

6 Artists memorialize Civil War regiment with state monument

By Robin Lee Michel
The Southington Citizen

After five months of work, two Connecticut artists saw the fruits of their labor unveiled at a ceremony held Aug. 20 in Hartford. Stacy Mathieu, of Southington, and Kerry Sheldon, of Durham, were among those who received accolades for their involvement with a new monument that will be placed at "Grant's Canal," part of the Vicksburg National Military Park at the site of the Civil War battlefield in Mississippi.

The Connecticut monument will be dedicated during a ceremony Oct. 14 in Vicksburg, an event both women plan on attending.

Made of black and green granite, it bears two brass plaques. Mathieu created the vivid etchings on the centerpiece from Sheldon's illustrations. "I am honored to have been involved with the creation of this historical monument," Mathieu said at the unveiling. She also credited other people at Mathieu Memorials, the family-owned Southington business best-known for grave memorials and other marble works.

The monument pays tribute to the 9th Connecticut Volunteer Regiment, known as the "Irish Regiment," one of 30 regiments that served during the Civil War. The 9th Connecticut Regiment, which contained volunteers from 70 Con-

necticut towns, was central to the effort to dig a canal across DeSoto Point, a peninsula created by a bend in the Mississippi River near Vicksburg.

Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's plan was to send Union gunboats through the canal, bypassing Confederate strongholds, then shell Vicksburg, which sits on a bluff overlooking the river.

The effort, undertaken during the height of the summer in malarial river swamps, took a dreadful toll on the 9th Connecticut. Of the 252 fatalities the unit suffered during the war, 150 fell at Vicksburg. The canal effort ended after about a month and the 9th Connecticut

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World War II airplanes will be on display Sept. 4 to 8 at the Oxford Airport in Oxford.

Wings

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said.

He will be joined on the flight by another nonagenarian, Frank Petrillo, of Waterbury, who was a bombardier on a B-17 during WWII.

On his 13th mission aboard the B-17, his plan was shot down over Schweinfurt, Germany on August 17, 1943 when it was hit by anti aircraft fire, and he was forced to bail out at

18,000 feet. He was taken prisoner by German forces and spent 21 months in Stalag Luft 3, the same prisoner of war camp portrayed in the movie, "The Great Escape."

According to Hushak, Petrillo was part of that escape and helped make counterfeit ID cards, and carry out the dirt from the tunnel that was dug to facilitate the escape. "It is an honor to have these two 90 year old veterans take part in this exhibit," he said.

For more information, contact Hushak at (860) 276-0749.

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was withdrawn.

To etch the front and back of the black granite centerpiece, Mathieu traced each image with transfer paper on to the monument and then removed the black, shiny surface with a diamond-tipped electrical tool to create the lighter areas.

The front of the monument includes the Connecticut 9th Regiment seal, portraits of some of the men, and a scene depicting the soldiers laboring at Vicksburg. The back displays the official Connecticut State seal, more portraits, and a second scene of soldiers working on the canal. The surface of the portrait panels were designed so that the viewer will see his or her face reflected in the mirror-like polished granite, according to Sheldon. The portraits were

designed to represent a diversity of ranks. It was decided not to engrave the names of the soldiers to emphasize that the men are representative of all who served in the Connecticut 9th Regiment.

Sheldon created the two scenes from many photographs taken at a 2006 Civil War re-enactment in Goshen, family portraits, old books, Civil War-era illustrations and other sources. Mathieu said, "Kerry volunteered countless hours for two years restoring portraits and the Connecticut 9th Regiment Seal." Sheldon also designed the booklets for the Hartford ceremony and the dedication in Vicksburg, Sheldon also documented the monument's progress on her Web site <http://casualclicks.com/vicksburg.html>.

In August 2005, Rell authorized the 9th Connecticut Regiment Memorial Committee, under the direction of Air Force Major General Thad

Martin, to commission a memorial to the citizen-soldiers who served at Vicksburg. The monument, approximately 10 feet high by 10 feet wide, consists of a base, a centerpiece and two wings. In all, it weighs 13,597 pounds.

Vicksburg National Military Park has more than 1,350 monuments and memorials – including 28 state memorials – and hosts nearly 1 million visitors a year.

"It is time — indeed, past time — that a tribute to the citizen-soldiers of Connecticut was placed there as well," said Gov. M. Jodi Rell, at the ceremony. "This monument will serve as a lasting memorial to the gallant men of the 9th Connecticut."



Photo courtesy of the Connecticut Irish American Historical Society

Stacy Mathieu, of Southington, etches a Civil War scene on a Connecticut memorial that will be erected in Vicksburg, Miss.