



Photo taken by Nancy Epstein

Islip, NY— Today (March 25), U.S. Congressman Steve Israel (D-NY), Islip Town Supervisor Phil Nolan, Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy and Islip Town Councilman Gene Parrington hosted a see-off ceremony for Long Island family members of the “Fighting 69th” heading to Fort Bragg, North Carolina to visit their loved ones before they deploy to Afghanistan. Following the ceremony, the families of Long Island’s 69th Infantry board a 10:45 a.m. Southwest flight to Fort Bragg, North Carolina to visit one last time with the soldiers of the 69th Infantry before their deployment to Afghanistan. Flight accommodations for the over 20 family members were donated by Southwest Airlines.

“As members of the Fighting 69th deploy to Afghanistan, we must not overlook the shared sacrifice of their family members,” said Congressman Israel, who passed legislation in the House of Representatives earlier this month honoring the Fighting 69th. “After meeting with members of the Fighting 69th in January before their deployment to Fort Bragg for training, I am honored to see-off their family members as they visit their loved ones before deployment to Afghanistan.” Congressman Israel is the founder and Co-Chair of the House Afghanistan Working Group and plans to visit the Fighting 69th during a Congressional Delegation trip to Afghanistan this July.

The 69th Infantry Regiment, known as the Fighting 69th, is composed of citizen-soldiers from Long Island, Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, the Bronx, Staten Island. The regiment was formed in 1851 and is known for being one of the first units to assist in the recovery effort at the World Trade Center in New York following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. On Long Island, the Fighting 69th is posted at the Bay Shore Armory in the Town of Islip and in the Huntington Armory.

“We are proud to claim the Fighting 69th as our Town of Islip hometown boys,” said Islip Town Supervisor Phil Nolan. “For us, the term “support the troops” also means “support the families.”

“As a combat Vietnam Veteran, I know how difficult it is to say goodbye to your family,” added Councilman Parrington. “It is important to realize that when a soldier is deployed, it is as hard on his family as it is on him. As Islip Town Liaison for Veterans Affairs, it is my goal to ensure we

support the families of our soldiers while they are serving our country abroad.”

In 2004, the Fighting 69th Infantry Regiment was sent overseas for the first time since World War II as part of “Task Force Wolfhound” in Iraq. During this deployment they fought al-Qaeda terrorists in the city of Al Taji, protected Iraq’s first free elections, and secured the infamous “Route Irish,” the most dangerous road in Baghdad. 19 members of the Fighting 69th were killed in action and over 78 were wounded in Operation Wolfhound.

In January, the Fighting 69th left for two months of training in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. At the end of this month, they will be deployed to Afghanistan to assist with training of the Afghan National Army and Police Force.

Following a ceremony that included representatives from American Legion Posts in East Islip (Post 635), Islip (Post 411), Ronkonkoma (Post 155), and Central Islip (Post 1039), the families and soldiers boarded the 10:45 a.m. Southwest flight to North Carolina.

In total, the Fighting 69th will have served in five wars including the Civil War, World War I, World War II, and Operation Iraqi Freedom and soon Operation Enduring Freedom. Congress has awarded six of its members with the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Families were presented with footage of the House of Representatives floor debate over Israel’s legislation recognizing the Fighting 69th. This legislation, which passed the House unanimously on March 13, 2008, recognizes the 69th as one of the great regiments in American military history. It also recognizes the contributions of Fighting 69th to the Global War on Terror and acknowledges the 69th Infantry Regiment’s upcoming deployment to Afghanistan.