

## **Gum Swamp, First and Second Battles of** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by Wiley J. Williams, 2006

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The two [Civil War](#) <sup>[4]</sup> battles at Gum Swamp occurred in April and May 1863. Companies B, D, and F of the 56th North Carolina Regiment were sent down the Lower Trent Road to a picket post on the Trent River about four miles above Trenton. Companies H and K were ordered to Moseley Creek on the Neuse Road, and Companies E, G, and I were dispatched to guard the junction of Dover Road and the [Atlantic & North Carolina Railroad](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, just east of Gum Swamp. There, while managing a vulnerable, zigzag line of "badly constructed" breastworks, four Federal regiments attacked on 28 Apr. 1863 with overwhelming numbers. While Col. Paul Fletcher Faison held his ground awaiting reinforcements, the enemy destroyed the [Confederate](#) <sup>[6]</sup> camp east of Gum Swamp. The parting Confederate volley-despite some Federal assertions of a decisive route suggests that the Confederate retreat, at least in parts of its fallback line, was orderly. It seems to be an undisputed fact, as well, that the Confederates were not seriously pursued beyond their fallback position. The retreat was Faison's recognition that his men were in danger of being cut off or destroyed. Federal losses at First Gum Swamp were officially reported as two men killed and five wounded. The 56th North Carolina Regiment lost three men killed, one mortally wounded, four wounded, and one captured.

The Second Battle of Gum Swamp occurred on 22 May 1863 after the 56th North Carolina Regiment under Faison marched back to the swamp and took up a position in the portion of the zigzag breastworks running south from the Atlantic & North Carolina Railroad. There the regiment, with perhaps 500 men, was attacked by about 2,000 Federals under Col. J. Richter Jones. Superior Union numbers, strategy, and timing prompted the Rebel retreat. The Federals closed in on the Confederates from multiple directions. Brig. Gen. [Robert Ransom](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, heading the 25th North Carolina, attempted to reinforce the trapped men but was forced from the field by a shower of Unionist balls.

Union troops remained in the Gum Swamp vicinity until late afternoon, demolishing the Confederate breastworks. Meanwhile, [Maj. Gen. Daniel H. Hill](#) <sup>[8]</sup> mounted a counterattack from Kinston, arriving at Gum Swamp late in the afternoon. After a brief exchange of artillery, Union troops retreated down the Dover road to get out of range. At about midnight, Hill's artillery shelled the Federals, who again retreated.

In the aftermath of Second Gum Swamp, Faison, being severely criticized for his regiment's performance, demanded an inquiry. In July he was brought before a court-martial under charges of "neglect of duty" and "misbehavior in the presence of the enemy." The accusations were questionable because, as the court implied in its findings, General Ransom bore a substantial share of responsibility for the disaster. Ransom was culpable primarily by placing too weak a force at Gum Swamp, thereby leaving Faison with the choice of either inadequately protecting his flank or fatally weakening his main line. In any case, the court stated, Faison could not have been expected to string out pickets from his post at Gum Swamp to the Lower Trent Road without superior orders. The court's decision did not extend to taking a hard look at Ransom's performance. Whatever the truth regarding the 56th North Carolina's performance, it is clear that the men of the regiment blamed Ransom, not Faison, for its defeat. The 56th lost 4 men mortally wounded, 6 wounded, and 144 captured at Second Gum Swamp. Federal losses were recorded as 1 man killed, 1 mortally wounded, 5 wounded, and 1 missing.

### **Reference:**

John G. Barrett, *North Carolina as a Civil War Battleground, 1861-1865* (1960).

### **Subjects:**

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[Battles](#) <sup>[10]</sup>

[UNC Press](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

[War](#) <sup>[12]</sup>

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