



The NJROTC unit from Nease High School stands at parade rest during the ceremony.

13th Anniversary of the attack on Stark

Editor's note: The following is an excerpt of Capt. (Ret.) John Mitchell speech at the USS Stark Memorial Service held last week. Mitchell was Commanding Officer, NS Mayport during the time of the attack.

By Capt. John Mitchell, Jr., USN (Ret.)

Former CO, NS Mayport

"You will never be forgotten"

These are the words on the Stark monument beneath the list of names. But are they just words?

I would like to suggest that they are much more than words. In my mind they convey several concepts. Concepts of commitment, promise, [and] obligation; as well as a message. I would like to look for a moment at a history of those words – who has been involved in the formation of them, how we got to where we are today, and what it means to each of us for the future – all in the context of commitment, promise, obligation and the message.

First to coin the phrase "You will never be forgotten" – Navy League of Mayport who came to see me shortly after the Memorial Service of May 22, 1987.

Led by Rear Adm. John Gavan, they were committed to building a monument which included names of the 37 men lost in Stark. [[They] wanted it to be positioned at the pier to which the ship would return – a symbolic joining of the entire crew once again.

Naval Station Mayport was

the next group to become involved. No, more than involved – committed. They were the keeper of the torch for the past 13 years.

For several years, shipmates who were currently serving in Stark insured the annual service of remembrance was conducted. Led by Stark crewmembers such as retired Capt. Pete Wynkoop, and Cmdr. Fred Berley, now Executive Officer NAVSTA, these annual memorials were a part of the ship's routine.

After Stark was decommissioned last year, Naval Order of the United States determined to make the commitment to keep the annual memorial service ongoing.

The message is addressed to all who are here today, as well as to those 37 who are here in spirit today and every day.

Very simply the message is that we, as shipmates, have an unwavering obligation to those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, and that this obligation takes precedence over all else that we do.

The message is that this Nation pledges to always honor the memory of your loved ones and to always honor your loss and your sacrifice.

And finally, to the 37 brave souls of USS Stark who committed their very lives to the freedom of this great Nation, the message is the same today as it was 175 years ago when the famous statesman and orator, Daniel Webster, spoke these words at the dedication of a monument to those who gave their lives in

the Battle of Bunker Hill:

"Our poor work may perish, but thine shall endure: This monument may moulder away, the solid ground it rests upon may sink down to the level of the sea; but thy memory shall not fail. Wherever among men a heart shall be found that beats the transports of patriotism and liberty, its aspirations shall claim kindred with thy spirit!"

"You will never be forgotten."



The Color Guard post the colors during the memorial.