

Dept. of Military Affairs: Best Warrior quest ends in Ohio

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NEWTON FALLS, Ohio — Two scant weeks after participating in the Wisconsin National Guard Best Warrior Competition, Sgt. Taylor Reichow and Spc. William Warner had finished the Region IV Best Warrior Competition at Camp James A. Garfield Joint Military Training Center in Ohio.

Reichow, an artillery crewmember with Battery B, 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery from Oshkosh, Wisconsin and Warner, a sniper with Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment, from Seymour, Wisconsin, will not advance to the national competition in Alaska, however. Spc. John Shields of the Iowa Army National Guard and Staff Sgt. Leo Kerfeld of the Minnesota Army National Guard won the Soldier and noncommissioned officer categories, respectively.

Warner said the competition went well, even though he didn't finish in first place.

"The training value, networking opportunities with other state National Guards and partner nations, and memories made were well worth it," Warner said.

Reichow represented Wisconsin at the regional competition after the Noncommissioned Officer of the Year, Staff Sgt. Michael Petersen, was unable to attend.

"I didn't just represent the state of Wisconsin — it meant so much more to me that I was representing all the females in the Army," Reichow said. "I was the only female that competed in this tough competition that consisted of infantrymen, military police, reconnaissance Soldiers and air defense artillery. I pulled my own weight and dug deep within myself to prove that I had every right to be there competing against the males."

Command Sgt. Maj. Curtis Patrouille, the Wisconsin Army National Guard's senior enlisted leader, described the level of competition at the Region IV Best Warrior event as "absolutely fierce."

"Fourteen of the best Soldiers and noncommissioned officers from throughout Region IV battled for five days in 13 events," Patrouille said. "The events were set up not to favor any specific military occupational specialty, and was a great test to determine the best overall Soldier and NCO."

Warner said taking part in the regional so soon after the Wisconsin Best Warrior Competition added to the challenge.

"The regionals were pushing the envelope in every respect from physicality to intellect, so it was definitely a rush order to get everything done to prepare in time," Warner admitted. "Something that stood out to me from this competition was the sheer physical intensity of the events. Being able to perform your duties while being forced to your physical limits is something that we should integrate more into our routine training."

Reichow said she had to adapt her preparation for the regional competition based on the fact that she was still physically recovering from the state event.

"However, it allowed me to focus more on the intellectual-based events," she said. "I relatively knew the layout for the regional competition because of the state Best Warrior Competition, so I somewhat knew what to expect so I could study accordingly."

Soldiers from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota and Ohio joined the Wisconsin competitors in events that included the Army Combat Fitness Test, water survival, a 12-mile road march with rucksack, land navigation, the Expert Physical Fitness Assessment, and other events. Additionally, five troops from Ohio's State Partnership Program nations Hungary and the Republic of Serbia took part in the competition.

Patrouille said he could not be any prouder of the Wisconsin Army National Guard representatives.

"Spc. Warner was in last place after day two and came roaring back with strong finishes in Day 3 and 4 to finish third overall — and just single digit points out of the

runner-up position,” Patrouille said. “Sp. Warner also was awarded the People First, Winning Matters Leadership Award, which was voted on by the competitors themselves.”

Warner’s experience underscores one of the reasons why the Best Warrior Competition exists.

“I gained new confidence in my own abilities, lots of new skills, some great perspective on other organizations, and forgive the cliché, some new friends to boot,” he said.

Reichow agreed.

“I gained confidence that I am a solid Soldier that can compete against the best of the best,” she said. “If you would’ve asked me six months ago when I competed in my battalion’s Best Warrior Competition if I thought I could make it to Regionals, I would’ve responded with ‘I don’t even think I can make it past battalion.’”

“I also experienced something that not many Soldiers can say they’ve experienced,” she continued. “This experience has taught me to be resilient and continue to fight for what I’ve worked so hard to earn.”

Reichow was individually recognized by Brig. Gen. Matthew Woodruff, Ohio’s assistant adjutant general for Army, during the award ceremony for her team-building abilities during the competition. Patrouille said the Region IV competition emphasized building cohesive teams.

“I was truly amazed at how these competitors, to include our international competitors from the Republic of Serbia and Hungary, were able to come together as a team and support one another through a very difficult competition,” Patrouille said. “I saw with my own eyes relationships develop from across state lines, and the bonds that were developed — along with the skills that were honed at this competition — will pay dividends to all of our organizations in the future.”

Reichow said this competition definitely felt different to her.

“In competition, the competitors are usually out to get one another to try and get that first place finish,” she said. “In this competition all the representatives supported one another. We cheered each other on, we helped each other, and most of all we were there for one another. It felt like we were a family even though we

just met.”

Warner has some hard-won guidance for next year’s competitors.

“The best advice I could offer to next year’s BWC competitors would be to focus their training on the fundamentals of what we do,” Warner said. “Marksmanship, physical fitness, rucking, and general Army knowledge. The competitors are the best of their states, and one needs to be well-rounded in all respects to perform.”

Reichow urged future Best Warriors to stay positive.

“Just because you don’t think you can do it, doesn’t mean you can’t,” she said. “I set personal records and I aced assignments that I have never done before. I surprised myself in this competition. I doubted myself, but I pushed through.

“Regardless of your reason for competing, this is a competition, it is meant to be fun,” Reichow continued. “Leave it all out on the table.”