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Wisconsin National Guard: Wisconsin soldiers compete among Midwest's best in

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CAMP RIPLEY, Minn. – Two Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers represented Wisconsin at the Region IV Best Warrior Competition held at Camp Ripley, Minnesota, May 11-15, finishing in second and third place for their categories.

Sgt. Josiah Bell, a resident of Rochester, Minnesota, with Company B, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, competed as Wisconsin's Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) of the Year, placing third at the regional competition. Recently promoted Sgt. Joshua Kleinhans, a resident of Kiel, Wisconsin, with Battery B, 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery, competed as Wisconsin's Soldier of the Year, placing second at the regional competition.

They competed against Soldiers from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio. The five-day competition tested Soldiers and noncommissioned officers technically and tactically through a series of 24 events including weapons qualification, fitness, land navigation, a ruck march, an obstacle course and more, designed to be physically and mentally taxing.

"At Camp Ripley all of their ranges are close together so moving from activity to activity is very smooth," Bell said. "It allows them to flex to a wider range of activities. They used that super well."

Both Bell and Kleinhans enjoyed rotating through various warrior tasks and skills the most throughout the competition.

"When I started, I had general knowledge of pretty much every task that we were

doing, and then they went into detail because they had subject matter experts at each lane and they had people who were qualified to teach that lane," Bell said. "At every single one you had the correct way to do it, and I wasn't perfect. I messed up on a lot of stuff so having that there immediately really cemented that stuff in my brain."

Kleinhans said he learned and feels like he is a better Soldier and leader after competing.

"Whenever I failed a task or did really poorly on a task, I asked questions and they gave me the answer and told me how I can improve," Kleinhans said. "Now I can bring that back to my unit and apply it to my Soldiers."

The state level competition last month taught each Soldier what events and skills they could improve on. Bell continued working out at the gym and reviewed various tasks while also completing his college final exams ahead of the regional competition. Kleinhans was able to go to his armory after work to study and prepare.

"All my leadership were there and helping me out, giving me access to the arms room and stuff like that, and my sponsor was always checking in and making sure I had everything I need too, checking my layout and everything like that, so they've been very helpful," Kleinhans said.

Bell's leadership also stepped up when they learned that his sponsor was unable to attend regionals due to an emergency.

"Within I think four hours of me giving them the information that my first sponsor wasn't able to go, they got a new one, and then he showed up and it went fantastic," Bell said.

Command Sgt. Maj. Curtis Patrouille, the Wisconsin Army National Guard's senior enlisted leader, went to the regional competition to support and cheer on Wisconsin's Soldiers.

"It's one of the highlights every year for a [Command Sergeant Major] to be able to travel to a regional or national level competition and watch what our Soldiers and NCOs can do," Patrouille said. "It's not only a testament to those individuals, but it's a testament back to our leadership in the state of Wisconsin that prepares them to

get to this level and to watch them compete – at the state competition we always say they're competing among of the best of the best, and that is just multiplied when you get to the regional level."

Although the Soldiers and NCOs were in competition with one another, they still celebrated successes and helped each other out.

"The level of camaraderie and building relationships was incredible watching the competitors cheer each other on and revel in the successes of those that were competing against them," Patrouille said. "I saw Soldiers and NCOs very happy for one another when they would do well in a particular event or even win the entire event."

While neither of Wisconsin's competitors will move on to the national level competition, they both said it was an honor to represent Wisconsin in the regional competition. They would encourage anyone considering competing to do it.

"It doesn't matter how much experience you have," Bell said. "It doesn't matter how much you've done. Try it. You will learn regardless because the biggest thing you're going to learn is what you don't know and how hard you can push yourself, and if you know those two things, you're going to go really far."

In the Soldier category, Spc. Nathanial Miska, of the 850th Engineer Company, Minnesota National Guard, was awarded the 2022 Region IV Army National Guard Soldier of the Year. Sgt. Joshua Kleinhans of the Wisconsin National Guard was the first runner-up and Spc. Kyle Lawson of the Indiana National Guard place as the second runner-up.

In the NCO category, Sgt. Richard Carlson, of 1st Battalion, 94th Cavalry Regiment, Minnesota National Guard was awarded the 2022 Region IV Army National Guard NCO of the Year. Sgt. Dain Petipren of the Michigan National Guard was the first runner-up and Sgt. Josiah Bell of the Wisconsin National Guard placed as the second runner-up.