



Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina

Routing the KKK



During the winter of 1958, the Lumbee faced another battle head on. In the midst of the civil rights movement, the Ku Klux Klan set their sights on the Indians and planned to hold a rally in Robeson County. The Grand Wizard of the KKK, James W. 'Catfish' Cole, proclaimed that he was "for segregation" and had come "to put the Indians in their place". The KKK burned crosses in the yard of an Indian family that had moved into a white neighborhood and in the yard of an Indian woman who was supposedly 'dating' a white man.¹

The Lumbee were outraged by these actions. The Robeson County Sheriff tried to dissuade Cole from proceeding with the rally. The Sheriff was well aware that the Lumbee, many who were veterans of the recent World War, would not sit idly by while the Klan gathered in their backyard. Cole did not listen to the warning and set his rally for January 18 near Hayes Pond in Maxton, NC. Meanwhile, the Lumbee gathered together and laid their own plans.



The photograph above featured in LIFE magazine⁴ shows the scuffle that broke out after World War II veteran Neil Lowry shot out the light. Alfred Oxendine is shown wresting away a microphone stand while Sanford Locklear, clad in leather jacket, stands ready with his shotgun. Both Oxendine and Locklear were also veterans of the recent war.

A confrontation was inevitable and several reporters were on hand to document it. One reporter from the Raleigh News and Observer, described that fateful night saying:

"Darkness had descended. It was freezing cold. The cars kept coming. The Klansmen had set up headquarters in the center of the field. They had stretched a huge banner emblazoned with KKK and had erected a long pole with a naked light bulb on it. Religious music blared forth on the cold air from a public address system. The Indians were arriving in fours and sixes and were getting from their cars and lining along the road. The armed Klansmen were at the little circle of cars in the center of the field and some patrolled at the edges of the darkness..."

~ Charles Craven²

Hundreds of Lumbee showed up that night to stand their ground at Hayes Pond. Cole's expected show of force never materialized and only about 50 klansmen joined him for the 'rally'. His derogatory rhetoric lingered in the air only a few moments before Lumbee Neil Lowry shot out the lone light bulb and the sounds of gunfire filled the air.

When the dust settled, the Klansmen had run away, including Cole, who had left his own wife behind. In her haste to get away, she ran her car

straight into a ditch. A Lumbee, Alfred Oxendine, helped her to safety by driving her to a house over in the next county.³

The Lumbee made national headlines, just as their ancestors had done a century earlier. No serious injuries from that night were reported. Cole was convicted for inciting a riot and sentenced to 18 - 24 months in prison by Judge Lacy Maynor, a Lumbee.



Above: Simeon Oxendine, an original 'Hell's Angel' who served on a bomber in World War II, poses with fellow Lumbee Charlie Warriax while wrapped in the KKK flag that he helped pull down on the night of the rally. This picture, taken by an area newspaper photographer, Bill Shaw, reached a national audience with its publication in LIFE magazine.⁶

Below: The Lumbee gather at Hayes Pond in January 2016 to commemorate the 58th anniversary of the Routing of the KKK.

