



## Honor for Staten Island's fallen soldier bittersweet for parents



Sandra Lotz, exalted ruler of the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks, Staten Island Lodge 841, and former ruler Lou Yodice, right, present the club's Medal of Valor to Robert and Linda Ollis, parents of Staff. Sgt. Michael Ollis, who was killed in Afghanistan. (*Staten island Advance/Ryan Lavis*)

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STATEN ISLAND -- Robert and Linda Ollis started out their Monday by visiting their son's grave in Resurrection Cemetery, Pleasant Plains. It had been exactly two months since Army Staff Sgt. Michael Ollis died while serving in Afghanistan, but for his parents living in New Dorp, every day reminds them of his sacrifice.

"It's been hard," said Robert. "You just wish he was here."

Later that same evening, the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks awarded him and his wife, Linda, its highest honor: The Medal of Valor, given to families who have lost someone serving in either Afghanistan or Iraq.

"It's our way of showing respect," said Sandra Lotz, exalted ruler of the Elks Staten Island Lodge 841. She presented them with the award during a meeting of the borough's Vietnam War Veterans group, of which Bronze Star holder Robert Ollis is a member.

"It was my honor to give it to them," Ms. Lotz said from the Greenridge lodge following the ceremony.

For the Ollises, the award was another bittersweet recognition of their son's heroic actions.

On Thursday, they received a Silver Star on their son's behalf during a ceremony in Fort Drum, N.Y., where, for the first time, they met the members of their son's platoon.

Both called the experience "overwhelming," as they described the array of military personnel -- from generals to lieutenants and colonels -- who greeted them during the day.

"It made us feel so proud of our son -- just having everybody telling us how great my son was," said Robert Ollis.

Michael Ollis, 24, died in Afghanistan on Aug. 28 protecting a Polish soldier from a suicide bomber during an attack on their base that, according to published reports, included "grenades, rockets and a 3,000-pound bomb."

Ollis' parents said soldiers who were present during that attack personally thanked them for their son's bravery during Thursday's ceremony.

"Hearing them talk about him, it almost makes you feel like you don't know your own son," said Robert Ollis. "We knew him as Mikey our son but we didn't know about Michael the soldier."

On Nov. 12, the Ollises will attend a ceremony honoring their son at the Polish Consulate in Manhattan.

Meanwhile, they continue to receive strength from their neighbors, friends and family.

"Again and again, Staten Island hasn't stopped. The support we have gotten has been overwhelming," said Robert Ollis.