Safety Regulation Group
Safety Investigation and Data Department

Follow-up Action on Occurrence Report

ACCIDENT INVOLVING PA25 / GLIDER, G-ASLK / BGA 3678, AT ASTON DOWN AIRFIELD ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2001

(MID AIR COLLISION BETWEEN FIXED WING TUG AIRCRAFT AND GLIDER)

CAA FACTOR NUMBER	:	F5/2003
FACTOR PUBLICATION DATE	:	12 March 2003
OPERATOR	:	Private
CAA OCCURRENCE NUMBER	:	2001/06390
AAIB REPORT	:	Bulletin 2/2003

SYNOPSIS

(From AAIB Report)

The gliding club at Aston Down normally used a winch to launch its gliders. On the morning of the accident, however, after successfully launching four gliders from asphalt Runway 03, the winch became unserviceable. In order to continue gliding, inquiries were made of the nearby gliding club at Nympsfield for the use of their Piper Pawnee tug aircraft. The Nympsfield club agreed and at approximately midday an Aston Down club instructor (a qualified tug pilot), who had flown three of the winch launched flights that morning, drove to Nympsfield to ferry the aircraft back to Aston Down. The weather was fine with scattered cumulus cloud at 3,000 feet, visibility in excess of 10 km, and a surface wind of approximately 315°/15 kt.

During the afternoon the instructor carried out nine 'aerotows' following the prescribed departure routes as detailed in the club briefing material. On returning to the airfield after each launch the tug aircraft varied its rejoining procedure carrying out both left and right hand circuits to land diagonally across the grass area to the south of Runway 03 threshold. It is thought that these variations in approach path were to cater for the noise sensitive areas within the local community and landing diagonally across the grass landing area was probably to allow for a more controllable into wind touchdown.

The Cirrus was the seventh glider to be aerotowed. Initially the launch was aborted after approximately six feet of tow due to wing instability caused by the cross-wind. A successful launch however was subsequently carried out, at 1510 hrs, with the Cirrus glider releasing from the tug at approximately 2,000 feet agl up-wind to the west of the field. The tug aircraft then returned to the field and towed a further two gliders up to 2,000 feet.

Witnesses on the ground, both at the launch point and in adjacent fields, saw the tug aircraft and the Cirrus glider as they returned to the airfield and positioned for their respective approaches. The glider was seen to fly a right hand circuit for an approach to land on the southern grass area parallel to the runway centreline. The tug aircraft appeared to join the landing pattern on a left base leg with the intention of crossing the extended centreline of the approach to turn closer into wind and land diagonally across the southern grass area as it had done before. The two aircraft approached each other at a height estimated by witnesses to be between 150 and 400 feet. The glider was turning to line up to land with slight right bank applied. The tug aircraft was carrying out a 20° banked continuous level left turn. Neither pilot was seen to take avoiding action before the two aircraft collided. After the collision both aircraft descended out of control. Both pilots were fatally injured on impact with the ground.

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FOLLOW UP ACTION

The three Safety Recommendations, made by the AAIB following their investigation, are reproduced below, together with the CAA's responses.

Recommendation 2002-26

It is recommended that the BGA advise gliding clubs, who use aerotows as a means of launching gliders, to review their procedures with a view to ensuring that appropriate separation between powered aircraft and gliders is maintained under all operating conditions and that best use is made of external lighting on tug aircraft to enhance their conspicuity.

CAA Response

This Recommendation is not addressed to the CAA.

CAA Status - Closed

Recommendation 2002-27

It is recommended that the BGA review the use of radio procedures to be used by tug aircraft and those gliders fitted with radios, with a view to improving the awareness of all pilots, involved in glider operations, of the presence of other aircraft in the vicinity of airfields involved in glider operations.

CAA Response

This Recommendation is not addressed to the CAA.

CAA Status - Closed

Recommendation 2002-28

It is recommended that the BGA oversee the introduction of a standard core syllabus for the training of tug pilots and ensure that all BGA approved tug pilots, who wish to maintain their tug pilot status, carry out their bi-annual PPL SEP rating renewal with a CAA authorised BGA tug instructor.

CAA Response

This Recommendation is not addressed to the CAA, nevertheless, the BGA's response will be considered and any necessary CAA follow-up action implemented.

CAA Status - Closed