

# **AIR TRAFFIC SERVICES OUTSIDE OF CONTROLLED AIRSPACE**

## **ATSOCAS**

### **“Taking Your Own Terrain Clearance Descent Approved”**

On 12<sup>th</sup> March 2009 the type of air traffic service available to aircraft flying **OUTSIDE OF CONTROLLED AIRSPACE** changes. These notes are to help you understand what has changed and what you need to ask for after that date.

This change has come about in an attempt to promote air safety and CAP 774 contains all of the terms of reference for this change. You will note that this publication mentions a lot of legal terms wrapped up in “Duty of Care”. It would seem that ambiguity is possible under the current regime with respect to who is responsible for collision avoidance. In the new litigious Britain that we live in this cannot be seen to be allowed to happen.

The second biggest killer of pilots of light aircraft after engine failures is controlled flight in to terrain, (CFIT). This is invariably caused by flying too low in poor visibility. It seems that this is what ATSOCAS is trying to remedy.

At present we have a system which is only as good as the number of aircraft using it. That is to say that if an aircraft is in the vicinity of your aeroplane and not using the same air traffic unit as you it is impossible to expect your air traffic unit to alert you to the fact. It would seem that this will still be true under the new regime.

There are various grades of service available to you depending on the kit available to the air traffic unit and your aeroplane.

ATSOCAS is a SURVEILLANCE SERVICE. It therefore implies that the air traffic unit needs some surveillance equipment and your aircraft also needs some surveillance kit. A Radar and a Transponder might be a good combination.

#### **What is NOT CHANGING?**

Nothing has changed in terms of Air Traffic Unit station addresses, hardware available to them or you. Leicester Radio for example is still Leicester Radio, Wellesbourne Information is still Wellesbourne Information. Similarly any Air/Ground ATU will still only be able to tell you the runway in use and the local pressure. They can't give you anything else and so they won't. It therefore makes sense to ask an ATU for a service that they can provide.

You couldn't get a Radar Advisory Service from Wellesbourne Information before hand and you still won't. Indeed it is up to the aircraft commander which ATU's he speaks to and what services he asks from them. **It is NOT MANDATORY.**

### Current Situation

Service Responsibilities	Information	
Radio Commander	Runway Circuit Pressure	Aircraft
Information Commander	As per Radio + Local Traffic	Aircraft
past hold		Once
RIS Commander	As per Information + Local Traffic	Aircraft
RAS Aircraft Cdr	As per RIS + Avoidance	ATU/

Under the current system it appears that the word RADAR leads some pilots to feel that they are absolved from terrain avoidance responsibilities, a dangerous assumption at the best of times. In an attempt to remedy this and overcome any language barriers to non native English speakers the following is to be adopted. You will note the word RADAR does not appear in the title of any of the services. This is to be introduced across Europe but only the UK will be adopting from 12<sup>th</sup> March.

Currently you would use Flight Information Services most of the time flying VFR. You might go for a Radar Information Service if the visibility is poor provided by a LARS Unit. This still gives you some flexibility in height and heading selection. Rarely would you go for a Radar Advisory Service unless you were in bound to a busy airport inside controlled airspace in IMC. Why? Because the ATU is now responsible for maintaining separation minima, and may vector you all over the sky to keep the minima intact.

**What are the new services called and what is their nearest old equivalent?**

**Basic – (OLD Flight Information Service)**

A Basic service is what you will use most of the time - local airfield information, no requirement for the ATU to monitor your flight. No traffic information. Aircraft Commander is responsible for terrain and collision avoidance. An ATU providing a Basic Service can suggest that you route a certain way to avoid danger areas etc.

Although available to IMC traffic it may not be appropriate.

**Traffic- (OLD RIS)**

To be able to provide a Traffic Service the ATU needs surveillance equipment. Once identified, the controller will then pass relevant information to you which means traffic within 3NM of you or 3000' of you vertically, but they may use their discretion if they judge no conflict is likely (diverging courses crossing behind climbing away etc). They will seek to warn you within 5NM of a conflict to allow you to assimilate the information before 3NM.

Aircraft Commander is responsible for terrain and collision avoidance and should avoid changing height or heading without advising and obtaining a response from the ATU. If the pilot is below the unit's safe terrain level the ATU will remind him.

The suggestion is that although available to IMC traffic it may not be appropriate.

**Deconfliction Service- (OLD RAS)**

Be careful here under a deconfliction service the ATU will give you instructions that could take you in to IMC. Do not use this unless you are able to comply with IFR. This service will provide deconfliction headings and heights against ALL unco-ordinated traffic to a minima of 5NM laterally and 3000' vertically. These minima can be reduced to 3NM and 1000' if the deconflicted aircraft are being handled by the same controller and have been verified. It follows then if Mode C is U/S you are a 5NM /3000' deconfliction.....would you want to be?

**NB This service cannot and will not be provided below the ATU's safe terrain level.**

## **Procedural Service – (New Service at aerodromes with unprotected let downs)**

In an attempt to be unambiguous you need to be careful here too this is nothing to do with procedural flying in the context of following a let down plate. **A procedural service does not require surveillance equipment.** In class F/G airspace do not be surprised if you meet other aircraft without ATC warning.

This service cannot be provided by all ATU's and is only provided by ATUs with Regulatory Approval.

ATC may well pass radial time height heading information to a pilot designed to avoid conflict. Due to the reliance on accurate flying and the likelihood of entering IMC pilots without the training/rating should not use a Procedural Service unless they can do so in VMC.

## **Conclusions**

If you are a non IMC rated pilot who flies around the local area you still have the complete right to call up Wellesbourne on departure and the ATU at your intended destination and ignore all other ATU's en-route. You will be an unidentified aircraft but that is quite legal.

You might want to upgrade your flight safety by finding out what other aircraft are in the local area and you may well do that by requesting a Basic Service. You will probably be told there are lots of local aircraft about but the heights and headings are unknown. However, the worth of this is the same as a current Flight Information Service in that it is the transmissions from other aircraft on frequency rather than the ATU itself which helps you build up a mental picture of local traffic movements.

If the visibility clamps in a bit and you could do with some help you could go for a Traffic service assuming that you have a transponder and the ATU has a serviceable Radar. If the weather clamps in a bit more and you are now entering IMC you can stay with a Traffic service or you can upgrade to a Deconfliction service but be prepared for some bizarre and seemingly random routings.

At the destination you may elect for a Procedural service if available but be prepared for any unidentified aircraft conflicts.

So what's changed? Nothing much you are still responsible for your own actions and still as likely to get an airprox from an unidentified aircraft – KEEP EM PEELED!!

**John Eburne CFI March 2009**