

AIRPROX REPORT No 2012037

Date/Time: 17 Mar 2012 1451Z (Saturday)

Position: 5210N 00012W
(3nm SE St Neots)

Airspace: Lon FIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: MD900 DA40 See Below

Operator: Civ Pol Civ Pte

Alt/FL: 1000ft 1300ft
QNH (1011hPa) QNH

Weather: VMC CAVOK VMC Haze

Visibility: >10km 4km

Reported Separation:

100ft V/500m H 200ft V/NR H

Recorded Separation:

300ft V /<0.1nm H

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE MD900 PILOT reports flying single pilot in a blue and yellow helicopter with strobes and anti-coll lights switched on, on a local police operational flight from RAF Wyton, monitoring Wyton APP (but not in receipt of an ATIS) and squawking 0054 (Cambridge Police ASU) with Mode C; TCAS was fitted. While heading 170° at 120kt he saw a white, low-wing, single-engine ac less than 1000m away just to the left of his nose, just above his height and heading straight towards him; he partially saw the ac registration but did not see any lights and had no TCAS warnings. He immediately initiated a tight right hand avoiding turn through 90° then resumed his track. He assessed the risk as 'close'.

THE DA40 PILOT reports flying a white and blue ac with strobes and nav lights switched on, on a VFR flight from Stapleford to Gamston, a route he is very familiar with, as he regularly visits the Diamond service centre at Gamston; he was squawking 7000 with Modes C and S but TCAS was not fitted. Unusually, on this occasion, Farnborough North had terminated the BS much earlier than he anticipated; his preference is to stay with them until 10nm S of Cottesmore. Once the service was terminated, he selected the Cottesmore frequency (now at Wittering) to maintain a listening watch before requesting a MATZ penetration.

About 2-3mins after Farnborough service terminated, heading 335° at 120kts and while busy making radio calls, he saw a helicopter approaching from the NW (left of his nose) about 200ft below. He saw the helicopter late (4sec before it disappeared below his wing) due to the poor Wx conditions, although there was enough time to react had it been necessary; he considered that it was not required as there was adequate separation and he assessed the risk as being low.

Had Farnborough not terminated the service early then perhaps he would have been given ample warning of the traffic. Also, perhaps if the Helicopter had been in contact with Farnborough, then the other pilot would also have been aware of him. He understands that the other ac was a police Helicopter; if so, TCAS may have been a help to the other pilot.

ATSI reports that an Airprox was reported by the pilot of a MD900 helicopter which came into proximity with a Diamond Star (DA40) in the vicinity of St. Neots.

The DA40 was on a VFR flight from Stapleford Abbotts to Gamston and maintaining a listening watch on the Cottesmore frequency prior to contacting the unit for a MATZ clearance. The MD900 was VFR on an Operational flight over Cambridgeshire and not in receipt of an ATS.

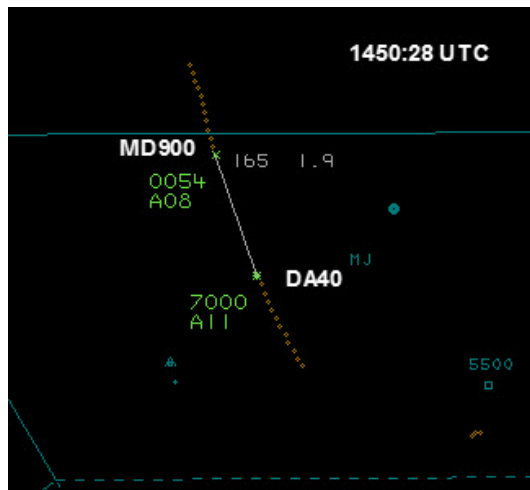
Meteorological Information for Cambridge Airport (approximately 13nm E of the incident):

METAR EGSC 171450Z 20006KT 160V240 9999 FEW010 BKN038 10/09 Q1010=

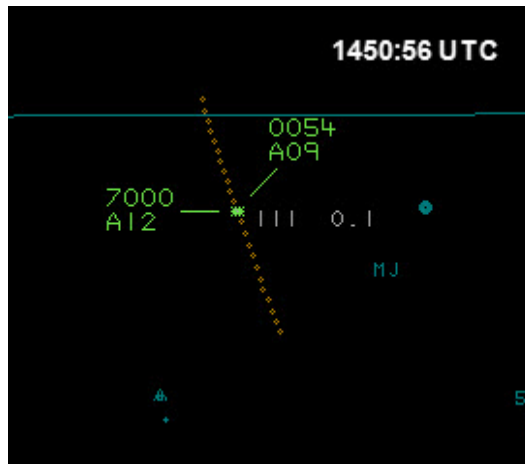
Between 1436 and 1449 the DA40 was in receipt of a BS from Farnborough LARS (North). During this period the ac flew in a general NW'ly direction from its aerodrome of departure at an alt of 1100ft (London QNH 1011 hPa).

At 1448:50 the Farnborough LARS controller informed the DA40, "...you're leaving Farnborough surveillance coverage shortly squawk 7000 suggest a freecall to London Information on 124.6". At 1449:00 the pilot replied, "Squawk 7000 and 124.6." The Radar replay showed that service termination was co-incident with the notified boundary of Farnborough LARS (North) area of service provision. The DA40's SSR code changed to 7000 at 1449:23 and at that time it was at an alt of 1100ft (London QNH), 6nm SSE of the MD900. The MD900 was on a S'ly track depicted on radar replay at an altitude of approximately 900ft (London QNH). Both ac were in Class G uncontrolled airspace.

The distance between the two ac continued to decrease as each remained in the other's 12 o'clock on reciprocal tracks as shown below. Note: SSR code 0054 is considered unvalidated and unverified.



At 1450:56 the position indication symbols of the ac merged on the radar replay with the MD900 at altitude 900ft and the DA40 at altitude 1200ft (as shown below).



Following the encounter the radar replay showed both ac adjust course to the right of their previous tracks.

The Airprox occurred in Class G uncontrolled airspace between two ac not in receipt of any form of ATS; as such, the avoidance of collision rested solely with the pilot of the ac and in accordance with the relevant RoA.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac, transcripts of the relevant RT frequencies, radar recordings, reports from the air traffic controllers involved and reports from the appropriate ATC authorities.

Members noted that this incident took place in a busy area of Class G airspace (below 3000ft) where 'see and avoid' is the principal method of collision avoidance. Both pilots had, they believed, some assistance with this responsibility. The MD900 was TCAS-equipped and, although the radar prints above showed the DA40 to have been squawking with Mode C, no warnings were issued by the TCAS. The DA40 pilot had been in receipt of a BS from Farnborough and seemed to be under the mistaken impression that this would provide him with traffic warnings. As explained in the ATSI report above, controllers are under no obligation to provide traffic information under such a service; should pilots require information on other traffic then either a TS or a DS should be requested. By the time of the Airprox the DA40 had flown out of Farnborough's coverage and both ac were in an area where there is little possibility of obtaining an effective TS at low altitudes. A Member noted that the DA40 pilot reported that he was flying at 1300ft; his selection of this unusual, but in the Board's view sensible, alt had avoided a closer vertical proximity.

The radar recording verified that the vertical separation was about 300ft, greater than either pilot estimated. Further both pilots saw the opposing ac, albeit rather belatedly, and were taking action to maximise the separation. That being the case Members unanimously agreed that there had been no risk that the ac would have collided.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Late sightings by the pilots of both ac.

Degree of Risk: C.