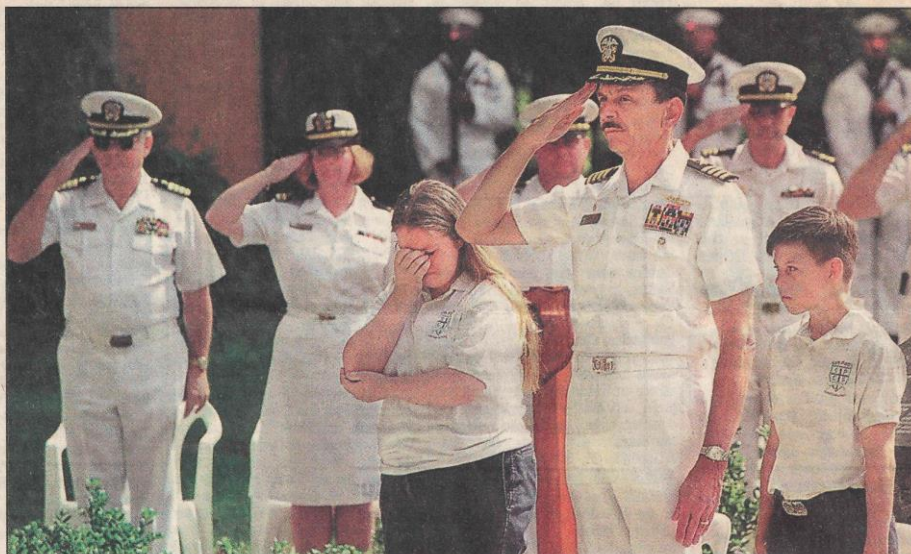


Taking time to remember



— Rick Wilson/staff

USS Stark

The guided-missile frigate USS Stark was decommissioned earlier this month.

Timeline

Aug. 24, 1979

■ Keel laid

Oct. 23, 1982

■ Ship commissioned

May 17, 1987

■ Stark attacked by Iraqi missiles, killing 37

May 7, 1999

■ Stark decommissioned

Crew

■ 188 enlisted, 15 officers

Notable achievements

■ Rescued 16 people from a burning merchant vessel hit by Iranian missiles in the Persian Gulf in 1984

■ Rescued two downed helicopter pilots in the Persian Gulf in 1991

■ Ship named after Adm. Harold R. Stark, who served in the Navy from 1903 to 1946.

■ Participated in drug interdiction missions, including seizure of a boat loaded with 14,000 pounds of marijuana in 1991.

■ Helped rescue more than 500 Cubans in 1994.



— Rick Wilson/staff

Above: Randy Pierce (front left), 14, and her brother, Logan, 12, remember USS Stark victims, including their father, Randy Pierce.

Left: Flowers rest on a memorial to sailors killed aboard the USS Stark in May 1987 by missiles from an Iraqi aircraft.

Sailors who died on Stark honored

By Dave Roman

Times-Union staff writer

It has been 12 years since her husband and 36 shipmates died aboard the USS Stark, but Diana Pierce Ellis remembers the day as though it were yesterday.

She was taking her newborn son for a stroller ride when her brother tracked her down with news that the fast frigate had been struck by Iraqi missiles.

Yesterday, Ellis was among a handful of relatives and Navy personnel marking the anniversary of the sailors' deaths at a Mayport Naval Station memorial cere-

mony.

"To me, it shows that the military hasn't forgotten them, and it shows my kids that their dad hasn't been forgotten," said Ellis, whose husband, Randy Pierce, was in the Persian Gulf when two Exocet missiles struck the ship's side.

Yesterday, her children, daughter, Randi Lynn, 14, and son Logan, 12, helped lay a wreath at the base of a monument honoring the fallen sailors.

"When I see my kids hurt, then I start

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Stark: Sailors who died aboard ship remembered in ceremony

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hurting," said Ellis, who remarried in 1989.

It was the first time her son, who has worn the ship's number 31 on his T-ball uniform since he was 4, participated in a memorial, though Ellis has attended nearly every one.

Rear Adm. David Ellison said there is a fear on behalf of his generation about how we will replace the young sailors like those who lost their lives on the Stark, especially at a time when so many young people say they can do better on the outside than in the all-volunteer military service.

"The answers to life are not found in the Dow Jones average," he said. "They're found in the deeds of men like these."

On the night of May 17, 1987, those deeds involved heroic fire-fighting efforts that saved the ship after an Iraqi jet accidentally fired two Exocet missiles

that struck the Stark. The attack came in the midst of the Iran-Iraq war.

Ellison, commander of the Western Hemisphere Group, said the question of why bad things happen to good people is the wrong one to ask about the Stark.

The better question is, "What do good people do when bad things happen?" he said.

In this case, Ellison said, sailors fought fire, flooding and smoke for hours on end to "save their shipmates, the ship and the respect of this country."

Although the service was sparsely attended, retired Navy Capt. Gregory Streeter and Brian Sheffield, representing the Naval Order of the United States, said they intend to see the ceremony continue now that the Stark has been decommissioned.

The 445-foot-long Stark was decommissioned May 7. During its 16½ years of service, the Stark never fired a shot in combat.