

2nd GLOBAL CONFERENCE on PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCHES, 28-29, November 2014

## The Conscripting System in Armed Forces: Turkey's Example

Sinan Caya<sup>a\*</sup>

*<sup>a</sup>Dr., Marmara University, Faculty of Engineering, Instructor of Social Electives*

---

### Abstract

In the armed forces of Turkey the compulsory service is the valid system. This is how temporary privates are obtained from among healthy and young male citizens. They constitute the backbone of the military man power; their numbers attain figures much bigger than the numbers of rank-carrying personnel, namely commissioned-officers and petty-officers. It is a widely known fact that military life is indeed tough, especially for those occupying the lower levels within the hierarchical pyramid. Conventionally those conscripts have their own informal ways to cope with the mentioned hardships. Effective seniority circles and Landsman solidarity are two most commonly observed practices, despite the rigid forbidding regulations of the official policy.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Research and Education Center.

*Keywords:* Seniority; compatriot; conscript; draft; private; rank; army; service

---

### 1. Introduction

In Turkey healthy men at the age of twenty are recruited for military service on an obligatory basis for a specified term. Successful students get a deferment until a certain age (usually 29). Deserving recruits are assigned first or second grade corporal ranks. Re-engaged corporals constitute the lowest ranked professional personnel. Then, higher up the hierarchy come the non-commissioned-officers and the officers, respectively. They are voluntary, schooled professionals. Some of the officers (the ones who hold the ranks of sub-lieutenant) are also conscripts; but they own university degrees. The highest officer rank is that of a colonel, over which are placed the generals.

Historically states relied on different methods of recruitment for their armies. In ancient times and in the middle ages soldiers were paid soldiers, in other words, mercenaries. Those professional soldiers could even be recruited

---

\* Sinan Caya. Tel.: 0216 348 0292.

E-mail address: [sinan.caya@gmail.com](mailto:sinan.caya@gmail.com)

from foreigners<sup>(\*)</sup>. But in modern times, with the emergence of national feelings and the formation of nation-states, the idea of compulsive military service came into being.<sup>(\*\*)</sup>

In modern times, sometimes lottery systems were employed. This was the case in the United States of America during the Vietnam War years (A problem arose when the heavy-weight boxing champion M. Ali Clay's name emerged in the lottery and he responded by refusing to go serve under arms. As a punishment, his title was cancelled "on the table instead of on the rings". Years later, his boxing prohibition got abolished. He emerged as a champion again. Finally, his kindling the Olympic torch in Atlanta was like an amend of his country to the former champion. In September 2000 in the opening ceremonies of *Sydney* Olympic games, among the honor guests we see the middle-aged handsome face of Mohammed Ali once more!).

In highly developed countries, where armed forces offer satisfactory opportunities, usually there are enough number of volunteers to keep the armies going. *Sociologist Gans (1972) says that the poor sections of the society are quite functional in this sense; they are lured into armies (as well as other dangerous or difficult civilian jobs) for the sake of the payment (Ritzer, 1983: 233).*

Though the above arguments can not be knocked down altogether; the concept of national character must also be given credit. Indeed, the same authors *do* admit this very same national character, when it comes to martial values.

An American sergeant-major, Cecil Stack, compares the Turkish Army with the American army as far as structure goes: The basic structure of each army looks the same, with units built on units; so in this manner platoons make companies, companies make battalions and so on. The Turkish Army parallels the U.S. army with officers, NCOs [non-commissioned-officers] and enlisted men. Every male citizen at age 20 must start military service if he has no physical disability and if his education is not interrupted. In the enlisted ranks are privates, who wear no rank insignia; [second order corporals] corporals, who wear red, one-stripe rank insignias; and sergeants [first order corporals], who are not equal to NCOs and wear red, two-stripe rank insignias. They have a 20-month [then the year was 1986, now the term is shortened] obligation and leave when it is up. Conscripts soldiers also must live in the barracks during the week. They can leave on weekend passes if their schedules permit. A second lieutenant said: "These men receive very little money; the army provides them with food, clothing and a place to sleep" (Stack, April 1986: 15). [Then the description goes on with daily activities like physical training and field tactics].

A realistic picture of the Turkish Army in 1960's is given by a scholar as follows: *The Turkish Army counts around half a million men. A good part of the American aid and the local budget is spent to keep this army. The obligatory service period lasts 24 months [It progressively got shorter]. Those with higher education [now at least a B.S. or a BA.] degrees perform their service as reserved officers. According to the given figures; an American soldier stationed in Turkey costs 7700 dollars per year, while a Turkish soldier costs only 240 dollars. The simple Turkish soldier, called Mehmetçik<sup>(\*)</sup> undergoes his service in rather harsh conditions: The head closely cropped [Since 1993 a soldier is allowed to have some hair on top of his head], only one piece of clothing, a straw mattress, a mediocre nourishment (900 grams of bread and 35 grams of meat per day). But, even in those circumstances he is very devoted to his officers and executes the given orders without even bothering to understand what motives lie*

---

\* This, the Byzantians did do, for instance: "The entrance of Armenians into Byzantine society [for such military purposes] excited considerable antagonism and jealousy on the part of the Greeks, who considered them to be crafty and treacherous. The antagonism is reflected rather virulently in medieval Greek poetry and proverbs" (Vryonis 1975:140). Seljuqs later did the same thing: "Seljuqs in Asia Minor absorbed the Greeks and Armenians into their military [as well as administrative, religious and agricultural] institutions. In addition, they forced the Nicaean-Trebizondine Greeks, the Georgians, and the Cilicians, as vassals, to furnish troops on an annual basis" (Vryonis, 1975:141).

\*\* "In both the American and French Revolutions the extending of the rights of citizenship (in particular the right to vote) was closely lined with the responsibility of military service. The linkage between citizenship and mass conscription was most clearly enunciated in France, where conscription was institutionalized early and became widely accepted"...In the Soviets, article 63 of the 1977 constitution stated the service of male citizens as a sacred obligation (Jones, 1985:52).

\* "Mehmetçik" means "little Mehmet / *petit* Mehmet". Mehmet is an abbreviation of Mohammed and is a very common name, literally loved by Turks. "This title designates the common soldier, who constitutes the main pillar of the Turkish Army. The title is an historic one. Historian Reshad Ekrem Kochu, in an extract about Fahreddin [Turkkan] Pasha gives the following knowledge. The Pasha instigated this title by using it regularly in daily issued orders and registering it on to the army archives. The pasha was the defender of the city of Medine against the British and their collaborators, the local forces, during the First World War. It was he who had sent some of the holy relics of the Blessed Prophet to the treasure of the Sultan in Istanbul, before the opposing forces seized the sacred city" (Erendil, 2000: 28).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1109539>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1109539>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)