An Interview with Honor:  
Ronald Rosser  
Congressional Medal of Honor recipient

A thesis submitted to the  
Miami University Honors Program  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
University Honors with Distinction

By

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April 2011  
Oxford, Ohio
Abstract

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This work is the transcript of a video interview conducted by the author on March 16, 2010 with Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Ronald E. Rosser. The interview takes place in Rosser’s home in Roseville, OH. An Ohio native born Oct. 24, 1929, Rosser earned the starry honor during a snowy winter tour of Korea when he had only two months of 22 under his belt. At 80, Rosser delivers a dynamic retelling of his time in Korea and that fateful January night captured on that video and meticulously transcribed here. Supplemented with photos, the video was originally created in fulfillment of an assignment for Cheryl Heckler’s Reporting and Newswriting class at Miami University in Oxford, OH and has since evolved to a work that intends to document, with respect and purity, an aging piece of American history.
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Acknowledgements

Though present in the videos credits, I would like to extend a more full thanks to the following individuals:

To Cheryl Heckler,
for inspiring this film and the associated transcript and for speaking like a hero.

To Kevin Roesch,
for loaning his car on such short notice for this adventure that turned out to be longer than I expected, for his unwavering love, affection and commitment, and for always, always, always believing in me.

And to Ronald Rosser,
for, a year later, continuing to be an example to myself and others of the determination, selflessness and steadfastness that create a character of courage and for your service and the service of your colleagues that provides me the freedom to worship Jesus Christ in a way that I take for granted far too often.
# Table of Contents

An Interview with Honor: Ronald Rosser  
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Approval</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Read the Interview Transcript</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Transcript</td>
<td>11-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>22-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to Read the Interview Transcript

Since the contents of this work are a transcript of a video, it must be understood that some elements may be lost in the absence of visuals. As such, I have done my best to render the creative elements of the video and Rosser’s retelling to the best of my ability. Thus, the formatting below indicates the following:

- Text shown in *italics* scrolls across the frame as text only; there is no vocal reading the text. Text placed in direct quotes and in *italics* indicates a direct quote from Rosser not featured in his narratives during the video.

- **Bold**, centered headings indicate a transition in chapters or segments. These bold phrases are chapter titles and appear through background music or sounds without the text being read vocally.

- Text contained within brackets [ ] designate sounds or music.

The main body of the interview is followed by a photomontage with photographs appearing in the text in the order of appearance in the video. Some photos are unavailable. The above rules continue to apply to headings and title frames during the photograph section, though citations, which are present below the photos in the written format, are not present in the video. Photos with title frames beside them have the title frame playing over the photo during the video. Those with separate lines are title frames over a black screens.
Introduction

Monday.

The word drives fear—or at least a bit of despondency—into the hearts of students and nine-to-fivers alike. On this particular Monday in March, 2010 I was the former. It was the second week back from spring break in my junior year at Miami University in Oxford, OH. If the cheerful weather outside weren’t distracting enough, home-cooked fettuccine with my then-boyfriend-now-fiancé, my 21st birthday and a bottle of wine awaited me at the end of that week.

My idle ears perked up though, sitting in the Mac-lined computer lab that hosted my Reporting and News Writing journalism class. Our professor Cheryl Heckler announced that anyone who could get an interview with a rare, living Congressional Medal of Honor recipient on camera would get an A+ in the class and forfeit attendance for the remaining eight weeks of the semester.

After hours online scouring award citations and White Pages, the phone calls began. Ringing, voicemail, ringing, “No, that’s not me,” and then, an answer.

“Hello?”

It would turn out to be Ronald Rosser, a Korean War vet with the light blue honor who still lived nearly four hours away on the other side of the state. I eagerly explained the assignment and propositioned him for his involvement.

“Are you free next Tuesday?”

Nay, he would be heading out of the country later that very week.

“What about tomorrow?”
Interview Transcript

[Drum roll].

Ronald Rosser  
RA 15248979

“Some people wanted to grow up to be a doctor or a lawyer.”

“I wanted to be a soldier and I wanted to be a good one.”

US Army Corporal  
Forward Observer

Congressional Medal of Honor recipient  
Korea – January 12, 1952

[Drum roll ends].

Duties of a Forward Observer

[ Sergeant drills soldiers, marching].

This oft-overlooked position is considered one of the most dangerous and challenging positions on the battlefield. At a tactical level the FO can serve in mission planning, strategy, and advisory positions with his command elements. Due to the substantial firepower they control, they are regarded as targets of very high importance to enemy forces, They can operate with minimal support located both on or behind enemy lines.

Their skills in reconnaissance must join with self-reliance, intelligence, and the ability to think quickly in situations of extreme stress. Their missions are always critical, as mental errors under stress can bring the massive firepower and ordinance they control down on friendly forces as well as enemy.

[ Sergeant drills end].
“For most soldiers on the front line, he has what you call a foxhole buddy or a platoon or squad where he knows everybody and I was completely different. I knew nobody. I had no friends. I had a radio man with me at all times, but in the eight men that served as radio men with me in combat, I lost seven of them.”

“When there’s misery all around you, you forget your personal vendettas.”

“You’ve got a job to do and you do it. In my case, I had a lot of responsibility and I couldn’t let my personal feelings enter into what I was doing.

“I kind of got famous there because I was so hard-headed about things, you know? I do it my way. It was my way or the highway, so to speak.”

Crossing Cultures

“I’d went farther north than my maps and so I had to get new maps because as a forward observer I lived by the map. So I went down to my company rear to pick up some maps and also some onions and stuff to make my food taste better.

“And when I went to the mess hall there was some little Korean kid there who was picking through the garbage can and had it upset. The mess warden was throwing rocks at him. And so I told the mess warden, I said, ‘Don’t throw rocks at that boy.’

“And he said, ‘He’s in my garbage can. I’m gonna get him out of there.’

“And I said, ‘Don’t you throw rocks at him anymore. I’ll take care of him.’
“So I went over and talked to the boy and his family had been assassinated by the North Koreans, mainly because they were land owners. So, he told me he hadn’t eaten in days other than the few scraps he’d found there today. So I took him down to the mess warden and I asked the mess warden to feed him and he told me to ‘Get that damn kid outta there’ and for me to get out too.

“I threw a round in my chamber and stuck my carbine in the mess warden’s ear and I told him, I said, ‘You feed him or I’ll blow your brains out right where you stand.’

“The mess warden immediately started feeding him. I told him, I said, ‘I’m gonna fix it up so this kid can stay with the company, do our jobs. You’d better fatten him up before I get back or I’m gonna shoot you anyhow.’

“About a month or so later, the mess warden got killed anyhow.

“The kid became a very important person in my regiment as an interpreter. We had large amounts of Koreans who were doing work, you know, around my area. And later on, he went into the Korean Army and retired as a full colonel for the Korean Army. So I accomplished something.”

The Award-Winning Evening

“Our mission on January the twelfth, 1952 was a company-sized raiding party on an enemy outpost about a mile-and-a-half behind the lines—their lines.

“The weather that day was 20 below zero and we’re in about a foot of crusty snow. We passed across the front of the mountain that we were to hit. We
dropped off a platoon to assault the front of the mountain and kind of mess up the Chinese thinking on what we were really gonna do.

“The rest of us swarmed to the back of the mountain, about over half a mile away, and climbed the back of the mountain, more or less to engage them on two fronts. The platoon that hit the front of the mountain, only nine men lived and they were all wounded and of the other men that went with me, everybody was killed, wounded or missing that was with me.”

“We got within about...We fought our way through the Chinese trenches and bunkers up the mountain until we got within forty yards of the top of the mountain. And by that time we went from 170 down to 35—and some of them were wounded. And, so I called my regimental commander on the only radio we had left and gave him a situation report and he wanted to speak to an officer so I drug my radio over to the company commander who had been seriously wounded in the face. The colonel told him to make one final attempt to take his objective and the captain said, ‘Yes sir.’

“And he looked up and he got this hopeless look on his face and I heard somebody tell the captain ‘I’ll take ‘em up for you, captain.’ And right then I realized it was me talking [chuckle]. I tried to shut my mouth, but it was too late.

“And so he said, ‘How you gonna do it, Ron?’

“I said, ‘I’m goin’ straight in shootin’, captain.’

“He said, ‘You know you’re not gonna make it.’

“And I said, ‘Well, we’ll try sir.’
“And so I took all the men that were left and lined them up behind me and I said, ‘OK boys, you’re not gonna have no trouble knowing which direction to go—just follow me.’

“The soldier in Korea lived a rugged life, but he persevered.”

“I let out a war whoop, jumped up and away we went. I was moving fast and the guys were moving a lot slower behind me and the machine guns just cut ‘em to pieces.

“I got about an arms-length from the Chinese—in fact, the only thing that separated us was the dirt from their trench. I was on one side of the dirt and they were on the other and I could hear ‘em talkin’.

“I looked back and I was by myself, you know? I knew I wasn’t gonna get no help so I let out a war whoop like a wild Apache Indian and jumped in the trench with them. We had quite a donnybrook there. I killed quite a few of them there—eight or nine before they could even blink an eye.

“They knocked out a machine gun bugger with a white Fosters hand grenade—set ‘em on fire then shot the survivors when they come out. I went around the trench and engaged about 30 more. They were chargin’ me so I charged them, shootin’ and yellin’. They lost their nerve and tried to get away and I shot several of them.

“I started fighting my way over to some bunkers—big bunkers—and I was starting to run out of ammunition so I fought my way back to the original trench where I killed the first bunch.
“There, some kid ran up to me from my group and just as he did, a Chinese raised up right in front of us and sprayed us both with a sub-machine gun and got the kid but didn’t get me—didn’t kill him, but hit him hard.

“And so I turned and looked at the Chinese and he ran. I picked this kid up and started down the mountain with him. The Chinese jumped out the trenches and was running down behind me, trying to shoot me and bayonet me, but there wasn’t nothing I could do about it because I didn’t have no ammunition—I’d just run out of ammunition. So I just ignored him.

“People down below me who was on my side started knocking them down around me, including a lieutenant who had already been shot in the shoulder.

“I got down to him and he looked up at me, he said—I was grinnin’ you know?—and he said ‘Soldier, what’s your name?’

“Because I thought is was funny, nobody...they were all trying to kill me and couldn’t get me, you know?.

“And he said, ‘What’s your name?’

“I said, ‘Well, my name’s Rosser, sir.’

“’He said, “You know what you’re doin’?’

“I said, ‘Yes, sir. I’m a-killin’ these varmints as fast as I can.’ I said, ‘But I’m out of ammunition. I gotta get me some darn ammo.’

“And so he said, ‘I wanna shake your hand.’

“So right in the middle of this firefight, me and this lieutenant shook hands—funniest thing I’ve ever seen.
“And I went down and I put a compress on this boy I was with, picked up, and then started crawling around getting me some hand grenades and ammo and loaded up the best I could with everything I could carry.

“I started back up and there was a big line of Chinese waiting in the trench for me to come up, you know, big line of ‘em. And for some reason they didn’t shoot right off the bat, you know? They couldn’t believe just one guy was chargin’ them, you know, ‘cause there’s hundreds of them [chuckle].

“So I got up close and I threw my first hand grenade. It went right in the trench with them and as I went over the trench I just dropped, kicked the spoon on the second one and dropped it ‘cause I’d already pulled the pins and dropped it on their wounded and kept going.

“I shot my way through a whole bunch of Chinese into these two big bunkers—troop bunkers or command bunkers, whatever they were. And so, we had white Fosters grenades and set ‘em on fire and then when they were screaming and carrying on something awful I threw in a couple frags and they stopped yellin’.”

“The only music where I was was the Chinese bugle.”

“The Chinese started coming at me from every direction—a couple hundred of ‘em, they were swarmin’ in on me—and, you know, I’d run out of avenue of things to do. There wasn’t much I could do, but I was trapped and couldn’t get out of it.

“And I got a hold of one—my last—white Fosters grenade and pulled the pin and kicked the spoon and threw it up in the air above me. And this stuff
comes down like burning rain, it’ll burn right through you—set you on fire and burn right through you. And I was on the outer peripheral of it, and I was ducking the streamers, smoky streamers, that come down around me.

“But the Chinese are underneath there and they were yellin’ and carryin’ on and then this big cloud of smoke just descended on everything and I went runnin’ through it.

“When I come out on the other side there was about three Chinese standing there wondering what was going on. I shot all three of them.

“And then I started up the trench—I was standing...I was outside of the trench and the Chinese were in the trench and I was chasin’ them up the trench about a dozen and a half of ‘em and I was a-yellin’ and shootin’ because all I could see was their head, their shoulders boppin’ and I was shooting at them. Some of ‘em I got, some didn’t.

“And I looked behind me and here come about a dozen after me. So I took out another hand grenade pulled the pin and dropped it in the trench and kept goin’ and they run right into it. That stopped their footrace.

“So I’d finally run out of ammunition again and I worked my way over to the first trench again. I was standing there going through my clothes to see if I could find a hand grenade or a magazine or something—didn’t have nothing.

“And this Chinese soldier ran right up on top of me ‘cause I was standin’ in the trench then. He ran right up on top of me with a sub-machine gun and started to shoot me.
“Well I was dry but he didn’t know it, and I shoved a macabre around in his face and screamed right in his face. He threw his hands up over his face and let out a big moan [chuckle]. He thought I was gonna kill him. I couldn’t kill him, I didn’t have nothing. And he turned and ran. I bluffe the heck out of him.”

“Life should be a life of service.”

“I started down the mountain again, picked up another kid, threw him on my shoulder and walked down there. People were lookin’ at me kinda funny by then.

“And so...I loaded up again and went back up—this time just hand grenades. I threw hand grenades allover the damn place trying to bust them up ‘cause they were trying to bunch up and run down and come down and wipe us out. And I got ‘em busted up. I went back down and got the company commander and I told him, I said, ‘Captain, better get your people out of here. You’re gonna lose everybody.’

“He said, ‘Will you get ‘em out for me, Ron?’

“I said, ‘Yeah, I’ll get ‘em out.’

“So I picked three...three or four wounded men there and we set up a defensive perimeter. We held the Chinese off while the walking wounded drug the rest of ‘em down the mountain and back to safety.

“Some tanks had come in at the foot of the mountain and they couldn’t get any further because they were under heavy fire. And we drug the dead and wounded down the mountain, loaded them on tanks and got ‘em out of there.”
Music under Rosser: “Hymn to the Fallen” by U.S. Army Band & Chorus

**Meaning of the Medal**

“My company commander called me three days later and told me I was in for the Medal of Honor and I said, ‘For what?’ [chuckle] you know, because I hadn’t done anything anybody else hadn’t done. I just got lucky.”

“I was doing what I was trained to do. I maybe just did it with a little more color.”

“The Medal of Honor in itself is a great honor. The fact that it’s awarded by Congress and presented by the President, these are also great honors, but the true honor in the Medal of Honor is that a handful of young men who were with you in a difficult time thought you were worthy of it.

[Pause]

“I mean, that’s...that’s what it’s worth.”

[Pause]

“Still bothers me to talk about it. A lot of people went down around me.”

[Music amplifies]

**Above and Beyond the Call of Duty**

*Cpl. Rosser, distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry above and beyond the call of duty. While assaulting heavily fortified enemy hill positions, Company L, 38th Infantry Regiment, was stopped by fierce automatic-weapons, small-arms, artillery, and mortar fire. Cpl. Rosser, a forward observer was with the lead platoon of Company L, when it came under fire from 2 directions.*
Cpl. Rosser turned his radio over to his assistant and, disregarding the enemy fire, charged the enemy positions armed with only carbine and a grenade.

At the first bunker, he silenced its occupants with a burst from his weapon. Gaining the top of the hill, he killed 2 enemy soldiers, and then went down the trench, killing 5 more as he advanced. He then hurled his grenade into a bunker and shot 2 other soldiers as they emerged. Having exhausted his ammunition, he returned through the enemy fire to obtain more ammunition and grenades and charged the hill once more. Calling on others to follow him, he assaulted 2 more enemy bunkers.

Although those who attempted to join him became casualties, Cpl. Rosser once again exhausted his ammunition obtained a new supply, and returning to the hilltop a third time hurled grenades into the enemy positions. During this heroic action Cpl. Rosser single-handedly killed at least 13 of the enemy.

After exhausting his ammunition he accompanied the withdrawing platoon, and though himself wounded, made several trips across open terrain still under enemy fire to help remove other men injured more seriously than himself. This outstanding soldier's courageous and selfless devotion to duty is worthy of emulation by all men. He has contributed magnificently to the high traditions of the military service.
Photographs


Corporal Ronald Rosser

Rosser, right, with President Harry Truman


“I decided a long time ago to do what I could to help the military.”


“Of all the places I’ve been, home is my favorite.”

UNAVAILABLE PHOTO - Source: Carlson, Jessi (Photographer). (March 16, 2010). Rosser in room [Photograph]
UNAVAILABLE PHOTO - Source: Carlson, Jessi (Photographer). (March 16, 2010). Citation frame [Photograph]
UNAVAILABLE PHOTO - Source: Carlson, Jessi (Photographer). (March 16, 2010). Rosser home [Photograph].

The End

Interview recorded on

Cinematography and
video & sound editing
by Jessi Carlson

Featuring
“Hymn to the Fallen”
by the US Army Band & Chorus

Special thanks

to Cheryl Heckler for inspiring this film,
to Kevin Roesch for providing the car for the adventure, and
to Ronald Rosser for being an example to myself and others of the
determination, selflessness, and steadfastness that create a character of courage.

[Fade out music]
References
