pilot had been given Traffic Information on the PA-28 but, distracted by the door issue, lost situational awareness and sight of the

PA-28 as he turned downwind. For his part, an instructor in the PA-28 heard the Comanche returning with a door problem, but also heard it being given traffic information about him.

Expecting the Comanche to integrate and avoid him, the PA-28 pilot continued his circuit believing that the Comanche's door problem was not a significant issue that required any change to his own intentions.

Unfortunately, it seems the student in the PA-28 compounded the Comanche pilot's inattention to height by also inadvertently climbing above the single-engine circuit height. Both aircraft were now at much the same height as they started the downwind leg and the PA-28 student suddenly saw the Comanche about 50ft above and descending.

A couple of things spring to mind regarding this Category A incident (**Airprox 2018273**). Board members said that although an open door might sound alarming, the airflow meant that it wouldn't open fully and so it shouldn't be that much of an issue. The important things are not to become distracted from the 'Aviate' task (which intrinsically includes lookout and attention to height), and not to be afraid to communicate clearly any emergency situations in plain language.

In this incident the Comanche pilot was reluctant to declare a PAN, even when prompted by the AFISO. Had he done so, the PA-28 pilot would likely have afforded him clear priority during his join and would probably even have extended upwind to allow the Comanche plenty of room to join and land without getting in his way.

Pilots might sometimes be a little too proud to declare emergencies, but there's no shame in doing so. Nobody is going to admonish a pilot who seeks help by declaring a PAN and asks for priority as they deal with a problem, and it immeasurably increases the situational awareness of all others on frequency so that they can either get out of the way or at least modify their intentions accordingly.

For the PA-28 instructor, the lesson is probably not to assume that other pilots are as competent, current or coping as well as he might. Hearing that the Comanche was returning with a door problem, and although he probably thought nothing of this himself, the other aircraft commander might not be as unflustered and, as in this case, might make a few errors under pressure. It's a fine line, but it might have been wise to just extend upwind anyway and to have defensively avoided the Comanche with the 'minor' problem.

Full details of the incidents can be found at the links within this note or at airproxboard.org.uk in the 'Airprox Reports and Analysis' section within the appropriate year and then in the 'Individual Airprox reports' tab.

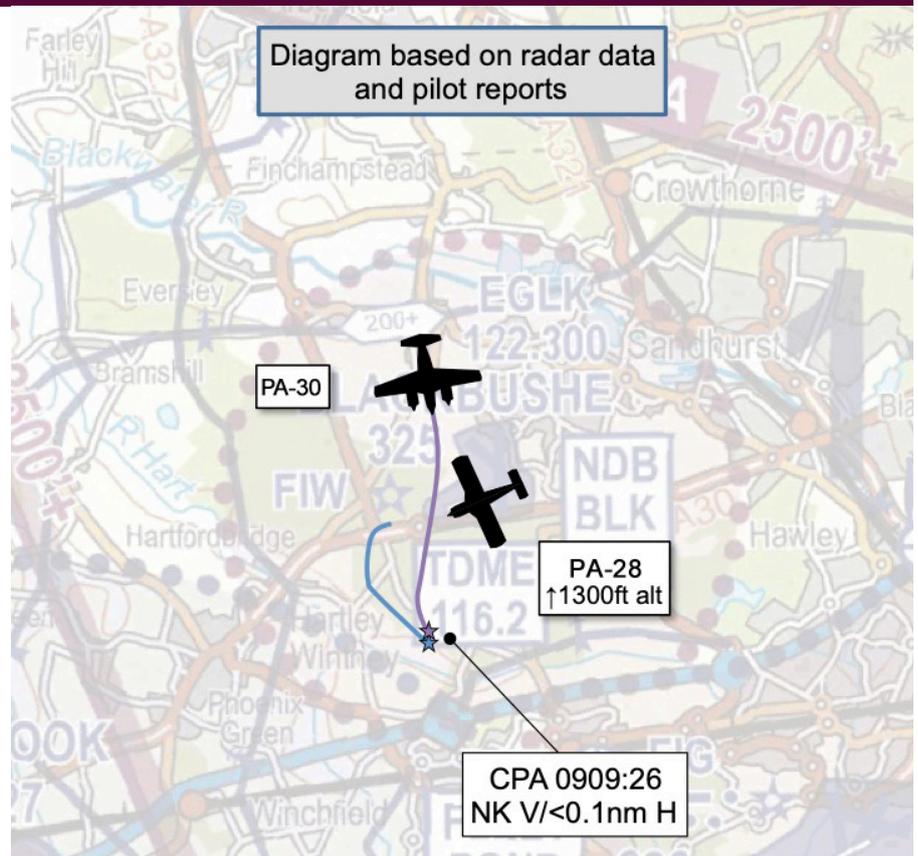
UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP

After a busy start to the year, March appears to have been quieter with the board reviewing 27 Airprox at its monthly meeting; eight were drone/sUAS incidents and 19 aircraft-to-aircraft. Three of the latter were assessed as risk-bearing (two were Category A, where providence played a major part, and one was Category B, where safety was much reduced through serendipity, misjudgement, inaction, or late sighting).

Overall, the numbers of aircraft-to-aircraft incidents for 2019 are now tracking the expected five-year average (25 actual vs 25 expected), but sUAS incidents are again well above expectations (18 actual vs nine expected).

This month's predominant theme again involved poor procedures, procedures not being followed, or poor tactical planning and execution by pilots (ten cases).

These incidents concerned, inter alia, lack of awareness of NOTAM; flying too close to airfields or through their approach path without talking to ATC; not flying the published circuit track or height; not complying with instructions; and ambiguous information that may



have mislead pilots in their planning and execution of their flight.

The usual crop of late- and non-sightings were evident in seven incidents, while inaction on sighting another aircraft was evident in three Airprox, and distraction from lookout featured in three others.

Controllership and inaccurate or insufficient Traffic Information was evident in six incidents; although recognising that the provision of Traffic Information is highly dependent on controller workload, had the pilots received timely information then it's likely they would have been able to avoid the associated conflicts.

One incident where a pair of military Hawk aircraft encountered a glider caused much discussion in the Board meeting about the procedures for the use (or not) of FLARM information by ATC. Although the incident occurred well above the ATZ/MATZ, the ATC unit had a FLARM display in the tower although this was being fed from the Glidernet website.

Latency in the Glidernet feed is a well-known issue, and for that reason controllers are rightly limited in what they can use the information for. In essence, they can refer to the display to provide corroborating information to what they see on their radar, but are not permitted to routinely use the information in its own right for detailed traffic information and avoidance purposes unless they have first seen a primary return from the glider.

In this incident, there was no primary return on the radar and so, although situational awareness might have been available in the tower, the controller was not himself able to access it for procedural reasons. While their procedures make a certain amount of sense for feeds with internet latency, things have moved on and, if FLARM, ADS-B or similar system receivers are installed that directly feed the displays, latency is much less of an issue.

Accepting that there are regulatory issues with using such unassured data, the Board felt that the time was right for the CAA and MAA to look again at how controllers might incorporate alternative sources of (unassured) GPS-based traffic information into their procedures, especially when in some circumstances this information may in fact be more accurate and available than radar-derived information.

The Board made a recommendation about this as below.

2018266

The CAA and MAA review the regulations and procedures pertaining to ATC use of 'unassured data' such as FLARM for the provision of Traffic Information. ■

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