

Somewhere in New Guinea
27 April 1944

Dear Carol,

Thank you ma'am, for the V-mail letter. I'm sure you and Nan and Sue must have enjoyed the visit to Jackson. What did the Easter Rabbit bring you?

You say you want me to write you about the animals in New Guinea. Well, I'll tell you, most of the "animals" in New Guinea aren't animals at all—they're insects, bugs, and regular varmints. About the only furbearing animals here—and the only ones I've seen—are rats and wallabys. I'm sure you know what a wallaby is. A sort of kangaroo, only smaller. They have a long, strong tail which they use sort of as a springboard when they jump. Their hind legs are large and strong, but their forelegs are tiny and very little use to them. They sit when standing, sort of like a dog begging for a bone.

One of our MP's caught a baby wallaby the other day and is trying to raise him on the bottle. He's a cute little devil, about the size of a cat. When grown they are about four feet high—and as you know they carry their young in a pouch in their tummies, like a kangaroo or an opossum.

There are some dogs on the island, which the natives don't mind eating. Also, wild pig—which the natives domesticate. We are warned not to shoot a pig near a native village as it is bound to be some chief's property and more valuable to him than his wife.

There's a large bird here, although I haven't seen him yet. He's the cassowary; four or five feet high, he is black and cannot fly. One of our guidebooks says "when brought to bay or ~~much~~ slightly wounded, the cassowary is very dangerous. He has sharp claws or nails and his kick is as dangerous as a stallion's.

There are birds of paradise here, protected against hunters by the Australian government. Around sundown, flocks of noisy white cockatoos circle over their roosting trees above my tent—and they wake me up at dawn with their awful screeching. There are dozens of kinds of parrots and pigeons.

Among them is the beautiful crowned pigeon, a smoky-gray bird as big as a small turkey and delicious to eat. The megapode or brush turkey, also good eating, wanders about the jungle near our camp area. We aren't allowed to shoot in the camp area, however, so I'm hoping to go on a hunting expedition into the mountains. This turkey buries its eggs in large hillocks of earth.

There are flying foxes (large bats) here. They eat fruit and are said to be good food. They have special trees where they sleep by day, hanging from the branches.

Going back to the "marsupials" (look that one up in Webster), there are several types of small kangaroos in New Guinea. The commonest ones are tree climbers—believe it or not. Others are woolly, slow-moving creatures described as being like the cuscus (whatever that is) about the size of an opossum.

There are ~~many~~ many varieties of snakes, including poisonous kinds. One is the sea snake, usually banded yellow and black. Some of the large lizards are ugly and mean looking, but are harmless. They run up the trees whenever you come about. Then they will "play possum" on the far side of the trunk, just like the little chameleons you have seen.

The streams, and of course the sea, are full of fish of all kinds. Most kinds are edible—and most of the freshwater fish have been eliminated by hand grenades and dynamite—the easiest way in the world to fish. The natives fish with spears, usually, or by using a common fish poison known as derris or "New Guinea dynamite." This is cultivated by the natives and is a sort of vine. Its roots and stems and leaves are crushed and pounded on a stone in a pool. The water goes pearly white and the fish rise to the surface stupefied.

There are crocodiles in some parts of New Guinea but I've never seen one.

I hope this gives you some idea of animal life here—but I still insist that most of the creatures here are ants, cockroaches, flies, mosquitoes, wasps, sand flies, beetles, spiders, scorpions and centipedes (which like to hole up in your clothes and shoes) and leeches, and moths and butterflies—I've seen some very beautiful ones and nearly every Sunday I find soldiers out hunting them with nets made from old mosquito bars.

Write me again soon, for I enjoy your letters so much. Love, Mac