

ATTACK ON THE USS STARK

Crewman wrote of untold problems, father claims

By David C. Rudd
Staff writer

The father of a crewman killed in the attack on the USS Stark said yesterday that a letter he received from his son mentioned problems aboard the frigate.

"It contradicts some of the things being said about the situation in the Mediterranean," Joseph E. Wilson said about the contents of the letter he received yesterday.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Lloyd Anthony Wilson wrote the letter three days before an Iraqi warplane fired missiles that struck the Stark, killing 37 men.

Wilson, in a telephone interview from his home in Charleston, S.C., said he would not divulge the contents of the letter, but said it indicated "something was bound to happen. Something else went wrong, something else that's not being told."

The petty officer was not the only one who apparently sent letters about the Stark before tragedy struck.

A Jonesboro, Ark., woman who made her husband promise to write to her every day said he survived the attack because he was keeping his promise.

Crew member Jimmy Hensley, 37,

"went to the lounge to write the letter, and that's the reason he wasn't in the rack [bunk] when it hit," his wife, Linda, said yesterday after she received a telephone call from him.

She said she and her husband, a communications specialist, did not talk much about Sunday's missile attack. He was exhausted and emotionally drained, she said.

"We've got the rest of our lives to discuss what happened," she added. In a letter written May 5, Hensley told his wife the Stark experienced a major engine breakdown twice that day.

According to Mrs. Hensley, her husband wrote: "I never expected

this boat to hold together. She needs an overhaul real bad."

Mrs. Hensley said Tuesday that she did not think her husband was concerned about his safety on the ship.

Meanwhile, Wilson said he plans to send copies of his son's one-page letter to the media, Congress and President Reagan. But so far, he has done nothing with it. "I don't want to send out anything prematurely," he said.

Wilson said he first heard about the attack Sunday when a news report interrupted the television program he was watching. He said he called government offices Monday

morning and afternoon, but was given no news about his son's condition.

He said two Navy officers came to his house about 10:30 p.m. Monday to tell him his son was dead.

He said that when he asked them details about his son's death, they would not give him any information.

The long wait to hear news about his 24-year-old son was stressful, Wilson said.

"I told the two officers that I would have felt better off if they had just made a telephone call to me," he said. "The trauma of a few extra hours would have been eliminated.

"The stress factor could endanger my life. This is something the military should address."

His son, who had served in the Navy since 1982 and was to end his tour of duty in the fall, last spoke to his father on Easter, Wilson said, adding that his son sounded depressed.

When the Stark left Mayport on Feb. 5, Wilson said, his son was feeling apprehensive about the duty.

"He felt there was a crisis and I don't think he liked the idea," he said. "He loved the Navy, but he questioned the motives."

This report contains material from The Associated Press.