

Bob Dole

To look at Senator Robert (Bob) Dole, you would see a man that has given of himself to his country more than many others. You would see the results of a shattering war wound and the endurance he mustered to recover from being paralyzed from the neck down for a time. Many people who rise to leadership in politics come from well-to-do families and seem to have all the breaks. But to study his life is to see a man who came from humble beginnings, faced economic and physical hardship, and yet never gave up.

Born to a working class family in western Kansas, Bob Dole found out at an early age what it meant to earn a living. He worked at various jobs young boys in the Midwest were accustomed to: paper routes, deliveries, washing cars, etc. The Great Depression hit the little town of Russell, Kansas hard as it did all over America. Bob's father, who ran a creamery business, creatively moved his family to the basement of their small house and rented out the floors above them to make more money for the struggling family. His mother sold sewing machines and gave sewing lessons. At age 12, Bob got a job in a local drugstore (a position that would come back to help him in years to come).

Bob always felt knit to the local community of Russell. "Anyone who wants to understand me must first understand Russell, Kansas. It is my home, where my roots lie, and a constant source of strength," he says in his book, *Unlimited Partners*, co-authored with his wife, Senator Elizabeth Dole. When WWII broke out Bob was eager to serve the people of Russell, by serving his country. He joined the US Army in 1942 and served in the 10th Mountain Division.

It was in April, 1945 in the hills of Italy, fighting the Nazis that Bob would meet with the defining test of his life. While attempting to assist a wounded member of his platoon, he was hit in the back by Nazi machine gun fire. The wound left him paralyzed and shattered his left shoulder. Medics gave him morphine as he lay on the Italian ground for over 9 hours waiting to be evacuated to a hospital. The gun fire had left him paralyzed from the neck down and his right arm was unrecognizable. He was not expected to live and most thought he would soon be dead. After undergoing kidney surgery his outlook seemed grim. He lay in a hospital bed in Michigan and there he found the strength to recover. He realized that laughter was his best medicine and that God still had plans for him. His faith was sustaining him.

The people of Russell hadn't forgotten him either. They placed a cigar box in the old drugstore Bob had worked in as a boy and collected over \$1800 in hospital bills. A surgeon volunteered to operate on Bob for no fee and through therapy he was able to regain his strength. Although medicine couldn't restore the full use of the right arm shattered by the Nazi machine gun, he taught himself to write with his left hand. He has kept the cigar box with him to this day as a reminder of the love of the people of Russell.

Bob knew that with his extensive damage, he would never be able to fulfill his dream of becoming a doctor, but he decided to give back to the people of Russell by serving them in the state senate. He was elected in 1951. In 1960 he was elected to Congress by a narrow margin of less than 1000 votes. He was elected President of the Freshman class of congress and served four terms.

In 1968 Bob ran for the United States Senate seat being vacated by Senator Frank Carlson. He served 5 terms and was elected Senate Majority Leader in 1984 and 1994 by his Republican colleagues. He served as Republican National Committee Chairman and ran for Vice President with President Gerald Ford in 1976. Although they were defeated, Bob continues to lead the Senate with his natural abilities.

In 1996 he ran against President Clinton for the Presidency. Although he failed in his bid for the White House, he won the admiration of millions of Americans. Since leaving public office he was worked for veterans recognition and gained popularity through the media for his humor. Some remark that his relaxed demeanor is refreshing in a day of political upheaval. As the husband of former Senator Elizabeth Dole, he speaks and works tirelessly for the International Commission on Missing Persons, the National WWII Memorial and the Republican Party. He appears in serious television forums and humorous situations in the media. He has written two books on political humor as well as the previously mentioned co-autobiography.

One has to admit, whether you agree with his political beliefs or not, that he has truly overcome obstacles to become a great leader. He has led a life that inspires many who have come from humble backgrounds or had physical infirmities. Presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award in the US government in 1996, it reads, in part, "Overcoming his own adversity, he rose to become a champion for the disabled and America's farmers, for preserving Social Security and promoting fiscal responsibility, and for strengthening our global leadership for freedom, peace, and prosperity."

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