

## **Ralph Lindeman:**

Thank you very much. I want to thank the Center for Archival collections of Bowling Green for giving me the award this year. It was a nice surprise. I also want to thank them for giving me the opportunity to give this book talk today. It's always nice to talk about history in your own backyard. And many of the events covered in my book actually took place in northwestern Ohio in the Lake Erie area.

So today in my talk, I'm going to explain how I came to write the book. I'm going to talk about the major themes in the book in terms of the context of the raid and where it fit into the overall context of the civil war. Going to explain how Johnson Island became a prison camp for Confederate officers. I'm going to talk about what happened in the raid itself, go into some fairly detailed specifics, and I'm also going to give my thoughts on what I think is the historical legacy of the raid. And the Confederate activities in Canada.

By way of overview of the book, I won't go into a detailed description, but I will say just briefly that the book, the events or the things covered in the book include pirates, disguises, spies, prison escapes. The book also gives a description of life on Johnson's Island for the Confederate officers who were held there. It includes a detailed account of the raid, as I mentioned. It also includes a discussion of the diplomatic relations of how the diplomatic relations between the US and Great Britain were affected by the Confederates in Canada and the events on the Great Lakes. And finally, the book includes a discussion of a possible connection between the Confederate leader of the raid on Johnson's Island, a man named John Yates Beall – his name is spelled "Beall," but actually is pronounced "Bell" - that there's a possible connection between Beall and Lincoln's assassin John Wilkes Booth. While it's not conclusive, there are some fairly good historical evidence to show that Beall and Booth did know each other, that they spent time together in Canada, and that one of the possible motivating factors for Booth in assassinating Lincoln was the fact that Lincoln refused to commute the death sentence that was given to Beall after he was court martialed and sentenced to death by hanging in early 1865.

So how did I come to write the book? Well, this actually starts with Johnson's island. As Nick mentioned, I grew up in the Cleveland area and for many years our family has had a vacation home at Lakeside, a town located between Sandusky and Port Clinton. We've had it for many years and I remember being taken as a young boy over to Johnson's Island and seeing the long rows of Confederate tombstones marking the the grave sites of many of the Confederates who died at the prison during the war. Many years later, as I approached retirement, I thought, well, maybe I'll write a history of Johnson's Island as a Civil War prison camp. So I spent a long afternoon at the Library of Congress and quickly decided that that was too big a subject to tackle. But I did see some references to a raid that occurred at the Johnson's Island Prison prison camp late

in 1864 towards the end of the war. There wasn't much in the way of details about the raid, but it intrigued my interest. And I thought, well, maybe that'll be a good subject for my book.

So as I started my research, there were many unanswered questions. Who conducted the raid? Why did it originate in Canada? What was the raid's objective? And why didn't it succeed? And finally, how did it fit into the South's overall goals in the war? I'm not a trained historian, although I majored in history in college. I did have experience as an investigator, both in my jobs at the Justice Department and in my later work as a journalist. So I decided to approach this project as an investigation. I spent a lot more time at the Library of Congress and the National Archives, which are near our home thankfully, here in Washington, DC. I also went out to the Sandusky area, stopped at the Sandusky Library, which has quite a nice collection of materials on Johnson's Island. I also visited the Rutherford B Hayes Center and Museum in Fremont. They also have an extensive collection of materials on Johnson's Island. I also stopped at Heidelberg College, which as you may know for many years had an archaeological project on Johnson's Island. Unfortunately, that project has now been discontinued, in part because of the death of the longtime director of that project, a man named David Bush.

So when I started my research, I started coming across many other historical threads that became important parts of the story. For example, I learned that there were tactical, even political reasons for why Confederate leaders wanted to conduct a raid on Johnson's Island. By late 1864, Confederate leaders in Richmond knew that they were losing the war, at least on the battlefield. In Virginia, Ulysses S Grant was forcing Lee and his army back to Richmond. Ohio, at the same time, was a hotbed of anti-war activity. After three years of war, the people in the northern states, including Ohio, were frankly tired of the Lincoln administration's inability to bring the war to a close. Also, by that time, Lincoln had issued his Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves. Many of the people in the northern states who originally thought they were supporting the war to keep the Union together, now found that another objective of the war might be freeing the slaves and many of them weren't completely on board with that objective. In addition, the Lincoln administration in 1863 had initiated a compulsory military draft, something that hadn't existed before. And this is just another element that contributed to much of the anti-war sentiment in northern states.

The opposition to the war was so strong, actually the Confederate leaders in Richmond thought that they could open up another front in the war, not a military front, but actually a political front by taking advantage of this anti-war activity and anti-war sentiment in the northern states. They thought that by conducting raids or bringing some violence into the northern states, they could actually fan the flames of this anti-war sentiment to the point that voters in some of these northern states would actually vote Lincoln out of

office in the 1864 election. Their thinking was that if Lincoln was voted out of office, a Democrat would come in. And at that time, Democrats as a political party were much different than the current Democrats in our political system, they were seen as more favorable towards the South. And the thinking was that if a Democrat took Lincoln's place in the White House, he might be more interested in entering into settlement negotiations with the Confederacy, something that Lincoln was definitely not going to do.

There were many other threads that I came across as I conducted my research. For example, anti-war sentiment in the North also had a military dimension. Copperheads was the name given to anti-war zealots in many of the northern states. These were people and groups that were actually so opposed to the war, they were actually starting to create their own militia units. The idea was that they would fight their local governments against the war. The Copperhead movement was so strong in some states like Indiana, for example, that the Confederate leaders were hopeful that some states might even secede. And this was again focused on Indiana. The thinking was Indiana might actually secede and join the Confederacy. Obviously that didn't happen, and that's just sort of one example of the exaggerated hopes on the part of Confederate leaders in Richmond of what they could do with respect to this anti-war feeling in the north. It led them into many miscalculations, many of which are covered in my book.

So where does Johnson's Island fit into the story? Well, first of all, Johnson's Island was one-of-a-kind. It was the first and the only Civil War prison built and designed by the Union Army during the Civil War. That's not to say that Confederate prisoners captured on the battlefield weren't held in other places. They were held in many local jails, they were held in some penitentiaries – the Ohio Penitentiary, for example, held many Confederate prisoners. In addition, some Army forts also cordoned off certain areas where they kept Confederate prisoners.

So how did Johnson's Island become a Confederate prison camp? Well, it starts with a man named Montgomery Meigs. Montgomery Meigs was a Union Army general, a longtime Army soldier who actually graduated from West Point. By the time of the Civil War, this career military man was the Quartermaster General of the Union Army, and in that position he was responsible for all the buildings and supplies that were being handled by the Army. He quickly realized that there was not enough space to contain or to confine all the Confederate prisoners that were being captured on the battlefields. Early in his military career, Montgomery Meigs had spent time in Detroit. He was working with the Army Corps of Engineers and he was actually involved in constructing Fort Wayne. And while Montgomery Meigs was in Detroit, he obviously became familiar with Lake Erie, and not only Lake Erie, but many of the islands that were in Lake Erie. So by the time of the Civil War, Meigs decided that maybe one of those islands would

be a good place to place a Confederate prisoner of war camp. It was far from the battlefields, it was isolated, and it was surrounded by safe states.

So at that point, early in the war, Meigs ordered another Union Army General, a man named William Hoffman, to go out to Sandusky and take a look at the islands and see if he found one that was suitable for a Civil War prison camp. So when Hoffman arrived in Sandusky in October of 1864, the first thing he did was take a pleasure cruise around the Great Lakes. He went on a small boat called the Island Queen with about 30 other passengers actually. They made the stops at North Bass, South Bass, Middle Bass, Kellys Island. But when Hoffman returned to Sandusky, he had concluded that really none of the islands was going to be a good location for a Civil War prison. North Bass was too far north, it was too close to Canada and it would be too hard to reach in the winter months. Middle Bass and South Bass had a number of farms on the islands and most of the farmers were unwilling to lease their property to the Union Army. He also concluded that Kellys island was not a suitable location, but for a different reason. Kellys Island had a number of vineyards and not only vineyards, but it had a few brandy establishments that he thought would be too great a temptation for the guards who would have to be manning the prison or manning the guard force at the prison camp.

So just before Hoffman went back to Washington, he noticed there was another island, even though he passed it several times, it was right in Sandusky Harbor. This was Johnson's Island. So he looked at it and saw well, it was close enough to land, but yet it was surrounded by water, so let's recommend Johnson's Island as the location for the prison camp, which he did. His recommendation was quickly approved. They began construction of the prison camp in October of 1861. Completed it quickly in February of 62. How did this come about? Well, first of all, Hoffman had no experience at all in constructing civil war prisons, because there hadn't been any until this point. But Hoffman did have experience with military forts. He had been a young army brat following his father with his family around the country. His father took different military assignments at various forts around the country, so Hoffman became familiar with that as a young man and later in his own military career. He had also had extensive time at military forts. So it's not a big surprise then that Hoffman designed Johnson's Island prison as essentially a military fort. It had a stockade that was 15 feet high. It had four two-story block houses that held about 300 prisoners each. where the men would eat and sleep.

Shortly after Johnson's Island opened as a prison camp in April of 1864, the decision was made that it was going to hold only Confederate officers. And there's not very much documentation explaining how this decision came about. It was made by the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, as well as William Hoffman. But the informed speculation essentially makes the case that they simply decided that it would be too great a risk to be housing both Confederate officers and enlisted men in the same place. It would

basically create a ready made command structure. So it's pretty likely they simply decided that it would be more difficult for Confederate officers to be ordering each other around.

The first prisoners who came to Johnson's Island generally gave it pretty good reviews. If you're going to have to be confined in a Civil War prison, Johnson's Island was a pretty good place to be. To begin with, it was located on the lake which provided nice fresh breezes during the summer months. The flipside, though, was that during winter, the southern officers had to experience, many times in the first times in their lives, the freezes of the northern states. The prison yard was open; the prisoners had access to the prison yard during the day. The general philosophy of the prison command all the way up to Hoffman was that these men were being confined as prisoners. They were not being confined to be punished, so things were pretty lenient inside the prison as long as they actually didn't try to escape. They were allowed access to newspapers, for example. This became a regular activity as one of the daily routines after roll call and breakfast. One of the Confederate officers would mount the steps of one of the block houses and read the daily headlines to the assembled officers. They not only had access to the Sandusky Register, but many of the other local papers, for almost the entire war.

Another activity that was engaged in by the prisoners of Johnson's Island was playing a new sport called baseball. Baseball had started as a sport in some of the northeastern states just before the Civil War. And the fact that many of the southern prisoners held in northern prisons started playing baseball, as they did in Johnson's Island, is generally seen as one of the reasons that the sport became so popular in the country after the war. Another activity the prisoners engaged in, given the location on the lake, was swimming. They were generally taken down to the lake in groups of about 50, and for the most part they enjoyed this activity. But there were some references in some of the war diaries that some of the prisoners kept of their annoyance, because by this time some of the more entrepreneurial boat owners at Sandusky started sponsoring boat tours or pleasure cruises out to the island, where the passengers could view the prisoners. And then this became an annoyance on the part of the prisoners, because as one wrote in his diary, he saw some women actually using binoculars to spy on the prisoners as they played in the water.

Maybe the most unusual activity that took place at Johnson's Island when it was a Civil War prison was photography. One of the captured prisoners had a camera with him when he came to Johnson's island, he was allowed to keep that camera. And he was very enterprising and actually made a little photography studio in the attic of his block house, where he not only photographed, but then developed and printed the pictures for any of the prisoners who wanted a little memento of their incarceration.

That's not to say there were not hardships on Johnson's island during its time as a Civil War prison. One of the main hardships was overcrowding. In the early years of the Civil War, there was an active program of prisoner exchanges between the North and the South. And this helped to keep down numbers of prisoners in the in the various prisons. But this only lasted for about a year. What happened was General Grant and the other members of the Lincoln administration realized that by releasing Confederate prisoners back to the South, they were simply helping to replenish the Confederate military. So these prisoner exchanges stopped in about late 1862 or 1863, and by that time, even though Johnson's Island was originally designed to house about 1500 prisoners, by 1864 there were over 3000 in the prison.

Another hardship in the prison was food shortages. By 1864, word had come out of the South about the horrible conditions that many of the northern soldiers were being held in. Some of the southern prisons or Confederate prisons. And partly in retaliation, Hoffman and other members of the Lincoln administration decided that they would put the prisoners that were being held in the Union prisons on half rations. And this also happened on Johnson's Island. Things became so bad on Johnson's Island that some of the prisoners began catching rats and using rats to supplement their diet.

So how did the raid on Johnson's Island fit into the Confederacy's plans to open up another front? It served two purposes. One was to help replenish the Confederate Officer Corps simply by releasing the prisoners. But not only releasing the prisoners because the idea was, once these prisoners got out of the prison camp, they would then conduct raids of their own in Ohio and many of the other states as they made their way back to the South. There was also a third factor, and this involved a ship called the USS Michigan. The USS Michigan was the only Union gunboat allowed on the Great Lakes during the Civil War. This is because of a treaty that was made between the United States and Great Britain right after the War of 1812 that tried to limit military presence on the Great Lakes. So at the time of the Civil War, there was just this one ship, the Michigan. It was a huge ship. It was 50 yards long, it had about 88 officers and crew, it also had 14 cannons. By 1863, the Union Navy decided they would reposition the Michigan from its home port of Erie, PA, and they sent it to Sandusky, where its sole purpose was to guard Johnson's Island.

The idea of the Confederates and where the ship became involved in the overall plans for the raid was that as part of the raid, the Confederate raiders would capture the Union gunboat and once it was under Confederate control, they would then take it up and down the shores of the Great Lakes and bombard cities all the way from Buffalo, Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, even into Lake Michigan at Chicago and Milwaukee.

So who conducted the raid? It was a group of about 20 men and they were a mix of POWs, deserters, military veterans, and they had all congregated for the most part in

Montreal. At the time, Montreal was seen as the main gathering point for Confederates in Canada. At its high point, there were probably over 500 Confederates that had gathered in Detroit during the Civil War. And they all seemed to congregate in the same place at a hotel called St. Lawrence Hall right in downtown Montreal. The reason they liked this location was that it was not only located right downtown, but it was located on two excellent rail lines. It had access to many of the major papers in both the northern and southern states. It had a well working telegraph and one of the most favorable features was that St. Lawrence Hall was the only hotel in Canada that served mint juleps, which is one of the favorite drinks of the Confederates.

So how did Confederates end up in Canada? Late in the war, Confederate leaders in Richmond decided to take advantage of easy access that they had to Canada and what they did was they wanted to send agents to Canada who would be involved in several different types of activities. As I mentioned, one of the activities was conducting raids in the northern states. But another important activity that was expected of these agents in Canada was to establish contact with many of the anti-war Democrats in Washington who were working against the Lincoln administration. Great Britain, which controlled Canada at the time, was neutral in the Civil War. It was really doing not much at all to monitor the activities of the Confederates gathering in Montreal and also in Toronto. It was relatively easy for the Confederates to reach Canada. There was no formal passport system at the time, the border was relatively open. They could cross over at places like Detroit, into Windsor or even Buffalo, Niagara Falls in Canada, in that part of the world. Another way they could reach Canada was by fast moving boats called blockade runners. These were sailboats that were so skillful at evading the Union Navy's blockade of the Southern states at the time that they could get through the blockade and then make their way up the eastern seaboard, make their way all the way up to the St. Lawrence River, and then down down the river into Canada.

The lead raider, as I mentioned, was a man named John Yates Beall. At the time of the raid he was a 30-year-old wealthy Virginian who had grown up on a big plantation. At the time of the raid, he was said to be worth millions of dollars. He had studied law at the University of Virginia but never practiced. Early in the war he served in the Confederate Army, but he was severely injured in one of the early battles and had to drop out of the army. But rather than spend the rest of the war sitting at his plantation, he decided to try to serve the Confederacy in other ways. By 1863, Beall had recovered enough from his serious injuries that he was going to make another attempt, and this attempt was where he actually tried to become a privateer on the Chesapeake Bay, and his objective was to attack Union shipping, even though he had no experience with boats, let alone naval tactics. But at that time, Beall and a small team of about 10 other men were so effective at attacking normal shipping that the US naval authorities around the Bay thought they were facing a force of as many as 100 men. Well, it wasn't long

before Beall and his men were captured late in the year of 1863. They were imprisoned, Beall and his men were taken to Fort McHenry in Baltimore and put in a military prison there. But within a few months, Beall was released. And at that point, he headed for Canada and made his way to Montreal, where he joined the other Confederates who had assembled there.

So now we're at the point of the raid, and as I mentioned, because I was so frustrated not being able to find information about the raid, I tried to make this one of the most detailed parts of my book. The raid began early on the morning of September 17th, 1864 on the Detroit River in downtown Detroit. There was a dock at the foot of Woodward Ave. At the foot of that dock was a pleasure boat named the Philo Parsons. It was a 60- passenger steamer, made daily cruises to the Lake Erie Islands and ended up at Sandusky. That morning of September 17th, Beall and about 20 other men boarded. They mingled with the other passengers and went out of their way to avoid making any sign that they knew each other. The Philo Parsons made its regular stops at North Bass, Middle Bass, Put-in-Bay, and Kellys island. After the boat left Kellys island, a man showed up at the wheelhouse. He asked the wheelman to please step out, which he did. At that point the wheelman felt a pistol in his ribs. "I am a Confederate officer, and I and my men hereby take control of this vessel," said John Yates Beall. At that point, Beall and his men pulled out a chest full of knives and guns that they had brought aboard when they boarded the ship earlier in the morning. They ordered the women into a cabin on the main deck, and the men were sent below into the hole.

Beall himself personally took down the US flag on the ship and hoisted the Confederate flag. It was the only time that the Confederate flag has ever flown on Lake Erie, or on any of the Great Lakes for that matter. As the Philo Parsons headed for Sandusky, Beall realized that there were too many passengers on board for him to effectively conduct the raid. He then ordered the Philo Parsons to turn around and return to Middle Bass, where they left off most of the passengers. The passengers were ordered not to tell anyone what had happened, but even if they wanted to disobey that order, it would have been difficult, because there was really no telegraph to the mainland and they had really no way to easily get off the island at the time.

As I mentioned, part of the raids was to have the USS Michigan under Confederate control. A few months before the raid took place, Beall and the Confederates sent another Confederate agent, a man named Charles Cole, to Sandusky. Cole's job in Sandusky was to pose as a wealthy oil investor. His job was to make friends with the captain and crew of the USS Michigan. He was also to make contact with many of the Copperheads, who by that time were also in Sandusky. On the day of the raid, Cole had invited the captain and the crew of the Michigan to a party onshore where there would be women, cigars, food and drinks. The plan was to get the crew drunk and then take over the USS Michigan with the other agents and copperheads in Sandusky.



As the Philo Parsons approached the entrance to Sandusky Bay between Bay Point and Cedar Point, Beall and his men could see the USS Michigan. They expected to see a flare, and that was going to be the sign that the Michigan was under Confederate control. But instead of a flare, what Beall and his men saw was the Michigan under a full head of steam with smoke pouring from its stacks. The guns aboard the Michigan were pointed directly at the mouth of the Bay. Beall urged his men to proceed with the raid, but they had already encountered so many unexpected events that day they effectively mutinied and Beall realized he had no choice but to return to Detroit, where he started earlier in the day. When Philo Parsons and Beall and his team arrived back at the Detroit River, Beall attempted to scuttle the Philo Parsons in the river, but it was so shallow the boat barely sank. Even so, Beall and his men jumped off at Windsor and eventually made their way back to Montreal.

So what went wrong? Basically, the short answer is that there was an informant. Somebody had squealed on Beall and his team and told Union authorities in Detroit and on Johnson's Island what was going to happen with respect to the raid. As a result, they were ready to repel any potential raid coming to the Johnson's Island prison camp. Cole was arrested in Sandusky and promptly gave authorities names of all the Copperheads who had been working with him. There's much speculation on who the informant was, but the short answer is nobody really knows for sure. Many of the Confederates had reasons to be angry, not being paid for certain jobs they had done, and things like that. There's fairly good evidence that one of the Confederates was the one who informed on them, but nobody really knows the specific identity of who that was.

And Johnson's island was not the only raid that was conducted, or at least planned, by the Confederates in Canada. For example, in August of 1864, there was a Democratic convention that was held in Chicago. And Confederate authorities decided they would conduct a raid on that convention and as part of the raid, with the distraction created by the raid on the Convention, they would also release prisoners that were being held in another military prison near Chicago. But it turns out this particular raid relied heavily on Copperheads, who were said to be in abundance both in Illinois and neighboring states. But when the time came to show up, they didn't. And as a result that raid also failed.

After Johnson's Island, Confederates also made another attempt with an attack ship, they sent an attack ship across Lake Erie and then into Lake Huron. The idea was similar to the Michigan, this attack ship was going to be bombarding cities along the Great Lakes. But it was so plagued by mechanical difficulties that it barely made its way across the lake. And not only that, but again, Union authorities were aware of the ship's objectives and they were trailing it the whole way across the lakes. And finally, there was a fairly significant raid in St Albans, Vermont, that's just across the Canadian border. Several raiders came across and they robbed several of the town's banks, collecting over \$200,000, which was a significant sum at the time. But it didn't take long

before people started to consider this more of an elaborate bank robbery than a serious military effort on the part of the Confederacy.

So Beall and his men returned to Canada. After a couple of months, actually in December of 1864, Beall decided he would make one more attempt to help the Confederacy. And this attempt was going to be an attempt to derail a train near Buffalo, NY. Beall had learned that there was going to be a transport train taking officers from Johnson's Island near Sandusky to some other military forts in the northeastern states. They're going to pass through Buffalo, NY. So Beall and his men set up a place where they were going to derail the train. The problem was they didn't know which train was going to contain the officers, so that created difficulties. They tried to derail at least one train, but it turned out to be the wrong one. And within a day or so, Beall and several other men were again captured. And this time, Beall was put in a military prison called Fort Lafayette in New York Harbor. And he was not released. In fact, in early 1865, Beall was court-martialed and he was convicted and then sentenced to death by hanging.

After his conviction, and before his hanging, there was a surprisingly active effort in Washington to try to get Lincoln to commute Beall's death sentence. The effort was mostly on the part of several of the Democrats in Congress, who I have mentioned at that time were a little more favorable towards the South and with respect to Beall in particular because of his background and family background. But by this time, Lincoln and his administration, they had decided that the raids from Canada simply had to stop, and they needed to make an example, which they decided to do with Beall and allow him to be hung. There was simply an effort to send a message to any other potential Confederates considering raids from Canada.

So what was the historical legacy of the Confederate States and the activities on the Great Lakes during the Civil War? Well, to begin with, I think one of the interesting possibilities is the fact that Beall and John Wilkes Booth knew each other. They were both in Montreal at the same time in October of 1864, and there's good evidence that Booth expressed profound sorrow when he learned about the death of Beall. And finally, the fact that the death of Beall might have been one of the motivating factors in leading John Wilkes Booth to assassinate Lincoln.

The fact that there were Confederates in Canada is still controversial to this day. After the Lincoln assassination, the conspirators who worked with Booth were put on trial. Federal prosecutors attempted to make the case that the assassination plot originated in Canada under the direction of Confederate leaders in Richmond. During the trial of the conspirators, two witnesses for the prosecution gave perjured testimony, not about the connections between Confederates in Canada and Richmond, but about unrelated matters. But even so, this perjured testimony essentially tainted the entire case, and as

a result, any effort to make the connection between Confederates in Canada and Richmond and the Confederacy were dropped. At that time it was not in the interest of either the United States or Great Britain to focus on connections between Confederates in Canada and the assassination plot. Already the relations, as I mentioned, between the two countries were significantly riled because of the events that had already occurred in Canada. As a result, for years this entire part of the Civil War has been largely untouched by mainstream historians. It's been only in recent years has there been a renewed effort to try to put this part of the Civil War under a greater focus. And that is why it's my hope that my book has played a small part in creating this new look on this forgotten part of the Civil War. Thank you.