

Holdcroft, Virginia
January 31, 1944

Dear Miss Paul,

I would prefer calling you Elaine, as I have three cousins by that name, and of course you are a mere child to me, since I'm old enough to be your mother, but perhaps it would seem a bit too informal. I meant to write you at once, but I was caught in a rush of work (such as butchering, canning meat, and painting numbers on launches) which has left my hands so stiff I still cannot write legibly. I tried to wait till they limbered up, but have given up in despair, so please excuse such scratching, and let Lt. Duggert's Mother know that I will write her as soon as I can. My own family is so scattered at the moment that it gives me a lot of writing to do.

I am glad my letter gave comfort to the family and friends of Lt. Duggert. I know in similar circumstances, I would want to know all I could - which is more than any of the boys ever tell. How much has he written you since it is all over, and his been back at his base? I judge he's long since been flying again - I know they try to get them back into the air as quickly as possible. And I am wondering if he and Sgt. Jones know what a miracle their escape was! The more we see of how that plane was torn and crumpled, and the more we learn of how quickly they usually sink (in ruin), even when brought down correctly, the

Just got letter from Lt. Duggert - no time to read it before mail goes out.

more amazed we are that they escaped - and unharmed! Of course Sam, Jr. (my brother-in-law) and Zora and Stanley Hula were his aides, there to do his bidding, but you have no one but God to thank for your Sweethearts' life - no human could have saved them if He had not first removed them from the plane. My husband remarked "God just simply reached out and pulled those two boys out of that plane - He just didn't get the other two." Of course that is the hard thing for us to understand - why one should be chosen, another lost. They were both just 25. Could their work have been finished, or did they lack the faith "to make them whole"? But I feel it should be a comfort to the two who were saved out of the plane, as it has been to those here who brought them in, that nothing more could have been done for the two lost, even if boats had reached the plane before it sank. They thought they had seen another man in the water, but they could not have. Sgt. Hequer was found in the pilots' compartment, which had been under water before sinking, with a fractured spine, so he would never have survived the shock, even if he could have been gotten out. And Sgt. Lattea must have been stunned and sunk like a stone (no wonder, in that heavy flying suit) when the plane hit the water and the bottom was

sheared off, since he was found about 300 yds. upstream and inshore from where the plane was raised (it drifted about 400 yds. before it completely sunk.) I have meant to write them, as I do not know how much of this the Army has told the two survivors, and I thought it might help them to know. I'm also wondering if they have seen the plane wreckage that was taken back to base. The ^{main} top part of it was broken into 3 pieces (4 by the time they raised it), the bottom was completely cut off, like you would cut an egg shell with a knife, below the wings, and the pieces of it and the inside, my husband says are scattered over 3 square miles of river bottom. He and a Claremont man raised Sgt. Luttea - the Army boat was not even near. He has since raised a good bit of wreckage, and some equipment which the Army will come up for. I wish Lt. Duggler & Sgt. Jones could come up - we'd all love to see and talk to them. Or if they would write to Lew, Jr. - I'm not sure that he is not a little hurt that he has not heard from them. They had his address, but if they lost it, it is A. L. Smith, Jr., Holdcroft, Va.

We, personally had no part in the rescue or in saving the boys, as we were

I see the peculiar printing on my stationary puzzled everyone - I wonder.
The name is John Clifford Smith - of your people, only one - (a man, at that! guessed "J".)

in Williamsburg, and didn't get back till about 6.30. My husband feels I had a premonition when I asked him to come back early after it started to snow - I did feel he should be at the river, but not strongly enough to insist when he vetoed my uneasiness. He went right on down when we rec'd Mrs. Kula's message (we live about 2 mi. from the River & his family) taking Calif. Jr., our 16 yr. old eldest son, to see if he could help - he knew they were using his launch, the only one on this side of the river, and came back for me & a hot water bottle about 7. The boys were both feeling better and talking when I got down - L. H. Dugger was up & walked into the other room as soon as I could get him a robe. I happened to be hostess in the home at the moment, as my mother-in-law is on the West Coast visiting her Father & family, and I was keeping house for Father Smith & Lew, Jr. Lew, Jr. is only 27 - single - farming the home place of 575 acres (not all open land, of course - this is a very wooded section) and about 100 acres besides. Mrs. & Mrs. Kula are about the same age, a young couple with two babies, also farming. Both boys are "frozen" on the farm, wild to get into Service, and very sensitive about it. I feel sorry for them, but tell them they can "flow under" more Japs than they could ever shoot, by helping to feed the Army & Navy, and it really takes bravery to do it. Kula is not pronounced like the Hawaiian dance, but more like Hew'-la - they are Czechs, ambitious workers and lovely neighbors. I gave them your letter to read.

If you share this with L. H. Dugger's family, let me know, and I'll just write Mrs. Dugger the circumstances leading up to the crash, as far as I know.
Sincerely Ethel M. Smith