



The Hanging Chicken

By Maj. Noel Garcia, USAF

It was a beautiful day in south Texas, with clear, fall skies. I was flying lead on a two ship, tactical-formation training flight near NAS Corpus Christi. When we had finished our training, we departed the simulated drop zone and headed home. We climbed to 1,000 feet, contacted approach, and were cleared for a visual, straight-in approach to Corpus. My student and I were 13 miles from the field, level at 1,000 feet, at 180 knots, when he yelled, “Bird! Bird!”

I looked across the cockpit and saw a large turkey vulture dive for cover. As the bird disappeared above our windscreen, we heard a loud thump. I thought the bird had hit the top of the

fuselage, just above and aft of the windscreen. My wingman had a front-row seat and witnessed the bird strike our aircraft. He saw a six-inch hole on the leading edge of my right horizontal stabilizer. It was impossible to ascertain the extent of the damage while in flight. I’ve had numerous bird strikes over the south Texas skies, so I wasn’t concerned.

The aircraft continued to fly without any noticeable control problems. From what my wingman could see and what I felt, we thought the damage wasn’t too bad. We were close to Corpus and headed straight home. My wingman assumed the lead and set us up for a visual straight-in to runway 13. Approximately five





miles from the field, while performing landing checks, the plane started to shake as we slowed through 125 knots. I added power, and, with increased air-speed, the vibration stopped. At 140 knots, I was comfortable with the stability of the plane and continued inbound. I maintained 140 knots until crossing the runway threshold, then slowed for an uneventful landing.

As I taxied to parking, one of my instructor buddies saw the damage and radioed, “Hey Grassy, did you just taxi by with a chicken hanging out of your stabilizer? I’ve got dibs on one of those chicken legs.”

The bird almost had penetrated halfway through the stabilizer, stopping three inches short of the spar.

pulled away from the fuselage, so the forward one-third of the stabilizer no longer was attached to the plane. Had the bird hit farther out on the stabilizer, the blow may have resulted in the stabilizer completely failing. The most amazing sight was the intact legs of the bird dangling from the gaping hole it had produced. 🦅

Maj. Garcia flies with VT-31.

I replied, “Yeah, right, what a comedian.”

After parking, I walked around the plane and was amazed at what I saw. The bird almost had penetrated halfway through the stabilizer, stopping three inches short of the spar. The inboard leading edge of the stabilizer also had