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Dole turns negatives to positives

Candidate's age and war wound now are symbols of experience.

By JAKE THOMPSON
Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON — To many of those chowing down on pancakes Friday in Russell, Kan., Sen. Bob Dole looked like a Washington veteran hungry for the White House.

Others at the VFW hall were reminded of another kind of veteran, one returning home from World War II physically wrecked, right shoulder shattered, feet shuffling from nerve damage.

It is no accident, of course, that kick-off week of the Kansas Republican's presidential campaign ended exactly 50 years after the day that Nazi gunfire chopped him down on Hill 913 in Italy.

Instead of being defensive about Dole's age, the campaign has turned the issue inside out and emphasized his

sacrifice and experience as a leader. The strategy also offers a contrast to President Clinton's avoidance of Vietnam, as well as the service deferments of some of Dole's Republican rivals.

But it also invites barbs that can get personal.

Political cartoonist Garry Trudeau, who has portrayed Vice President Dan Quayle as a feather, Clinton as a waffle and House Speaker Newt Gingrich as a lighted bomb, turned his pen on Dole in

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War wound might attract some votes for Bob Dole

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a March 19 Doonesbury strip.

"Does my war wound stand in vivid contrast to the smooth untouched skin of a Bill Clinton or a Phil Gramm, say? You be the judge," asked the Dole conjured by Trudeau.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the candidate is penned to say, "please give a warm welcome to ... my old war wound."

In the cartoon, the wound responds, "Thank you, Bob. I'm proud to be a political asset."

Was that out of bounds? Dole thought so.

"I don't know if being wounded is a political asset," Dole told ABC's Sam Donaldson on "Prime Time Live" recently. "I'd be glad to trade Garry Trudeau. I think it was in poor taste, but everybody has to make a living."

Veterans organizations predictably were outraged.

"Mr. Trudeau makes his living with his hands," William M. Detweiler, national commander of the American Legion, wrote in a blistering letter to *The Washington Post*. "For him to belittle another man's loss of the use of his hand requires an insensitivity that defies description."

Trudeau responded with his own letter to *The Post*.

"Since it was Sen. Dole who has

chosen to showcase his military record in order to call into question the relative patriotic devotion of his rivals (just as many irate veterans have challenged mine), I believe commentary on his political strategy is both appropriate and fair."

Dole and his campaign contend the anniversary wasn't aimed to compare military service records.

The week was selected, according to Deputy Campaign Chairman Bill Lacy, because the Senate is in recess, a rare block of free time for the Senate majority leader.

But Lacy conceded, "I think the fact of Bob Dole having a record in combat is a plus."

Those who missed boot camp also include Lamar Alexander, the former education secretary, commentator Pat Buchanan, and House Speaker Newt Gingrich, whose name keeps coming up as a '96 possibility. Each received student or medical deferments.

But some other Republicans certain or likely to run in 1996 have some military experience. They include Indiana Sen. Richard Lugar, Navy; U.S. Rep. Bob Dornan of California, Air Force; California Gov. Pete Wilson, Marines; Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, Air Force.

Should Colin Powell decide to jump into politics, he would not



A monument in Russell, Kan., commemorates the day Bob Dole was wounded.

have to answer questions about military service.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of World War II to the 71-year-old Dole.

His service permanently disabled his arm, indelibly branded his psyche, and propelled him into law and then politics. In this campaign it comes up much more than in the past ones.

When he was on David Letterman's show, he introduced a man in the audience, 74-year-old Frank Carafa, the sergeant who pulled the wounded Dole back out of enemy fire.

The "Prime Time Live" segment included footage of Dole and Donaldson walking over the Italian hillside last year, talking about the war.

And Dole's announcement speech recalled that battlefield and the visit to the one in Normandy, where he said he saw why America needs a president who knows what made it great.

In Topeka, Dole also recalled learning the hard way in Russell to respect the "spirit of community that reaches out to those wounded in body or soul."

Campaigning Thursday in South Carolina, where he spoke to veterans at a Vietnam memorial, Dole was asked about the importance of military service in the race.

"Facts are facts," Dole said. "I think it's important. It's certainly made a difference in my life."

But how important Dole's service will be to voters is unclear.

Larry Sabato, a political scientist at the University of Virginia, said Baby Boomers alive during the turmoil of Vietnam will demand more of Dole than his modest Russell rearing and war hero medals.

"He has to demonstrate he's a great leader," Sabato said.

Steve Van Buskirk, a spokesman for the Veterans of Foreign Wars headquartered in Kansas City, said military service should be emphasized as a character issue.

"Object pacifists or those who are anti-war," he added, might be

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Marc Leepson, spokesman for the Viet Nam Veterans Association.

turned off.

Marc Leepson thought it fair game for Trudeau to raise the issue. The Viet Nam Veterans Association spokesman, however, was not ruffled by Dole mentioning his military career.

"Dole is sort of an artifact," Leepson said, "the last one of his generation fighting what some called a 'good war.'"

"It doesn't strike me that he's pushing it too much," he added.

Indeed, a visit recently to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington illustrated the same conflicted feelings exist about the issue.

T.F. Stimson, a burly, gruff retired Army general from Laramie, Wyo., stood at one end with members of his tour group. To Stimson, who also served in Europe, Dole's war service is a badge of honor.

"This is the war Bill Clinton should have served in," Stimson growled, waving toward the wall.

"And this is the war he avoided. In my generation we didn't question, we went. We didn't turn tail, we faced it."

Nearby Ron Lyon of Rawlins, Wyo., who served in Korea in the early 1950s, made a counterpoint.

"I don't think it matters as much as it used to," Lyon said. "As we go down the road we're going to run out of people who were veterans. What's important is if a president is compassionate, concerned for his fellow man and is honest."

Dole's war service would make a difference to Rick Pack, 37, an Ohio welder, if he doesn't exploit it.

"What would America be without someone willing to lay down their life for it? Isn't that the supreme sacrifice?" said Pack, training a video camera on the wall.

"But if he's going to use it as a stepping stone, it would be just as bad as not serving at all."

Four years is too quick for balancing U.S. budget, Dole says

Kansas responds to pledge by Phil Gramm to achieve goal in first presidential term.

By STEVE KRASKE
Political Correspondent

RUSSELL, Kan. — Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole refused on Saturday to promise a balanced budget by the end of a first term as president, saying such a vow by rival Republican Phil Gramm is unrealistic.

Dole, who made the comment during a taping of NBC's "Meet the Press" program in his hometown, said he would need more than four years. He suggested he could do the job in seven years.

"I don't believe the American people could stand ... restrained growth of that much," Dole said

about Gramm's four-year pledge.

"We have to be realistic. We can't go out and make statements that may attract a few votes. You've got to tell people the truth. It's going to be tough enough to cut it in seven years."

Gramm of Texas, considered by some to be Dole's chief opponent for the nomination, has said that he would not seek a second term if he could not achieve a balanced budget in his first term.

In the Kansas City area, Meet the Press will air at 8 a.m. today on Channel 41.

The taping in Russell Saturday was the payoff of a televised bet that Dole, the Senate majority

leader, won with "Meet the Press" host Tim Russert on the 1993 Super Bowl.

Russert, a native of Buffalo, N.Y., told Dole he'd have to go to Buffalo if the Bills won. Dole took Dallas on the premise that Russert would take his show to Russell if the Cowboys triumphed.

Dallas won.

"It took 27 months, but I kept my word. I'm in Russell," Russert told about 600 residents before the taping began at Ruppenthal Middle School. Dole, 71, attended classes there when Ruppenthal was the town's high school.

The show, taped in conjunction with Dole's homecoming Friday at the end of his five-day campaign announcement tour, marked Dole's 53rd appearance on "Meet the Press," a record.

Former Vice President Hubert Humphrey is next with 25.

Asked to name examples of movies or television shows that poison the minds of America's youth, an issue Dole raised last week, the senator cited "Priest," a new movie that depicts a gay Roman Catholic clergyman, an alcoholic priest and a third priest involved sexually with a woman.

"It gives the impression that all Catholic priests are like these," Dole said. "That's what we're concerned about."

He said he would not advocate censorship of such releases, but as president he "would encourage consumers to turn off their TV sets and not patronize these movies."

"If we're not willing as president of the United States to try to

shame people into not showing some of these things on TV or on the screen, then we make a big mistake," Dole said.

He refused to cite other television shows or movies that he found objectionable.

On another matter, Dole said former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's recent statement that America's involvement in the Vietnam War was a tragic mistake came too late to help families who lost loved ones in the war.

He said McNamara's comments in his new book do not vindicate President Clinton's avoidance of military service, as the president suggested Friday.

"I think that would be a stretch," Dole said. "I mean, some book comes out and it takes him off the hook? I'm not going to

raise military service in the campaign, and I think indirectly he is. I think he'd be better not to say anything."

On other matters, Dole said he: ■ Would not back a constitutional amendment as president to ban abortion. "There may be other ways we can approach it," Dole said.

■ Would release psychological, mental and physical medical records during the campaign and if he becomes president.

■ Would not select a vice presidential running mate before the primaries begin early next year.

■ Opposed repeal of the Brady gun-control law that provides for a waiting period.

■ Has not determined what role his wife, Elizabeth, would play in his administration.

Dole tapes news show in Russell

Senator labels as 'mistake' his remark about Clinton

By The Associated Press

RUSSELL — Questioning whether Bill Clinton is a "real president" was a mistake although the remark was made in jest, Sen. Bob Dole said Saturday during the taping of a television news show.

"I must say if (I could) I would go back and state that differently. I made a mistake. I shouldn't have said that," Dole said during the taping of "Meet the Press," NBC's Sunday news show. "I was smiling, though."

Dole also classified as "mistakes" comments made during past campaigns, including his statements that Democrats were responsible for most wars involving the United States and that former President Bush lied about Dole's record during the 1988 presidential primary campaign.

After the balanced budget amendment failed in the Senate last month, Dole said Clinton had abdicated his responsibility in not supporting it. Dole said the outcome might have been different "if we had a real president" in the White House.

Dole attributed his acerbic wit to his father and to growing up in Russell.

"I learned a lot of wisecracks from my dad, and I liked to try them out," he said.

"I think people in Russell, Kansas, when they think something is inaccurate, they ought to say so. We're fairly blunt out here. If I've only made three mistakes in my life, at my age, you know I have a pretty good record."

Host Tim Russert asked Dole if he can "keep his cool" during the race, a reference to remarks Dole's staff has made about one of the senator's weaknesses.

"Oh yeah, I'm cool," Dole said.

His response brought down the house in the packed 600-seat auditorium in Ruppenthal Middle School near downtown. It was the city's high school until 1962; Dole graduated from it in 1941.

The show was being taped in Russell because of a bet between Dole and Russert. Dole bet Dallas would beat Buffalo in the 1993 Super Bowl. The Cowboys won, and "Meet the Press" went on the road for the first time in the 3 1/2 years Russert has been the host of the show.

Dole concluded his formal declaration tour Friday and spent the night for the taping. Tickets to the show were distributed to townspeople. Russert and his panelists, David Broder of the Washington Post and Lisa Myers of NBC News, answered questions from the crowd after Dole was finished.

Residents of Russell are "the nicest people we've ever worked with," Russert said.

On campaign topics, Dole said: ■ He is in "good health with a lot of stamina, a lot of energy," and will make public his medical records. But he said he won't take a pledge to serve just one term — he would be 77 at the end of a first term — because that would make him a lame-duck president from the day he was sworn in.

■ He won't select a vice presidential running mate before he secures the GOP nomination, because "if you have a running mate out there you're going to be having two people being shot at by the press."

■ He didn't mention abortion during his announcement tour last week because it is a divisive issue and, "I don't want to drive people away from the Republican Party." He said he favors regulating abortion by law rather than by adopting a constitutional amendment.

Bee buzzing around Bob, but will he be stung like Harry?

Herewith, it is hoped, are some notable notes and quotable quotes, starting with some advice from Harry



Dick Snider

This morning

"The ruination of more good legislative workers is brought about by that presidential bee than any other one thing. I can name you half a dozen

fellows in the United States Senate who have been ruined by just having the bee fly close to them. I have no further political ambition..."

■ One of the sad things about the advent of spring is that it marks the end of the regular chili season. With each late cold snap, real chili lovers get the urge to whip up a batch, but before they can turn the urge into action, warm weather returns. And, it's a long time until next season.

■ Now that the Dole announcement has stirred the campaign juices of true followers, let's hear a story from the time Gene Talmadge was running for governor of Georgia. In a rural area he happened on an acquaintance who owned a pickup truck.

Talmadge told the man that if he'd drive around and campaign for him, he'd give him a job when he got elected governor. The man just about wore out his truck, going everywhere, nailing up signs and

handing out fliers.

When Talmadge was elected, the man drove to Atlanta to claim his job. Talmadge told him, "I know I told you I'd give you a job if you helped me, and I know you did, but I ain't got no job for you. I just told you a lie, that's all."

The man drove home and told his friends, "I didn't get the job, but I'll tell you one thing. Gene Talmadge will sure tell you the straight truth."

■ Not long ago I wrote a column about the poem, "Casey At the Bat," and you may recall that it ended with the lines, "But there is no joy in Mudville; Mighty Casey has struck out." That literary classic is more than 100 years old.

Much newer is a sequel, called "Casey's Revenge." Our hero is in the same crucial setting: At bat in the bottom of the ninth, two on base and two outs, and Mudville trailing by two runs. This time he doesn't strike out. The poem ends, "Five

thousand voices shouted, five thousand threw a fit, but no one ever found the ball that Mighty Casey hit."

■ There is a report the U.S. Postal Service has fired employee Bruce Henry and rejected the last of his 200 complaints. Henry contended that a female employee's partly unbuttoned blouse was a distraction to other workers, resulting in mistakes in sorting the mail.

So that's what's been causing it.

■ When Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles launched his plan to get rid of thousands of the state's unnecessary bureaucratic rules, he asked for suggestions. This one came from transportation secretary Ben Watters:

"A little over 1,000 years ago, Alexander the Great came to the city of Phrygia and saw the impossibly complex knot tied by King Gordius."

"Learning of the legend that gave the rule of Asia Minor to anyone

who could untie the knot, Alexander drew his sword, sliced the knot in half and went on to rule not only Asia Minor but all the known world. Hence, the classic example of proper rule reform."

■ Finally, some real news has come out of Los Angeles, eluding the blanket coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial. This is big-time stuff.

You surely are aware that the last two credits listed at the start of a movie are the producer and the director, indicating they're the two most important people behind the film. That will change. Soon, the writer or writers will be listed next to last, with the producers being bumped up into the pack somewhere.

The Writers Guild recently

engineering this in an agreement with the studios. The producers are screaming foul.

If that's not important, what is? ■ Dave Anderson of the New York Times recalls that when Gil Hodges was manager of the Mets he was a stern leader.

One day he noticed Cleon Jones was not on the field for batting practice. Hodges stormed into the clubhouse and told Jones, "That'll cost you \$1,000."

"That doesn't bother me," said Jones.

"Now it's \$2,000," said Hodges. "Let me know when I get to a number that bothers you."

■ When somebody says, "It's all downhill from here," is that good or bad?