



# Ohio Adjutant General's Department

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## **1191st Engineer Company raises the floodgates for its hometown community**

**Story by Staff Sgt. Michael L. Carden  
Ohio National Guard Public Affairs**

PORTSMOUTH, Ohio — The Ohio River was rising, it had crested at 53 feet and rain was in the forecast for days to come, putting the city of Portsmouth in jeopardy. On the afternoon of Feb. 19, over Presidents Day weekend, Capt. Coleman Johnson, commander of the local Ohio Army National Guard unit, received a phone call telling him his unit was needed, and needed fast.

“From the time I first received the call, within 4 1/2 hours I was already having to tell people, ‘No, we already have enough volunteers from the local area,’” Johnson said. “The vast majority of our Soldiers out here live within 50 miles of Portsmouth, so it really is Ohioans helping out their family and friends.”

The 1191st Engineering Company, Johnson’s unit, is headquartered out of a readiness center about 3 miles from the Portsmouth flood walls. The unit is made up of Ohio National Guard Citizen-Soldiers who live and work within Portsmouth and the surrounding communities and stepped up and answered the call to help their hometown community in its greatest time of need. The mission? Erecting floodgates for the city to keep out rising water. At 55 feet the morning of Feb 19, it was a precaution, but it still needed to be done in case the weather turned worse.

Nearly 40 engineers from the 1191st erected two floodgates in the city’s flood wall on Feb. 19. Across the city there are 15 flood wall openings of varying sizes that will be closed depending on the river crest levels. The two gates the Soldiers raised, positioned at the lowest elevation near the river, are where the most immediate need is, in case of rising waters. Less than a half a mile away, a local racetrack was completely underwater, with only a billboard and parking lot lights peaking above the water, proving it wasn’t part of the river.

The gates were assembled quickly, due to the quick action and teamwork between the Ohio National Guard and the Portsmouth Flood Defense Division. In less than nine hours on Presidents Day, the towering structures of steel beams, wood planking and plastic sheeting were in place. Hundreds of burlap sandbags lined the base, securing the lower edge.

“Everybody knows their job and what needs to happen,” said Sgt. Matthew Moore, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the flood wall project on 2nd Street in Portsmouth. “It makes it go up smoother, faster and safer for our Soldiers and the community.”

It was something every National Guard Soldier is trained for, to serve the community when called.

The last time the walls were needed was in March 1997, when the river crested at 59.8 feet, causing \$25 million of damage in Scioto County alone. The city’s flood wall and levee are designed to protect up to a crest of 72 feet, but without the gates it wouldn’t matter. Every couple years the 1191st joins forces with the Scioto County Emergency Management Agency and the Portsmouth Flood Defense Division to train together, erecting floodgates to ensure when they are needed to protect the city, everyone is prepared.

“Every major emergency response always involves the Ohio National Guard,” said Larry Mullins, the public information officer for Scioto County EMA. “We’re just blessed to have such an amount of people who are ready to volunteer their time and help out their community.”

For the Soldiers of the 1191st, the opportunity to support their community is why they joined the National Guard.

“We’ve been on several other missions, hurricane relief and helping other states, but very rarely do we get the call to come help out our own community,” Moore said. “It makes me proud to be a part of this community.”

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**EDITOR’S NOTE:** High resolution [photo](#) and [video](#) imagery to support this story are available on the [Defense Video Imagery Distribution Site \(DVIDS\)](#).

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