

REPORT OF A MEETING HELD IN DORNOCH ON
19th SEPTEMBER, 1967, TO DISCUSS DANGER AREA D.703

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. On the 12th September, 1967, a notice was circulated by the Town Clerk, Royal Burgh of Dornoch, that a meeting would be held to discuss the situation with regard to the use of Dornoch Links landing field. The notice was as follows:-

"A meeting will be held in the Council Chambers, County Offices, Dornoch on Tuesday 19th September, 1967 at 3 o'clock afternoon when Members of the Ministry of Defence (Admiralty) and the Board of Trade (Civil Aviation) will, under the Chairmanship of Provost Henry Clunie, J.P., make their respective submissions with reference to the Dornoch Firth Danger (Flying) Zone and the use of Dornoch Landing Field by Civil Aircraft. Thereafter the views of Dornoch Town Council, Sutherland County Council, the Highlands and Islands Development Board and the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) as also the present and potential users of the Links Landing Field will be heard."

- 1.2. The Scottish Council (Development & Industry) was represented by Messrs. D.P. Shaw and V.C. Slight. On the 10th July, 1967, Mr. V.C. Slight circulated notes on the case to members of the Air Group of the Transport and Communications Committee. The paper pointed out that the Royal Burgh of Dornoch lies completely within Danger Area D.703 which extends from sea level to 20,000 ft. above mean sea level, the seaward side of which is used by the Navy Department for bombing exercises. The area includes the Dornoch Firth, Tain and Tarbat Ness and encloses an area of 136 sq. nautical miles. The area is categorised as one in which firing, bombing or other hazardous activities constituting a risk to aircraft, take place by day and by night, and must be regarded as permanently active.

2. REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

- 2.1. Opening the Navy's case Commander Slade of the Ministry of Defence (Navy) London, stated that there was a number of facets which were not easily understood in London. For this reason he commenced by asking Mr. W.C. Wright, Town Clerk and Chamberlain of Dornoch, a number of questions, the answers to which, it is submitted, should have been known to an authority exercising this type of control over an area. In reply to the Commander's query as to the number of movements at Dornoch aerodrome, Mr. Wright replied that there might be two per day on two or three days per week. In answer to further questions Mr. Wright, as the controlling authority for the aerodrome, stated that he had received no notification of embarrassment caused to civil aircraft or any near misses, due to military flying in the area and, indeed, he could only recall one occasion when military aircraft had been flying at the same time as a civil aircraft movement. Mr. Wright was unable to say whether all aircraft using the airfield were fitted with radio but he considered that this was most probably the case. He was, of course, unable to make any estimate of future movements for a number of reasons, not least of which was whether civil aircraft operations could continue at Dornoch. No minimum conditions were laid down by Dornoch Burgh Council for the qualification of pilots using the aerodrome and from his experience most aircraft arriving at Dornoch did so from a southerly direction.

- 2.2. The Commander continued by pointing out that his Ministry's sole concern is for flight safety. Although no reported cases of near misses had come to light it is essential that if there is any remote possibility of such an occurrence then every step must be taken to overcome the possibility before it happens.

- 2.3. The Navy were prepared to suggest that, subject to detailed procedures being drawn up, agreement would be given to aircraft making their initial approach to the field from the west, keeping 1,500 ft. above the highest fixed object within 2,000 ft. of the area. Departure from the field would similarly be to the west. The Navy would require aircraft to make radio contact with Lossiemouth Royal Naval Air Station when at least 30 miles from the Danger Area using one of the three civil frequencies available at Lossiemouth. Upon receipt of such a notification the range controller would cease operations in the vicinity of Dornoch until the aircraft had landed. An aircraft about to depart from Dornoch would be required to telephone Lossiemouth Air Traffic Control by tie-line and state his estimated time of departure in order that military operations might be postponed until the aircraft was clear of the Danger Area. During the period that civil aircraft were operating in or adjacent to the Danger Area, they would be under continuous radar surveillance by Moray Radar, operated by Royal Navy personnel.
- 2.4. Mr. Mackenzie, representing the Board of Trade, stated that there had been an exchange of correspondence between his Board and the Ministry of Defence (Navy) since March 1966. The correspondence had commenced when the Danger Area had been promulgated as permanently active as distinct from its previous category when it had been inactive except when notified by a Notice to Airmen. He considered that the Ministry of Defence proposals, made at this meeting, represented a step in the right direction. In answer to a query from the Provost as to how such a procedure could be enforced with civil aircraft, Mr. Mackenzie replied that any person entering a Danger Area was open to prosecution and it was necessary, therefore, that action such as the MOD suggested be brought into force if the airfield was to be used safely and the users kept free from possible prosecution.
- 2.5. V.C. Slight was then called upon to present the views of the Scottish Council (Development & Industry). He pointed out that Dornoch airfield is capable of serving more than the immediate area of Dornoch. Situated between Wick and Evanton it has a potential communications importance for a considerable area of Sutherland and Ross & Cromarty. Furthermore, the Scottish Council has noted the urgent need for airfields in the Highlands, particularly coastal airfields, for the development of a high grade air taxi service to provide internal links, as well as feeders to the main airports for onward connections. Without adequate communication development must be retarded, and air communications are of major importance in this context. The point was then made that in accordance with Ministry of Defence Flying Orders and Board of Trade Flying Orders for Military Aircraft, the rules of the air so far as they are applicable to, inter alia, low flying, are identical for military aircraft as for civil aircraft flying in accordance with the Air Navigation Order, 1966. For this reason it was not understood why the Danger Area is extended over the Royal Burgh of Dornoch and other habitations. It was agreed, however, that by the nature of the operations it was necessary, whilst they continued in the area, that a Danger Area should be notified and, subject to certain conditions the Scottish Council would agree to the procedures proposed.
- 2.6. With regard to the BOT observation that pilots flying in a Danger Area were liable to prosecution it was argued that such action was not the case. Confusion seemed to exist between the definition of a Danger Area and that of a Prohibited Area. A Danger Area is defined as an air space of defined dimensions within which activities dangerous to the flight of aircraft may exist at specified times. A Prohibited Area, as the name implies, proclaims a total prohibition of flying in the notified area whereas a Danger Area is notified for advisory purposes although, of course, it would be highly imprudent for a pilot to enter a permanently active Danger Area.
- 2.7. The conditions which the Scottish Council would need to see observed in agreeing with the MOD proposals would be the promulgation of the full particulars /

particulars applicable to Dornoch in the Aerodromes Section of the United Kingdom Aeronautical Information Publication and full details of the Air Traffic Control procedures for using Dornoch to be included in the Air Traffic Rules and Services section of the AIP.

- 2.8. It was observed that the Danger Area D.703 also had the effect of causing aircraft flying between Inverness and Wick to route via Bonar Bridge, a distance of 76 nautical miles as compared with 68 nautical miles if the route could be flown direct. In the absence of a radio aid at Bonar Bridge, visual contact had to be established.
- 2.9. Replying the Commander responsible for Air Traffic Control at Lossiemouth stated that scheduled aircraft do not need to fly round the Danger Area as described by Slight, but do in fact contact Lossiemouth and obtain clearance to fly direct between Inverness and Wick through the Area. Slight replied that this should be promulgated in the AIP as the procedure for flying round the Area was the only one shown in that document.
- 2.10. The Commander (Air Traffic Control) then demonstrated on a map the various patterns followed by military aircraft exercising in the Area, and the Commander (Flying) at Lossiemouth also stated that a large area was needed as the pilots using the bombing range were, in general, in the student category.
- 2.11. The BOT representative suggested that the Scottish Council's views would be satisfied if a Control Zone was established around Dornoch based on Lossiemouth. Slight objected and said that this would be unacceptable as pilots using the airfield would then be restricted to those holding Instrument Ratings or fortunate enough to obtain a clearance under the Special Visual Flight Rules. As a result most private pilots and all student pilots would be precluded.
- 2.12. The Commander from MOD stated that procedures would have to be carefully prepared in consultation between his Ministry and the BOT but he was prepared to say that whatever procedure was finally decided upon, military exercises would cease immediately upon a civil aircraft commencing approach or departure at Dornoch. In respect of the aerodrome and procedures being shown in the AIP, he suggested that a notice be distributed to users by the Town Clerk of Dornoch. The BOT and Scottish Council representatives pointed out that this would not reach all potential users, and unless it was promulgated in the official AIP transgressors would have the defence that they were unaware of the procedures laid down.
- 2.13. Speaking for the potential users of the aerodrome the pilot of an executive aircraft, and a member of the distillery which employed him, agreed that the Navy had difficulties and seemed to be going as far as they possibly could to assist in alleviating the situation. The pilot pointed out that he might be biased as he had only retired from the Naval air service last December.
- 2.14. A flying instructor argued forcibly for the complete abandonment of the Danger Area. He elicited the information from the Commander (Flying) that the range is used when the cloud base is not worse than about 1,000 ft., although this was flexible, and that it was only used from Monday to Friday under normal circumstances. The RAF also used the range from time to time.
- 2.15. When asked to comment, the representative of the Highlands & Islands Development Board said that he had nothing further to add to the Scottish Council's case, with which his Board was in full agreement.

- 2.16. The Convener of the County Council of Sutherland expressed his concern that the Local Authorities had not been informed by Her Majesty's Government of the use being made of the air space over their land areas. He asked the representative from the MOD to convey his views that the action in establishing a Danger Area without reference to the Local Authorities concerned was undemocratic.

3. OPINION

- 3.1. To ensure the continued use of the airfield it is necessary that steps be taken to have it notified as such in the United Kingdom Aeronautical Information Publication as being the official document referred to in the Air Navigation Order, 1966, for this purpose. This, it is submitted, would be acceptable as prima facie evidence of the airfield's existence as an active field for the landing and take-off of aircraft. Agreement with the Scottish Council's request that this action be taken by the Board of Trade (Civil Aviation Department) is considered as an important step forward.
- 3.2. Proposals made by the Ministry of Defence (Navy) indicate that Ministry's acceptance of the need for the airfield and reduces the strength of any future argument against its importance.
- 3.3. It is essential that pressure be kept up in order that the Danger Area be removed in due course from the vicinity of Dornoch as, by the Navy's own admission, it is used by students and, in the best interests of the local population, this cannot be considered acceptable under any circumstances. There have been serious accidents, which can be cited from the past, when practice bombs have caused fatalities off bombing ranges and where slower aircraft than those in present use, flown by experienced pilots, have gone out of control on low flying sorties.
- 3.4. If the Navy insist on a telephone tie-line between the airfield and Lossiemouth, then it should be installed at the expense of the Ministry of Defence, and subsequent rentals and charges settled by that Ministry. The Dornoch Council should not be held liable for expense arising from a situation which it did not bring upon itself.
- 3.5. It is submitted that the establishment of a Danger Area over Dornoch airfield by the Ministry of Defence (Navy) constitutes an interference with the proper enjoyment of a reasonable use of the surface of the land by the owners thereof.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1. It is recommended that in view of the evidence which was presented at this meeting the Local Authorities involved should make representations in the form of formal submissions to the Minister of Defence (Navy) and the President of the Board of Trade for the early removal of the Danger Area. In view of the airfield's importance to the economic development of this area of the Highlands it is further recommended that the Scottish Council (Development & Industry) should give the Local Authorities its fullest support.

Minute of meeting between Dornoch Town Council, Ministry of Defence (Admiralty) and Board of Trade, Civil Aviation Department, at the County Council Chambers, County Offices, Dornoch on Tuesday 19th September, 1967 at 3.p.m..

Sederunt: Dornoch Town Council:

Provost Henry Clunie, J.P., Senior Bailie D.A. Gardner, Dean of Guild D.D. Purvis, Hon. Treasurer E.K. Cartwright and Councillors John Phlmister, W.J.A. Davidson and G.W. Melville.

Ministry of Defence:

Commander E.R. Anson, Royal Naval Air Station Lossiemouth, Commander J.W. Slade, Ministry of Defence, Directorate of Naval Air Warfare, Lieutenant Commander D.G. Heighway, Royal Naval Air Station Lossiemouth and Lieutenant Commander D.E. Adams, Staff of Flag Officer, Naval Air Command.

Civil Aviation Department
Board of Trade

G. Mackenzie, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh.

Also Present:

J.P. Whittet, O.B.E., J.P., Convener of Sutherland. County Councillor George Fraser, Dalchiel, J.B. Rodger, County Clerk, Charles Beaton, County Planning Officer, J.J. McMillan, County Development Officer, A.A.S. Scott, Director of Scottish Malt Distillers, Ltd., Elgin, Captain Aitchison, Strathair, Perthshire, D.P. Shaw and V.S. Slight of Scottish Council Development and Industry, J. Cameron, Highlands and Islands Development Board, D.G. Grant, Braambury, Brora for North Air, Caithness, J. Michael Scott, Factor, Sutherland Estates Office, Golspie.

In Attendance:

W.C. Wright, Town Clerk.

Chairman:

Provost Clunie.

Opening:

In his opening remarks the Chairman stated that he had first learned of difficulties concerning the use of Dornoch Landing Field on 23rd June last when the Town Clerk received a telephone call from Mr. Mackenzie, Civil Aviation, Board of Trade, Edinburgh concerning a deadlock between his Department and Ministry of Defence concerning a flying Danger Zone affecting Dornoch Links Landing Field. Apparently the Ministry of Defence had suggested a meeting with Dornoch Town Council in an attempt to resolve the problem. After several attempts a meeting had been fixed for this date. He called upon Commander Slade to make his Ministry's submission.

Ministry of Defence
Submission:

Commander Slade, with permission, asked the Town Clerk a number of questions regarding the air field such as the number of occasions on which the air field is used, whether aircraft using the air field are equipped with radio and what notice was given by air craft intending to use the field. The Commander then stated that the safety aspect is of primary importance. No case of danger had been reported but if danger is a remote possibility it must be prevented. He suggested that the field at Dornoch be used as follows namely:-

Minsitry of Defence
Proposals for use of
Links Landing Field
by Civil Aircraft:

- (1) that entry and exit to the field be from the west.
- (2) that aircraft coming in should make use of the facilities provided at Lossiemouth, i.e. avail themselves of Moray Radar and
- (3) that aircraft leaving the field should make direct telephone contact with Royal Naval Air Station Range Controller for clearance.

Civil Aviation Board of
Trade Submission:

Mr. G. Mackenzie, Civil Aviation, Edinburgh stated that he had been in correspondence with the Ministry of Defence for some fourteen to sixteen months as the Danger Area covering

Dornoch air field had been altered from "On Notice" to "Permanent". Any civil air pilot rendered himself liable to prosecution if he entered the Danger Area.

Scottish Council
(Development and
Industry)

Mr. Slight of the Scottish Council Development and Industry pointed out that a "Danger Area" is not the same as a "Prohibited Area". His Council would be happy to accept a position where notice to the Controller, Royal Naval Air Station, Lossiemouth given prior to arrival at and departure from Dornoch Landing Field would leave the air field operational.

Highlands & Islands
Development Board:

Mr. Cameron representing the Highlands and Islands Development Board stated that his Board's view coincided with that of the Scottish Council. He asked however if there were any strings attached to the Ministry of Defence's suggested solution. Commander Slade said that there were no strings attached.

Users
North Air , Caithness:

Mr. D.G. Grant, Braamby, Brora representing North Air, Caithness stated that he had retired from the Royal Air Force and was now Board of Trade Pilot Examiner for the area north of Perth and instructor for a flying club with an aircraft stationed at Wick and operated at Inverness. He said that his Club wished as soon as possible to have an aircraft centred on Dornoch. He did not think that, for light aircraft, the proposals made by the Ministry of Defence could be operated and suggested that as the Range in Dornoch Firth area was not suitable for high speed aircraft the Range area should be moved eastwards to allow of transit by aircraft direct from Dornoch to Inverness.

Strathair:

Captain Aitchison for Strathair stated that the Ministry of Defence proposals were "workable" and in fact offered better civil aircraft landing facilities at Dornoch than he had expected. The final word was left with Commander Slade for the Ministry of Defence when he said that the Dornoch Air Strip exists. To enable it to continue Royal Naval Air Station, Lossiemouth would offer the use of Moray Radar to ensure the safety of aircraft coming in to land at Dornoch. It would be essential to establish a direct land line from the Dornoch Airfield to the Range Controller, Royal Naval Air Station, Lossiemouth and this was a matter for arrangement between Ministry of Defence, G.P.O. Telephones and Dornoch Town Council. The Airfield could be used by radio equipped aircraft only and notification of the airfield and requirements would have to be widely circulated. It was pointed out by the Town Clerk that no intimation had been given to Dornoch Town Council nor so far as he was aware to Sutherland County Council of the existence of the Danger Area in the Dornoch Firth although the existence of the Landing Field, as a former Royal Air Force aerodrome would have been known to the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Naval Air Station Lossiemouth. It would be necessary to find out how the Danger Area had been delineated without reference to the Town Council. Provost Clunie in his closing remarks thanked Commander Slade and other Officers from Royal Naval Air Station Lossiemouth and Mr. Mackenzie, Civil Aviation Department, Edinburgh for their explanations. He thanked all who had come to the meeting to speak in support of the continued use of the Airfield. He thanked the Convener for his Council for the use of the County Council Chambers.