

AIRPROX REPORT No 2012149

Date/Time: 22 Sep 2012 1419Z (Saturday)

Position: 5155N 00108W
(O/H Bicester A/D - elev 259ft)

Airspace: Lon FIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: ASK-8 Glider EC135

Operator: Civ Pte Civ Com

Alt/FL: ↑900ft 1500ft
QFE NR QNH (1014hPa)

Weather: VMC CLBC VMC CAVOK

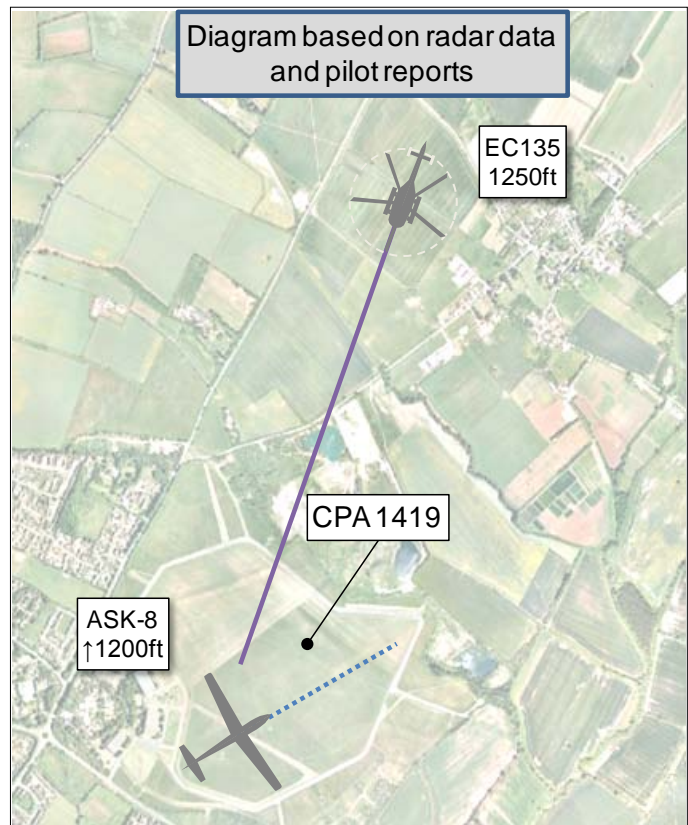
Visibility: 30km 40km

Reported Separation:

0ft V/100m H 500ft V/>300m H

Recorded Separation:

NK



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE ASK-8 GLIDER PILOT reports climbing during a winch launch, heading 060° at 60kt in a steep nose-up attitude. She was operating in VMC under VFR and was in RT contact with the launch control point. The white and blue glider was not fitted with external lights, SSR transponder or an ACAS. Between 800-900ft she saw a helicopter in her 11 o'clock position at a range of 150m, flying towards her at a similar height. She banked to the R to increase separation and the helicopter passed behind her on the L, at the same level and with a minimum separation of 100m. She continued to climb on the winch launch and released from the cable at 1200ft.

She assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

THE EC135 PILOT reports transiting to Oxford Hospital on a Cat A HEMS Mission with 2 HEMS crew and 1 patient on board. He was operating autonomously in VMC under VFR in a red and yellow helicopter with external lights and landing lights on. The SSR transponder was selected on with Modes 3/A and C. The ac was not fitted with a Mode S capable transponder or an ACAS.

He had noted gliders in the general vicinity to the N of his departure point and knew that his planned track would take him near Turweston A/D and then O/H Bicester. He proceeded with caution and extra vigilance as he knew the Wx would make gliding a popular choice and he knew the area [of his route] was popular for gliding. He called Turweston, routed to the E of the A/D, and then proceeded by direct track towards the hospital, which [he was aware] would take him through the Bicester airfield O/H. He repeatedly attempted to establish RT contact with Bicester on the Common Glider Field Frequency [129.975MHz] but was unable to obtain a response. He noted there were 2 non-conflicting gliders in the distance to the W to the S. He could only verify that there was any activity when approaching the [Bicester] airfield N'ly boundary, at approximately 1-2nm. Heading 220° at 130kt at about altitude 1500ft [QNH 1014hPa]/height 1200ft, he saw the glider launching by cable and routed to the W side of the O/H which took him above and behind the climbing glider. Although the glider climbed to near his altitude, he had already passed above and behind and there was no perceived risk. The H distance was greater than 300m. He tried to establish RT contact a further 2 times but there was no answer. He stated that he proceeded with caution and extra vigilance and noted there had been no two-way RT at any time and that he thought there should have been.

He assessed that there was no risk of collision.

[UKAB Note(1): Bicester Gliding Launching Site is promulgated in the UK AIP ENR 5-5-1-1 as operating during daylight hours with winch and aerotow launches up to height 3000ft. The site uses the BGA Common Glider Field Frequency of 129.975MHz, as promulgated in Edition 18 of the BGA Laws and Rules for Glider Pilots, dated October 2012.]

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac and radar video recordings.

Discussing the EC135 pilot's unanswered RT calls, the Board was advised that there is no requirement to maintain a RT listening watch, even during operating hours. Civilian glider pilot Members observed that when they are manned, glider club radios can be operated by inexperienced club volunteers who might have no awareness of how to respond to a non-club call. This could even be to the extent that they may assume the call was not intended for them and would therefore not respond. The Board noted that the EC135 pilot did not take the absence of a response to mean that there was no gliding taking place.

Members next discussed deconfliction strategies and noted that glider launch sites generally have no form of controlled or regulated airspace around them; the circles around glider launch sites, as printed on aeronautical charts, are intended purely to highlight their presence. As such, all parties are operating in Class G airspace where 'see and avoid' is the primary means of collision avoidance. Notwithstanding this, it was also noted that the locations of glider winch cable operation are well promulgated, that the cables are used at fixed locations, that it would be very difficult to see the descending cable once a glider had released and that minimal effort is required to avoid the launch site. Although the EC135 pilot was aware of gliding activity and entitled to take the course of action he took, helicopter pilot Members with HEMS experience were of the opinion that greater avoidance could have been effected without compromising the flight's purpose. Members with gliding experience regarded avoiding action by flying away from conflicting traffic during winch launch as a high risk strategy which, due to the cable geometry, was unlikely to increase significantly any potential miss-distance whilst appreciably increasing the risk of cable break or loss of control. Members were of the opinion that the winch launch should be flown normally and that a release/no-release decision would be a better course of action, dependant, of course, upon the circumstances at the time.

It was also observed that, by the nature of their operations, gliders, tugs and glider/tug combinations would be operating at altitude unless recovering to the cct. Low level activity is concentrated directly above the runway/launch strip and, as altitude increases, is more dispersed laterally, Consequently, glider site activity describes a form of inverted cone above the launch site location, within which it is more likely gliders will be flying. It was therefore recommended to remain 'below the cone' if it was deemed essential to fly close to a glider launch site.

In this instance Members were content that both pilots had seen each other and that action was taken to prevent ac collision.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: The EC135 pilot, on a Cat A Medevac flight, flew through a promulgated and active glider launching site below the maximum level of the winch cable and close enough to cause the launching glider pilot concern.

Degree of Risk: C.