

Mayport Remembers Stark's Fallen

From Staff

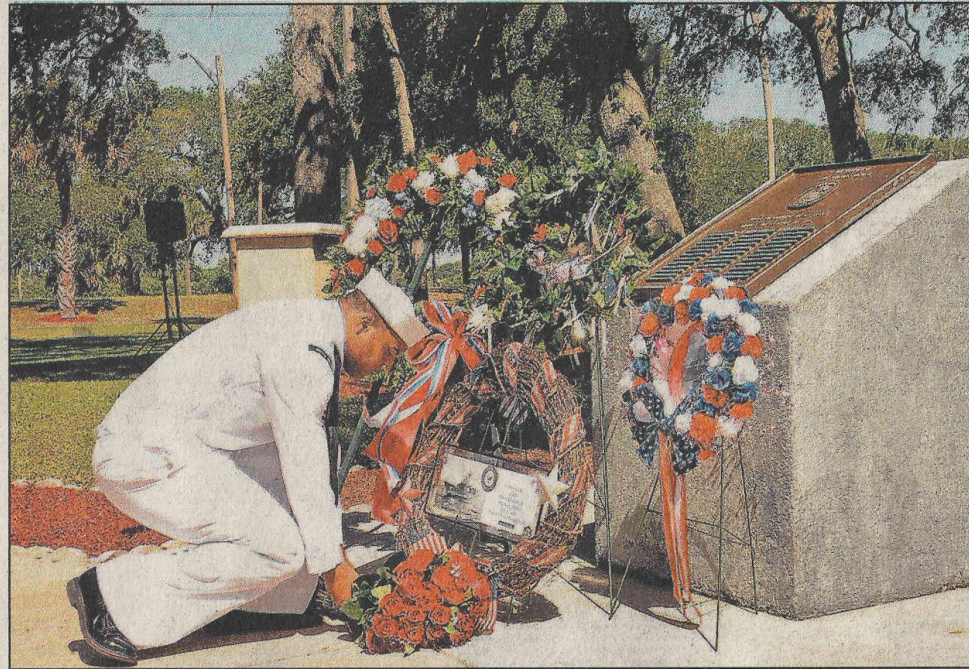
More than 300 civilians and service members gathered at Naval Station Mayport's Memorial Park Friday for the 27th anniversary of the attack on USS Stark (FFG 31).

On May 17, 1987, 37 Sailors aboard USS Stark were killed after the frigate was struck by two Iraqi missiles while it was deployed on patrol in the Arabian Gulf. Despite the severe damage, the heroic efforts of Stark's crew saved the ship.

Guest speaker, Capt. Wes McCall, commanding officer of NS Mayport, reminded the attendees of the crew's efforts to save their shipmates and the ship.

The service featured accounts of some of the events that occurred during the attack and also events that followed.

"Shortly after [9 p.m.], the ship was hit by two Exocet anti-ship cruise missiles fired by a single Iraqi F-1 Mirage fighter," McCall recounted. "The first missile entered the port side of the ship. Parts of that missile travelled through the ship, creating a hole in the starboard hull. The second missile entered the ship near the same location and exploded approximately three feet inside the skin of



-Photo by MC2 Damian Berg

YN2 Demario Smith places a wreath in front of the USS Stark Memorial plaque on display at Naval Station Mayport's Memorial Park during the annual USS Stark remembrance ceremony held in memory of the 37 Sailors killed aboard the ship in 1987. The ship was hit on May 17, 1987, by two Iraqi missiles while on patrol in the Arabian Gulf.

the ship. Each missile injected approximately 300 pounds of propellant into the ship's control-berthing and chief petty officer's quarters. The combination of 600 pounds of burning propellant resulted in a near instantaneous heat release of approximately 12 million BTUs, ending the lives of many Sailors immediately."

The CPO mess imme-

diately filled with smoke, as did the officer quarters, he said. "The decks forward of the explosion were in flames and the fire spread through the mess line and starboard passageway forward. Smoke filled the repair locker number 5 and repair 2 areas and firemain pressure was reduced to 60 PSI due to a ruptured firemain forward. Radio communica-

tions were all but lost."

In fact the crew had to use the PrC-90 radios from the helicopter aircrew survival vests to coordinate rescue and damage control efforts. And those efforts would last for almost 20 hours as the crew fought raging fires and looked for missing shipmates.

McCall also told the story of fallen shipmate Seaman Recruit

Brian Clinefelter, whose father Senior Chief Gary Clinefelter was stationed at NS Mayport during the attack.

"On April 23, 1987, Brian arrived on board USS Stark eager to begin his naval career and honor his family with service to his nation," McCall said. "Twenty-four days later, Brian had just completed his watch and was preparing

for bed when the missiles struck. Although grieving the loss of his son, Gary volunteered to work at the coordination center the base had set up to support the grieving families. He simply said, 'I need to keep working.' In keeping with Gary's sterling example, we too must continue to work."

"We must work to keep our shipmates' memory alive," he continued. "This tragic loss reminds us that even when America is not at war, servicemen and women risk everything so that all Americans can be at peace....May our memories be long."

During the somber ceremony, the names of those killed at sea were read aloud by a fellow shipmate and a bell tolled for each one; 37 strikes of a bell and a 21-gun salute honored the Sailors who lost their lives.

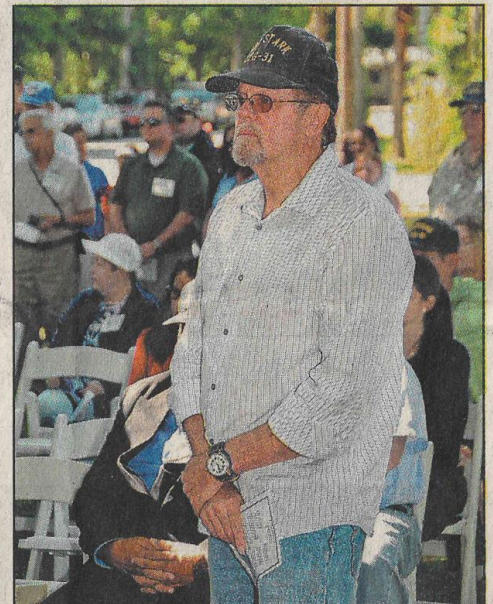
Stark was decommissioned at Mayport in 1999. In order to preserve the tradition once the ship was retired, the Naval Order of the United States, North Florida Commandery, assumed sponsorship for the memorial service.

Mayport's Memorial Park was established Aug. 1, 1987, with the dedication of the Stark monument.



-Photo by Paige Gnann

Ernestine Foster, widow of QMCS Vernon Foster, holds up his last will and testament after reading a scripture during the memorial service.



-Photo by Paige Gnann

A former USS Stark crew member stands during the tolling of the ship bell in remembrance of the 37 fallen Sailors.