

THE STARK INCIDENT

NEARLY 40 YEARS THE EVENT, MYSTERY STILL SURROUNDS THE IRAQI ATTACK ON THIS AMERICAN GUIDED-MISSILE FRIGATE

BY ROGER BAXTER

It was something that should not have happened — ever.

On 17 May 1987, the USS *Stark* was on patrol off the Saudi Arabian coast near the Iran-Iraq War exclusion boundary. For those that remember, the two third world countries were engaged in a deadly war fired by religion and greed. The slaughter on both sides was tremendous and the United States Navy was keeping a wary eye on the proceedings. This was part of what has become known as the “forever wars” and a situation that is continuing today.

USS *Stark* (FFG-31) was the 23rd

ship in the *Oliver Hazard Perry*-class of guided missile frigates. Commissioned on 23 October 1982, *Stark*, at the time, was one of the Navy’s newest ships and was under the control of Captain Glenn R. Brindel who had taken command of the frigate during June 1984.

Iraq was under the leadership of the despot Saddam Hussein and he had a large arsenal at his fingertips. One of the aircraft flown by his air force was the French Dassault F.1EQ-5 Mirage and this supersonic aircraft was capable of carrying the French AM.39 Exocet missile, which, at the time, was one of

the deadliest anti-shiping weapons in operation.

According to initial reports, one such Mirage had gotten airborne on that date and was being piloted by Abdul Rahman (if this indeed is correct) and, for reasons still not known, he acquired *Stark* on the jet’s search radar. There was a considerable amount of American naval and air power in the vicinity including a USAF Boeing AWACS.

Radar aboard the *Stark* picked up the Mirage and at 2209, Capt. Brindel ordered a radioman to send the message “Unknown aircraft, this is a US Navy

warship on your 078 [degrees] for twelve miles. Request you identify yourself.” Rahman did not respond. Brindel ordered a second message sent, again with no response.



Captain Glenn R. Brindel was relieved of his command for not defending the *Stark*. He elected to retire but had not served as a captain long enough to retire at that grade so he had to retire at the rank of commander.

At 2210, Brindel was told that the Cyrano IV fire-control system on the jet had locked onto the *Stark*. Soon after, an Exocet was fired at a distance of 22 miles from the frigate. At 15 miles, a second missile was launched by the speeding jet (it should be noted that the Mirage was apparently only capable of carrying one Exocet), which then banked hard to the left and began to withdraw from the area.

Aboard the *Stark*, the search radar, ESM, and CIWS systems failed to detect



Hit by two Exocets, one of which did not explode but caused considerable damage, the crew of the *Stark* fought heroically to save their ship.

USS *Stark* underway during sea trials by Todd Pacific Shipyards on 13 July 1982.



Emblem for the USS *Stark*.

Burning and heavily listing, the USS *Stark* was under threat of sinking after the Iraqi missile attack.