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146 years later, Irish Regiment lauded

Conn. unit opened path to Union win

By

Associated Press / September 2, 2008

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VICKSBURG, Miss. - After years of work and waiting, Connecticut will have a monument in the Vicksburg National Military Park.

It will be a tribute to the men of the Ninth Connecticut Regiment Volunteers - known as the Irish Regiment - who, in the summer of 1862, began digging Grant's Canal across Louisiana's DeSoto peninsula so Union ships could bypass Vicksburg and its Confederate guns.

Long denied a place at the military park because of the timing of their service, the Ninth's monument is to come to fruition next month.

National Park Service workers recently broke ground at the monument site, across the river near Delta, La., where traces of Grant's Canal remain. The canal was begun in June 1862 and abandoned the following January after several disastrous attempts.

The Ninth was there for two months. About 150 men from the regiment died from malaria, dysentery, or heat stroke.

One of them, John Marlow of New Haven, was the great-great-grandfather of Bob Larkin, a Cheshire, Conn., resident who has worked for nearly 10 years to see a memorial at the park for the men of the Ninth.

"It's been tiring but very rewarding because of my ancestor," Larkin said in a phone interview, shortly after the centerpiece of the Connecticut monument was unveiled in a Hartford ceremony by Governor M. Jodi Rell. "I found a lot of other people with ancestors who were in Vicksburg that are interested in history

and were anxious to see some mention of what they went through."

The monument to the Ninth's efforts is black granite and comprises a base, a center panel winged by two side pieces, and two benches. The centerpiece is nearly 9 feet tall and weighs 5,827 pounds. Mounted on the side pieces are bronze plaques, one in the shape of the state of Connecticut. The plaques tell the history of the Ninth, which also saw action in Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

Vicksburg National Military Park historian Terry Winschel was at Grant's Canal recently as work progressed on the site, a flat, grassy area fringed with trees.

"The monument's center panel has laser etchings of the soldiers, including some of the faces of the men who worked on the canal," he said. "The black granite stone is beautiful."

The pieces will be assembled and rest on a concrete plaza, which will include a central area in the shape of the state of Connecticut with its counties shown in different colors, Winschel said.

Nearby, a series of metal tablets and information markers already line the path and tell the story of Grant's Canal, remnants of which are just beyond the site on the 2.56 acre property. Other units besides the Ninth also worked on the canal, as well as about 500 slaves mustered from nearby plantations.

"This will open a whole new chapter of interpretation for us," Winschel said.

The area will not be staffed but is included on park maps and in the latest edition of park brochures being printed as the site work gets underway.

In its initial establishment of the Vicksburg National Military Park, Congress authorized monuments for the 28 states with units that fought in the 1863 campaign and siege of Vicksburg, Winschel said. All 28 of those states have erected monuments.

Because the Ninth Connecticut worked on Grant's Canal during the summer of 1862, separate legislation was required to expand the park's province.

Winschel praised Larkin and the committee that worked to see the Connecticut monument become a reality.

"It's been a very time-consuming process. Also very expensive. I have no idea what the cost of the monument was. All the funds were raised privately," he said.

Larkin said the Ninth was called the Irish Regiment because many of the men were first-generation Irish-Americans or immigrants. ■