

Monument Will Honor Veterans Of Civil War

by Leslie Hutchison
Herald Staff

During the Civil War, Vicksburg, Miss. was called "The Gibraltar of the Confederacy" for its strong defense against Union soldiers, nearly a dozen volunteers from Cheshire.

As part of the 9th Regiment, also called Connecticut's Irish Regiment due to its ethnic members, the local soldiers mustered in August 1861 and a few months later were on their way to Mississippi. Included in that group was Pvt. John Marlow, the great-grandfather of Robert Larkin of Cheshire.

After he retired, Larkin became a genealogy buff and started researching the role of his ancestor in the Civil War. As his interest grew, Larkin came to realize Connecticut is one of only two states involved in the war that has no monument at the Vicksburg National Military Park. He felt that needed

to change, and he's started a committee with that goal in mind.

At the Cheshire Historic Society Monday night, Larkin talked about his 6-year-long effort to secure a space for Connecticut at Vicksburg. He then unveiled a model of the memorial for the 9th Regiment designed by Mathieu Memorials of Southington. The black granite centerpiece will be nearly 11 feet tall and measure 10 feet across at the base. Hand etchings will illustrate soldier's faces and the regimental seal.

Also included on the memorial



Leslie Hutchison/Cheshire Herald
Robert Larkin shows a model of the monument he is working to have built at the Vicksburg National Military Park in Mississippi. Below are a recruitment poster for the 9th Regiment and the regiment's flag.

will be scenes of the 9th Regiment digging "the Williams Canal," a failed plan that was to be designed to allow Union ships to bypass the cannons at Vicksburg on the Mississippi river. The undertaking resulted in the death of 150 soldiers in less than a six-month span.

Larkin said the Union's strategy called for 5,000 troops to dig the 1.5-mile long canal in mid-summer when temperatures are said to have reached 110 degrees in the shade. "The soldiers were ill-equipped," Larkin told members of the Historical Society. "They had to sleep on the ground" and dozens died from malaria, dysentery and heatstroke.

In an ironic twist, Larkin said some of the men who were sent to Vicksburg had been farmers and miners who laid down their shovels in Cheshire and then "had to take them up again in Mississippi" to dig the canal. Four of the regiment's soldiers from Cheshire died during the war.

The names of the Cheshire soldiers who belonged to the Ninth Regiment can be seen on the Civil War Monument on the Green and also at the monument on East Rock in New Haven and a smaller monument at Bayview Park near Howard Avenue in New Haven.

Not long after the 9th Regiment began working on the canal "it became clear this was going

to be a disaster," Larkin noted. "They tried to cut across De Soto Point" and it was not possible.

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He said Gen. Ulysses Grant tried the same tactic six months later, with 10 times as many soldiers, but the plan failed again.

Part of the failure during the first attempt is attributed to General Thomas Williams who was called "the villain of the effort" for the way he drove his men "with no food or water," Larkin said. History shows that Williams "made the soldiers drill with full knapsacks and then be sent to dig at the canal" for the rest of the day. Larkin noted that, "two weeks later, Williams was killed in Baton Rouge. Some say he was felled by friendly fire."

Vicksburg finally fell to Union forces on July 4, 1863, one day after Gettysburg. Larkin said about 18,000 Union soldiers are buried at Vicksburg cemetery, the largest Civil War cemetery in the country.

Larkin said because the original definition of the Vicksburg Campaign (April 1863 - July 4, 1863) did not include the attempts by generals Williams and Grant to dig the canal and isolate Vicksburg, Connecticut has not

been allowed to place a state monument in the cemetery.

That changed in 1990 when the U.S. Senate passed legislation to expand the national park to include the canal area. The Vicksburg National Parks Service then wrote a letter to Larkin's committee stating the federal government's approval of a Connecticut monument "to honor the gallant soldiers of the Ninth" at Vicksburg.

Larkin said the monument will cost about \$30,000 to build. So far, his committee has raised almost \$20,000. Larkin said the design for the monument will be sent to the National Park Service in the next couple weeks and he hopes the monument will be installed at Vicksburg in about a year.

To celebrate their soon-to-be successful campaign for a 9th Regiment memorial at the National Park, descendants of the soldiers will lay a wreath at the regiment's monument at City Point in New Haven at 11 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 12. A press release from Larkin states "the descendants' focus will not be so much on the 100-year-old granite column looking down at New Haven harbor as on the National Cemetery at Vicksburg, Miss., almost 1,400 miles away."

For more information about the Ninth Regiment monument, go to www.jimlarkin.com/9thRegiment/9thRegimentHome.htm. Donations for the fundraising effort may be sent to IHRT Inc., 9th Vicksburg Monument, Box 6028, Hamden, Conn., 06517.