

Resident Takes On Monumental Task To Honor State's Irish Regiment

by John Rook
Herald Staff

At Vicksburg National Park in Mississippi, monuments from 28 states stand proudly over a field once filled with the sounds of war. During the American Civil War, Vicksburg had been a stronghold of the Confederacy, and was the site of one of the most famous battles of the conflict. Those who fell are remembered as far as the eye can see.

Connecticut, however, has no such monument, even though the Connecticut Ninth Regiment—called The Irish Regiment because of the heritage of the majority its troops—had been a part of the Vicksburg siege. The Regiment, which included 11 Cheshire residents, had been responsible for constructing an ill-fated canal that was suppose to help Union ships bypass the dangerous cannons that led through the city. The plan cost many of the soldiers their lives, yet, when it came time for officials at the Vicksburg National Park to invite states to build monuments honoring their fallen heroes, Connecticut was left off the invitation list.

That is all about to change. In October, a 10-foot-tall, 10-foot-long,

black granite monument honoring the 845 soldiers in the Ninth Regiment will be erected in Vicksburg National Park, a moment that will mark the end of a long journey lead by Cheshire resident Robert Larkin.

Larkin, a retired administrator for Southern New England Telecommunications Corporation (SNET) — now AT&T — became interested in the Ninth Regiment in the late 1980s. Larkin knew his great-grandfather, Pvt. John Marlow, had been a member of the Irish Regiment and that he had served at Vicksburg.

However, after some research, he discovered there was no mention of his relative's exploits at Vicksburg, and that the Irish Regiment was not mentioned at all.

"Vicksburg considers the siege and capture of the city to have taken place between April and July of 1863," stated Larkin, who has become somewhat of a Civil War history buff after researching his great-grandfather's involvement in the war. "The Ninth [Regiment] was there before that time period, so they didn't consider them to be a part of the actual battle."

Larkin's initial curiosity set off a flurry of correspondence with officials from the Vicksburg National Park who, originally, remained

steadfast in their decision not to include any recognition of the Connecticut troops. However, a U.S. Senate bill was passed in 1990 stating that the timeframe accepted by the park should be expanded and that those who had worked on the canal—referred to as Grant's Canal after General Ulysses Grant—should be recognized. Larkin received a letter a few years later from the Vicksburg National Park Services saying that they would be "honored" to have a monument commemorating the Ninth Regiment.

"That really started a series of things and one thing just led to another," said Larkin.

The Cheshire resident then began exploring options for a monument. He started a committee, enlisted the help of several local organizations, from the Cheshire Historical Society to the Connecticut Irish American Club, and began to research how

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In October, a black granite monument, similar to this prototype, will be erected in Vicksburg National Park in Mississippi to honor the 845 soldiers of the Ninth Regiment, 11 of whom were from Cheshire.

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much a monument would eventually cost.

Mathieu Memorials of Southington was hired to come up with the final design, and after years of working with park officials, government officials in Connecticut and raising the necessary funds to build the monument—approximately \$30,000—the first pieces of the monument finally arrived in Connecticut this year.

"I never expected it to become this involved," laughed Larkin.

The monument will serve as a lasting tribute to a Regiment that had seemingly been everywhere during the Civil War. Many other officers within the Union army had looked down on the Regiment, according to Larkin, because the Irish were viewed as lower-class citizens.

Yet the Irish-born soldiers soon

proved their worth, becoming one of the first regiments to capture Confederate colors, marching through New Orleans when the city finally fell, and being involved in some of the fiercest fighting of the war just outside of Richmond.

Their time at Vicksburg proved to be the most costly, however. Of the 845 soldiers who first left with the Irish Regiment in 1861, 250 had died by the end of the war, with 150 of them dying while trying to construct the canal.

One of the dead was Marlow, Larkin's great-grandfather, who died of malaria while working in the heat outside of the city.

When completed, the monument will have the faces of several of the soldiers who served in Ninth Regiment etched into the reflective granite. The Regiment's seal will be displayed at the top, along with Erin Go Bragh, the

patriotic Irish phrase translated as "Ireland Forever," written on the top.

Two granite park benches will be set up on both sides of the monument, which will be erected on a small parcel of land that still has the remnants of the canal the soldiers tried to build.

An exhibition of the monument is planned in July for Gov. M. Jodi Rell, and then a formal ceremony and the unveiling of the monument is tapped for October in Vicksburg.

However, Larkin has even bigger plans for the monument.

With the help of a local engineering company, Milone and MacBroom, Inc., a design for a concrete stand for the monument has been developed. Drawn in the shape of Connecticut, it would highlight the different counties within the state.

Jason Williams, an engineer for Milone and MacBroom, has been integrally involved in the design phase of the stand, and stated that he and his firm were happy to help Larkin expand the scope of the monument.

"This was really a wonderful opportunity for us to give back to the community and to help Robert with this project," said Williams.

The stand, according to Williams, would be the first of its kind at Vicksburg and would give people visiting the site an opportunity to not only learn about the heroes of the Ninth Regiment but

also the State of Connecticut as a whole.

"You would even be able to see it on Google Earth and other Web sites, which seems to be something people are very excited about," stated Williams. Currently, there is no timeframe for the stand's construction and the total cost of such a project has not been estimated, Williams said.

The Ninth Regiment monu-

ment has become pretty much a full-time job for the now retired Larkin, but it has afforded him the opportunity to meet new people and honor the soldiers who gave their lives for their state.

"I am happy to know that there will be something permanent there to honor the state, the Regiment and my ancestor," stated Larkin. "That is what I am most pleased about."