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1937-10-15, Letter from Charles Roberts to E.J. Peterson

Charles Roberts

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Hunan Bible Institute
Changsha, Hunan, China

Mr. E. J. Peterson,
The Bible Institute of Los Angeles
558 South Hope Street,
Los Angeles, California, U.S.A.

October 15, 1937

Dear Mr. Peterson:

Greetings from the Land of Distress. We little thought that soon after our return to China that we should be busy with preparations against attack from the air. But such is the case. While missionary work as been seriously disrupted in many parts of the country yet in Hunan we are able to carry on to a certain extent. And now our peace is being disturbed, especially along this famous Canto to Hankow railway line and on which line the city of Changsha is situated. In the past ten days we have had three air-raid alarms. Fortunately in each case the Japanese planes failed to put in an appearance and after two or more hours of waiting, the all clear signal was given. The closest the planes have come to our city is a point on the railway line thirty miles south, the railway junction of Chuchow. This place was badly smashed up. Another town to the south of Chuchow, Hengchow was also badly damaged at the railway station and other places. It seems certain that we shall in turn receive a visit from the Japanese planes. As our Institute compound is only one third of a mile from the railway station you can see that we are in a most vulnerable spot. And while our Administration Building is of re-inforced concrete construction it is feared that should a bomb be dropped near us that the concussion would be so great that those in the building might suffer serious injury. As we have a few Chinese women and children and also one foreign lady we have decided to build a large dugout on the south-west land with trees on it. We have dug down ten feet and are building up the sides and putting a 1' thick concrete cover with another 1' granite slap and sandbags and earth on top of that! It will at least give us some protection from flying missiles. If we are bombed the news will doubtless be relayed to America by one of the Press agencies, and you will be receiving calls for information. And there are a few relatives and friends that we should like airmail letters dispatched to in case such should be the case. Please find enclosed a separate sheet of which I have written a number of two word phrases. In case of our being bombed on any day I will cable you under these phrases. This will keep you in touch with the situation and also we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that our friends are informed. Example of cable: Biola Los Angeles Bombed Destroyed Four Injured. Elizabeth You should read this to mean: "The city of Changsha was bombed to-day. There is considerable damaged to Institute buildings particularly as follows Mr. Roberts' residence. The following missionaries were slightly injured Elizabeth Keller, others are safe." As code is not permissible during war time the cable will begin with. "Bombed" and the following words after "Bombed" will give you the key to the result of the bombing. Numbers will indicate the different buildings as listed. And the first name of the Kellers and myself will give you the key to the persons injured or killed. Thanking you for your help in this matter and with kindness Christian greetings, Ever truly yours,

[Signed]

Charles A. Roberts