

Armistice Day Blizzard

Story by Wayne Eateringer
with assistance from
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Much has been written about the ‘Blizzard of ‘49’ and documented by stories and photos in newspapers and books. A not so well-known blizzard took place in the Midwest region of the United States on November 11 (Armistice Day) and November 12, 1940. Known now as the Armistice Day Blizzard (or the Armistice Day storm), the intense early-season “panhandle hook” winter storm cut a 1,000-mile-wide (1600km) swath through the middle of the country from Kansas to Michigan.

This is a local story of Byron Eateringer’s father, Ralph Eateringer, who rode horseback to rescue B.F. Carter and Ida Celesky on the old Thedford to Brownlee road during the Armistice Day blizzard, November 11, 1940.

The following is Byron’s recollection of what happened.

The morning was foggy and maybe a little misty, but no one was suspecting a blizzard. I was excited because Higginses, Harry, Mattie and the kids, were coming for dinner. Earlier, Dad and Mike, who was the oldest of the Higgins boys, went over east to Fred’s duck hunting.

B.F. Carter was working for one of the stations in Thedford hauling gas. He and Ida were driving an old gas truck heading to Brownlee to have dinner with the Abe Carters when B.F. got stuck in the sand killing the engine and then couldn’t get it started. They were about five miles north of Lloyd Hamiltons and about six miles south of Eateringers. By that time it was beginning to snow and B.F. and Ida weren’t prepared for winter weather. She was wearing a dress with high

heels and he had on slacks and dress shoes. No winter clothing at all.

In the meantime, Dad and Mike had come home from hunting and everyone had dinner. Dad must have begun to worry about the weather because there were no horses in the corral, so he had Mike, once he got home, ride his Shetland pony (Goldie) down and run our horses in.

Fortunately, men working for Matt Shanley, who had been delivering cattle to Thedford, were riding horseback to the Shanley ranch near Brownlee and saw them stranded. Once home, they were able to get word to Abe Carter, who then headed south in his truck, but was only able to get to our place because it had snowed so much. Abe helped Dad put chains on our car, but it had snowed so much so fast they weren’t able to get far.

It was then Dad started preparing to rescue them horseback. He saddled Brownie and Cookie. Brownie was a big horse with a lot of ambition. Dad hunted coyotes all over the country on him and he could really cover the ground. Cookie was smaller, but had a lot of go. I remember Dad stopping by the house to get a gunny sack full of warm clothes. By this time it was dark and really storming. No one, but Dad, could have made it down there horseback in the dark without getting turned around. He had an unusual ability that way. He would very seldom get disoriented.

Once he found them, he got inside the cab with the clothing. B.F. had been outside tinkering with the truck trying to make it run and had gotten himself wet and cold.

“B.F. was so cold he didn’t know where he was,”

Dad said. “I had to get the wet clothes off him and dry ones on so he could have a chance to warm up.”

Ida had stayed dry, but she still had to pull clothes on over her dress. “I was handing clothes to her, but she told me she thought she’d be fine. I told her if she didn’t put them on she would freeze to death. So she did.”

Dad had to take them south to the Lloyd Hamilton ranch because it was closer and down wind.

“I had quite a time getting them both mounted. Also I was having to hold on to B.F. because he wasn’t doing so good. It was really storming and of course the horses were wanting to go home and I was having trouble getting Brownie to head south.”

Brownie had spent several nights at Hamiltons because of overnighting cattle there during ship

ping and finally he figured out where Dad wanted him to go and took off marching south.

“Things were pretty good then, although there were places the snow was so deep the horses were having to lunge and there were a couple wire gates closed across the road. We were lucky not to get tangled up.”

The last place Brownie stopped was Hamilton’s barn door.

“B.F. sure was cold, took him a long time to get thawed out. When I headed home the next morning the sun was out, but it was three below zero, and the wind was still blowing.”

Needless to say, B.F. and Ida wouldn’t have lived through the night. As a side note, B.F. had worked for the Eateringers during the 1930’s, and he and Ralph were good friends. It’s a pretty safe



The 1957-1958 Thomas County officials and courthouse personnel. Standing, l-r: Sheriff Cecil Avery, Commissioners B.F. Carter, Gerald Finney and Lester Harris, Clerk Fred Arnhoit, Custodian Elza Parker, and Attorney Joe Divis. Seated, l-r: Welfare Services Opal Witt, County School Superintendent Marietta Day, Treasurer Emma Smalljohn and Judge Clarence McMillan.

20th century. Survivors describe the cold as so severe that it was difficult to breathe. A total of 146 deaths were blamed on the storm.

The U.S. Weather Bureau was criticized that it failed to predict the huge blizzard and officials released a statement that they were aware that the storm was coming, but wrong about its strength and scope.

Several references were made about the Armistice Day Blizzard in Nebraska including train delays, no school in several districts, cars stuck and people walking to the next home and staying overnight. One man went on home on horseback and came back Monday for his family. Halsey was without electric power for 30 hours with 10 feet high drifts, sales were

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Knights & Lady Knights MNAC Champs



BRIDGET LICKING

Members of the 2023 MNAC Champion Sandhills-Thedford Lady Knights are, back row, l-r: Coach Heyden holding Berkley Anderson, Grace Johnston, Lindsey McIntosh, Katen Licking, Whitley Rasmussen, Laney Dahlberg, Jaylen Dimmitt, Charlise Teahon, Arena Fetty, Dayle Haake, Shaylee Milleson, Coach Trosper and Coach Anderson with Baylor. Front row, l-r: Anna Clark, Hayley Dimmitt, Cora Martindale, Karley Haake and Kallan Cox.

The Sandhills-Thedford Knights and Lady Knights both clinched the 2023 Mid-Nebraska Activities Conference Basketball titles.

The Sandhills-Thedford Knights upset the #1 seeded South Loup Bobcats 50-39 to bring home the Championship trophy.

Complete results from the boy’s side of the brackets are:

Round 1, Monday, Janu-

ary 22 - Game #1: #4 Mullen lost to #5 Sandhills Valley, 33-35; Game #2: #1 South Loup defeated #8 Brady, 66-38; Game #3: #3 Twin Loup defeated #6 Anselmo/Merna; Game #4: #2 Sandhills/Thedford defeated #7 Arthur County 65-32.

Semi-Finals, Thursday, January 25 - Game #5: Sandhills/Thedford defeated Twin/Loup, 53-39; South Loup, defeated

Sandhills Valley, 55-33 Consolation Bracket results from Friday, January 26 - Arthur County defeated Brady, 49-36; Anselmo/Merna defeated Mullen, 42-22.

On Saturday, January 27 the top four teams met at Broken Bow High School. Sandhills Valley defeated Twin Loup, 50-36 to take the third place trophy and Sandhills/Thedford defeated South Loup 50-39 for the Championship.



BRIDGET LICKING

Members of the 2023 MNAC Champion Sandhills-Thedford Knights are, back row, l-r: Coach Christen, Caleb Furrow, Maurice Robinson, Brady Dahlberg, Kyle Cox, Ross Martindale, Brady Haake, Tate Johnston, Aydyn Hall, Henry Dahlberg, Coach Martin and Coach Bradley. Front row, l-r: Dom Rowse, Quinton Marshall, Thatcher Teahon, Brandon Goshorn, and Carter Anderson.

The Lady Knights went into the tournament in the #1 seed and defeated the Brady Lady Eagles 62-21.

Complete results from the girl’s side of the bracket are:

Round 1, Tuesday, January 23 - Game #1: #5 Anselmo-Merna defeated #4 Twin Loup 66-31; Game #2: #1 Sandhills/Thedford defeated #8 Sandhills Valley, 61-12; Game #3: #3

Arthur County defeated #6 Mullen, 34-29; Game #4 - #2 Brady Defeated #7 South Loup 41-27.

Semi-Finals, Thursday, January 25 - Game #5: Brady defeated Arthur County, 32-30; Game #6: Sandhills/Thedford defeated Anselmo/Merna, 55-37; Brady defeated Arthur County, 32-30.

Consolation Brackets were played on Friday, January 26 and South Loup defeated Sandhills

Valley 58-28 and Mullen won over Twin Loup, 51-36.

The top four teams were at Broken Bow High School on Saturday, January 27 to crown a champion. Anselmo/Merna defeated Arthur County for third place by the score of 47-31. The Sandhills/Thedford Lady Knights routed the Brady Lady Eagles 62-21 to win the championship.