

## Longevity of the Military Hard Core: The Case of the Turkish Republic

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### Abstract

In this study it is attempted to get a notion about the average life span of officers in Turkey. Ten random issues of the journal of the association of retired officers are employed for this purpose. The last pages of the mentioned journal are devoted to obituary notices, where names, military branches and decease dates are entered. The military record or registry (numéro d'inscription/Registriernummer) of each is also included and this is the critical knowledge, since the number provides the graduation dates, from which the birth date is easily calculated. The average officer lives about a decade longer than the country's average-male.

**Keywords:** Officer; Life span; Obituary notice; Birth date; Death date

### Introduction

The officer's record consists of two hyphenated numbers, the first of which is the graduation-and-commission date. The second number reflects the academic standing: The more successful the graduate as far as his cumulative course average is concerned; the smaller is the second number.

In this research, the vast majority of the data involve graduates of the war colleges. It is namely those educative institutions which provide the officer corps to the armed forces. The army college is the equivalent of America's west point. Gendarme officers come from the same source. The naval war college is the US air force academy located at Colorado springs. In Turkey the army is the biggest force and sometimes merely the word army comes to denote the entire armed forces.

Data regarding officers with civilian university education like military medical doctors or veterinary surgeons or engineers or teachers, are at a minimum. Their proportion is indeed smaller with respect to combat officers, in each of the forces. To avoid some possible confusion; let us specify that engineering corps or fortifications is a combat support branch of the army, whose members come from the war college. Even the topographical engineers come out of the war college but they later undergo various professional courses. A few topographical engineers are contained within the given data and they are included in the related calculations.

### Methodology

At a second-hand bookstore we ran into a bunch of journals. There were thirteen of them all together. I was long familiar with the journal, anyway. It is the publication of the association of retired officers. Thumbing through the pages, the idea occurred to me right away. For no other profession one could find so regular and detailed data revealing the life spans.

Those journals contained a good bunch of data to be evaluated and I bought them immediately, without even bargaining (Normally it is conventional to bargain at second hand book-dealers). Indeed, Chang [1] (ref to Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 739-740) tells us that a wide array of labels indicating an auto-ethnographic<sup>1</sup> orientation includes (among others) items like first-person accounts, impressionistic accounts and even opportunistic research (as long as complying with ethics, as I feel to add). No offence, on my part! One might as well go ahead and label all that work an opportunistic research [2].

<sup>1</sup>The explanation of auto-ethnography makes it transcend autobiography by connecting the personal to the cultural. The importance of linking the self and the social is also affirmed in Reed-Danahay's influential book, auto/ethnography: rewriting the self and the social, 1997 (Chang 2008: 46).

At home at a closer glance it was discovered that three issues were repeated among the bunch of journals, which left us with only ten distinct copies.

The obituary notices got scanned. Each journal was assigned a code name arbitrarily, to facilitate the work. The codes went as *ZABIT 01*, *ZABIT 02*, etc. ("Zabit" is the older, Ottoman word for "officer").

Then the life span of each officer was easily calculated and listed together. The war colleges (for land, navy and air force) used to be equivalent to the levels of 2-year-long junior colleges in duration. (1972 Graduates had 3-year-schooling; 1978 graduates were the first generation to have 4-year-schooling). Physicians had 6 years of university history. Veterinary surgeons had 5 years and engineers four years at their respective faculties. Birth dates of the members belonging to those branches, were calculated, accordingly [3].

Some of the entries in the journals are about females, the crushing majority of whom are officers' wives. A few are officers' daughters. There are also civilians who were honorary members of the society. All such entries are excluded from our specific purposes.

At the appendix of this paper all scanned pages as well as the tabulations are displayed.

### How Good are the Data in Reflecting Birth Dates?

Students who interrupt schooling are not admitted to military schools. Therefore, all cadets are at the specified, proper age in admission date. The military education institutions find their "footing" from among sheer middle classes [4]. Most are urban youths, even if from the provinces. This fact alone ensures that their birth dates were duly registered.

In villages, births were not as soundly reported as in town centres, at least in former years. A peasant cannot go to the population registry

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department in the district immediately and delays do occur. Some deliberately postpone the baby-registries [5]. A daughter should appear younger at her wedding. A boy may thus get drafted into the compulsory military service (as a private/plain soldier) at an age somewhat older than twenty, in order to suffer the hardships<sup>2</sup> better.

Some of the officers had failed one or more courses and had to repeat the whole year. But they are only a tiny percent of the officer-population [6]. Usually in a classroom comprising roughly thirty military students at most one or two are “wash backs” from a previous year, and they carry different cadet-numbers on their collars.

Many cadets do fail in difficult courses (namely science courses like math, physics or chemistry) in June at the end of the year. However; following a summer course, they eventually pass the September conditional exams, in practice, in accordance with the long traditions and conventions.

As an army major (September 15, 2014) explained to me in Ankara; while a cadet at the military Lycée in Bursa, their officer-in-charge of disciplinary issues was famous” for having lost three (!) years in his educative history, as an exception [7]. One year in military junior high school<sup>3</sup>, another year in military high school and still another year in war college. (Losing two years in one of those stages means dismissal). I remembered the name (M.K.) from my own military service days. But I learned this secret of his only recently. The mentioned individual had a brilliant professional career as an infantry officer.

It is probable that university graduates had failed at least one year or maybe more. There courses are harder, after all. In former times, one could stay in Turkish universities until graduation, as a rule of thumb. A military student who keeps the title of student automatically keeps his title of military student (following studies on the account of the military) [8].

A teacher-colonel in Çankırı, years ago, mentioned about his eccentric classmate at the faculty of turcology. “This fellow” had deliberately failed an easy course-therby not jeopardizing his eventual graduation-successively, in order to prolong his military student life [9]. Food, clothing and sleeping wards and the humble pocket money paid to cadets kept him happy as a student, instead of graduating, getting a rank and assuming many responsibilities. This is an exceptional case, as well [10].

## Results

Processing the data from ten issues of the journal of the association of retired officers verified the fact that the average life span of the officer in Turkey is 81.1 years. This is quite a high value [11].

## Debate and Conclusion

“Life-expectancy is a very useful standard measure for comparing the health of societies, and for noting progress and regress in economic development. In Norway in 2000 it was 79 years and in the USA 77 years. In Sierra Leone it was 35 years. As an example of regress we can note that for Russia, life-expectancy fell between 1986 to 1994 from 70 to 64 years” [12].

<sup>2</sup>Kışlalı (1967: 155) asserts that the Turkish Johnny leads a rather hard life with his shaven head-ever since mid 1990s plain soldiers are allowed to have some hair: a single official clothing and mediocre collective meals. But he does not mind it. Most of them are deprived even of those conditions back home in their villages and small towns, anyhow.

<sup>3</sup>There were two junior military high schools, one in Istanbul-Selimiye district, the other in Erzincan. They got abolished in late-1960s.

In Turkey, on the average, women live 78 years while men live only 71 years [13,14]. It is no surprise that the average officer outlives the average male citizen (81.1 years *versus* 71 years). The health examinations at the entrance to the military schools ensure that the population-samples constituting the officers are at good health, initially. Moreover, they lead disciplined lives, including sportive activities and they are fairly well-to-do, in terms of their gains (fairly good salaries with respect to other government employees). Another factor can be their relatively high IQ points, when the immense competition to enter the military schools is considered. Out of roughly thirty thousand applicants to military high schools about a thousand are accepted [15]. After all; Lewis Madison Terman’s (1877-1956) famous longitudinal research starting in 1920s on hundreds of gifted Californian school children showed that they were more successful, more adaptable and healthier in the long run, than other Americans. “Even the death rate was about 33 percent lower than that for the general population [16].

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