

AIRPROX REPORT No 2011051

Date/Time: 2 June 2011 1459Z

Position: 5133N 00106W (3½nm
S of Benson - elev 203ft)

Airspace: Benson MATZ (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: Lynx AH Mk7 Skyranger ML

Operator: HQ JHC Civ Pte

Alt/FL: 900ft↓ 400ft
QFE (1027mb) QFE

Weather: VMC CLBC VMC CAVOK

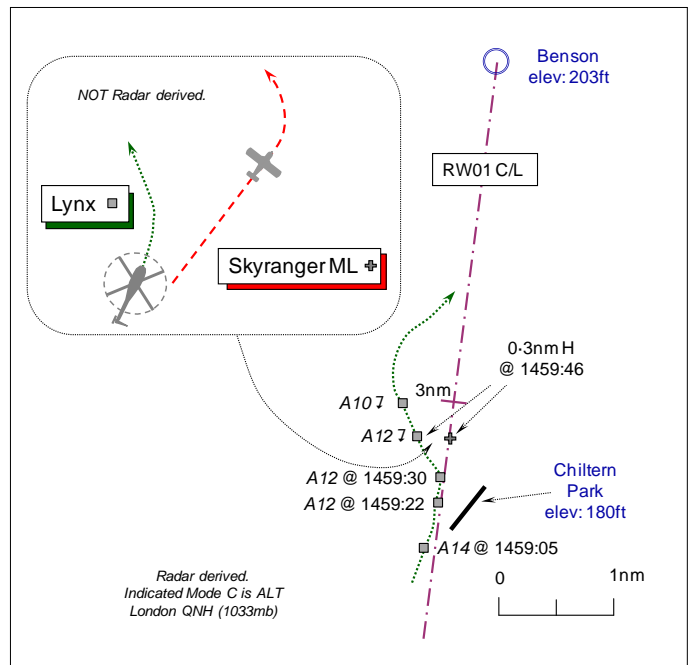
Visibility: 25km 10km

Reported Separation:

NR NR

Recorded Separation:

Not recorded



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE WESTLAND LYNX AH Mk7 PILOT reports flying a training sortie from Odiham and was conducting an SRA at Benson to RW01RHC in VMC. He was in receipt of a TS from Benson TALKDOWN (TD) on 277.675MHz. A squawk of A3617 was selected with Mode C; neither Mode S nor TCAS is fitted.

Established on the centre-line at 100kt, heading 020° whilst approaching 900ft QFE (1027mb) in the descent under terminal guidance, a small civilian ac – the Skyranger Microlight (ML) that had been spotted from about 4nm Final – was seen to line up on a private strip [Chiltern Park] about 3nm S of the A/D. He saw the ML roll and take off and, as he was visual with it at this point, it was not a problem. As it lifted off, the TD controller called traffic in their 1 o'clock, slow moving; the ML then executed a L turn which would have brought it into conflict with them, but at the same time the controller issued a 40° avoiding action L turn. He saw the ML pass behind with a 'medium' Risk but did not report the separation. The SRA was completed and after returning to base he contacted Benson ATC and discussed the incident with the controller.

His helicopter had a grey/green camouflage scheme; ac lighting was not specified.

THE SKYRANGER 912S MICROLIGHT PILOT reports he was departing from Chiltern Park aerodrome for a local VFR flight. His ML is coloured red and white and the strobe lights were on. Their normal procedure is to telephone Benson ATC to inform them of their operational status prior to any take-off from Chiltern Park, but because of a misunderstanding, Benson had not been informed of their active status.

After take-off from RW04 at Chiltern Park, he turned L onto the crosswind leg of a standard LH cct at 70mph, ascending to an intermediate height of about 400ft QFE. Soon after take-off he was contacted on the radio by the Chiltern Park aerodrome manager, who advised him that he had passed close to a helicopter on final approach to Benson. The Manager wanted to ascertain if he had contacted Benson to advise them of their active status, but he had to acknowledge that he had not done so and immediately radioed Benson ZONE on 120.9MHz to apologise for the omission.

The Lynx helicopter had turned away from its original path before he had turned onto the downwind leg, and, being camouflaged, was not seen. The Downwind leg of RW04/22 at Chiltern Park runs close to the FAT for Benson's RW01, about 3.5nm from the touchdown point of RW01. Military helicopters are known to approach Benson at low-level, often below Chiltern Park's cct height of 700ft, and, on occasion, after Chiltern Park has notified Benson as being 'active'.

Due to an increase in incidents involving military ac recently, the current arrangements with Benson, which are detailed in a LOA, are being reviewed. Changes have been proposed to the Chiltern Park cct pattern to deconflict traffic and other measures are under consideration by Chiltern Park management, for discussion with Benson in the near future.

He suggests he shall now call Benson ZONE on the RT- or TOWER if ZONE is closed - at the holding point to request information on current traffic movements before returning to the Chiltern Park frequency, as is required by the Chiltern Park Flying Orders.

THE BENSON TALKDOWN CONTROLLER (TD) reports he was conducting a SRA to RW 01RH for the Lynx AH Mk7. The meteorological conditions were good - sfc wind 040°/8kt, 25km visibility and FEW cloud at 3800ft. As the ac was approaching the 4nm point he noticed a primary radar return that had just 'painted' to the E of the centreline at the 3½nm point. Immediately, he called the radar return to the Lynx pilot as, in his judgement, it indicated that the primary return could be an ac climbing out of Chiltern Park, situated to the S of Benson A/D. The Lynx pilot did not call visual at that point; in the controller's view, as the unknown ac turned straight towards the Lynx on the centreline at the 3½nm point, there was a definite risk of collision. Avoiding action was given to the Lynx pilot of a L turn onto a heading of 330° to ensure that the risk of collision would be avoided. The Lynx pilot then called visual with the unknown ac and he was then able to continue with the SRA and complete the approach.

THE BENSON SUPERVISOR (SUP) reports that all positions in the ACR were reasonably busy with APP/DIR bandboxed. Whilst facilitating an internal pre-note between APP and ZONE he observed a 'non-squawker' relatively close to the A3617 Benson squawk which he knew to be the Lynx conducting an SRA. He immediately moved to a position behind TD who was conducting the SRA to increase his own situational awareness and quickly ascertained that the Lynx pilot had not reported visual with the non-squawker and observed it taking controller initiated avoiding action to maintain separation. The Lynx was then easily vectored back towards the centre-line and a clearance obtained at 3nm.

Praising TD for his actions, he then followed the non-squawker on ZONE's display whilst trying to ascertain if Chiltern Park had called active at any point. Shortly thereafter a VDF trace was observed passing through the non-squawker; the pilot identified himself with the Skyrainger ML's registration having just climbed out of Chiltern Park without 'activating' the airfield IAW local agreements. The ZONE controller acknowledged an apology from the ML pilot and reminded him of the necessity to call. A few minutes after this, the ATC assistant in the VCR relayed a message that Chiltern Park was now 'active' and the person that had called in had apologised for how close the Skyrainger ML got to the Lynx, something he had observed from the ground.

HQ 1GP BM SM reports that this Airprox occurred between a Lynx conducting an SRA at Benson in receipt of a TS from Benson TALKDOWN (TD) and a ML departing Chiltern Park airfield VFR.

This Airprox does not appear on the LATCC (Mil) radar recording, although the Lynx is visible throughout the incident sequence. [UKAB Note (1): A primary radar contact appears on the Heathrow Radar recording at 1459:46, 0.3nm E of the Lynx which may or may not be the reported Skyrainger ML. At this point the Lynx is indicating 1200ft London QNH (1033mb), which broadly equates to 1020ft Benson QFE (1027mb) - about 1040ft above Chiltern Park aerodrome's elevation of 180ft.]

TD was manned by a relatively inexperienced first tourist controller who had been awarded their SRA endorsement that morning. The controller states that as the Lynx "was approaching the 4nm point I

noticed a primary radar return with no height information that painted just to the east of the centre-line at the 3½nm point.” At 1459:04, TD passed TI to the Lynx stating, “...*traffic right 1 o'clock 1 mile manoeuvring, no height information*”, which was not acknowledged by the Lynx pilot.

TD then goes on to state that in their opinion, as the ML turned into conflict with the Lynx, there was a definite risk of collision and, at 1459:20, instructed the Lynx crew, “*avoiding action, turn left immediately heading 3-4-0 degrees, traffic right 1 o'clock 1 mile crossing right - left no height.*” At 1459:31 the Lynx pilot reported visual, with the avoiding action turn becoming evident on the radar replay at 1459:33.

Neither pilot provided an estimate of the minimum separation, with the ML pilot stating that they had not been visual with the Lynx until after the CPA.

JSP 552 405.135.20 provides regulation for the separation and avoidance of other contacts whilst providing a PAR. It specifies that irrespective of ATS, when a collision risk is apparent in both elements of the PAR display involving an un-notified radar contact:

‘advice on suitable action for collision avoidance together with information on conflicting traffic [is to be given].’

There is no comparable regulation contained within JSP 552 405.125 which pertains to the conduct of an SRA.

In this instance TD provided relevant and accurate TI to the Lynx pilot and, when the controller perceived a risk of collision to exist, provided deconfliction advice to the Lynx pilot. Although the Lynx pilot was visual with the ML throughout the incident sequence, TD fulfilled their perceived duty of care by offering deconfliction advice.

In terms of the regulatory difference between the provision of a PAR and a SRA, the absence of comparable regulation, whether consciously or unconsciously, caused TD to apply an incorrect regulation. In this instance, this transfer of training had a positive outcome; however, a different set of contextual conditions or a different interpretation of the regulations may have produced a different, negative outcome. Following a procedure which has not been designed for the specific situation could have unforeseeable and undesirable results, with deficiencies or differences in regulation or procedure being identified as causal or contributory factors in many air accidents and incidents.

Consequently a recommendation has been made to the MAA Op Gp – ATM Division – relating to a review of JSP 552 405.135.20 and JSP 552 405.125 and the provision of additional guidance; a reply is awaited.

HQ JHC comments that despite the fact that there is an absence of regulation for an apparent collision risk whilst on an SRA, when the controller passed relevant TI to the Lynx, it is disappointing that it was not acknowledged by the Lynx pilot. Whilst the avoiding action was successful, it is not considered good airmanship for a pilot to be visual with an aircraft of concern but not relay this information to the controller, although it is acknowledged that the final stages of an instrument approach creates a high workload in the cockpit. It is probable that the Lynx pilot would have taken avoiding action himself at the same point should the controller not have given avoiding action advice so promptly.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

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

The Board noted the recommendations made by HQ 1GP BM SM to the MAA Op Gp – ATM Division – relating to a review of JSP 552 and the provision of additional guidance for SRA controllers. The CAA SRG Strategy and Standards Advisor considered there was sufficient guidance for controllers about collision avoidance action when providing a TS or DS within CAP774, which details air traffic services outside CAS. However, controller Members opined that at military A/Ds the Talkdown controller might not, in some cases, also be validated on Radar Director or Radar Approach and agreed that a review of the guidance applicable to Talkdown controllers conducting SRAs would be worthwhile, which the MAA Advisor confirmed was being undertaken.

Notwithstanding any lack of official advice, the Board commended the Benson TALKDOWN controller for his swift appreciation of the situation and appropriate reaction to the conflict through the transmission of avoiding action to the Lynx crew, in this instance all the more so because of the controller's inexperience. Nevertheless, it was apparent from the Lynx pilot's report that in the prevailing good weather he had spotted the Skyranger just before it took off and watched it turn L downwind. This was before the controller spotted the aeroplane on radar himself and issued the avoiding action L turn away from the Skyranger, which was promptly complied with by the Lynx crew.

The Skyranger pilot's frank admission that he had not notified Benson ATC that he would be flying at Chiltern Park, as is normal procedure in accordance with their LoA, was plainly a significant omission. This denied Benson ATC any prior warning that might have been taken into account during the Lynx's approach. The absence of prior notification was to some a significant factor, and discussed at length in terms of airmanship; one Member suggested that the Skyranger pilot took off into conflict with the Lynx. However, the Skyranger pilot's omission did not finally figure in the Board's determination of the Cause of the Airprox. Within the MATZ, where specific rules apply to military pilots, but outside the ATZ, where Rule 45 of the Rules of the Air applies within, it is all Class G airspace where the VFR entreat civilian pilots to 'see and avoid' other ac. There is no national requirement for civilian flights to be in communication with Benson ATC within the MATZ, albeit that good airmanship dictates close observance of the guidance within the UK AIP relating to MATZ crossings. It is, therefore, not a 'known traffic environment' and under the TS afforded to the Lynx crew no stipulated deconfliction minima apply. Clearly, observance of the LoA with Benson ATC engenders a safe and harmonious working relationship between these two closely located facilities and good airmanship necessitates compliance. However, the Board concluded the fundamental Cause of this Airprox was a conflict in Class G airspace resolved by the Talkdown Controller.

The Skyranger pilot had not spotted the Lynx, either before take-off or during his cct, and was only aware of the conflict from the A/D Manager's RT call. This was not a warning of the helicopters approach it would seem and occurred after the event. Members warned against alarming or distracting pilots in the air and it was far better to talk about it on the ground rather than provoke concern whilst airborne. Conversely, the Lynx pilot had the aeroplane in view throughout until it drew astern. Prompted by the controllers avoiding action, the Lynx was steered away from it and then back onto the SRA with little difficulty the controller reported and the Lynx crew could have taken more robust action if need be. The Board concluded, therefore, that no Risk of a collision had existed in these circumstances.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Conflict in Class G airspace resolved by the Talkdown Controller.

Degree of Risk: C.