

Stark memories linger 26 years after attack

37 sailors killed
by Iraqi missiles
honored at Mayport

By William Browning
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Chris Hallett, 58, stood in the shade beside the USS Stark Memorial on Friday remembering.

"I was just coming off shift, way back in the hangar," he said. "It was a normal night, everything was pretty quiet. The first one came in. Felt the ship rock. We thought we hit something. A few seconds later, the second hit. We knew something serious was happening. From



An honors detail from Mayport Naval Station delivers a rifle salute during a ceremony of remembrance on the 26th anniversary of the Iraqi missile attack on the USS Stark that killed 37 sailors on May 17, 1987.

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there, we shifted into a whole new perspective."

Hallett was remembering the night 26 years ago when two Iraqi Exocet missiles struck the USS Stark, a frigate based out

of Mayport Naval Station. As he finished his story, the emotion in his voice turned raw.

"For the next, basically,

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EXTRAS

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STARK

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19 hours straight it was a firefight," the former aviation electronic technician said. "It brought us all together back then and it still does today."

The Stark was on patrol in the Persian Gulf at the time. Thirty-seven sailors lost their lives in the surprise attack on May 17, 1987.

On Friday, more than 100 people came onto the Navy base at Mayport to remember them and honor their service during an annual memorial ceremony.

Retired Rear Adm. George Huchting was the keynote speaker. He retired from the Navy in 1999 after 36 years of service.

Huchting told the crowd they were gathered for a "memorial." His dictionary, he said, defined that word as, "anything meant to help people to remember some person or event."

Simply gathering, he said, marked the event.

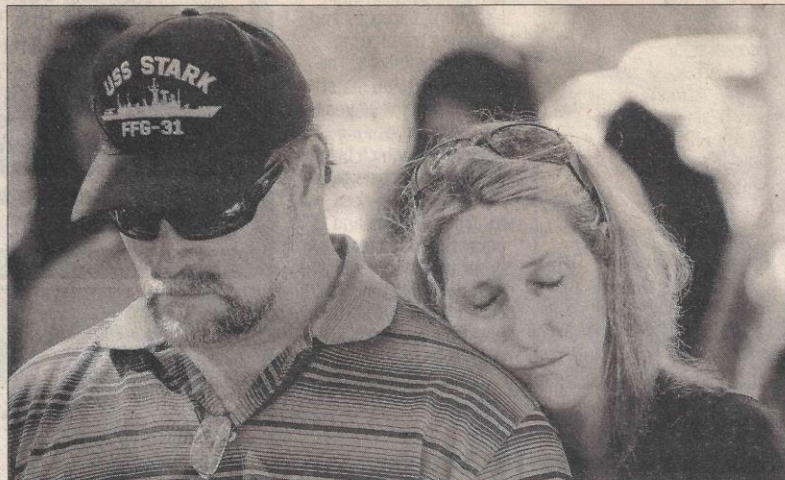
"I would like to focus on the other aspect of that definition — the people involved," he said.

The men who lost their lives that day were shipmates and messmates. But, he said, they were also husbands with families; fathers who were mentors to little boys and little girls; sons; uncles; and brothers.

"Let's take a moment to reflect on the wonder and the beauty of the individuals we lost and how lucky, how lucky we were to have known him, had him in our lives, even if for a very short period of time," he said.

Then the names of 37 fallen sailors were read. After each one, a bell rang.

A dozen or so old Stark



Photos by Bob Mack@jacksonville.com

Paul LaBare, who was on the USS Stark at the time of the attack, and his wife, Lori, share a quiet moment during the benediction delivered by Lt. Cmdr. Jerome Cayangyang, chaplain at Mayport Naval Station, during a ceremony of remembrance on the 26th anniversary of the Iraqi missile attack on the USS Stark on May 17, 1987.

sailors were at the ceremony. They huddled afterward and caught up with one another. They laughed. They hugged.

One was 60-year-old Larence Barrow. An operations specialist chief at the time of the attack, he joined the Navy in 1977 and retired in 1995. He feels like the Stark attack is an event the nation has nearly forgotten. Maybe that's because it didn't happen during a time of intense war, he said.

But for the men onboard that day, he said, "I'm not sure anyone could forget that day or what they were doing."

That's why he comes to the memorial on May 17 every year to honor his old shipmates.

"Their memories are not forgotten," he said. "Their lives have meaning."

The Stark was retired in 1999.



A sailor pauses to salute after placing one of the wreaths in front of the USS Stark Memorial monument.

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