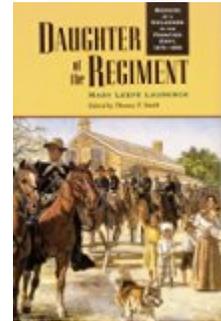


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Mary Leefe Laurence. *Daughter of the Regiment: Memoirs of a Childhood in the Frontier Army, 1878-1898*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. xxx + 208 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-2919-8.

Reviewed by Katherine Burger Johnson (University of Louisville)  
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## Women and the West/Women and the Army

Major Thomas T. Smith considered Mary Leefe Laurence's memoirs of her childhood as the daughter of a U.S. infantry officer in the late 1800s a rare and wonderful find. He was certainly correct in that assessment. *Daughter of the Regiment*, written by Laurence when she was in her seventies, chronicles her life from age six to twenty-six. The manuscript, written by an educated woman who intended it to be read, is interesting, entertaining, and well structured. Smith's editing and extensive footnoting add a vast amount of information that enhances the value of Laurence's memoirs as historical documentation. Although writing in retrospect with the value of hindsight and the vagaries of memory, Laurence was amazingly accurate about most details.

After a stint in the Union Army, Laurence's father served with the Nineteenth Infantry for thirty-three years. During the twenty-year period covered, the Leefe family lived at ten different army forts: from Fort Ringgold in south Texas to Fort Bradley, Michigan; as far east as Davids Island, New York, and west to Fort Lyon, Colorado. The memoir begins with a foreword followed by Laurence's first memory: the death of the commanding officer of Fort Dodge, Kansas, in 1878, when she was six years old. She describes life at the fort for herself and her siblings. She talks about their schooling, social life, church, and play. She reflects on her parents' relationships with other officers and their families, with the men of the enlisted ranks, and with people of the civilian community. With each move she describes traveling from one fort to the next, and setting up housekeeping.

Smith discusses the scarcity of primary material concerning childhood before the twentieth century and compares Laurence's writings to some of the few important works—that is, those by Douglas MacArthur, Charlotte Ouisconsin Van Cleve, and Fiorello La Guardia. He explains that gender, class, racial, and cultural differences exist between Laurence's circumstances and those of the other writers showing that, although her life cannot be considered a typical nineteenth-century childhood, it is a valuable contribution to the study of American childhood, family life, military life, and Victorian culture.

Smith fleshed out Laurence's work by checking every fact, verifying each of her father's service dates, as well as adding information about John Leefe's commanders and other personnel at the forts. He explains the importance of events to which she refers and defines military jargon and duties. He corrects Laurence's dates, names, or locations as necessary. Smith inspected military records for names, dates, the layout of forts and the correct location of the Leefe family's housing assignments, adding descriptions of the buildings if possible. He interviewed Mary Laurence's son and niece, who were still living in 1994, for family information. *Daughter of the Regiment* is an excellent book for those interested in women's history, family history, childhood in America, military history, or American culture.

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