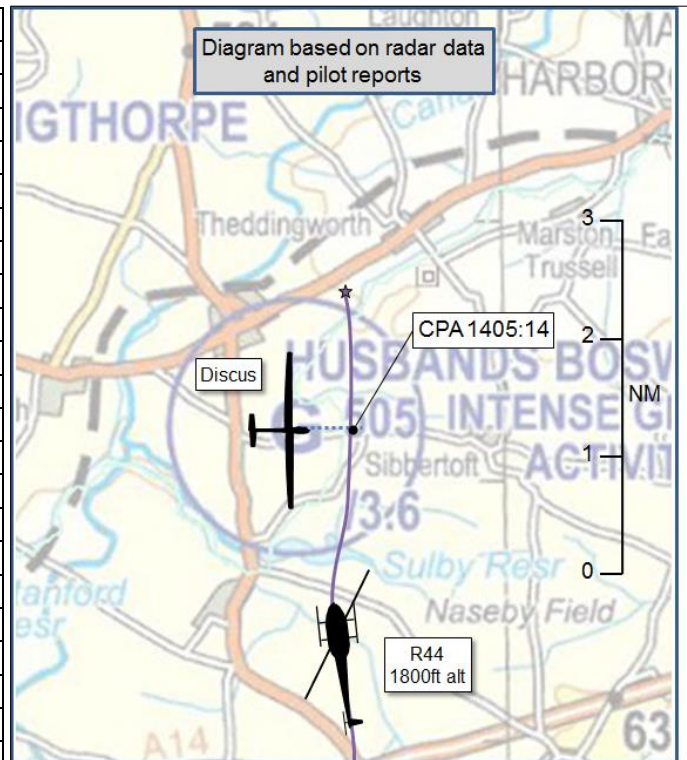


AIRPROX REPORT No 2016074

Date: 07 May 2016 Time: 1405Z Position: 5226N 00102W Location: Husbands Bosworth Airfield

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	Discus	R44
Operator	Civ Trg	Civ Pte
Airspace	London FIR	London FIR
Class	G	G
Rules	VFR	VFR
Service	None	None
Provider	N/A	Leicester
Altitude/FL	1200ft agl	1800ft amsl
Transponder	Not Fitted	On/C
Reported		
Colours	White	Green, Silver
Lighting	None	Strobe, Nav
Conditions	VMC	Choose an item.
Visibility	10km	3nm
Altitude/FL	800ft	1800ft
Altimeter	QFE	QNH (1007hPa)
Heading	090°	350°
Speed	70kt	105kt
ACAS/TAS	Not fitted	Not fitted
Alert	N/A	N/A
Separation		
Reported	0ft V/50m H	750ft V/750m H
Recorded	NK	



THE DISCUS PILOT reports that the R44 crossed the active airfield at about 800ft in level flight, and that the gliding activity was subject to a gliding NOTAM. He recalls that he was close enough to see the R44 pilot flinch and make a slight turn. He was climbing on the winch and if he had not looked for the other traffic he believes that either he would have collided with the R44, or the R44 would have flown into the winch cable. He released the winch cable as soon as possible to prevent the R44 flying into it.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

THE R44 PILOT reports that he was in poor visibility as he passed 1.5nm due East of Husbands Bosworth airfield. He saw a glider taking off from the airfield, which was below and behind him. He made no report since he did not believe it represented an Airprox. However, if visibility had been better, he would have tracked further east of the glider site. He was surprised that the gliders were operating.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'None'.

Factual Background

The weather at Coventry was recorded as follows:

METAR EGBE 071220Z 05006KT 350V120 6000 NSC 21/12 Q1007

Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

The Discus and R44 pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance and not to operate in such proximity to other aircraft as to create a collision hazard¹. An aircraft operated on or in the vicinity of an aerodrome shall conform with or avoid the pattern of traffic formed by other aircraft in operation².

Comments

BGA

Another Airprox that illustrates the very serious hazards of flying close to active winch launch sites, and of making assumptions about the activity state of airfields rather than positively checking.

Summary

An Airprox was reported when a Discus and a R44 flew into proximity at 1405 on Saturday 7th May 2016. Both pilots were operating under VFR in VMC; neither pilot was in receipt of a Service.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of reports from the pilots of both aircraft and radar video recordings.

The Board first noted the disparity between the reported heights from the Discus and R44 pilots. However, referring to the radar recording showed the R44 being at 1800ft AMSL as it transited through the area, and the height profile from the Discus flight log showed its release point being at about 1200ft AGL (approximately 1700ft AMSL) which would correspond with them being at effectively the same height during the incident. The Board believed that the disparity in the Discus pilot's report was probably due to his being startled during the launch and, having to react quickly to the situation, underestimating the winch release height. The gliding Board member said he had spoken with the Discus pilot and observers on the ground had corroborated the height; however, Board members reiterated the difficulty in trying to assess aircraft height from the ground without any references, and that this was why recorded data was so vital.

The gliding Board member pointed out that there was a recurring theme regarding the weather conditions in which gliders will launch compared to other aviators' assumptions about likely levels of activity. He said that it was often possible to launch gliders into the glider circuit in much worse weather conditions than expected by operators of powered aircraft and that; therefore, it should never be assumed that gliders will not be operating from a notified glider site. It was suggested that the BGA could usefully reinforce education on glider operations through an article in relevant flight magazines to reflect not only weather minima but also the importance of glider launch teams carrying out a thorough pre-launch lookout. The gliding Board member said he would endeavour to produce such an article.

Turning to the specific incident, the gliding member went on to point out that the glider site in this instance had a Police helicopter based to the south of the site. He wondered whether the transiting R44 helicopter noise could have been mistaken for a Police helicopter operating in the area, and whether the glider pilot and launch crew may have subconsciously disregarded the transiting helicopter as normal operations.

¹ SERA.3205 Proximity.

² SERA.3225 Operation on and in the Vicinity of an Aerodrome.

As for the R44 pilot, it was clear to the Board that he had made a false assumption that the site would be inactive, and that the glider that he had subsequently seen below and behind him was probably the Discus after its pilot had manoeuvred to avoid him. As emphasised by the gliding member, the message was clear; always assume that gliding sites are active, and avoid them by a good margin up to the promulgated winch-launch height (in this case 3600ft as annotated on the CAA VFR chart by the symbol /3.6). The consequences of hitting either the launching glider, or even a released cable, were obvious.

The Board then discussed the cause and risk of the Airprox. They quickly agreed that the cause was that the R44 pilot had flown through a promulgated and active glider site and into conflict with the Discus. Turning to the risk, members agreed that the glider pilot and the launch team had all described a situation where separation had been reduced to the point where there had been a serious risk of collision. Although the Discus pilot had released the cable and actively tried to prevent a collision, members thought that despite his endeavours, this had been too late to materially affect their separation and therefore chance had played a major part in preventing the aircraft colliding. As a result, the Board assessed the risk as Category A.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: The R44 pilot flew through a promulgated and active glider site and into conflict with the Discus.

Degree of Risk: A.