

CASE STUDY COMMENT 3

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Communication is one of the most important things in life and arguably the most important concept in aviation industry...

Sharing the information is crucial at all levels, starting from information exchange between the Captain and the First Officer to communication between different aviation entities. In the aviation industry, a person receiving information is not the only one who benefits from it; often it is helpful to pass on the information you possess so that others can help. Flying the plane or controlling air traffic is a dynamic process and the situation may change drastically in a matter of seconds and thus it is critical to pass the information you receive on to everyone concerned.

On initial training both future pilots and controllers are trained in communication skills. It is clearly explained to them that sharing of the information is the cornerstone of the day-to-day operations in aviation industry. An immense part of an air traffic controller's job is passing relevant information to pilots and pilots, on the other hand, should share pertinent information with controllers. This process creates situational awareness, a condition where both parties have

an understanding of the current state and dynamics of a system and are thereby able to anticipate future developments.

And so what do we have in our case?!

The controllers did not advise the pilot that the PAPI was out for both runways. The pilots were not informed about the VFR traffic crossing final approach at 1500 feet. On the other hand, the pilot did not inform the controller that the glideslope indication had disappeared.

All of the above-mentioned contributed to the sad outcome of our case. But things could have been worse. Mid-air collision could have occurred if TCAS did not kick in! The near miss between two aircraft that triggered the TCAS RA could have been easily avoided if the controller had simply passed traffic information to the inbound aircraft. At the same time, because of the TCAS RA, the aircraft had to climb and thus became well above the glideslope. Moments later the glideslope became unavailable, but the pilot did not report it. If he had done, the controller could have switched it back on and the aircraft might have been able to land safely.

To make things worse, the PAPIs were out as well, but that was a surprise for the pilot since the controller did not inform him about it. The First Officer had to increase the rate of descent according to his best judgment which led to an EGPWS warning. At this point the pilots

had received two warning signals in quick succession (TCAS RA and EGPWS warning) and that already is a lot of pressure for pilots putting aside the fact that they were behind schedule.

To cut the long story short: lack of communication was a significant contributor in our case.

A RECOMMENDATION

Additional training is needed for both the pilots and the controllers so that they realise the importance of information exchange. The controllers were not aware that the glideslope signal had been switched off and the pilots were not informed about the non-functional PAPIs. The aircraft on final approach and the VFR flight crossing the approach were not aware about each other and that almost caused a mid-air collision! If information had been shared between the controllers and the pilots, Brent's Trabant might have enjoyed another 100,000 km on its odometer! ☺

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