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Another memory for civil war park

(Updated: Tuesday, September 2, 2008 7:18 AM CDT)

VICKSBURG, Miss. (AP) — 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 9th Connecticut Regiment Volunteers — known as the Irish Regiment — who, in the summer of 1862, dug 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 9th's monument will come to fruition in October.

National Park Service workers broke ground this past week 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 9th was there for two months. About 150 men from the regiment died from malaria, dysentery and heat stroke. One of them, John Marlow of New Haven, Conn., 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 9th.

"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 Gov. 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. They weren't at the final battlefield and siege, but they were there the year before."

The monument to the 9th'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 9th, which also saw action in Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

Vicksburg National Military Park historian Terry Winschel was at Grant's Canal this past



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week as work progressed on the site, a quiet, 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 9th 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 manned, but is included on park maps and in the latest edition of park brochures being printed even as the site work gets under way.

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 9th Connecticut worked on Grant's Canal during the summer of 1862, separate legislation was required to expand the park's province. Passed in 1990, the bill authorized memorials for two additional states, Vermont and Connecticut, which served in the 1862 campaign, and to accept the donation of the land. Vermont has not yet accepted its invitation.

Winschel gave high praise to 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."

Larkin said the 9th was called "the Irish Regiment" because many of the men were first-generation American-Irish or immigrants. The Web site of the Connecticut Irish-American Historical Society prominently features the 9th and its Vicksburg monument and puts the estimate for the cost at \$60,000, a figure Larkin confirmed.

"We had early support from the Knights of Columbus," he said. "One of the first Knights of Columbus - the original Supreme Knight - was a sergeant in the Connecticut 9th at Vicksburg."

Another benefactor was the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, whose executive director, Karen Senich, joined Rell, Larkin and others at centerpiece unveiling in Hartford.

The official dedication ceremony will be Oct. 14 at the Grant's Canal site.

"We hope Governor Rell will accept the invitation and come down in person for the dedication," Winschel said. "We hope Gov. Bobby Jindal of Louisiana will attend, too."

The Connecticut monument will bring the park's total to 1,332, making it "one of the most densely monumented battlefields in all the world," Winschel said.

In recent weeks a number of preservation and restoration projects have taken place at the park, including replacing markers commemorating Col. T.N. Waul's Texas Legion's defense positions and moving monuments honoring Illinois artillery units and Union Col. Adolph Engelman inside park boundaries. Next year, park officials expect to dedicate a Kentucky state monument.

"When Connecticut was not invited to place a monument at Vicksburg's National Military Park, they put in a beautiful monument to the 9th overlooking the harbor in New Haven," Larkin said.

"This was in 1903. Two months later the first monument was dedicated at Vicksburg - the Massachusetts monument. I'm sure if we'd been invited back in 1899 or 1900 Connecticut might have been first.

"But it's finally happening in Vicksburg."



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