

182. 1982

Senator Bob Dole

Dear Friends:

"Some memories are realities", wrote the great prairie novelist Willa Cather, "and are better than anything that can ever happen to one again". In my own life, I've discovered the truth of Miss Cather's words. Even memories that on the surface would seem to hold little besides pain and suffering can be interpreted positively. A case in point are the events brilliantly captured in print by my friend Noel Koch, in a *Washingtonian* article I wanted to share with you as a friend and supporter.

For me, the memories of Hill 913, the 10th Mountain Division, and the 15th Evacuation Hospital yield easily to a house on Maple Street in Russell, Kansas, a loving set of parents, a church and a school that together shaped the values that no enemy explosive could destroy. The memories don't stop there: they include a drugstore, the classrooms of Kansas University, and athletic programs where a young man could test himself -- little imagining the tests in store for him on a distant battlefield.

Most of all, my memories include people: generous, supportive, filled with faith and eager to express their confidence in me and my future, at a time when conventional wisdom doubted both. I remember doctors and therapists, nurses and neighbors. I remember operations made possible through the generosity of friends. And I remember the lessons learned while lying flat on my back. Above all, I learned that courage is mental as well as physical, that it means resistance to fear rather than the absence of fear.

All these memories are realities, which still guide me through a life filled with wonder and blessed with human kindness. I count your friendship among the latter, and as one token of my appreciation, I want you to have this article, to share some memories and especially warm feelings that are not limited to any individual season of the year.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Bob

The Faith to Endure

It Is Easy to Forget That Politicians Are Flesh-and-Blood People, That Long Before the Senate Votes and Presidential Campaigns There Can Be Harder Battles That Forever Change a Man

BY NOEL C. KOCH

Gerald Ford intended to waste no time launching his 1976 presidential campaign. It would begin that weekend in Russell, Kansas, hometown of his vice-presidential running mate, Bob Dole. Russell is almost the geographical center of the continental United States. Socially, economically, culturally, and politically, Russell is dead-center. The Ford-Dole gathering was held on the lawn of the courthouse, and featured hot dogs and soft drinks. No beer.

Dole got up to face his townspeople. He stepped to the microphone to an outpouring of pride and affection. As the crowd settled, he began to speak.

The words began with the studied protocol of the Senate-seasoned orator, but the sound was the harsh, flat, atonal assault of the American prairie.

A local farmer in the crowd was telling a reporter about the town and when Dole was young and how children were given mustard sandwiches for dinner because that's all there was. . . . "And the dust blew in and filled the creek and sifted in the windows and nothing would grow. We'd wrap the babies' faces with wet towels because people were dying of dust pneumonia. Nobody had anything here and Bob Dole was a poor boy, too."

The Dust Bowl years were mostly forgotten now, called back in stark beauty in photographs by people like Margaret Bourke-White, a piece of history in coffee-table books. Now the poor were in the cities. And so were the votes. But the people who had lived through it remembered. They remembered that they

Noel C. Koch served six years in the US Army, including a tour in Vietnam. From 1971 to 1974, he was a special assistant to the President, and in 1976 he traveled with vice-presidential candidate Robert Dole. He currently is principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs. This article is from an unpublished biography of Senator Dole.

got through it mostly on their own, not because of the government but in spite of it. It shaped their politics.

Jimmy Carter had cried poverty throughout the land in the primary campaigns. Bob Dole never would. He had known poverty. "Everybody in Russell's been broke at least once. It's something we all remember," the farmer said.

But being poor wasn't what was on Dole's mind as he looked out at the people who knew him.

"I can recall when I needed help, the people of Russell helped. . . . His voice halted, resumed, faltered, and stopped. Dole's left hand moved to his forehead, the fingers splayed as if to shield his eyes from the sun. There was a silence, and his fingers came down squeezing into his eyes, and his shoulders began to quiver.

The hard-nosed conservative senator, the Republican hatchetman, was crying, first silently, then audibly. And as the sound of his human self carried, the President of the United States rose and the people of Russell, Kansas, rose and began to applaud, the sound sheltering and protecting, lifting him yet once more, with no undue concern, and certainly not in pity, but out of a long habit of love. Recovering his composure, Dole whispered, "It was a long time ago."

April 14, 1945. One might select any of a number of dates to say how long ago it was. The doctor might choose the day he told Dole that he could no longer play basketball. Dole's mother might pick the day he came home. Dole himself might choose the first time someone, thinking him to be unconscious, said that he was going to die. Perhaps when a man says, "It was a long time ago," he means to be vague.

Those who knew him on April 14, 1945, could also contribute dates. Ollie Manninen fought that day and he speaks

about the common experience, but he does not say that he won a Silver Star on April 14. Still, there is something his modesty will not contain, that he wants to tell. At the end of the conversation he stalls, and then shyly works it in: "There was another thing I wanted to mention. I had the honor to represent the United States at the Olympics in 1948. I was a cross-country runner."

He doesn't mean that you should know that he is a man of achievement. No, he means he loves America, and tried to prove worthy of her.

There was another Olympian there that April day of 1945. Devereaux Jennings would go to the 1948 Winter Games at St. Moritz as a downhill racer. The probability of having two Olympians in one Army Division is not great, yet there were two just in that Company, for this was an unusual group of men. There were scions of great families, an over-representation of America's ruling class, and there were other champions. Torger Tøkle, the national ski-jumping champion, was there. Al Nencioni remembers passing his body. "He was in the 86th and we passed through them on the second day, going along the saddle toward Torracio. That was woods in there, and they got a lot of tree bursts. Somebody said, 'That's Torger Tøkle over there.' We walked right past him. We carried bodies out of those woods for hours."

Nencioni does not say that he got a concussion on April 14, 1945. You get it out of the record. If you pry you will learn he refused to be sent home from the evacuation hospital, but jumped on a passing truck and found his way back to his unit. He prefers to talk about the unit, the men. He has his points of personal pride, however. As though it was a mistake to have taken it from the folder of documents and pictures he has beside him, he advances and then pulls back a

Reprinted from *The Washingtonian* Magazine, copyright © 1982

December 1982 *The Washingtonian*



Above: In 1943, when Robert Dole was 20 years old, he stood six feet two and weighed 192 pounds; he had played football and basketball at the University of Kansas, and in track he nearly broke the indoor record for the quarter-mile. There were other exceptional young men in the Army platoon he would join in 1945; the 10th Mountain Division included future Olympic athletes, scions of great families, and many Ivy League graduates. They had a reputation for never losing the ground they took, and in the six weeks Lieutenant Dole was with them they labeled him "the best combat leader the platoon had." In the photo at right, Dole is kneeling at far left, wearing a light-colored jacket.



photograph of himself and his wife. They are standing with Senator Hubert Humphrey and FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover. Nencioni is a retired FBI agent. "I wrote the J. Edgar Hoover March," he says. "The Marine Band used to play it when he was around. I didn't want anybody to know I wrote it, though." But he is proud of it. And he remembers the way people from Graves Registration would throw the bodies on the trucks. "I thought they'd just lay them up there, but they didn't. It made me sick," and he clears his throat. He clears his throat a lot when he talks about the war.

And there is Stanley Kuschick, repository of the tribal memory. When others' memories fuzz, they tell you to ask Kuschick, he'll know. Kuschick knows not just what they did and where, or who got hit and with what, but the smell and the sound of it. He knows how wars are run. Kuschick is as old as working every day for 30 years without vacation will make a man.

"I had a football scholarship to Villanova after the war. But you need the killer instinct to play good football. After the war, I didn't have it anymore. I couldn't pretend after everything I saw.

The Washingtonian December 1982

I used my GI bill to learn how to farm."

The spring offensive, "Operation Craftsman," is scheduled to begin on April 12, 1945. Since February, efforts have been under way, initiated by Germans, to bring about the surrender of German forces in Italy. Soldiers in the field are unaware of this. So is Hitler. As the intrigue goes forward, so does the war. The Allies mean to destroy the German forces in Italy, and to have their surrender without condition as agreed upon by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin. German forces in Italy are dwindling, they can no longer be reinforced, and their commander, Generaloberst Heinrich Gottfried von Vietinghoff, has no illusions about what confronts him. He cables the German Armed Forces High Command to say, "If the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces continues to maintain its intention of keeping the Anglo-Americans as far and as long as possible from the border of the Reich, its aim can only be achieved if we defeat the known intentions of our enemies, the annihilation of the German armies. This can be done only if we avoid decisive battles by retreating, if necessary, to our

prepared Ticino-Po defense positions."

Other German generals have made similar requests. Friedrich von Paulus, commander of the German 6th Army, had done so in the fall of 1942. Hitler's enraged answer was "Stand and fight." So von Paulus stood and fought at Stalingrad, and before the spring of 1943 his 300,000-man army no longer existed.

Von Vietinghoff's answer comes three days later: "All further proposals for a change in the present war strategy will be discontinued. The Führer expects now, as before, the utmost steadfastness in the fulfillment of your present mission, to defend every inch of the north Italian areas entrusted to your command." The signature is Generaloberst Alfred Jodl's, but the order is Adolf Hitler's.

A military historian says that the spring offensive scheduled for April 12 was delayed by fog, which prevented planes from flying. The troops remember that on April 12 Franklin Delano Roosevelt died, and some say it was this that delayed the offensive. The emotional impact of Roosevelt's death was great. But it was fog that caused the offensive to be rescheduled for April 14 at 0600.

At that hour, heavy weather continues

to shroud Allied-held airfields, and the American commanders, like golfers on a weekend, fidget and curse. At 0800 the fog begins to lift, and one hour later begins the most intensive bombing of German positions yet undertaken in the Mediterranean Theater. Heavy bombers are followed by fighter-bombers, and by artillery, more than 2,000 pieces firing for more than half an hour. What could not be seen for fog now cannot be seen for dust and smoke, and under its cover the spring offensive begins against heavily fortified German positions, against men of whom "the Führer expects now, as before, the utmost steadfastness. . . . For those who might not be galvanized by their Führer's expectations, there is an additional encouragement. The troops are told that the 10th US Mountain Division does not take prisoners. The unit has become legendary. It is the only unit that, having taken a position, has never lost it. The ground they take, they keep.

It is not so cold in the mountains as it has been, but not so warm that you can smell the bodies you pass.

The noise of the shelling continues, speckled closer in with the rattle of smaller arms. Here in this ravine there is a small silence. If birds or animals were there, they have fled, frightened, perhaps knowing something you don't.

Over the top of the ravine is a clearing. Across it, curving down and away to the right, are hedgerows—so thick a tank cannot traverse them. You cannot approach the hedgerows from the left for

there is a minefield there, nor skirt the clearing to your right for that is the responsibility of the 3rd Platoon. You are to move across the clearing.

Second Lieutenant Robert Dole leads the 2nd Platoon of "I" Company of the 3rd Battalion of the 85th Infantry Mountain Regiment of the US Army's 10th Mountain Division.

He has scouts in the clearing, and now he takes a squad of men along with his radio operator and moves over the top of the ravine and into the clearing. It bears the marks of the bombing and shelling. Dole's men, both for caution and for the silence they do not understand, will move toward these shell holes, going from one to the next, clinging to some little security.

The hedgerow is low, and beyond it the land climbs quickly up the objective, Hill 913, so that the clearing is exposed to the rising land.

There is a stuttering of automatic-weapons fire into the clearing and mortar rounds from Hill 913, killing one or two whose names the others no longer remember. Dole has called for covering fire, and it spatters into and across the hedgerows, but it does not stop the stuttering or the mortars or save the radio man who has moved to his comrade and is hit almost within his reach. The rest of the squad has scrambled into the craters and some are wounded, but Dole is not. He bellies out into the fire to get his



The mortar, shell, or bullet that exploded Dole's right shoulder on April 14, 1945, paralyzed all four of his limbs. He had lost 70 pounds when this hospital-bed picture was taken later that year. "To be completely helpless has a marked effect on anyone," he says. "I couldn't feed myself for almost a year, or do anything with my hands." Finally, he was able to stand, and then to walk—at right, he's at home visiting with his father and grandfather in Russell, Kansas.



December 1982 *The Washingtonian*