

Memorial Honors Fallen Stark Crew

From Staff

The Naval Order of the United States and Naval Station Mayport will host the 23rd annual memorial service commemorating the crew members of USS Stark (FFG 31) killed on May 17, 1987, at Memorial Park, Naval Station, Mayport, Florida at 10 a.m. on Monday, May 17, 2010.

The Sailors were killed when two missiles struck the ship without warning after 9 p.m., while the ship was on patrol in the southern 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, but the cost was heavy: 37 shipmates were killed.

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 is Capt. John B. Mitchell, commanding officer of Naval Station Mayport during the 1987 attack.

Mitchell is a 1965 gradu-

ate of the United States Naval Academy. After commissioning, he served in three destroyers and commanded a minesweeper -- USS Engage (MSO 433). Early shore tours included Aide to the Commander, Naval Electronic Systems Command and as a student at the Naval Postgraduate School, where he earned a Master of Science Degree in ASW Systems Technology. After a tour in the Pentagon (OP 39), Captain Mitchell returned to sea as Executive Officer, USS Benjamin Stoddert (DDG 22). He then served as Surface ASW Officer on the staff of Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet. In 1983, Captain Mitchell assumed command of USS Fahrion (FFG 22), beginning the first of five consecutive tours in Mayport. Subsequent tours included Chief Staff Officer, Destroyer Squadron Eight; Commanding Officer, Naval Station Mayport; Commander, Destroyer Squadron 12; and Chief of Staff, Commander Carrier Group Six. Mitchell retired in 1995 after completing his final tour as Head, Surface Trials Board, Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV).

Mitchell spent six years with Bath Iron Works, opening the shipbuilder's Mayport Field Office, before moving to his current employer, Delex Systems, Inc., of Vienna, Virginia.

Former crew and family members seeking information about the service are encouraged to contact starkmemorial@earthlink.net.