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Missile hits USS Stark; crewman dies

Information hot line

The Navy has activated a toll-free telephone hot line to provide information to families of USS Stark crew: 1-800-368-3202.

From staff and news services

WASHINGTON — A Mayport-based frigate on patrol in the Persian Gulf was seriously damaged last night and at least one crewman was killed when the ship was hit by a missile fired from an Iraqi fighter plane, the Pentagon reported.

Sources said the attack on the USS Stark apparently was a case of mistaken identity.

Pentagon officials said that fires aboard the guided-missile frigate were under control early today and it was heading for Bahrain, about

85 miles away. However, there was concern that it might not make it, and nonessential personnel from the ship were evacuated to the San Diego-based Waddell and the Norfolk-based Conyngham, two other U.S. Navy vessels with the Stark at the time of the attack, U.S. officials said.

Robert Sims, the Pentagon's chief spokesman, said in a briefing at 9:45 p.m. EDT that he was not in a position to confirm fatalities aboard the Stark.

"We just don't know for sure. It's getting

close to daylight over there now and the captain of the ship is beginning to take a muster to account for the crew," he said.

Family or friends seeking information on crew members were asked by the Navy to call its personal command center at 1-800-368-3202.

The State Department issued a strong protest over the attack.

"The United States regards this attack with great seriousness," said Secretary of State George P. Shultz. "The president was in-

formed at once, of course, and is following the situation closely."

Sims said the attack occurred about 2 p.m. EDT — about 10 p.m. local time — in the gulf, as the Stark was patrolling in an area about 85 miles northeast of Bahrain.

Sims said that based on preliminary reports, the Stark was attacked by two Iraqi Mirage F-1 fighters, each of which fired one Exocet missile from a range of about 20 miles.

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