April 10, 1944

Well, Mom, my perfect luck finally gave out. Now that it’s all just a memory I feel you should know about it. Not too many days ago we were forced to bail out of a plane. I wasn’t with my regular crew at the time. I was filling in for a man who was ill. Unfortunately, we lost one of the pilots in the mishap.

At the time we were on our way home, not far (by air) from the bases. I came down in a flooded rice paddy. Fortunately there were coolies nearby who came to help me. They took me to a village where I found another officer from the plane. From then on we left ourselves completely in the hands of the Chinese. Within a few days they had us safely back at our base.

The people who helped us were the most remarkable I’ve ever seen they are the poorest people in the world. Yet their desire to help us was uncanny. In many ways it was a trying experience. But at the same time, it was an invigorating one. My faith in human nature has increased a thousand fold. My heart felt like it would burst in gratitude for the poor Chinese who helped us.

Later in the evening, others of the crew were brought to the little village. Every coolie gave what little he had to make us comfortable. It was amazing the way they understood our needs despite the fact we could not converse (everything was done by signs).

During the night, without our knowledge, members of the village busily organized an expedition to return us to our base. Most of us were badly shaken up. The following morning, to our surprise, we found that they had rigged up means for carrying all of us. Those that were worse off were put in chair-affairs made of bamboo and supported on the shoulders of two coolies. The others were put on Chinese ponies. They would not permit any of us to walk. It was indeed a peculiar looking procession. Three Chinese soldiers were put in charge of the expedition.

The trip back was made through narrow passes with mountains towering on either side it seemed the grade we had to climb became steeper and steeper as we progressed on our way. Few white men could have climbed even one of those mountains with such a load. Yet, we traveled as much as thirty miles a day.

It’s difficult to make you understand my enthusiasm for the wonderful job the Chinese did in helping us. You would have to know the country to properly understand this. The fast majority of people with whom we came in contact had never before seen a white man. They didn’t know there’s a war going on. You see, such people have no contact whatsoever with the outside world.

Their life is spent in trying to exist from the land on which they were born. They’ve never known a single comfort, never worn anything but dirty rags. Yet those people stayed up all
night so we could lie down. They rounded up every fresh egg in the village when they found we
would eat them. And all this with no thought of being rewarded. In fact, when we reached our
destination it was with great difficulty that we forced them to take compensation for their
wonderful help. I gave them everything I could get my hands on.

On the last day, I spotted a plane. It was our CO looking for us. At the time I was a piece behind
due to a breakdown in my “chair.” I quickly had the coolie spread my parachute on the ground.
The Major saw it and zoomed low to drop us supplies. I thought the coolies would go mad with
joy. They’d never seen a plane low before. From that moment on, my attention was tripled. I
was the one that the “fiji” (Chinese for “airplane”) had dropped things to.

I feared all the way back that we had been reported missing by the War Department. I certainly
wanted to spare you such a shock. As far as I can learn, no such report was sent out. Anyway, I
sent a radiogram on my return.

I still have the silk from my parachute. I will see that you get part of it. I sincerely hope that this
letter won’t cause you worry. I am in perfect shape mentally and physically. I have complete
confidence that there’s a power above watching over me and guiding me.