

Official News & Information from Army ROTC

Search...

Search

- [News »](#)
- [Feature](#)
- [Standalone photo](#)
- [Best Warrior competition](#)
- [RSS Feed](#)

Follow Me

Deadly tornado can't keep Ringgold program from national drill meet

By

[stevearel](#)– 05/01/2011 Posted in: [News](#)

Ringgold High School open color guard members pray with their coach, retired Sgt. 1st Class Joey Sisemore, before their routine Saturday. Photo by Steve Arel

By **Steve Arel**

U.S. Army Cadet Command

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. – Their town lay in ruins, obliterated by a monster of Mother Nature that took the lives of eight members of the Ringgold, Ga., community and almost wiped out the Junior ROTC program's hopes of competing nationally.

Still, they came.

Without electricity, water and practice for almost a week, a team of four Cadets from Ringgold High School reluctantly trekked nine hours to Daytona for the 29th annual National High School Drill Team Championships. They vied Saturday in open-level color guard and compete in masters level

• **Links**

- [Go Army ROTC](#)
- [U.S. Army Homepage](#)
- [Cadet Command on Facebook](#)
- [Army ROTC Photo Galleries](#)
- [LDAC Photos](#)

• **Pages**Home Go• [Army ROTC News](#)

- [LTC Koester named GAJROTC president](#)
Feature on a Georgia JROTC instructor elected to a state-level position [...]
- [New ROTC director plans to take cadets to the next level](#)
Feature on the new APMS stationed at Elon University (North Carolina A&T) [...]
- [Give him a Purple Heart for paper cuts](#)
St. Petersburg Times (Fla.) columnist weighs in on the resume of a former APMS at Fla. A&M [...]
- [Sept. 11 survivor to donate piece of Pentagon to Dan River ...](#)
Feature from the Danville, Va. Register & Bee on a local Army JROTC ceremony [...]
- [Neto's Tucson: Cholla student fell in love with military ...](#)
Feature on the 2011 PMS of the Year in his home town newspaper [...]

• [@ArmyROTC on Twitter!](#)

- [ArmyROTC: Chaplain \(Maj.\) Kelvin Todd bows his head as](#)

exhibition Monday.

The Cadets' reluctance wasn't rooted in not wanting to perform, but rather in helping with the recovery effort back home. However, with emergency crews out en force and much of the town cordoned off, "there's nothing to do," said Jordan Clark, the color guard commander.

"This is better than sitting around," he said.

"We might as well come down here and represent the town," said Mitchell Leavey, another Cadet. "We want to bring back a trophy for the town."

Ringgold didn't win the color guard competition. But its performance was arguably the most inspirational, if at least for the adversity Cadets overcame.

Wednesday's twister, packing 175 mph winds and striking shortly after the sun went down, cut a 13-mile long swath through the town of 3,000.

Each of the Ringgold Cadets, who experienced no direct losses, knew someone who lost a home, lost property or lost their life. Two of the dead were their Ringgold High classmates.

The day before the tornado, the Cadets borrowed some Army service uniforms from another school because they wanted to perform in Daytona in the new dress blues. The tornado ravaged much of Ringgold High, cutting them off from a storage area where the uniforms and equipment were kept.

Retired Sgt. 1st Class Joey Sisemore, with help from an FBI contact, was able to get into the building for 10 minutes. He grabbed what he could.

Even as the group prepared to head out Friday, the district superintendent balked, given the circumstances. Sisemore petitioned for approval, pointing out that the students had raised money to make the trip, local groups had contributed financially and the Cadets had "worked their butts off" to earn a national berth.

Eventually, the superintendent relented.

When the Ringgold team arrived in Daytona, they relished the hotel amenities – namely the electricity and running water they had been without for a couple of days – and began practicing. But then they realized they had another problem: One student needed a dress shirt, and another needed a pair of slacks.

Fortunately, Sisemore is about the same size as his students. He immediately gave his up.



Jordan Clark carries the American flag for Ringgold High School's open level color guard team. Photo by Steve Arel

So when other instructors asked why he wasn't in uniform Saturday, Sisemore said it wasn't as if he didn't have it with him. He simply had to sacrifice being out of uniform on the sidelines or his

[Kelley Parks delivers a prayer for the nation's leaders at Tuesday's...](http://t.co/WqJ5UKM)
<http://t.co/WqJ5UKM> 08/30/2011
 ArmyROTC: Chaplain (Maj.) Kelvin Todd bows his head as Kelley Parks delivers a prayer for the nation's leaders at Tuesday's...
<http://t.co/WqJ5UKM> [...]

- o [ArmyROTC: 455 Cadets deployed on real-world missions and gained real-world experience on five different continents this year... http://t.co/zr0XBo2](http://t.co/zr0XBo2) 08/25/2011
 ArmyROTC: 455 Cadets deployed on real-world missions and gained real-world experience on five different continents this year... <http://t.co/zr0XBo2> [...]
- o [ArmyROTC: A recent grant from the National Rifle Association Foundation is helping fund the Atlantic Community High... http://t.co/WwkhwMr](http://t.co/WwkhwMr) 08/24/2011
 ArmyROTC: A recent grant from the National Rifle Association Foundation is helping fund the Atlantic Community High...
<http://t.co/WwkhwMr> [...]

• Tags

[2010 Best Warrior competition national drill meet](#) [7th Brigade McDonald Alamodome drill meet](#) [Ranger Challenge](#) [Junior ROTC Sandhurst Bataan All-American Bowl](#) [Kojo JROTC Leader's Training Course combine](#) [2011 All-American Bowl drill](#) [ROTC francis lewis NCO of the Year competitions](#) [air rifle George C Marshall 2011 Ten-Miler 2011 national drill meet](#) [George C. Marshall 1st Brigade training](#)

• Recent items

- o [Army JROTC Cadets Grow in Confidence, Leadership at JCLC Mountain](#)
- o [Army JROTC Alumni Lead JLAB Teams, Tour Nation's Capitol](#)
- o [Longtime Ohio JROTC instructor closes teaching career, plans to continue working with youth](#)
- o [Atlanta JROTC Cadets tackle training at Fort Knox](#)
- o [Cadet Command celebrates silver anniversary](#)
- o [Cadet Park honors fallen ROTC](#)

students being out of uniform on the competition floor.

It was an easy choice.

As he looked on Saturday morning, Sisemore said he could sense his team's nervousness. But watching them on the floor, most never would've picked up on it.

"I'm more critical of them than any of the judges ... they did good," he said. "Watching them perform, you wouldn't know" what had happened just days before.

Even without equipment, Sports Network International, the Daytona Beach company that puts on the national meet, had begun making arrangements with local JROTC programs, just in case, to get Ringgold Cadets what they needed.

During Saturday evening's challenge level awards ceremony, Justin Gates, the competition director, called for a moment of silence for those affected by the Wednesday's storms that swept through much of the South, killing more than 300 people.

Ringgold Cadets said they had never seen some of the things they saw in the tornado's aftermath. Massive metal restaurant signs lifted from their concrete bases and deposited upright in the middle of buildings. Metal roofing wrapped around poles. Even the glass façade of their school shattered and the shards blown into a rear wall like a mosaic.

"When you look at your town, and there's nothing there ... there's no way to describe it," Clark said.

Sticking with their plan to compete in the national drill meet, Cadets said, illustrates one of the lessons JROTC teaches – overcoming adversity. They said the experience back home and in Daytona has made an already close team closer.

Once they return home, Cadets aren't sure how long it'll take for life to return to normal, if it ever will.

Emergency crews are still using cadaver dogs in several neighborhoods. Power has yet to be restored. And damage to Ringgold High has forced its closure for the rest of the school year. So when the Cadets return to classes May 9, they'll share space at another high school, splitting the day with that school's students.

"There's nothing to do but keep going," Clark said.

Tags: [2011 national drill meet](#), [ringgold high school](#)

[Share](#) **1** retweet

Comments Closed

Comments are closed. You will not be able to post a comment in this post.

[grads](#)

- [Pittsburg State Cadet, injured in Joplin twister, puts well-being of others before his own](#)
- [Cadets earn air assault wings](#)
- [Scholar, statesman receives annual DePuy Award](#)
- [Francis Lewis earns third straight national drill title: MacArthur breaks through in unarmed](#)

• Log in

- [Log in](#)
- [Entries RSS](#)
- [Comments RSS](#)
- [WordPress.org](#)

•

[About Arras WordPress Theme](#)

Copyright U.S. Army Cadet Command. All Rights Reserved.

