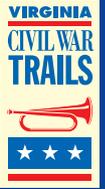


# DISMAL SWAMP CANAL

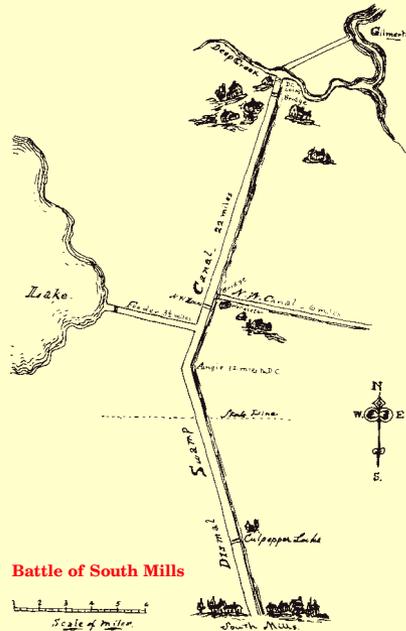


## *The Battle of South Mills*



Before you is the Dismal Swamp Canal, a much sought after prize of war during the Civil War. The Confederates made good use of the canal facilities during the initial stages of the conflict. A large volume of supplies passed through in both directions.

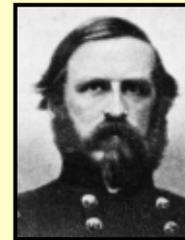
Naval ordinances and supplies were shipped through the canal for the CSS *Sea Bird*, commanded by Flag Officer W.F. Lynch, at Elizabeth City, North Carolina, on February 10, 1862. The supplies did not arrive before Union naval forces under the command of Commander S.C. Rowan in the USS *Commodore Perry* rammed and sank the *Sea Bird*. During this engagement in the Pasquotank River all but two of the Confederate “mosquito fleet” were destroyed or captured. The CSS *Appomattox* and CSS *Beaufort* sought escape via the Dismal Swamp Canal to Norfolk. The *Appomattox* was two inches too wide to enter the first lock and was burned by the Confederates. The *Beaufort*, however, could negotiate the locks and made it safely to Norfolk.



Battle of South Mills



Brigadier General  
Jesse L. Reno, USA



Brigadier General  
Edward A. Wild, USA

No attempts were made to capture the Dismal Swamp Canal until two months later. The Union, fearing that the Confederates planned to send an ironclad to the Albemarle Sound via the canal, mounted an expedition to block the canal. On April 17, 1862, 3,000 men commanded by

Brig. Gen. J.L. Reno marched toward South Mills where the Confederates had constructed fortifications. A brisk but brief engagement occurred at South Mills on April 19. The Confederates were forced to retreat, however, the Union forces were unable to destroy the locks at South Mills.

The Union gained control of the canal shortly after the fall of Norfolk on May 10, 1862. Yet, by 1863 their control over the region was tenuous. Great quantities of supplies were smuggled through the canal by Southern sympathizers and Confederate guerrillas annoyed the Federals with their periodic raids.

Brig. Gen. Edward A. Wild led a punitive expedition on May 15, 1863, from Norfolk toward South Mills and Camden Court House. The expedition did not appear to serve any legitimate purpose. Black troops were used which caused great resentment among the local inhabitants. The guerrillas constantly “pestered” the Union advance, yet escaped capture in the vastness of the swamp. All settlements discovered along the march were burned and property confiscated.