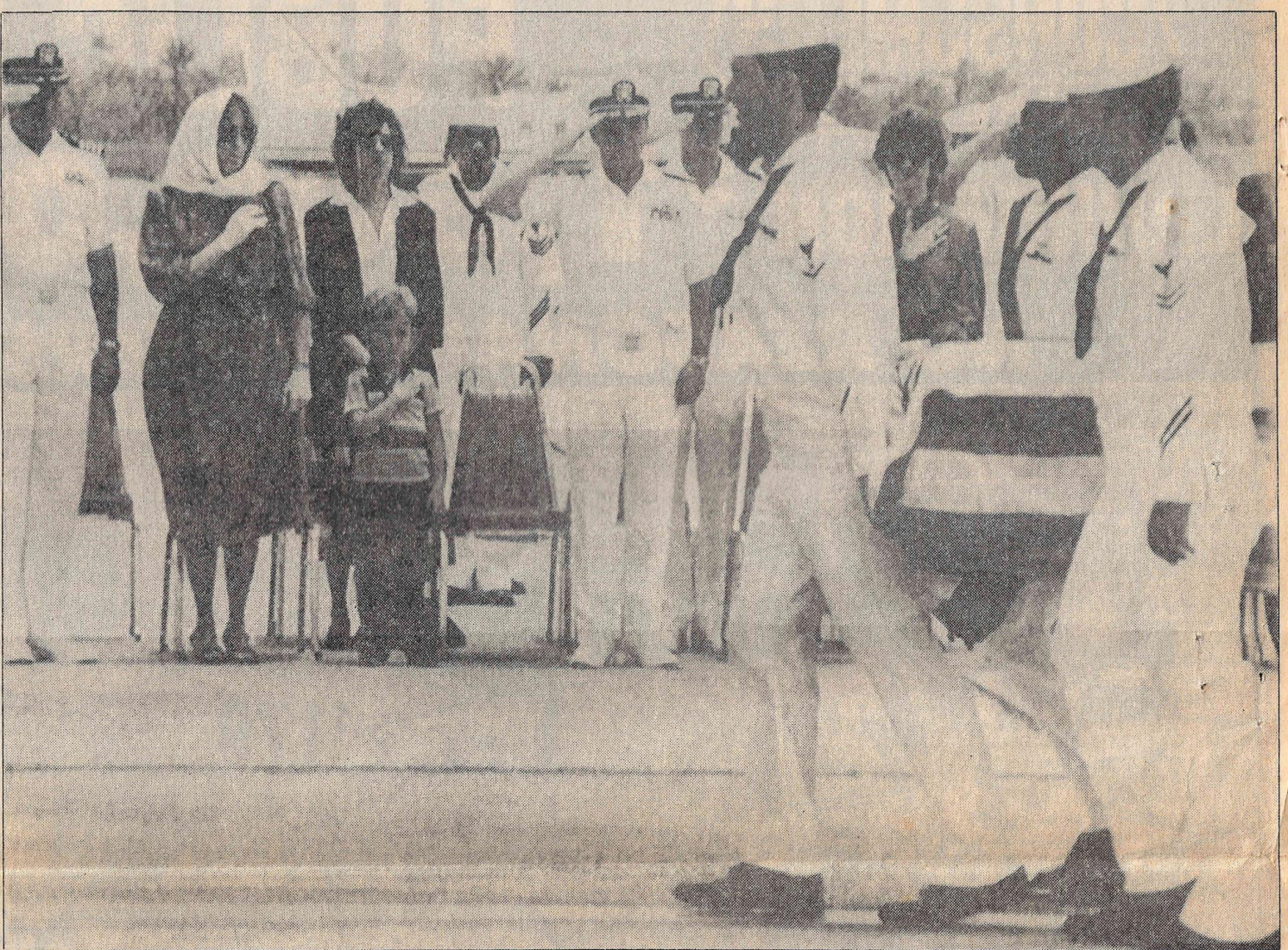




— Associated Press

Barbara Kiser (left, wearing scarf) and her son John, 5, cross their hearts at Bahrain airport as sailors carry the casket of a crewman killed Sunday in the attack on the USS Stark. Among the observers

were Navy officers, who saluted their fallen comrades. Mrs. Kiser's husband, Stephen, died in the attack. She has sent a Bible and note to the Iraqi pilot who fired the missiles.

Victim's wife forgives Iraqi pilot for attack

From AP and staff

Barbara Kiser and her 5-year-old son stood near the runway yesterday at the Bahrain International Airport, watching the bodies of 35 USS Stark sailors leave the island.

A few days earlier she had sent a Bible and letter of forgiveness to the Iraqi pilot who fired the missiles Sunday that killed her husband and the other crewmen.

Young John Kiser crossed his heart as the remains of his father, Stephen Greg Kiser, 36, and the other dead were saluted and carried to the C-141 transport plane where U.S. flags were placed on their caskets.

Two other victims are missing and presumed dead.

Though saddened by her loss, Mrs. Kiser, a born-again Christian, was content knowing her husband was "going home," and she had forgiven the pilot who fired missiles at the ship.

"When she called a couple days ago," Kiser's mother, Norma Kiser of Elkhart, Ind., said yesterday, "I asked how she was and how Steve was and if she had heard anything.

"She said, 'Yes, Mom, the Lord has called Steve home.' And, of course, for us, home is heaven."

Widow sends note, marks verse in Bible

Barbara Kiser had been in Bahrain for about six weeks so that she and her son could see Kiser as much as possible while he was on a six-month Middle East tour.

The morning before her husband died, she and her son stood on the dock, waving goodbye to him as the guided-missile frigate pulled out of port.

Later that night, she learned her goodbye wave had meant forever. She learned of the attack on the Stark and the fiery deaths that followed.

"She had talked to Stephen and the chaplain and wanted to be closer to Daddy to spend more time with him," Norma Kiser said. "Now we're so glad they were able to do that."

The day after the attack, Barbara Kiser bought an Arabic version of the New Testament, said the Rev. Nevin Alwine of San Pablo Baptist Church in Mayport, where the Kisers worshipped.

Alwine said she marked a special verse in the Scripture, Luke 23:34. In the verse, Christ, while hanging

on the cross, says to those crucifying him, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Barbara Kiser gave the Bible and her note, saying she and her son forgave the pilot and that they were "going to be praying for him," to the U.S. ambassador to Bahrain, Sam Zakhem, who was to forward them to Iraq's ambassador to Bahrain, Alwine said.

"It's been very uplifting," Alwine said. "She called and ministered to me. She said that God doesn't make mistakes. She's saying this in reference to their lives, not to lessen the misery of others. The whole family is exercising a faith in God and it's very refreshing."

Although the family members are not angry about Kiser's death, they are frustrated that U.S. forces are unable to do more in the Middle East, Kiser's mother said.

"I wish we'd be more decisive," Norma Kiser said. "This has happened over and over, and we don't do anything. We need a stronger stand. I don't want to blow them all away, but we have to give our men

the protection and authority they need.

"Now, we don't want to be in a war. I don't want any more wives or mothers or children to go through this. If we're going to lose them anyway, let's have a stronger country."

The men aboard the Stark had shore duty last week, she said, so Barbara Kiser and their son were able to visit Kiser every evening.

"She'll have good memories of those times," Norma Kiser said.

Kiser, who grew up in Elkhart, Ind., had been in the Navy since graduating from Elkhart High School 18 years ago. He had served two tours in Vietnam and was prepared for the risks that accompany military service, his mother said.

"This isn't new to us," Norma Kiser said. "We've had to let go of him before and rest in God while he was away. He was ready for it. They both knew that the Persian Gulf was a very dangerous area and that they faced possibility that they may have to carry out those [funeral] plans.

"The Navy briefed them well," she said. "They were not caught off guard."