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# A great day for the Irish (Regiment)

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CHESHIRE - Robert Larkin's great great grandfather, John Marlow, was a private with Connecticut's Ninth Regiment in the Civil War. It was also known as the Irish Regiment, because the majority of soldiers were first-generation Irish immigrants.

The Irish Regiment marched through the streets of New Orleans as a show of force after that city fell into Union hands. Later, the regiment was at the key strategic city of Vicksburg, along the Mississippi River. In 1862, the troops were trying to build a canal that would bypass the river, and effectively negate the influence of Confederate guns.

Vicksburg finally fell in 1863, following a battle and a long siege. Victory was secured at the same time the Union was winning the battle at Gettysburg, and was as central an element in turning the tide of the war. It also helped make the reputation of Ulysses S. Grant. Were it not for Vicksburg, it might have been a different general to whom Robert E. Lee surrendered a couple of years later.

When Vicksburg Military Park became a national park in 1899, 28 states were invited to put monuments there. But Connecticut was not among the invited, because its troops had not participated in the final battle and siege. That changed with the passage of a Senate bill 18 years ago that expanded the timeline of the battle to include the canal effort in 1862.

With that, Larkin, a Cheshire resident retired from a career at the telephone company, began a long struggle of his own to get a monument at Vicksburg honoring Connecticut's Irish Regiment.

That he is about to succeed is nothing short of remarkable, said Neil Hogan, a former newspaper reporter and historian who specializes in Irish American history.

"If somebody had asked me to give the odds" of establishing a monument "150 years after the fact, I would have said, 'no way,'" said Hogan, of Wallingford.

"He's just amazed me, the way he stuck with it," Hogan said.

Larkin's massive effort

Larkin acknowledges that there aren't many people setting up Civil War monuments these days, but he's felt it important that Connecticut's contribution to so significant a battle be recognized and honored.

Over the years, he's enlisted hundreds to help in the effort, including Civil War re-enactors, the Irish-American Historical Society and the Knights of Columbus, to name a few. He's gained financial backing from the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, the Knights, AT&T Connecticut and the William and Alice Mortensen Foundation. Larkin

received the approval for the monument committee, of which he is chairman, in a letter from Gov. M. Jodi Rell in 2005.

The more than \$30,000 raised is enough to pay for the monument itself. He's still working on raising funds to pay for the installation in Mississippi. All this is scheduled to come to fruition when the monument, designed and made by Mathieu Memorials & Granite Works, of Southington, is dedicated at the Vicksburg Military Park on Oct. 17. Today about a million people a year visit the park, where there are more than 1,300 memorials and the largest Civil War cemetery in the nation.

The nine-foot-tall monument is made of black and green granite - black to reflect the viewer's face and green "to reflect the fact that most of the regiment was of Irish origin," said Marc Mathieu, the designer.

The monument has two wings. Mathieu's wife, Stacy Mathieu, is now working on the etchings. One side of the monument includes Connecticut's state seal, portraits of various members of the regiment and scenes of the soldiers cutting trees and marching. On the other side are more portraits and the regimental flag. The monument weighs in at about 14,000 pounds.

Among the portraits is one of Private Martin Joyce, of Meriden, who is buried in Meriden's St. Patrick's Cemetery, on Wall Street.

Also under consideration is a concrete plaza where the monument will sit. Milone & MacBroom Inc., of Cheshire, donated a design for the plaza that through the employment of colorized concrete replicates the shape of Connecticut. So if you zeroed in on the military park using Google map, for instance, you'd find the state imprint there. Whether that part of the project sees fruition remains to be seen.

\$12 a month for the widow

All this because of Larkin's great great grandfather, on his mother's side. "I was always told I had an ancestor in the Civil War," he said. Marlow's name appears on New Haven's East Rock Civil War monument of 1887. Another New Haven monument, dedicated in 1903, is specifically for the Irish Regiment.

In the Civil War, the wealthy could pay for substitutes to serve their war duty for them. Edward Everett, the orator who gave a speech before President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, paid a \$300 commutation fee to the draft board for his two sons, for example. Many of those serving as substitutes were Irish, the immigrants of the day.

Of the 845 soldiers in the Ninth Regiment, 250 did not live to see the end of the war. About 150 died in the four months of service at Vicksburg. Most died from disease, including dysentery, malaria and heat stroke. Larkin's ancestor, who was originally from Ireland's County Tyrone, died near Vicksburg of malaria in July 1862. His widow received a pension of \$12 a month, said Larkin.

"I think it's generally conceded" that the Ninth did not "take part in the great victory," said Larkin. But for the million visitors to Vicksburg each year "there is no Connecticut, and there should be," he said.

After Vicksburg, the Ninth defended New Orleans, was involved near Richmond and saw action in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley.

In Savannah, Ga., near the end of the war in 1865, the Irish Regiment

celebrated Saint Patrick's Day with a parade. A local Irish military group loaned them a green Irish flag.

You can follow the project at [www.jimlarkin.com/9thRegiment/9thRegimentHome.htm](http://www.jimlarkin.com/9thRegiment/9thRegimentHome.htm).

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