# NS Mayport Remembers USS Stark



-Photo by MC2 Gary Granger Jr.

*Former USS Stark (FFG 31) commanding officer from 1992-94, retired Capt. Pete Wynkoop reads the names of Sailors who died during the attack on the Stark as the tolling of the bell is conducted by John Kiser, son of fallen Senior Chief Electrician's Mate Stephen Kiser, during the 23rd anniversary memorial ceremony at Naval Station Mayport on May 17.*

**By Paige Gnann**
*Editor*

Dozens of people crowded into the rainy-day venue at Ocean Breeze Conference Center on May 17 to rememer 37 Mayport Sailors killed exactly 23 years ago.

The annual ceremony marks the death of the crewmembers of USS Stark, homeported at Naval Station Mayport, after the ship was struck without warning by two Iraqi missiles while on patrol in the Persian Gulf. One missile exploded, causing immediate fires and tremendous damage in the forward part of the ship.

Fuel from the second missile intensified the fires, and the crew fought the inferno through the night and the next day. Aided by equipment and fire fighting teams from other Navy ships, the crew succeeded in saving the ship.

Restored and returned to service in 1988, USS Stark (FFG 31) since won two Battle 'E' awards as best ship in the squadron. After the ship was decommissioned in 1999, the Naval Order of the United States and Naval Station Mayport partnered to preserve the observance of this tragic incident that wrought so much misery for the crewmembers and their families.

Guest speaker for the memorial was Capt. John B. Mitchell, commanding officer or Naval Station Mayport during the 1987 attack. Mitchell thanked the attendees for keeping the memories of the fallen Sailors alive at Mayport and in the Navy.

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-Photo by MC2 Gary Granger Jr.

*Former USS Stark (FFG 31) crewmember David Brangaccio, now a captain in the Navy Reserves, talks about his fallen shipmates swho died during the attack on the Stark during the 23rd anniversary memorial ceremony held at Naval Station Mayport, May 17.*

## Stark

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"Twenty-three years is a long time," he said. "When you think in terms of what has occured, it puts that time in focus. Every child of the 37 fallen hereos ... have now reached adulthood. Changes can be measured in many ways,but evolution of children into adulthoood is one of the most pleasant yardsticks."

Mitchell reminded the crowd of then-Pres. Ronald Reagan's visit to Mayport immediately following the attacks. During his speech to the grief-stricken base, Reagan "spoke of honor. They were ordinary men who did extraordinary things. Yes, they were heroes."

He also talked about how the Sailors embodied the Navy's Core Values of Honor, Courage and Commitment even before they were adopted in 1992.

"For the men of Stark, those core values were in place and demonstrated in full," he said.

Also to speak at the event was Navy Reserve Capt. David Brangaccio, who was just a lieutenant junior grade officer serving aboard Stark during the attack.

Brangaccio also talked about remembering the fallen during the memorial, talking about two of his shipmates in particular.

"At first, I did not quite know what I was going to say," he began. "I didn't know if my words would honor and pay tribute to these people. We are here to remember, reflect and rejoice."

"As I reviewed the names of the fallen, two names stood out to me. Each one of the 37 men had, no doubt, influenced a shipmate during their time aboard USS Stark. These men, did me."

Brangaccio recounted a story about 23-year-old Petty Officer Chris DeAngelis,who stood the midwatch with him for several weeks. As a young officer, Brangaccio said he "probably immaturely voiced my disgruntlement" at having to stand the uneventful watch hour.

"Finally, DeAngelis had enough of me," Brangaccio told the attendees. "He told me to stop whining. That one day I would get qualified, but he'd still be standing there. And that was fine because as long as he was there, he was going to do his best."

Later, when Brangaccio did move off of the watch, he said knowing that was DeAngelis was there - and could rely on him to do a good job - built a confidence to rely on his staff later in life.

"The trust and respect I have for my staff [now] grew directly out of my knowing him," he said.

The other Sailor to hold great influence in his life was Senior Chief Vernon Foster.

Brangaccio credited Foster with his success in the Naval Reserves, in which he serves as a captain.

"None of that could be possible without Vernon Foster," he said.

The ceremony concluded with the tolling of the bell by John Kiser, son of the late Senior Chief Stephen Kiser and the reading of the 37 names, followed by a wreath laying and 21-gun salute.

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