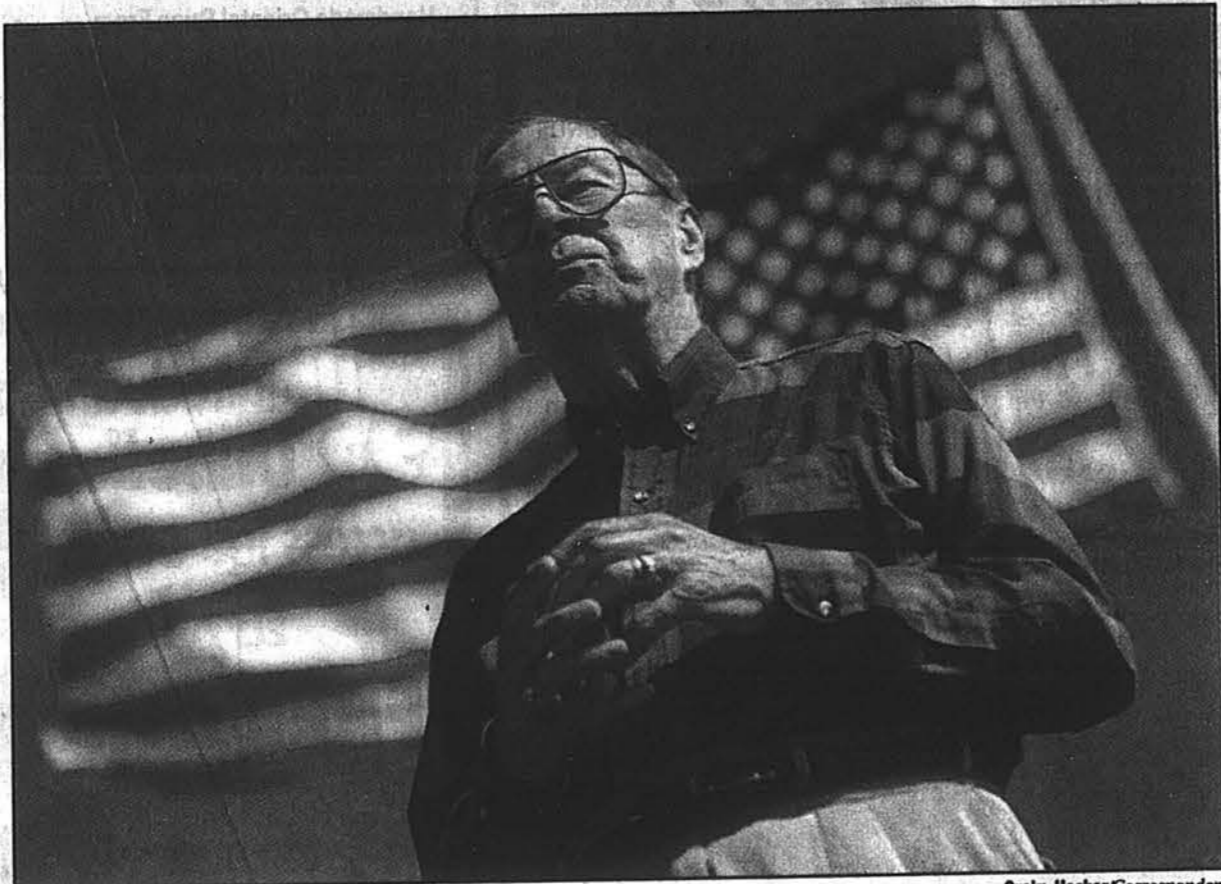


Russell

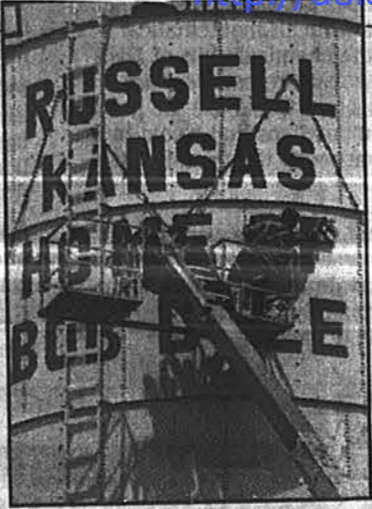
Its character runs deep

"Anybody that grew up in this era, during the dust storms, during the Depression, during World War II, they were forged in a pretty good crucible, you know it?"

G.B. "Bub" Dawson, 78, retired drug store owner



Craig Hatcher/Correspondent



Daniel Pickens shines up the lettering on a downtown grain elevator proclaiming Russell as the home of Bob Dole.

By Mark Weaver
The Wichita Eagle

RUSSELL — Ask Dean C. Banker what makes the people from his hometown of Russell so special, and he'll tell you it was the tough times they all endured. "It was the adversity that, I think, gave us some strength," Banker said. There was plenty of that to be sure in Russell, the north central Kansas plains

town that was the childhood home to two Republican presidential candidates, Arien Specter and Bob Dole.

The Great Depression. The Dust Bowl. World Wars I and II. Oil boom and, eventually, bust.

But the hard times are only half the story. They jostle for space in Russell's collective memory with those other tales of small-town life. Precarious downhill rides clinging to the inside of a truck tire. Mock battles with homemade rubber band

guns. Hollywood cowboy Tex Ritter on the bill at the Dream Theater's Saturday afternoon matinee. The rope swing on the cottonwood tree leaning over the pool at the city power plant.

And the squat, wooden tanks next to the oil well pumping jacks in the wheat fields and pastures outside of town. The water in the tanks 12 feet deep and warm

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Wichita Eagle

SATURDAY

April 15, 1995

Russell turns out for hometown hero

By Tom Webb

Eagle Washington bureau

RUSSELL — Exactly 50 years after a Nazi machine gun nearly ended his life, Sen. Bob Dole on Friday made a sentimental journey to the Kansas hometown that saved his wounds and launched his remarkable political career.

"We came home today because I wanted to say thank you," the Kansas Republican told about 2,000 friends and supporters gathered outside Russell VFW Post 6240. "This is where it all started. This is where I was born."

Earlier this week in Topeka, Dole, 71, declared his third run for the presidency.

Yet unlike in 1980 and 1988, Dole opted not to announce his candidacy in Russell, instead choosing to return on the more personal and painful anniversary of his wounding in World War II. On April 14, 1945, as U.S. troops advanced through Italy, Dole was hit by Ger-

man fire and permanently disabled.

Anniversary or not, Dole on Friday displayed his usual reticence to speak about that struggle. On other occasions he has wept when the memories became too personal. This time he kept his emotions at a distance, with no tears.

Still, the whole town of Russell seemed happy to step in, providing fond anecdotes and small-town pageantry in great abundance. A few friends even remembered a moment nearly five decades ago, when young Lt. Robert Dole returned home from a veterans hospital, emaciated and permanently crippled.

"When I saw him come back, I was just shocked at his physical condition," remembers classmate Adolph Reisig, 72. "I was appalled. ... But he wasn't a quitter. He abso-

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Craig Hatcher/Correspondent

Sen. Bob Dole greets Theresa Frazier of Russell and other supporters after speaking outside Russell VFW Post 6240 on Friday.

DOLE

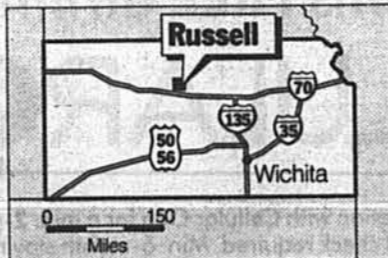
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lutely wanted to improve his physical condition."

Other Russell friends told of Dole's long rehabilitation in the 1940s, his entry into politics in the 1950s, and his election to Congress in 1960. Those anecdotes also showed a sweeping passage of time — as Dole's classmates and friends are now retired and in their 70s. Even the Dole campaign girls of the 1960s, christened "Dolls for Dole" in that pre-feminist era, are now grandmothers with white hair and their own litany of health problems.

At a community-wide pancake breakfast at the VFW hall, Bob and Elizabeth Dole heard the oft-told story of how in 1947 the people of Russell put dimes and quarters and dollars into a cigar box, \$1,800 in all, so Dole could have special reconstructive surgery on his withered right arm and shoulder.

Friday, the cigar box theme was back, this time carrying \$7,000 in contributions from Russell residents to the Dole for President campaign.



And there were the usual campaign trappings, with speeches and bands and balloons. A plaque was unveiled. The mayor announced the naming of Bob Dole Drive. Then Dole, wrapping up a weeklong presidential announcement tour, spoke.

"I grew up in a small town ... where we knew if somebody had a problem, you'd tried to help that person with the problem, just as they helped me a long time ago. And when you renew somebody's life possibilities, then I think in turn we have an obligation to do what we can to make a difference."

The day's pageantry, however, was truly provided by residents of this windy, high plains community of 4,600 — a panorama of small-town America eagerly captured by

Dole for President cameras and two dozen visiting TV crews.

There were energetic young children and proud old soldiers, farmers wearing seed caps and elderly women wearing scarves in the relentless south wind. There were giggling cheerleaders in pleated skirts, and Boy Scout Troop 118 in khaki uniforms. There were trombone players in blue uniforms, Chamber of Commerce officials in scarlet blazers, and college Young Republicans in dark suits. And everywhere, there were Dole buttons, Dole signs, even Dole dresses.

One dress belonged to Lorene Hardin, a lifelong Dole family friend who remembers when her uncle, in the 1950s, told the family to become Republicans.

"My family were all Democrats, and we all had to change because he said there's a young man that's going to go a long way," she said.

This time, after decades of waiting, she thinks that once-young man's moment has finally arrived.

"I have a lot of friends who are Democrats, and they're all going to work for him," she said. "He's a good fella, truly."



Jeff Tuttle/The Wichita Eagle

Bob and Elizabeth Dole greet the crowd Friday as the senator wraps up his weeklong presidential announcement tour with a speech in his hometown of Russell.