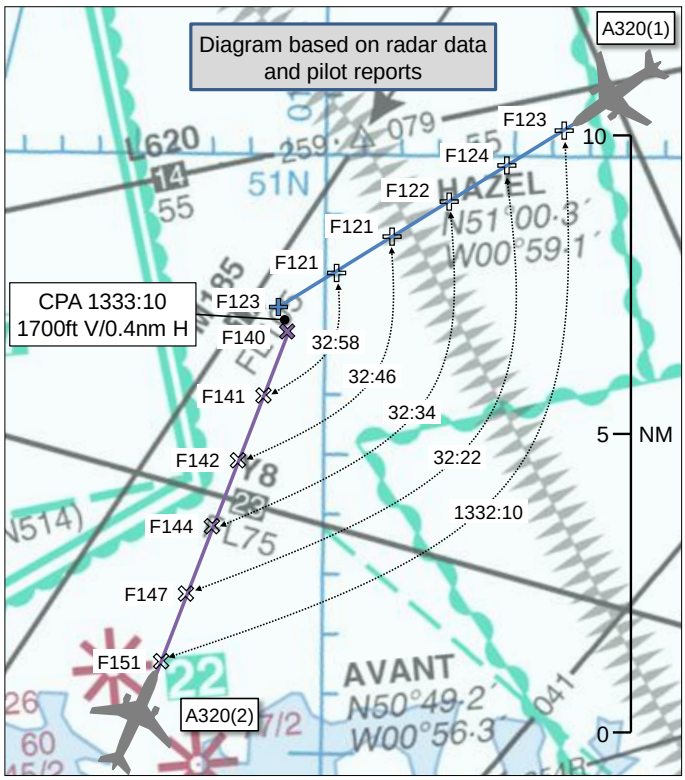
AIRPROX REPORT No 2013132

Date/Time: 3 Sep 2013 1333Z

Position: 5057N 00101W (4nm SW HAZEL)

Airspace: LTMA (*Class*: A)

	Reporting Ac	*Reported Ac*
Type:	A320(1)	A320(2)
Operator:	CAT	CAT
Alt/FL:	FL120	NK
Weather:	VMC CAVOK	NK
Visibility:	*>10km*	NK
Reported Separation:	2000ft V/5nm H	NK
Recorded Separation:	2100ft V/3.1nm H 1700ft V/0.4nm H	



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE A320(1) PILOT reports operating an IFR CAT flight. Strobes, beacon and navigation lights were illuminated; SSR Modes C and S were selected. He was monitoring the progress of a B767, which was descending towards his aircraft as he was climbing to FL150. London Control issued an immediate avoiding action descent to FL120 as he was passing FL122. He disconnected the Autopilot and descended. He did not receive a TCAS alert. The B767 was instructed to stop its descent at FL140 [UKAB Note 1].

He assessed the risk of collision as 'Medium'.

[UKAB Note 1: The A320(1) pilot believed, erroneously, that the other involved traffic was a B767 (which was in fact a B777) that was descending to FL110 inbound to OCKHAM (OCK).[1] In fact, the ATC avoiding action was against another A320(2) as reported below.]

THE A320(2) PILOT reports that he did not remember any kind of incident on the date of the Airprox.

Factual Background

As coordinated tracks within the LTMA, the required minimum separation between A320(1) and A320(2) was 1000ft and/or 3nm.

Analysis and Investigation

CAA ATSI

An Airprox was reported by the pilot of A320(1) following the issuance of avoiding action to him by the LTC Southwest[2] controller against A320(2). A320(1) had departed LGW for an IFR flight and was in receipt of a Radar Control Service from LTC Southwest on 134.125MHz; A320(2)

[1] His closest point of approach to this non-involved aircraft was in fact 3.7nm and 2400ft.
[2] LTC Ockham, WILLO and Southwest Departures combined.

was operating an IFR flight inbound to London Heathrow (LHR) and was in receipt of a Radar Control Service also from LTC Southwest.

The default surveillance setting for LTC Southwest is Swanwick Multi Radar Tracking (MRT) and all references to radar data in this report are with reference to MRT. No report was received from the LTC Southwest controller. The unit only became aware that an Airprox had been filed on 25 September 2013.

ATSI had access to both pilot reports, recorded area surveillance and transcription of the LTC Southwest frequency.

A320(1) was on a heading of 239° climbing to FL100 against a B777 descending FL110 inbound to OCK. [The B777 that the pilot of A320(1) incorrectly transposed into the narrative of his Airprox report.]. At the same time, A320(2) was inbound to HAZEL for an OCK arrival at LHR, descending FL130, and had been instructed to reduce speed to 220kt when level.

At 1330:39, a change of the LTC Southwest controller took place. The controller's second transmission, at 1330:45, was to instruct the A320(1) pilot to climb to FL150. [Note: the controller's Flight Progress Strips were not available to the investigation; however, A320(2)'s tabular data block was clearly visible on the controller's situation display; SLAVE mode].

There were constant transmissions on frequency 134.125MHz for the next 20-25sec before a pause of 15sec. Then, at 1331:58, the following transmissions took place:

Controller "[A320(1) C/S] turn, correction [A320(1) C/S] stop climb please flight level 120 avoiding action"
A320(1) "Stop climb 120 [A320(1) C/S]"
Controller "[A320(2) C/S] stop your descent please flight level 140"
A320(2) "140 stop the descent [A320(2) C/S]".

When the controller instructed the A320(1) pilot to stop climb the aircraft was passing FL118 with a rate of climb of 2400fpm. A320(2) was in A320(1)'s 11 o'clock, range 13.8nm, descending through FL156.

A320(1) reached FL125 before descending back to FL120. By 1332:36, A320(2) was levelling at the (autopilot) selected flight level of FL140 and A320(1) was reaching the (autopilot) selected flight level of FL120. There was no loss of standard separation.

At 1332:36, the controller informed the A320(1) pilot that the traffic against which his climb had been stopped was now at FL140 and he was instructed to climb to FL130. The two aircrafts' tracks crossed shortly afterwards with more than standard separation.

Summary

An Airprox was reported by the pilot of A320(1) when he was instructed to stop his climb at FL120, the level he was passing, despite having previously been cleared to climb to FL150. In response, and whilst attempting to comply with this late call, A320(1) climbed 500ft above the stop level before returning to FL120. The LTC Southwest controller, having just taken over the sector, had incorrectly issued the pilot of A320(1) with a climb to FL150 which would have placed him in conflict with A320(2) descending to FL130. However, the error was assimilated in a timely manner and corrective action was taken; standard separation minima were maintained.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both aircraft, transcripts of the relevant RT frequency, radar video recordings and reports from the appropriate ATC and operating authorities.

Although the pilot of A320(1) had filed an Airprox against different aircraft, it was clear to the Board that the incident had occurred between A320(1) and A320(2). The Board quickly decided that the LTC SW Radar controller had initially overlooked the presence of A320(2), which was descending to FL130, when clearing the A320(1) pilot to climb through its level to FL150. However, the Board noted that the controller soon spotted the error and quickly resolved the situation before standard separation had been eroded. Indeed, the Board considered that the resulting avoiding action taken by the controller should be commended in that, by stopping the A320(2) pilot's descent at FL140 and levelling the A320(1) at FL120, the controller had built in extra height separation to allow for the fact that the late re-clearance for A320(1) would likely cause it to temporarily balloon above FL120 before being able to descend back down.

The Board considered that, although the incident met the criteria for reporting, by analysis it was determined that normal procedures, safety standards and parameters pertained; accordingly, they allocated the Risk as E.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: The LTC SW controller incorrectly instructed the A320(1) pilot to climb; the conflict was resolved by the controller before separation minima were eroded.

Risk: E.

ERC Score: 1