

Netherlands East Indies
26 October 44

Dearest Inez,

I feel very good today, after having one of the best breakfasts I've had since coming overseas. Yesterday I visited a native village and brought back some ripe paw-paws and fresh yard eggs. Johnson scrounged some real breakfast bacon (canned) and we topped our toast and coffee off with those super delicious figs you sent me. Very satisfying.

The package, mailed in July, arrived a couple days ago, with the figs were three rolls of film and the developer, which I was glad to get. Someone stole my camera from my baggage, but I know I can borrow a camera as the film is a common size. The two red canes the kids sent, I swapped for the eggs and paw-paws.

That's one thing the natives will sell their all for--clothes or cloth. If I had had a few yards of calico yesterday I could have brought away the entire village. I swapped an old undershirt for a nice bamboo chair and an old can for an ebony cane which I am going to send your papa before someone snitches it as they did the last one I had.

We went up to inspect one of our outlying units which is camped near the capital village of this island. On the way up we trolled and caught one kingfish which was enough for ten of us for lunch.

We tied up our boat to a famshackle jatty at the village and after completing the inspection tour I wandered through the village, of about 100 houses, some just shacks and a few very nice cottages. About 700 people live in the village, including a couple of Chinese families.

In the center of the village is a community well, made of concrete, and with a couple of large concrete washing basins. Sitting astride one of the vats was a small boy, about 8 years old, and he was playing a small bamboo flute. The tune, and very well played, was "Silent Night, Holy Night." When I walked up, he jumped down and gave me an American salute and said "Kampong _____" giving the name of the village. I already knew the name of the village but I said Thank you. Then he pointed to himself and said "Yosef". So I decided to adopt Joseph as my guide. I asked him where the village chief lived and he darted across the street to a very nice cottage and called out something. An intelligent young man, with a trim mustache and a European haircut came out, saluted and introduced himself as the Kampong chief. I indicated I had enjoyed the boy's music, and he became very proud, pointing out a stack of musical instruments on his porch--drums, flutes, bass horns, cornets and trombones--all made of bamboo and the most ingenious contrivances I've ever seen. The trombone, for instance, is merely a large bamboo tube, with a smaller one inside. By blowing on the smaller tube and sliding the larger one back and forth, sound came out not unlike the music of Tommy Dorsey. A drum was similarly made, the smaller bamboo being thumped up and down inside the larger tube--something Krupa would be proud of. I learned the musical instruments, which belonged to the village band, were stored at the chief's house, and every Sunday the kampong band serenades the American camp.

"Me papa," the chief said, pointing to Joseph. Then he said something which sounded like "gottalichi yamanaki ikki nistapakin mana." The little boy put the flute to his lips again--and played "Pistol Packing Mama"! By the end of the second chorus the chief was thumping a drum and I was singing, having a big time, and then an old man and aged woman and a younger woman with a tiny girl clinging to her skirts came out of the house. "Me" the chief said, pointing to the little girl. "Me" he said pointing to the young woman. "Papa me, Mama me" he said pointing to the old couple. Very proud. I buttoned one of the red canes about the little girl's neck and she

*I mailed the Christmas cards yesterday &
some small trinkets a week ago. Hope they arrive OK*

immediately hid behind her mother's skirts. Then I gave the mother the other cane and each of the men a white undershirt. (I had several and with the weather here have no use for them whatever.) Then I gave the children some chocolate bars. Joseph then presented me with his flute, making signs it was of no value as he had others. The children's mother said something real fast and ran back into the house. She brought out a small woven basket and handed it to me. Inside was a large golden yellow pawpaw and five fresh eggs.

I told the village chief I wanted to see the "naelau sultan" -- chief of the island. He went into the house and came back with an old tropical helmet, bearing ~~an~~ a Dutch officer's insignia, and led me to the most imposing house in the village--stucco walls, slate roof, trimmed in blue and pink.

The island chieftain, about 50 and having as fine a pair of handlebar mustachios I've ever seen off of a Russian, came out, very dignified, bowed to me and then snarred a most military salute. He was wearing sparkling starched white duck slacks, a crisp white shirt, and a glistening white tropical helmet, with the Dutch insignia only slightly off center. He and I had a very interesting conversation. First he talked in Dutch, then Malay, then Indonesian, with possible a few Chinese phrases thrown in. I talked American and ridgen English, and we reached perfect understanding, neither of us understanding a word the other was saying. The chief showed me his wardrobe of which he seemed very proud. His uniforms consisted of the white ensemble he had on, a pink shirt and matching tropical helmet, a blue shirt and a blue helmet. He indicated that he only wore the pink shirt with the pink helmet and the blue shirt and helmet together, and seemed to think himself very smart, too. He apparently had only one pair of trousers and no shoes at all.

When I started to leave, the old chieftain barked out something to a dirty youth who attended him, and the boy brought out a cane ~~and~~ which the old man gave me. I thanked him and he thanked me and so I went on into the village to trade my last undershirt for my chair. (I had given the old chief an undershirt, too, and he was most pleased.)

Joseph pointed out the village school and said "me sukul"--then he hesitated and said "tomorrow" with evident satisfaction. As we passed back by the village chief's house, his wife came running out and held out her clasped hand in a sort of "guess it and you can have it" gesture. When she opened her hand it contained one of the most beautiful seashells I've ever seen. I'll send it to you, along with some other pretty shells I've found.

When I passed the village mosque, the old Mohammedan priest bowed to me, then saluted---they all do it. He was ~~off~~ inestimable age, wearing a dirty brown fez and a pair of GI drawers. He had a wonderfully large and black beard, looking something like Akim Tamiroff made up as Genghis Khan.

It was only after my return to camp that I noticed some fine inlay work on the cane the old chief had given me. The cane was divided in sections with minute inlaid metal dots, with malay characters at each section. The best I can figure out is that the design represents some sort of calendar, but I'll have to get the Dutch officer to translate it for me. I thought I'd send the ebony cane and the calendar cane to Mr. Smith and Mr. Mac.

Thanks very much for the package. Especially the figs and the film. The jars were very nicely packed in the cotton, but the film had taken a beating, but I think are undamaged. So many packages are watersoaked that I think everything should be packed inside a waxpaper wrapper. Fold the wax paper around the package and run a hot iron along the edges to make it stick. Use plenty of cotton about fragile items and pack the lot in as heavy a box as you can get, with tough wrapping paper. (Incidentally, I forgot to include small three-cornered files on the list of tools I would like to have.)

I started reading one of the Redbook novels last night. I had run completely out of reading material, but now I can go another week anyway.

I have made some little blouse buttons and pin sets for the girls out of pretty shells, and will send them along.

Lots of love,

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