



BLUE AND GRAY DISPATCH



The obelisk | photo courtesy of Parker Hills



Obelisk detail | courtesy of Parker Hills

Raymond's Obelisk

By Parker Hills – December 13, 2019

For 172 years a gleaming white monolith has marked the grave of a Mississippi rifleman of the Mexican War. It has served double duty as a silent sentinel on the grassy hillside overlooking Raymond's Confederate Cemetery. In one of the strange coincidences of life, and even death, this alabaster cenotaph has a connection to the soldiers from the next American war, the Civil War, who lie at rest a hundred yards downhill.

On the sunrise side of the monument, the gracefully etched eulogy divulges only part of the story: "Malcom McInnis—A volunteer in the 1st Reg. of the Miss. Rifles. He served 12 months in the war with Mexico: returned with the Regiment on the 18th of June, and died on the 20th, A.D. 1847, aged 29 years."

McInnis was one of 991 members of the First Mississippi Infantry—the famed "Mississippi Rifles." The regiment mustered in Vicksburg in June 1846, and elected United States Congressman Jefferson Davis as its colonel, and the famed duelist, Alexander McClung, as the second in command. The unit traveled to New Orleans and then sailed on July 26, 1846, to a point near the mouth of the Rio Grande for the war with Mexico. With their 1841 Whitney rifles and Bowie knives instead of bayonets, these men defeated Gen. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna's Mexican lancers at the Battle of Buena Vista on February 23, 1847, assuring a victory for Gen. Zachary Taylor's fourfold outnumbered army.

Almost one year later, on June 18, 1847, the greatly depleted Mississippi Rifles returned with only 376 men. Unexpectedly and tragically, Malcom McInnis died two days later, at the tender age of 29, ostensibly from food poisoning from a homecoming celebration. The marble pillar that marks his Raymond grave was fashioned by Italian artisans at the stonecutting shop of Gamble and Skates in Vicksburg, and it is believed that Malcom's comrades-in-arms paid for the classical shaft that marks his final sentry post. The stone shaft bears the crest of his regiment, complete with eagle and shield, cannon, drum, flags, and the words "Buena Vista."

Sixteen years later during America's Civil War, on a blistering Fourth of July in 1863, Vicksburg was finally occupied by Federal troops after a 47-day siege. Exactly one year later, some of the Northern soldiers, eager to commemorate their capture of the Hill City, paid a visit to the monument shop of Gamble and Skates. Among the statues, stones, and markers in the shop they found an unfinished copy of McInnis's gravestone. The obelisk was complete with the crest of the Mississippi Rifles, and was intended for another veteran of that famed regiment, yet the name and epitaph had not yet been inscribed. The unfinished shaft quickly was diverted from its original mission, and was inscribed to commemorate the surrender site on the Vicksburg defenses where Union Gen. U. S. Grant and Confederate Gen. John C. Pemberton discussed the terms of surrender on July 3, 1863. Thus, a stone intended to serve as a final marker for a Mississippian of the Mexican War became a memorial for the surrender of Vicksburg in the Civil War.



Grant and Pemberton discussing surrender terms at Vicksburg | Harper's Weekly



The original surrender obelisk | National Park Service



The original obelisk, at the visitor center | NPS

The surrender site monument was put on site near the 3rd Louisiana Redan on the Vicksburg defense line on July 4, 1864, and withstood the unmerciful ravages of souvenir hunters for three years. Chips of the marble were broken off to serve as memorabilia, and the crest of the Mississippi Rifles almost was obliterated. Consequently, the marker was moved to a safer place on the Indian Mound in the Vicksburg National Cemetery, where, in a twist of fate, it stood guard over 17,000 Union graves until 1940. It was then moved back to its original location on the Vicksburg defenses. In 1990, the ravages of time, vandals, and weather had made themselves evident on the old marble stone, and the peripatetic marker was moved indoors for safekeeping in the park headquarters of the Vicksburg National Military Park, where it may be viewed today.

However, if one wants to see the surrender site monument at Vicksburg as it was originally intended to be seen with the crest of the Mississippi Rifles, the grave of Malcom McInnis in Raymond is the place to go. Meanwhile, as he has done for a century and a half, with each setting sun Malcom McInnis stands guard over his fellow soldiers on the grassy hillside of the Raymond Confederate Cemetery.



Raymond Confederate Cemetery | Library of Congress



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