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Wesley Makely. *I Fear I Shall Never Leave This Island: Life in a Civil War Prison.* Edited by David R. Bush. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011. xiii + 269 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-3744-8.

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Johnson's Island from the Inside

When Confederate General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia began its retreat from Gettysburg following its defeat on July 3, 1863, Lee was relying on the cavalry brigade of Brigadier General John D. Imboden to protect his trains of supplies and wounded while also acting as a rearguard against any potential Union pursuit. One of the regiments in Imboden's brigade was the 18th Virginia Cavalry, which was commanded by his brother Colonel George W. Imboden. The Confederate cavalry was successful in escorting Lee's beleaguered Confederates to Williamsport, Maryland, where they intended to cross the Potomac into what is now West Virginia. High water and a destroyed pontoon bridge, however, would keep the Confederates from immediately crossing, forcing them to dig in around Williamsport. As this drama was unfolding the Confederate cavalry did its best to rest and resupply while waiting for the river to fall. On July 8, Wesley Makely, a captain in Company D of the 18th Virginia Cavalry, was captured near Clear Spring, Maryland, while attempting to acquire provisions for his company's horses.

Makely, who was called called Nessa by his wife Catherine, whom he called Kate, was quickly packed off to Camp Chase, Ohio, before being transferred to Johnson's Island on July 18, 1863. He would remain on the island until his exchange and transfer back east on March 21, 1865. His time on the island, just over a year and eight months, would produce a fascinating collection of correspondence with his wife that gives clues not only to life on the island but also how Confederate prisoners of war, particularly those with means, dealt with their incarceration.

The infamous Confederate prisoner of war depot, Johnson's Island, sits at the mouth of Sandusky Bay in Lake Erie, just northwest of Sandusky, Ohio. This facility was ready for prisoners in early 1862, with the first arriving on April 10. A mere three days later, orders were received from the War Department that Johnson's Island would be used solely for Confederate officers. The complex itself was originally a "14.5-acre prison compound contain[ing] thirteen prisoner housing barracks known as blocks, twelve as barracks and one as a hospital" (p. 8); each block had its own latrines and three wells were located within the palisade of the prison. Additional structures such as a sutler's stand, pest house, and huts for condemned prisoners were also located witnin the prison. The prison facility was expanded in July of 1864, allowing for two large mess halls to be built that August.

As with other prisoner of war depots north and south, Johnson's Island became a community in and of itself. It is on the physical byproducts, the archeological evidence of the camp and its inmates, that the editor of the Makely letters, David R. Bush, chose to focus in *I Fear I Shall Never Leave This Island: Life in a Civil War Prison.* The book itself is a fairly straightforward collection of letters from Wesley to his wife and young daughter. There is also a smattering of letters to his brother. What makes this collection so special is that in most cases we are privy to the entire conversation, as Catherine's letters in reply are also included.

Throughout the correspondence between this young couple a number of themes develop. First and foremost is the desire to see one another again and the hope for a speedy exchange. Bush makes a point of discussing the Dix-Hill Cartel that established a system of exchange between the U. S. and Confederate militaries and how this system, ratified on July 22, 1862, had broken down by May of 1863. This breakdown was due primarily to issues of proper treatment of prisoners by both sides and the South's refusal to treat captured United States Colored Troops or their officers as legitimate prisoners of war (pp. 32-33). The collapse of the exchange system resulted in significant overpopulation of prisoner of war

sites on both sides of the Mason-Dixon, including Johnson's Island. Wesley faced these hardships stoically, and one gets the impression that he is deliberately keeping information regarding his difficulties on the island from Catherine.

One hardship that does come up regularly in their correspondence, however, is sickness. Wesley often comments about his ill health and enquires regularly about the health of Catherine, their daughter Lillie, and the extended family in Alexandria, Virginia. Overcrowding and inadequate supplies were the primary culprits responsible for Wesley's poor health. Every few weeks he wrote of being ill for a few days, or not feeling well, or having just gotten over one sickness or another. Catherine also mentions sickness a number of times in her letters, but primarily concerning Wesley's parents and in-laws as opposed to herselfor Lillie. Malnutrition, as well as the weather, led to most of the cases of sickness on Johnson's Island, diarrhea being particularly common among the inmates. To help combat this and to supplement their meager fare, prisoners were allowed to purchase items and food from a sutler that was contracted with the United State government. This privilege could be withdrawn at any time, however, as happened from November 1863 to March 1864, and again in August of 1864 (pp. 36, 119-120). In both cases the sutler, Mr. Johnson, was removed due to price gouging, but he and later his replacement were often restricted in what items could be sold. Additionally, boxes of eatables and clothing were allowed to be sent from home to the prisoners. In fact this system of home front supply was encouraged by the Federal authorities as a way to offset the cost of the POW facilities (p. 227). Much like the prisoners' letters, however, these boxes were subject to search and later would not be allowed at all unless special permission were given by the prison commander.

Beyond sickness and exchange, the topic that takes up the greatest portion of the Makely letters, and the subject the author chooses to focus the majority of his attention on, is that of prisoner jewelry. Bush is a professor of anthropology at Heidelberg University and has personally excavated portions of the prisoner depot over the course of several years. There he has found a considerable amount of refuse from the thriving jewelry-making trade on Johnson's Island. The bulk of this jewelry was made from a hard rubber known as gutta-percha. Gutta-percha was most often used to make buttons and it was from these buttons that prisoners carved a variety of finger and ear rings, as well as pins and other knick-knacks. Evidence of this production, found at the sites of all the barracks and latrines, can also be found throughout the Makely letters, and Wesley himself became quite engrossed with sending jewelry home to his loved ones. Bush suggests that this near obsession with having fine pieces of jewelry made and sent south is an example of Wesley attempting to fulfill his duties as a provider even while incarcerated. As Wesley succeeded in sending several batches of jewelry home over his twenty-month stay at Johnson's Island and seems to have obsessed over the items being made correctly, this theory appears to be well founded.

Throughout the book the author provides detailed images of many of the gutta-percha artifacts as well as other artifacts recovered from the archaeological investigation of Johnson's Island. These images give the reader a much better idea of and appreciation for just how detailed these items were and the skill of the prisoner-artisans who made them. Catherine Makely actually placed several orders for jewelry through her husband for local ladies in and around Alexandria, Virginia. Owning a piece of the prisoner-made jewelry became a status symbol of sorts in the South, a physical representation of the sacrifices being made not only by the soldiers, but by their families at home as well. As such these items were in high demand (pp. 168-169).

While Bush does a fine job documenting the archeological evidence of Johnson's Island and placing the letters of Wesley and Catherine into the historical context of the greater drama of the American Civil War, the last chapter of the book is somewhat lacking. This chapter, titled simply "The Prisoner-of-War Experience," would have been much more useful at the beginning of the book. This is particularly true for readers who are unfamiliar with the conditions of prisoner of war facilities both north and south. The chapter does a fair job comparing the Northern and Southern military prison systems and details differences and similarities between Andersonville and Johnson's Island. A comparison of the archeological findings at Johnson's Island with another prison complex would have been an excellent topic for a concluding paragraph. Though the excavation at Camp Lawton, Georgia, was probably too recent to have been included in this work there is no doubt that other sites could have been used for comparison. Instead, the author chooses to use pages 235 to 237 to rail against the current prisoner of war policies of the U.S. military and Guantanamo Bay. While the attempt link the past with modern issues is commendable, this argument seems tacked on and should have either been expounded upon or left out entirely.

In conclusion, *I Fear I Shall Never Leave This Island:*

Life in a Civil War Prison, is a fascinating work that allows the reader access to the private lives of the Makelys and the trials and tribulations they faced over the course of Wesley's imprisonment. The book covers not only the production of prisoner-made jewelry and discussions on exchange and sickness, but also delves into the how prisoners dealt with the day-to-day boredom of imprisonment. Their coping strategies ranged from the mundane, such as reading or playing games, to the brilliant, as in the case of Lieutenant Robert Smith of the 61st Tennessee Infantry, who not only managed to make his own working photo studio (p. 71) but also earned over two hundred dollars by taking pictures of his fellow inmates (p. 74)! These stories and the accompanying images provided by Bush make *I Fear I Shall Never Leave This Island* well worth the read and a must for researchers of both Civil War prisoners of war and the Southern home front.

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