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Artist Stacy Mathieu of Southington etches the monument to the Ninth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers while working on the granite stone in May.

Overdue honor for Irish regiment

Monument for Vicksburg park dedicated at Hartford State Armory

By Leslie Hutchison
Record-Journal staff

HARTFORD — Nearly a decade of his life has been dedicated to a monument that will be installed thousands of miles away. But for Robert Larkin of Cheshire, a Connecticut presence at Vicksburg National Military Park is a realization of a goal long sought.

The monument to the Ninth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers was dedicated Wednesday at the Hartford State Armory, with descendants of the soldiers mixing with Civil War reenactors and a former state troubadour.

"Our official Irish regiment has never been forgotten in this state, although they, along with Connecticut, have long been overlooked on the banks of the Mississippi at one of our country's finest national parks," Larkin said in the ceremony's opening statement.

With more than \$30,000 in donations collected since 2000, a granite monument was crafted to honor the ninth regiment, often called Connecticut's Irish Regiment. The 13,500-pound, 10-foot monument will be installed in Vicksburg on Oct. 14.

The inclusion of a Connecti-

cut memorial at the national park became possible in 1990 after the U.S. Senate revised the timeline of the battle and siege to include the Union army's effort in 1862. In June of that year, the Connecticut regiment arrived in Mississippi as part of a campaign to capture Vicksburg.

The regiment's roster includes at least 11 men from Meriden and others from Cheshire, Wallingford and Southington.

A song that honors the soldiers' commitment to the Union cause was written by former state troubadour Thomas Callinan. He sang the original tune, "Connecticut's Ninth," at the dedication:

"Oh, I sing of Connecticut's Ninth, my boys,
They were 845 strong,
Young men fighting for freedom,

In a land where they hadn't been born."

The Connecticut soldiers were put to work digging a canal that would have allowed the Union ships to bypass the guns of Vicksburg that were situated high on a bluff. The conditions in the swampy land were so bad that 153 soldiers

6—Record-Journal, Meriden, Conn., Thursday, August 21, 2008

From Page 1

□ Monument for Vicksburg Military Park dedicated at Hartford Armory

died within a four-month period. The canal project was abandoned.

The granite monument will be the first at the national park to be decorated with hand-etched designs. Artist Stacy Mathieu of Southington spent five months etching the intricate scenes into the dark green granite. The designs include the regimental flag, faces of 12 soldiers and scenes of work at the canal site.

Karen Senich, state historic preservation officer, commended the work of Mathieu. "The portraits of officers and enlisted men look directly at the viewer, inviting them into their world of dirt, heat, sweat and death," she said.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell honored the work of Larkin and the volunteer committee.

"Men from 70 Connecticut towns were part of Connecticut's Ninth. Vicksburg has 1,350 monuments and one million

visitors a year. It is time, in fact past time, that a tribute to Connecticut soldiers be placed there."

The details of the etching are so distinct Mathieu said some people have told her it looks like the grass in the canal scenes is still growing.

"I'm totally pleased. There are no other etchings at Vicksburg," he said.

Using a diamond-tipped electric tool, Mathieu began the etching in late February. She was eventually able to etch for five hours at a time. As spring arrived, she began working six days a week to make sure she met the Aug. 1 deadline. "I finished a couple weeks early. We went out to celebrate," she said.

Before the etching began, Kerry Sheldon of Durham took exacting care to make sure the soldiers' depictions were historically accurate. Using historic and modern-day photos as the starting point, Sheldon digitally enhanced the soldier's uniforms to insert the proper insignia or badge.

"We were not just restoring photos, but researching uniforms of the time," Sheldon said. If a soldier's photo was taken 10 years after the Vicksburg encampment, she made certain his uniform was consistent with what he wore in 1862.

"I had to demote some" soldiers, Sheldon said.

The monument's Web page is hosted by Larkin's son, Jim. "He gets so much more traffic on his Web site, about 1,200 page views a month," she said. His dad's Web site is 30 pages long, while Jim's is just six.

Robert Larkin is so impressed with the Internet's visual precision that he's planned a unique feature for the Con-

necticut monument. Within the concrete platform that will support the granite stones, the state's shape will be made of a contrasting color.

"The shape of Connecticut will not only be visible at ground level, but also from an aerial perspective," reads the dedication's booklet. "It will be distinguishable from Internet satellite images, (such as Google Earth and MSV Virtual

Earth), making Connecticut a first at a national park."

For more information about the installation of the memorial for the Ninth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers at Vicksburg National Military Park, go to Larkin's Web site, <http://ninthregimentcv.com>.

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Please see Monument / 6