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Competitive Dole Never Stays Down for the Count

• DOLE, From 1A

the national indoor track record for the quarter-mile, Dole would spend 39 months in the hospital, fighting for his life and then fighting to rebuild it.

He lost a kidney, most of the use of his right arm and some of the feeling in his left. Getting dressed in the morning — buttoning a shirt, threading cuff links, tying a tie — can take him an hour. The devastation to his body forced Dole to give up his dreams of becoming a doctor — but that was one of the few concessions he would allow.

"I don't have to stop myself from offering to help. He makes me forget he might need help," says his wife, Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Hanford Dole. Not long ago, she recalled, "I asked him to hang a picture in the living room. He just laughed at me and said, 'How?'"

In Washington, where he and "Liddy" are the city's premier power couple those who know him now find it easy to forget the way he has built — and rebuilt — his political career over two turbulent decades.

He arrived in the Senate in 1968 as a vociferous defender of newly elected President Nixon and worked his way up to the chairmanship of the Republican Party — just before the Watergate break-in. In 1974, he came close — within 1 percent — of losing his Senate seat in Kansas to Democrat Bill Roy.

In 1976, as Ford's vice presidential candidate, Dole's slashing, partisan attacks on Democrats Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale earned him the label of his party's "hatchet man." Some blamed the defeat of the GOP ticket in part on the furor over Dole's assertion, during a televised debate with Mondale, that every war in the 20th century had been a "Democratic war."

But since then, Dole's performance as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, beginning in 1981, and as Senate Republican leader, since late 1984, has been widely praised by both Republicans and Democrats.

"HE DOESN'T use head-knocking tactics to get bills passed, because he's so good at putting all the little pieces together beforehand to make sure people are happy," said Sen. Thad Cochran, R-Miss. "It's so effective, and he's so brilliant at it, sometimes guys are surprised just what all they agreed to support."

This new appraisal has given rise among some critics to a theory that there is a "new Bob Dole," that the bitter partisan has mellowed — personally and politically — as a result of his second marriage, to Liddy, in 1976.

But those who have known him the longest say there's still only one Bob Dole, the competitor who gets back on his feet as fast as he can.

"Bob once told me that he lost 10 years of his life because of his injuries, and he was going to get them back. That's what he is doing now, every minute, every hour, he's catching up," says Dole's brother, Kenneth.

The force of Dole's single-minded drive is sometimes obscured by his banter and self-deprecating quips. "I wanted to run for president in 1980 in the worst way — and I did," is a favorite one-liner. But his determination to get somewhere, to make up for lost time, has often swept everything before it.

BY HIS own admission, Dole's first marriage was a casualty of that drive. His wife, Phyllis, told reporters in 1972 that her freshman senator-husband had been home for supper with her and their daughter, Robin, only twice that year before he walked in and announced, "I want out."

At the office, Dole can be a demanding taskmaster who stretches the workday into the night and into weekends. One former Capitol Hill aide describes a stint with Dole as "a year in the bathtub with 'Jaws.'" Another recounts how he submitted memos written on a half sheet of paper so that Dole wouldn't rail about wasted time.

And always, they say, Dole's attention is focused on future battles, not past failures. Even when the favored Ford-Dole ticket was beaten by Carter-Mondale, the Kansan barely missed a beat.



File Photo/Wichita Eagle-Beacon



Bob Dole has enjoyed a political career that spans three decades and has lifted him to one of the most powerful positions in Washington. Clockwise from left, Dole and Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel enjoyed a 1969 KU-KSU basketball game. Dole broke down in tears in 1976 when he returned to his hometown of Russell to thank townspeople after President Ford chose him as his running mate. Dole frequently meets with President Reagan. Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole and her husband attended the 50th American Presidential Inaugural Gala in Washington in 1985.

"The morning after 1976, Dole called a meeting in his apartment," recalls Dave Owen, who has worked in all Dole's campaigns. "No apologies. No self-pity. He just said, 'Well, what does the next (Senate) election look like?'"

"He doesn't have time to dwell on disappointments. After you work with him, you realize there is no one he'll demand more from or push harder than himself."

But there's a human side of Dole as well, one that contrasts sharply with his tough reputation. For example, Dole broke down in tears on a summer day in 1976 when he returned to thank the townspeople of Russell after Ford chose him as his running mate.

AND WHILE Dole is a tireless campaigner — "When I get to the last clean shirt in my suitcase, I know it is time to go home," he jokes — and almost never takes a Saturday off, he spent his 63rd birthday in July with his wife giving a party for 40 residents of Sarah's Circle, a Washington project for the low-income elderly. He instructed his staff not to publicize the event.

He also has sought little publicity for the Dole Foundation for Employment of Persons With Disabilities, which raised more than \$1.2 million last year and which he created after encountering two handicapped teenagers waiting outside a meeting with Kansas bankers a few years ago. Recalls Elizabeth Dole: "He came home and sat on the bed with tears in his eyes and told me he had to do something. And he didn't stop: In a few weeks, he had the program organized."

She adds: "People describe him as tough, but they are talking about an inner strength he built up. He doesn't talk much about that. He doesn't chew on things or unload on people."

"BUT WHEN he was in the hospital, he faced the fact that nobody could do it for him, he had to go on with life. That's given him a tremendous strength."

Another longtime adviser says: "Bob Dole never got a break in his life or asked for one — so he doesn't tolerate demands from others easily. But the same experience gave him tremendous compassion for anyone who really struggles — and he will go all-out for those people."

Most of the time, however, it is

the driven Bob Dole who is on public display. Senate colleagues may praise him as a brilliant strategist, but they also note that Dole is not much given to cloakroom philosophizing or personal revelations. "You don't sit around the old cracker barrel with Bob Dole," says Sen. John Danforth, R-Mo.

And sometimes, Dole's prickly qualities can irritate — even those who have signed on to his presidential campaign. "He frustrates me. Sometimes, I just want to kick him in the shins," says Republican Sen. Nancy Kassebaum of Wichita, daughter of Alf Landon, the only native Kansan ever to win the party's nomination for president. "But he would make a good president. He could make a great president."

The passenger trains from Kansas City and Denver once roared across the prairie through Russell at 3 a.m. every day. "Almost everyone grew up on the wrong sides of the tracks — either coming or going — and nobody knew it," says Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., who also grew up in the small western Kansas town of 6,000 people.

"The reality of Russell is that it wasn't big, but it was highly competitive," says Specter. "There was a lot of pride in the town, in the high school. You got a drive to be the best in whatever you did."

Bob Dole was born in 1924 in a two-room house close to the tracks, the oldest of four children. His father, Doran, had come back from World War I to run the White Front Cafe. When that failed, he turned to running a creamery operation and later a grain elevator.

His mother, Bina, drove out to farmhouses to sell Singer sewing machines. All the Dole children did chores and shared a newspaper route. By age 12, Dole went to work as a soda jerk in Dawson's Drugstore. Still, the Depression years were tough ones: One year, the entire family was forced to move into the basement of their home on Maple Street so the top floors could be rented to oil field workers in order to meet mortgage payments.

"I WAS so embarrassed I didn't want to go to school," recalls Kenneth Dole, who deals in oil and gas leases in Russell. "I know it was

tough for my parents, but they didn't talk about it. My mother always said, 'There is no such word as can't.'"

After lettering in football, basketball and track in high school, Dole entered the University of Kansas as a premedical student. Later he would confess he was more interested in sports than grades: He had a "C" average, but played football and basketball and ran track.

In 1943, Dole quit KU and enlisted in the Army. After Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Ga., he was sent to Rome as a pool officer, waiting to replace officers in the field. In February 1945, he was assigned to "I" Company, 3rd Battalion, 85th Mountain Division, an elite corps that trained to fight in winter weather or mountainous terrain. Many of its members came from Ivy League schools.

Less than six weeks later, on April 14, "Operation Craftsman" was launched against German forces in Italy. Second Lieutenant Dole was ordered to take Hill 913 in northern Italy's Po Valley.

Dole was leading a squad of men over the top of a ravine and up to the hill under heavy shelling and machine-gun fire when his radio man was hit. The rest of the squad scrambled into shell holes; Dole crawled out to pull the radio man out of the fire.

According to medical records, no one is sure if it was a mortar shell or a bullet that blew apart Dole's right shoulder: A fellow soldier remembers only dipping a finger in Dole's blood to put an "M" on his forehead — a signal to the medical corpsmen that the lieutenant had been given morphine.

IT WAS nine hours before Dole arrived by litter at an evacuation hospital, his arms and legs paralyzed. With no feeling in his arms, Dole thought he had lost them. Recovery was painfully slow once Dole returned to the States. According to medical records, he weighed 186 pounds when he left Fort Benning; when Dole was brought home to a Veterans Administration hospital in Topeka in June 1945, he weighed 120 pounds — including his cast.

Slowly, Dole relearned how to walk, to move his left arm, to feed

himself. After five months, doctors transferred him for further therapy to Battle Creek, Mich. But there he developed blood clots in his lungs. For three months, he slid in and out of fever. Doctors said he would die — but asked Dole's parents to sign a release so he could receive an experimental drug called streptomycin. It worked, but Dole had lost all the physical skills that his therapy had rebuilt.

Dole says that was his darkest period. "You go through a period asking, 'Why me? Why did this happen to me out of all the millions of people in the war?'" Dole says. "You can become a professional patient. You don't want to go out; you don't want to leave the hospital where you are protected."

"But you force yourself out. You find out you had the strength, the faith. And if you get discouraged, you look around. "ONCE I was joking with another patient about the cold weather, and I said, 'Boy, this weather freezes your feet.' He just tapped his legs, and I looked down and saw he didn't have any feet."

After he was released from the V.A. hospitals, Dole still hoped he could regain full use of his arms. When folks back in Russell learned that there was a surgeon in Chicago who could operate on him, they staged a fund-raising drive to pay his expenses.

Dole recalls his series of operations in Chicago in 1947 as his final break with any dreams of complete recovery. "I don't think I understood the medical realities — you keep having one test after another, and you keep hoping you will be all right," Dole said. "The doctor was a big influence. He told me it wasn't going to happen. And he told me to face it and go on."

Once Bob Dole realized he would not run track again, he raced to catch up elsewhere. After marrying Phyllis Holden, a physical therapist he'd met during his stay in Michigan, Dole enrolled at Washburn University in Topeka. He lugged a huge tape recorder to class for lectures — and taught himself to write left-handed so he could transcribe the notes at night.

While still in law school at Washburn in 1950, he ran for and won a seat representing Russell in the House. There, he quickly made a mark as a brash freshman unafraid to take on his elders.

"One day when an older member was going on and on, Bob just jumped up and told the guy off — bad," recalls Bill Fribley, who sat next to Dole and is now a Crestline businessman. "Of course, Bob was exactly right. And after, people knew that when Bob Dole went to the podium, you watched to see what would happen."

BACK IN Russell in 1952, Dole was elected county attorney — and re-elected three times. In 1960, he won election to Congress. Seven years later, when Sen. Frank Carlson, R-Kan., announced his retirement plans, Dole was ready, and won the seat handily. Almost as soon as he walked onto the Senate floor, Dole began fashioning a national political career for himself, traveling around the country on behalf of the party and winning election as GOP national chairman in 1972.

After Dole's 1972 divorce, however, his tireless schedule was interrupted by a meeting with then-Federal Trade Commissioner Elizabeth Hanford, who came to his office to lobby him on an issue. There was a slow courtship, partly because of his worry about their 13-year age difference: She was 36, he was 49. "He called me three times before he finally asked me to dinner," says Elizabeth Dole. "I guess he was shy, but it was kind of cute."

They married in 1975, less than a year before Dole was selected as Ford's vice presidential running mate. Elizabeth Dole resigned her job in order to campaign, and she quickly became a valued adviser. Before the debate with Mondale, she was the one who prepped her husband in a Houston hotel room. The Doles are a close team. They exchange phone calls during each workday: When she travels, she says Dole calls her staff "to make sure I'm not on a single-engine plane — he always insists on a double-engine plane" for safety reasons.

Yet after the 1976 defeat, Elizabeth Dole says her husband never discussed his disappointment with her — only his determination to run again.

"He thanked me, and told me I was a great help," she says. "And he went back to work."