



Stark

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repairs before heading back to the grieving NS Mayport. Called one of the U.S. Navy's deadliest peacetime disasters, the incident rocked the nation and President Ronald Reagan and wife, Nancy came to the base for a memorial service.

Guest speaker Vice Adm. Michael Kalleras said three days following the incident were some of the hardest he had lived through.

"Thirty-seven brave Stark Sailors became heroes. Sixteen widows were created and 250 family members lost their fathers, brothers and sons."

Reading a letter from John Mitchell, who was NS Mayport's commanding officer during the incident, Kalleras talked about how the former base CO "recalled vividly watching on screen [CNN's coverage] of smoke on the horizon and a ship burning. It seems a blur of day and night," Mitchell wrote. "I also remember the outpouring of love from the citizens of Jacksonville."

Guest speakers spoke of the generosity of the Jacksonville citizens through donations of food, hotel rooms and car rentals.

"Yellow ribbons started appearing throughout Mayport, then Jacksonville and the whole nation," Mitchell wrote. "Grief was constant, but the real fact was we were all bonded together. We all know how each person added something to that ship. Twenty years ago, I told the Stark families I would keep them in my heart and I do that daily through prayer.... Shipmates are forever. You cannot divorce a shipmate."

"I wasn't supposed to be there," said Dr. Art Conklin, the former Damage Control officer during the incident. "Because of problems with my relief, I was asked if I could stay on for the cruise....I learned what was a hero. I watched my shipmates throw themselves back into danger over and over again. I have learned the value of shipmates and value that life can be unexpected. I try to live every day like it's my last."

After the memorial service families and former Stark crewmembers attended a special reception at the CPO Club that was hosted by the Naval Order of the United States and the Mayport Council Navy League.