

Bob Dole Has the Faith to Endure

By NOEL C. KOCH
Gerald R. Ford intended to waste no time launching his 1976 presidential campaign. It would begin that weekend in Russell, Kan., 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 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 played 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 hatchman, 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, Kan., 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. Devereux 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 Tokle, 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 Toracio. That was woods in there, and they got a lot of tree bursts. Somebody said, 'That's Torger Tokle 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 records, 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 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 fuz, 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. 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 administration 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 radioman 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 radioman, not knowing that it no longer matters how many more times he may be hit.

On the right, the 3rd Platoon is moving. There is a farmhouse on the flank of 913, and Sergeant Sanford Rague has gone to it, negotiating a minefield along the way. He is hit from the farmhouse as he comes beneath its windows and plops a grenade inside. So now Rague is bleeding on the far side of a minefield, and a private named Smith whom no one previously suspected of ruthlessness takes two German prisoners and orders them across the minefield. German prisoners are often costly, knowing they are, out of battle and safe while their captors must still face death.

These prisoners are not cucky. They plead, "Nein, nein, Mine! Mine!" as though the American does not understand what he is asking them to do. Smith makes it clear that he will shoot them, so they begin across the minefield and both explode mines and are killed. Smith takes a ladder, lays it on the two German bodies, totters across, and retrieves Rague.

There is a sniper 50 yards to the front, midway up the hill, and Sergeant Bill Skinner of the weapons platoon takes a mortar up in front of the hedgerow and fires it. He is shot in the forehead, but his round drops on the sniper. Al Nencioni goes forward to peek at his friend, Skinner, and knows that he is dead. "Their snipers were good. There were a lot of head shots. That was a bad day. It was worse than Belvedere." Asked why the beginning of the spring offensive was worse than the taking of Mount Belvedere, he says that they lost more men on this day.

"But it wasn't that. Belvedere was at night. You couldn't see what happened to your friends so much at night."

Now Nencioni has one more hour to see what is happening to his friends. Then a large mortar round will go off a little too close to him.

Company "I" is to take Hill 913 and continue three miles beyond it. By nightfall they will have gone only a thousand yards, but they will have reached the summit. The resistance is everything the Führer could have hoped, except successful. Nor is it unusual that day for the men of this American unit to have to be driven forward by the curses and kicks and rifle butts and bayonets of their non-commissioned officers. "We thought, the way they wiped that mountain, we wouldn't have any resistance at all," Nencioni says, recalling the bombing and artillery fire. "But they were there, dug in."

The 10th Division that day will take more casualties than all other Allied forces in Italy combined, and men will become injured to it. Dev Jennings will catch a few hours of sleep that night wrapped in a mattress cover, and wake up screaming as men from Graves Registration begin to haul him up to be numbered, one notched dog tag between his front teeth, his mouth kicked shut upon it, the other tag sent up for the records.

In his shell hole Dole has administered morphine to his radioman because it is all he can do. Overhead the firing from the hill stops. When it begins again, if it begins again, it may find them in their shell holes. No one believes light-



ning doesn't strike twice in the same place. So now Dole comes up again, out into the clearing, moving on the unseen positions.

The iron rain begins, and something — a mortar round perhaps, one medical record says an explosive shell, Nencioni thinks it could have been a bullet, and so does Kuschick; you think these things can be determined with precision, but they can't — something full of orange-brown-black noise explodes Dole's right shoulder.

Behind them, the 2nd Platoon continues to pour fire across the hedgerow and into the hill. Kuschick, second in command as platoon sergeant, now has a problem. They have been ordered to leave their wounded to await the medics who come behind. It is a practical order to conserve manpower in a unit that takes so many casualties that if one man is left to guard and comfort another who has been wounded, then there might be none left to move forward. Kuschick decides to disobey this order.

"The Lieutenant was gray, the way they got before they died. I couldn't just leave him there to die by himself. We gave him some morphine, and I told Arthur McBryar to stay with him. You know, we weren't supposed to have morphine. But the Germans would shoot our medics. They didn't care about the Geneva Convention. So we had to make do a lot. When we came across a dead medic, we'd take his morphine. Then when our guys got hit, we could help them a little. You dipped your finger in his blood and put an 'M' on his forehead, because we had to leave them, and when somebody got to them to take care of them they'd see the 'M' and not give him more morphine. So he wouldn't overdose, see?"

"So we gave the lieutenant the morphine and left McBryar. I figured McBryar wouldn't have to wait long."

The Allied invasion of Italy had begun on Sept. 3, 1943. Its objectives were not entirely military, but political as well, involving the prestige of the British Empire, then defended by Winston Churchill. Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower agreed that Italy should be invaded (Army Chief of Staff George Marshall did not), but he could have contented himself with taking the strategic airfields at Foggia, just north of the heel of the Italian boot, then using Allied airpower against southern Europe.

Churchill had a different idea. Planning for the cross-channel invasion of Normandy was in full swing, and the United States was determined that no men or equipment should be diverted for a major Italian campaign. Churchill was equally determined that British forces in the Mediterranean were not going to sit out the last half of 1943 and the first of 1944 waiting for the attack on France. The plan to go into Naples, called "Avalanche" went forward.

On Sept. 3, a combined U.S.-British force landed at Reggio on the toe of Italy. On that same day an armistice covertly negotiated with the new Italian government was signed. Five days later another combined force steamed toward Salerno on the coast south of Naples, and the armistice was announced.

That the Allies were no longer at war with the nation that they now invaded was no more than a mournful coincidence. Germany prepared to reinforce Italy and to take the deposed Mussolini and re-establish him as the head of the

Fascist government. This was done as the Allies were trying to fight their way out of the Salerno beachhead. On the 15th, the German General Kesselring pulled back and Salerno was secured. The Allies were irrevocably on Italian soil.

On Oct. 8, 1943, Churchill cabled Roosevelt: ". . . we cannot yet tell whether it is in October or November that we can occupy Rome; but it is certain that we shall not come in contact with the main German forces at the top of the leg till December, or even later. . . ."

It was even later, for Hitler resolved to stand south of Rome and charge dearly for any inch of ground, so that the Allied conquest of Rome did not come until June 5, 1944, and by then its luster had been dimmed by its terrible cost. There was more to come.

As the price of Italy went up, Private Robert "Joseph" Dole, 17179287, was being factored into the U.S. military establishment.

On Dec. 14, 1942, his parents, Doran and Bina Dole, swore before a notary in Russell, Kan., that they "the undersigned, being the father and mother of Robert Joseph Dole, a minor, an applicant for enlistment in the United States Army, do hereby give our consent to his enlistment therein." The next day he was enlisted at Lawrence, Kan. He was finally called to active duty on June 1, 1943.

The records show that he was a trainee in the Army Medical Corps from June until November of 1943, and that he was then placed in the Army Specialized Training Program for engineering studies until March, 1944. This took him to Brooklyn College, where he compiled a short academic record.

The medical and engineering training completed, Dole now became a gunner in an anti-tank company of the 290th Infantry at Fort Breckinridge, Ky. At Breckinridge, on June 15, Dole applied for Officer Candidate School.

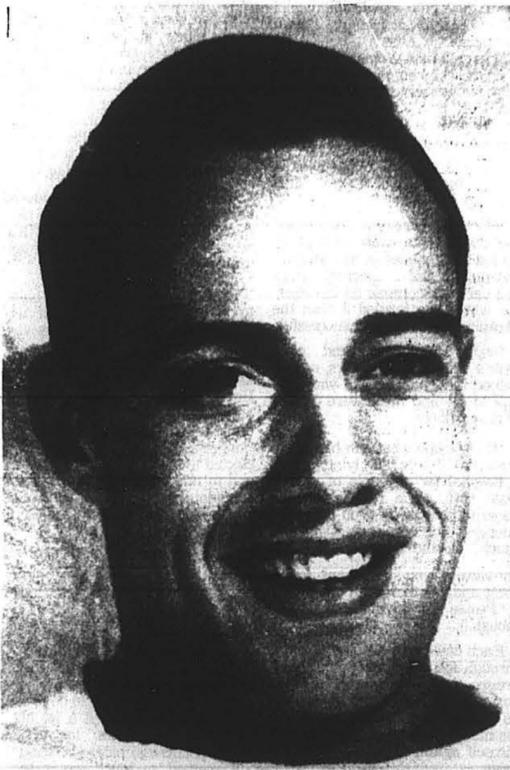
He was sent to Fort Benning for officer training. The physical required showed that he was a large, healthy 20-year-old: 6 feet 2 inches tall, 186 pounds.

During the same period, the 87th Infantry Mountain Regiment was being shot at on the Aleutian Island of Kiska, where it was landed along with some 30,000 other men with the mission of retrieving this bit of American soil from the 6,000 Japanese forces planted there. Before they arrived, the Japanese were quietly evacuated and the fresh, frightened American troops went ashore, spread out in a dense fog. They began firing at any noise, killing and wounding a number of their own people.

This inglorious episode was not consistent with the expectations of those who had labored to make mountain troops a part of the U.S. armed forces. Chief among those was Charles Minot Dole (not related to Robert Dole), a skiing enthusiast who had founded the National Ski Patrol System. In 1940, "Minnie" Dole and some of his friends had suggested that a German attack on America could come from the Northeast and encounter no U.S. forces trained to fight in winter weather or mountainous terrain.

The secretary of war was offered the services of the National Ski Association in preparing to defend the Northeast. He was not interested. But winter sports were still largely the province of the rich, and the rich were well-connected.

(Continued to Next Page)



HOSPITAL PATIENT — Bob Dole in a hospital bed recovering from serious war wounds received during World War II as he led an attack on a German stronghold in Italy. Dole was hospitalized for 39 months and underwent several surgeries. After he was hit, all four limbs were paralyzed. After languishing for six months in a Veterans hospital at Topeka, Dole's right shoulder was still paralyzed and he had deep injuries to his spine, but worse, the muscles of both upper arms had atrophied grotesquely. His right hand was crabbed, and his left hand was nearly useless. Strenuous exercises were ordered. Doctors shook their heads. They did not expect Lt. Dole to live.