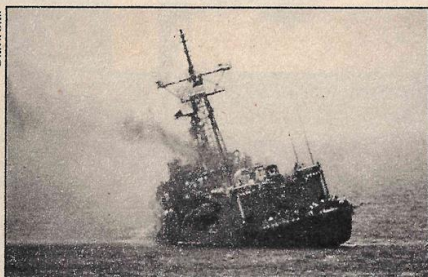


"I was tired, burned, I couldn't see," recalls Lt. William A. Conklin. "I figured we had lost."



Bellicore Group

How They Saved The Stark



The *Stark*, threatened by deadly fires, also was listing heavily from the water she had taken on. Top: The ship and crew return home to Mayport Naval Station, Fla., on Aug. 5, 1987.

HE SETTLED INTO HIS BUNK, READY TO GET SOME SLEEP BEFORE STANDING WATCH at 11:30 p.m. Earlier, he had stood the 3:30 a.m. to 7 a.m. watch, after which he had worked the entire day. Idle and at ease at last in a pair of gym shorts and a T-shirt, Lt. William A. Conklin was in his quarters aboard the *U.S.S. Stark*, a Navy frigate patrolling the Persian Gulf.

Suddenly, a crashing roar—like the thunder of a racing railroad train—filled the air, rousing the officer to his feet. He grabbed his coveralls and shoes and ran out into the passageway. Outside his stateroom, Conklin could see only the dense, blinding smoke.

"Inbound missile, port side, all hands brace for shock," an overhead loudspeaker intoned. Instinctively, Conklin kept running toward the engine room. Then a second thunderous explosion sounded, rocking the 3600-ton ship. "I remember watching the passageway move to the right a couple of feet, right out from under me," he recalls.

It was Sunday, May 17, 1987, 9:12 p.m. Persian Gulf Time. The *Stark*, on routine patrol to protect American merchant vessels from attack in the Iran-Iraq war, had just absorbed two Exocet

BY DAVID FAIRBANK WHITE