



Civil Aviation Authority
Aeronautical Information Service
Control Tower Building, London Heathrow Airport
Hounslow, Middlesex TW6 1JJ
Editorial: 020-8745 3460 (NATS AIS)
Distribution: 01242-235151 (Documedia Cheltenham Ltd)
Content: 020-7453 6543 (ORA)

Cancels AIC 27/2001 (Yellow 46)

MILITARY LOW FLYING TRAINING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

1 Introduction

1.1 The United Kingdom Military Low Flying System (UKLFS) is sponsored by the MoD. The Directorate of Airspace Policy and the MoD co-sponsor this Circular to inform civilian pilots about military low flying training operations in the UK in the interest of mutual flight safety.

1.2 Low flying training remains an essential element in the tactical inventory of an effective air force and regular training in a realistic environment is essential to maintain operational capabilities. Over the UK, low flying is carried out by the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy, Army Air Corps and the UK-based 3rd United States Air Force. To a much lesser degree, training is also conducted by other NATO air forces.

2 The United Kingdom Military Low Flying System (UKLFS)

2.1 The UKLFS (see Annexe) extends across the whole of the UK and surrounding overseas areas, from the surface to 2000 ft. This permits a wide distribution of activity, which contributes to flight safety and reduces the environmental impact of low flying. Military pilots are directed to avoid major conurbations, built up areas, Controlled Airspace (CAS), Aerodrome Traffic Zones (ATZ) and other sensitive locations. Inevitably, the protection given to these areas creates unavoidable concentrations of military low flying activity where corridors are formed between them. Where necessary, military pilots follow uni-directional flows below 2000 ft to reduce the risk of conflict. These flow structures are published at UK AIP ENR 6-5-2-1.

2.2 For administrative purposes, the UKLFS is divided geographically into low flying areas (LFA) (see Annexe). Certain LFAs, nominated Dedicated User Areas (DUA), are allocated for special use (such as concentrated helicopter training) and are managed under local arrangements. Civil pilots should be aware that Unusual Air Activity (UAA) and night exercises are frequently conducted in DUAs. These exercises can include aircraft operating without, or with restricted, navigation lights. Details of UAAs conducted in other areas of the UKLFS are promulgated by UK NOTAM.

→ 2.3 In the North of Scotland, the Highlands Restricted Area (HRA) is used for special training, often in Instrument Meteorological Conditions (IMC). To ensure safety, entry by Civilian and non-participating military aircraft is normally prohibited during the promulgated operating hours. Details of the HRA, and its operating periods, are contained in AIC 57/2001 (Pink 21) and UK AIP ENR 5-1-2-4.

2.4 UK Danger Areas are regularly used for weapons training. This can lead to an increased amount of low flying in the surrounding airspace. Details of Danger Areas can be found in the UK AIP ENR 5.1.

3 Military Low Flying Activity

3.1 Military fixed wing aircraft (except light aircraft) are considered to be low flying when less than 2000 ft Minimum Separation Distance (MSD), which is the authorised minimum separation, in all directions, between an aircraft and the ground, water or any obstacle. The lowest height at which military aircraft normally fly is 250 ft MSD. However, in three specially designated areas, known as Tactical Training Areas (TTA), located in Mid-Wales, in the Borders of Scotland and in the North of Scotland, a small number of flights may be authorised to fly down to 100 ft MSD. Military light propeller aircraft and helicopters are considered to be low flying when operating below 500 ft MSD. In practice, most military low flying takes place between 250 ft and 600 ft MSD, decreasing in intensity up to 1000 ft MSD and reducing further in the 1000 ft to 2000 ft height band. Occasionally, however, military aircraft perform high-energy manoeuvres between 250 ft and 2000 ft, during which rapid changes in height, speed and direction of the aircraft will occur.

3.2 The greater proportion of low flying training is restricted to weekdays and to daylight hours, although it is necessary to carry out some low flying at night and occasionally at weekends. Fast jet aircraft are normally limited to a cruising speed of 450 kt, although speeds of up to 550 kt can be authorised for short periods during simulated attacks and practice interceptions. Of course, light propeller aircraft and helicopters operate at much lower speeds.

3.3 Most low flying takes place in the UK Flight Information Regions (FIR), outside CAS, where ground radio and radar coverage is not adequate to provide a radar service to military aircraft flying at low level. It would be equally impractical for military jet aircraft to achieve de-confliction by contacting ATC units. Military low flying is only conducted in Visual Meteorological Conditions (VMC), where pilots not only fly with visual reference to the surface, but also apply the 'see and avoid' principle regarding other aircraft. The exception to this rule is low flying in the HRA, when active, which is regularly conducted in limited visibility using terrain following radar.

→ 3.4 The Headquarters Strike Command Low Flying Booking Cell (LFBC) based at the London Air Traffic Control Centre (Military), (LATCC(Mil)), disseminate information on hazards and restrictions, including Civil Aircraft Notification Procedure (CANP) and some recreational aviation activities, to military aircrews via a military NOTAM distribution network. It is also possible for some late warnings to be passed to aircrew by telephone before flight, but once airborne, because of high transit speeds, frequency distribution and terrain screening, there is a limit on the extent to which ground to air communications can be maintained.

4 Civilian Low Flying

4.1 Civilian pilots engaged in low level aerial work may be subject to aircraft manoeuvring limitations and/or restricted look-out. CANP exists to provide military aircrews with information on civil aircraft below 1000 ft agl engaged in crop spraying, photography, surveys or helicopters carrying under-slung loads. Military aircraft flying at speeds in excess of 140 kt will avoid the notified CANP areas of operation either laterally or vertically, with a separation of not less than 500 ft. Recreational activities will not normally attract CANP avoidance areas, but military aircrew will take account of some specified activities when planning low flying sorties. Information on the use of CANP is published in AIC 55/2001 (Yellow 52) and UK AIP ENR 1-10-13 to 1-10-16. ←

4.2 To reduce the risk of conflict with low flying military aircraft, civilian pilots conducting transit flights under Visual Flight Rules (VFR) during the working week are recommended to fly above 2000 ft agl if possible. In particular, they should avoid operating in the 250 ft to 1000 ft height band. When departing from aerodromes in the FIR, pilots should endeavour to reach 1000 ft as quickly as possible, and to delay descent below 1000 ft for as long as possible when approaching such aerodromes. Military pilots are directed to avoid ATZs. Where an ATZ is established, civilian pilots are recommended to fly circuits and procedures within the ATZ as far as they can. In the vicinity of aerodromes without an ATZ, military pilots will apply the 'see and avoid' principle.

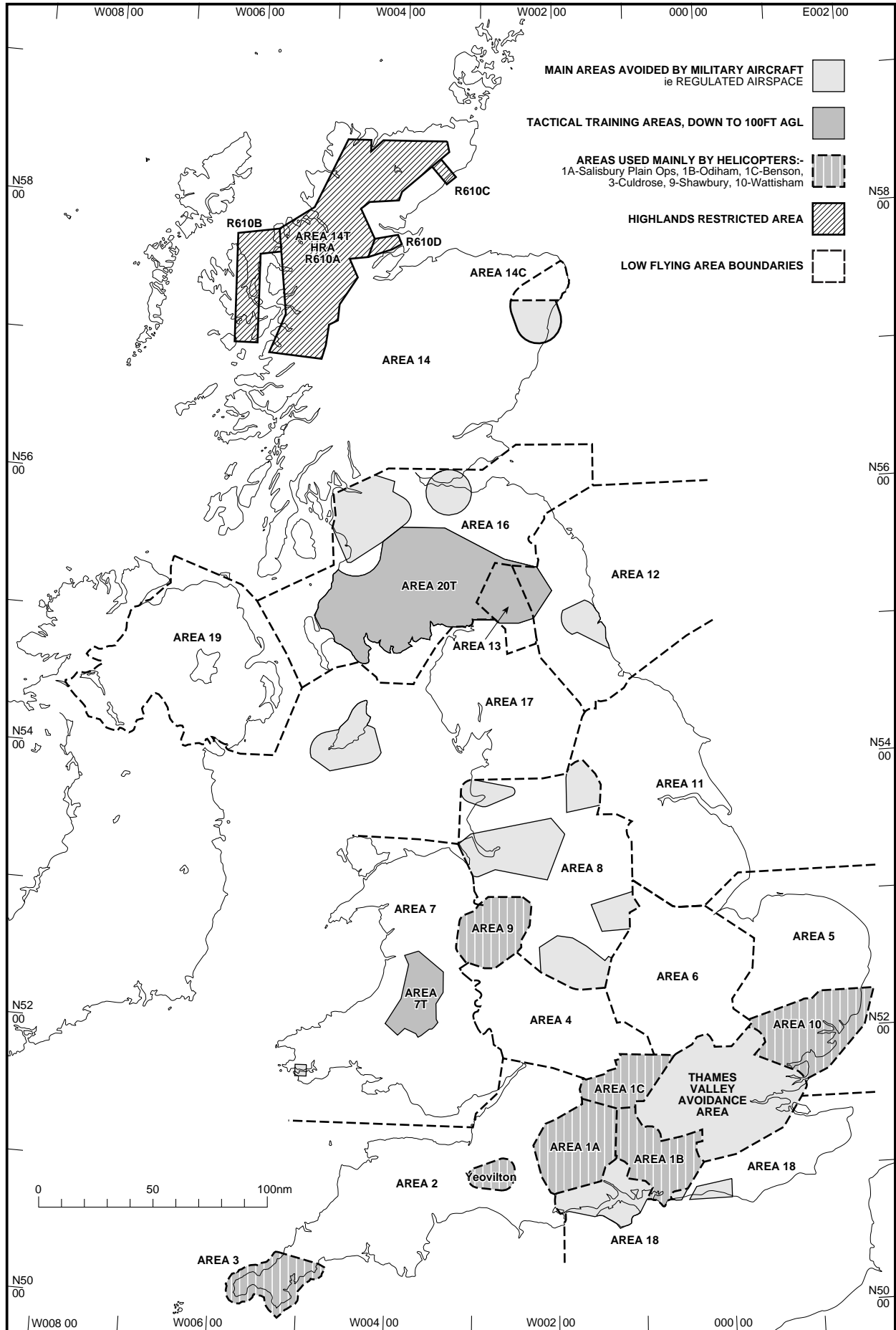
5 Conclusion

5.1 In UKLFS airspace, as elsewhere in the FIR, de-confliction depends on pilots seeing and avoiding other aircraft. Civilian pilots can make a considerable contribution to flight safety by flying above 1000 ft whenever possible and remaining aware that some military flying occurs in the 1000 ft to 2000 ft height band.

This Circular is issued for information, guidance and necessary action.

ANNEXE

UK MILITARY LOW LEVEL FLYING SYSTEM



AP7 M96085b 11.08.00