

The Florida Times-Union

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA THURSDAY MAY 21, 1987

B

Unexploded missile found on Stark

Frigate's captain defends crews' actions after attack



— Associated Press

Lawrence Mark Bareford of Spotsylvania, Va., a fire controlman on the USS Stark, was carried to a plane at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington, D.C., yesterday. He was en route to the

Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. Bareford was one of two sailors burned Sunday when two Iraqi missiles hit the Stark. Thirty-seven crewmen were killed and 21 injured.

From news services

WASHINGTON — An unexploded missile warhead was found yesterday aboard the U.S. frigate Stark, three days after the ship was attacked by an Iraqi jet in the Persian Gulf, the Pentagon said.

Thirty-seven sailors were killed aboard the Mayport-based guided-missile frigate, which was towed to Manama, Bahrain.

But chief Defense Department spokesman Robert Sims said the ship's crew was not considered to be in any danger. He said ordnance disposal teams were working on the warhead to "render it safe" for removal.

"There is no immediate danger of it going off," Sims said.

"I can confirm that we did recover an unexploded Exocet warhead on the Stark," which came under attack Sunday while on routine patrol, Sims said in response to questions.

Earlier yesterday in Manama, the captain of the USS Stark said he was in the process of activating his ship's defenses when it was hit by the two Iraqi missiles. He angrily denied that a weapons radar had "locked on" to the Stark.

"I don't know whether any of it was my fault," said Capt. Glenn Brindel. "I don't know if it was the fault of an operator. I don't know if it was the fault of equipment, I don't know if it was an act of God."

"I don't know what in particular caused the missiles to come in and

hit the ship without warning," Brindel said at his first news conference since the Sunday attack.

Brindel also said Stark's defenses were "fully operational," but confirmed he had no warning of the attack until seconds before the impacts of the two missiles.

Brindel, a muscular, ash-blond veteran of 22 years of Navy service, also lashed out at Iraq's indiscriminate tactics in its Persian Gulf "Tanker War" against Iran but appeared to accept Baghdad's claim the attack was a mistake.

In his sharpest display of anger during 25 minutes of sometimes pointed questioning about his actions, Brindel denied knowing the weapons radar of an Iraqi F-1 Mirage jet had locked on to his ship — a hostile act that, if true, would have justified his shooting down the plane and raised questions about his failure to counterattack.

The Stark's sophisticated electronic sensors received signals from the F-1's general search radar, he said, but not from weapons radars used to guide missiles on their course.

"The information that I received was that we did not detect any electronic emissions" from a weapons radar, he said.

Asked to explain his statement in light of a comment Tuesday by Rear Adm. Harold Bernsen, commander of U.S. Naval forces in the Persian

(See SECOND, Page A-8)

Second U.S. ship approached by Iraqi fighter planes

(From Page A-1)

Gulf, that the Stark had received a weapons radar lock on, Brindel snapped: "That question has already been answered."

A Navy spokesman later said Bernsen had "backed off" his comment and added he did not know why the admiral had initially thought the Stark had monitored a lock on.

Adm. Ulysses S. Grant arrived in Bahrain yesterday to head a Navy Commission of Inquiry that will conduct a detailed review of the attack and interview the officers involved. Grant declined to meet with journalists.

In other developments yesterday:

- The Pentagon acknowledged that Iraqi fighters had twice approached a U.S. destroyer this week in the same area where the Stark was attacked, but reversed course after being warned away by the ship.

- The bodies of 35 crewman killed in the attack arrived in West Germany en route to the United States. Eleven of the bodies have yet to be identified. In addition to the 35, two other crewmen are missing and presumed dead. Twenty-one sailors were injured.

- A brief ceremony was held at

Bahrain International Airport to honor the dead sailors.

- A plane carrying two crewmen who suffered burns over 40 percent to 45 percent of their bodies left West Germany yesterday en route to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas.

- The United States will go ahead with plans to register Kuwaiti tankers under the U.S. flag, but President Reagan will not increase the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf, Senate GOP leader Bob Dole of Kansas called for "a special, renewed examination" of the agreement, and Rep. Tom Lantos, D-Calif., asked, "Are we becoming a silent party to the Iran-Iraq war?"

Brindel said his ship's defense systems were "fully operational, no deficiencies," on the day of the attack but added he did not have enough time to activate them in the few seconds between his first warning of an incoming missile and the first explosion.

Stark's radars monitored the F-1 jet from the time it was 200 miles away, Brindel said, but he had no reason to worry because Iraqi aircraft are "generally designated as friendly." Although the United States is officially neutral in the Iran-Iraq war, its policies lean toward Iran.

The Stark radioed warnings to the approaching jet on an international emergency frequency, he said, but the Iraqi pilot did not acknowledge the transmission and continued flying toward the frigate.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Tarek Aziz said the pilot who attacked the Stark thought he was firing on an Iranian vessel and did not receive the signals from the frigate before he fired.

Two or three minutes after the second radio warning, Brindel said, the Stark's lookout spotted a missile trail against the night sky and warned the Combat Information Center, the ship's war room.

"In a matter of a few seconds," Brindel added, that first missile slammed into his ship, followed by another about 30 seconds later. "We did not realize that missiles had been fired until it was too late."

The Stark "never detected" the separation of the missiles from the F-1, he said, or the "seeker," U.S. military jargon for the Exocet's independent radar that guided it on its wave-skimming course toward the ship.

In the brief time between the lookout's warning and the first blast, he said, he began the "automatic sequencing" to activate the Stark's defense systems but none

could fire on the incoming missiles before they hit.

The ship's Phalanx weapon — an array of Gatling guns designed to put up a curtain of bullets and destroy incoming missiles — was active but on manual control to prevent it from indiscriminately shooting at any targets near the ship.

Brindel also said one missile has been definitely identified as an Exocet ship-killing missile from pieces of the rocket found in the Stark. With the discovery of the second, unexploded missile, officials know two of the French-made missiles hit the ship.

The captain also criticized the Iraqi air force's policies of indiscriminately shooting at almost any ship in the gulf it thinks to be Iranian — the Stark was about 60 miles off the Iranian coast when it was hit — but appeared resigned to the idea that innocent ships are sometimes attacked by mistake in times of war.

"I don't like to say that it was a matter of time before this happened," he said, "but that is basically what happened."

A Pentagon official who asked not to be identified, said the unexploded warhead was discovered yesterday morning as damage assessments were being made.