

Navy Proposes to Cut Five EA-18G Growler Electronic Attack Squadrons



Sailors assigned to the “Lancers” of Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 131 recover an EA-18G Growler during night operations in 2020. Under Navy plans, the squadron is one of several that would be deactivated. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Benjamin Ringers*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is proposing to deactivate five electronic attack squadrons, or VAQs, that operate the Boeing EA-18G Growler electronic attack jet, roughly a third of the Defense Department’s tactical jet electronic attack force.

As laid out in the recently released Department of the Navy’s fiscal 2023 budget highlights book, the Navy proposes to deactivate its entire expeditionary VAQ force, which deploys to overseas bases to provide electronic attack capabilities to

the joint force. The five expeditionary VAQ squadrons are separate from the Navy's VAQ squadrons that deploy on aircraft carriers.

The Navy is the only provider of expeditionary electronic attack jets to the joint force. The Air Force retired its last EF-111A Raven jets in 1998 and the Marine Corps retired its last EA-6B Prowler tactical jets in 2019. The expeditionary VAQ squadrons have deployed to Southwest Asia, Japan and Italy over the years in support of U.S. and coalition forces. Last month, one squadron, VAQ-134, was deployed to the European Command as part of the build-up of forces in support NATO's eastern flank after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The budget book says the five squadrons include a total of 25 EA-18Gs which would be placed in storage at the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group at Davis-Montham Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona, half in fiscal 2024 and half in fiscal 2025. The cuts also would free up approximately 1,020 officer and enlisted personnel. The Navy estimates the savings over the Future Years Defense Plan would be 807.8 million.

The Navy's five expeditionary VAQ squadrons are all based at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington: VAQs 131, 132, 134, 135, and 138. The Navy's only reserve VAQ squadron, VAQ-209, also has been used in an expeditionary role.

The carrier-deployable VAQ squadrons are VAQs 130, 133, 136, 137, 139, 140, 141, and 142, with another, VAQ-144, set for establishment in October. All are based at Whidbey Island, except for VAQ-141, which is based at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, as part of the forward-deployed Carrier Air Wing Five for USS Ronald Reagan.

The expeditionary VAQ squadrons are considered high-demand/high-value assets by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The assessments of the various regional combatant commanders may be instrumental in reversing or mitigating the Navy's

proposal.