On the Kwa River, approaching the Congo.
Dec. 25, 1952.

Dear Margaret,

It is Christmas Day and we are paddling down the wide Kwa River. The river is swollen and red with silt, and the banks have ~~no~~ small trees, ~~and~~ bayous which are patches ~~and fields~~ of green grass, and low hills. For the time we have left the tall tropical forests behind. ~~At two o'clock~~ Soon, we shall reach Kwamouth, the town at the entrance to the Congo River, and to morrow afternoon we shall be in Leopoldville. The ship is small, but would be comfortable except for the crowding. The only place to read a write or sit is in the open at the bow. That is also the dining room, and last night a tiny spot was cleared for dancing and we all wore paper hats. ~~There~~ My cabin has two beds, which fill it completely except for a space 3 ft. wide and the length of the beds. I have a Swiss roommate who snores, but is agreeable otherwise. There is no screening of the space at the bow, but everyone takes quinine. On the deck below are the goats which are slaughtered to supply our mutton and there are also, chickens, native passengers, a pet monkey, the boilers, and an enormous supply of wood.

This a most leisurely ship. It stops several times a day for an hour or more to load wood from the supplies on the shore. When we draw up to the shore there is a muscular negro standing on the bow and another at the stern with the loops of the steel cables over their necks. At the right moment they jump into the muddy river and disappear

Finally they reappear, near the shore, swimming and wading, ~~which~~ and dragging the heavy cables. The loops are then fastened over stumps or posts and the ship is pulled to the shore.

Yesterday the Kasai river, which we were following, joined the Kwango to form the Kwa. We turned up the Kwango and went to Bandundu (now Banningville). They keep applying good native names to new Belgian pioneers. As we approached the town we saw ivory tusks laid out on the bank and also other freight and baggage. One tusk was about 7 feet long and weighed over 100 lbs. (46.5 kg). On shore, I bought from a native one of the musical instruments that they play with their thumbs. We shall see what Billy can do with it. I am becoming "expert" at it, and the "boys" are always wanting to play it.

We have just entered the Congo. The yellow-brown shade of the Kwa is gradually blending with the brownish gray color of the great Congo. On the right bank is French Equatorial Africa and on the left is the Belgian Congo. There are rolling hills, mostly wooded, on both ~~banks~~ sides. We are on one of the great rivers of the world.

I suppose it is still early in the morning in Hastings, and the children are creeping down to see the presents. I intended to send a cable of greetings from Kwamouth, where the Kwa & the Congo blend, but the village was very small and the post office was shut on account of its being Sunday. We have been much cut off from the family and the world. We can only hope that all has gone well and that you and the children know that I ~~to~~ am wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and am regretting that I cannot be with you. There is little to

remind one of Christmas here. The one little boy on board does not seem to have any presents and no one is wishing anyone else a Merry Christmas. They all explain that New year's Day is the great feast day and day of gifts with the Belgians. And a Dutchman has told me that Santa Claus' day in Holland is Dec. 6, and that presents are given to children then. It is a Catholic holiday.

I am gradually accumulating a few things in my trunk, and we will have an echo of Christmas when I get home. I have not ~~got~~ been able to arrange my passage across the Atlantic ~~line~~ in Darkest Africa.

My equipment has been quite satisfactory and I have used nearly everything. The only thing that has moulded in the trunk ~~was~~ is the leather collarbox. It melted the collars inside and mildewed everything near it, but I have aired it, and may be able to bring it home. The mosquito net has been invaluable, and also the mosquito boots. I have been in excellent health in spite of the many opportunities for infection here. I hope that you are all as well as I am.

With much love to you all,

Willem.