



## **History of the Sixty-Ninth Regiment (“The Fighting 69th”)**

**Tradition holds that the Sixty-Ninth Regiment of New York is the most highly decorated regiment in the United States. The Sixty-Ninth Regiment traces its lineage to 21 December 1849. After the failed “Young Ireland” revolt in Ireland in 1848, the locus of Irish revolutionary/republican activity moved to New York. The leaders of that movement believed they needed to create and train an Irish Brigade for the future liberation of their homeland, and then decided to accomplish this in the New York State Militia system. They created three regiments in Manhattan: the 1<sup>st</sup> Irish Regiment, brought into the State Militia as the (“Irish”) Ninth Regiment; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Irish Regiment, as the Sixty-Ninth; and the 4<sup>th</sup> Irish Regiment, as the Seventy-Fifth. These three regiments are in the lineage of the Sixty-Ninth Regiment of today and they co-existed until consolidated in 1858 as the 6Sixty-Ninth Regiment. Although the Sixty-Ninth Regiment only traces its history and lineage to 1849, one of its companies, “A” Company, traces back to 1775 and the American Revolution.**

**The American Civil War began in April, 1861. The Sixty-Ninth Regiment answered Lincoln’s call traveling to Washington and fighting in the Battle of Bull Run. Colonel Michael Corcoran, commanding the 69th, was captured. Thomas Francis Meagher, who commanded a company in the battle, returned to New York and began raising a new Irish Brigade, which served with great distinction in the war. On release from prison, at President Lincoln’s request, now Brigadier General Corcoran formed another Irish Brigade, Corcoran’s Irish Legion. Once again the 69th Regiment’s history and lineage traces through three regiments: the Sixty-Ninth Regiment, New York State Militia, the Sixty-Ninth Infantry Regiment, New York State Volunteers (1st Regiment of Meagher’s Irish Brigade), and the Sixty-Ninth Regiment, Artillery (Serving as Infantry) New York State Volunteers, later changed to the 182d Infantry New York State Volunteers, the 1st Regiment of Corcoran’s Legion.**

**Many of the Regiment’s traditions come from the Civil War. Robert E. Lee is credited with dubbing the Regiment “the Fighting 69th”. The Sixty-Ninth, New York State Volunteers carried a green flag as the Regimental Color but the flag was so decimated by Confederate fire at the Battle of Antietam (17 September 1862), the Regiment did not have a green flag to carry at the Battle of Fredericksburg (11-13 December 1862). Soldiers placed sprigs of boxwood on their hats as they charged up Marye’s Heights. After the Battle of Fredericksburg, the Regiment received a new green flag. On 28 June 1963, President John F. Kennedy presented this flag, the “Second Irish Color”, to the Irish people, on behalf of the Regiment. It hangs inside the entrance of Leinster House in Dublin, seat of the Irish Parliament. The Regimental Cocktail (one part Irish Whiskey and two parts Champagne), consumed at all ceremonial occasions, began when Meagher sent his aide looking for Vichy water for his Irish whiskey. The Aide returned with Champagne. Timothy Donohue, Peter Rafferty, and Joseph Keelle were awarded the Medal of Honor during the Civil War.**

**In World War I the 69th was re-designated the 165th Infantry and ordered to active duty as part of the new 42nd “Rainbow” Infantry Division. The statue of Regimental Chaplain, Father Francis Duffy, stands in Duffy Square on Broadway between 46th and 47th Streets; another statue of Father Duffy stands outside the Post Chapel at Camp Smith. The renowned poet Joyce Kilmer, a Sergeant in the 69th, was killed-in-action in France. His poem, “Rouge Bouquet”, written during the war, is read at funeral services for all members of the 69th. “The Fighting 69th” is portrayed in the 1940 movie of the same name. During World War I, Colonel William “Wild Bill” Donovan commanded the 1st Battalion and later the Regiment. In World War II Donovan founded the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). His uniform is on display in the 69th Regiment Armory (68 Lexington Avenue, between 25th and 26th Streets). Donovan, Michael Donaldson, and Richard O’Neill were awarded the Medal of Honor during World War I.**

**Still called the 165th Infantry Regiment, the unit was activated for World War II - part of the 27th (“New York”) Infantry Division. Sent to the Pacific and initially assigned the defense of the Hawaiian Islands, the 69th assaulted Makin Atoll in the Gilbert Islands. The unit later engaged in heavy combat on Saipan and Okinawa. A Regimental Commander, Colonel Gardiner Conroy and Regimental Chaplain, Father Lawrence Lynch, were killed in action on Makin. Father Lynch’s bullet-struck helmet is displayed in the Armory. Alejandro R. Renteria Ruiz was awarded the Medal of Honor for bravery on Okinawa, the seventh 69th man to be so honored.**

**In 1963 the name of the Regiment was changed back to the “69th Infantry”. In the Cold War the 69th was prepared to deploy as infantry in the event of a major European conflict. In the aftermath of the 1990/91 Gulf War, the 69th transitioned to Air Defense Artillery (1993/96) and then to Mechanized Infantry.**

**On September 11, 2001, on the commander’s initiative and without orders, the 69th responded to the attack by mobilizing and moving to “Ground Zero” to secure the perimeter and assist with rescue efforts. The Regiment also offered its armory as the place where families of the victims of 9/11 could come for information and assistance. The Fighting 69th later provided security at West Point and vital transportation hubs before being selected to deploy to Iraq in 2004/05 as the core unit of “TASK FORCE WOLFHOUND” (named for the Regiment’s Irish Wolfhound mascots), as part of the 256th “Tiger” Brigade Combat Team. Nineteen soldiers of the “Fighting 69th” were killed in action in Iraq.**

**Some three hundred fifty soldiers from the “Fighting 69th” were selected, for a deployment to Afghanistan (2008/2009). There were many Iraq veterans among the volunteers for “TASK FORCE PHOENIX”, part of New York’s 27th Brigade Combat Team. Four 69th soldiers were killed-in-action in Afghanistan. The 69th, through its Family Support Groups and Veteran Corps, cares for the families of those soldiers wounded or killed-in-action.**

**The Regimental Motto is “Gentle when stroked, fierce when provoked”, The Unit Day is March 17<sup>th</sup> (St. Patrick’s Day. The Sixty-Ninth Regiment leads the St. Patrick’s Day**

**Parade in New York City each year. Although the Regiment is represented by all ethnic groups and religions, the Regiment traditionally begins Unit Day activities with a Mass celebrated at Saint Patrick's Cathedral for the deceased members of the Regiment before leading the largest parade in New York.**

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