

The Military Education of the Turkish Officer

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Abstract: In this article an overview of the educative process of the Turkish combat, combat close-support and combat support officers is presented. The category of schooling, related prerequisites and timing and the historical development of the involved programs is also highlighted briefly. The social background of the cadets is an included topic. A glimpse at the military career itself is not neglected, either; since this is deemed as a necessity in getting the reader understand the purpose of the mentioned schools, better.

Key words: officer, Military Lycée, war college, Naval War College, Air War College, Staff Officer Academy, military branch, rank

1. Introduction

The Armed Forces consist of the army (Land Forces or Ground Forces), the Navy and the Air Force. Gendarmerie (roughly an approximation for the “rural police”) constitutes the fourth force, whose officers come from the same source as the army. This force has a dual character in the sense that it works in coordination with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, while subjected to sheer military rules regarding promotion and disciplinary matters.

The War College is the main source of the army officers. Its equivalents are the Naval War College and the Air War College. The bulk-and-the-backbone of the Armed Forces, is the army. The bulk of the army, in turn, is the infantry branch.

Other branches (*classes militaire*) are tankers (armored troops), pilots (of helicopters and pipers)¹ and military intelligence.² Then come close-support branches, which consist of the artillery, engineering corps (fortifications) and signals. Then come support branches like ordnance (production, procurement and maintenance of weaponry), quartermaster (supplies of food, drink, clothing and equipment), transportation, personnel and finance (which emerged as an offshoot of the quartermaster branch, in early 1980s).

Each cadet (military student) has his branch specified just prior to graduation. Along the course of his career, a combat officer who loses his good health is usually transferred onto a support branch (below certain health criteria, however, disability-retirement may follow).

The War College used to be two-year-junior-college, ever since the late Ottoman days. Its location was *Harbiye* district of Istanbul, which is a city *quartier* named after this institution. Now the historical building is a military museum. In the republican era, the War College was carried to Ankara.

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¹ As for the pilots of The Air Force; they fly jet-planes and huge transportation pipers.

² This branch was formerly an appointed temporary duty, like the military police work. In late 1990s it was instigated as a separate combat branch, whereby new members were recruited from among other combat branches, for a beginning.

The Naval War College stayed in a Marmara island, from where it got carried to a newly-built campus at nearby *Tuzla* district, in early 1980s. The Air War College was established in *Yeşilyurt* district of Istanbul in 1957. Older Air Force members are all transfers from the army. They got qualified thanks to swift orientation courses and then changed their olive drab uniforms for the new blue ones.

2. Who Enter the War Colleges?

Graduates of the Naval *Lycée* (high school) all go to the Naval War College. Selected graduates of the Military *Lycée* go to Air War College, while the rest go to War College.

So; the turning point comes after junior high school, at the age of fifteen. Up to 1960s there was a Military Junior High School; which recruited its student-body from among primary school graduates, at the age of twelve. Famous writer *Aziz Nesin* relates in his posthumous memories (dated July 08, 1996) that when he entered the Military *Lycée* at the age of 15, he was first excluded by that inner clique of comrades, who used the pejorative term of “pumpkin-registry” (*kayd-i kabak*) for the new-comers!

They take sport exams and cognitive exams besides undergoing a preliminary health exam. Ever since the late Ottoman days a *good physical figure* is always emphasized in regulations. Certain limits of height and weight are specified. Before definite admission, medical reports are required from military hospitals asserting their health conditions suitable for military schooling. The exams are very competitive. Approximately 5% of the applicants are selected. The applicants are at a certain academic standing, to begin with. Their Science course average is at least 7 out of 10.

One can argue that the system, in this respect, resembles the mighty *Janissary corps*³ of the early Ottomans: Healthy and able children were recruited from the Balkan provinces, converted into Islam and given training, eventually to form the hard core of the Palace soldiers, at the times. Mounted cavalry from all over the lands were only the auxiliary troops in battles. (Unfortunately the elite *Janissary corps*, were to deteriorated into rebellious irregulars in later times, until they finally got abolished by Sultan *Mahmud* the Second, in 1826).

The equal opportunity principle⁴ works best in the military. A two-star-general once boasted in a formal speech that he was the son of a peasant from the province of Amasya. He added that his father had become a literate man only during his compulsory service, at the bosom of the military.

3. Socio-Cultural Origins

Parents of officers are humble citizens of all walks of life, in general. They are mostly petty government officials or clerks of all kinds or skilled workers or small shop-keepers.⁵

³ This was a realization of the dream of Ancient Greek Philosopher Plato. He had thought about ideal guards with no anxiety about material goods, for the protection of the city-state. Seljuk State's ghulam and Ottoman State's Janissary are just that (paraphrased from Melek, 1983).

“A ghulam was a slave (by definition, a non-Muslim) educated and trained for state service. The Islamic caliph Al-Mustasim (833-842) used ghlams, and the Ottomans knew of the institution from their direct predecessors, the Seljuk Turks. The Ottomans modified the ghulam system by instituting the *devshirme* system” (Guisepi, 1992).

⁴ This somehow results from the nature of the military environment. Late military sociologist and my former pen-friend — he was delighted when he got quoted in Turkish for the first time, by me — Professor Charles C. Moskos used to emphasize this point for America: Even racial conflicts are at a minimum degree in the military environment. Moreover, the closer a town to a base, the better are the racial integration, even among civilians.

⁵ More specific information is to be found in a military publication as follows:

“Fathers of our cadets are mostly government officials/clerks (40.9%). The second big representative layer is that of the labors

Only small percentages are sons of officers. Officers are not usually eager to send their sons to the military career, on one hand. On the other hand, officer-sons themselves are more inclined to start civilian careers. The number of cadets who are sons of petty-officers are conventionally higher than the number of officer-sons, which can be easily explained by a Freudian argument: They were urged by the parents.

Affluent and privileged children never go to military schools, as a rule of thumb. They can not put up with the harsh discipline. In America, it is known that some do it just to prove their toughness⁶ and this is an entirely different issue, not applicable to the Turkish society.

Kışlalı (1967, p. 155) affirms that officers come from middle classes and seldom from rich classes. Military profession does not appeal to rich family children since the obligation of service in eastern regions is not at all compatible with their aspirations.

Koopmans (1977, p. 228) asserts with reference to *Özbudun* that officers come mostly from the lower-middle class and the salaried middle-middle class. For those youths, military career represents one of the few possibilities for social upward movement.

Nevertheless Koopmans (1977, pp. 228–229) specifies that as Jonowitz & Lieuwen put it, armies are isolated from the society as institutions. Because of this fact; officers identify themselves more with their present social class than their origins. Dodd is of the same opinion and argues that officers integrate with the social class they had climbed, namely the upper class.

The “footing” of the petty-officer schools (roughly equivalent of the non-commissioned-officers of the American system, they carry yellow strips on their arms and eventually make it to the level of senior chief sergeant) come from much lower socio-cultural-economical levels. Some boys even win both entrance exams and prefer the petty-officer school because it is a shorter way to start the profession and earn salaries!

Tezcan (1984, p. 128) writes that lower classes head for the vocational schools with the hope of obtaining a profession via the short way and he lists petty-officer schools among those vocational ones.

In some developed countries officers come from upper social layers: In the academic year 1983–1984 58.6% of Military Academy cadets were from private expensive schools and only 41.4% from state schools (O'Donnel 1988, p. 124).

Janowitz' research verifies that social origins of American officers have enlarged downwards during the first half of the 20th century, leading to a democratization in the officer's class origins (Pavalko, 1971, p. 74).

Still, the obligation of a recommendation from a senator or Congressman ensures a certain social level. The first time I heard about this was from an American ex-military chemical engineer. Recently I read about it once more in the German translation of a novel by Ken Follet.

[One of the heroes is a flight engineer in 1940s]. Eddie is a wood-chopper's son from Oregon. He had to walk miles to school from his house. The teacher Mrs. Maple liked her enthusiastic student. Years later she wrote to a Congress member so that Eddie could participate at the entrance exams to the marine Academy in Annapolis (Follet, 1992, p. 86).

(23.2%). 63.7% of our cadets had completed their junior-high school years in province centers (including the three biggest cities). 33.1% of our cadets had completed their junior-high school years in the country/rural areas.” (Kuleli Askerî Lisesi Hazırlık Sınıfı Öğrencilerinin Sosyo-Ekonomik ve Kültürel Özellikleri, Anket Sonuçları (1987–1988), Çengelköy, İstanbul).

⁶ While attending an English course in Texas years ago, as a group of three Turks, we met and befriended a military family at a café. The young husband, graduate of a very expensive university, Berkeley, had joined the marines and was a lieutenant. When he began to chat about how tough men they are, his wife impatiently interrupted him with a loud complaint: “Oh, Jeff, not again!”. 1992-Presidency candidate Ross Perot was a rich broker's son and he entered the Naval Academy out of admiration for a neighbor peer. Such things do not happen in Turkey.

[At the academy] while the other freshmen complained about the food, Eddie would wipe out his plates completely. He witnessed that besides him, there was only one other cadet who enjoyed the food: Steve. They looked at each other and understood each other [they would be friends for life] (Follet, 1992, p. 135).

4. The Stepwise Evolution of the Military Education

There are no 1971-graduates of War colleges. The schooling duration was increased to three years at that particular date and the second class became the third class. To equalize the generations of officers; the first military rank, that of a sub-lieutenant,⁷ was omitted by the career officers. From then on, they graduated as lieutenants.

Then they become first lieutenants, captains, majors, lieutenant-colonels and eventually colonels, in sequence. A new rank comes with years in service, automatically, unlike the American system, where it is “earned”. Only general and admiral ranks are “earned”. Nevertheless; all officers can not persevere until the rank of colonel. A senior major has a right to a pension. Some quit at this point or the next, while they are lieutenant-colonels.

In 1976 another break-through occurred. No 1977-graduates came out. The schooling duration climbed to four years. To equalize the generations of officers once again; the future-major-rank interval of 1978 graduates would be shortened to five years, instead of six.

Meanwhile foreign-language preparatory classes were instigated at the commencement of the Military *Lycées*. Ever since 1983, an officer is an individual who had an intensive language class for an entire year as well as four years of higher schooling.

The introducing of the Prep classes caused no interruption in graduation history thanks to recruitments from civilian high schools, to replenish the vacancies. Normally, only symbolically small numbers of civilian high school graduates are admitted, like a total of 20, next to about 800 Military *Lycée* graduates. Some years, none are admitted. Ever since mid 1990s again symbolically small numbers of females are also being accepted.

5. A Two-Year-long Interruption in Early 1960s

In August 1962 and August 1963 (graduation date in memory of the last victorious battle of national struggle, after the disintegration of the Ottoman State) nobody graduated from the War College; either. This first interruption of graduates was on non-academic grounds.

To understand this development first the May 27 coup in 1960 must be mentioned; when a small junta organized a coup d'état against the Democrat Party cabinet in power. All deputies of the party got imprisoned. The prime minister and the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance were hanged. (Those three martyrs of democracy were to receive posthumous acquittals two and a half decades later and re-buried with due ceremonies).

The junta attributed the operation to the whole Armed Forces. A four-star-general already in retirement in İzmir was fetched by airplane to Ankara and presented as the head-figure, as a “window-shop”. Tens of generals and literally a few thousand senior officers were forcefully retired. The junta, some of whose members were only young captains, were less than 40 in number. A later session reduced the number to 23.

⁷ The sub-lieutenant rank nowadays pertain to reserve-officers, only. The term could be misleading for an American. A reserve-officer is one who is conscripted (drafted) like any young male citizen, but is granted an officer-standing for his temporary stay, due to his distinguished and/or suitable-for-military education level. (I was once one such reserve-officer). Most of the conscripts serve their terms as plain soldiers / privates, as mentioned above. Some are given corporal ranks (one red stripe on the arm). Some are given senior-corporal ranks (double red stripe on the arm) at most (Officer-ranks are carried on shoulders).

The new constitution's preparation got guided by the junta, who eventually occupied permanent seats at the newly-established second parliamentary chamber, the senate.⁸ They were now known as the National Unity committee and appointed as "natural senators".

In May 20 and 21, 1963; a colonel who was the commandant of the War College armed and mobilized the student-body intending to carry out a coup by deployment of those young and elite cadet-troops of sheer cadets.

Let us note that in former times it was relatively easy to realize a coup and this could have been an enticing factor. Seizure of a few strategic points, one of which being the radio-house, would achieve the desired result.

Rushdie, in his autobiographical novel (1891, pp. 294–295) talks about the coup of *Ayub Khan* in Pakistan in a humorous style. Eleven-year-old *Rushdie* is at a visit in the house of a relative, General *Zulfikar*. After a hearty dinner, all servants are dismissed and the honor guest *Ayub Khan* orders that the young ones (*Rushdie* himself and *Zulfikar*'s son, *Zafar*) should stay. The sight of the medal-and-cordon-carrying men makes his peer *Zafar* uneasy and the Persian carpet of the room gets partly wet by some organic yellow liquid, right there!

Zulfikar, embarrassed as he is, dispels his son and looks at his nephew in the eye. He takes *Rushdie* to the next seat. It is now him who is entrusted with the holy duty of saving the family's honor. As the Chief General discloses the simple plan, the boy moves around the representative objects, at the hint of Uncle *Zulfikar*: The tiny mustard bottle, an infantry platoon, moves to the Central Post Office. Two plates of left-over stew, a company of soldiers divided into two, squeeze a ladle, *Rawalpindi* Airport. The salt-shaker is the backing guard etc.

Sayeed (1968, p. 290) claims that Ayub proved to be a good politician, holding the two parts⁹ of the country in harmony. He adds that Morris Janowitz — in the words of Moskos, the forefather of Military Sociology — also asserts that; for the specific case of Pakistan; demilitarization of the military-elite was more appropriate than the civilian-elite's getting militarized, in political attitude and behavior.

Returning to the May 20-21 operation; in a sense; this was a more radically-oriented coup try against recent coup-makers, themselves and thereby a very wrongly-chosen target was in question, from the very beginning. The retaliation was indeed severe. The operation got aborted by the regular forces. It is told that a jet-fighter, a major, dropped his bombs on top of the cadets, among whom was his own son! The leader of the rebellion got caught, quickly tried¹⁰ and hanged along with a major, his so-called "right arm".

All cadets got dismissed. There were two classes at the time. The first and the second grades. Therefore, there are neither 1963 nor 1964 graduates of the War College! It was politically so arranged that universities opened extra quotas for them. Most were to take up fairly bright civilian careers in business world, politics, academics and bureaucracy.

⁸ It is ironic that after September 12, 1980 coup the constitution got re-written again and the senate got abolished. The one-chambered parliament returned to the political scene. This new coup was a chain-of-command operation, involving the armed forces in their entirety. All politicians were jailed from all parties, for a short time. But none was accorded capital punishment.

Before that, in March 12, 1971, a chain-of-command memorandum had ousted the cabinet. But the parliamentary houses were left intact, if only pressurized from outside. The then-chief-of-general-staff resigned in order to become a candidate for the vacant presidency. The deputies stubbornly refused to elect him, despite all means of intimidation implied or even displayed. Simultaneously, the Air Force Commandant intended to replace the resigned chief-of-general-staff, as the first Air general at the top of the pyramid. The army generals collectively opposed the intention. Nevertheless a consensus fell on a retired admiral as the new president.

⁹ The other part is the future-Bangladesh. In mid eighties in Texas I once asked a visiting elderly Bangladesh colonel how come he became a colonel, the country having been established only in mid-1970s. He replied that he had been an officer in Pakistan and got transferred to the new country.

¹⁰ While a sub-lieutenant, I was once chatting with an elderly elegant lady, the widow of an admiral, in an officer club. On a certain occasion she indicated a white hair gentleman sitting at the front row of armchairs and identified him. "It is he who gave the death verdict on the leader of the May 20-21 coup. He is a retired marine judge. His last rank was admiral".

Four decades later those men were given a sort of military amnesty and granted entrance cards into regular officer clubs. The ranks on those very special entrance cards are indicated as “*Harbiyeli*” (War College Student). In close solidarity, they soon were allowed to build their own club-house in *Bostancı* district of Istanbul.

The chain of graduations re-started with 1965 graduates. On a passenger bus from *Tekirdağ* to Istanbul I once happened to sit next to a former signals officer. When I asked him about his graduation date, I received the interesting reply of 1965. I befriended with him and tactfully induced him to talk about his cadet years.

This is also the classical question when two officers meet on any occasion, like sharing the same room in the hotel section of an officer club. No two members are equal¹¹ in the military, even if they could be buddies as comrades-in-arm. Behavior patterns are adapted accordingly.

For instance, as it is the senior one who has the say, he chooses the bed for himself, first. The other merely complies. If the graduation dates overlap, the army member comes first, the Navy man next, and the Air Forcer last; based on the forces’ own histories. If both come from the army, the branches come into play, infantry being the highest. If branches also overlap; one has better annual appraisal points from his own immediate-superior and those grades are officially announced.

Returning to the “testimony” of the 1965-graduate; let us proceed: In the beginning of the academic year; they got admitted into the evacuated campus. Even the civilian janitors and cooks had been moved elsewhere. The new commandant was a brigadier (one-star) general now, instead of a colonel. (*Nâmik Kemâl Ersun* would later make it to the level of a four-general-rank). Their academic courses were hard and their military training was especially harsh. For months they were not allowed to go down town on weekends.

I once eavesdropped a dialogue between two officers in civilian clothing at a restaurant. It turned out that one was appointed to the War College a year ago. On one occasion he met his best friend from *Kadett* years, an officer from a provincial battalion, on a visit in Ankara, for the moment. He wanted to take his friend to his office to refresh his youth memories. For all his insistence, the other refused to come along, absolutely. Both were 1966 graduates and one can infer that the campus environment was still quite “hot” 3 years after the big incident. Bitter memories of the other officer were overweighing in his mind.

The Naval and air Force Colleges in Istanbul were not involved in the May 20–21 1963 incidents due to their geographical locations. Their senior classes did graduate in 1963 and 1964.

6. The Staff Officer Academy

Outstanding young combat and close-support officers earn the privilege to sit the exams of the Staff Officer Academy. Those few who win are given an intense two-year-long further education. They come out as staff officers. They are the ones who can achieve general ranks in the future. The Academy used to be in *Yıldız*¹² district of Istanbul. Then it got moved to *Ayazağa* district.

Even if all staff officer can not achieve the general-ranks, in case they are good at foreign languages, they usually ensure a temporary post abroad for two or three years as military *attachés* or NATO officers and this is a social and economic contribution to the whole family.

¹¹ If two plain soldiers come together; the one who had joined the army a day or even an hour earlier is the superior, while the other is the subordinate. This is an excellent reflection of hierarchy as depicted by the German sociologist Max Weber.

[As a matter of fact] Weber devised the ideal (and in his own words efficient model) by inspiration from the army and the church (Çaya, 2011–2012).

¹² My father was a student at the Academy. He was a tanker. He got forcefully retired in May 27 1960 coup, while working his way

It is also the staff officers who work in big headquarters located in big cities, while the others are dispersed into troops throughout the country and undergo a lot of deprivation (*Entbehrung*). The staff officers thereby naturally attract the admiration or even the animosity of ordinary officers.

It is a general acceptance that staff officers are the most brilliant ones and generals are even more brilliant. Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy (1996, p. 183) confirm this fact for the case of the United States by reference to the work of P.P. Campbell (1987), The Psychological Test Profiles of Brigadier Generals: They are over 95% of the general population in IQ levels. They even proved to get higher IQ points than a sample of civilian higher administrators.

7. Conclusion

The Turkish officer's education got better and better along the course of republican history. Especially nowadays many young officers who could not make it to the Staff Academy try to get some consolation by studying foreign languages and obtaining master degrees or even Ph.D. degrees in various social and administrative sciences, in various universities throughout the country.

As one old retiree once said so; in brief; the officer's life is dominated by 7 "T" letters which are: *Tevellüt, tedrisat, talim, tayin, terfi, tekaütlik, tedvin*. (In respective order; those Ottoman words come to mean *birth, education, drilling, appointment, promotion, retirement, burial*).

One may perhaps add another Ottoman word onto the list, which a literature teacher friend of mine taught me on the verge of my wedding: *Teethül*. It literally means getting domesticated and the second meaning involves marriage.

However; unlike the generally-accepted and all-encompassing seven items given above, a wedding does not necessarily apply to all officers. Some of them, though few in number, stay as bachelors. After all; one of the most charismatic chiefs-of-staff of recent history, Full-General *Cemâl Tural* was a single man, himself.

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to become a staff officer.

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Supplement



Left: The Lead Postal Stamp of A Petty-Officer Preparatory School's Post-Office in the City of *Çankiri*, Right: The Ring of the Infantry Petty-Officer School, Cast for 1994 Graduates, in Silver



Two Different Rosettes of the War College



The Chest-Ambler of the War College, for the External Uniform



A Key-Chain of A Military High School in the City of *Bursa*



Three Different Rosettes of A Military High School Located in Istanbul



A Key-Chain of the Naval War College



The Logo of the Winter Sports Center of the Armed Forces



A Silver-Cast Ring of the War College



A Rosette in Memory of the 1980-Graduates of the War College



A visit by the researcher (at the right) to the special club of dismissed cadets in *Bostancı*. His friend, a resident of the district and a retired navy colonel (on the left), made the arrangement possible. On the background is a photograph showing the War College Buildings. At the table the napkin-case contains their logo: *May 20-21 Association of War College Cadets 1963*.

When I was a child I was taken to a military hospital by my mother because I was biting my fingernails. The psychiatrist being absent, they sent us to the neurologist, instead. At the moment he was inspecting those high school graduates who had won the entrance exams to Military *Lycées*, as I was to infer much later. Below is the related story in prose.

The Unforgettable Military Neurologist

One day when I was only five,
Ma took me to Military Hospital;
Because I was all the time
Gnawing at my fingernails.
The physician we needed
Being absent at the time;
They sent us to another one.
(Now it is clear to me:
The psychiatrist wasn't there.
The next best instead
Was the neurologist then.

The man really resembled
A victorious commandant!
Handsome solid he did look!
Steel-rimmed glasses on his eyes,
Pure whites on his tall body!
A group of big boys
Were standing before him.
He was asking each of them
Where he happened to come from.
But no matter what they said;
With a frown of his brows,
The invariable negation:
*"I have never yet seen
A proper, estimable personage
Originating from that town!"*

The funny thing: Each big boy
Would stay mute, expressionless!
Then the doctor grabbed papers
From the boys' hands and signed them.
(Now I can imagine:
Those boys had all won
Admissions to schools
Of the Military nearby
And they wanted the reports
Of good health, for registry.
The doctor was simply
Driving them mad knowingly
To test their reactions).

When it came to our turn;
My mother talked to the man,
Explaining the problem.

She boasted over my
Intelligence, moreover:
“Though he can’t yet scribble
Sentences in real sense;
The letters are in his mind!”

Then the doctor began
Articulating some
Letters of the alphabet
While I noted them all down
In an enormous note-book.
*“Now stands there
Your own name!
This means your signature.
No more biting on your nails!
The signature over here
Is hereby an official
Promise to me, on your part!”*

Then he gave me a really
Penetrating look and asked:
“Aren’t you gonna thank me then?”
I murmured a thank-word.
Burying my confused face
On the lap of my ma;
Pulled on her rock to urge her
To leave the room right away!
Nevertheless curious,
Just out of the threshold,
I raised my eyes to glance at
The terrific doctor one last time.

He, too, came out of his room
And talked aloud to himself:
*“Now that the day’s task’s over;
We might as well close this shop!”*
With his elbow he hit hard
At the knob of the white door,
Slamming it with a bang.

S.Ç.