

29 March 1945

My dear Mrs. Staubach:

Although my own injuries which kept me hospitalized for some time prevented me from going to Washington D.C., to personally take care of writing to you and families of the other gallant men who were lost on the U.S.S. SAMUEL B. ROBERTS, I have not been unmindful of your grief, occasioned by this loss. Although I know that Mr. Roberts, the Executive Officer of the ship, has in writing to you, expressed far more ably than I can do, our sympathies, I cannot, as your husband's Commanding Officer, avoid expressing my own personal sympathies to you. I trust that you will realize that it was due to my own hospitalization and the difficulty of securing all the addresses and of writing these many letters, a few each evening, which has caused the apparently long and unwarranted delay in my writing to you, and not lack of interest, appreciation or understanding on my part.

The loss of each man who made the supreme sacrifice from the crew of my ship was a very personal one I assure you. A destroyer escort is not so large but what the Commanding Officer can know most of the crew. Charles was very well known to me. He was one of the original nucleus crew to report at the building yard in Houston and quickly established himself as one of the key men in the ship. He was recognized immediately as such not only by myself but by the other officers in the ship. He was not only respected for his professional abilities but well liked for his high personal qualities, not only by his officers and the men who served under him but by his closest associates, the other chiefs, who only a few days before had elected him mess treasurer of the G.P.O. mess. His duties on the ship were commensurate with the abilities he possessed both technically and as a leader of men, and which were well recognized by the officers in making such assignments. The first lieutenant, Lt.(j.g.) Gurnett was in overall charge of damage control, handled through three separate repair parties, located in three locations throughout the ship. Each of these repair parties was under the direct charge of one of our chiefs, and Repair Party Two, our centrally located and by far the most important repair party was entrusted to your husband. This job was handled by him in an outstanding manner.

The engineers division in the 413 was the outstanding division. Lieut. Trowbridge the engineering officer and Ensign Riebenbauer the Ass't Engineering Officer were both extremely capable and energetic. The division was large however and the splendid results they obtained were admittedly due not only to their own efforts but to the very active and intelligent efforts of the "E" division chiefs. Charles played an extremely important role in the administrative as well as the purely mechanical and technical part of the division's activities. I so well remember two very excellent "E" division memorandas, two of many, which were submitted to me for approval before being distributed to the ship's company. One was on the use and care of sound power telephones, and the other was on the operation and care of switches. I have never read memoranda covering instructions for the care and operation of these or like appliances which were so carefully pre-



pared, so clearly and yet concisely presented and so logically organized. They were so good that I sent for Mr. Trowbridge to personally compliment him on them. His reply was characteristic of him and one reason he was such a good officer and so well liked by his men, for he always saw that credit went where it was due. He told me, "No thanks to me Captain, although I wish I had done them as they are so good, Staubach is the author of both of them."

Charles' attention to duty and his all out giving of himself to do the job that was his obtained in the same manner during the battle of October 25th. While rigging an auxiliary telephone system, by the way an excellent one, designed jointly by him and Mr. Gurnett, he was hit with shrapnel from an explosion nearby when a large caliber Japanese shell hit us. Although badly wounded and weakened from the loss of blood, he continued in his efforts to string the telephone lines until continued loss of blood caused him to become so weak that he could continue no longer.

After the word was given to abandon ship two other officers and two enlisted men stayed with me until the last in order to evacuate all the wounded. Charles was among these and I talked to him for a few minutes. He was badly wounded, extremely weak from the loss of blood and suffering from pain and shock and although in a state of semi-consciousness his almost every thought and word were of you and his son, whom he so regretted not having seen. I hate to add to your grief by telling you these things, but I am sure that in the final analysis you would rather know them, and if you are only one tenth as brave as Charles was that day you can face them without flinching. It brought tears to our eyes and weighted our hearts as though immersed in molten lead to hear him sob over and over again, "I don't want to die, I want to see my baby, I've never seen him yet." These are grim memories to me Mrs. Staubach, for I had as fine a crew as any Commanding Officer ever had, and they were more to me than just rates and serial numbers, they were men who like myself had a job to do, a cause to defend, but also a home, and for the most part wife and children at home, to go back to we all hoped, and my every day is saddened by memories of men whom I knew, lived and served with who died that day in furtherance of a cause which we all sincerely hope will make a better world for the children of both those of us who were spared and those who dedicated their lives to the fulfillment of that purpose.

Charles' conduct was, I assure you, in every way a great credit to him and to his family. Great though your sense of loss and grief must be, yet greater should be your sense of pride, and the sense of pride yet to be developed in his son, that although his allotted time on earth had apparently run out, to the very last, both in battle and later in death, tossed on the seas in a life raft away from those he loved, thought of and to the very last mentioned with his feeble lips, he was a real man, worthy of the highest respect and cherished to the memories of we his shipmates with whom he served.



I state to you in all frankness that in my initial reports, which of necessity were hurried, and were made under considerable difficulty from a hospital bed, I did not include Charles in my original list of men recommended for citations. A more complete survey of the vast amount of information collected from each and every survivor relating to the outstanding duties and acts of individual heroism performed by certain individuals has now been completed by me. In a few days I will forward through official channels to the appropriate naval command an additional list of men recommended for citations. I am pleased to inform you that that list will contain the name of Charles Staubach, CEM United States Navy, recommended by me for the award of the Bronz Star. I am sorry that this delay has been occasioned, but please rest assured that it has been due to my own personal feelings that awards and citations should not be promiscuously scattered around for sentimental reasons, but rather should really mean something, as an expression by way of acknowledgement of an outstanding performance of duty, for after all, each and every man on the ship performed his duties in a generally outstanding manner, facing the enemy and almost certain death at the hands of overwhelming odds in a most steadfast and courageous manner. There will undoubtedly be a considerable delay before any action is taken on this recommendation as no action has yet been taken on my original recommendations of December first.

I realize that I have gone to what may be considered unnecessary detail in writing to you, however I hope that in so doing I have given you a clearer picture of your husbands valor and worth to the Navy, and made you more fully cognizant of the fact that it was recognized and appreciated. It is also my hope that even though the relation of these details of his injuries and suffering may cause a greater temporary pain and grief to your bereaved feelings, than in the end this knowledge may give you a compensating abiding peace and contentment, particularly in those future years when you may relate to your son these facts which can not help but crystalize within him a desire to emulate in his own living the attributes of his father. If I can ever furnish you any additional information which would be of comfort or assistance to you please do not hesitate to write me. I will be at the Naval War College for two more months but mail addressed to me there will always be forwarded.

Yours most sincerely,

RW Copeland