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Whidbey Growler squadron faces possible yearlong deployment

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An EA-18G Growler squadron from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island currently deployed in the Middle East as part of operations against Iran may not return home in time for the holidays.

Navy leaders advised family members of those with the USS George H.W. Bush strike group to prepare for its deployment to be extended to a year during a town hall earlier this week, as reported by MS NOW. The strike group departed on March 31 and was originally expected to be deployed for six to seven months.

Electronic Attack Squadron 140, known as the "Patriots," is deployed with the strike group as part of Carrier Air Wing 7 as of Nov. 9, according to the United States Naval Institute News.

A senior Navy official, in a statement, acknowledged that "operational demands on our forward deployed sailors and marines are always unpredictable." He could not provide information on the deployment's end for security reasons.

According to MS NOW, there are approximately 7,000 service members in the strike group. About 200 sailors comprise any Growler squadron, said Mike Welding, the public affairs officer at NAS Whidbey.

Deployed service members families expressed frustration with the extension at the "combative" town hall, according to MS NOW. Ombudsmen for the squadron did not respond to questions about whether the families of the Growler squadron were aware of the deployment extension and how they reacted to it.

VAQ-140 is not the first Growler squadron touched by a lengthy deployment this year.

In October, Electronic Attack Squadron 133, the "Wizards," returned to Whidbey after 10 months abroad with Carrier Air Wing 9. It spent 265 days at sea without a port visit, as previously reported by the News-Times.

Concerns about conditions on the USS Abraham Lincoln, the aircraft carrier the wing deployed with, and the mental health of sailors arose as a result of the deployment's duration.