

Pa. 85 - 1992

DOLE

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hamburger. Dole had to get that machine gun. The lead squad was going to have to flank that house and get the nest of Krauts. Sergeant Frank Carafa assumed he'd be going out with the squad, but Dole said, "Sergeant, I'll take 'em." Carafa stayed behind to cover. He got the rest of the guys in position to fire at the farmhouse, then called for mortars, while they opened up with BARs — Browning automatics, the light machine guns.

Dole went ahead on the steep, rocky field. With the morning's bombardment, the mortars, and machine-gun fire, the ground was littered with bits of metal. There were still shells flying in from the slope behind the farmhouse, and German mortars dug in on the backside of the hill. Dole made fifty or sixty feet before they spotted him from the farmhouse, opened up on him and his squad. He yanked the pin from a grenade and lobbed it, but it fell short. Romberg, the first scout, was closer. He half stood to let loose a grenade, but they got him. He fell face forward and his helmet rolled off in front of him. Dole couldn't see the second scout. Jerries might have got him, too. Dole dove for a shell hole, made it, but his runner, Sims, did not, he was down. Dole scrambled from the hole on his belly, slothered out on the pocked dirt, while shells tore the air over him, and he grabbed little Sims by a handful of shirt, dragged him back, but he was dead-weight, it was too late. . . . and now the Jerry gunners sighted Dole, who was scrambling from his hole . . . had to get out, his guys were getting chewed up there . . . and Dole was on all fours, moving, tearing up his hands on the ground, and then . . . he felt a sharp shock of sting in his back, behind the right shoulder, he twisted in the air and went down on his face in the dirt, he couldn't feel his arms, they shot off my arms, he couldn't feel . . . couldn't see, face on the dirt, can't get up to see, can't lift . . . have to get out of here!

The others could hear him moaning. Carafa thought he heard Dole calling to him, heard it plain between the roar of the guns. . . . Sergeant Carafa. . . . Dole only knew they were dragging him, dragging him back into a gully, a shallow depression, rolling him over . . . the tank jacket was shredded open near the neck and shoulder. You could see into Dole through the jacket, through the shoulder, like a gouged fruit, see down to the core, and they folded the lieutenant's arms on his chest, they had to get out . . . The sergeants said they were going to push to the right, to the east, where the engineers were tripping mines. There was another company to the east, breaking through the German line. They'd get by the hill and the Krauts to the east. They had to get moving. Dole was just lying there, staring up at them, the look in his eyes a silent plea. He knew they had to get out . . . but how could they leave him?

They called in medics, but two got killed trying to get to Dole. There weren't many medics going to make it that day. That's why Sergeant Kuschik carried morphine. Stan Kuschik was a great, hairy bear of a man, son of a Jewish baker from New York. He did the best he could for Dole, more than orders allowed: he pulled up a kid named Arthur McBryar, a Tennessee boy who'd been in Dole's platoon. Kuschik told McBryar to stay with Dole, even though orders said to leave no able-bodied man behind. Dole was gray, like they get before they die. Kuschik couldn't leave him to die there, alone. Before he got out, Kuschik dug through his kit, gave Dole a shot of morphine. Then he dipped his finger into Dole's shredded jacket, and with Dole's blood traced an "M" on his forehead. That'd let the med-



Courtesy photo

Bina Dole nurtured her son Bob at their home in Russell after he returned from World War II in 1945 with debilitating injuries.

ics know he'd had a shot — another would kill him, overdose . . . if a medic ever got there . . . if McBryar could spot one . . .

McBryar was scared to death. The medics were never gonna find them, down there, in the ravine. There was cover, but no one'd come. Dole was still right where they left him, on his back with his arms crossed over his chest, still conscious, moaning, trying to talk . . . but he couldn't unclench his teeth. He wasn't cryin' or anything. But McBryar was listening to the guns, couldn't catch what Dole was trying to say. It seemed like forever till that Kraut machine gun quit. Artillery was still comin' in. He tried to keep Dole talking, keep him going, afraid he was gonna give out.

McBryar had a bandage pressed onto Dole's wound, had to try to slow the bleeding. Blood was soaking his jacket and uniform, turning the dry ground dark underneath. "How bad is it?" Dole said through his teeth. McBryar pulled the bandage away. Whatever hit Dole had ripped everything. McBryar could look into him, see right down to Dole's back. His



Lt. Bob Dole was shot in 1945 trying to save his platoon from German gunfire. He returned to the states and spent months regaining his health, cared for by his mother.

tray. Bob liked to have those French doors open, while Bina rushed around, cooking and doing for him. Kenny, Bob's brother, was just back from the war, but more than ever, Bob came first. Bina would feed him, bathe him, dress him, comb his hair, hold his cigarette to his mouth, carry the bedpan back and forth, go to the bathroom with him. There weren't enough hours in the day for all she wanted to do for him. She'd wake up at dawn thinking about what he could wear that would be comfortable to lounge in, and what she could cook, what he'd like, what would make the day special. She worked herself to the frayed edge of exhaustion, though she would never let Bob see that. And when Bob got down, Bina would crumble. Sometimes, with her sisters or her daughters, safe in the kitchen, where Bob couldn't hear, Bina would cry like a baby. She'd stand at the kitchen sink sobbing. "I'm afraid we brought him home to die."

At night, Doran would sit with Bob, read to him from *The Salina Journal*. Or he'd have Chet Dawson and his wife, Ruth, over to play bridge late at night after the drugstore closed, so Bob could listen through the open French doors to news of the town and farmers. Chet would call in the afternoon. "Bina? What're you cookin'?" Well, save some for me. I'll be by sometime." Bob didn't mind the Dawsons, but he didn't want anyone else to see him. He was so ashamed of the way he looked. There'd be time enough for them to see, when he was whole again, when he could play. That was the dream that kept him going. He was going to play ball for Coach (Phog) Allen. It was more than a dream. It was a plan. He'd count off months in his head, what he'd be able to do with his arms and legs two months from now, four months, six . . . how he'd start to run, build his endurance . . . But then, when someone came, even a good friend, he'd see in their eyes: "Poor Bob!" Their eyes made him see himself as they did . . . "Poor Bobby Joe!" . . . And then the plan was only a dream, a pipe dream.

Bina let him talk on about how he'd play ball . . . whatever he wanted. What was the point of telling him anything else? For her part, talk of the future was bright, and immediate. How about his favorite, liver and onions, tomorrow? Bob, will you wear your new sweater this Sunday? Or Christmas! . . . Christmas was always a big deal in that house, and this year, it would have to be double-special. But by Thanksgiving, Bob was gone again. He went to a special Army hospital in Michigan,

where they did modern miracles in orthopedics. It was Uncle Sam's special center for paraplegics and amputees. Why should he wait around for Christmas? More movement, more feeling in his left arm! The strength to walk on his own legs for ten minutes, twenty, an hour! To run! And a miracle for his right arm, to let him play ball. To be whole again. That's what he wanted for Christmas. But there was no miracle for Bob. On the fourth day before Christmas, he woke with a savage pain in his chest. It was a blood clot in his lung, the price of lying immobile so long. The doctors in Michigan started treating him with dicumarol, a vicious drug to thin the blood. It turned him, temporarily, into a hemophiliac. But there was no choice. If the blood clot loosened from the wall of his lung and went to his heart, he was a dead man. He was strictly confined to bed again. This time he demanded that doctors tell the outlook, straight. And they told him, it was fifty-fifty he'd live.

So he stayed in bed for weeks, then months, while all his strength ebbed away. As the new year stretched into its second month, he was weaker and weaker, and now the fever was back. The doctors tried cutting off the dicumarol. But the pain returned, and chills . . . the fever was eating him away. So they started the drug again, with penicillin, but the antibiotic couldn't stop this infection. He was coughing and rattling in his bed. Pneumonia was filling his lungs.

Bina and Doran drove back and forth from Kansas to Michigan, but they could see that the doctors had no plan. They couldn't stop the fever, so they packed him in ice. They had Bobby Joe packed like a fish in the market! By the end of February, Bob grew worse and the hospital called again, but Bina couldn't bear to go back . . . when Bob didn't know her, when the fever had him. So Kenny went to Michigan. He figured he was going just to pick up the body. It wasn't even Bob in that bed. It was just a shell of him. "Is there any hope?" Kenny asked. They told him about an experimental drug. The Army had the only supply, a thirty-day dose for three patients. Bob would be the third. Would Kenny authorize the treatment? "Well, what happened to the others?" One died and one went blind, but he lived. "What are his chances without it?" Without it, nothing. So Kenny called home, and Bina and Doran came back to Battle Creek, to sign the form, to watch the treatment. They had Bob tied down in bed, so he'd be still while the new drug took hold. Doctors told them not to expect much. Even if it worked, there was no guarantee he'd know them, be able to move, get the strength back he had before. No one really knew what this drug would do. It was called streptomycin. So, beginning of March, they put him on it. Four days later, he sat up in bed, asked Kenny to go downtown and get him a milkshake. Monday: Dole enters Russell County politics in 1952.

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War left Lt. Dole struggling for life

Lieutenant Bob Dole of Russell, then 21 years old, got his orders in February, 1945 to join U.S. Army troops fighting the Germans in Italy.

By Richard Ben Cramer

April 14, 1945, was a daytime nightmare of cannon, mortar, machine-gun fire — flesh in uneven contest with the "instrumentalities of war." A second lieutenant named Kvam tried to take cover from German artillery, dived into a shallow ditch, and tripped a Kraut booby trap. It was a steel pipe, cut on a diagonal and filled with explosives, so when it blew, it would spray burning steel in a wide, deadly swath. But Kvam took the whole load. When his men got to the hole, it looked like someone had dabbed the lieutenant a hundred times on his face and body with a tiny black paint brush. He was perforated.

Bob Dole got his men down to the low stone wall, and started to advance in British formation. The lead squad, maybe fourteen men, followed two scouts at the point of advance. Two smaller squads were behind on the flanks. Farther behind, at the rear point of the diamond, came the weapons squad, with machine guns and light mortars. The top sergeant would move in the middle as a belly-crawling, rolling headquarters. Dole could have stayed in the middle too. But he knew his job, and he did it. He was out front, with the lead squad.

They were pinned down quick. The whole company didn't make a quarter mile that morning. Third Platoon got over the wall, but the sergeant told the men to advance across the field before they'd get engineers to check for mines. So the men of the Third made about forty yards and started stepping on mines. Some were killed right there, many wounded. The rest were pinned down in the field, when a farmhouse on the left opened fire: a Jerry machine-gun nest; the men in the field were

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