

Stanley John Oliver killed on HMS Voltaire in April 1941

Born 1918, died aged 23 years. P/JX 167762, Rank: Able Bodied Seaman Regiment: Royal Navy



This is a transcript of the poignant letter written to his mother by A. Ransome (Petty Officer).

Dear Mrs Oliver,

May 27th 1945

Please let me introduce myself so that you will be enlightened as to the contents of this letter. If I hurt you by reviving a bitter memory, do please forgive me, but I feel it is what you would wish to know and cherish in your heart for always.

I was Petty Officer on H.M.S. Voltaire A.M.C. during her last action in which she was sunk taking the late able seaman S. Oliver down with her.

Your late son came under my care in the fore-castle of the ship so naturally I can speak of him as I found him. He was a most efficient seaman, upright and well conducted, a good willing worker and an instant volunteer when asked for. I cannot speak too highly of him, he was one of my best men.

April the fourth was a sad day for you in the year 1941, but I hope that now that the bitterness of your great loss has been eased by time, that it may be changed to pride after you have read further. On April the fourth our ship was on passage from Trinidad to Freetown when about a thousand miles from the latter we came up with a disguised German raider flying the Spanish flag, after challenging her she opened fire and we fought for over 3 hours, unfortunately she proved vastly superior to us, in fact she just played with our slow moving ship, hopelessly outranged. In the closing stages of the battle, when our gallant ship was but a blazing furnace with but two guns in action, I called for

volunteers to man those guns, Able Seaman Oliver was the first and with one other volunteer we got a gun in action between us, later others joined us including the Gunner of the ship (Mr Sutton 61 years old) this officer decided to get the other remaining gun in action and took two of the crew with him to the other gun, your son was one of those two, and they got that gun in action and finished three rounds when I saw the explosion which caused your boys death, it was instantaneous and I assure you he never suffered. Well Mrs Oliver for coolness and undaunted courage I have never witnessed the like, he inspired me in the bravery he showed, just as if it was but an exercise and the picture of your worthy son in that losing battle has remained with me throughout the four years that I have been a prisoner of war and I vowed I would give his mother a little conciliation in the knowledge that her son died bravely, so now I have kept my vow I fervently hope your heartache will be relieved a little when you read this letter . Your son proved his worth, showing bravery and courageous devotion to duty, I am proud to have known him and he will live in my memory always.

I will close now hoping my letter has not upset you but uplifted you in the true story I have tried to give you of that bitter episode in your life.

I remain yours sincerely

A Ransome.