

Spend An Hour With USS Stark



**CMDCM Bill Houlihan
NS Mayport CMC**

On May 17th we, as a Naval Station and as Sailors who recognize the importance of history and those who have gone before us, will pause.

We will pause, as we do every year, to remember the 37 Sailors who died on USS STARK (FFG 31) thirty years ago.

At the time, in 1987, STARK was part of a

ANCHORS AWAY

Middle East Task Force off the Saudi Arabian coast during the Iran-Iraq War. She was on patrol when an Iraqi pilot attacked with two Exocet missiles. The first missile struck near the bridge on the port side. It didn't detonate, but rocket fuel ignited and fire engulfed the ship's post office, a store room and the combat operations center.

The second missile also struck the port side and it detonated and left a ten by fifteen foot hole.

Considering the condition of the ship, the fires, the lack of ability to fight back due to the damage to Combat, and a ship

lost at sea was a real possibility.

Twenty nine Sailors died almost immediately. Eight would die later from their injuries. Of the thirty seven dead, two were lost at sea.

STARK fought. Unable to engage an enemy, they turned their attention to a Sailor's true nemesis, fire at sea. Throughout the remainder of the day, STARK and the destroyer, USS CONYNGHAM, fought. The fire burned for twenty four hours but they finally brought it under control.

Many of the survivors and several family members of those killed will be here on May 17th to

remember that day, and those men. It's always a moving ceremony. STARK was a Mayport ship. They were family. STARK is ours and we remember them, here, every year. This year is significant, as big numbers like 30 tend to be.

Survivors will be here, and it's not easy for them. It's not easy for them to remember the horrors of that day and I can't imagine how hard it must be to remember the men with whom they sailed and fought, those men who paid the ultimate cost.

The family of those lost come back to Mayport each year for this remembrance. Again, it can't be easy for them. I believe they take some comfort, though, in knowing that we haven't

forgotten that ship or that crew or those men who died. We take special care of those families, because we can be justifiably defined by how we support the loved ones of those who make that sacrifice. We value them because it's the right thing to do.

Mayport Memorial Park was established less than three months after the attack, with the Stark monument as its centerpiece. It's my hope that you'll join me there on May 17th as we honor the 37 who died in 1987.

This is a special place and I'm talking about Mayport. Everyone who visits here understands that. Maybe we take it for granted, the close-knit family environment we have. It's hard to expect all of us to keep

our good fortune in mind all the time. But, it's moments like the one you'll experience at the Stark remembrance ceremony that will remind you. USS STARK is part of Mayport history, but that ship will always be part of who we currently are because we won't forget the Sailors who we lost, their families or those who fought to keep that ship afloat.

Take one hour out of your day. Get in your whites and come down to the Memorial Park on May 17th at 10 a.m. It could very well be the most valuable hour of your career as you take a moment to remember and thank those who have gone before us.