

## The Battle of Hayes Pond

The Battle of Hayes Pond refers to an armed confrontation between the Ku Klux Klan and Lumbee Native Americans near Maxton, North Carolina on the night of January 18, 1958.

During the 1950s, the Ku Klux Klan waged a campaign of terror throughout the American South. In 1957, Klan Wizard James W. "Catfish" Cole of South Carolina began a campaign of harassment against his neighbors to the north, the Lumbee Indians of Robeson County, North Carolina. Declaring the Lumbee to be "mongrels," Cole told newspapers: "There's about 30,000 half-breeds up in Robeson County and we are going to have some cross burnings and scare them up."

The new year began with a wave of Klan terror. On January 13, 1958, a group of Klansmen burned a cross on the lawn of a Lumbee woman in the town of St. Pauls, North Carolina as "a warning" because she was "having an affair" with a white man. The Klan held still more cross burnings while Cole traveled throughout the county speaking out against the "mongrelization" of the races.

Pleased with the Klan's campaign of terror directed against the Lumbees, Cole planned a massive Klan rally to be held on January 18, 1958, near the small town of Maxton, North Carolina. Cole predicted that 5,000 rallying Klansmen would remind the Lumbees of "their place." Cole hoped that his efforts at cowing the Lumbee into submission would consolidate his control over the Klan in the Carolinas.

"He said that, did he?" asked Simeon Oxendine, who headed the Lumbee chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Oxendine has flown more than thirty missions against the Germans in World War II. "Well, we'll just wait and see."

Not surprisingly, Cole's speeches, particularly his inflammatory references to the "loose morals" of Lumbee women, provoked anger among the Lumbees. Robeson County Sheriff Malcolm McLeod went to see Cole and told him that "his life would be in danger if he came to Maxton and made the same speech he'd been making." Cole proceeded with his plans undeterred. He was convinced that a strong show of force would prove an unequivocal demonstration of white supremacy and put an end to what he perceived to be rampant "race mixing" in Robeson County.

On the night of the battle, only 50 Klansmen out of the planned 5,000 arrived at the designated rally point, gathering in a dark field alongside the road, lit only by a single bulb powered by a portable generator. However, before Cole could begin the rally, over 500 well armed Lumbee appeared, fanned out across the highway and encircled the assembled Klansmen. When Cole began to speak, a Lumbee smashed the light bulb with his rifle and the hundreds of Lumbee gathered began making whooping noises and shot their rifles into the air.

Panicked, the Klansmen scattered, abandoning their unlit cross and leaving their public address system and Klan regalia behind. Four Klansmen were wounded in the first volley fired by the Lumbee, but none were seriously injured. James W. "Catfish" Cole reportedly fled so fast that he left his wife behind and escaped through a nearby swamp. The Lumbees then helped Mrs. Cole push her car out of the ditch where she had gotten it stuck during the panic.

After the battle, the Lumbee held a "victory party", burned the Klan's abandoned regalia, and danced around an open fire. The Battle of Hayes Pond is remembered as one of the most significant events in Lumbee history and is celebrated annually as a Lumbee holiday. Moreover, the Battle of Hayes Pond received national attention. Newspapers mocked the Klan and praised the Lumbee. In fact, the cover of Life magazine featured a photograph of a proud Simeon Oxendine wrapped in a KKK banner he had confiscated during the event. North Carolina Governor Luther H. Hodges denounced the Klan in a press statement and the embarrassed James W. "Catfish" Cole was prosecuted, convicted, and served a two-year sentence for inciting a riot.

Sources:

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Hayes\\_Pond](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Hayes_Pond)
- <http://www.lumbee Tribe.com/Press%20Room/50th%20Celebration%20of%20Battle%20at%20Hayes%20Pond.html>
- [http://www.fayobserver.com/special/battle\\_of\\_maxton\\_field/#](http://www.fayobserver.com/special/battle_of_maxton_field/#)

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### The Battle of Hayes Pond Discussion Questions

1. Why were Klan members terrorizing the Lumbee in the 1950s?
2. Cole predicted 5,000 Klansmen would show up to the rally. In actuality, how many Klansmen came? How many Lumbee came? Why do you think the numbers turned out this way?
3. How would you characterize the Lumbee who showed up at the rally?
4. Why do you think so many Lumbee showed up to defend themselves? How might this rally have turned out differently had not so many Lumbee attended?
5. Once the Klan was outnumbered, how did they respond? How would you characterize their response?
6. How does the image in your mind of the Klan retreating in this way differ than many of the images we generally envision of the Klan?
7. Why is this event such a victory for all people who were (and are) targeted by the Klan?
8. Why is it important to remember the Battle of Hayes Pond and to honor the Lumbee for such a brave response to hate?
9. Consider the various ways we ensure particular history that we deem monumental or important is not forgotten and is honored/celebrated. What are some specific ways The Battle of Hayes Pond can be remembered?