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Letter from Fr. Leonard Amrhein to Catherine Amrhein, Al, and Tom.

Fr. Leonard Amrhein C.P.

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Catholic Mission,
Chenki, Hunan,
Oct. 26, 1945

Dear Mom, Al and Tom,

Don't mind the return address. I am just visiting here and am leaving tomorrow. That's all I have been doing since I arrived in Hunan - traveling and visiting our various missions. Our Bishop told us to take a vacation. We are supposed to be resting but we are traveling instead.

Your letter of Sept. 12 caught up with me last week together with one from Frank and one from Mary. Thanks a million everybody. It sure made me feel good to get those letters. I'll answer them just as soon as I have an opportunity. Incidentally, Tom's letter didn't come any faster than the others. So she might as well send her letters by ordinary post. This is China and not even air-mail can hurry the Chinese.

I just noticed I made a mistake in my return address. I am not at Chenki but at Chikkiang. If it makes any difference to you, I am going to Chenki ^{tomorrow}.

Now for Tom's letter. ^{By} ~~But~~ this time you have received more mail from me answering the questions you asked, Tom. As soon as I get back to Yunnaning, I'll get my big post-war letter on its way to you. That will give you all the information you are seeking. This post-war

letter was written just for our own family. So please don't lend it to outsiders. I have good reasons for asking this. I was going to comb through it and write an article for the sign but I haven't been in Ywanling - except for one day - for over a month. And the letter is in Ywanling. Later I might write something for the sign. I can use my diary for that.

Dear Mom! I sure am glad to know that you are well. I know you must have worried a lot during the war. And I was always anxious about you. But God took care of both of us.

Just one month from yesterday and today are your feast-day and birth-day. Well, this year they surely will be happy for you, because all the worry and anxiety of the war is over. I shall offer Mass for you on your feast-day and remember you in my prayers on both days. I would offer Mass for you on both days, but we are permitted only one Mass for our own intention a week.

Is Al going to continue to work for the ship yards? How do you like the job Al? You know Andy Sanitrik worked for the ship-yards in Chester, Pa. Perhaps you met him during the war. Write and tell me about your experiences. I am very much interested in your work. Any kind of mechanical work always interested me. I wish I knew a lot about mechanics. It sure would come in handy over here. In fact, any kind of trade is useful here. There is always something to do. Of course, we can hire Chinese to do our odd jobs, but lots of things are new to them and they just don't get the idea we "foreign devils" are trying to put across so we just do the best we can under the circumstances.

I was sorry to hear that "Uncle Tom" died. Francis told me about it in his letter. I'll bet you miss him a lot, don't you Tom? He sure was a fine old gentleman. May the Lord have mercy on his soul.

Francis also told me about Aunt Ann's death. I shall offer Mass for her at the first possible opportunity.

Do you still teach Sunday school, Tom? You didn't ~~not~~ mention it in your letter, so I thought perhaps you may have stopped because of "old age"!!!! Which reminds me, (the Sunday school - not the old age) how is Fr. Majka and the other Fathers at the Point? Give them all my best regards. Tell Fr. Majka I could have used that box of rice he gave me before I left home, when I was in Hei Hsien. It would have been a welcome change. During the whole five months in Hei Hsien, we didn't even see one grain of rice. However, we made up for it when we returned to Peking. By the end of the war, I was so sick of rice that its very name gave me the creeps. I have since been reconciled to it.

There was one thing in your letter, Tom, which disappointed me very much. During the war, when I saw a Jap with nice clean teeth, I would think he was the guy that swiped my package with the Lyons Toothpower in it. But there were so many with clean teeth that I thought they must have passed it around. You can imagine my disappointment when I read in your letter that you didn't send it. Think of all the poor Jappies that I rash judged! And all those others with dirty teeth, who would have profited by having some Lyons Toothpower!

That reminds me of an incident that happened in Hei Hsien. The Japs were selling us some of their own tooth powder. One day one of the internees told a Jap that we liked this powder very much.

It was very good for white shoes. The internee wasn't trying to be funny. He really was praising the junk. Well, the Jap hit the ceiling and came out through the roof. He threatened to cut off supplies, write to the Emperor, etc., etc. But when the internee broke down and cried after this tirade, the Jap softened and didn't write to the Emperor.

To get back to the box you didn't send. There is no need in sending anything now. He left Peking with just a couple bags but the U. S. Army has been so good to us, that at present we don't need anything. And then again, until I finally get an appointment, I won't know just what I do need. Thanks a million just the same.

As for sending money. I just spoke to F. J. Marshall - the local missionary - about it. He said to tell you at present don't send any money. The financial condition of Chinese is still unsettled. Until a determinate rate of exchange has been set, it is better not to send any money because we would lose in the exchange. So wait until you hear from me before you send anything. The N. Y. Drafts cannot be cashed in the interior. Ordinarily in normal times we send them to our procure in Hankow or Shanghai. At present we have no procure in either of these places. Sooooo!

Well now how about China! As I said before, I have been on the go ever since I arrived here. I've traveled hundreds of miles up and down the country side - always by army truck or jeep. So far I haven't taken any trips to place off the auto roads. We have lots of missions thus located. All of this traveling is through mountains. Heman is all mountainous - at least our section, Western Heman. One mountain we climbed was almost straight up. The Chinese blasted the road out of solid rock. The straight-aways were nearly all 3rd gear grinds. There are 14 cut-backs - steps they call them. They are about 100 yds. long, then a hairpin curve and back ^{on} a little higher ground. The curves are so sharp that the big trucks must back up a couple times to make the turn. Believe me! talk about thrills! I climbed this mount. in a jeep. We were escorting a big army truck to our Northern Missions. At every turn we stopped to watch the truck come around. They had to back to the edge of a cliff, then go ahead. If they

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backed too far — well — they would go down the fast way. Half way up, we got out and looked down. These were five steps just beneath us at lower levels. They were so close together they looked like a five lane highway.

On top of this mountain, there is a monument erected in memory of the coolies — some 200 or more — who were killed when the road was constructed. They worked on all the steps at the same time. When they blasted, the rocks flew down and killed a lot of the coolies on the lower levels.

Flash! My letter was interrupted a few sentences ago by the arrival of a visitor. Fr. Leo from Peking, no less. What a surprise! He brought all our luggage along too. He left Peking less than 48 hours ago. Our Bishop went up to Peking a few weeks ago and told him he should come down here for a rest. So now we are all together again. It sure is great to see him again.

Back to the news. Last week the pastor of Chenki had to go to Kun Ming on business. Since I was living there at the time anyhow, I was put in charge of the Mission. But since I didn't have faculties for hearing confessions, a visiting Spanish Father stayed on to take care of the confessions. He could speak Spanish, Latin and Chinese. So I got to of practice speaking Chinese. Incidentally, the language down here is quite different from Peking. They say it will take a couple of months to get on to their "slang" down here.

Anyhow, last Sunday I went to an out-station to say Mass. The people haven't had Mass there for six weeks. Everything went well on the way down river. I traveled by boat, ^(a gasoline boat used by U. S. Soldiers) He had to pass through a couple of rapids. He did turn around in the first rapids and went down backwards. But that wasn't anything. Coming back, our boat couldn't make the rapids. The engine — a Chevvy Motor — wasn't powerful enough. We were tossed like a match stick onto the shore. Another very large boat was on the rocks on the opposite side of the rapids. About 20 coolies were pulling and proying it loose. When it cleared the rocks, it swung over and side swiped ours, knocking us higher on the bank. But this time we were ashore. I thought it was the end of our boat. After

a lot of fuss, the big boat was finally pried loose and it went spinning down the rapids. Very little damage was done to our boat, owing to the fact that it gave, when struck, sliding higher on the shore. The best job was to get it through the rapids. There were no extra coolies around to pull us. We finally bargained with another boatman and offered to pull him up to Chenki if he helped us. He said O.K., so we launched out into the deep once more with our own boat crew and the extra help on the long end of a tow rope. Still it wasn't enough, in spite of the fact that the engine was doing its bit. So I had to roll up my trouser legs and pull too. We got through this rapids and the next and finally arrived home safe and sound and all wet. We are not supposed to do coolie work but there was no other way to get through. Such is life in China.

We are preparing for our Chinese Faculty Exam now. When our Bishop comes home, he will see if we know enough Chinese to hear confessions. Then we'll be sent to some mission with an older Father to learn how to be a missionary. We don't know where we'll be sent yet.

Well I think I better finish this letter now. I want to mail this letter from here, since I think it will get home quicker than if I mailed it from Chenki. I think I'll be going back to Chenki tomorrow - if I can get someone to take me down.

I shall answer Frank's, Mary's and Francis's letters as soon as I get an opportunity. In the meantime thank them a lot for writing and ask them to bear with the delay.

So long everybody. Give my best wishes to all at home - Frank, Joe, Andy and Jake and their families and to all my friends at home.

God bless all of you,

Leonard.