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One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer

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fellow Air Force officers detracts from the story. Nevertheless, this is an important book that would be of interest to many.

ROBERT WHITTEN
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Fick, Nathaniel. *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. 384pp. \$25

Perhaps not since Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon served together in the 2nd Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers during World War I has so much literary talent been employed to recount the operations of a single unit as we find now in the case of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM I. In *Generation Kill* (reviewed by me in the Winter 2005 *Naval War College Review*), Evan Wright wrote about his experiences with 1st Recon as an embedded journalist. His perspective is that of an intelligent outsider who related most to the junior enlisted Marines of a single platoon. The commander of that platoon, Nathaniel Fick, has now written his own story. The military memoir written by a junior officer was a mainstay of war literature in the twentieth century, which saw such distinguished examples as Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That*, Ernst Junger's *Storm of Steel*, John Masters's *Bugles and a Tiger*, and Phillip Caputo's *A Rumor of War*. The authors of such works are in general well educated and intelligent, dedicated to their jobs, but also sensitive to the unaccustomed demands and horrific scenes of war. Fick's book

belongs to this tradition while eloquently speaking to our own time.

The best of the junior officer memoirs are both compelling as narrative and instructive in the broad sense. A lieutenant with a gift for writing brings an informed but open mind to his tale, and the reader is able to learn about war, about this war, along with the writer. In *One Bullet Away*, Fick moves from the Dartmouth College campus, to the training areas of Quantico, Virginia, to active service in Afghanistan and in Iraq. He develops from undergraduate to Marine infantry and reconnaissance officer in combat. The book contains some excellent battle pieces, but some of the best parts occur early and late, as Fick tries to adapt to his new circumstances and later to begin succinctly to sort out what he feels and thinks about his experiences. A classics major, he often sees events through a lens of ancient history. Like many other junior officers, his military service often appears as an effort to recapture a lost nobility and simplicity that he has found lacking in his previous surroundings. Hearing journalist Tom Ricks speak about the Marine Corps at Dartmouth before enlisting, Fick observes that, "Ricks used words like 'duty' and 'honor' without cynicism, something I'd not often heard at Dartmouth."

Of course, he also acquires the skills and outlook of an infantryman. An early scene in the book has him conducting a night attack while in training. By now, Fick has learned the rules, but he is also beginning to understand how to apply them imaginatively and effectively to changing and uncertain circumstances. Fick's first taste of war is in Afghanistan. He observes senior

leadership at its most inspiring and effective in the person of Lt. Gen. James Mattis, the division commander, who is seen visiting front-line positions in the middle of a freezing night.

After the campaign in Afghanistan, Fick transfers to the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, an organization whose emphasis on finesse over force appeals to the thoughtful young officer. The war in Iraq finds this unit at the point of the advance toward Baghdad. It is impossible to summarize all that Fick and his platoon see and do in the space of few lines; indeed, it may be impossible even for a Homer or a Tolstoy to render them adequately into words at all.

Fick decides to leave the Corps after his unit is withdrawn from Iraq. A “reluctant warrior,” he has decided that he will not be one of those who live and define their lives by fighting on command, without much questioning, as professional soldiers are perhaps required to do. Some of his comrades return to Iraq after he has left the service, and Fick learns of the death of his replacement, Capt. Brent Morel. The ending chapter of the book may seem rushed, as if Fick has not yet come to terms with his service by the time he has finished writing his story. He finishes on a positive note, but the full meaning of what he has seen might be years in coming. Fick appears to be too decent and honest a man to be content with simple answers. Classicist Fick often intersperses his tale with classical allusions, none more meaningful or moving than the quotation with which he opens his last chapter.

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Edgerton, Robert B. *Remember the Maine, To Hell with Spain: America's 1898 Adventure in Imperialism*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2005. 225pp. \$109.95

Robert Edgerton, a noted anthropologist and member of the UCLA faculty for more than forty years, has written extensively about the small wars of empire that dot the historical landscape of the nineteenth century. Among the better known of his works is *Like Lions They Fought*, an examination of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, which no collection on the subject should be without. He would, therefore, seem to be eminently qualified to explore the historical and cultural aspects and ramifications of the Spanish-American War.

Like many conflicts of the era, the Spanish-American War has until recently been under-examined and largely forgotten. Yet it remains one of America's more important armed conflicts. The war marked the emergence of the United States upon the world stage as a major, externally focused power. It was, in many ways, the physical manifestation of the strategic thinking of Alfred Thayer Mahan. The war left the United States with a physical as well as commercial empire, forever altering the lives of millions of peoples, as well as the development of state power in the Caribbean, Latin America, and Asia. The war occurred when both the U.S. Navy and Army were in the process of revolutionary change. The war would eventually involve U.S. forces across a wide variety of points on the spectrum of conflict, from fleet-to-fleet actions to protracted nation-building efforts. Some scholars have gone as far as to suggest that the U.S. experience in the