



Johnson's Island: A Prison for Confederate Officers (Civil War in the North)

Roger Pickenpaugh

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In 1861, Lt. Col. William Hoffman was appointed to the post of commissary general of prisoners and urged to find a suitable site for the construction of what was expected to be the Union's sole military prison. After inspecting four islands in Lake Erie, Hoffman came upon one in Sandusky Bay known as Johnson's Island. With a large amount of fallen timber, forty acres of cleared land, and its proximity to Sandusky, Ohio, Johnson's Island seemed the ideal location for the Union's purpose. By the following spring, Johnson's Island prison was born.

Johnson's Island tells the story of the camp from its planning stages until the end of the war. Because the facility housed only officers, several literate diary keepers were on hand; author Roger Pickenpaugh draws on their accounts, along with prison records, to provide a fascinating depiction of day-to-day life. Hunger, boredom, harsh conditions, and few luxuries were all the prisoners knew until the end of the war, when at last parts of Johnson's Island were auctioned off, the post was ordered abandoned, and the island was mustered out of service.

There has not been a book dedicated to Johnson's Island since 1965. Roger Pickenpaugh presents an eloquent and knowledgeable overview of a prison that played a tremendous role in the lives of countless soldiers. It is a book sure to interest Civil War buffs and scholars alike.

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