

The 26th North Carolina Regiment, commanded by Colonel Zebulon Vance, later the war time governor of North Carolina, occupied a series of redans situated atop ridge-lines that extended finger-like into Bullen's Branch, an irregular creek flowing westward some 30 feet below the redans that had been hurriedly constructed just days prior by the troopers of the 26th. Two artillery pieces, two dismounted cavalry companies, and three infantry companies strengthened the right of Vance's line.

Below the redans atop the promontories and facing south across the meandering Bullen's Branch, the trees and been felled to a distance of about 300 yards and formed into abatis to obstruct the Union advance. The cold water of the creek was dammed to a depth of some 30 inches to further impede the enemy.

The Battle of New Bern was the baptism of fire for each of the North Carolina units. Later, in July 1863, the 26th North Carolina at the battle of Gettysburg would lose 588 of 800 men - sustaining the largest numerical losses of any unit, North or South, during the entire course of the war.

A UNION VICTORY COMBINED CASUALTIES TOTAL: 1,080



CONSEQUENCES

The fierce battle in the fields, in the swamps, and along the railroad five miles south of New Bern on 14 March 1862, was a major victory for the Union, and led to its occupation of New Bern for the remainder of the war. Although Union forces never seized and held the rail line at Goldsboro, their presence in New Bern required the Confederate government to divert troops to the railroad's defense that might otherwise been employed in the fighting in Virginia. For General Burnside, the victory in New Bern brought him national notoriety that was key to his being selected by President Lincoln as the next commander of the Army of the Potomac.

NEW BERN HAS A TREASURE

There are many historical riches in the city of New Bern and vicinity, but a significant and unique example of the town's civil war past is emerging with the development of the site of the Battle of New Bern, the core of which has remained largely untouched by development, agriculture, and the whims of man - even the forces of nature have been kind in little affecting the redans and entrenchments sustaining these extensive defenses in a near pristine state after the passage of one hundred and fifty years.



The New Bern Historical Society is the steward of this hallowed ground, and is dedicated in its efforts, as are its membership and the citizens of New Bern, to memorialize those who sacrificed their lives and the innocence of their youth to the conduct of war. It is for those who fought here that this battlefield is preserved as a lasting tribute to their memory.

ABOUT THE BATTLEFIELD SITE

The New Bern Historical Society received the core 24.65 acres of the battlefield from the Civil War Preservation Trust, and an additional 2.4 acres adjacent to the Park was subsequently purchased.

A grant from the Craven County Tourism Development Authority brought the battlefield well-deserved recognition by the National Register of Historic Places.

The New Bern Battlefield Park is owned and operated by the New Bern Historical Society.

**NEW BERN'S FUTURE WILL BE SECURED
THROUGH HONORING ITS PAST**

new bern historical society

The Battle of New Bern

March 14th 1862



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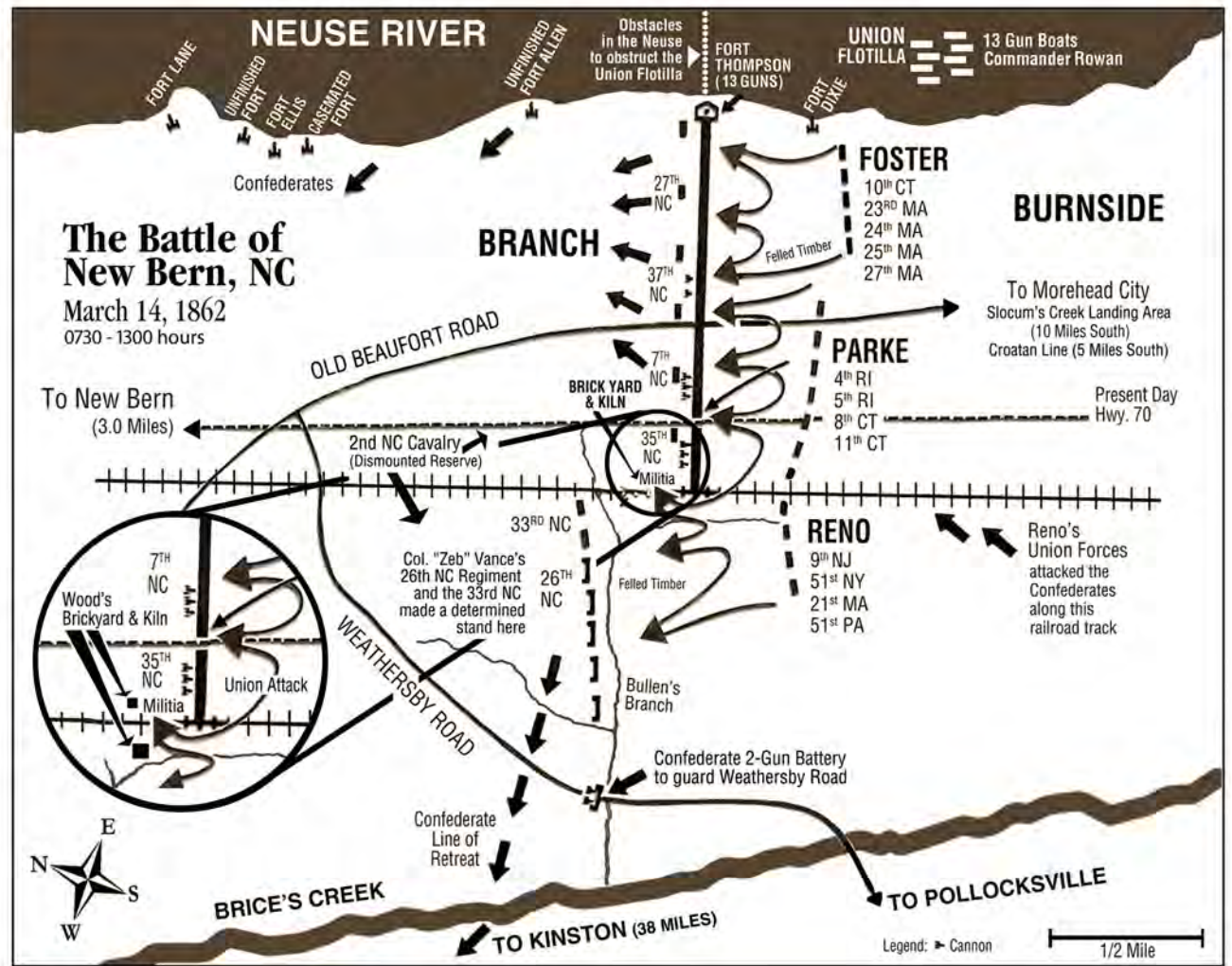
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The Battle of New Bern

WHAT HAPPENED HERE?

On 13 March 1862, a joint ground and naval force of some 12,000 Union troops under the overall command of General Ambrose Burnside, supported by 13 gunboats led by Commander Stephen C. Rowan, made a joint amphibious assault at Slocum's Creek, on the Neuse River adjacent to the present-day Marine Corps Air Station at Cherry Point. This was one of the earliest amphibious landings in U.S. military history. This was also one of the earliest examples of a joint force operation. The Union objective was the capture of the river port town of New Bern because of its strategic location - the Atlantic and North Carolina railroad passed through this town, the second largest and second oldest town in the state, to link up with other railroads transporting men and provisions vital to the Confederate war effort in Virginia. Union strategists anticipated using New Bern as a launch point for Union troops to sever the main Confederate north-south railroad supply line at Goldsboro.

Weather conditions that Thursday were thick fog, unseasonably cold temperatures, and intermittent heavy rains as Burnside advanced his three brigades: BG John G. Foster led his 1st Brigade on the right along Old Beaufort Road (modern day Old Cherry Point Road), BG Jesse L. Reno and his 2nd Brigade on the left or west side of the Atlantic and North Carolina railroad, parallel to Old Beaufort Road to the east. BG John G. Parke's 3rd Brigade was positioned behind Foster in reserve. Commander Rowan's gunboats would proceed steadily in a northern direction along the Neuse River to shell the shoreline just ahead of the Union advance. In fact, Rowan commenced his fire almost a day early along the western edge of the river Neuse to damage the Confederate forts, casemated gun positions, and earth-work entrenchments. Burnside had prior knowledge of these defensive works, to include the strength of the Croatan Line lying just sixteen miles north of Slocum's Creek. This formidable defensive line extended west more than a mile from the Neuse River to its terminus at the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad where a robust bastion guarded the flank. The Croatan Line, previously considered by the Confederate General Lawrence O'Bryan Branch the primary line of defense, required too many troops and lay too far south of New Bern making it vulnerable to a reverse attack by Union forces.



THE BATTLE COMMENCES

Awaiting the Union forces were approximately 4,500 inexperienced and ill-equipped Confederate troops commanded by General Branch, a politician with no military experience. Branch deployed his six infantry regiments, one cavalry regiment (dismounted), a two-week old local militia unit and three gun batteries to defend a line extending approximately 2.5 miles from Fort Thompson on the bluff along the Neuse River shoreline across to the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad, then north along the railroad some 400 yards where it continued westward to Weathersby Road, now modern day Old Airport Road.

The battle commenced at about 0730 hours, 14 March, and raged for nearly six hours. The main Union attack pushed hard against the Confederate line of defense in the vicinity of Fort Thompson. Despite suppressing fire from Commander Rowan's gunboats, this attack was stalled for several hours by the stiff Confederate resistance. However, Union troops were eventually able to flank the militia battalion in the vicinity of Wood's brickyard adjoining the railroad. These poorly armed, inexperienced militiamen were driven from their position leaving exposed and vulnerable the right flank of the 35th North Carolina Regiment. The Confederate line, then broken between the 26th and the 35th regiments, allowed the Union units to push through, forcing a general Confederate retreat.