



Children from the choir at nearby Joseph Finegan Elementary School, which is now known as Anchor Academy, stand silently during the rifle salute at the end of the 2017 memorial service for the USS Stark. A piece of the ship's stern bearing its name was on display during the ceremony. BOB SELF/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION

35 years later, USS Stark crew will never be forgotten



At the 2000 memorial gathering for the USS Stark, William Elliott tries to comfort his nephew Logan Pierce, 13, whose father, 1st Class Petty Officer Randy Pierce, was killed in the May 17, 1987, attack. Logan was born in April 1987 and never met his father. BOB MACK/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION

On May 17 every year people gather to remember and honor the 37 crew members of the USS Stark who were killed in a 1987 missile attack in the Persian Gulf. This year marked the 35th anniversary as former sailors aboard the Navy frigate and about 250 others paid their respects at the USS Stark Memorial at Naval Station Mayport.

"They're still inside," Petty Officer 1st Class Darryl Allen said during the 2003 ceremony, patting his chest as he remembered his shipmates. "Knowing there's a memorial here, that it's not forgotten, helps a lot."

"I remember total darkness after the first missile struck the ship," he said, two years later as a chief petty officer attending 2005's tribute. "You couldn't see your hands in front of your face."

The USS Stark was halfway through a six-month deployment in the Persian Gulf when an Iraqi jet fired two Exocet

missiles at it. The first went through the barbershop, post office and part of the chief petty officers' quarters, sparking a fire that melted part of the bulkhead. The second missile engulfed the sleeping quarters, just after many in the crew had hit their bunks.

Survivors, working heroically, managed to put out multiple fires, though the ship was left with a gaping hole in its hull.

From Doran Bolduc to Lloyd Wilson, 37 died that day.

After repairs in Bahrain and 10 months in a Mississippi shipyard, the Stark returned home to Mayport in September 1988.

It served until it was decommissioned at Mayport in 1999. The Stark memorial was erected some 12 years earlier, on Aug. 1, 1987, just inside the main gates of the port the ship called home.



Before the start of the 2002 ceremony, a mourner runs her finger over the name of James Dunlap, one of those killed in the attack on the Stark. STUART TANNERHILL/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION



President Ronald Reagan and first lady Nancy Reagan traveled to a memorial service at Mayport a few days after the 1987 attack, where they offered condolences to the family of Jeffrey Curtis Sibley of Metairie, La. Speaking to a tear-choked crowd of about 1,100 in an aircraft hangar, a solemn Reagan called on mourners to "keep faith with their sacrifice" by supporting continued U.S. military presence in the Middle East. He assured the friends and relatives of those killed that the sailors were heroes who "made themselves immortal by dying for something immortal." M. JACK LUEDKE/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION



At a 2005 memorial to the 37 sailors killed aboard the USS Stark, Chief Petty Officer Darryl Allen, right, composes himself after delivering a tribute to the crew. He was a Stark crew member along with Tim Martineau, left, who had earlier read a scripture passage in honor of his fallen shipmates. BOB MACK/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION