

England
December 23, 1943

Dear Mom;

I have waited almost seven months to write this letter and it has turned out that I have more to write about than I thought I would. About a week ago I finished up my missions. I now am Asst. Operations Officer in a different squadron and after the first of the year I am going on a seven day pass. Things are looking up these days. The only thing sad about the whole story is that I won't be home for some time. I suppose that if I complained enough, I could come home right away, but the way I figure it, if I did come it would just be a short furlough, then back to training. I think that by staying here I can do more good and learn a lot more. Things change so fast over here that after a few months of sitting on the ground I won't be much good to anybody so I think that you can expect me home in March.

The other thing I wanted to tell about was the most unexpected Bit of excitement I have ever had. The day after I finished up I was detailed to take a group of new pilots and their officers up to Scotland to pick up some new aeroplanes. After a busy afternoon and night, keeping all the crews together and getting the paper work done, I briefed them and much to my surprise we all took off together and flew back to the field in formation. When I put my wheels down as a signal to land I found that one of them wouldn't come down. I told the engineer to crank them down but he couldn't get it down either. No matter how hard I thought there was nothing left to do but come in on the belly.

I called out field and told them what the score was and they sent me to a field where they specialize in major repair jobs. When I arrived there they told me that if I could get rid of the ball turret it would save the ship from too much damage. After about an hour of tinkering the rest of the crew had it all ready to drop except for two bolts. I flew to a bombing range north of the field and when we were in position I called "bombs away" and they unfastened the remaining bolts and the turret dropped just about where we wanted it. We went back to the field and circled until our gas was just about gone then I called the tower and told them that we were coming in. I made one try at the field but the visibility was so bad that I couldn't see it until it was too late. On the next try the tower "talked me in" until I was about twenty feet off the ground then I was on my own. Much to my surprise and relief, it was one of the best landings I have ever made.

After skimming along on her belly for about two hundred yards the plane finally came to a stop and we all got out quite hastily for fear of fire and there was a newsreel camera grinding away. The camera man made us pose by the bent props while he took some more pictures, then we talked with him for a while and he told us that he had flown up from London while we were dropping the turret, and that this was the first time anyone had ever gotten a picture of a B-17 making a belly landing so if you ever see any pictures of this type you can be pretty sure who's flying.

It sure doesn't seem anything like Christmas time over here. But just the same I feel pretty darn good, I think the fact that I know that no one will be shooting at me for some time has something to do with it.

The one thing funny about everything that has happened is that after two years of almost everykind of experience I have ended up right where I started in an operations office, but this time I'm happy about the whole thing.

Love,

Charlie