

## FASVIG PROGRAMME – ACCESS TO ATZs AT CLOSED AIRFIELDS

FASVIG has a FAS approved task to improve access to ATZs at closed airfields. This note sets out the situation and identifies some potential alleviations.

### BACKGROUND

1. FAS DSG approved the FASVIG Implementation Programme on 30 Sep 15. The FASVIP includes a work package

#### *A.2.5 Release ATZs at Closed Airfields*

*ATZs at civil airfields are only established during the hours of operation of the ATS, FIS or A-G. However, military ATZs are either H24 or have longer hours than the unit that controls them. This makes an ATZ at closed military units inaccessible to VFR (or any other) traffic.*

*FASVIG would propose a policy change related access to ATZs at closed units.*

2. The approved funding milestone for this activity says

*Develop and deliver the process to define underutilised regulated airspace and ATZ's at closed airfields and deliver ACP submissions to enact changes at the Top 20. (August 2016)*

3. The relevant section of the UK Rules of the Air are:

(2) An aircraft must not fly, take off or land within the aerodrome traffic zone of an aerodrome unless the commander of the aircraft has complied with paragraphs (3), (4) or (5), as appropriate.

(3) If the aerodrome has an air traffic control unit the commander must obtain the permission of that unit to enable the flight to be conducted safely within the aerodrome traffic zone.

(4) If the aerodrome provides a flight information service the commander must obtain information from the flight information centre to enable the flight to be conducted safely within the aerodrome traffic zone.

(5) If there is no flight information centre at the aerodrome the commander must obtain information from the air/ground communication service to enable the flight to be conducted safely within the aerodrome traffic zone.

### DISCUSSION

This works well for civil aerodromes where the ATZ is active during the notified period of watch of the ATS, AFIS or A-G Service.

Although the notified periods of operation are detailed the AIP there is no practical reference available for VFR aircraft in flight so it is common practice for aircraft to call on the published frequency for clearance or information. If there is no reply it indicates that the ATS/FIS/AG service is closed so the commander makes "traffic calls" and has then satisfied sub para (5) of the Rules of the Air.

Most military aerodromes list an ATZ to be active H24 or for periods in excess of the normal hours of operation of the ATS/AFIS/AG service. We understand that MOD wishes to retain ATZ availability in case of a need for short notice or standby operations. However, when the

ATZ is notified as active but the ATS/AFIS/AG service is closed the area becomes a prohibited area to civil aircraft.

The principle we seek to resolve in Package A.2.5 and FASVIG milestone (f) is that when MOD is using the airspace of an ATZ it is accessible on clearance from ATS/AFIS/AG but when MOD is not using the airspace it becomes a prohibited area. This is of particular relevance where a military ATZ is in an area of limited airspace where it contributes to a choke point. For example at week-ends when VFR operations are busy but military operations are suspended, often as a matter of standard routine.

It is the FASVIG view that an ATZ in the UKFIR is Class G airspace in which separation is not provided but that certain rules apply. It is not private airspace to be closed to all traffic or to have special rules applied at the discretion of the aerodrome. We regard this as a situation where flexible use airspace principles should apply.

Whatever solution may be adopted it will need to be practicable for the VFR pilot to operate at both the flight planning stage and in-flight.

### POTENTIAL ALLEVIATIONS

#### 1. Provide ATS/AFIS/AG Service during the notified hours of the ATZ

At some units where the ATS service is closed an AG service is provided using a callsign of xxxx ops. Whilst that could be useful we are aware of the AG service directing civil aircraft "to remain clear of the ATZ" which is not a clearance we believe an AG service is entitled to give. However even if that was resolved it would be expensive to provide and largely underutilised.

#### 2. Provide a recorded announcement (ATIS) on the published contact frequency

An ATIS announcement stating that the ATS/AFIS/AG service is closed and following up with details of any local use traffic and a frequency to use would allow a commander to comply with sub para (5) of the rules of the air and enter the ATZ making traffic calls.

Units would need an ATIS recorder/player that could be coupled to the appropriate VHF frequency. Depending on the nature of the unit task the recorder might need to be controlled remotely to enable the message to be stopped or amended for such activities as short notice standby activation where ATC is not opened. Where ATC is opened any recording could be switched off and normal procedures resumed.

This option might incur some provision costs but that might be provided through a minor FASFF bid.

#### 3. Change Rules of the Air

The Rules of the Air could be amended to allow access at closed units perhaps by addition of a paragraph (6) to the effect that "where no ATS/AFIS/AG service is provided commanders are to make traffic calls on the notified tower frequency". That would appear to satisfy MOD requirements but involve regulatory change, cost and delay.

#### 4. Interpretation of the Rules of the Air

There was a time when the then DAP took the view that where a RT call to a military unit was unanswered twice it was reasonable to assume that the unit was closed and that was sufficient to satisfy sub-para (5) above and a commander could make traffic calls and transit

the ATZ. That does not seem to be the current view but perhaps it could be. That would appear to satisfy MOD requirements and is the simplest solution with no cost or time delay.

### CONCLUSION

Option 1 would be costly and be a poor use of resources. Option 2 would satisfy all requirements and involve a minor cost and procedure change. Option 3 would require only regulatory change but Option 4 is the simplest and could be implemented quickly without equipment or regulatory change.

FASVIG

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