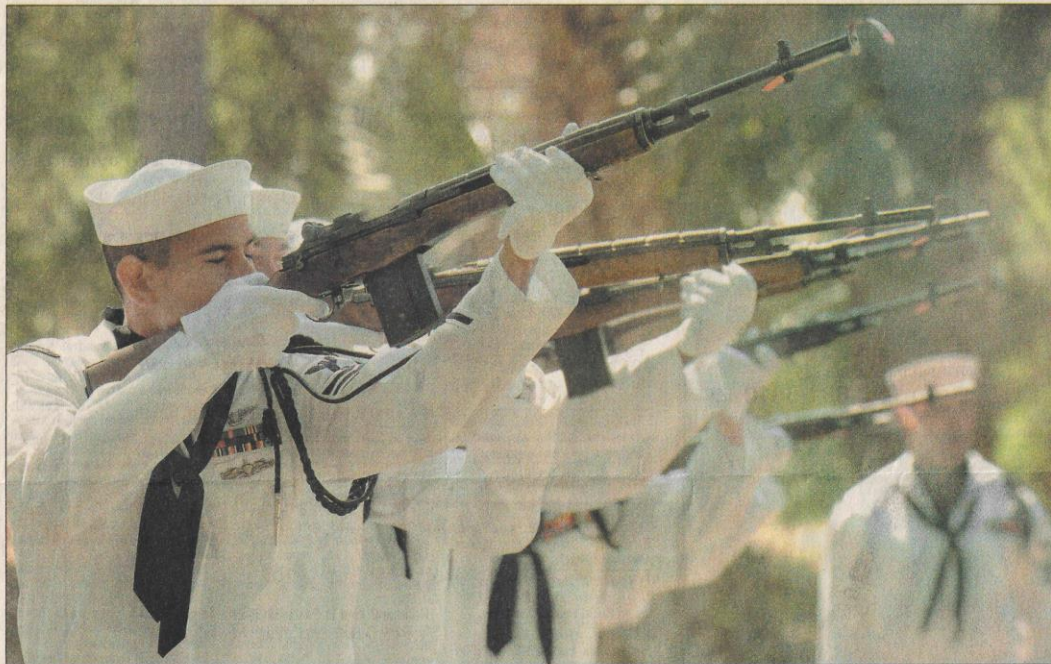


Sailors gone, but not forgotten



Members of the Mayport Naval Station Honors Detail fire a rifle salute during a memorial service Saturday at Mayport. The ceremony remembered the lives lost during the May 17, 1987, Iraqi missile attack on the USS Stark.

Photos by WILL DICKEY/The Times-Union

Mayport remembers the 37 who died in the USS Stark attack.

By JIM SCHOETTLE • The Times-Union

Days after 37 sailors died in an Iraqi missile attack on the USS Stark, Barbara Kiser boarded the ship to visit the spot where her husband burned to death.

Kiser said she sifted through the ashes that once was his bunk and amazingly found a pocket-sized Bible she'd given him years earlier.

Nothing else was left.

Kiser clutched the brittle, scorched Bible just before a memorial service on Saturday at Mayport Naval Station to remember the May 17, 1987, attack. She's shared the Bible with people in the Middle East while working as a missionary, and now keeps it in a little box in her Fort Caroline home.

"When they hear the story

about the Bible, they actually kiss it and bless God," Kiser said of people she'd met on her missionary trips. "It's a miracle it survived."

Kiser was among 75 people who attended the service for those who died when two missiles blew apart sections of the Mayport-based guided missile frigate in the Persian Gulf. The Iraqi government said the jet

attack was an accident, apologized and paid compensation. Many Americans thought the hit was intentional.

The 30-minute service under a spread of oak trees on a sun-splashed day included prayers, patriotic music and a rifle salute. The decommissioned Stark's quarter-deck

STARK continues on B-4



Barbara Kiser holds her hand over her heart as the names are read of those lost in the attack on the USS Stark. One of the names was that of her husband, Senior Chief Petty Officer Stephen Kiser.

MORE ONLINE
For more photos from the ceremony at Mayport, go to Jacksonville.com.

Stark

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bell was solemnly rung after each victim's name was read.

Those who watched included families of the dead, surviving crew members and aging veterans such as Elbert Sawley.

"We came to pay our respects to let the families know they're not forgotten," said Sawley, 84, a Westside man who served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. "We'll remember them until the end of time."

Bill Morandi was sleeping aboard the Stark when the missiles hit. A fire controlman at the time, Morandi tells a harrowing tale of falling through a hole in the ship and wading in the Persian Gulf for nearly 12 hours before being rescued.

Morandi said he often thinks of the attacks and the friends he lost. As their names were read, he said he saw many of their faces again.

"There's a lot of guilt issues. Why them? Why not me? Why did I survive?" said Morandi, 42, visiting the service from his Orlando home. "It's something that you have to work through."

Morandi said he appreciates having somewhere to mourn.

"It's a small part that I can do to help remember these guys," he said.

Kiser said she and her 5-year-old son, John, were in Bahrain waiting to visit with



WILL DICKEY/The Times-Union

Barbara Kiser holds a Bible belonging to her husband that she recovered after he died in the Iraqi missile attack on the USS Stark. She said some people on her missionary trips who saw the Bible kissed it and thanked God.

"You just don't realize what a big change it is ... for the husband and father to be gone."

BARBARA KISER
Widow of a sailor killed aboard the USS Stark

her husband, Stephen, when the attack occurred. She said Navy personnel took her to the ship five days later to attend a memorial service. The Bible she recovered has a faded inscription on the inside

cover noting the day in 1980 she gave it to her husband. Kiser also keeps a picture of his melted compartment as a reminder of the tragedy.

Stephen Kiser died as a 36-year-old senior chief petty officer.

"I still do miss him. Yes, I do," said Kiser, 65. "You just don't realize what a big change it is ... for the husband and father to be gone."

Kiser said her faith in God and the support of people like those who attended the service have helped her survive. So has finding the Bible.

"It's a good thing to remember what happened," she said softly.

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