

# From Baghdad to Boston, Wisconsin Guard members answer marathon challenge

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Running the Boston Marathon once is quite the accomplishment for any runner. Running it twice, on two different continents, is a rare feat.

Maj. Mike Yount, the brigade logistics officer for the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 64th Troop Command and a Baraboo native, and 1st Lt. Katie Berberich, the rear detachment administrative officer for the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and an Onalaska native, are members of the elite few who have done this. Yount and Berberich ran their first Boston Marathon as a "shadow run" while deployed to southern Iraq in April 2010. This race qualified them for the 2011 Boston Marathon held stateside.

"When the opportunity to enroll came we decided, 'Here's our chance to go for real,'" Yount recalled.

"Not many people get to say they have run the Boston Marathon — certainly fewer can say they have run it in Iraq and in Boston," Berberich added.

The two planned on running the original Boston Marathon since taking part in the shadow run last year. Once they were registered, the hardest part of the endeavor began — training.

"My goal was to improve from the last marathon," Yount said. The workload of a full-time logistics officer, along with the Wisconsin winter, didn't make the training any easier, but Yount had a partner in Berberich. They competed in the shadow run in Iraq together and decided to have a reunion tour in Boston.

Even though Berberich and Yount live in different parts of the state — Berberich in Onalaska and Yount in Baraboo — the two trained together.

"We were encouraging each other over e-mail and Facebook to keep up with the training and to stay focused," Yount said.



**1st Lt. Katie Berberich and Maj. Mike Yount ran in the 2011 Boston Marathon in April. Last year they took part in a "shadow run" of the Boston Marathon while deployed in Iraq. Submitted photo**

"We have put many miles in together," she said.

One of the biggest differences between the two marathons was the training. For the first race, they trained in the Iraqi desert with temperatures exceeding 100 degrees, but when they began preparing for this year's Boston Marathon they faced the freezing Wisconsin weather.

After 16 weeks of preparation, it was finally time to make the trek to Boston and realize their goal of running in one of the country's oldest marathons.

"The Boston Marathon is 'the' marathon to run," Berberich said. "There was so much sensory overload that the course just flew by.

"Running in the marathon was rewarding because of the pageantry they have," Yount said. "They really do it right."

Yount and Berberich ran the race

together, but they weren't the only veterans in the immediate area. Other recent combat veterans took advantage of a Boston Marathon program where deployed shadow run participants automatically qualify for the stateside race.

"It was very moving to be treated like a rock star just for doing what I volunteered to do," Berberich said of the veteran's program.

"Getting to run with over 100 other veterans was very rewarding," Yount said. "There, other veterans ranged from 82-year old veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars to recent veterans of Operation Enduring and Iraqi Freedom." [The race officials] brought us together and treated us well. The interaction with all of the veterans was the coolest part of the deal."

With their training behind them and

new friends made, the two began the grueling 26.2-mile run ahead of him. But the 16-week running program wasn't the only preparation the officers had in their corner.

"Military training instills 'heart,' which is what compels people to run a distance that most people would prefer to drive," Berberich said.

"The thing about marathon running is that it is nine-tenths mental, and the ability to focus and stick to a goal and plan helped," Yount explained. "When Things weren't ideal my military background gave me a leg up to mentally work through the 26-mile run."

The most memorable part of the four hours, 33 minutes and eight seconds the two ran the marathon?

"Crossing the finish line after four and a half hours and being motivated by the crowd and being able to feed off the crowd's energy and the energy of the other runners," he said. "It's a good feeling."

Yount encourages others to get out and run, especially at the marathon level,

"It's one of those things where you become part of an elite group just by doing it," he said. "If you're into it and motivated you can make it happen. Get a group of like-minded Guardsmen and build camaraderie — move toward an important personal goal."

"[Yount] has been a great mentor and running all the relay races and now the two Bostons are great memories," Berberich said.

Berberich also hopes to run the 116th Boston Marathon next year, either as a part of the veteran's program or through fundraising. Yount plans on running the Fox Cities Marathon later this summer, and has put together a group of active and retired Wisconsin National Guard members to run a 200-mile relay.

"It really is about the camaraderie," he said, "and the ability to get with folks that enjoy running and doing something that others rarely get a chance to do." 