

Veteran, writer Van Blaricom leaves indelible mark on Wallowa County

By Elane Dickenson
For the Chieftain

When E.H. “Van” Van Blaricom died at the age of 96 this month, Wallowa County not only lost a man who was an outspoken community leader for many years, but also lost one of its last survivors of World War II.

Van as he was widely known was a rancher, conservative voice, conservationist, bird watcher, avid outdoorsman, Wallowa County Chieftain columnist and KWVR radio commentator.

He considered his war experience the defining time in his life.

“I was tested and I passed,” he said in a Chieftain interview when he was 89.

He was 20 when he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, fueled by patriotism that only grew stronger with his war experience, which he described as “short but violent.”

He survived combat in three major battles in the Pacific before being seriously wounded by a grenade on Guadalcanal in December 1942.

He didn’t let losing much of his right hand in combat slow him down in his long and productive life. He felt very fortunate to come home to marry Betty, the sweetheart he had left behind. She preceded him in death in 2014 after 71 years of marriage.

They had already raised their four daughters when they moved from a dairy farming operation in Pasco, Wash., to Wallowa County, where he rapidly carved a deep niche for himself as a cattle rancher on an upper Prairie Creek ranch.

Janie Tippett of Lower Prairie Creek knew Van and Betty Van Blaricom well for many years.

“Van was very kind, a good guy. He had ideas that not



E.H. “Van” Van Blaricom

“He was intensely interested in the world, and said he was never going to quit writing, learning or living life no matter how old he was. He was quite a guy.”

— Janie Tippett

everyone agreed with, but he practiced what he preached and was a true American,” she said.

She remembered the time 30 or so years ago when she was taking her 4-H club snow camping on the east moraine, and Van volunteered to haul all their gear over waist deep snow to their camping spot in his snowmobile. By morning, it was raining, and Van got stuck in the snow trying to retrieve the group and burned out his snowmobile motor.

“He loved the outdoors, hiking, the wilderness. He loved birds, and he had a zest for life,” Tippett said.

In recent years when she visited Van at Alpine House, he was always on his typewriter surrounded by books.

being named Grassman of the Year by the Stockgrowers and Rotarian of the Year.

Van helped spearhead the Prairie Creek Riparian Project along Highway 82 just east of Enterprise, which earned the International Rotary Preserve Planet Earth Award.

Years earlier Van was active in a local “adopt a stream” program and had earned accolades for organizing a habitat development project at a Zumwalt area pond.

One of the reasons Van moved to Wallowa County was his love of fishing, hunting and mountain climbing. Among his achievements was finding an 87-foot circumference whitebark pine tree up McCully Basin, designated the state’s largest.

On his 80th birthday, he climbed the Matterhorn, one of the Wallowa’s highest peaks.

In his popular long-time Chieftain column “The Nature of Things,” and later in his radio commentary, “Think About It,” Van said he tried to be the voice of the Depression-era babies of Wallowa County.

He made no apologies about being a conservative, but also claimed equal rights as a conservationist.

His last columns for the Chieftain, which he wrote until about a year ago, “Bird Watching,” was focused on birds and their habits.

During a 2010 interview with the Chieftain, Van pointed out that WWII veterans were then dying at the rate of 1,000 a day and it was important to remember the sacrifices they made to preserve freedom.

“I was a young man when the last Civil War veteran died, and in a few years, all of us World War II veterans will be gone,” he said.

Van Van Blaricom outlived most of his WWII comrades and left an indelible mark on Wallowa County.



Kathleen Ellyn/Chieftain

Chief Joel Fish goes over paperwork with Enterprise Police Officer Cody Billings. Now that Billings has graduated from the police academy, the ranks of Enterprise PD are at full force.

Billman completes police training

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

Enterprise Police Officer Cody M. Billman is on the job in Enterprise, having graduated with the 374th Basic Police Class of the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training Feb. 16.

Billman, along with 39 other officers and deputies, entered class last October. The 16-week course includes dozens of training areas, such as survival skills, firearms, emergency vehicle operations, ethics, cultural diversity, problem solving, community policing, elder abuse, drug recognition and dozens of other subjects.

“I’m excited about having Billman,” said Chief Joel Fish. “He knows a lot about law enforcement because he’s been around the jails and the courts. He won’t take as long to go through field training — we’ll probably be able to accelerate that. He already knows a lot of the people we deal with all the time in Union County, knows them by name and face, so he’s kind of got a leg up on that.”

Billman, originally from La Grande Sheriff’s Department, worked for five years

in Union County, beginning as a reserve officer and then as a corporal for the Union County Correctional Facility.

Billman replaces Officer Jed Stone who retired.

“I’ve got a lot of learning to do, but I love it. I feel comfortable about it,” said Billman. “I love it (here); people from bigger agencies have not even met their chief. These guys in Enterprise Police Department are all so close. When I come to work, and I’m with these guys, I know who they are, what they do and how they act.”

Billman will be out on patrol on his own hopefully by May, Fish said.

Fish, himself, has completed his police certification for Oregon and is nearly through the state managerial certification.

“We’re doing good in Wallowa County,” Fish said. “I notice a difference. Some of our drug dealers are in prison, some are on probation, some are back in jail because they can’t do their probation. We’re working on it. We had a little bit larger meth problem when I got here than I thought we had, and it’s the exact same people that do the stealing and everything else.”

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