



March 9th was one of skirmishing and probing by both sides but there were no major battles. Despite the full of the day Bragg still believed he could win. That night, Bragg ordered Hoke to be aggressive and to hit the Union left flank near the Wyse Fork crossroads while Hill attacked the Union center left. "The attack must be vigorous and determined, as success must be achieved". About noon on March 10th, Hoke had his division in position but unlike his attack two days earlier Hoke did not catch the Federals off guard. Twenty-one Union cannons had been moved to Wyse Fork. Hoke's regiments hit hard. One of Kirkland's Brigade (42nd, 66th, 17th NC) fought its way into Union works but were repulsed. Hill's division made even less headway. At the sound of firing on the right his division pushed forward. His men only got as far as the first lines of Union works before grinding to a halt. By the evening March 10, 1865, the Battle of Wyse Fork was over. After a promising beginning, the Confederate army at Southwest Creek was forced to retreat. Bragg had failed to stop Cox and Schofield. The Union army finally captured Kinston.

In early 1865, after the fall of Wilmington, Union General John Schofield moved his base of operation to New Bern. His mission was to open the railroad from New Bern to Goldsboro in order to link up with and resupply Sherman's troops coming up from South Carolina. During this time the Confederates concentrated Gen. Braxton Bragg's command, Gen Robert F. Hoke and Gen. Daniel Harvey Hill's divisions at Kinston. Schofield marched out of New Bern in early March and headed west toward Kinston. On March 6th the Union Provisional Corps, under Gen. Jacob Cox's command, reached the Southwest Creek area. He found the Confederates deployed into fortified defensive positions along the west bank of Southwest Creek from Jackson's Mill, across the Dover Road to Neuse Road and Caswell Station Road. Hoke's division held the Confederate right flank; Hill's the left. During March 7th two of Union Gen. Cox's divisions moved to both Wyse Fork and to where British Road crosses the railroad; and sent brigades forward to picket Southwest Creek. On the evening of March 7, 1865, at a council of war, Gen. Hoke proposed a plan to take out the Union advance and set a trap to snare part of the army. In the predawn hours of March 8th, Hoke pulled three brigades out of the entrenchments and marched to the southwest around Jackson's Millpond and crossed the Southwest Creek swamp undetected by the Union advance. To mask Hoke's movement, Hill's infantry and artillery fired on the Union soldiers in their front. Hoke's assault on the Union's left flank cut the 15th Com. & 27th Mass. off from their support two miles away at Wyse Fork. The outnumbered and surprised Union soldiers turned about face and fired at Hoke's attacking infantry three times. Each time the Confederates enveloped them and forced them into a smaller space. Finally the discipline of the Union soldiers failed and the Confederates overwhelmed the survivors and rounded up most of those trying to escape, capturing nearly 900 officers and men in the last mass capture of Union troops of the Civil War. During the night the Union Army withdrew to Wyse Fork area and went on the defensive, soldiers cut trees and dug earthworks. Few Union soldiers had shovels, so they dug with plates, bayonets and anything else they could lay their hands on. They built a "U" shaped earthwork east of the British Road, stretching across the lower Trent Road and Dover Road, anchored at Wyse Fork. The Confederates moved toward Wyse Fork and dug in along British Road and behind Mill Branch forming an upside down "L".

# The Battle of Wyse Fork - the last mass capture of Union soldiers during the Civil War

March 7-10, 1865

**Other Names:** Wilcox's Bridge, Wise's Fork, Second Kinston, Second Southwest Creek, Kelly's Mill Pond

**Location:** Lenoir County

**Campaign:** Campaign of the Carolinas (February-April 1865)

**Date(s):** March 7-10, 1865

**Principal Commanders:** Maj. Gen. John Schofield [US]; Gen. Braxton Bragg [CS]

**Forces Engaged:** Divisions: 20,500 total (US 12,000; CS 8,500)

**Estimated Casualties:** 2,601 total (US 1,101; CS 1,500)

**Result(s):** Union victory

## Second Largest Civil War Battle in North Carolina

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# The Battle of WYSE FORK

## HISTORY AND DRIVING TOUR



#### TOUR STOP # 1

*Begin at the Kinston-Lenoir County Visitor's & Information Center and turn right out of the parking lot. Drive 1.9 miles on Hwy 70 East. Turn left on Neuse Road and take the immediate right into the parking lot of the small building complex. The Civil War Trails sign is at east end of the parking lot.*

The Howard House, located to the east and destroyed in the 1960's, was the headquarters of Gen. Braxton Bragg. At this location on March 7, 1865, plans for the attacks by Gen. Hoke and Gen. Hill's Divisions were made. The plan was for Hill's Division to feint forward across Southwest Creek while Hoke's Division moved around the Millpond to attack the Union left flank. Hoke's move around the Millpond would position him at the junction of British Road and Cobb Road, where he would strike with surprise and strength, which would lead to the capture of the 15th Connecticut and the 27th Massachusetts regiments on March 8th. 900 Union Troops would be captured along with three pieces of Union Artillery. This was the most significant success of the Confederate forces during the battle.

#### TOUR STOP #2

*Return to US Hwy. 70, turn left and go 0.4 mile. Turn right into The Baron & The Beef parking*

*lot, proceed to the east end of the lot. The Millpond was just to your right. To your right and rear, behind the building, was part of Hoke's Division, to your left front the earthwork line ran along Southwest Creek to Camp Southwest and beyond. Hoke's Division was flanked to the left, by Gen. D. H. Hill and Lawrence Baker's NC Junior Reserves in Camp Southwest.*

#### TOUR STOP # 3

*Return to US Hwy 70, turn right and go 0.6 mile and turn right into the Woodmen of the World parking lot where you can read the Civil War Trails sign "Last Mass Capture of Union Troops" in the Civil War. Look across Hwy 70 at the 3 story white home, The Cobb House. This house was used as a hospital during the battle. In the early 1970's, before there were four lanes of the highway, there were large oak trees in the yard with the tops blown out by cannon projectiles. Photos of these trees can be seen on page 38, Figure 29, in the book "Through the Eyes of Soldiers: The Battle of Wyse Fork, Kinston, North Carolina, March 7-10, 1865" by Tom J. Edwards and William H. Rowland. The 15th Connecticut Regiment had a line directly behind this house. They were all captured in the Hoke flank attack of March 8.*

#### TOUR STOP # 4

*Turn Right on Hwy 70 E, go 0.1 mile and turn right on Cobb Road. Go 0.6 mile and pull over into the*

*fork of Cobb and Whaley Road, look east. This is the center of Hoke's Divisions flank attack of March 8. He quickly entered the field to your front and rolled the 27th Massachusetts back toward US 70 (Dover Road), where the capture of the 27th Massachusetts and the 15th Connecticut took place.*

#### TOUR STOP #5

*Return 0.5 mile to US 70, turn right and go .6 mile and turn left onto British Road. Immediately turn right into the Historical Markers parking lot and read sign. British Road was a strategic position of higher ground, running relatively parallel with Southwest Creek. After the mass capture and heavy artillery shelling of the woods in front of you, the Confederates set up a line of strong earthworks on the west side of British Road, running toward the Railroad and stopping along, just shy of Mill Branch. This line was maintained on March 9 & 10 by Gen. Hill and Hoke's Divisions.*

#### TOUR STOP # 6

*Turn Right on British Road. Drive 0.4 mile to the next stop, the Jones County line. You are traveling in the relative center of the two lines where very heavy fighting took place on March 8 & 10. Be careful as you pull over, the shoulder of the road is narrow. Use flashers!!!! To your left, the Confederate line angled left. Starr's Battery was*



just to your left front, in the field. The open area to your right, with mobile homes, and through the thin line of trees, was an area of very heavy fighting, evidenced by thousands of minie balls, cannonball projectiles and every kind of artifact one could imagine! The grounds here were literally saturated with lead.

#### TOUR STOP # 7

*Drive 0.9 mile up British Road, cross the railroad track and turn into the vacant drive to your right, in the cluster of pine trees. To your front are Union earthworks, held by Gen. Innis Palmer, which was the extreme right of the Union line. Hoke attempted a flank attack here on March 9th, but thought better of it, based upon his assessment of this position and the difficulty of getting around the flank at this place.*

#### TOUR STOP # 8

*Go back 0.6 mile toward US 70 and turn left, on Caswell Station Road. Go 0.2 mile and pull over on wide shoulder in front of small brick home. At this point, the Union lines crossed the road. They were under the command of Colonel Orr, and were entrenched to your right front, along the tree line. Troops under Union Col. Classen were positioned across the road, at an angle, across the field to British Road.*

Relatively heavy fighting took place in this area, as evidenced by artifact finds, but not nearly as heavy as stop #6.

#### TOUR STOP #9

*Continue on Caswell Station Road 0.6 mile to Hwy 70 and cross over to Mallard's Convenience Store Parking lot. Drive to west end of Parking lot to The Civil War Trails sign that will describe General Hoke's 3rd day attack. Looking West, just slightly to your front and left, Col. Splaine's 17th & 25th Massachusetts troops were dug-in. To the right of US 70, behind the white house, Col. Malloy was entrenched. By March 10, Union Gen. Cox extended his left flank, up to and across the lower Trent Road, to your left rear. Gen. Hoke's Division of Kirkland, Clingman, Colquitt and Hagood Brigades had made a cross country march in the late night and early morning of March 10, to attack this left flank. Had the lines not been extended, Hoke probably would have rolled up the left flank. Cox, recognizing the potential of this flank attack and extending the lines, saved the Union Army. Hoke's attack, instead of being on the flank, hit firmly entrenched infantry which had heavy artillery support. Kirkland's Brigade, the lead element, was handled roughly, suffering heavy casualties. Col. McQuiston, on the east side of the Lower Trent Road, was on the flank of the 66th Regiment NC Troops. It was a bloody angle. Hoke retreated back quickly to the west side*

of Southwest Creek. On the night of March 10th, the Confederates Retreated to Kinston, under mounting Union pressure. This area to your left, behind the power lines and left of the silo to the Lower Trent Road, was strewn with thousands of minie balls, evidencing the place of the March 10th flank attack.

#### TOUR STOP #10

*Drive across US 70 down Caswell Station Road 2.1 miles to Neuse Road. Turn left and go 0.7 mile, you will see a sign for Camp Southwest. The "NC Junior Reserves" and "Camp Southwest" Civil War Trails signs are located here.*

#### TOUR STOP # 11

*Return to Neuse Road, turn left and go 0.4 mile to the Railroad Crossing. This is the Confederate evacuation route into Kinston, after the Battle of Wyse Fork. As you look to the west, Kinston is about 1.5 miles away, across the Neuse River.*

#### TOUR STOP # 12

*Drive 0.7 mile to US Hwy 70. Turn right and drive 1.9 miles to the Kinston-Lenoir County Visitor's and Information Center, where more information on the Battle of Wyse Fork, including a map set showing troop positions and movements, is available.*