

Emotions mark anniversary of Stark attack

MAYPORT NAVAL STATION, Fla. (AP) — Hugging each other and crying, and vowing never to forget, relatives of the 37 seamen killed aboard the USS Stark dropped yellow roses into the sea Tuesday to commemorate the first anniversary of the Persian Gulf attack.

"I'm still asking myself 'Why did it have to happen?'" said Diana Pierce, widow of Petty Officer Randy E. Pierce.

Almost 150 wives, parents, children and other relatives of the victims took part in a dockside memorial service at the guided-missile frigate's North Florida home port. Many of them then boarded the Stark's sister ship, USS Antrim, to a position about five miles into the Atlantic Ocean for a wreath-laying ceremony from the stern of the vessel.

"I'm relieved," said red-haired Nancy Ciletta, who with daughters Laura, 4, and Dawn, 14, wiped away tears as they moved from the ship's railing after tossing their tissue-wrapped roses into the ocean.

"I'd rather not go through it over and over," the widow of Bosun's Mate John Ciletta said about the anniversary services. "I would rather just remember John as he was."

Chaplain Bill Perry and Capt. John B. Mitchell Jr., Mayport's commanding officer, memorialized the 37 as heroes, as President Reagan had in services held after disaster last year.

Standing before a stone and bronze monument to the Stark at the Mayport dock, Mitchell told the crowd sitting under white awnings that the reason for the observance was engraved on the memorial: "You will never be forgotten..."

"Last May, we were God's people caring for God's hurting people. One year later, we are now God's people caring for God's healing people," Mitchell said.

Said the chaplain, as the name of each dead seaman was intoned to the ringing of a ship's bell: "Even if you wanted to, you could not forget the pain, that personal pain that goes beyond description."

Similar observances were held in Pascagoula, Miss., where the Stark is undergoing a \$100 million overhaul, in Washington and aboard many Navy ships and installations around the world.

A wreath-laying ceremony was also held by Navy ships still patrolling waters of the central Persian Gulf — where the Stark



ELIZABETH ANN ERWIN, sister of Steven Erwin, who was killed on the USS Stark one year ago, is comforted at the service of remembrance Tuesday. (AP LaserPhoto)

was hit by two missiles fired by an Iraqi jet.

At Mayport, except for the shipboard ceremonies which followed the memorial services, there were few tears on this sunny, hot day. Flags on the base and aboard ship flew at half mast, and the echo of taps wafted far out over the Antrim's wake following a 21-gun salute by an honor guard.

There was little anger or remorse expressed by relatives of the dead. Many took pictures of each other at the waist-high monument. Others stared straight ahead, or prayed silently at times.

"My only anger is at the Iraqis, at my son's loss," said Rodney Erwin, 50, a General Motors plant supervisor from Troy, Mich., whose 22-year-old son Steve was among the victims of the attack.

The plane's pilot reportedly said he mistook the Stark for a tanker from Iraq's

enemy Iran.

"My son and I always loved the water," added Erwin, aboard the Antrim with his wife Nancy. "We had boats all the time when he was growing up, and when I was putting our little boat into the water the other day, I cried," he said.

Seaman John K. Lampkin, 22, sat during the services with eight members of the family of seaman Vincent Ulmer, another of the Stark's victims.

"We were best friends. Played basketball together. Joined the Navy together.

Came here together," said Lampkin, who is a crewman aboard the USS Galley, the same type of ship as the Stark.

Lampkin returned from the Persian Gulf in March and is due to go back soon.

"It's very scary. I still worry about it. . . It's unbelievable that it happened to the Stark," he said.