

AIRPROX REPORT No 2010012

Date/Time: 21 Feb 1633 (Sunday)

Position: 5133N 00241W (4nm NW
Filton)

Airspace: Bristol CTA (Class: D)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: A319 Untraced object

Operator: CAT N/K

Alt/FL: ↓6000ft (QNH 990mb) (NK)

Weather: VMC CLOC NK

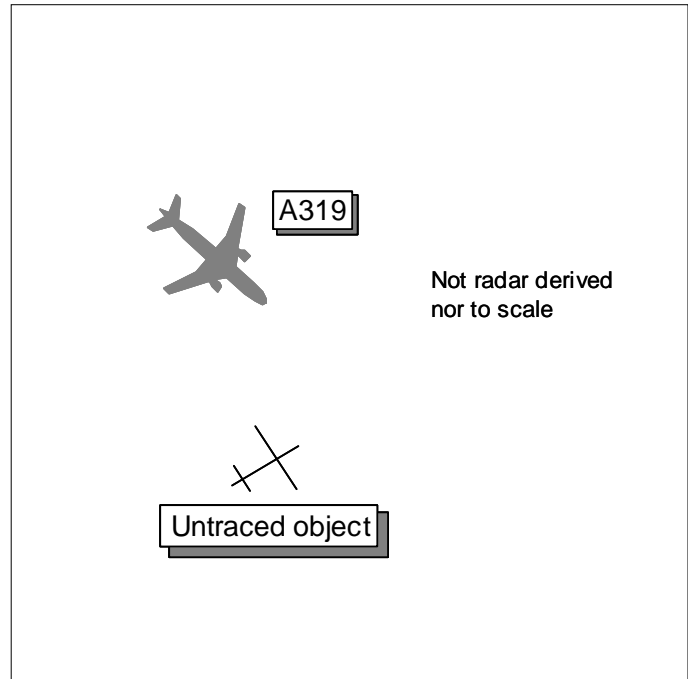
Visibility: 10km NK

Reported Separation:

50-100ft V NK

Recorded Separation:

NR



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE A319 PILOT reports inbound to Bristol IFR and receipt of a RCS from Bristol, squawking an assigned code with Modes S and C. Whilst descending to 6000ft on radar heading 140° at 220kt, the FO pointed out an object in their 12 o'clock position at roughly the same level. He, the Capt PF, looked out and saw the object fly under the ac's nose; its level was difficult to judge but he thought it was between 50-100ft below. The FO described the object as ac shaped coloured white with a red stripe, in an apparent bank to its R and he, the Capt, having only seen it for 3-4sec confirmed the colour and shape. The radar controller was asked for any TI or possible contacts but nothing was seen on radar.

RAC MIL reports extensive procedural tracing action was carried out but the identity of the object/ac remains unknown. Adjacent glider sites, airfields and private strips were contacted but no ac movements occurred that could be correlated to the incident time and location. AUS were contacted regarding permission notices issued for balloon releases for that geographical area but none were issued.

THE BRISTOL RADAR 1 CONTROLLER reports vectoring the A319 from DOBEM towards RW27. After passing the new Severn Bridge the pilot asked if there were any other ac in their vicinity to which he replied 'negative' and also stating that the ac was close to Filton in case it was a nuisance TCAS response. The pilot then informed him that something had just flown underneath their ac; they were unsure what it was but it was fast moving from S to N and believed to be red/white/blue colour scheme. He told the pilot that nothing was showing on radar, which was confirmed by RAD 2, and that it was CAS, a known traffic environment. The A319 continued the approach normally and landed. The Capt later telephoned and both he and his FO were sure that an object came very close to hitting the underside of their ac. The crew confirmed the colours and that it may have had a red stripe along the side. Much later an inbound flight reported that the 7000ft wind was 250/20kt.

The Bristol METAR shows EGGD1650Z 27005KT 9999 SCT023 04/00 Q990=

BRISTOL WATCH INVESTIGATIONS reports that later RAD 1 viewed the radar recording and on close inspection there was a very faint, irregular, primary-only contact near the A319's track, tracking approximately 070° from the new Severn Bridge area at 15-20kt. The LACC Supervisor was contacted to see if there had been any break-away balloons reported; however, none had been. The

local radar recording at 1633:23 shows a pop-up primary only contact in the A319's 12 o'clock range 0-5nm which merged with it 8sec later. At 1633:50 the A319 crew ask if there are any ac in the area and then the primary only contact disappears. The radar return is then intermittent but does move in a NE'ly direction before fading completely at 1639:58. At all times it is only ever a small return and fades rapidly. The conclusion (conjecture) was that it might have been a small metallic balloon that was caught in the ac's lights briefly.

ATSI reports that the Bristol Radar 1 Controller was vectoring the A319 for RW27. Just after 2min after the pilot had made initial contact, when the ac was close to the new Severn Bridge, he enquired, "...did you have any traffic right in our vicinity about four or five seconds ago". The pilot confirmed it was, "...dead ahead twelve o'clock". Shortly afterwards, the pilot continued "...just about a minute ago it looked like er a fast moving aircraft er went straight below us er from south to north erm we're not a hundred percent sure because as I say it was moving so quickly". The controller responded, "Okay I know roughly where you called it there's certainly nothing showing on radar at the moment and erm erm it's certainly not speaking to anything and it's our airspace so it's it's sort of known traffic environment so I'm not quite sure what that could have been unless it's a sort of balloon or something". The pilot added, "Erm we reckon it was colour schemed er red and blue er red white and blue and er as I say it was moving er so quick that we couldn't really see it". On subsequent inspection of the radar recording, there was a very faint irregular primary contact near the ac's track.

UKAB Note (1): At the time of the incident the A319 is seen approaching Bristol from the N and turning L on to a SE'ly heading, as directed by Bristol ATC, just under 1min before the encounter. At 1633:23, the time the local radar recording shows a pop-up contact ahead, the A319 is 4nm NW of Filton within the Class D airspace of the Bristol CTA base 4000ft, descending through FL71 for its cleared altitude of 6000ft QNH 990mb.

UKAB Note (2): Sunset was 1736Z.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the crew of the A319, transcripts of the relevant RT frequencies, radar video recordings, reports from the air traffic controllers involved and reports from the appropriate ATC authorities.

Although the crew reported sighting an ac shaped object, the radar recording did not show any target in the location that could be correlated with an ac type radar return. The primary only return in conflict captured on the Bristol radar was moving in the direction of and at the speed of the reported wind. Had this target been a balloon or possibly a bundle of balloons, it/they would have appeared to the crew to pass them very quickly owing to the high speed differential. Members thought it unlikely for it to have been a glider owing to the high level of the encounter, the Wx conditions at the time and the closeness to sunset. With the tracing action ruling out breakaway balloons, notified balloon releases and no ac identification possible, Members could offer no explanation as to the identity of the reported object. Members reluctantly agreed that, on the limited information available, this encounter would be classified as a conflict within Class D airspace with an untraced object but it was not possible to assess the risk of collision.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Conflict in Class D airspace with an untraced object.

Degree of Risk: D.