

NAME TO REMEMBER

Navy, survivors, families gather for 29th anniversary of Iraqi attack on Mayport ship



Photos by Bob Self@jacksonville.com

Richard Arceneaux has a quiet moment with the stern plate from the USS Stark. Arceneaux was assigned to the Stark after the missile attack and was part of the crew that brought the ship back to the U.S. He later retired from the Navy as a crew member on the Stark.

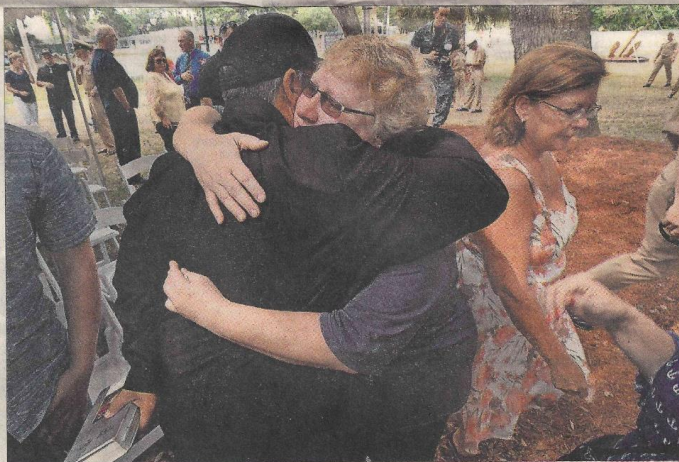
By Dan Scanlan
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Twenty-nine years after exploding Iraqi missiles pierced the USS Stark in the Persian Gulf and killed 37 of its crew, part of it returned to Mayport Naval Station as survivors and the Navy remembered those lost shipmates.

But the donation of the 3,900-ton guided missile frigate's stern plate came with a challenge to survivors who didn't make it to the base's Memorial Park Tuesday to remember those killed in 1987 — come next year.

Janna Ryals' brother, signalman Earl Ryals, was one who died when fire gutted the crew's quarters. She tracked down the stern plate with the ship's name in Chicago last summer where it had been salvaged for scrap in 2006. Mayport officials asked if it could be donated for display at headquarters.

"I primed and painted it and got the front of it the way it should be, then the more I thought about it, the more I thought it wasn't mine to keep," said Ryals, teardrops dotting her blouse after the memorial. "... It's where it



Janna Ryals, who lost her brother Earl Ryals in the missile attack, hugs Bernard Martin, a gunners mate who was serving onboard the Stark but had left the ship a few hours before it was attacked. Martin's replacement, Daniel Homicki was killed in the missile attack.



The partially cleaned stern plate from the USS Stark after it was acquired by Janna Ryals, who lost her brother Earl Ryals in the missile attack on the ship in 1987.

STARK continues on A-4

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Photos by Bob Self@jacksonville.com

A painting of the USS Stark and the names of the 37 crew members who were killed was on display at Memorial Park at Mayport Naval Station on Tuesday, the 29th anniversary of the attack by Iraqi missiles.

STARK

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should be. And it means a lot to the guys who were on it."

The Ohio woman gave other pieces of the ship to crew and families at the memorial, part of the challenge laid down by Command Master Chief Ross Cramer at Tuesday's ceremony.

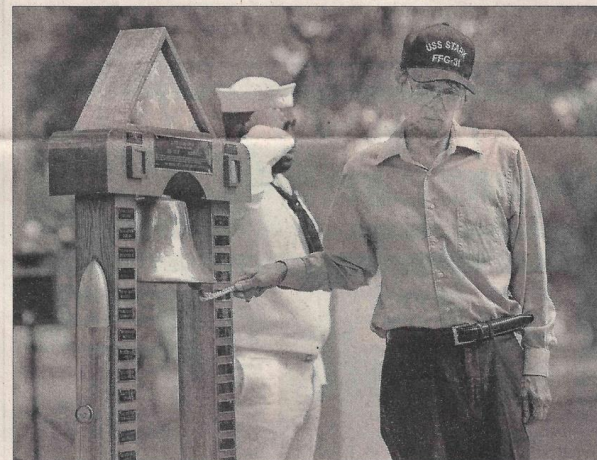
"If you know another shipmate, cut [the piece] in half and give him part," Cramer said. "Grab that shipmate and bring you and the shipmate and your pieces back here next year for the 30th. That's your two rules — fair enough."

The USS Stark was halfway through a six-month deployment in the Persian Gulf when two missiles were fired at it from an Iraqi jet.

The first ripped through the barber shop, post office and part of the chief petty officers' quarters, sparking a bulkhead-melting fire. The second exploded, engulfing the sleeping quarters.

The first blast tossed Cliff Sellers out of his bunk. The boatswain's mate third class was en route to the deck when the second missile hit, he said. The crewman behind him didn't make it. Sellers joined a firefighting team that had to grab a portable pump when the fire hose failed.

"The Navy thought we did the impossible task of saving the ship after two missile hits, and they call us heroes," Sellers said. "No. The heroes are the



Former Stark boatswain's mate Cliff Sellers rings the bell from the USS Stark as the names of the 37 crew members who died in the missile attack were read.

ones who are not here anymore. We are survivors."

Gunner's mate Bernard Martin had just mustered out and was about to leave from Bahrain when he learned the fate of his ship and the death of gunner's mate Daniel Homicki, his replacement.

"It was the emotional roller-coaster, then the guilt feelings of 'I don't think I did enough,'" he said. "... That was home and I lost my home that day."

After preliminary repairs in Bahrain, the Stark spent 10 months in a Mississippi shipyard. It was decommissioned in 1999.

Mayport erected a monument to the Stark on Aug. 1, 1987, and a ceremony takes place every May 17

presented by the local Naval Order of the United States and Second Class Petty Officer Association.

About 200 people gathered Tuesday as Capt. Wesley McCall, the base commander, asked them to "keep the Stark's memory alive."

"It's been a great honor for me to personally get to know the families of the Stark and the community that supports you," McCall said. "... As President [Ronald] Reagan said on board this installation almost 29 years ago, our task is simple, 'We are here to honor the service and sacrifice of 37 shipmates and to personally recognize the inspirational valor and professional competency

STARK SLIDESHOWS
A look back: The 1987 USS Stark attack and aftermath. Jacksonville.com/StarkAttack

The toll: Remembering the 37 sailors killed in the attack. Jacksonville.com/StarkSailors

displayed by Stark's crew, whose actions most certainly saved the ship."

The ceremony ended with the reading of the names of the dead shipmates as Sellers tolled the ship's bell, then family members placed wreaths on the memorial plaque. Just before it began to rain, a rifle salute fired as taps was played.

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