



Photos by Bob Mack@jacksonville.com

Peter Weber (left) pauses to control his emotions as he read the names of each of the 37 sailors who died in the attack of the USS Stark while Tim Martineau rang the ship's bell for each name in a ceremony on Thursday. Weber and Martineau served aboard the Stark.

25 years later, remembering Stark sailors

By William Browning
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Peter Weber stood at the podium and read the names. After each one, a bell rang. When it did, Weber saw their faces in his mind.

The annual memorial ceremony for the men who lost their lives when the USS Stark was attacked May 17, 1987, took place Thursday at Mayport Naval Station.

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As their names were called, everyone in the crowd, one-by-one, stood. It was easy to make out the men who were aboard the Stark when it was attacked 25 years ago. They saluted.

In all, 37 sailors died in the surprise attack. The Mayport-based Stark was on patrol in the Arabian Gulf at the time.

Weber was a sailor aboard the Stark when two Iraqi Exocet missiles struck the frigate. He remembers screaming and fire. He lives in Jacksonville now and attends the ceremony each year at Mayport to honor his fallen shipmates.

"I want to keep the names of those sailors alive,"



A rifle detail from Mayport Naval Station bow their heads during the invocation on Thursday. A ceremony of remembrance was held at the Memorial Park.

THE USS STARK FALLEN

Doran Bolduc
Bradley Brown
Jeffrey Calkins
Mark Caouette
John Ciletta Jr.
Brian Clinefelter
Antonio Daniels
Christopher DeAngelis
James Dunlap
Steven Erwin
Jerry Farr
Vernon Foster
Dexter Grisset
William Hansen
Daniel Homicki
Kenneth Janusik
Steven Kendall
Stephen Kiser
Ronnie Lockett
Thomas MacMullen
Charles Moller
Jeffrey Phelps
Randy Pierce
James Plonsky
Kelly Quick
Earl Ryals
Robert Shippee
Jeffrey Sibley
Lee Stephens
James Stevens
Martin Supple
Gregory Tweady
Vincent Ulmer
Joseph Watson
Wayne Weaver
Terrance Weldon
Lloyd Wilson

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Photos by Bob Mack@jacksonville.com

A group mostly of former USS Stark crew members pose for a photo around the USS Stark Memorial plaque after the ceremony.

STARK

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the 49-year-old said after the ceremony. "I don't want people to forget."

Arthur Conklin spoke during the ceremony Thursday. He also was aboard the Stark during the attack. He has attended the ceremony at Mayport for the past five years and each time, he said, he reflects on the men killed.

"People call them heroes," he said. "What made them heroes is not the fact that they died for their country. What made them heroes was the fact that they raised their right hands to serve their country."

He also talked about the families that had loved ones give the ultimate sacrifice.

"When we went to sea, they stayed behind and kept the home front running," Conklin said.

One of the sailors who died was Petty Officer 3rd Class Joseph Watson. He was 25 years old. He and his wife had a plan. He was going to serve his country for four years and then go back to Michigan State to finish his education. That dream never happened.

"The hardest part was looking at the potential — what we were going to do — that was lost," Kristin Shannon, his then-wife, said. "There is no second chance."

Watson was buried in Michigan. His parents have died. Shannon keeps the flag that was draped across his coffin in a "special place" in her bedroom. She has since re-married, has five children and lives in Jacksonville. Each year she understands more and more, she said, the sacrifice Watson and his shipmates made. And each



Ruth Penn (front left), of the Fleet Reserve Association, and Ernestine Foster (right), wife of Senior Chief Vernon Foster who died in the attack, pay their respects.

year she attends the ceremony.

"It honors his service," Shannon said. "This is the only thing we have left."

The ceremony featured a speech by Rear Adm. David M. Thomas, commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic. Other sailors who were on the Stark spoke about their memories during the hour-long event that was attended by 150-plus people. It ended with a rifle salute and a playing of taps.

Paul Mullendore was one of the men who held a salute when Weber read the names of the sailors. Mullendore was not aboard

the Stark when it was attacked but came to the memorial to pay his respects.

"I was a sailor for 31½ years," Mullendore, 66, said. "Whenever I get the opportunity, I honor my fellow sailors who have gone before me, for whatever reason. They are my shipmates."

The Stark was retired in 1999. The Naval Order of the United States, First Coast Commandery, sponsors its annual memorial services.

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