

AIRPROX REPORT No 2014044

Date/Time: 17 Apr 2014 1316Z

Position: 5207N 00056E
(Wattisham
– elevation 284ft)

Airspace: Wattisham ATZ (Class: G)

Aircraft 1 Aircraft 2

Type: Sea King C172

Operator: HQ Air (Trg) Civ Pte

Alt/FL: 1100ft 1500ft
QFE (1007hPa) NK

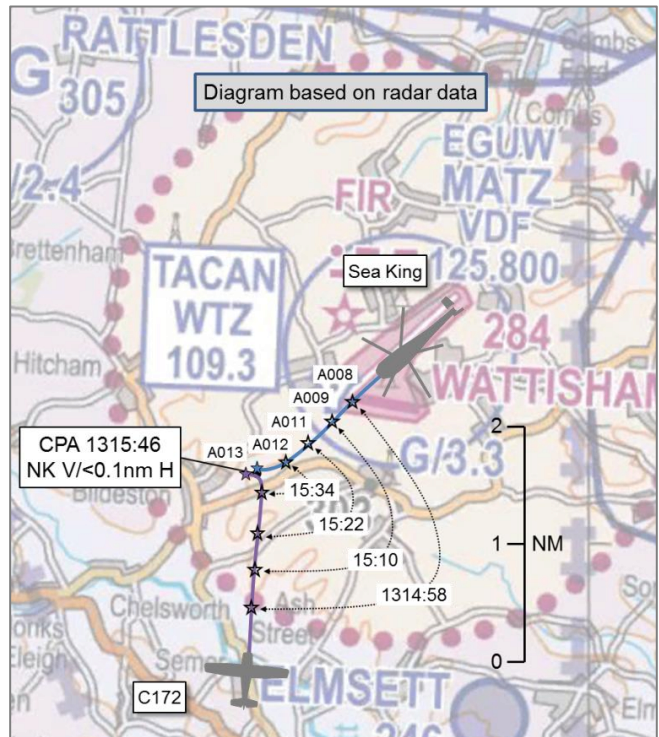
Conditions: VMC VMC

Visibility: 27km >10km

Reported Separation:

100ft V/100m H 400ft V/800ft H

Recorded Separation: NK V/<0.1nm H



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE SEA KING PILOT reports conducting a general handling sortie at Wattisham Airfield. The yellow helicopter had navigation and strobe lights selected on, as was the SSR transponder with Modes A, C and S. The aircraft was not fitted with a TAS or ACAS. The pilot was operating under VFR, in VMC, 2000ft below cloudbase, and was in receipt of an A/G Service from Wattisham Radio, he thought. A simulated computer failure was being conducted with the crewman also in the cockpit. The Sea King pilot was at 1000ft, on the centreline of RW23, and about to turn downwind when the RHS pilot saw a blue and white Cessna 172 about 100ft above and slightly to the left at a range of 100m. The Sea King pilot made a level avoiding turn to the right, and the Cessna pilot was seen to pitch nose-up into a hard left turn at the same time. The Sea King pilot had not heard any radio calls from the Cessna pilot who, when challenged on the Wattisham APP VHF frequency, did not respond.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'Low'.

THE C172 PILOT reports returning to his home airfield to the north of Wattisham. The blue-and-white aircraft had strobe lights selected on, as was the SSR transponder with Modes A and C¹. The aircraft was not fitted with a TAS or ACAS. The pilot was operating under VFR, in VMC, listening out on Wattisham Radio but not in receipt of an ATS. The pilot had unexpectedly been urgently required to transit to another local airfield. He stated that on the way to the local airfield there was no radar cover so he radioed his intentions to land at that airfield and was made aware of a Sea King operating in the [Wattisham] overhead. On subsequently departing the local airfield, he radioed Wattisham on the ground without reply and made a further call when airborne, again without reply. He stated his routeing intentions on the RT as through 'the narrow gap between Rattlesden and the Wattisham MATZ'. As he approached what he thought was the gap he became aware of a yellow Sea King helicopter on a similar heading, 400ft below and 800ft to the right. He had sufficient time to observe the helicopter maintain its height and heading; he carried out a steep turn to the left 'to maximise his profile' and give sufficient separation. The pilot stated that he did not believe either aircraft was in danger but conceded that 'it was close to the acceptable limit for safe separation'.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'None'.

¹ The radar replay return did not display Mode C derived altitude information.

Factual Background

The weather at Wattisham was recorded as follows:

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METAR EGUW 171250Z AUTO 29013KT 9999 FEW034/// SCT150/// 15/06 Q1017
METAR EGUW 171350Z AUTO 29015KT 9999 SCT032/// 14/07 Q1017
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Wattisham ATZ is bounded by a circle of 2.5nm radius centred on N52 07 38.22 E000 57 22.55, from surface to 2000ft aal. The ATZ is active H24 with airfield hours of operation 0830 - 1830L, Mon - Fri².

Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

Both pilots shared an equal responsibility to avoid collision and not to fly into such proximity to another aircraft as to create a danger of collision³. The C172 pilot was required to conform to the pattern of traffic formed by other aircraft intending to land at Wattisham or keep clear of the airspace in which the pattern was formed⁴. The C172 pilot was required to communicate his position and height to the A/G Operator on entering the ATZ⁵. It was established in subsequent enquiries that, in anticipation of the Bank Holiday Weekend, Wattisham ATC had closed at 1145, and that the Fire Section were maintaining a listening watch on the TWR frequency.

Comments

HQ Air Command

Notwithstanding what appears to be a slight navigational error from the C172 pilot, it is encouraging that the pilots of both aircraft saw each other, albeit at a late stage, and immediately took action to resolve the conflict. This incident could perhaps have been avoided if the C172 pilot, given the cloudbase at the time, had elected to transit above the Wattisham ATZ.

Summary

An Airprox was reported when a Sea King and a Cessna 172 flew into proximity near Wattisham airfield at about 1316 on Thursday 17th April 2014. Both pilots were operating under VFR, in VMC, the Sea King pilot in communication with 'Wattisham Radio' A/G Operator and the Cessna 172 pilot not in receipt of an ATS.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of reports from the pilots of both aircraft and a report from the appropriate operating authority.

The Board established that although the incident occurred during the promulgated hours of operation of Wattisham ATC, the ATSU had in fact been stood down, and the TWR frequency was manned only as a listening watch by the Fire Section. It was considered likely that the C172 pilot had been in contact with the Fire Section on his initial transit outbound but the Board was unable to establish why he could not establish RT contact on the way back and could not be raised by the Sea King crew after the incident; they postulated that he may have had a different frequency selected at the time. Notwithstanding, Wattisham ATZ was promulgated as active H24, and it was the C172 pilot's responsibility to remain outside the ATZ until in 2-way RT contact. The Board noted that he could equally well have avoided the ATZ either vertically or horizontally, and expressed surprise that a local airspace user was not able to navigate around a local ATZ.

² UK MIL AIP, AD 2 – EGUW – 1 – 6, dated 12 Dec 13.

³ Rules of the Air 2007 (as amended), Rule 8 (Avoiding aerial collisions) and as reflected in Military Flying Regulations.

⁴ *ibid.*, Rule 12 (Flight in the vicinity of an aerodrome).

⁵ *ibid.*, Rule 45 (Flights within aerodrome traffic zones).

The Sea King pilot was established in the visual circuit, was conducting a practice emergency, and fortuitously saw the approaching C172, albeit at a late stage. The Board commended him for his actions and noted that this Airprox provided a salutary reminder that all-round lookout was essential even when within the 'protected' area of an ATZ. Although the regulated airspace of an ATZ should provide a degree of protection for aircraft in the visual circuit, such protection was only achieved against traffic whose pilots were aware of the extent of the ATZ and of their own position. Most ATZs, this one included, were established in Class G airspace, and the underlying tenet of 'see-and-avoid' remained fundamental within them in order to mitigate unexpected incursions.

Considering the cause, the Board decided that the C172 pilot had flown through the active ATZ and into conflict with the Sea King which was turning downwind in the visual circuit. As for risk, after some debate, the Board decided that, notwithstanding the pilots' own assessments, the lateness of the sightings and the reported ranges indicated that safety margins had been much reduced below the norm.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

<u>Cause:</u>	The C172 pilot flew through a promulgated and active ATZ and into conflict with the Sea King in the visual circuit.
<u>Degree of Risk:</u>	B
<u>ERC Score⁶:</u>	4

⁶ Although the Event Risk Classification (ERC) trial had been formally terminated for future development at the time of the Board, for data continuity and consistency purposes, Director UKAB and the UKAB Secretariat provided a shadow assessment of ERC.