

EOD Delivers Spectacular 'Wall of Fire' at Air Show

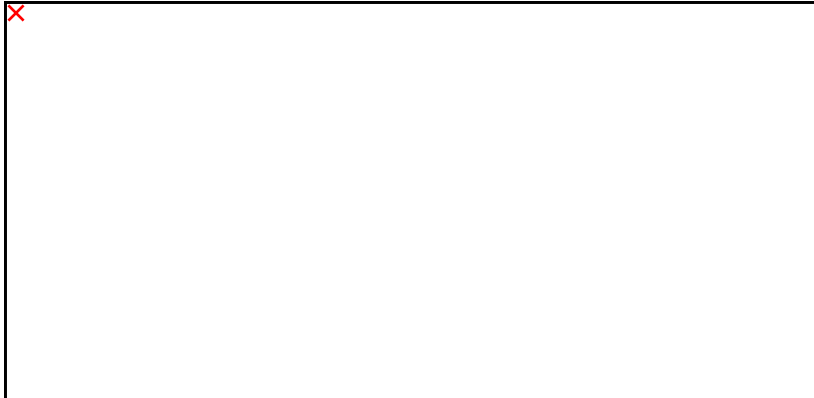
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Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point, North Carolina Air shows presented by the US military are popular and awe-inspiring, but sometimes the excitement rises to a new level when the show includes an impressive pyrotechnic display known as the "wall of fire."

A recent show at MCAS Cherry Point offered viewers just that. This "wall of fire," orchestrated by highly-skilled EOD technicians, was around 1,000 ft long and several hundred ft tall.

The demonstration, typically the finale event of a show by aerial teams like the Blue Angels or Thunderbirds, is designed to mimic an aircraft dropping bombs on the airfield.



In a recent interview, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Michael Gaydeski, a 23-year member of the Marine Corps EOD and supervisor of the event, said, "It takes time. It takes the raw materials, the explosives, and a little bit of expertise. I had about 30 guys working for me. As soon as it's light, I have the guys working."

Gaydeski explained that it took about four hours to set up the explosive display, which used over 4,000 ft of detonation cord and other combustible materials, including large amounts of fuel. Under his guidance, the Marine EOD team did a practice run a month before the event to make sure everyone knew what to do.

According to Gaydeski, the "wall of fire" takes a typical pyrotechnic display, like fireworks performed for Independence Day celebrations, to a whole new, "more dangerous" level. EOD personnel use explosives that they put together themselves, not manufactured devices. The fiery explosions, though contained, often set the grass on fire, and there is always a chance something will go wrong.

Gaydeski explained these risks, "Once things start catching on fire, you might have other explosives that are still on the field. Then you have fire and explosives, and you don't want an unintentional detonation. If something goes wrong and we're unable to fire a particular charge, perhaps because one of the wires got burned through, that is the most common cause; we've got to disarm that."

Master Sgt. Carlos Villarreal, the second in charge with 11 years Marine Corps EOD experience,

was tasked with overseeing safety during the air show. His job was to ensure everyone was behind cover before the detonation and that the explosives posed no threat to personnel, aircraft, or the spectator line which was about 1,500 ft away from the explosions.