

Kinston, Battle of ^[1]

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by Dan Blair, 2006

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"First Battle of Kinston Battlefield Park." Image courtesy of Flickr user J. Stephen Conn, uploaded Feb. 4, 2009.

^[4]The [Civil War](#) ^[5] battle at Kinston on 13-14 Dec. 1862 was the first major [Confederate](#) ^[6] opposition to the advance of Brig. Gen. [John G. Foster](#) to Goldsboro. Foster led a force of about 10,000 infantry, 640 cavalry, and 40 pieces of artillery. The defending Confederates numbered about 2,014 and were commanded by Brig. Gen. Nathan G. "Shank" Evans, who won fame at the First Battle of Manassas (Bull Run).

On 12 Dec. 1862, as his column approached Kinston from New Bern, Foster sent a small party of cavalry on a feint down the main road into Kinston. Meanwhile, the main body detoured to the south and west, intending to attack the town from the southwest, an unanticipated direction. At midmorning on 13 December, the Union army reached Southwest Creek, a small tributary of the [Neuse River](#) ^[7]. Two regiments forced a crossing of the creek, driving back the North Carolina regiment holding the position. When Evans arrived, he withdrew all of his forces to a defensive line two miles from the bridge crossing the Neuse at Kinston and held this strong natural position overnight.

The Union attack resumed at 9:00 a.m. the next day. The inexperienced Federals faced both stiff Confederate resistance and casualties inflicted by their own artillery. Nevertheless, they crossed the swamp in front of the Confederate position and turned its left flank, sending that portion of the troops retreating north across the bridge. Evans, who thought that all of his men were safely across, ordered the bridge burned and turned his artillery on the troops remaining on the right and center of what had been the Confederate line. Shelled by the enemy and their own commander, the remaining Confederate troops made for the bridge. Closely pursued by the Federal advance, the organized retreat fell apart when the men approached the burning span. Nearly 400 of Evans's command were captured in the race for the burning bridge. Confederates north of the river retreated to establish a position two miles beyond Kinston. Foster's men extinguished the flames on the bridge and crossed on the partially destroyed span. Once across the river, Foster entered Kinston and sent a request for Evans's surrender, which was curtly refused. Before Foster could reform his units for another attack, the Confederate commander withdrew once more. The Union forces camped near Kinston that night and recrossed the river the following morning to resume their advance. Foster had lost about 160 killed and wounded in the fight. Confederate casualties were 125 killed and wounded and 400 captured, and Kinston was thoroughly looted by the Federal troops.

References:

John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (1963).

Clifford C. Tyndall, "Lenoir County during the Civil War" (M.A. thesis, East Carolina University, 1981).

Additional Resources:

Historical Preservation Group: http://www.historicalpreservationgroup.org/battleofkinstonstory_lonnie.pdf [8]

National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/hps/abpp/battles/nc007.htm> [9]

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