Checklist

PLEASE RETURN THIS CHECKLIST WITH YOUR INTERVIEW

Before submitting your recordings to the Veterans History Project at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress, be sure you have included the following:

1. Recorded interview, not to exceed 90 minutes. After recording the interview, the plastic tabs should be removed from the audio or video cassettes to prevent recording over them. Cassettes must be labeled with the full name of the veteran or civilian interviewee and his or her birth date (month/day/year).

2. Completed biographical data sheet for each veteran or civilian interviewee (see Biographical Data Form).

3. Release form signed by each veteran or civilian interviewed (see Veteran's Release Form).

4. Release form signed by the person(s) producing the recording. This includes interviewers and recording operators (see Interviewer's Release Form).

5. Audio and Video Recording Log.

6. Photographs (not more than twenty). Photographic prints should be numbered and dated on the back lower-right corner using a soft (no.1) pencil. For slick prints where it is difficult to write on the back, enclose them in individual labeled envelopes. Please do not write on the prints with a pen or marker. Slides may be labeled on the frame. Scrapbooks and photograph albums containing more than twenty images are acceptable, but donors are encouraged to describe the contents as fully as possible.

7. Photograph Log.

8. Release form signed by the photographer(s) (see Interviewer's Release Form).

9. Selected letters, diaries, and other printed and handwritten manuscripts relating to the veteran or civilian interviewee.

10. Manuscript Data Sheet.

Please tell us how you heard about this project: ____________________________
Veteran’s Release Form

TO BE COMPLETED BY VETERAN OR CIVILIAN
(In cases of deceased veterans, to be completed by the donor of the material.)

I, MRS RITA WILSON FOR ALEX DRABIK, am a participant in the Veterans History Project (hereinafter “VHP”). I understand that the purpose of the VHP is to collect audio- and video-taped oral histories of America’s war veterans and of those who served in support of them as well as selected related documentary materials (such as photographs and manuscripts) that may be deposited in the permanent collections of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The deposited documentary materials will serve as a record of American veterans’ wartime experiences; and may be used for scholarly and educational purposes. I understand that the American Folklife Center plans to retain the product of my participation as part of its permanent collection and that the materials may be used for exhibition, publication, presentation on the World Wide Web and successor technologies, and for promotion of the Library of Congress and its activities in any medium.

I hereby grant to the Library of Congress ownership of the physical property delivered to the Library and the right to use the property that is the product of my participation (for example, my interview, performance, photographs, and written materials) as stated above. By giving permission, I understand that I do not give up any copyright or performance rights that I may hold.

I also grant to the Library of Congress my absolute and irrevocable consent for any photograph(s) provided by me or taken of me in the course of my participation in the VHP to be used, published, and copied by the Library of Congress and its assignees in any medium.

I agree that the Library may use my name, video or photographic image or likeness, statements, performance, and voice reproduction, or other sound effects without further approval on my part.

I release the Library of Congress, and its assignees and designees, from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of such recordings, documents, and artifacts, including but not limited to, any claims for defamation, invasion of privacy, or right of publicity.

ACCEPTED AND AGREED

Signature MRS RITA WILSON FOR ALEX DRABIK
Date 2/28/04

Printed Name MRS RITA WILSON FOR ALEX DRABIK

Address P.O. Box 545

City KENTON State OH ZIP 43326

Telephone (419) 673-1699
Interviewer's Release Form

TO BE COMPLETED BY INTERVIEWERS, RECORDING OPERATORS, AND PHOTOGRAPHERS

I, ____________________________________________, am a participant in the Veterans History Project (hereinafter “VHP”). I understand that the purpose of the VHP is to collect audio- and video-recorded oral histories of America’s war veterans and of those who served in support of them as well as selected related documentary materials such as photographs and manuscripts that may be deposited in the permanent collections of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The deposited documentary materials will serve as a record of American veterans’ wartime experiences; and may be used for scholarly and educational purposes. I understand that the American Folklife Center plans to retain the product of my participation as part of its permanent collection and that the materials may be used for exhibition, publication, presentation on the World Wide Web and successor technologies, and for promotion of the Library of Congress and its activities in any medium.

I hereby grant to the Library of Congress ownership of the physical property delivered to the Library and the right to use the property that is the product of my participation (for example, my interview, performance, photographs, and written materials) as stated above. By giving permission, I understand that I do not give up any copyright or performance rights that I may hold.

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I agree that the Library may use my name, video or photographic image or likeness, statements, performance, and voice reproduction, or other sound effects without further approval on my part.

I release the Library of Congress, and its assignees and designees, from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of such recordings, documents, and artifacts, including but not limited to, any claims for defamation, invasion of privacy, or right of publicity.

ACCEPTED AND AGREED

Signature __________________________ Date ____________
Printed Name __________________________
Signature of Parent or Guardian (if interviewer is a minor) __________________________ Date ____________
Printed Name of Parent or Guardian __________________________
Address __________________________
City __________________________ State __________ ZIP __________
Telephone ( ) __________________________
Relationship to veteran/civilian __________________________

Library of Congress American Folklife Center VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT
Biographical Data Form

To ensure inclusion in our National Registry of Service, this form must accompany each submission. Please use a separate form or additional sheet for service in more than one war.

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Veteran ☐ Civilian ☐ Alex A. Drabik (Dec)'s (Daughter)

Address P.O. Box 545

City Kenton State OH ZIP 43326

Telephone (419) 673-1699 Email 

Place of Birth Lucas County Ohio Birth Date March 11, 1911 - Sept. 1993

Race/Ethnicity (optional) U.S. Army

Branch of Service or Wartime Activity 9th Armored Division

Battalion, Regiment, Division, Unit, Ship, etc. Ninth Armored Division

Highest Rank Sergeant

Enlisted ☐ Drafted ☐ Service dates 9/42 to 10/45

War(s) in which individual served World War II

Locations of military or civilian service Basic - Fort Riley, Kansas

Was the veteran a prisoner-of-war? Yes ☐ No ☑

Did the veteran or civilian sustain combat or service-related injuries? Yes ☑ No ☐

Medals or special service awards. If so, please list (be as specific as possible):

Purple Hearts - Theater ribbons - Distinguished Service Cross

Are photographs included? Yes ☑ No ☐ (If yes, please complete the Photograph Log in this kit.)

Are manuscripts included? Yes ☑ No ☐ (If yes, please complete the Manuscript Data Sheet in this kit.)

Does the veteran or civilian have field maps Yes ☐ No ☑ or wartime-related home movies Yes ☐ No ☑

Interviewer (if applicable) Andrew Fisher

Partner organization affiliation (if any, i.e. AARP, etc.) University of Toledo

Please use reverse for additional biographical information.
Manuscript Data Sheet

Please complete this form when donating letters, diaries, and other printed and handwritten manuscripts to the Veterans History Project. It is to be used in conjunction with the required Checklist, Biographical Data Form, and Veteran’s Release Form.

1. Name and address of collector.
   Name of Collector/Interviewer: ANDREW FISHER
   Address: 7455 CLUB ROAD
   City: SYLVANIA State: OH ZIP: 43560
   Telephone: (419) 882-1945 Email: ALFISHER@peoplepc.com

2. Full name and life dates (birth–death) of the person about whom the manuscripts relate. In most instances, this person is the veteran or civilian whose name appears on the Biographical Data Form.
   NAME

3. Types and dates of manuscripts submitted, for example:

(Over)

4. Number of items: 12 Is this an exact ✓ or estimated □ figure?

5. If these items are copies of originals, describe how they were reproduced. Are they transcripts, photocopies, or photographic prints? Identify when the copies were made, and give the name and address of the person or group who holds the originals. Please note that the Veterans History Project encourages you to donate the originals to the Library of Congress or another trusted institution for long-term preservation and for access by researchers. (Continued on back.)
6. Occupation or type of activity of the principal person represented in the manuscripts, including significant events and dates in his or her career and the place of residence or location of the activity described. If this information is already recorded in the Biographical Data Form, there is no need to repeat it here.

7. Describe the scope and content of the manuscripts by addressing the following:

Please identify by name the writers and recipients of the letters and other documents. What is their relationship to the veteran or civilian whose name appears on the Biographical Data Form?

**Written by various newspaper reporters about Alex Dlabik**

What historical time period and theaters of war are covered?

**World War II**

What are the most interesting/important topics and events described in these documents?

**Articles describe 3/7/45 when Alex Dlabik and his 16 man squad captured the Ludendorff Bridge over the Rhine River at Remagen.**

8. Have any of these materials been published or have copies of them been donated elsewhere? If so, please provide full citation of the publication or the location of the copies.

**No**
Audio and Video Recording Log

1. Name and address of collector or interviewer.
   - Name of Collector/Interviewer: Andrews Fisher
   - Address: 7455 Club Road
   - City: Sylvania
   - State: OH
   - ZIP: 43560
   - Telephone: (419) 882-1945
   - Email: AFRIVER@peoplepc.com
   - Organization or Affiliation (if any): University of Toledo

2. Full name and birth date of the veteran or civilian being interviewed as it appears on the recording label and Biographical Data Form.
   - Name of Veteran/Civilian: Alex A. Dlabik
   - Birth Date: March 1911

3. Recording format (please check)
   - VIDEO type: Betacam
   - VHS
   - 8mm
   - High-8
   - Digital
   - Other
   - (identify)
   - AUDIO type: Cassette
   - Microcassette
   - CD
   - Reel
   - Digital (DAT)
   - Is item: Original
   - Copy

4. Date of Recording: 8/28/04
   - Estimated length of recording (in minutes): 30

5. Location of recording: Sylvania, OH

6. Corresponding materials (please check)
   - Have you included materials other than the recording? Yes
   - No
   - If so, please complete the Photograph Log and/or the Manuscript Data Sheet.

7. Please summarize the topics discussed in the interview in their order of appearance on the recording.
   - Meter Reading or Minute Mark
     - 0-033
     - 033-042
   - Topics presented in order of discussion on recording
     - Introduction
     - Alex Dlabik - Pre-War
   - (Continue on back or on additional sheets as needed.)
Photograph Log

Photographic prints should be numbered with a soft (no. 1) pencil on the back of the photograph in the lower-right corner. If the back is too slick to write on, enclose each photograph in a labeled envelope. Please do not use a pen or marker to label prints. Slides may be numbered on the frame housing. Photographers should sign a release form when possible. If more than five photographs are submitted, please make photocopies of the second page of this form to complete.

Name of Veteran/Civilian  ALEX A. DRAPIK  Birth Date  MARCH 1911

PHOTOGRAPH # 1

Place  REMAGENS BRIDGE POST  Date  1987

Person(s) left to right  Picture is marked with those men who don’t remember.

Description  Picture of a 1987 VFW meeting.

Photographer (if known)  UNKNOWN

PHOTOGRAPH # 2

Place  SYLVANIA OMA  Date  MEMORIAL DAY, 1992

Person(s) left to right  RAYMOND OTT – ALEX DRAPIK – JOHN WIECZAREK

Description  Memorial Day Ceremony

Photographer (if known)  UNKNOWN

(Continue on back.)
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<tr>
<th>Meter Reading or Minute Mark</th>
<th>Topics presented in order of discussion on recording</th>
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<td>THE RHINE RIVER OBSTACLE</td>
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<td>THE BRIDGE AT REMAGEN</td>
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<td>THE IMPORTANCE OF CAPTURING THE BRIDGE</td>
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<td>THE ALLIED REACTION</td>
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<td>RETURN TO CIVILIAN LIFE</td>
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<td>ACCIDENTAL DEATH</td>
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<td>277-310</td>
<td>INTERVIEW WITH DAUGHTER- MRS. WILSON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>310-337</td>
<td>INTERVIEW WITH MRS. CAROL COLROTH</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MEMORIES OF A FRIEND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>337-348</td>
<td>Close</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To: Mr. Ryan Smith  
The Toledo Blade  
541 N. Superior St.  
Toledo, Ohio 43660

From: Bud Fisher  
7455 Club Road  
Sylvania, Ohio 43560

Enclosed is the essay written for the Veterans History Project (VHP) at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. This paper will be the basis for an audio tape that will be in the archive in Washington and at the Canaday Center at the University of Toledo. The Canaday Center is a partner of the VHP for NW Ohio. The Canaday now has in its archive almost 200 interviews of veterans of America's wars.

It is most unusual that a hero such as Alex Drabik can be so completely forgotten, which has led me to ask our Congresswoman for her help in remembering him. Copy enclosed.

Since you and I communicated on your D Day article, I thought you might have an interest in this all but forgotten hero of World War II.

Please feel free to call or E-mail at any time.

ALFISHER@peoplepc.com  
419 882 1945
September 8, 2004

To: Mrs. Rita Wilson  
P.O.Box 545  
Kenton, Ohio 43326

From: Bud Fisher  
7455 Club Road  
Sylvania, Ohio 43560

I have finally finished the paper and the tape of Alex Drabik for the Veterans History Project. As promised, I enclose a copy of each.

The tape and pictures and newspaper articles I found at the Toledo Library will be sent to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., where they can be accessed by historians, students, family or any interested parties. A copy of the tape and all materials will also be available at the Canaday Center at the University of Toledo. This archive will also be available to the public.

I hope that you will find the information on the tape to be accurate and that you will be pleased with the way your father's life is presented to the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.

I include a letter that I have written to our Congresswoman, Marcy Kaptur asking for her help in recognizing Sgt. Drabik in some permanent manner. Further, I include a letter to Ryan Smith at the Toledo Blade. He indicated that he might want to write an article about Sgt. Drabik.

I have used your address for any correspondence from the Veterans History and the Canaday Center.

I will appreciate your comments.

ALFISHER@peoplepc.com  
419 882 1945
There is no record of how many parishioners served in the military, but one Memorial Day service in the early 1980’s stands out. The flag bearer was Alexander Drabik, a parishioner and WWII hero who was the first American soldier to cross Rhine River bridge at Remagen, Germany. As a squad leader in the 9th Armored Division he received the Distinguished Service Cross for capture of the Ludendorff railroad bridge March 7, 1945. Sgt. Drabik and his small band of soldiers raced across the 1200-foot-long bridge and seized it only minutes before the Germans were to blow it up. The fete was credited with shortening the war and saving 50,000 lives.
The mission of the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress is to collect the memories, accounts, and documents of war veterans from World War I, World War II, and the Korean, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf Wars, and to preserve these stories of experience and service for future generations.

In pursuit of that mission, the University of Toledo, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Veterans History Project (VHP), has conducted more than 170 interviews of America’s veterans. These taped histories are sent to the Library of Congress archive in Washington, DC and a copy is retained in a local archive at the Canaday Center at the University.

Conspicuously absent is an oral history of Ohio’s Sergeant Alex A. Drabik. This was brought to our attention by Mrs. Carol Colboth, who said that the hero of the Remagen Bridge should be in the VHP archive in Washington. This prompted a lengthy search for information about one of America’s great war heroes.

Sgt. Drabik died in 1993, but phone interviews were held with Messrs. John Nye, William Turanski, and Ed Hassen, fellow members, with Sgt. Drabik, of the VFW Remagen Bridge Post; also, great nephew, Mr. Greg Drabik; Sgt. Drabik’s daughter, Mrs. Rita Wilson of Kenton, Ohio, Mr. Lamont Gee, and a visit with Mrs. Colboth. These interviews along with articles from local newspapers, found in the library, disclosed the almost forgotten, but dramatic and poignant story of Alex Drabik, citizen soldier.

So, we will begin this history with what has been learned of Alex A. Drabik before World
August 28, 2004

War II, follow with his well-documented heroism at Remagen, and then his life after the war.

Alex Drabik was born in March, 1911 and lived on the family farm on Wolfinger road in western Lucas County, Ohio. The Principal of his school, Mr. Mathew Reed, said, in a press interview, in 1955, "He was a big boy in school. Although he never once started a fight, lots of times, I saw him beating up bullies, who pestered the smaller kids. Once he got an idea, he never let up, that's why I'm not surprised (about his heroism)". Mr. Turanski summed it up when he said, "he was modest but fearless".

Alex Drabik was living in Holland, Ohio, and working as a butcher at Folgers Meats, when he joined the U.S. Army in 1942. He was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas for basic training with the 9th Armored Division, the unit with which he would spend his entire enlistment. After basic training, his unit was sent on maneuvers to Louisiana and California. Very early on in his army career, Sgt. Drabik distinguished himself by rescuing 120 recruits, who had become lost in the California desert. Soon thereafter, he and his unit were sent to the European Theater.

We next hear of Sgt. Drabik at the Battle of the Bulge, where he was seriously wounded by artillery fire, but would not be evacuated. He stayed with his men until the siege was lifted.

The Battle of the Bulge was Adolph Hitler’s last great counter-offensive. It was his attempt to stop the hard-driving American Army and cut off their supply port in Antwerp, Belgium. When that failed, at great cost to both sides, the Americans continued their advance to the Rhine River and the German homeland.

Hitler, at first, had denied his army’s request to withdraw across the Rhine, to set up defensive positions on the east bank. When he finally conceded that men and equipment were being lost at an alarming rate, he allowed them to draw back, but directed that, under penalty of
death, all bridges must be destroyed after German forces had crossed. As the Americans advanced, each river crossed, without a bridge, came at great cost in time and men. Pontoon bridges had to be built while the enemy regrouped and set up defensive positions on the far bank. The Rhine River was the most formidable obstacle yet to face the Allies. It was wide, sometimes as much as a mile, with a swift current and high banks, from which German forces could inflict great losses.

Wherever the American forces came to the Rhine, they attempted to seize an intact bridge, over which they could pour men, tanks and artillery into the heart of Germany. They tried and failed to capture the Hohenzollern Bridge at Cologne. It was blown up just before they arrived. Another attempt was made at Dusseldorf, where the bridge was blown as the tanks entered the approach. A third attempt was made to capture the Adolph Hitler Bridge at Urdigen. Again it failed. All the bridges on the Rhine had been blown up, save one.

On March 7, 1945, the 9th Armored Division under the command of General Hoge arrived at the city of Remagen, on the Rhine. From the high ground on the west bank, they were amazed to see that the Ludendorff railroad bridge was still standing. German forces were still retreating over the bridge and they were awaiting a German artillery unit, which was due to arrive and cross shortly. So, begins the story of the Hero of Remagen.

The bridge was already prepared for demolition when the Americans raced down to seize it. As they got to the approach, the bridge was blown. The explosion lifted the bridge, but, miraculously, it settled back on its foundations and was still intact. As the Germans hastily prepared for another demolition, a squad rushed onto the bridge, but they were pinned down by heavy fire from the east bank. It was then that a squad, with Sgt. Drabik in the lead, rushed onto the bridge, which was to be blown at any moment. It was said that he leaped up and yelled,
“Who’s coming with me?” Under heavy fire, Sgt. Drabik and his ten men raced to the other side of the bridge, where they set up defensive positions, thus preventing the Germans from a second attempt at destroying the bridge. It was typical of Sgt. Drabik that he doesn’t remember shouting, “Who’s coming with me?” Nor did he think he had done anything other than his duty. Of course, the rest of the American forces and the American public thought it was a special act of heroism. Two incidents that occurred bear comment. Shortly after Sgt Drabik reached the east bank of the river, he captured a German soldier, but rather than send him back, across the bridge, in the heat of battle, to an uncertain fate, from an overzealous GI, he kept him with him. He had the German dig a foxhole for the two of them, where they spent that night. In the morning, he had the German escorted back over the bridge as a POW, thus certainly saving his life. The German soldier was to thank him many years later. The other incident occurred when General Hoge went across the bridge the next day and retrieved Sgt. Drabik’s helmet, which he had lost during his mad dash across the bridge. He handed it to Sgt. Drabik, as a sign of respect for his heroic deed.

At this point, it is important to understand the significance of capturing the Ludendorff Bridge intact. From D Day through France the Allies advanced steadily, but as they neared the borders of Germany, the resistance stiffened. Although the Allies were clearly winning the war, it was not without setbacks. Operation Market Garden, a combined American-British effort to breach the Rhine in the Netherlands failed with casualties of 17,000. The Battle of the Bulge, a massive German counter-offensive, which Germany eventually lost, cost 80,000 American casualties. So, the Americans were looking for something to energize their march to Berlin. The capture of the Remagen Bridge came at an opportune time to give them that lift. Once across the Rhine, the
Americans could turn north to join in a move to encircle the Ruhr Valley, the industrial heart of the Third Reich. Now certainly Sgt Alex Drabik was not thinking of all this when he made his heroic dash across the mined bridge, but General Eisenhower immediately saw the value of that one heroic effort and how it changed the course of the war. He knew that crossing the Rhine without the bridge would have cost valuable time and many American lives. Instead, the engineers had the existing bridge ready to handle tanks and heavy vehicles in just two hours.

Aside from the military value, it was a wonderful morale booster for the weary Americans and a serious blow to German morale. "The Rhine, not crossed by an invader since Napoleon, had long been considered by the Allies as the last great barrier to the heart of Germany. In the months of planning, no one seriously counted on the possibility of seizing a bridge intact. That would be too fantastic". So said the great World War II historian John Toland. Historian Stephen Ambrose said, "It was one of the great victories in the Army's history", and, "The Ludendorff Bridge was suddenly the most critical strategic spot in Europe". Author Ken Hechler, an official army historian, who was there at the time, said, "It broke the back of German resistance". "Nothing, since the January 20th attempt on his life, had infuriated Hitler so much as the capture of the bridge at Remagen" (Toland). He realized that he had lost his last natural defense. A comment by Hermann Goering, Hitler's second in command, further explains the far reaching effect wrought by Sgt. Drabik's heroic deed, "It made a long Rhine defense impossible, and upset our entire defense scheme along the river. The Rhine was badly protected between Mainz and Mannheim as a result of bringing reserves to the Remagen bridgehead. All this was very hard on Hitler". (Flower/Reeves). So angry was Hitler that he fired Field-Marshall Von Rundstedt, who was in charge of the armies in the West, and had five officers, who were at Remagen, tried and condemned to death. He called for frogmen to destroy the bridge and had Stuka dive bombers
attack it, all to no avail.

As for the Americans, they were elated. General Eisenhower, in his book, *Crusade in Europe* said, "That was one of my happy moments of the war". He was, in later years, as we shall see, to honor Sgt. Drabik at the White House. He said that Sgt. Drabik’s heroism had saved as many as 50,000 lives and shortened the war by two months. Hitler’s rage and Eisenhower’s elation were well founded. By March 8, the east bank at Remagen was secured and at General Omar Bradley’s orders, five divisions and 2500 vehicles including tanks crossed the Ludendorff Bridge in the next seven days. A sign was posted at the west entrance to the bridge. It read:

Cross the Rhine with dry feet  
Courtesy of the 9th Armored Division

An eyewitness at Remagen was Mr. Lamont Gee of Sylvania, Ohio. He was there with the 988th Treadway Bridge Co. of the 7th Eng. Corps. They had built their first bridge at Carentan in Normandy and were to build their last at the Mulde River, where they met up with the Russians. While the Ludendorff was being used, the 988th was building, in just twenty hours, the first Treadway bridge across the Rhine. It was 1176 feet long and was capable of handling any and all sizes of equipment. The Ludendorff Bridge stood for ten days and finally collapsed, but by that time three pontoon bridges had been built. The bridge had served its purpose. It had altered the course of the war and, it no doubt, convinced the German soldier that the war in the West was indeed lost, because they began surrendering by the thousands. Seven divisions were eventually sent across the Rhine at Remagen. They turned north and joined the U.S. Ninth Army in a giant pincers movement that captured the Ruhr Valley, much of the industrial capacity of Germany,
and about 400,000 POWs.

So, the reason to mention all of this is to point out the far-reaching effect of one single act of heroism in the course of the war, and explains why Sgt Drabik was recognized as one of the great heroes of World War II.

For their heroism, Sgt. Drabik and his men were each awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC). The DSC is second only to the nation’s highest honor, The Congressional Medal of Honor. Years later, the German officer, Captain Friesenhahn, who was attempting to blow the bridge, and who had survived Hitler’s wrath, was told that Sgt. Drabik and his men had received the DSC. He replied, "They certainly deserved it. They saw us trying to blow up the bridge, and by all odds, it should have blown up while they were crossing it. In my mind, they are the greatest heroes in the whole war".

Two months later the war in Europe was over. Sgt. Alex A. Drabik was discharged on October 12, 1945, after three years and twenty days in the Army. He returned to the Toledo area, married, and lived at 8765 Dorr street with his wife Margaret and their daughter Rita. He went back to work as a butcher for Folgers Meats and wanted to live a quiet life with his family. As his great nephew Greg Drabik put it, “He was raised a farm boy and lived his life as a farm boy”. But that was not to be. Although a reluctant hero, the modest Alex Drabik was not only one of Ohio’s great war heroes, but was a national war hero as well, and that carried certain obligations with it.

March 7, 1955 was the tenth anniversary of the capture of the Remagen Bridge. To commemorate the occasion, Alex Drabik and his squad were invited by President Eisenhower to the White House. The President announced the formation of the Society of the Remagen Bridgehead. Mr. Drabik was given a picture of the Remagen Bridge, that depicted the action
of March 7, 1945. The inscription read: “In commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the
seizure of the Remagen Bridge at Remagen, Germany on March 7, 1945 by the 9th Armored
Division. This pictorial of the occasion is presented, on behalf of the U.S. Army, to Sgt. Alex
Drabik, who was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic participation in that
historic operation”. On that occasion, the President said that no one thought it could be done and
that, “It typified the dash of ingenuity, the readiness at the first opportunity, that characterizes
the American soldier”. Ken Hechler, the army historian, wrote the book, The Bridge at Remagen,
the first copy of which was given to Alex Drabik, to deliver to President Eisenhower, at the
White House. Two years later the Toledo Blade reported that Mr Drabik was again in
Washington, D.C. for a reunion of the Society of the Remagen Bridgehead. In 1970 Mr. Drabik
was again invited to the White House. This time by President Nixon, for the 25th anniversary of
Remagen. That year Alex Drabik was elected Commander of the Turanski-Van Glahn VFW Post
7372, a position he held for seven years. The Post name was soon changed to the Remagen
Bridge Post, in honor of Mr. Drabik. That same year, he was invited to Washington to view a
Hollywood war film about the bridge at Remagen. Although honored to be invited, he was
unhappy with the Hollywood version. On the 40th anniversary trip back to Remagen, Mr Drabik
met up with the German soldier, whose life he had saved on March 7, 1945. The man was there
especially to express his gratitude to Mr. Drabik. He said, “If it were not for you, I wouldn’t be
here today”. It seemed that Sgt. Alex Drabik, Hero of Remagen was not to be forgotten.

But then on September 28, 1993 it all suddenly ended. Alex Drabik was on his way to a
meeting in Kansas City, when he was killed in an automobile accident in Columbia, Missouri.
He was returned to Toledo and buried in Resurrection Cemetery next to his wife, Margaret, who
had died in January, 1993. His sole survivor was his daughter, Mrs. Rita Wilson of Kenton, Ohio.

When reached in Kenton, Mrs. Wilson expressed great affection for her father, as did all who knew him. She agreed with his friends, that her father was a very modest man, who would not talk about the war unless prodded. She has a wall in her house devoted to her father. It has the picture of Remagen, that President Eisenhower gave to him in 1955, other pictures of Remagen and the bridge, a picture of Sgt. Drabik receiving the DSC and newspaper articles about him. In 1995, she represented her deceased father at the 50th anniversary ceremony in Remagen, where she presented a memorial wreath. She said that he was still remembered there with great respect by Americans and Germans alike. She said that there had been a movement to have the Congress award Sgt. Drabik the Medal of Honor. Those involved in that effort believed very strongly that Sgt. Drabik's heroism was worthy of the nation's highest honor. Not only was his an act of extreme heroism, but it had such a profound effect on the course of the war, that a Medal of Honor seemed appropriate. As one reads and learns about Sgt. Drabik, their efforts on his behalf seem to have merit. When asked for some final comments about her father, Mrs. Wilson said that she still misses him very much and finds comfort in playing audio tapes of his talks. "Sadly," she said, "few people recognize the name of Alex Drabik anymore." Almost no one in Kenton, Ohio knows she is Alex Drabik's daughter or who Alex Drabik was. The man once honored by Generals and Presidents is all but forgotten.

Finally, there was a discussion with Mrs. Carol Colboth, who had first brought Sgt. Drabik to the attention of the Veterans History Project. She talked about the post-war life of Mr. Drabik. She and her now deceased husband, Raymond Ott, knew Mr. Drabik in the last years of his life through the VFW and through the church that both attended. She would see him most Sundays sitting alone in a back pew, speaking to no one unless spoken to. She said that she would make a
special effort to greet him, which he would shyly acknowledge. She said that he was very active in the VFW and the American Legion. He participated in the Sylvania, Ohio Memorial Day parade and one year was named the Grand Marshall. She and her husband would meet him at VFW events, particularly at the annual Memorial Day dinner. She would sit with him and engage him in conversation because, as she said, "He looked so lonely". It was obvious as she spoke that she too had great affection for Mr. Drabik. When asked why, she replied, "He was always a gentleman and a gentle person, he never bragged, and never spoke of the war, unless in response to direct questions".

Was this the man who Generals and Historians said had affected the course of the War? Was this the man who was honored by Presidents? He was an unlikely hero to be sure. Everyone interviewed agreed that he was shy, modest, and retiring, but history records for us that when called upon, he was an exceedingly courageous man. He was as his old friend said, "Modest but fearless". He was an American hero.

Andrew Fisher
7455 Club Road
Sylvania, Ohio
419 882 1945
ALFISHER@peoplepc.com
Sandra: This is to confirm that I received the newspaper article about Mr. Drabik. Please inform the family that this material will be added to his file. And thanks for your continued great work.

Peter

Peter Bartis  
Senior Program Officer  
Veterans History Project  
American Folklife Center  
Library of Congress  
101 Independence Ave. SE  
Washington, DC 20540-4615  
Tel. (202) 707-4919  
FAX (202) 252-2046
Mrs. Rita Wilson  
PO Box 545  
Kenton, OH 43326

Dear Mrs. Wilson,

I sent the newspaper article, dated March 6, 2005, to the Library of Congress, Veterans History Project as you requested.

Enclosed is the reply from Peter Bartis the Senior Program Officer, American Folklife Center.

We also have a copy of this article in Mr. Drabik’s file housed in our Archives for all to view when they ask for his file.

Thank you again for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Sandra Rice  
Ward M. Canaday Ctr.
August 25, 2004

To: Representative Marcy Kaptur
One Maritime Plaza
Toledo, Ohio 43604

From: Andrew Fisher
7455 Club Road
Sylvania, Ohio 43560

I am a veteran and a volunteer with the University of Toledo, which has been designated a partner of the Library of Congress Veterans History project. I have interviewed about 150 veterans of America's wars and those who supported their nation on the home front. These interviews are sent to the archive at the Library of Congress and to the Canaday Center at the University.

Often during these interviews your name is mentioned as a friend and supporter of veteran's affairs. This was especially true before and during the recent WWII Memorial ceremonies in Washington, D.C., which all agree was a project that you led to a successful conclusion.

It is for this reason that I write you for your help in remembering that great Ohio hero of World War II, Sergeant Alex Drabik. I enclose a paper that I have written about Sgt. Drabik. I spent many, many hours gathering the information enclosed, and the more I learned the more I could sympathize with the friends of Alex Drabik, who believe that he should be memorialized in the Toledo area. He has been dead eleven years now and today, there is not a building, a bridge, a street or even a plaque to honor this great war hero.

Please read the enclosed story of Sgt. Alex Drabik and you may well agree that such a hero should not be forgotten. If you are able to find a way to remember Alex Drabik to the people of NW Ohio, his friends, relatives and all who knew him will be grateful.
August 25, 2004

Please let me make it clear that I have no personal agenda in this matter. My connection to Alex Drabik is limited to the work I have done in the last few months to uncover the story of a forgotten American war hero.

I will appreciate your reply. Thank You.

ALFISHER@peoplepc.com
419 882 1945
To: Greg Drabik  
C/O Resurrection Cemetery  
Toledo, Ohio

From: Bud Fisher  
The Veterans History Project  
The University of Toledo

Thank you very much for talking to me about your great-uncle Alex Drabik. I thought you might be interested in what I have written for the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

A copy of this transcript and an audio tape are also available for public use at the Canady Center at the University of Toledo.

The more I learned about Alex Drabik, the more I was impressed by this American hero.

Thanks again.