

Mayport readied for president

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Staff writers

Mayport Naval Station officials were preparing the base yesterday to welcome President Reagan, who is expected to attend memorial services tomorrow honoring the 37 sailors killed in the missile attack on the USS Stark.

The service is scheduled for 11 a.m. in Hangar 1552 at the base's Naval Air Facility.

The Stark, a guided-missile frigate, is based at Mayport.

This will mark Reagan's first visit to Jacksonville as president. Members of a White House advance team were on the base yesterday to work out details of the visit.

Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger and Navy Secretary James Webb are among the top military officials expected to attend the ceremony, Pentagon spokesman Robert Sims said.

Gov. Bob Martinez and Rep. Charles Bennett, D-Fla., also have announced they will attend.

Officials said the service, which also will recognize the sailors injured in the attack and the families of the crew members, probably will not be open to the public.

"I don't think there will be a general invitation, just because of the space limitation," Navy spokesman Nick Young said. "There's been such an outpouring [of concern] from the public."

Chief Petty Officer Gene Schoeck, a Navy spokesman at Mayport Naval Station, said: "The service is specifically for the families and friends of the crew members and shipmates aboard other ships on the base."

Officials did not specify what security precautions would be taken.

Meanwhile, much of the Mayport base was operating as usual yesterday. Several golfers played the base course, a group of men played softball and steady flows of people entered and left a McDonald's restaurant on the base.

Family members were welcoming home sailors aboard the USS Yosemite, a destroyer tender that returned yesterday from Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba.

But in Hangar 1552, workers scurried for Reagan's arrival. Some men sprayed the white deck with water as others brushed soap away with brooms. Others scrubbed the deck with sponges.

Media technicians examining the memorial site were warned not to lean on newly painted walls.

Sailors also cleaned the long,

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empty hangar that will be the site of the memorial service.

Many of the workers in the area laughed and joked with each other. Some camera-shy cleaners backed away from news photographers. Others moved closer and offered smiles as they continued to brush the surface.

Officials aboard other frigates at the base shooed away news photographers who approached the edge of the pier where several frigates were docked for repair.

On the sides of each of the Stark's sister ships were signs "Desron Eight. Count on us." The Stark, too, is part of DESRON (Destroyer Squadron) 8.

Ranking Navy officials, who only allowed reporters on base as part of an organized bus tour, were protective of servicemen who had been approached for interviews and forbade sailors from commenting.

As "a mark of respect" for the victims, Reagan ordered yesterday that the U.S. flag be flown at half-staff at all public buildings, military posts, U.S. embassies and on naval vessels through Monday, Memorial Day.

Reagan also directed the Navy to pay the cost of transporting the victims' immediate family members to Jacksonville for the service.

Standard military regulations call for the Navy to transport only primary next of kin — wives of married servicemen and parents of those who are unmarried. Sims said that policy had been changed.

Continental Airlines also has volunteered to fly family members to Jacksonville for the ceremony.

The last president to visit Jacksonville while in office was Jimmy Carter, who spent three hours here on July 17, 1980.

Reagan last traveled to Jacksonville on Sept. 4, 1980, when he was a presidential candidate stumping for votes. During his four-hour visit, he spoke at a luncheon meeting and a Hemming Plaza rally at which \$1 box lunches were sold.

As naval officials were working out details of his trip tomorrow, family members were struggling to deal with the tragedy.

"The families are going about the business of coping, and we're trying to do our jobs," Schoeck said. "But obviously, nobody will forget what's happened."

A memorial service also was scheduled for Saturday at Ponte Vedra Beach for Robert L. Shippee, a 35-year-old fire technician and one of the 16 dead crewmen whose families live in the Jacksonville area.

The service, which is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church on Florida A1A in Ponte Vedra Beach, will be open to the public, said Cheryl Charles, a neighbor who has been assisting the family.

Shippee, a New York native who will be buried in that state, lived in Ponte Vedra with his wife, Carol, and three children.