

Navy family reaches out to support relatives of those killed in attack

By Helen Hu
and Laura Griffin
Staff writers

Three fluttering U.S. flags were lowered to half-mast yesterday at the Mayport Naval Station in tribute to the 37 men killed aboard the USS Stark.

A five-man honor guard lowered the flags at noon under gray skies rumbling with distant thunder as crowds of reporters, photographers and television camera crews looked on.

Among the onlookers was Sandy Bechtold, a Navy wife who voluntarily serves as a liaison between the Navy and families of crew members.

People are feeling grief and anger about the deaths, said Mrs. Bechtold, who is counseling the families of men aboard the ship. Her husband is not assigned to the Stark.

"Why me? Why my husband? That [reaction] is part of the grieving," she said.

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- The Iraqi government is prepared to meet the U.S. demand to pay reparations for the loss of life and damage to the \$200 million Stark. Story, Page A-7.

- Imelda Barrow hoped a different house would be enough to ease her fears. Story, Page A-9.

- An admiral says the surprise must have been "incredible." Story, Page A-9.

In a news conference, Rear Adm. Michael P. Kalleres said the families of 16 of the crewmen who died live in the Jacksonville area. Their families were notified yesterday morning.

A list of those and other casual-

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— John Pemberton/staff

Sailors from the Mayport Naval Station lower three American flags at the base's main entrance in tribute to the 37 USS Stark crewmen who were killed Sunday.

Navy community comes together to share grief

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ties will be released at noon today, a Mayport spokesman said.

Kalleres, commander of Cruiser-Destroyer Group 12, which includes the Stark, said a list of men unhurt by the attack also is being compiled.

He said he thinks the entire crew has been accounted for.

Among those on the casualty list was Senior Chief Petty Officer Robert Laurence Shippee, a native of Adams Center, N.Y., who made his home in Ponte Vedra.

His wife, Carol — a teachers aide at Palm Valley Elementary School — was unable to talk to reporters yesterday, but two of her brothers said this trip to the Middle East was to be her husband's last sea duty.

Shippee had been in the Navy for 17 years and enjoyed what he did, Mrs. Shippee's brothers said. "He's made it his whole life," said Peter Maffucci, one of Shippee's brothers-in-law.

"Whether he was going to retire or stay in, we don't know," said the other, Mike Maffucci.

Shippee, a 35-year-old fire technician, was the father of three children — Patty, 12, Timmy, 10, and Brian, 8.

While Brian Shippee was busy painting the family's red-cedar porch furniture yesterday afternoon, his brother and sister were

inside with their mother, who was trying to rest after two nights with little sleep, Mike Maffucci said.

"Patty's taking it the hardest" of the three children, he said. "I don't know if it's really sunk in with the boys" that their father was killed.

But the boys were asking, "Why did daddy have to be on that ship?" and "Why do all the reporters keep calling and coming here?" he said.

Many of the families will need help coping with their sudden loss, Kalleres said, and in order to help them, counselors were flown in from Portsmouth Naval Hospital in Virginia to supplement the five already on the base.

Chaplain Bill Perry said the tension Monday night was tight, "like a guitar string that you turn tighter, and tighter, and then give another turn."

Perry described the feelings of one woman who waited to hear about her husband — and found out he was safe — as "I want the phone to ring, and afraid it will."

At this point, he told reporters, families appeared not to be questioning strategy or policies, but "simply grieving in their own pain."

Survivors "hurt like fury — feel terrible inside," Perry said.

He said he told a woman who wept and expressed anger, "This is a terrible day for you — cry until you can't cry anymore."

Yvonne Hanes was one of the lucky wives. She learned yesterday morning that her 27-year-old husband, Randall, survived the attack.

Her two-day vigil by the phone was worth it. But her anguish of not knowing had been overwhelming.

Now she can sleep again.

"They called and said he was OK," she said, the tone in her voice expressing her relief. Though they did not tell her when she will see him again, merely knowing he will return is reason enough to look forward to "just waiting for him to come home," she said.

When she was unsure whether he was alive, she expressed the sentiments of many Navy personnel.

"What are they [sailors] doing there if they're not going to fight back?" she asked. "They're just sitting targets; there's no reason for that."

Those feelings have been expressed by many wives and sailors at the Mayport base.

And for survivors, Perry said, "It's all right to be angry at the Navy, at God, and at the press, the bearer of bad tidings."

The attack, Kalleres said, was an "emotional and grief-stricken time" for him personally because he had put the Stark into commission Oct. 23, 1982.

"When you raise someone from birth, it's tough to see them get

hurt," he said.

The admiral spoke cautiously about the attack. It happened at night when "no one is terribly good" at reacting, he said.

Still, he said, in the Navy "you know the risk you take when you go."

Marilyn Tweedy, whose husband, Gregory, was a 16-year veteran of the Navy, said he knew the risks and believed in what he was doing. He was among the 37 killed.

Knowing he was going to the Middle East made him a little uneasy, she said, but not terribly so.

"I think anyone headed in that direction has some qualms about it, but it's part of the job. You just have to go with it," she said.

Navy people are reacting as one big family, with people showing concern for Stark crewmen and their families from naval bases around the country, Kalleres said.

"I know as far as me personally," Mrs. Tweedy said, "everyone is reaching out and being supportive. It's been a big help."

Mayor Jake Godbold and Gov. Bob Martinez have called the Navy to express their concern, and U.S. flags were flying at half-staff at Jacksonville Beach and Atlantic Beach city halls. Signs expressing sorrow were displayed at several businesses and churches at the Beaches.



— Special

Senior Chief Petty Officer Robert Shippee, a fire control technician on the USS Stark, was one of the 37 crewmen killed Sunday. He had a family portrait taken with his wife, Carol, and three children — (from left) Timmy, 10, Patty, 12, and Brian, 8 — shortly before Shippee sailed with the Stark for the Persian Gulf.

A large sign in front of the Comfort Inn on Mayport Road near the Navy base read: "Our Sympathy to Families and USS Stark."

A sign in front of the Beaches First Church of the Nazarene on Florida A1A in Neptune Beach said: "Families USS Stark Our Love and Prayers Are With You."

And another sign expressing concern was in front of the NCOA & Petty Officers Association Service Center, a fraternal organization on Mayport Road: "God Bless USS Stark Crew and Families."

Staff writers Julie Howard and R. Michael Anderson contributed to this report.