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Transportation and Public Safety
Chairman Doug Green
Sponsor Testimony – HB 516
Wednesday, March 14, 2018
10:00 AM Room 017

Chairman Green, Vice Chair Greenspan, Ranking Member Sheehy and members of the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee....

Thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 516. This proposal names a portion of State Route 78, running easterly and westerly from the border of Monroe and Noble Counties to the intersection of SR 78 and S.R. 26 after a dear friend of mine from Monroe County..... Herman Zerger.

“Zerg”, as he is known by many people throughout the county and state, has lived a long and successful life. He was born January 5, 1924 in Woodsfield, OH. Growing up, he worked on local farms and in his family stone quarry. Delivering stone to Center township for road repairs was his first insight into how local governments work to repair roadways. Center Township did not have equipment to fix the roads, so he would help them with their road repairs.

Zerg has been a leader in Monroe County for years as a businessman, elected Township Trustee, active member of the local VFW post and Chair of the Monroe County Democratic Party. He was inducted into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame in 2008.

I want to take a few moments to highlight his experience in the US Army.

He was enjoying a western movie at the tender age of 17 when Japanese fighter pilots bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. This life changing incident would encourage him to enlist in the US Army immediately after graduation. He was assigned to the 36th Texas Infantry, 141st Regimen, Co. I, known as the Fighting 36th, the Texas T-Patchers, and shipped overseas in 1943. The T-Patchers saw action in some of the fiercest fighting in WWII,

especially in the Italian Campaign which included the battles of Salerno, San Pietro, Anzio, Monte Casino and the bloody crossing of the Rapido River. He was injured and hospitalized in France.

Herman shared his account of these bloody encounters in his book *Courage and Beyond*, which he put together a few years ago:

The 36th was ordered to do a night crossing of the Rapido River. Despite support from artillery and efforts to hold a bridgehead, Herman writes, "Then enemy tanks opened fire until the weight of the German counter-attacks forced a decision. The battalion commander ordered his men back. The Rapido had been a failure." Then a second attack was ordered, this one by a daylight assault. "As the infantry men approached the crossing sites the story was the same. Incoming artillery and mortar fire, men moving over reportedly cleared lanes stumbling upon German anti-personnel mines, many casualties...In one company alone, the company commander was killed, the second in command wounded and 35 casualties.

Herman continues, "The scene at the Rapido River in Italy in 1944 would be forever seared in the survivors' memories. There were bodies everywhere, mostly parts – arms, legs, some decapitated bodies with hardly any clothes left on and there was always the spine-chilling cry for medic. Sadly, there weren't any left. They had been blown up by mines or hit by German shells or swept down the raging river and drowned." In two days of fighting at the Rapido River, 2,530 men were killed, wounded and missing in action.

My friend Herman went on to fight further in Italy and France and survived as a POW. He was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.

Herman Zerger is definitely an individual that has been dedicated to his country, his community, his family and friends. His legacy as one of the "Greatest Generation" serves as an inspiration to others. It is very fitting that the local community aspires to name the roadway entering the county after this local hero and true inspiration to others. I am proud to call Herman my friend.

With that said, I wish to thank you, Chairman Green, for the opportunity to speak on this bill. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions.