

# Case Study Comment 3

## by Mike Edwards

What happened next...

### Mike Edwards

was until recently Head of Safety Investigation at NATS (the UK Air Navigation Service Provider). He held this role for 7 years and prior to that he was Head of Investigation at London ACC. He had been an ATCO at Edinburgh and Heathrow before becoming the manager of all student controllers and then a Supervisor at London Terminal Control. He holds a PPL with Group B rating.

**18:29**

His phone rang just as he was putting his usual microwave ready meal on to a plate. How he hated these tasteless things that were always either cold or too hot. It was the airline Fleet Captain. "Yes, that's right...What vehicle?... How close? ....Never, we would have seen it...anyway it's not our fault, we had landing clearance, so no problemo.... What do you mean, we didn't have landing clearance? but..but..yeah okay..9 o'clock tomorrow, good bye". He was stunned, he sat down with a beer and his ready meal - it was cold. He offered it to the cat, who sniffed it disdainfully, gave him a look and walked off.

**18:30**

Liza was still at the Tower. The incident had happened two hours ago, she had been there since nine o'clock this morning and now she just wanted to go home. "This is ridiculous, I have written my report, I don't know what happened. It's not my fault that you can't get the recorders to playback. I have been sat here for two hours tearing my hair out and I want to go home!"

Peter said sorry again but explained again that the Chief wanted to speak to her and he was still in his car... somewhere.

**18:45**

The electrician, known affectionately as Sparky by his friends, finally got home. He kept reliving the moment when he turned round and saw that aeroplane on top of him. How it missed he will never know. Being a devout man, he had gone straight away to thank his God. "I am sorry, I swear that I will never do it again" he had said and he really meant it this time. He hated having to go out on the airfield by himself. He was an electrician not an airport person. He had told them, but they had just sat him and some others in a classroom for a couple of hours, took them on a tour around the airport tarmac and gave him a map and a crib sheet of what to say to the people in the Control Tower. They crossed a runway a couple of times, but he didn't get a go on the radio. He didn't understand most of it, but he hadn't said anything.

**18:50**

The Chief phoned in. He asked Peter where he was when it happened. Peter was afraid he would be asked that question. He was feeling very guilty that he had stayed in the Rest Room watching his team. He knew that he should have gone back upstairs but Liza was on and she was solid, she would cope and not complain and it was 1 – 1 and going into extra time. Peter told the Chief that Liza was waiting to see him. The Chief said to

tell Liza that it didn't matter and to go home. Peter wasn't looking forwards to telling Liza.

**18:55**

The Captain picked up the phone, it was the First Officer ringing. "Yes they have, 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.... you too.... right well we had better get our story straight then. Okay, so you switched to the Tower and got the landing clearance....What do you mean?...So, we were still on the Radar frequency then...so how did we?... why didn't you?...what?... well I would have expected....forget it". He put the phone down and tried to calm himself by singing Samba Samba, but he could not remember the words anymore.

### THE NEXT DAY

**09:00**

He was sitting in the Fleet Captain's office along with the First Officer. Last night had not gone well, as they had ended up blaming each other and were barely on speaking terms. The Fleet Captain had glossed over the issue about flying duty times and asked him the one difficult question.

"So, when you had alarm bells ringing and lights flashing at 4 miles, why didn't you just go around?" He was ready for this one. "I knew we were running late. I didn't want to inconvenience our customers any further".

**10:00**

Liza and Peter were sat in The Chief's office, drinking something brown and lukewarm. It was probably called "A



Suggestion of Coffee” or something equally stupid. The walls were painted in a sky blue colour. Liza thought of her boss’s favourite phrase about “Blue Sky Thinking”. “No clouds, no problems, it’s the big picture that matters, nothing is impossible”. The Chief wondered why he was still here.

The Chief was not a happy man. He was incredulous. “How could an Airbus land when the runway was blocked and without any of you knowing anything about it? You are both suspended until we sort this mess out”

Liza thought that this might be the result, but did at least expect a chance to tell her side of it.

“Look boss, I am really sorry but Peter and I were concentrating on the new strip display because the training was so long ago and just I didn’t see it coming on the ATM. If we still did the warning in of the order from Approach to Tower, like we used to do, I would have known to expect it and if we had got the integrated system with the Runway Incursion Monitor, I would have been warned about it. Yes, and another thing, the Local Runway Safety Team has been saying for ages that vehicles on the runway should be on the Tower frequency not with some dozy assistant who isn’t looking out of the window – and anyway, what was the crew doing landing on a runway without a clearance? They weren’t even on the right frequency!”

The Chief suddenly looked very pleased. “Thank you Liza, I had already thought of those last two points of course and I will certainly be discussing them with the airline. You two go and help out in the Training department or something. I will try my best to get you back in position as soon as possible”.

**10:20**

Just as The Chief was about to dial the number for the airline, his other phone rang. It was Steve from the Airport. “Hello Steve .... a special runway safety action meeting...yes, an excellent idea, funnily enough I was about to phone you”.

**RECOMMENDATION**

**This tale revolves around money and the philosophy of “it hasn’t gone wrong yet, so why waste money on it”. The rising number of Runway Incursion reports and the number of Captain’s Discretion reports are indicators that it was going wrong. Where is the Regulator in this story?**

**It is recommended that the Airport Director in conjunction with the Air Navigation Service Provider and other airport operators agrees upon a program of runway safety actions, focussed on addressing the factors associated with reported runway incursions, as prioritised by the Local Runway Safety Team (LRST).**

**The LRST should grade actions as Urgent – Required – Desirable. The program of action to be agreed within two months and a project delivery plan agreed within one month thereafter. 5**