



"There's smoke coming out, and you are on fire."

It's Good To Be Dash 2

by Lt. Chris Maslowski

I was scheduled to lead a three-plane Red Air hop in support of our sister squadron. They were conducting a practice self-escort strike from the southeastern part of the TACTS 3A/B operating area off the coast of Virginia into the Dare County Range. The off-target VID presentation positioned our flight on the eastern part of 3B, roughly 80nm from Oceana. After we finished the event and made one more AIC run against our Dash 3, Dash 2 and I remained in the area for a 1 v 1 abeam set. The engagement was lengthy but the RTB seemed like an eternity.

I called KIO for fuel and began a climb toward home plate. Just as the flight switched off area-common in Comm 1, Betty seized the opportunity to brighten my day.

"Engine fire left, engine fire left...engine fire right, engine fire right."

At first, I was in denial. I thought, "No way could this actually be happening.

Maybe it is just one of those sporadic cautions that will clear in a second." No such luck.

Reality set in quickly, and I knew I was in serious trouble. As my skipper in Dash 2 was joining, I told him that I had a left-engine fire light, a left-bleed caution, and a right-engine fire light, with no other related cautions. My IFEI indicated all was normal as I pulled the left engine to idle and the right one to mid-range (which, for a dual-engine fire, was the minimum practical for flight).

Dash 2 didn't see anything at first, but he soon realized the severity of the situation.

"There's smoke coming out, and you are on fire." He called. "Exactly what are all your indications?"

I repeated all indications, including a left-bleed light.

The left-engine bay and the left side of the right-engine bay were soon engulfed in

flames. I contacted Giant Killer on the front radio, declared an emergency, squawked 7700, and pointed toward the nearest divert field of Elizabeth City. Dash 2 switched the back radio between our tactical frequency and base, relaying pertinent information. After further evaluation of the situation and associated left-engine cautions, we decided to turn the left bleed off, secure the left engine, depress the fire light, use the fire-extinguisher light, and put the hook down. All we could do then was wait.

It seemed like an hour—no less—before the fires and indications began to subside. In reality, the fires and cautions were gone in under a minute and a half. The left engine was secured, the right engine operating 4.0, and all indications normal.

The skipper decided to continue on to NAS Oceana for a single-engine, half-flap trap on an off-duty runway. Discretion being the better part of valor, I enthusiastically concurred. While talking to approach, we decided to maintain our altitude until

closer to the field and dropped the landing gear while over the water. I started a descent at 37nm from the field, with three down-and-locked.

Numerous options and considerations were discussed between base, Dash 2, and myself on Comm 2 during the approach.

“Maintain above eighty-five percent on the operating engine, stand by for possible flight-control problems, fly on-speed, and don’t get slow. If the hook skips, go around, but you may not want to...”

The decision for me was easy: I was going to fly the approach, trap, shut down the engine, and exit the aircraft posthaste. All went as planned.

The investigation is still pending as to the cause of the fire and the ensuing damage to the aircraft. The factors that brought the jet back were having my wingman visually inspect my aircraft, having good aircrew coordination about corrective actions and options, and doing the published emergency procedures. 🛩️

Lt. Maslowski flies with VFA-37.

