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Review of *The Frontier Army in the Settlement of the West* By Michael L. Tate

Richard Winders
The Alamo

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Frontier Army in the Settlement of the West. By Michael L. Tate. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. xx + 454 pp. \$34.95.

Readers conditioned to expect any book with “army” in its title to be filled with detailed descriptions of campaigns and battles will be disappointed with Michael L. Tate’s *Frontier Army in the Settlement of the West*. Instead of focusing on the conquest of the West by force of arms, Tate describes the army’s vital role as agent for economic and cultural development. An example of new military history, an approach that examines the social aspects of soldiering, his work is a significant contribution to our understanding of the American West.

Tate’s thesis is that the army provided civilians in the West with a support system that significantly advanced the region’s settlement. Many of the western trails had been blazed by army explorers; soldiers and forts provided assistance to emigrants in distress; the army improved transportation routes and helped to regularize communication with the East; army officials enforced the law and kept order in the absence of civil government; military building projects drew civilian contractors and laborers to them; army surgeons treated civilians as well as soldiers; the army reinforced culture by recreating institutions such as churches, schools, and libraries on post; and army personnel promoted settlement through published letters, diaries, and books. Moreover, the army often formed the basis of local economies by providing goods and services and in turn requiring the same from local merchants, contractors, and others who followed in its wake. More than just Indian fighters, the army established an infrastructure enabling civilian settlement of the West to occur.

Tate pays homage to such scholars as Billington, Prucha, and Utley who laid the

foundation for his study. While his work does not supplant their classics, it does add a well-researched volume that strongly supports his thesis and adds to their work. Tate’s definition of the West is the region west of the Mississippi River. Thus, although some attention is given to the antebellum period of army activity in the West, the post-Civil War era understandably receives the most attention, including the army’s activities on the Great Plains. Three maps depicting the region during this period aid the reader in placing events and settlements geographically. Well-crafted and based on solid scholarship, *The Frontier Army in the Settlement of the West* deserves attention from both military and non-military historians.

RICHARD BRUCE WINDERS
The Alamo