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Bob Dole Has —

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Soon the National Ski Patrol found itself advising the military on how to equip and train troops for the kind of role they might have to perform in the northeastern United States, or in the mountains of Europe.

In November, 1941, the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Mountain Regiment, was activated at Fort Harris, Wash. The Army now had a paper unit, but they hadn't the personnel to man it. So the National Ski Association became the recruiting agency for the 87th Infantry Mountain Regiment. They were a discriminating agency. Those wishing to join up had to provide letters of recommendation.

The result was that the 87th and its spawn, the 85th and 86th Infantry Mountain Regiments — one day to be the 10th Mountain Division — were composed of men rarely found in the Army. Many were graduates of Ivy League schools.

Through the summer and winter of 1943, the mountain regiments trained while wars in the Atlantic and Pacific went forward. The one exception was the embarrassing adventure of the 87th on Kiska. It began to appear that those who had opposed the formation of the elite unit — and there were many, for the military has a traditional hostility to elite units — had had their revenge. The mountain men might be good, and they might be valuable. But no one would ever know because they had never been tested.

Then came Monte Cassino. Mountain troops, George Marshall realized, would have been valuable at Monte Cassino.

In October, Marshall toured the European Theater of Operations and chanced upon a colleague, General George P. Hays, commanding the 2nd Division's artillery in the Ardennes Forest. Marshall thought the job beneath Hays, whose military exploits had included winning a Congressional Medal of Honor in World War I by dancing his horse through a German artillery barrage, calmly identifying targets for his own gunners. Marshall brought Hays back to the States and put him in charge of the mountain regiments, now coalesced into the 10th Mountain Division. In November the division received orders to go to Italy.

While the 10th was sailing for Italy, Bob Dole was already there, assigned to the 24th Replacement Depot as a pool officer. Winter action was limited, and so were Dole's duties.

"I thought that Replacement Depot was the best duty you could have. I remember going to Rome. They had a big sports school in Rome. I figured the best way to get out of that Army over there was to get in the sports school." Dole laughs, almost wistfully. "Never could figure out how to do it. All those athletes running around the Coliseum there in Rome, getting in shape for the games. . . . His voice trails off. Dole has no problem admitting that he never went in search of something dangerous to do.

On Feb. 25, 1945, he was assigned to "I" Company, 3rd Battalion, 85th Mountain Regiment. The unit morning report recording this routine personnel action gives an account of the day: "Company in defense. Weather fair and warm. General thawing out. Morale very good."

One week earlier, the 10th Mountain Division had assaulted and taken Riva Ridge and Monte Belvedere-Monte Torracio Ridge, opening the way for an attack on Bologna and the Po Valley. The Allies had attempted this three times before. On one occasion, Belvedere had been held for three days, but the Germans took it back. The 10th Mountain took it and kept it, against the fortifications and firepower of the Germans' desperate knowledge of what could pour through this bottleneck. A radio message from Hays catches the urgency with which he drove his troops: "Recall 6 to Rebate 5: General does not want to hear of anyone stopping. Send patrol over to break through and to hell with this business of being surrounded."

The division took more than 900 casualties, 203 dead. When it was over, the reputation of the 10th Mountain Division was made.

At the time Dole joined it, "I" Company was in defensive positions. Dole had not been there when the unit was blooded. To the men of the 2nd Platoon he was just another lieutenant, and the division was quickly using up lieutenants.

"When he got up there, we'd been pretty busy, and we were dirty. I don't know what he thought of us," Kuschick says. "We were both about the same age, but I had not shaved, had a beard, and I must have looked older or something, because he was very respectful. He asked questions and he listened. A lot of them didn't listen."

Al Nencioni says: "At first, he looked like a sissy. He didn't wear a helmet, he wore one of those cloth hats to keep his head warm. And I remember he didn't blouse his pants over his boots. I don't

know why — just wrapped them tight around his legs and laced his boots around them. He looked funny. A lot of guys who looked like sissies had more guts than the others, though — the John Wayne types. And he always listened to the sergeants."

"We had two battles going," Kuschick says. "One with the Germans, and one with the officers. A lot of them weren't worth much. Dole was the best combat leader the platoon had. If he had to take a farmhouse, he went right for it. Never told somebody else to do it. He stayed in front."

On March 18, Dole took a patrol out to try to capture some Germans. It is the first record of Dole in action. They came under fire, and he, along with three of his men, was lightly wounded by grenade fragments. These may not have been German grenade fragments.

"I think one of ours might have bounced off a tree and rolled back," Dole says. "Sometimes it was like a shooting gallery in the dark. You didn't know where the stuff was coming from or whose it was."

On April 14, the spring offensive began. Dole was hit less than one hour after it began.

Whatever justifies the recollection that he was the best combat leader the 2nd Platoon had remains locked in the memories of men who shared an experience a long time ago. Inevitably, a war wound invests the bearer with an aura of heroism; yet being wounded is almost always an accident. Why people get medals for it is a mystery. Heroism involves choices, and Dole perceived no choice between leading his men and not leading them. For six weeks he was in the war and showed himself worthy of one of the best units and was hit. He seems to have met the high expectations of those he led. What it meant to him then or now is not clear.

He returned to Italy years later to try to find the hill where he was on April 14, 1945, but the land was strange to him. In recent years he has attended an occasional reunion of men from the 10th Mountain Division, but he doesn't remember many, nor does he maintain contact with them. The unit's archivist, Andy Hastings, says, "For a long time Bob didn't identify himself with us. He just felt like he didn't belong." There is nothing that would lead one to believe now that he shares with them a sense of belonging. Out of it all, it is this that most sets Dole apart from his comrades. Read Henry's exhortation at Aiguncourt to them, and they will understand it in their stomachs. Every generation of soldiers has its St. Crispin's Day.

Tenryson's "Ulysses" will touch the same scars that these men intentionally keep open so as never to forget. Men may pray for peace and brotherhood, but they will settle for the brotherhood they've known at war. They are grateful to have known it.

For Bob Dole, it was just bad luck. He did not begin with these men: He came to them by chance, and long afterward he suffered for it. While Manninen and Jennings were competing for Olympic medals in 1948, Dole was being released from a hospital, and even that was not the end of it.

Dole had lain in the shell hole with McBryar for what seemed like an eternity. The medics who should have come to help him had themselves been hit by German fire, and it was nine hours before Dole arrived by litter at the 15th Evacuation Hospital, where the consensus was that he would die. Whatever had hit him had damaged his spine: "The patient had immediate paralysis complete in all four extremities."

Two days later he was transferred to the 70th General Hospital in Casablanca.

The letters began to come in to the little house at 1035 Maple St., Russell, Kan. Because Dole could not use his hands, the letters were written for him.

April 25, 1945

Dear Mom and Dad:

Just writing to let you know I'm feeling O.K. I can move my legs now, but I'm still having a little trouble with my left arm. I have a broken bone in my right arm and two in the shoulder. I guess some German thought I was a good target.

Write and let me know all the news. Tell me how Kenny is getting along in the Army. Tell everyone hello and to write. I'll let you hear from me as often as possible. Please don't worry about me. I may be home for my birthday. — Love, Bob

April 27, 1945

Dear Mom and Dad:

I'm feeling pretty good today. I'm just a little nervous and restless, but I'll be okay before long. I'm getting so I can move my right arm a little and I can also move my legs. I seem to be improving every day, and there isn't any reason why I shouldn't be as good as new before long.

Send me something to read and something to eat. — Love, Bob

April 27, 1945

Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Dole:

I'm sure you know that Robert is unable to write so I tried to write him a note. He told me what to write. I know you are worrying

about Robert, but I wouldn't worry too much because there isn't any doubt in my mind at all but what he will be just as good a man when he gets well as he was before he was hurt.

Just thank God it wasn't any worse than it was. That's the way I feel about it. In case you want to know who I am, my name is John Booth of Bethany, Mo. Robert was my platoon leader. He is a fine fellow. I'll write again for him. (A sniper shot me in the foot. I can't walk very well, but it won't be long until I can.) — As always, John

May 23, 1945

Dear Mom and Dad:

I haven't written in a couple of weeks, primarily because I thought I'd be home by this time. I'm in a different hospital now and I should be going home soon. Am feeling much better than I was when my last letter was written. My legs are better and my left arm seems to be improving steadily.

The cast I'm in is none too comfortable but as soon as I reach home, it will be taken off. There is a possibility that I will be sent to Winter General Hospital in Topeka.

— Love, Bob
P. S. I don't know who wrote this.

The war in Europe ended May 8, 1945. On June 12, Dole was admitted to Winter General Hospital in Topeka. Shortly, the Doles arranged a leave for their son and brought him home on the train. His townspeople were there to see him borne down among them on a stretcher.

Dole was now 22, having been born in Russell on July 20, 1923, eldest of the four children of Doran R. and Bina Dole. Doran Dole ran a cream-and-egg business and sold feed and other rural sundries. Mrs. Dole sold Singer sewing machines and vacuum cleaners. The children sold Cloverine Salve and The Salina Journal, mowed lawns, and had chores. The proceeds helped to pay for their schoolbooks and clothing. In a place where constancy was a necessary virtue, Doran Dole gained a homey fame by missing one day of work in 40 years.

The boys were active in the Boy Scouts, the family active in the Methodist Church. All four children attended Russell Elementary School. Dole's third-grade teacher remembered him: "Bobby Dole was unforgettable. He had big, brown eyes — warm and sensitive. When I looked into the room, across the little faces, I was always aware of Bobby. He studied his lessons and he enjoyed coming up with the answers to questions. He stood by his desk like a little soldier."

Even in his youth there was a fidelity to duty. A family story recalls an occasion when Bina Dole was ill. "Dad was in charge of us kids," said Dole's sister, Gloria. "One morning he popped out of bed without looking at the clock and immediately went about waking everyone up. We protested, but Dad would hear none of that."

"Then, while we were sitting at the table waiting for breakfast — and none of us hungry — Dad sent Bob to the drugstore to get something for him."

"After Bob left, Dad finally looked at the clock and saw it was only 3 a.m. When Bob didn't come back right away, Dad sent the rest of us back to bed and went down to the drugstore. There was Bob, sitting in the darkened door of the drugstore half-asleep, determined to wait until it opened."

Dole went to work there at Dawson's Drug Store when he was 12. He worked after school, evenings, Saturdays, and Sundays after church. The Dawsons had three sons, all quick-witted and outgoing, and Dole recalled, "Many customers who traded there came just to be 'insulted' by the Dawson brothers. It was natural that I would pick up some of this." He bought the family a \$26 bicycle for \$2 and services to the store owner. It took a year to pay it off.

As he grew older he developed a passion for sports, and he trained hard. His work at the drugstore enabled him to meet the local doctors, and he developed an ambition for a medical career.

In high school he became president of Hi-Y and a member of the National Honor Society. His last summer in high school he worked for Kaw Pipeline Company, and his body hardened further. Before he left the drugstore he'd met the son of Kansas University's basketball coach, Phog Allen. Allen was told of the young man who ran everywhere he went, training all the time, lifting weights, doing calisthenics, winning letters three years running in football, basketball, and track, and making the all-conference teams.

Dole enrolled at The University of Kansas as a pre-medical student, played football and basketball, and in track nearly broke the indoor record for the quarter-mile. But there was a war, and Dole had already joined the reserves. Finally, he asked to be placed on active duty.

Now the strapping boy who had brought the trophies home to Russell was home again, and there were few who had the voice to give him welcome. He weighed 120 pounds, excluding his cast.

The "instrumentality of war" that broke him had entered his right shoulder, fracturing the clavicle, which is the collarbone, the scapula, which is the large shoulder



THIS PENCIL SKETCH is of 2nd Lt. Bob Dole in a hospital bed recuperating from war injuries received in the Po Valley of Italy on April 14, 1945. The sketch was made by a fellow patient. After languishing in hospitals for 39 months,

surgery was performed on Dole by a Chicago doctor. The community of Russell at the time raised \$1,800 to pay hospital and medical costs. The doctor donated his services.

der bone behind the collarbone, the humerus, which is the upper arm, and penetrated to the fourth cervical vertebra. The bony top of this vertebra was fractured, and the vertebra tilted out of line, shocking the spinal cord, paralyzing all four extremities, and taking away normal bowel and bladder functions.

Dole went back to Winter General with a few additional pounds and improved color. Soon he lay near death. His mother was told he might have a few hours to live. His temperature reached an improbable 108.7 degrees.

The loss of bladder function, notwithstanding catheterization, results in kidney infection and kidney stones: "Extensive workup was done and it was found that the right kidney was markedly infected and contained a large number of stones. This necessitated removal of the kidney on July 11, 1945. The patient had an uneventful recovery from his kidney condition. By September 1945, the patient had regained function of his bladder and bowels as well as function in both lower extremities with some improvement in the left upper extremity."

Autumn, and to be able to stand alone was a great achievement. Bina Dole had taken an apartment close by the hospital and helped him each day. "Bob had learned to walk as a baby when he was between 10 and 11 months old. At Winter General I watched a nurse get him up out of bed. He walked the same way — tentatively, but with the determination to learn."

He had begun to smoke, and she held his cigarettes for him because his arms didn't work. He was still given slight chance of recovery, and occasionally acknowledged this. And if he lived, what? "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."

By late fall he could take a few steps and move his left arm. He could manipulate his left hand a little. In November he was transferred to Percy Jones General Hospital in Battle Creek, Mich., away from his home and parents and friends. But his progress encouraged him to hope again.

Most of his time was spent on his back. When a patient is incapacitated, bedded for long periods, the blood slows in the body. This slowing leads to clotting.

Early on Dec. 21 he awoke with a savage pain in the left side of his chest. It was diagnosed as a pulmonary infarct — an obstruction in the lung. The obstruction was a blood clot. He was treated with dicumarol, an anti-clotting agent that made him, temporarily, hemophilic. And because he wanted to be told, the doctors admitted again that it was uncertain he would live.

The dicumarol was continued. There was no other treatment available at the time. For long periods Dole's body was packed with ice. The year ended, the days oozed into weeks, and the weeks saw January out and February come, and the physical skills Dole had sought to restore were sliding away again.

On Feb. 12 the dicumarol was discontinued, and on Feb. 13 there was a chill and the pain returned. The dicumarol was begun again along with penicillin, but on the 14th there was a second chill and coughing. The medication wasn't working anymore. The penicillin was not hitting all the cocci that threatened his life. His parents had come to Percy Jones, knowing that the doctors didn't know how to save their son.

There was a chance, however: An experimental drug called streptomycin. There was no guarantee that it would work and no real assurance what it might do. The Doles signed a release.

The streptomycin did work. On March 6, Dole was permitted to sit up in a chair for a few moments.

Now Dole started again. Each day he could sit up a little longer. Then he could stand. Finally, he walked. The ability honed back at Dawson's Drug Store — jibing, joking — came back more quickly than his other skills, and because he made the doctors and nurses laugh, it was thought that he might have a good effect on others. So they wheeled him around to a ward with men paralyzed from the waist down. They had heard of the streptomycin guinea pig; he was proof that you didn't have to die even if you were supposed to.

He laughed at himself and he laughed at them and they laughed at each other.

If Uncle Sam had things a little better organized he'd figure out how to dismantle us and put the good parts together. Throw the other junk away.

Yeah. Except everybody's got good heads. Too many heads and too many brains for them.

If I had a head as ugly as yours, I'd be glad to sacrifice it.

Listen to you guys. Two hogs arguing who's prettiest. . . .

How about running down the machine and get me some Luckies?

You go, my feet are tired.

Can't. They see me skipkin' down there they pull my disability and put me back on active duty. I am a paraplegic!

Shut up, I'm a Sosnowski.

I'd rather be a paraplegic. . . .

I'll tell you something, pal.

Yeah?

I am going to walk.

Keep saying it.

This war went on. Dole stayed in it. He made them laugh, lifted them up.

His industriousness reassured itself, and for a while he took up selling automobiles in the hospital. Oldsmobile had a specially equipped car with controls on the steering wheel. He hustled it with the paraplegics. He was not successful.

Inspiration comes and goes. Dole's spirit helped others, and so helped him, but the end was difficult to see and there were periods of despondence.

"It's strange what can happen to a man after he's been lying around a hospital for a couple of years," Dole says. "The realities of life seem to fade away. You lose your energy, you stop caring, it's too much trouble to do anything."

Sometimes you just want to lie there and let others wait on you.

"People who love you can help, though."

Each day in the hospital he went through the same therapy, the exercises to strengthen his legs, to strengthen his left arm, to restore as much articulation as possible to his hands, to learn to do things for himself again, to eat, to dress, to write.

In the wards at Percy Jones was a Dr. Bill Eilert, injured by a mortar blowback on Okinawa. Eilert had heard of a man named Kelikian in Chicago who performed the kind of surgery that might help restore Dole's right shoulder and arm, and thought Dole ought to see him.

Dr. Kelikian is an American immigrant. He came to America and enrolled at The University of Chicago while working as an elevator operator there. He went on to become one of the nation's leading neurosurgeons. His brother was killed in Italy. Kelikian agreed to operate on Dole for nothing. "I do what I can for the country," the doctor said, "both out of gratitude and out of respect. Dole epitomized America to me. He had the faith to endure. . . ."

Before the operations, Dole went home again to Russell.

This time he came standing up. The first day he got out his old track shoes and circled the block. Every day he worked to increase his speed. In his basement he set up a gym. His friends came to wonder up a gym. When he toppled over he got up by himself. He would have no help. Wherever he went he carried a rubber ball to squeeze his left hand back to strength, though he had almost no feeling in those fingers. His right hand still would not work properly. They cast a device in lead to fit his arm and fixed it with rubber bands to hold his fingers open, and covered it with felt from the pool hall to keep it from chafing. This help he accepted.

When his townspeople learned he was going to Chicago for operations to make his shoulder and arm work better, the Russell Veterans of Foreign Wars Post No. 6240 got up a fund drive to help pay his way, for even without Kelikian's fee, there were transportation and other costs to cover. One person gave \$100, another a nickel.

The first operation on his shoulder was done on June 3, 1947, another on Aug. 4, and the last on Nov. 5. Part of the scapula was removed, and muscles in Dole's neck were connected to his arm. The arm had been ankylosed, or fused, at the elbow, and the paralysis of nerves in the shoulder was relieved by the operation in Chicago. When Dr. Kelikian was finished with him, Dole was getting about 40 percent use of his right arm, and the doctor estimated that this should increase to 70 percent in time. No, he wouldn't play basketball again.

What he could do was still uncertain, but he had set his mind to one thing, and this he confided to his brother Ken. "I'm going to get those years back," he said.

Epilogue: Robert Dole went back to college, at The University of Arizona at Tucson, and then received a law degree in 1952 from Washington Municipal University in Topeka. He was elected to the Kansas House of Representatives in 1950, and was Russell County attorney until he was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1960. In 1968 he was elected to the United States Senate, and in 1976 he was the Republican candidate for vice president. Later he served as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee.

Editor's Note: One of the story ideas we talked about was which Washingtonians you would want or not want to be in a foxhole with during a battle. We finally dropped the project, partly because the long list of people we didn't want to be in a foxhole with included a lot of well-known writers, lawyers, and politicians, partly because it seemed so much easier to pick the pragmatists (the cowards) than the good guys, but mostly because it seemed too mean. One politician who never appeared on my good-guys list was Senator Robert Dole, who I never knew much about other than that he was a tough, successful politician. There are a fair number of such politicians in town, and some would sell their grandmothers for the right price. But after editing the article "The Faith to Endure," I'd now put Dole pretty near the top of my list of people to have around in time of real trouble. It's very easy to think of all Washington politicians as compromisers, opportunists, or worse. The Dole article is a good reminder that politicians are flesh-and-blood people. — Jack Limpert