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Connecticut monument's dedication at Grant's Canal Tuesday

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The newest monument in the Vicksburg National Military Park and the first for the state of Connecticut will have its formal dedication ceremony Tuesday at 10:30 a.m. at the park's Grant's Canal site across the Mississippi River, near Delta.

It memorializes the men of the 9th Regiment Connecticut Volunteers who, during the summer of 1862, attempted to dig a navigable channel across DeSoto Point so Union ships on the river could bypass Vicksburg's heavily armed bluffs. The work ended in failure after only a month, as more than 150 men succumbed to heat stroke, dysentery, malaria and other diseases.

Master of ceremonies for the dedication will be Robert O. Larkin of

If you go

The Connecticut monument at the Vicksburg National Military Park will be officially dedicated at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday at the park's Grant's Canal site near Delta. Take I-20 to exit 186, turn right and cross the railroad tracks, turn right again and proceed on old U.S. 80 for about 2 miles to the park's signs for Grant's Canal.

Cheshire, Conn., chairman of the monument committee and the great-great-grandson of one of the men who served in the 9th and died there in July 1862. The monument will be presented to the National Park Service by Karen Senich, executive director of the Connecticut Commission on Tourism and Culture, and accepted by VNMP superintendent Monika Mayr. Connecticut's Troubadour Emeritus, Tom Callinan, will sing two original songs composed for the dedication.

The 9th was known as Connecti-

cut's Irish Regiment because of the predominance of Irish-born members and initially included 845 men. Before arriving at Vicksburg they were among the first Union troops occupying New Orleans after the city's surrender. In April 1862, members of the 9th either captured or found the regimental flag of the 3rd Mississippi Infantry, according to varying accounts. The flag was later repaired by the wives of the Connecticut 9th and returned to Mississippi in 1885. On display for a time in Beauvoir, the Biloxi

museum estate of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, the flag was believed lost during Hurricane Katrina. Only recently it was discovered that the flag was upstairs at the museum all the time.

According to Larkin, cleanup at Beauvoir after Katrina also yielded a sword engraved "Sgt. William Doyle, Ninth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers."

Charles Sullivan, historian at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College and Beauvoir board member who unearthed the sword, will be at the dedication Tuesday, Larkin said, in uniform and with the sword.

Larkin, who spent about 10 years spearheading the effort to get the 9th their monument in the park, added, "Things just keep on growing."

The new monument, installed

Sept. 30, overlooks the remains of the ill-fated canal, which was 60 feet wide and six feet deep. It rests on a concrete plaza, the center of which is a darker material in the shape of the state of Connecticut, edged with narrow wood insets.

The broad, grassy site is ringed with trees and shrubs dotted with wild purple morning glories and waving goldenrod.

The black granite monument comprises a base, a center panel, two side panels, and two benches. The centerpiece, nearly nine feet tall and weighing 5,827 pounds, features the crest of the 9th Connecticut Infantry, 12 portraits and detailed scenes of the men marching, cutting trees and digging.

Connecticut artist Stacy Mathieu of Mathieu Memorials in Southington, Conn., designed the monument and hand-etched the portraits

and scenes, a task requiring more than five months and 500 hours to complete.

VNMP was established by Congress in 1899 as a memorial to the 1863 campaign and siege of Vicksburg. Twenty-eight states have erected more than 1,330 monuments, markers, tablets and plaques on park grounds, according to VNMP historian Terry Winschel.

This is the first for Connecticut because the initial authorization included only units that fought in 1863.

The 9th's service during the previous summer kept it out of the park until a special act of Congress in 1990 authorized monuments for the Connecticut and Vermont regiments that were here in 1862.

Vermont has not accepted an invitation to erect a memorial.