

# Stark's survivors still feel the flames after 18 years

Memorial service at Mayport honors those who died aboard the ship in an Iraqi attack.

By **JOSEPH DEMARTINO**  
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Navy Chief Petty Officer Dar-ryl Allen was visibly emotional Tuesday as he recounted the night his ship was attacked 18 years ago.

"I remember total darkness after the first missile struck the ship," said Allen, who served aboard the USS Stark as a seaman. "You couldn't see your hands in front of your face."

Allen and about 50 others gathered Tuesday for a memorial service at Mayport Memorial Park in Mayport Naval Station to honor and remember the 37 sailors who died in an attack on the Stark in 1987. The Stark was home-ported at Mayport.

The frigate was in the Persian Gulf, guarding oil tankers during the Iran-Iraq war. On May 17, 1987, an Iraqi F-1 Mirage fighter fired on the Stark without warning.

Two Exocet missiles struck. One punched a hole in the ship's hull but failed to detonate. Another penetrated the crew compartment and exploded.

Allen recalled he was about to go on watch and a friend told him to take a shower shortly before the missile hit. His friend, Seaman Vincent L. Ulmer, was killed in the attack.

"I still feel a lot of guilt, knowing that if I didn't get out and take a shower, I would not be here today," Allen said.

Retired Rear Adm. John Gavan, who was the featured speaker at the ceremony, praised the actions of the surviving crew members, who fought fires and kept the damage from sinking the ship.

"All hands showed heroism that was part and parcel of the naval tradition," Gavan said.

Barbara Kiser, whose husband, Stephen, was killed on the Stark, praised the ceremony.

"It's a wonderful tribute for those who gave their lives for their country," Kiser said.

Tim Martineau, who was a petty officer third class and ship's diver aboard the Stark, recalled the intensity of the fires the Stark's crew had to fight.

"It was a Class Delta fire, which meant that some of the metal itself was burning," said Martineau, who retired from the Navy shortly after the attack. "We were battling the fire all through the night and into the next day."

The Stark returned to



Photos by **BOB MACK/The Times-Union**



**Above:** John Kiser and his mother, Barbara, whose husband, Stephen, was killed aboard the Stark, salute as a color guard passes.

**Left:** Retired Rear Adm. John Gavan speaks Tuesday at a memorial at Mayport Naval Station for sailors killed in 1987 in an Iraqi jet's attack on the USS Stark.

Mayport about three months after the attacks and after 15 months of repairs rejoined its fleet until 1996. It was decommissioned in 1999.

Martineau also read a short passage from the Bible at the ceremony.

The ceremony conclusion began with a tolling of the bell, during which retired Capt. Peter Wynkoop — who commanded the Stark from 1992 to 1994 — read a list of the dead crewmen, while Allen rang a quarterdeck bell from the Stark. Kiser then assisted in a wreath-laying ceremony. A Navy band

played *Eternal Father* in tribute, and an honors detail fired a 40-millimeter saluting gun. A playing of taps and a benediction concluded the ceremony.

Allen, who received a naval achievement medal for his actions during the attack, said he carries the Stark incident with him wherever he goes.

"A lot of people still ask me why I've remained in the Navy all these years," Allen said. "I tell them it's because I still have the watch."

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