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Etching honors state's Ninth Regiment

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05/04/2008

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SOUTHINGTON - Art major Stacy Mathieu has created etchings before, but she's never tackled anything as large as the project she's been working on since February.

Mathieu is hand-etching a nine-foot-long block of black granite that is the centerpiece of a memorial to Connecticut's Ninth Regiment, which will be installed at Vicksburg Military Park in Mississippi.

Watch Video

Mathieu and her husband Marc work for Mathieu Memorials & Granite Works, a family business on Meriden Avenue. Marc Mathieu designed the memorial that will honor the Civil War regiment. The company is also known as the Irish Regiment, because many of the soldiers were first-generation Irish immigrants.

Stacy Mathieu works on the monument about five hours per day at a warehouse near Newington. She's built up her stamina over the months, she said, to be able to work for hours on the highly detailed etchings that are created with a handheld diamond-tipped tool.

The design will cover both the front and back of the 5,000-pound centerpiece, Stacy Mathieu said. She's finished about two-thirds of the designs on the back, which includes the Connecticut state seal. The seal alone, about 1½ feet in diameter, took around a month to complete, she said.

Other designs will show the regiment members digging a canal, chopping wood and assisting a fallen soldier. Those designs will measure about three feet square, Marc Mathieu said.

There will also be six to eight historically accurate portraits of regiment members etched on each side of the centerpiece. One of those portraits will be of Private Martin Joyce of Meriden, who is buried in Meriden's St. Patrick's Cemetery on Wall Street.

The memorial is the brainchild of Robert Larkin of Cheshire, whose great-great-grandfather, John Marlow, was a private with the regiment. Larkin has worked doggedly for years to bring the project this far.

"I never expected to be doing this," Stacy Mathieu said after a day's work on Thursday. "The first thing I etched was a lighthouse on a tile."

The black granite is very dense, Stacy said, and heavy. "It's ideal for etching. The black is very uniform, it's dark so you can get contrast."

Many New Englanders think of Vermont when they think of granite, but the black granite is not native to the region, it's from northern China.

"North American granite is mostly earth tones," Marc Mathieu said. "You get brown from the Dakotas and pink from Canada, but deep red and black are from India and Asia."

"That's geology," he said.

The Mathieu family has a distinct advantage when ordering from China, Marc Mathieu said. His brother, Michael, speaks Chinese. "He deals directly with the quarry. There's no middle man."

When Stacy Mathieu finishes the etchings on the back of the monument, she said the block would be put back in its wooden crate and strapped in place. A crane will then turn the stone over so she can begin etching on the other side.

The memorial will be dedicated in Vicksburg Military Park on Oct. 17. The entire Mathieu family is planning to attend.

For more information about the Ninth Regiment, and to see the etching progress, go to Larkin's Web site at www.jimlarkin.com and click on the 9th Regiment link.

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