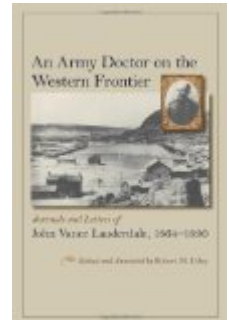


John Vance Lauderdale. *An Army Doctor on the Western Frontier: Journals and Letters of John Vance Lauderdale, 1864-1890.* Edited by Robert M. Utley. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014. 208 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8263-5453-2.



Reviewed by Sara Kern

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

In *An Army Doctor on the Western Frontier: Journals and Letters of John Vance Lauderdale, 1864-1890*, former chief historian of the National Park Service Robert M. Utley provides an annotated and edited volume of army physician John Vance Lauderdale's letters and journals written during his military service. Lauderdale was captain and assistant surgeon in the US Army during and following the American Civil War. He was stationed in the western United States, first in the District of Utah during the Civil War, and later in California, Arizona, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Texas. Utley has written many books on American military history and the American West but this is his first editing of a primary source collection. His transcriptions and annotations of Lauderdale's letters and journal offer a valuable window into an army doctor's life as well as the experiences of settlement in the American West.

Utley argues that Lauderdale wrote "as a means of venting displeasure" for he often denounced the actions of those in the camp (p. 1). Because Lauderdale favored temperance, his writ-

ings highlight the frequent consumption of alcohol by those around him. More broadly, his writings reveal more about everyday life than about medicine or military tactics, yet they capture the mellowing of his personality as he became accustomed to the West and the trials of settling and maintaining a military presence there.

In particular, these sections of Lauderdale's writings highlight his shifting views of the American Indians and Mexicans living near the camps where he was stationed, which ranged from interested to downright hostile. When speaking of the Plains Indians in May, 1865, Lauderdale argued that the only the fact that they are humans "prevents us from deciding on their utter annihilation" (p. 20). However, this enmity was only toward certain tribes, and decreased over his years in the West. In 1875, after a visit to Canyon de Chelly, he brought a Native American man, Nuttallay, back to camp to weave a blanket and work at his home. Lauderdale's comments about Nuttallay emphasize the overall relaxation of his opinion about surrounding communities, particularly

Native Americans and Mexicans, and his increasing interest in their lifestyles. While the hostility never completely disappeared, he became open to experiencing these different cultures, rather than judging them from the outside. Regarding camp life in general, Lauderdale offered a perspective about the West during peacetime, while at the same time outlining the harsh physical and mental conditions that brought soldiers into his care.

This collection represents only one of a handful of the published writings of Lauderdale. *An Army Doctor on the Western Frontier* draws on previous research, as well as other sources from Lauderdale, to contextualize his life and fill in gaps in the existing work. Other works include Peter Josyph's *The Wounded River: The Civil War Letters of John Vance Lauderdale, M.D.* (1993) and Jerry Green's *After Wounded Knee: Correspondence of Major and Surgeon John Vance Lauderdale while Serving with the Army Occupying the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, 1890-1890* (1996). *An Army Doctor on the Western Frontier* fills in the time gap of 1864-90 between published collections of Lauderdale's writings. Further, it contributes to the broader history of the American West through Lauderdale's focus on everyday life, his complaints about neighboring Native Americans and Mexicans, and his commentary on social practices in camps.

Throughout the collection, Utley generally lets Lauderdale speak for himself, with occasional incursions into providing context, explaining references, or summarizing long passages. Unlike other primary source readers, in which the explanations are limited to the beginning of each source, Utley provides background information throughout the text. While his summaries often excise large sections of the text, his generally minimal invasion and explanations make the book an easily accessible reference work and a helpful collection of primary sources.

Because of the editing choices and style, the text would be useful in undergraduate classes.

From appearances by famous people such as General William T. Sherman to explanations of Native Americans weaving blankets, the work could be used to engage diverse groups of students' interests. As for scholars of the US Army and the American West, *An Army Doctor on the Western Frontier* serves as a starting point or supplementary source. Overall, the collection features the often overlooked voice about the reality of life as an army doctor and life on the western frontier.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
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