

## AIRPROX REPORT No 2010034

Date/Time: 25 Apr 2010 1418Z (Sunday)

Position: 5139N 00016E (5nm E LAM)

Airspace: LTMA (Class: A)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: MD82 Untraced ac

Operator: CAT N/K

Alt/FL: ↓FL160 (N/K)

Weather: VMC NR NK NR

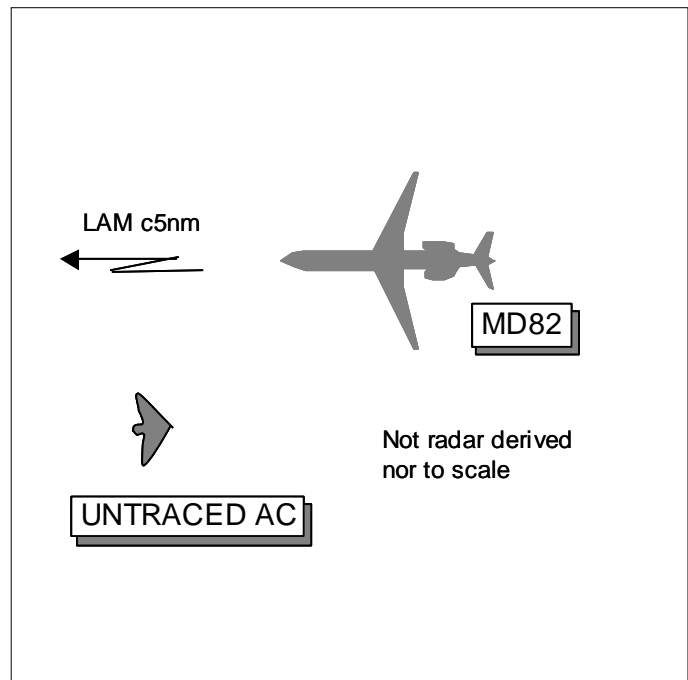
Visibility: NR NR

Reported Separation:

50-100m H

Recorded Separation:

NR



### PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

**THE MD82 PILOT** reports descending towards LAM to enter the hold while looking for the preceding ac. Suddenly, in front and a little to the L, there appeared a dark object coming in their direction. As it got closer it appeared to resemble a green/white coloured parachute/hang-glider, which was much bigger than a Wx balloon. It passed about 50-100m to their L. No action was required but ATC was informed.

**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 fitting the description could be identified at these locations. AUS were contacted regarding permission notices issued for balloon releases for that geographical area but none were issued.

**THE LTC NE DEPS/LAM RADAR CONTROLLER** reports operating in bandboxed mode with the MD82 inbound to Heathrow maintaining FL170, he thought. About 3nm E of LAM the crew reported that they had observed a small ac or possibly a glider about 30sec prior to levelling at FL170; they considered it had passed very close. A number of primary and secondary contacts were observed in the area but this was nothing out of the ordinary. No CAIT warning had been activated on any of the secondary contacts. The crew reported that they would be filing an Airprox. He requested that other traffic keep a good lookout in the area but nothing was observed.

**NATS UNIT INVESTIGATIONS** reports the Airprox occurred approximately 5nm east of LAM at 1418 UTC. The MD82 was inbound to Heathrow Airport via LAM. At 1418:41, when the ac was 3nm E of LAM, the MD82 flight was instructed to descend to FL160. The read back to this instruction was garbled with another ac's transmission and so the controller asked the crew to confirm the cleared level as FL160. The following transmissions then took place.

MD82: "Confirming FL 160, MD82 c/s, and we actually had some foreign object up here. It looked like a hang-glider, parachute or something".

Controller: "OK, at your level now?"

MD82: "It passed us just around 30 seconds ago".

Controller: "OK, and was that at your level?"

MD82: "That's right".

Controller: "OK, we'll get that reported".

The controller then continued with other tasks for the next minute before making the following transmission to the MD82 flight:

Controller: "MD82 c/s, what did you say it looked like?"

MD82: "Like a parachute to a hang-glider. It was green and white and very close to us".

On questioning, the Capt of the MD82 confirmed their intention to file an Airprox report. The controller subsequently passed details of MD82's report to the next inbound flight (AC3) and the crew were asked to report if they became visual. No further sightings were reported by the crew of AC3 or any other flight. At the time of this event the controller was using the Debden Radar. There was no traffic displayed on radar or known to the controller that could be readily attributed to the object described by the crew of the MD82.

Following this event, Swanwick Investigations contacted the MD82's company to request a further description from the crew regarding the object seen. The Capt reported: -

*"In descend towards LAM VOR we were looking for preceding aircraft when we saw a dark shadow coming towards us a little from the left. I first thought it was a military aircraft because it had a shape of two wings. Getting closer it turned out to be a hang-glider/parachute object, the long and thinner type with green and white square markings. No letters or other markings as I could see. I think it came approximate 50-100 meters close to us, maybe closer because I could see it perfectly on my left side. When I first observed the object it looked like a normal distance for a preceding aircraft but it was much smaller and darker and was coming in our direction".*

This incident was reported to ATC at 1418:41 with the MD82 crew reporting that the event occurred approximately 30sec beforehand. The position of the MD82 was reviewed at this time on the radar replay system using several different radar sources (Debden, H23, S10 & MRT). There was no surveillance data to support the presence of an object in the position described by the crew although both the Debden and MRT pictures displayed an intermittent primary return approximately 2nm S of the MD82's track. Further analysis of the surveillance data was undertaken by the Surveillance Asset Investigations Team at NATS. Although some slow moving primary returns were detected in the vicinity of the MD82 at the time of the reported event, the lack of a definitive track did not support these returns as being genuine and are considered to have been radar "clutter".

**ATSI** endorsed the NATS Unit report.

**BHPA** comments that it is physically extremely unlikely to have been an unpowered hang glider or paraglider at that location and height as either would have had to be launched from/by another ac at a greater height. As powered hang gliders and paragliders do tend to show up on primary radar due to the engine and propeller, and that it would have taken a specialist modified and in-flight tuneable engine, and that it would still have taken a considerable time to both climb to that height and descend from it (the UK record climb of 17,500ft took 92min on the way up and 46min on the way down), it also seems very unlikely to have been one of these.

## **PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS**

Information available included reports from the pilot of the MD82, transcripts of the relevant RT frequencies, radar video recordings, reports from the air traffic controllers involved and reports from the appropriate ATC and operating authorities.

The Capt's description of a green/white ac, possibly a hang-glider/parachute, passing 50-100m down their LHS at their level was explicit enough for Members to be in no doubt that something was encountered. However, the radar recording does not show any target that could be correlated with an ac-type radar return and the crew of an ac following behind the MD82 did not visually acquire the

untraced ac. Members noted the comments made by the BHPA and added that, although possible, it would have been extremely unusual for a hang-glider or microlight pilot to fly his ac at high level, particularly above 10,000ft where oxygen would be needed for safe operation. On the limited information available and with tracing action not revealing the origin, type or size of the conflicting ac, Members were left with little option other than to classify this as a conflict in Class A airspace but were unable to assess the risk of collision.

**PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK**

Cause: Conflict in Class A airspace with an untraced ac.

Degree of Risk: D.