Mr. Fick began his talk by noting that the experiences that he would be describing as a young officer in Afghanistan and Iraq were not unique. However, his background going into the Marines as a graduate of Dartmouth with a degree in Classics was somewhat less common. He believes that his studies have given him an unusual perspective. Several times in the talk he noted that there appeared to be a large gap between his views and those of his contemporaries both in college and at the graduate schools he is presently attending.

As a traditionally trained infantry Marine, Mr. Fick was trained to “Shoot / Move / Communicate.”

- Considers this an adaptable concept for most situations he ran into.
- Not convinced that the emphasis on shooting is really what is needed now
  - Troops were not equipped for the peace-keeping ops now on-going in Iraq
  - Never had enough guns for any fire fight they were in during the war
    - Air strikes were the force multiplier
    - One great military policy advance: pushing authority to call in air strikes down to the lowest levels
- Communications was the most important element
  - Never had enough power with him
  - Communications was a lifeline

**Deployments**

- On his first Pacific deployment on 9/11/01; his task force headed toward Afghanistan immediately
- There is a lot of down time on deployments
  - Usually wait/wait/wait/wait/spin up to go then wait/wait/etc.
  - Appreciated leaders who insulated troops from too many unnecessary spin-up cycles
- Skills atrophy without training during deployment
• Afghanistan was deceptively peaceful and very beautiful
  o Little interactivity with people there
  o Each village said the next village was full of Taliban
  o Really needed more translators and cultural affairs specialists
• C-17s were very important
  o If they landed nearby in the desert at night, troops would eat the next day
  o Obviously, was seeing the end of the logistics tail
• Tora-Bora
  o Troops were extensively prepared for an attack that presumably would take out bin Laden
  o Attack was cancelled at the last minute – troops were very disappointed
  o After that, it was combat-lite but did help prepare him for fighting in Iraq

Iraq was much tougher place to fight than Afghanistan

• Fick was then in Recon, the Marines special operations force
• Recon was not used in its traditional operational roles in Iraq
  o Were given HumVees with no doors or roofs
  o Turned down armored vehicles – require more fuel since heavier so would limit range
  o At the time, didn’t know about IEDs; they were not a problem
• His battalion’s exploits were written about in a book that criticized how the battalion was used
  o His troops were not very understanding about how they were used
  o Could not refuse non-traditional missions if wanted to stay relevant
  o There was a urgent need to rush to stay out front during the main Iraq push toward Baghdad
• In the South saw much success from the flyer and related info campaigns to convince fighters to surrender – thousands did
  o People were mostly friendly and welcomed them at first
• Friendliness ended when the reached Nashari
  o There began the blooding of a whole generation of Marines
  o First time he saw any wrecked US vehicles – before there were only great numbers of destroyed Iraqi vehicles

• Marines were told that they would be fighting regular Iraqi army troops
  o Found lots of people in civilian clothes with machine guns
  o Many used children, others as human shields
  o Attacks were coming from mosques and hospitals, too
  o Some would wave white flags then start shooting when troops neared
  o Result: troops got weary and callous about interactions with civilians
Equipment

- Snipers were very important – did not create collateral damage
- Some equipment did survive the problems of dirt, bad weather, and lack of maintenance
  - Dragon Eye UAV – provided 45 minutes of surveillance for 10 km range right to the platoon’s laptop
  - Blue Force Tracker – transponder and receiver system for US vehicles
    - Every friendly vehicle shows up as a blue dot
    - Can also send transponder messages to others
    - Net was open so could upload data on minefields, etc.
    - Result: greatly improved situational awareness
- Technology is not central – human material is
  - Need to pay attention to the psychological effects of combat
  - Three basic ways troops used to cope
    - Superman (I’m bullet proof) – mostly from the young and dumb
    - It is all in God’s hands
    - I’m a professional and can do my job well, let the consequences happen – fatalistic but liberating

Fighting in Iraq

- After three weeks of a shooting war Fick’s troops went more into SASO missions
- He had been trained for the 3 block war where each block had a different level of hostility and action
- His Recon group was made up of older Marines; average age 26 rather than 20 as in infantry platoons

- Big problem in Iraq: adults had too many decades of personal vendettas and hostilities so not likely to be won over or changed by US troops
  - Might be able to make inroads with kids who were more open to change
  - Adults expect only the worst and are suspicious of anything less
    - Many thought that the sunglasses troops wore gave them x-ray vision to look at women under their clothes
    - Given an opportunity to try on the glasses themselves, some wanted to know where the on-switch was to make them work
- In the beginning of the shooting war, Fick’s troops were fighting the people the Administration said they would be fighting
  - Almost always found Syrian passports on bodies
  - On May 3rd, Fick would have agreed with President’s “Mission accomplished” aircraft carrier statement
  - Then the resistance started growing and got very hostile
    - Could argue about exactly when resistance/insurgency started
    - No one thought to use the word insurgency at the time
• Now the only hope seems to be with the kids

QUESTION & ANSWER DISCUSSIONS

HUMINT teams and translators

• Were very helpful and need many more
• Would need own translators to check on what local translators were telling them
  o Often obvious that they were not translating correctly/completely
• HUMINT teams gave them more confidence in what they were doing when interacting with locals
  o HUMINT teams had the flexibility and freedom to follow up leads

US troops as part of the problem in the insurgency development

• Troops certainly did things at the time that seemed perfectly logical but can be seen as sowing seeds of discontent
  o Leaving trail of MRE trash
  o Putting rounds into towns that were shooting at them
• Being unable to stop the looting was frustrating
  o Ordered to be back in own compounds after dark
  o Looting starts after dark
• Small units given 60-70 sq miles to patrol, protect, disarm, show the flag, etc.
  o Areas with thousands of people
  o Only so much so few can do in given area/time

How should training be changed to improve readiness for Iraq?

• Many of his Marine/Army contemporaries are now in teaching positions at combat schools
  o Experienced friends tell him that not much has changed in curriculum
  o Explanation: they are there to train for the core competencies
    • Can’t fixate on what is needed now without harming basic requirements
    • Focused training needs to be done in the units before deployments
  o Joint Forces Command participant noted that answers may lie at the joint level, not at the platoon level
    • Highly focused intel/HUMINT operatives need to go along with platoons to cover these problems
Fick noted that some of his Foreign Service Officer friends are frustrated that Marines are now doing their jobs
  - Military does such things because they are there and they can do it
    - Something similar happens with situations like hurricane relief
    - May only have fraction of accuracy but 90% of the reach needed
  - Fick believes in the citizen soldier concept but some tasks may be too complex
    - Can’t learn everything needed for high intensity fire fights on weekends and summer deployments
    - However, need the older, more mature policeman, fireman, etc., in civil affairs units after battles for the reconstruction
  - The training cycle seems to control too much of what get done for troops
    - And there is never enough time to do all that needs doing

Soldier / Marine profiles

- Really do need 18-20-year olds for high intensity firefights
  - But they have to be ready to handle the insurgency issues, too
  - Not enough time to bring in another more mature force for stability ops
- Cannot expect to afford two separate forces
  - Young troops do get better at these tasks as they go along
  - The best can move from one type of task to the other
- Institutionally, we reward those who do well in the high-intensity fight side
  - Need to reward the others, too, in order to retain their services

Predeployment Training

- Focused on the fire fighting – win it quickly and then go home
  - Troops often heard: “Road home is through Baghdad”
- Yes, cultural training was insufficient but hard to say what else to cut out
  - Can’t add something without taking away something else
  - There is only so much time available

People of Iraq

- Found few ideologues – mostly pragmatists
- They wanted electricity, sewage services, ability to walk around town safely
- There was only a short period when US could have made this happen before insurgency took off
- US troops were doing what made tactical sense at the time
  - Not the big concept of what do we need to do to win
Cultural divide at home

- From his study of history, saw that the human elements do remain the same
  - You can project the future from what comes before
- Fick finds that at the prominent government policy school he attends at Harvard, he is usually the only person with any real experience with Iraq and/or the military
- Big cultural divide between military and students/faculties at major colleges
  - Fick feels he is a small bridge between these two worlds
  - On campus, some cultural issues are leftovers from 35 years ago
- Finds it morally repugnant that so few American are going into the military
  - They lack the shared sense of sacrifice and investment in the Iraqi war

What do we need to do to win the war?

- Training in a few simple phrases would be helpful – if used with the proper respect that needs to be taught to the troops
- Personal view: Need to ratchet down our goals
  - Not as much about a full fledged democracy
  - More like ensuring that there is no genocide in Iraq
- Need to get US people more involved in the fight
  - Burden now on 150,000 military members and their families
  - Everyone else goes shopping
  - Need a real long term energy policy to break US away from reliance on oil
    - Should not be just a “Green” leftist issue
    - Need the freedom of action that would come from being less dependant on oil
- Long term: a real national energy policy
- Short term: redefine “Victory”
  - Iraq is not the spark of revolution in the Mid East that was once feared
  - Other countries (Iran, Turkey) have their own problems so not likely to be affected by big changes in Iraq
  - Only what is happening in Iraq itself is relevant
  - Just because the sides have been fighting each other for centuries, does not mean that we can’t help to control the situation
Troop levels

- Fick stated that he had the sense that the US did have enough power during that first three weeks of the war to win it
- The there was a critical period of waiting – Iraqis wanted to see what US would do for them
  - Needed massive amounts of aid to come in
  - Wanted practical things: security/electricity/etc.
- That window of time did not have enough people involved
  - Probably should have had more than a factor of two as many people but less than a factor of ten
  - That would have solved the problem then
- Now American presence is an irritant and counter-productive

Are soldiers/Marines the right people to do what needs to be done?

- They did what their mission called for – win the fighting war quickly
- Then there should have been a quick handoff
  - With military only doing about 20% of the effort (security for other tasks)
  - But now only the military can be there
- Military can enable reconstruction but not carry it out alone
  - Things could have been worse if they had not been as good as they have been at the reconstruction jobs that they should not be doing
- The core competencies just are not there

Responsibilities of a troop leader

1. Always be ready
2. Always win
3. Bring your people back better than they were when you left
   - This is the hardest.

- At home could be bailing out Marines each weekend for civil misdemeanors but in Iraq troops rose to the occasion
- Military does help build concept of citizenship
  - More diverse units were more likely to be meritocracies
  - Military is also a place for better character development for those who did not have that chance as they were growing up
Training changes

- Trainers are now teaching from experience
- Would not want to change things that much – too much to do
- Fick would change his own attitude about what to pay attention to in training and do a little more

Morale

- Did not see a morale problem with Marines in Iraq
- Maybe some problem with the reservists who got more than they signed up for
- When the force does not feel confident, it will fall back on force protection issues
  - Focus needs to be outward

How important is youth to the military?

- Problem of 18-year-olds vs 30-year-olds with experience
- Allied forces in Iraq tended to be older and were superb
- 26-year-olds were no less willing to head into battle
- Older people are now more fit than they were decades ago
- Ideally, would want older, more mature, physically fit troops for all the various missions