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A HERO'S WELCOME

Russell shows where heart is for presidency

By LINDA MOWERY-DENNING
The Salina Journal

RUSSELL — It was an emotional moment for the hometown hero who 50 years ago Friday almost died on a rocky World War II battlefield in Italy.

The plaque on the limestone marker read: "Bob Dole: majority leader, U.S. Senate, charter member VFW Post 6240 Russell. Dedicated 50th anniversary of wound he sustained in WWII."

Beyond the marker were hundreds of people who over the years helped Bob Dole go from a shattered combat veteran to a candidate for the nation's highest office.

There was Henry Bender, holding a sign that identified him as a member of the Russell High School Class of 1941. That was Dole's class, about 100 strong, the one that plans to gather in town next year for its 55th reunion.

"He was a good old boy in high school, just one of us guys," Bender said. "He's still just Bob to me. That never will change."

Also in the crowd was Bub Dawson, whose father owned the local drugstore, the place where a young Bob Dole worked as a soda jerk. The two have been friends for years.

"Everywhere I look, I see someone who reminds me of one little chapter, one little phase of my life," Dole said. "We came home today because I wanted to say thank you. This is where it all started. This is where I was born. This is where I grew up."

This was the homecoming, the end of a week that started Monday in Topeka and included visits to 11 cities in 10 states before ending early Thursday night with the arrival of Dole and his wife, Elizabeth, at Hays Municipal Airport, about 30 minutes away.

If the candidate was tired from the breakneck pace of the week, he didn't show it in Russell, where townspeople staged a free pancake breakfast to welcome him home.

As Dole said in a short talk, his strength comes from the people, and there was no doubt who the people in the crowd of more than 2,000 supported this windy day in Russell.

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Dole: 'I know where to go home to'

► FROM PAGE 1

From the time he arrived, the talk everywhere was of Dole — from the restaurant where Dole staffers ate late Thursday to the corner convenience store where a huge American flag stands guard over Old Highway 40.

Other parts of town were spruced up for the visit. American flags flew at downtown intersections and in the yards of private homes near the VFW hall. Windows of businesses and houses were decorated with Bob Dole signs. They were joined by an Arlen Specter sign in the window of the headquarters of the Russell County Republican Committee. Specter, a U.S. senator from Pennsylvania and Republican candidate for president, also is a graduate of the local high school, but he was not in Russell as long as Dole, and he has not maintained the same

and five friends. They were out of school because it was Good Friday.

Also in attendance were Dole's sisters, Gloria Nelson and Norma Jean Steele, both of Russell.

About 48 members of the Dole family attended a dinner Thursday night, and another gathering was planned Friday.

Nelson said her brother was tired, but his Russell family and friends hoped to restore his energy by the time he leaves today for Washington, D.C.

After a quick breakfast, Dole was at the podium after being introduced by another longtime friend, Russ Townsley, former editor of the Russell Daily News.

Townsley gave Dole a small chest with more than \$7,000 inside. The box was symbolic of the cigar boxes residents stationed around town when Dole returned home from the war. The boxes

were used to collect pennies, dimes and nickels to pay for an operation on Dole's right shoulder, which had been seriously injured by German gunfire.

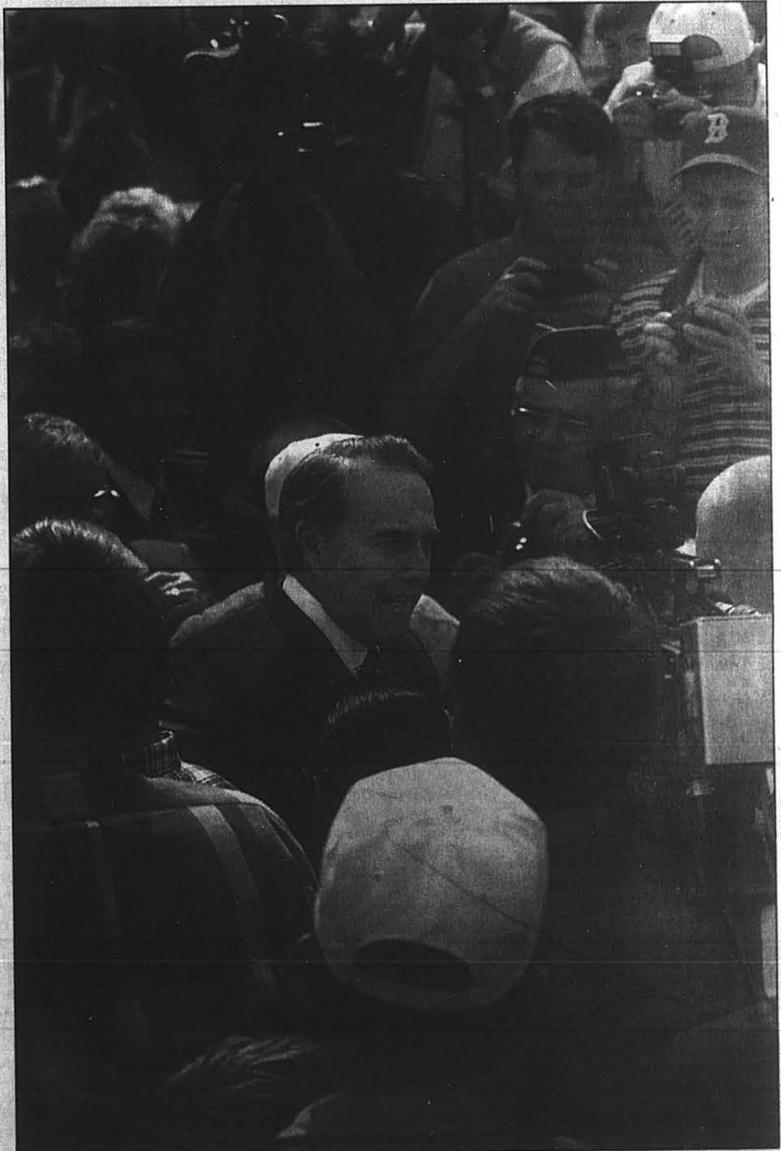
Peter Williams, Russell County attorney and a Republican, said Russell couldn't expect to match the fat wallets Dole found in New York and other states for the campaign. But almost everyone here has a Bob Dole story, he said, and they're ready to share them with the nation.

Williams, who was born in Austria, was adopted by a Russell County couple in 1956 with the help of Bob Dole, county attorney at the time.

These were the kinds of experiences Dole referred to Friday.

"I think I know almost everybody who is in this crowd. I look around, and I see people who have helped me in a lot of ways, in campaigns and other ways, and maybe a few people that I've helped along the way.

"I'm very excited to be home. I know where to go home to. I know where I belong. I grew up in a small town where everybody knew everybody, where we didn't lock our doors at night, where we knew if somebody had a problem



Photos by TOM DORSEY/Salina Journal

Sen. Bob Dole is swarmed by press and well wishers as he walks through the crowd after speaking at a pancake breakfast in Russell.

you'd try to help that person — just as they helped me a long time ago."

Dole also talked about his quest for the presidency.

"I'm going to work hard. I never give up, never give up, never give up. And it's not because of ambition, not because of some selfish ambition. It's because I love America."

Dole said he wasn't afraid to

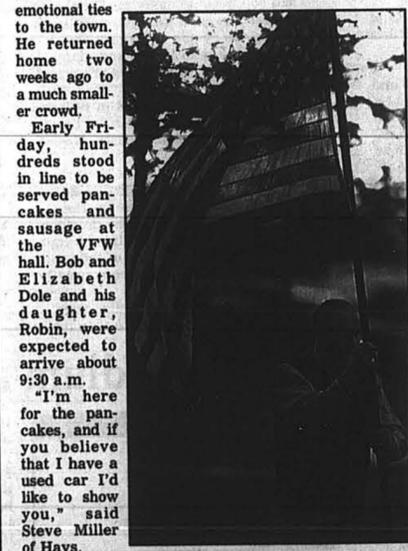
lead and to make the tough decisions. And, although no one can predict what might happen in the months before next year's election, he told supporters "it feels different this time around" — different from his failed campaigns in 1980 and 1988.

"This is another time. We had a political earthquake last November. There's another opportunity for leadership, and it just

seems to me that it's out there." It was a feeling shared by many in Friday's crowd. This town already is selling President Dole T-shirts.

And, while waiting for Dole to arrive at the pancake breakfast, his friend Townsley slipped while giving instructions to people standing near the door.

"As soon as the president, I mean Bob, passes," he said.



Bob Dawson sets an American flag in the front yard of his home near the Glenn VFW hall. Dawson's father owned the drugstore where Bob Dole worked.

World War II-era music blared from large speakers set up near a platform for Dole and his family. Later, the Russell High School band provided patriotic music.

Inside, Jim Kuper — "The Pancake Man" from Council Bluffs, Iowa — staged a show for the people passing in front of his grill. He flipped pancakes under his leg and high into the air before slapping them on a paper plate.

"Come on, folks. Keep the line coming," said the former farm equipment salesman. He turned to one of the many Russell volunteers at the breakfast: "I think we're going to have more people than we anticipated."

At one table sat Damian Morgenstern, a Russell sophomore,