



— Stan Badz/staff

An unidentified family member of a USS Stark crewman is comforted by Navy personnel after being overcome with emotion during the memorial service for the 37 sailors who died Sunday.

## Silence, then sobs fill Mayport hangar

By Laura Griffin  
Staff writer

The first blast from a 21-gun salute shattered the silence yesterday in a near-by aircraft hangar that served as a chapel for 1,100 mourners, and brought home the reality that 37 men would never return from the Persian Gulf.

After the volleys had echoed through the Mayport Naval Station hangar, a bugler played taps, and hundreds of sailors and families broke down, many weeping uncontrollably, others silently.

For 25-year-old Karen Supple, who found out Tuesday that her husband, Martin, had died in an Iraqi missile attack

on the USS Stark, taps was an emotional turning point in the service.

"You're kind of in your own world there," she said. "Then it [taps] really was moving. It kind of finalized things for me."

A Mayport sailor stood in the back of the crowded hangar, wearing dress whites. Clutching his sailor's cap in one hand and a memorial service program in the other, he watched, biting his lower lip, a tear streaming down his cheek.

The bugle call raised such emotions in family members that one woman, wearing a white veil, thought to be the widow of a dead seaman from Tallahassee, cried

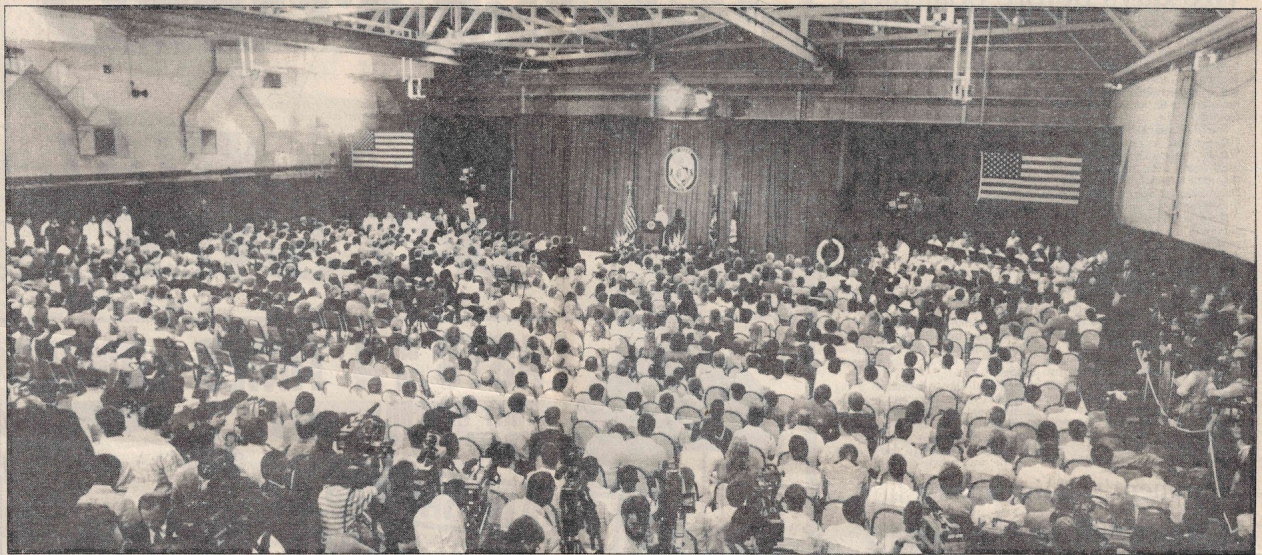
out, "Why?, why?"

She collapsed, and several sailors helped her out of the auditorium as she continued to wail.

Two other women cried out uncontrollably and had to leave the service — one immediately after President Reagan expressed his condolences to her family.

After Reagan spoke to those at the memorial service, he and his wife, Nancy, greeted each of the family members personally, expressing their sorrow for the lives lost in what the Iraqi government

(See TAPS, Page A-8)



— Scott Wheeler/staff

About 1,100 people attended yesterday's memorial service at Mayport Naval Station for the fallen crewmen of the USS Stark. Below the flag is a U.S. Navy band; members of the media are in the foreground.

## Taps brings reality home for survivors

(From Page A-1)

called an accident.

"He told me how sorry he was, and he said 'God bless you,'" Mrs. Supple said. "And then he told me 'No one makes me prouder than a man in uniform.' It was nice."

Hal Watson said of his brief meeting with the president: "I know he is an actor, but there is no way he could have been acting about this. It was genuine."

Watson is an older brother of Joseph Pearce Watson, who was killed on the Stark.

"There was a lot of emotion in there," said Watson, who came from Detroit for the memorial service.

Watson's sister, Kay Bartz, of Charlevoix, Mich., also attended the service.

"Hal grabbed on to Nancy [Reagan] and it seemed like he held on to her for five minutes," she said.

That emotional moment between Watson and Mrs. Reagan was captured on national television.

Reagan stressed in his address that those who died on the guided-missile frigate Stark died as heroes with dignity.

"The men of the USS Stark stood guard in the night. One of our ambassadors paid them this tribute: 'They were tough, they were brave, they were great,'" Reagan said. "They were great. And those that died did embody the best of us — they were ordinary men who did extraordinary things. Yes, they were heroes."

Before the service, hundreds of mourners were inspected by Secret Service agents and herded through metal detectors before they took their seats under exposed red pipes and U.S. flags in the steamy hangar.

A military band played *America the Beautiful*, *Battle Hymn of the Republic* and the Navy hymn as dignitaries, including state and federal officials, filed in.

Sailors stood by in dress whites, hands clasped behind their backs, paying tribute to the friends and relatives they had lost.

Petty Officer 3rd Class James Bell, a machinist with 12 years in the Navy, lost his 27-year-old stepbrother, Randall Pierce, in the attack on the Stark.

Pierce, who was a sailor for eight years, planned on a career in the

Navy. Pierce wanted to give his wife and young son a good life, said Bell, whose eyes were red from tears.

He took long drags from a menthol cigarette as he discussed the ceremony and the Navy.

The attack did not leave Bell apprehensive about continuing his Navy career.

"I'm in for a reason. It's like the old saying: There's a job and somebody's got to do it," he said.

Bell said he was satisfied with the memorial service; it was what he needed.

"I thought it was good; it really did help," he said. "The only thing I regret is all the press people being around. I know there's an interest, but they didn't have to be so noticeable."

The media — about 450 representatives — were difficult to ignore.

The sudden attack on the Mayport-based frigate was a story of national interest and every major news organization and television network wanted to cover it.

Crammed into a small area behind the mourners, television cameramen, reporters, announcers and photographers strained to relay the memorial to readers and viewers.

Often, only a baby's cry or the clicks of cameras broke the silence during prayers and speeches.

Many of the mourners were prepared for it, but others were not.

"I wasn't at all," Mrs. Supple said. "I have never seen so many cameras in my life. But the Navy did a good job of keeping them away from us, so it wasn't bad."

Mayport Naval Station and the Jacksonville community showed the families unbounded support all week.

Thousands of Jacksonville motorists drove with their headlights on yesterday in memory of the dead.

The flashing sign at the Mayport base entrance relayed the message: "USS Stark families — God be with you. You are in our thoughts and prayers."

Arrangements of red, white and blue flowers shaped like ships and anchors were inside the security building on the base.

At the service, families of the living and the dead wore yellow and blue ribbons, representing the Stark's colors.

Staff writer Frank LoMonte contributed to this report.



— Stan Badz/staff

Two unidentified men embrace at the memorial service at Hangar 1552 for the 37 sailors killed

aboard the USS Stark. President Reagan and Navy officials addressed the mourners.