

AIRPROX REPORT No 2013146

Date/Time: 7 Oct 2013 1612Z

Position: 5155N 00001W
(12.8nm NE of Luton)

Airspace: London FIR (Class: G)

Aircraft 1 Aircraft 2

Type: MD902 Untraced Single
Engine Aircraft

Operator: Civ Comm Unknown

Alt/FL: 500ft NK
Rad Alt NK

Conditions: VMC NK

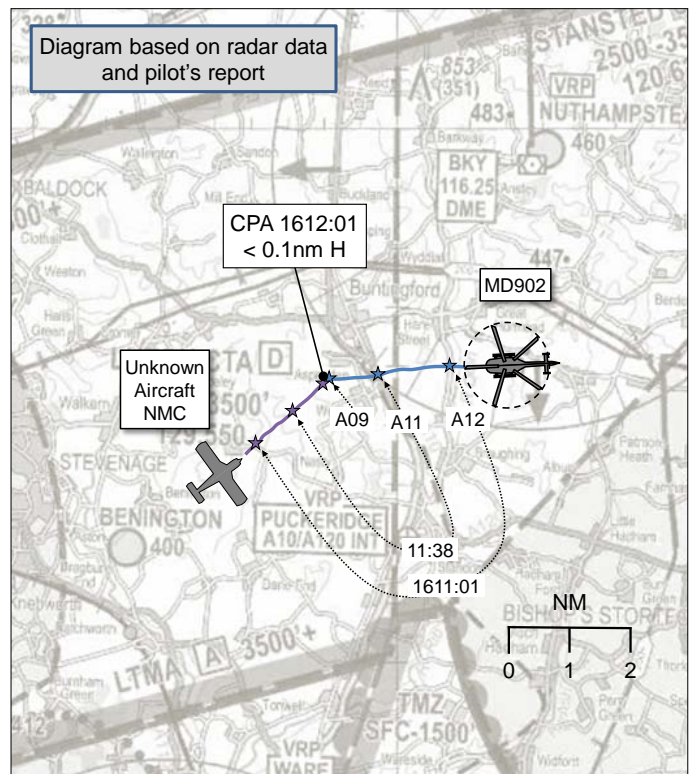
Visibility: 5km NK

Reported Separation:

50-100ft V/ 0ft H NK

Recorded Separation:

NK V/<0.1nm H



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE MD902 PILOT reports flying a yellow and white helicopter on an operational 'Alpha call' sortie, with upper and lower strobe lights, navigation lights and 3 landing lights illuminated. He was squawking transponder Modes 3/A, C and S, and receiving a Basic Service from Luton Radar. Whilst heading 270°, at 130kt, in VMC, into sun with 5km visibility in haze, the pilot received Traffic Information from the Luton Radar controller on an aircraft in his 12 o'clock but with no height information. The pilot and his crewman 'could not see anything' to the front due to the haze and the position of the sun; seeing that the weather was clearer below, the pilot descended to 500ft RadAlt¹ in an effort to 'sky-line' any aircraft ahead of them. As the helicopter was levelled at 500ft, the crew saw a single-engine aircraft pass 50-100ft 'directly above' them.

He assessed the risk of collision as '95% if we hadn't descended'.

THE PILOT of the other aircraft could not be traced. The radar return was tracked to Panshanger Airfield but the flying club which operates from there was not open on 7 Oct, and it was not possible to elicit a report from any of the private aircraft owners who may have been independently operating.

THE LUTON RADAR CONTROLLER reports providing a Basic Service to the MD902, en-route to Hitchin, at 1000ft (QNH 1024hPa), when he noticed a radar return on a 'converging track' with the MD902, squawking Mode 3/A 7000 without Mode C. He passed Traffic Information to the helicopter pilot and reminded him he was under a Basic Service. The radar returns 'merged' and the MD902 pilot informed Luton Radar that the other aircraft had 'passed overhead' by 100ft.

Factual Background

The Luton weather at 1550 and 1620 was reported as follows:

METAR EGGW 071550Z 23008KT 9999 BKN021 17/13 Q1024=
METAR EGGW 071620Z 24007KT 9999 OVC022 17/13 Q1024=

¹ Radar Altimeter

Analysis and Investigation

CAA ATSI

ATSI had access to the report from the pilot of the MD902, the report from the Luton Radar controller, recorded area surveillance, and transcription of the Luton Radar frequency.

At 1609:17 UTC, the MD902 pilot contacted Luton Radar having been transferred from Essex Radar who had advised the MD902 pilot that he was on a Basic Service outside controlled airspace. The Luton controller cleared the MD902 pilot to enter the Luton Control Zone, for Hitchin, VFR, not above 1500ft.

At 1611:20, the Luton Radar controller advised the MD902 crew that they had traffic in their eleven o'clock at 2nm converging from the left with no height information (Figure 1) and reminded them that they were under a Basic Service. The MD902 pilot acknowledged the information.

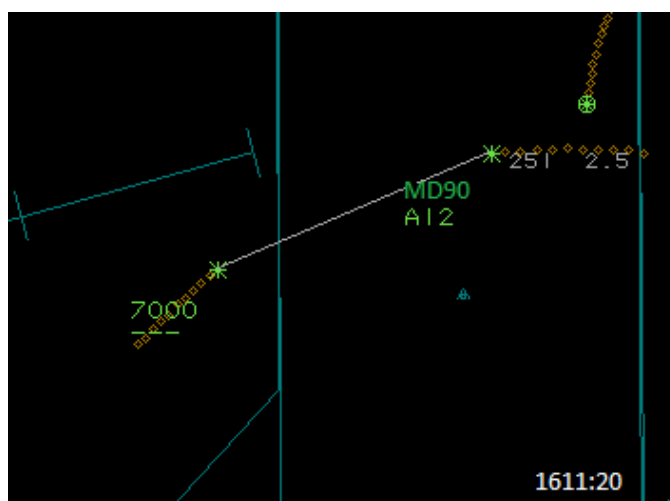


Figure 1.

The two aircraft continued to converge until 1612:03, when their tracks crossed (Figure 2). The MD902 pilot reported that the other traffic had just passed overhead.

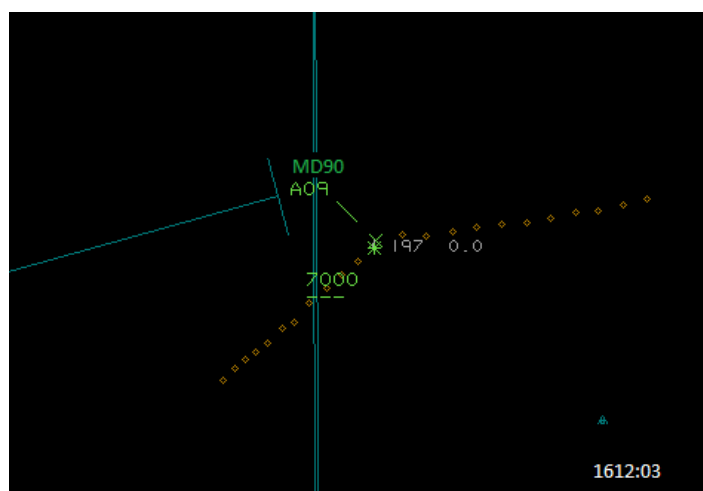


Figure 2.

The MD902 pilot was operating VFR in Class G airspace where he was responsible for his own collision avoidance. Under a Basic Service there is no requirement to pass Traffic Information. If a definite risk of collision exists, then a warning may be issued to the pilot.

UKAB Secretariat

This Airprox occurred in Class G uncontrolled airspace where both pilots had equal responsibility to avoid collisions². The MD902 was on the right of the converging unknown aircraft and so, technically, the pilot of the unknown aircraft was required to give way.³

Summary

An Airprox was reported by the pilot of an MD902 when an unknown aircraft passed 50-100ft above, 12.8nm to the east-northeast of Luton airport in Class G airspace. The MD902 pilot was operating VFR on a transit flight to Hitchin and was in receipt of a Basic Service from Luton Radar. The MD902 was being flown into sun and reported reduced visibility in haze. The Luton Radar controller passed Traffic Information on the unknown traffic, but the MD902 pilot did not see the aircraft and descended to 500ft in an effort to improve visibility. The CPA, recorded on radar, was <0.1nm.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilot of the MD902, transcripts of the relevant RT frequency, radar photographs/video recordings, a report from the air traffic controller involved, and reports from the appropriate ATC and operating authorities. The Board noted that the light aircraft could not be traced after being seen from the radar recording to land at Panshanger, and expressed their frustration that Panshanger's booking in and out procedures had not proven to be robust.

The Board first considered the actions of the Luton Controller and noted that the MD902 pilot was under a Basic Service. Under such a service, the Luton Controller would not necessarily be expected to provide Traffic Information and the Board commended him for his timely and accurate interjection.

Turning to the actions of the MD902 pilot, the Board agreed that, in receipt of the Traffic Information, the pilot's decision to descend was rational and reasonable given that 'sky-lining' can be a very effective method for pilots to spot other aircraft provided that their descent does not restrict their ability to take avoiding action; it had simply been unfortunate that the light aircraft had also been flying low. Notwithstanding, some members opined that, because the other traffic was in the MD902 pilot's 12 o'clock, he may have been better served by also turning to create lateral movement and separation between the aircraft, which could have increased the miss distance whilst also improving both pilots' chances of seeing each other. However, a member with air ambulance helicopter experience informed the Board that, given the normal tasking of these aircraft, their crews will endeavour to take the most direct routing to their destination and would be reluctant to deviate from track in order to reduce to a minimum their response time. Nevertheless, despite the emergency nature of their tasking, the Board noted that they are still subject to the Rules of the Air which require aircraft that are approaching head on to turn to the right to avoid.

All things being considered, the Board agreed that this was simply a conflict in Class G airspace. Because the MD902 pilot had seen the other aircraft too late to take effective action, and because there had been no apparent avoiding manoeuvres by the other pilot, the Board agreed that the degree of risk was Category A due to the fact that separation had been reduced to the minimum, no safety barriers had been effective in increasing separation and chance had played a major part in events.

² Rules of the Air 2007, Rule 8, Avoiding Aerial Collisions

³ Rules of the Air 2007, Rule 9, Converging

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

<u>Cause:</u>	A conflict in Class G.
<u>Degree of Risk:</u>	A
<u>ERC Score⁴:</u>	20
<u>Recommendation(s):</u>	Panshanger management reviews their aerodrome booking in and out procedures.

⁴ 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.