

Bird Strikes by E J Sherwood

My experiences with aircraft bird damage at MacDill AFB, FL;

F-84F: In 1963 after returning to base on IFE (in-flight emergency), the Thunderstreak was brought into the FMS – AR shop, hanger #4. The aircraft had hit what the pilot thought was a pelican during flight. The bird struck the leading-edge of the left wing, about mid-point and then cascaded down the front of the wing spar toward the wing tip, breaking all the aluminum stringers along the way, creating a bulge near the wing tip. I was surprised by the amount of skin that actually stretched out near the aluminum wing tip due to the force generated by the bird carcass. The damaged area began to draw flies immediately so we sent the aircraft to the wash rack to clean up the stinky mess so the repair work could begin. The 12th FMS always had good sheet-metal men and they were able to expeditiously repair the damaged wing and put it back into service.

F-4C, 63-7429: In late 1964, I launched Capt. Denny Smith and his back-seater, Lt. Jon Hentosz, on what was supposed to be a routine training flight. During the mission they hit what they thought was a large hawk somewhere between the air base and gunnery range at Avon Park. The bird struck the front canopy shattering the Plexiglas but Capt. Smith was unhurt. However, pieces of the canopy Plexiglas and remnants of the bird were forced into the rear cockpit due to the speed of the aircraft. Lt. Hentosz was lucky to survive as this debris tore into his left arm and shoulder. He was out of commission but thankfully Capt. Smith was one cool pilot. After declaring an IFE, he brought the Phantom II back and landed it with no additional problems.

What a mess this was to clean up. After stripping the cockpits of their seats and all the black boxes from the consoles and instrument panels, I used ammonia as the cleaning agent followed by warm water rinse and a lot of vacuuming. I thought all the glass was cleaned up after two days of extensive cleaning, but for the first few flights after the incident would prove this to be false. When flying the aircraft inverted or through a negative G maneuver, the aircrew would return from flight with particles of Plexiglas down the back of their collars. This would then generate a Form 781-A write up for “floating debris in the cockpit”, and I would have to repeat the steps again by stripping both cockpits, and a re-vacuum. Aircraft **429** was the sorriest of all the F-4’s that I crewed for time “in-commission”, but it kept me in the learning mode as it was always broke and in need of attention. Its redeeming value to me was it became a great teacher.