

ALERT BULLETIN

AB 2020:3/7-1

2/12/2020

1703425, 1697850, 1695426, 1661544

TO: FAA (AVP-1)

INFO: FAA (AAS-300, AAS-1, AVP-200, AJI-144, AFS-280, AFS-200, Director of Air Traffic Operations - WSA, CSA, ESA (North and South)), A4A, AAAE, ALPA, AOPA, APA, ASAP, CAPA, ATSAP, ATSG, IATA, IBT, ICAO, ICASS, IFALPA, IPA, NATCA, NBAA, NTSB, RAA, SWAPA

FROM: Becky L. Hooey, Director
NASA Aviation Safety Reporting System

SUBJ: Similar Sounding Call Signs

We recently received an ASRS report describing a safety concern that may involve your area of operational responsibility. We do not have sufficient details to assess either the factual accuracy or possible gravity of the report. It is our policy to relay the reported information to the appropriate authority for evaluation and any necessary follow-up. We feel you should be aware of the following:

ASRS continues to receive reports from Air Traffic Controllers describing similar callsign confusion issues resulting in airborne conflicts.

(ACN 1703425) ZID ARTCC Controller reported the wrong aircraft acknowledged for a new altitude assignment and the Controller did not detect it due to similar sounding call signs.

(ACN 1697850) SCT TRACON Controller reported an airborne conflict resulting from similar sounding callsign confusion.

(ACN 1695426) C90 TRACON Controller reported giving vectors to the wrong aircraft, resulting in a traffic conflict. Similar callsigns were cited as a contributing factor.

(ACN 1661544) C90 TRACON Controller reported an airborne conflict after descending the wrong aircraft due to similar sounding callsign confusion.

To properly assess the usefulness of our alert message service, we would appreciate it if you would take the time to give us your feedback on the value of the information that we have provided. Please contact Gary Brauch at (408) 541-2869 or email at gary.j.brauch@nasa.gov



Aviation Safety Reporting System
P.O. Box 189 | Moffett Field, CA | 94035-0189



ACN: 1703425

Time

Date: 201911

Local Time Of Day: 1201-1800

Place

Locale Reference.ATC Facility: ZID.ARTCC

State Reference: IN

Altitude.MSL.Single Value: 36000

Aircraft 1

ATC / Advisory.Center: ZID

Make Model Name: Commercial Fixed Wing

Aircraft 2

ATC / Advisory.Center: ZID

Make Model Name: Commercial Fixed Wing

Person 1

Function.Air Traffic Control: Enroute

ASRS Report Number: 1703425

Events

Anomaly.ATC Issue: All Types

Anomaly.Conflict: Airborne Conflict

Anomaly.Deviation - Altitude: Excursion From Assigned Altitude

Anomaly.Deviation - Procedural: Clearance

Anomaly.Deviation - Procedural: Published Material / Policy

Detector.Person: Air Traffic Control

Result.Air Traffic Control: Issued New Clearance

Result.Air Traffic Control: Separated Traffic

Narrative 1

I climbed Air Carrier X Flight ABBB to 36,000 feet. I believe Air Carrier X Flight AABB took the clearance and I did not realize it. I also believe that they both took the clearance but I'm not sure. Moments later I switched Flight AABB frequency via CPDLC. While Flight ABBB was climbing into my sector I noticed that Flight AABB started descending. I was not talking to Flight AABB. I verbally coordinated with the sector which is located next to me that I'm stopping Flight ABBB at 35,000 feet and turning south and then I issued the instruction to the pilot. Then the sector I gave Flight AABB to called and said that Flight AABB was returning to 38,000 feet. When traffic was no longer a factor I climbed Flight ABBB to 36,000 feet and turned them on course. I never realized how close the call signs were until it was too late. Be more aware of similar call signs.

Synopsis

ZID ARTCC Controller reported the wrong aircraft acknowledged for a new altitude assignment and the Controller did not detect it due to similar sounding call signs.

ACN: 1697850

Time

Date: 201911

Local Time Of Day: 1801-2400

Place

Locale Reference.ATC Facility: SCT.TRACON

State Reference: CA

Altitude.MSL.Single Value: 6000

Aircraft 1

ATC / Advisory.TRACON: SCT

Make Model Name: Light Transport

Aircraft 2

ATC / Advisory.TRACON: SCT

Make Model Name: Light Transport

Aircraft 3

ATC / Advisory.TRACON: SCT

Make Model Name: Commercial Fixed Wing

Person 1

Function.Air Traffic Control: Approach

ASRS Report Number: 1697850

Events

Anomaly.ATC Issue: All Types

Anomaly.Conflict: Airborne Conflict

Anomaly.Deviation - Track / Heading: All Types

Anomaly.Deviation - Procedural: Published Material / Policy

Anomaly.Deviation - Procedural: Clearance

Detector.Person: Air Traffic Control

Result.Flight Crew: Requested ATC Assistance / Clarification

Result.Air Traffic Control: Separated Traffic

Result.Air Traffic Control: Issued New Clearance

Narrative 1

Air Carrier Y was on the RNAV arrival landing BUR. I was stepping this aircraft down reference other aircraft in the area. Air Carrier X Flight ABCD was an OXR arrival at 4,000 feet that I was vectoring to final due to the ILS being out of service. I had another OXR arrival that was being vectored to follow and was stepping down reference other traffic. Air Carrier X Flight ABCE was enroute to SBA at 6,000 feet from over VNY. The Controller who was working Air Carrier X Flight ABCE requested direct to the IAF for SBA. I said unable I need him on the route. I was trying to vector Air Carrier X Flight ABCD between several VFR aircraft while trying not to vector too far south to avoid an MVA at 4,300 feet. I switched Air Carrier X Flight ABCD with a last heading of 260, which was read back. Then Air Carrier X Flight ABCD asked if that last call was for Air Carrier X Flight ABCD, which I responded in the affirmative and shipped the aircraft to Approach. At this time I did not realize that Air Carrier X Flight ABCE took the frequency change for Air Carrier X Flight ABCD. When I realized that Air Carrier X Flight ABCE was not on the route as I had coordinated and expected I tried to turn the aircraft twice with no response. I then turned Aircraft X immediately and descended the aircraft to 5,000 feet. He responded

and stated that he was receiving a TCAS RA and I issued a traffic alert.

In this event I assumed that Air Carrier X Flight ABCE would be on the route that had been coordinated, however the previous Controller issued a heading instead which put the aircraft head on with my arrival. If he had been on the route they would have passed with about 4 miles of lateral separation. I got distracted with my OXR sequencing and avoiding VFRs while trying to vector to final with the ILS OTS. When I noticed the conflict, I had time to save it and tried to turn the Air Carrier X Flight ABCE out of the way, however the aircraft was not on frequency due to him taking his company's frequency change.

The first thing that NEEDS to happen is to get the company to change their call signs. I personally have had several incidents with similar sounding call signs with this particular company and all depart around the same time. I have brought this up multiple times with no response. I don't understand why we still allow this to happen. I talked to the Controller working the adjacent sector and he apologized and said that he thought I understood that he put the aircraft on a heading.

Synopsis

SCT TRACON Controller reported an airborne conflict resulting from similar sounding callsign confusion.

ACN: 1695426

Time

Date: 201910

Local Time Of Day: 1201-1800

Place

Locale Reference.ATC Facility: C90.TRACON

State Reference: IL

Altitude.MSL.Single Value: 5000

Environment

Flight Conditions: VMC

Aircraft 1

ATC / Advisory.TRACON: C90

Make Model Name: Commercial Fixed Wing

Aircraft 2

ATC / Advisory.TRACON: C90

Make Model Name: Commercial Fixed Wing

Aircraft 3

ATC / Advisory.TRACON: C90

Make Model Name: Commercial Fixed Wing

Aircraft 4

ATC / Advisory.TRACON: C90

Make Model Name: Commercial Fixed Wing

Person 1

Function.Air Traffic Control: Approach

ASRS Report Number: 1695426

Events

Anomaly.ATC Issue: All Types

Anomaly.Conflict: Airborne Conflict

Anomaly.Deviation - Procedural: Published Material / Policy

Detector.Person: Air Traffic Control

Result.Flight Crew: Became Reoriented

Result.Air Traffic Control: Issued New Clearance

Result.Air Traffic Control: Separated Traffic

Narrative 1

Air Carrier X Flight ABCD was next to turn base behind Air Carrier Y Flight EDEC. Air Carrier X Flight ABCF was behind Air Carrier X Flight ABCD. Seconds before I could turn Air Carrier X Flight ABCD base, a pilot checked on as Air Carrier Z Flight GHCC leveling at 7,000 feet. Air Carrier Z Flight GHCC was just entering the descent area so I descended him to 5,000 feet. During the read back, the pilot stated the altitude to descend to and his call sign as Air Carrier Z Flight CEDG. Air Carrier Z Flight CEDG was the aircraft behind Air Carrier Z Flight GHCC and would have descended in to the departures had he descended to 5,000 feet. I corrected the altitude for Air Carrier Z Flight CEDG to maintain and received the correct read back. The situation I had to work through caused by Air Carrier Z Flight CEDG checking in as the aircraft in front of him caused me to be late turning base. I glanced down at my flight progress strip

and read off an instruction to Air Carrier X Flight ABCF to turn right heading 020. As I was clearing Air Carrier Y Flight EDEC for the approach I noticed the wrong Air Carrier X aircraft was turning base. I issued an immediate turn to Air Carrier X Flight ABCF. He did not respond the first time, so I re-issued the immediate turn and issued traffic. Air Carrier X Flight ABCF turned to avoid and reported the aircraft on approach in sight. I could not descend the Air Carrier X aircraft or climb him due to traffic at 4,000 feet landing a parallel runway and traffic descending through 6,000 feet to the other parallel runway. I vectored Air Carrier X Flight ABCF back to the approach without further incident.

What started this even was the two Air Carrier X aircraft with almost identical callsigns. If they were different I do not believe I would have turned the incorrect aircraft. Also, the Air Carrier X pilot who checked on using the callsign of the aircraft in front of him caused confusion and required immediate action by me to ensure that he would not descend into departure traffic. Ultimately, I did not take the time to ensure that I had turned the correct aircraft, especially knowing that the call signs were almost identical.

Synopsis

C90 TRACON Controller reported giving vectors to the wrong aircraft, resulting in a traffic conflict. Similar callsigns were cited as a contributing factor.

ACN: 1661544

Time

Date: 201907

Local Time Of Day: 1201-1800

Place

Locale Reference.ATC Facility: C90.TRACON

State Reference: IL

Environment

Flight Conditions: VMC

Aircraft 1

ATC / Advisory.TRACON: C90

Make Model Name: Commercial Fixed Wing

Aircraft 2

ATC / Advisory.TRACON: C90

Make Model Name: Commercial Fixed Wing

Person 1

Function.Air Traffic Control: Approach

ASRS Report Number: 1661544

Events

Anomaly.ATC Issue: All Types

Anomaly.Conflict: Airborne Conflict

Anomaly.Deviation - Procedural: Clearance

Anomaly.Deviation - Procedural: Published Material / Policy

Detector.Person: Air Traffic Control

Result.Air Traffic Control: Issued New Clearance

Narrative 1

I had two Air Carrier X aircraft inbound each going to a different runway. Aircraft X and Aircraft Y. I was busy and instructed the wrong Aircraft to slow to 250 knots then descend to 7,000 feet. I descended the top aircraft rather than the bottom aircraft. I saw Aircraft X slowing from 300 to 250 knots instead of the bottom aircraft. I thought something was wrong and instructed the aircraft to maintain 11,000 feet. They had already started down and got as low as 10,700 feet. Aircraft Y had the other aircraft in sight however a LOSS had already occurred.

Similar sounding call signs and an above average traffic volume lead me to instruct the wrong airplane to start a descent with another aircraft beneath them. Long term fatigue from 6 day weeks and a quick turn definitely contributed to this mistake. The last few weeks have been full of short breaks, high position time, and lots of convective activity.

Synopsis

C90 TRACON Controller reported an airborne conflict after descending the wrong aircraft due to similar sounding callsign confusion.