

**SERIOUS INCIDENT**

<b>Aircraft Type and Registration:</b>	Airbus A319-111, G-EZAJ	
<b>No &amp; Type of Engines:</b>	2 CFM CFM56-5B5/P turbofan engines	
<b>Year of Manufacture:</b>	2006 (Serial no: 2742)	
<b>Date &amp; Time (UTC):</b>	26 May 2021 at 0840 hrs	
<b>Location:</b>	Lasham Airfield, Hampshire	
<b>Type of Flight:</b>	Other	
<b>Persons on Board:</b>	Crew - 2	Passengers - None
<b>Injuries:</b>	Crew - None	Passengers - N/A
<b>Nature of Damage:</b>	None	
<b>Commander's Licence:</b>	Airline Transport Pilot's Licence	
<b>Commander's Age:</b>	35 years	
<b>Commander's Flying Experience:</b>	over 5,000 hours (of which 5,000 were on type) Last 90 days - 129 hours Last 28 days - 44 hours	
<b>Information Source:</b>	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and MOR submitted by the aerodrome	

**Synopsis**

An airliner landed on Runway 27 at Lasham Airfield while winch-launch cables were present on the grass abeam the southern edge. The gliding club and maintenance organisation have taken action to improve communication between relevant parties and to emphasise the importance of securing the runway area during heavy aircraft movements.

**History of the flight**

On 25 May 2021, the aircraft operator sent a 'Pre-Allocation Report' to the operations department of the maintenance organisation (MRO) at Lasham Airfield indicating that Airbus A319 G-EZAJ was scheduled to arrive from Gatwick Airport at 0900 hrs the following day. This information was passed to the gliding club at the aerodrome by email. Later in the afternoon, a 'Final Allocation Report' confirmed these timings. At 2235 hrs that night, the air operations department of the MRO received the flight plan which gave an Estimated Off Blocks Time<sup>1</sup> (EOBT) of 0800 hrs and a Scheduled Time of Arrival of 0817 hrs, 43 minutes earlier than previously indicated by the operator. The flight plan was subsequently transmitted by email to the various parties on the airfield, including the duty instructor (DI) of the gliding club but not any member of the winch team.

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**Footnote**

<sup>1</sup> The time that the brakes are released for the purpose of the aircraft being pushed-back from the gate or parking spot is referred to as 'off-blocks'.

At 0730 hrs on the morning of the flight, gliding club staff began preparing for flying. The DI noted the updated scheduled arrival time for G-EZAJ but was not aware that the winch team planned to carry out maintenance on the winch cables; consequently, the DI did not update the winch team on the change.

The commander of G-EZAJ rang the duty Air-Ground Operator (AGO) at Lasham at 0753 hrs to inform him that the aircraft would arrive 25 minutes later. Meanwhile, the winch team went onto the airfield, set up the winch along the south side of Runway 27 and towed out the winch cables. G-EZAJ taxied at Gatwick at 0800 hrs as scheduled and at 0801 hrs the AGO at Lasham sounded the siren to deploy the airfield fire service.

At 0807 hrs, the Farnborough Radar controller (FRC) called the AGO to let him know that G-EZAJ was about to depart Gatwick. The AGO advised him that the airfield was still being secured and the runway was not yet available. G-EZAJ departed Gatwick at 0809 hrs and a minute later the AGO advised the duty Senior Fire Officer (SFO) at Lasham that the aircraft was airborne but that he “might have to hold him off”.

At 0811 hrs, the AGO advised the FRC that the runway was still unavailable. A minute later the AGO determined from the SFO that the runway would be available in 4 minutes and passed this on to the FRC. The FRC and AGO agreed to position G-EZAJ onto the final approach for Runway 27 to fly a visual circuit if the runway remained unavailable.

At 0813 hrs, the winch team advised the SFO that the winch cables could not be retrieved immediately because they had been cut from the winch as part of the maintenance procedure and they would have to be re-spliced before they could be wound in.

At 0817 hrs, the AGO requested a range check from the FRC. At the same time, the SFO contacted the AGO advising him that a further 5 minutes would be required before the runway would be available due to the winch cables. The AGO advised the FRC, who in turn stated that he would advise the crew of G-EZAJ to expect to fly a visual circuit. The AGO passed this to the SFO.

At 0819 hrs, the crew of G-EZAJ contacted Lasham Radio and, advised they were on the approach at 6 nm distant and expected to join a visual circuit at 2,000 ft. In response, Lasham Radio advised the crew that there was a delay in runway availability because of winch cables on the ground.

At 0820 hrs, the SFO considered that there was insufficient time to recover the cables while G-EZAJ flew a visual circuit; consequently, the attempt to recover the cables was abandoned. The SFO then declared to the AGO that the runway was available. No mention was made of the position of the winch cables.

At 0827 hrs, G-EZAJ landed within the touchdown zone on Runway 27 with the winch cables still on the grass aside the southern edge of the runway.

## Aerodrome information

Lasham airfield is 32 nm west of Gatwick Airport, situated within the Odiham Military Air Traffic Zone. The airfield is a major centre for gliding and is owned by the local gliding society, which leases part of the land to an MRO for large commercial aircraft. Responsibilities for airfield operations are shared between the airfield owner and the MRO.

The MRO is responsible for the provision of functions pertaining to large aircraft movements, including the Air-Ground communication service (AGCS), the airfield fire service (AFS), and ground handling and fuelling services. The AFS deploys portable Precision Approach Path Indicator (PAPI) units for large aircraft movements.

The MRO utilises the asphalt main runway, Runway 09/27, which is unlicensed. The airfield information plate provided by Jeppesen Charts includes the following warning:

*'Intensive glider operations every day with simultaneous RH [right hand] and LH [left hand] circuits by up to 20 gliders and tug ACFT [aircraft], and danger of launch cables both on the ground and in the air up to 3,000 ft AAL. Occasional movements by large jets.'*

Although Lasham airfield is unlicensed, the MRO seeks to maintain a protected runway strip clear of infrangible objects, vehicles, persons and aircraft during heavy aircraft operations to or from Runway 09/27. The strip is equivalent to that required by a non-instrument code 3 runway for licensed airfields, extending to 75 m either side of the runway centreline and 60 m beyond each runway threshold.

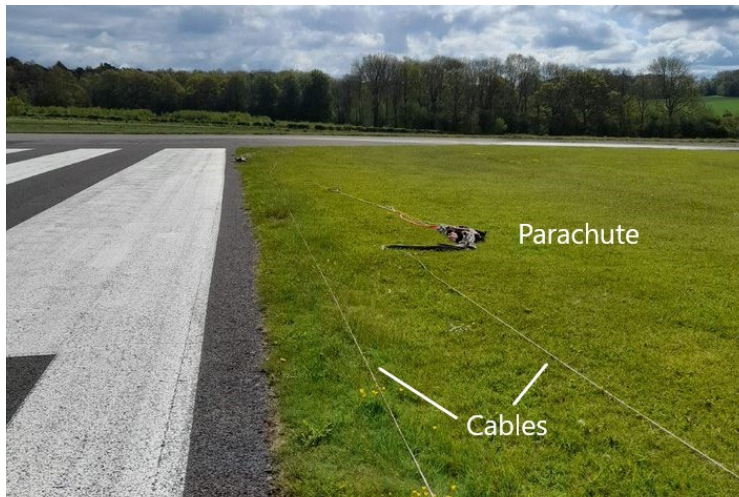
## Winch-launch cables

The winch-launch cables were 6 mm thick and made of synthetic plastic, with a parachute attached on the end connected to gliders for launch. The parachute allows for a controlled descent of the cable following release from the glider.

The cables were subject to a maintenance procedure known as a cable reversal, whereby the cables are reeled out to their full extent, the end of the cable attached to the winch is cut and the winch is then reattached with a splice to the opposite end of the cable. The procedure requires use of the longest part of the airfield, which is adjacent to Runway 09/27, and typically takes 10 minutes; however, it is recognised that the re-splicing of the cable back on to the winch should not be rushed due to its safety-critical nature (Figure1).

## MRO investigation

The investigation by the MRO found there was an absence of coordination between airfield users. This resulted in information not being shared between the flying operation and other sections of the gliding club. Consequently, the winch team was unaware that the arrival time of G-EZAJ was earlier than originally advised, while the flying staff were unaware of the planned winch cable maintenance.



**Figure 1**

Winch cables with parachutes laid on grass along southern edge of Runway 27 abeam the landing threshold

The MRO investigation also found that the AGO was unaware of the continued presence of winch cables abeam the runway when he advised the crew of G-EZAJ that the runway was available. Although the SFO had previously advised the AGO that more time was required to clear the cables, he subsequently declared the runway as available, but gave no update on the position of the cables. This was attributed to the absence of written guidance to the SFO as to what constituted a secure runway strip. Instead, the SFO had the discretion to determine whether the position of an object or person was safe.

The MRO investigation found that it was also likely that the SFO felt pressure to declare the runway available owing to the arrival of the aircraft in the circuit. The aircraft's presence had arisen from the agreement between the AGO and the FRC to continue to vector the aircraft towards the airfield instead of instructing the aircraft to hold pending runway availability.

The MRO investigation also noted that the winch team conducting the maintenance was likely to have been less current at performing these maintenance tasks due to a significant reduction in winch launching during public health restrictions.

## Analysis

The location of the winch cables along the southern edge of the runway posed a potential hazard to the landing aircraft because the parachute at the end of the cables lying abeam the landing threshold might become inflated by the jet wash of the landing aircraft. This risk was only likely to manifest itself if the landing aircraft had landed close to the threshold rather than in the touchdown zone. However, the commander commented that he considered this unlikely owing to the treeline in the undershoot, which deters landings in that location. In addition, the portable PAPIs would have provided appropriate glidepath guidance to the crew.

The commander had been alerted to the issue of the cables along the southern edge of the runway when he first spoke with Lasham Radio. However, the subsequent declaration by the SFO that the runway was available, without an update on the cables, may have given the impression that the cables no longer posed a hazard. The commander was not told that the cables remained along the southern edge of the runway, so had an incomplete picture on which to base his decisions. He might otherwise have considered flying a further visual circuit or holding while the runway strip was secured.

## Conclusion

The Airbus A319 landed while winch-launch cables were present on the grass abeam the southern edge of the runway. This resulted from a lack of coordination between users of the airfield and insufficient guidance on what constituted a secure runway strip.

It is likely the Senior Fire Officer felt pressure to declare the runway available for the arriving aircraft, which was in the circuit. The Air-Ground Operator was not told that the cables remained abeam the southern edge of the runway when the Senior Fire Officer declared the runway available. Consequently, the commander of G-EZAJ did not have the opportunity to manage the threat posed by the presence of the cables.

The following safety actions have been taken:

The airfield owner stated that:

- Individuals are required to contact the DI for a brief on relevant airfield information and any aircraft movements if there is a need to enter the operational area prior to the daily briefing.
- Planned winch maintenance will be notified the day before it is due to take place.
- Any winch maintenance should be conducted as far away from the main runway as the circumstances allow.

The MRO has:

- issued an information bulletin to provide guidance on the importance of securing the runway during heavy aircraft movements and what constitutes a secure runway strip. This will be incorporated into the AFS manual which is currently undergoing revision.
- briefed Fire Crew Commanders on the event and on the guidance about runway strips, the procedures to be used, and how to determine that a runway strip is secure. This will be incorporated into future Fire Crew Commander training.
- briefed all members of the AGCS on the incident and how the handover from FRC before the runway was available contributed to the incident.