

N A D I R E M A T E R

VOICES FROM THE FRONT

TURKISH SOLDIERS

ON THE WAR

WITH THE

KURDISH GUERRILLAS

TRANSLATED BY

A Y S E G Ü L A L T I N A Y

FOREWORD BY

C Y N T H I A E N L O E



VOICES FROM THE FRONT

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TURKISH SOLDIERS ON THE WAR WITH
THE KURDISH GUERRILLAS

NADIRE MATER
TRANSLATED BY AYŞE GÜL ALTINAY
WITH A FOREWORD BY CYNTHIA ENLOE

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FOREWORD

It was October, 2003. This was my first visit to Istanbul. The U.S. government by this time was deeply engaged in its military invasion of Iraq. Nine months earlier, the Turkish parliament, however, had surprised the Bush administration by voting to refuse to allow the U.S. military to use Turkey, where there had been American bases for decades, as a launch pad for its northern incursion into neighboring Iraq. Those parliamentarians voting to deny the Americans this access were persuaded in no small measure by an effective lobbying campaign mounted by the Turkish peace movement, in which Turkish feminists played a significant role.

Ayşe Gül Altınay was my host in Istanbul. A feminist anthropologist at Istanbul's independent Sabanci University (where all first-year students are given laptop computers) and a sophisticated analyst of the daily workings of Turkish militarism, Ayşe Gül was making sure that I would learn a lot in a short time. We were meeting and having intense conversations over tea, coffee, meals, and wine with publishers, peace activists, conscientious objectors, university students and feminists. My mind was working overtime to absorb it all. Despite its importance to the making of "The West" and to current European Union and NATO politics, despite its century-long women's movement (the archives of which are all available in Istanbul's Women's Library), despite its global significance in the complicated evolution of thinking about empire, nationalism, militarism, and the secular state, Turkey was a country about which there had been dismayingly little discussion in political science, international relations, and women's studies. I knew embarrassingly little. I had a lot to learn.

On this October morning we were climbing up the stairs of a small building in the bustling Istanbul neighborhood of Tunel to meet Nadire Mater, codirector of BIANET, a self-consciously independent Internet news service. My first impression was of what I had always imagined a real newspaper office should be—no frills, no walls, lots of energy, windows looking out over the city; oh yes, and cigarette smoke. Nadire Mater greeted us warmly. She exuded the sense of a real newspaper woman: direct, informal, savvy. In Turkey today, to be an independent journalist means also having to stay alert, determined, and brave. In a

country where the military plays a central role in political life, where a fierce ethnicized civil war has been going on in the Kurdish southeast for a generation, where, as in the United States, religion and politics are in an explosively fluid relationship, “national security” has been wielded by those in authority to dampen independent journalism.

I was beginning to see why Ayşe Gül thought that I, who was trying to track the blatant and subterranean workings of gendered militarization in the United States and other countries, would find time spent in Turkey so valuable.

Nadire Mater is the author of this terrific, eye-opening book you are about to read. Ayşe Gül Altınay is its skilled translator.

The Turkish state still acquires its rank-and-file soldiers through all-male conscription. The voices we hear here are those of young men who have been conscripted. While there now exists a vibrant Turkish conscientious objector movement, most young men and their parents do not see themselves as having much choice but to submit to conscription.

Many conventional historians of the nation-state—a particular sort of state, one whose officials and defenders claim that it acquires its legitimacy from having roots in a horizontally bonded community of citizens, that is, in a nation—have asserted that the creation and perpetuation of a conscript army of male citizens are crucial for any state wanting to stay rooted in the nation. Feminist theorists of the state and of the nation have put neon-lit asterisks around the awkward fact that military conscription almost always applies only to male citizens, thus making living in both the nation and the state quite a different experience for women than for men. A system of male military conscription does not bind women to the nation-state.

Since the 1970s, more and more states have given up male military conscription, legislators seeing it as a symbol not of national legitimation of the state, but, instead, of state coercion. This has left these governments relying instead on “all-volunteer” forces. Britain, Japan, Australia, Canada, and the United States, followed more recently by South Africa, the Netherlands, and Belgium and several of the postwar Eastern Europe states, have given up conscription as the means for mobilizing soldiers. On the other hand, in France—the prototype of the male citizen nation-state military—as well as in Germany, Russia, South Korea, Switzerland, Israel, and Italy, there are presently public debates over whether something essential in the nation-state will be lost if the state’s military no longer directly touches the lives of all its young male citizens—and their parents. Turkey’s state elites, like those of France and Russia and South Korea, are loathe to surrender their grip on masculinized nationalist legitimacy.

Those states that have turned to all-volunteer forces have faced the challenge of attracting sufficient numbers of young people into their uniformed ranks.

When the local civilian economy is booming, or when the government is deploying its soldiers to wage a less than popular war, recruiters' jobs become especially hard. Today in the United States, military recruiters are under such stress to meet their monthly recruiting quotas that many are reporting mental health problems. Most governments that have given up male conscription have found that to fill the ranks, especially to fill them with young people with secondary and even university educations (increasingly necessary as soldiering has called for more and more advanced skills), recruiters have needed to enlist more young women. The elimination of male conscription and the subsequent rise of women as a percentage of the state's soldiers are not unconnected.

The Turkish military remains today dependent on young male conscripts. Since the early 1990s, women have been permitted to enlist voluntarily as officers (Italy, not Turkey was the last NATO military to permit women to voluntarily enlist), but they remain a very small percentage of all the Turkish government's troops. At a deeper level, compulsory male military service remains widely seen in Turkish official circles and among Turkish nationalists to be the essential experience of national belonging. While this may seem to make Turkish political culture dramatically different from American political culture in the early twenty-first century, the proliferation in the United States of yellow ribbons with their "Support our troops" logo, together with the omnipresence of uniformed military personnel at school and professional sporting events and town holiday parades might suggest that the 1973 ending of conscription ("the draft") in the United States did not actually sever the ideological links that many Americans forge for themselves between military service and national belonging.

Nadire Mater is a skilled and careful interviewer. The voices of the young men one hears here on these pages are relatively unfiltered, unchoreographed. The young men we meet here are reflective, unsure, candid. Precisely because state legitimacy, nationalist ideology, and masculinized military service have been so tightly woven together in Turkish political culture, making public these highly personal mullings by ordinary soldiers about their worries and anxieties can amount to political dynamite. Who is the "enemy?" What does it mean to become a "man?" How can one hold onto one's basic humanity? To appreciate the political saliency of soldiers' narratives, one needs only to think of how sensitive have been the publications of soldiers' thoughtful narratives in Israel, in South Korea, in the United States and in Russia.

On one evening of my intense Istanbul visit, I was invited to join a party in the modern apartment home of a family long engaged in Turkey's vibrant urban intellectual life. The conversations were lively, moving between Turkish and English. The buffet was enticing, the wine plentiful. Stories were shared, political meanings were dissected, laughter abounded. As the party wound down, a

dozen of us were putting on our coats and saying extended goodbyes and thank yous in the front hallway. A friend of the hosts asked about their university graduate son's imminent conscription into the military. There was no question that it would happen, only how he might be deployed. In a spirit of friendship, one of a party raised a glass and made a toast: "May your son be assigned to the Navy's volleyball team!" We all joined in.

Several months later, now back in Boston, I heard the outcome of our collective wishing: the young man was assigned to the army and sent to the Southeast to join the government's fight against Kurdish insurgents. I wonder now what he will think of these testimonies given to Nadire Mater. Which will most closely match his own? What, I wonder, will his father think? And his mother? And his sister? And his girlfriend? Maybe, though, he will feel it is best to keep his confused reflections to himself. Silence is comforting to many militarized nation-states. This book is not comforting.

Cynthia Enloe

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For their support from the very beginning, I am grateful to my friends James Ron and Ertuğrul Kürkçü, my partner Tayfun and my daughter Çiğdem . . .

If it were not for the support I received from the John D. And Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation-Global Security and Sustainability Program, I would not have been able to leave everything else aside for a year and work on this book.

The 42 plain, innocent, ordinary young men whose stories you are about to read are the ones who created this book with their courage to share. I am so glad they did. I thank them deeply.

¹ The translator would like to thank Nusret Karayazgan, Ertuğrul Kürkçü, Hakan Altınay, and Tayfun Mater for their valuable contributions to the translation.

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PREFACE

“Death is just two inches high,” says Ahmet wryly. “Stick your head two inches above the trench and you get a bullet hole through the forehead.”

The remark comes from a conscript army officer from Southeast Turkey. Twenty-five years old, with a masters degree in economics from Istanbul University’s faculty of political science, he has the poetic aspirations of the educated youth in combat; “The enchanting bang of the Kalashnikovs from afar sooths death,” he says. A start at a career in Turkey’s booming financial sector was interrupted by the draft and deployment amongst the 220,000 Turkish troops sent Southeast to join the fight against the PKK.

“I hated them all,” Ahmet says of his first encounter with the locals of the Southeast town of Kars, an oasis of peaceful indifference in the midst of war-torn, inhospitable countryside. “There on the mountains some soldier was dying for them at that moment, but down there no one cared,” he says, having learnt the first lesson of young soldiers everywhere. “Soldiers and civilians belong to two entirely different worlds.” Another world away, in Istanbul, his niece was born. “Back in the World”—as the young draftees of Vietnam used to call their days on leave—among his friends in the city of the Ottomans, he has to face their uncomprehending questions. “They do not understand that you are obliged to do it,” he responds angrily. “If you are to live in this country you have to go for military service. You kill rather than be killed and you set villages afire. It is inevitable”.

Ahmet has a collection of photographs. As innocently as someone recalling a picnic in the countryside, he picks out a picture of a moment in the mountains; of himself, holding an automatic rifle. Behind him a village simmers with flames. After three months of basic training in Ankara, Ahmet was ordered to join a unit in the town of Kars, close to the Armenian border, before being sent to join the fighting in the mountains. “Here a fellow officer was shot.” He points to another picture of a rugged mountain range. “I was nearly shot as I tried to rescue him.” His unit’s medic panicked and hid in a nearby cave, leaving him alone with the dying conscript. The evacuation helicopter arrived five hours too late to take him to safety, his corpse was placed in it. Another photo: A group of soldiers at rest in a tent. Ahmet is pictured reading poetry. “Pablo Neruda, or maybe Mayavoksy.” He struggles to remember.

Ahmet is now in command of a thirty-six man artillery unit. In his free time he reads papers and books seized from PKK shelters. He listens to the radio, picking out the songs about Turkey's mountains. His favorite is entitled "My Beloved Waits Behind the Mountains." His mother and girlfriend are in Istanbul. His father is working as a "gastarbeiter" in Germany. Another picture: A dead PKK guerrilla stripped of his clothes. "We have to strip them. They might have hidden documents under their clothes, or have booby traps placed on their corpses." Ahmet is still on the defensive. "It does not matter whether they are men or women." But he cannot explain why he took the picture, or why he keeps it. Or why he shows it. He struggles to explain the war crimes and breaches of the Geneva Convention that his troops are committing. "The psychology of the fighter in the front is different." Another picture: Another affectation of the youth at war; his gun held up, with a flower stuck in the barrel. A sign of peace and a possible disciplinary offense in the field.

Ahmet recalls Laila. He was ordered to fire on a group of supposed women PKK guerrillas. The unit was led, he says, by a Kurdish woman guerrilla called Laila. For five months they spoke over their army radios, their calls to their respective soldiers crossing over the air as they routinely monitored each other's transmissions. Now, whenever Laila's voice is picked up over the radio the operators call out "Ahmet! Yours is on the line!" One day, he fears, he may play a part in her death. What will happen when Ahmet finally comes home from the mountains? There are more references to Vietnam and the miserable existence of the veteran of a war without victory or glory. "Life in the mountains is beyond imagination," Ahmet says. "A unique nature, lots of alcohol. Doctors even supply addicts with drugs. Generally the PKK abstain, though a few captives have been found with rough processed 'crack' cocaine in their pockets."

The PKK claim the Southeastern provinces of Turkey as part of an independent Kurdistan. Ahmet and his army, a ragtag mix of NATO trained "special forces" and bootless "village guards" armed with aged shotguns have been sent South to stop them. "Raw in the fields the rude militia swarms," wrote the seventeenth-century English poet John Dryden, about another civil war. "Mouth without hands; maintained at vast expense. In peace a charge, in war a weak defense." The penultimate lesson. That of the youth who can still, without understanding why, feel a shameful pride in his training, in the responsibility and power that war confers on the young. He recalls the artillery barrages called down on the enemy on his direct order. "Each shell costs 700 dollars," he says. He has two weeks of leave before his last three months of combat duty in the mountains. "Life," he says, "is so much more meaningful now. I have at last learnt who is leading whom to death, or who is wasting twenty bullets at one shot to make others believe that the war is going on . . . Though the bullets come back as fast as inflation and increasing death

rates,” adds Ahmet, the political economist he became years ago still alive deep in his soul.

The feature above, transmitted by IPS *Third World News Agency*, dates back to November 20, 1994.¹ The piece was not scheduled for that week. We were acquainted with Ahmet (that is how we called him), but had learnt his real name only after he left for military service. We accidentally came to hear his story when he, during leave, was visiting friends in his former workplace. He was picking one picture after another from among a big bunch and telling the others his story. Ertuğrul and I joined the group to listen. We felt that what he was saying would be of interest to all who lived in this country. We invited Ahmet to our office nearby. The next day he came, sat down on the chair in front of my desk and for four hours at a stretch, not even letting me ask any questions—indeed it was unnecessary—he spoke on and on, then left. As soon as he was gone we started to type down whatever we had been able to recall in our minds. The feature we called “Ahmet’s story” was the starting point for what has developed into “Mehmet’s Book.”

During flights to or from the Southeast provinces of Diyarbakır or Batman, I used to chat with young men whose fear of the first flight already suppressed their curiosity for venturing into the “unknown,” whose cheeks blushed in embarrassment as they clumsily tried to lock their belts. The private in the plane from Batman, who after his basic training was heading for his unit in Diyarbakır, could not understand what the other soldier—who after procuring leave based on faked illness was about to be discharged—said to him in advice. “Don’t pretend you are capable of everything,” the experienced one told, “thus, you could be appointed to easier duties, and escape risks. You should seek to get out of there alive.” The private excitedly challenges with the fervor of someone who has just started feeling like a young man: “Why should I look incapable?” “I feel like his grandpa,” the first one says helplessly. “Though, I was just like him two years ago. Going there is something, leaving is something else.” Being two years younger, the private concludes the discussion: “We will do whatever we can. This country is ours to the last inch. We will safeguard it, even it means becoming a martyr or a disabled veteran.”

For years, during my numerous trips to the Emergency Rule Zone, I attempted to interview the soldiers and police officers there on duty, but in vain. Of course, they would (or could) not speak. Anecdotes were quoted in my

¹ (Nadire Mater, “Back into the World: Reminiscences of a Turkish Youth from the War Front,” Published with permission of the IPS-INTER PRESS SERVICE).

features in order to add a touch of their mood. Yet, even during those limited encounters, I found myself refraining from looking at their faces. I did not want their faces. Would not knowing a face hurt more, when you hear of their deaths? I was seeking to protect myself.

* * *

The woman dressed in a conservative bathing suit gazes around on the beach; another one in her bikini, imbued with the startling reports in newspapers is ready to accuse the anonymous crowd: "What insensitiveness! How can they go on vacation in such days?" As she browses through the pictures of young people killed in the clashes and of their weeping mothers, the "sensitive" woman is deeply affected; she is worried about the people arrested under yet uncertain charges.

The other woman stops gazing and attempts at initiating a chat: "They say, it is the anniversary of 'terror' today. We came here from Ankara to see our son. But they won't let us see him. His father is looking for a way out. And I am waiting here." She waits for her son who is doing his military service in the Foça district of the Western province of Izmir. "He has just returned from operations in the Southeast," the woman says. A while later, the "son" appears. An extremely thin young man, his skin stuck to his bones. Apparently his father's plea has worked. The mother hastily stands up, tightly embraces her son. The young man stays silent. Mother rubs his back with sun oil like his baby days. His body is white as milk but his face tanned. Nobody on the beach is aware of the presence of a "hero." Would they like to be? The "sensitive" woman, who until then had been pouring her anger into the sea or onto the beach is embarrassed.

"Look at these roads, let aside the gendarmes, not even a policeman is patrolling. How strange . . ." She is a schoolteacher from Western Izmir, now living in Southeast Diyarbakır with her husband, a fighter pilot. "How could they feel so comfortable? No fear, no anxiety, they can wear whatever they wish and go wherever they like. I am afraid, they would not even care even if they left their identity cards home."

Why is she so obsessed with those issues? "During my first days back, I was enraged with all who live here, even with my parents. There in Diyarbakır, you cannot go out whenever you wish, you should not carry your military ID card but use other cards; out on the street you fear: 'What if someone identifies me and shoots me because I am the wife of an air force officer?'" Yet, confession follows the accusation: "Humankind is strange. Even before the second week was over, I forgot about Diyarbakır and became a part of this place. In September, when I go back, I will remember; and those living here will realize what is happening, when time comes for their sons to go for military service."

Everyone in Turkey has experienced similar instances, some more some less, with or without being aware of it. Albeit no reliable figures exist, since 1984—when the PKK declared guerrilla war against Turkey—an estimated 2.5 million young men have been sent to the Emergency Rule Zone for military service. Along with their families, the situation has already affected at least 15 million; when their close relatives and friends are added, nearly half of Turkey's total 62 million population has been affected. Indeed, not even resorting to figures, just by simply looking around us, we can already sense or witness that the hearts of our relatives, neighbors, or friends beat for their sons, brothers, or loved ones who might at that moment be fighting somewhere in the Southeast.

We further know that for the last 15 years, whether we call it “war,” “low intensity conflict,” “combating terrorism,” or anything else, many people involved, including politicians, the military, human rights organizations, the United States of America and EU officials, journalists, writers, and experts, have been talking. Yet those who have been sent to the Southeast war zones of Şırnak, Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Siirt, Mardin, and so on, for military service are only allowed to speak while they are in the military, restrained by “the chain of order and command.”

A young soldier appears on TV: “We have come here to finish the goddamn terror. I would advise others to volunteer to come here. It is a very nice feeling to climb up on the mountains and fight the terrorists. We are a nation of martyrs, and many martyrs will come from among us during the summer operations.” A youth from the Eruh Commando Brigade addresses his girlfriend Şölen: “Wait for me, and don't you forget.” The young privates from the Çanakkale 116th Gendarmerie Basic Training Regiment send messages to their families: “I have missed my family a lot,” “I expect my fiancée Derya to wait for me and I will wait for her,” “my mom and dad are waiting for me,” “my parents, my beloved ones: I am OK, don't worry for me.” The anchor person from the national channel TGRT is excited: “Serving in such a place is an award!”

Until I interviewed Ahmet, I had not thought of interviewing the young people who have been serving in the Southeast since 1984 *after* they came back from the military. It had not occurred to me that those who would hardly speak while on duty in the Southeast, would be able to talk about their experiences upon their return. As I was setting out for the interviews, I was anxious. I never imagined I would be so warmly welcomed by these young people, as warmly as one of them from my own hometown expressed: “I knew that someone would come someday and ask. I had been waiting.” I was hoping that they would be delighted to have someone to listen to what they had to say, but I was not sure at all.

Where could they be found? “Mehmet” was the driver of the cab or the streetcar we took, the waiter serving in our restaurant, the clerk in our usual

grocer, the bodyguard in our bank or shopping center, the help we hire to paint our living room, the carpenter who repairs the sofa, the laborhand in the remote fields, or the unemployed on the street. Unlike their fathers and grandfathers, they would not repeat exaggerated memoirs of their days in the military, but just concentrate on their work and sweat. We did not know each other; for some reason, we could not meet. Which one of the 2.5 million young men would I interview?

As I set out for this study, I did not intend to provide the reader with sociological or political analysis. This should be done, but it is not my task. What I wanted deep in my heart was to make the voice of the very men who, with or without their own consent, had become the subject of a war, be heard by the public. I wanted to provide the people their standpoint of the war. Those interviewed should be able to reflect not simply their personal experiences but, to a certain degree, also the sensitivity, mentality, and the values of their surroundings, of the medium they had grown in and belonged to. Therefore I had to interview young men from every part of the country. Ethnic, religious, sectarian, and cultural differences were equally important to represent. It was even more important that the interviewees reflected the prevailing diversity and plurality of opinions regarding the war, ranging from the leftists to rightists, nationalists to Islamists, pacifists to war mongers. Of course, it was not less important to reflect the progress of the “Low Intensity Conflict” year by year since its beginning on August 15, 1984 and from the point of view of combatants coming from different classes of land forces—ranging from infantry to artillery, gendarme, tank or commando units. Thus, I would be able to come up with a picture that was both general and personal at the same time. Because it would be based on the experiences of the “Mehmeds” *as they told them*, it would be a genuine picture.

Had soldiers from other parts of the world testified? Had they expressed their feelings, their fear, pain, regret, revolt, and happiness? Browsing through the literature, the books within our reach, revealed the fact that such examples were not abundant. In one of the books, the author said: “We know only one war, but in a single war, many wars—at least as many as the number of the fighters involved—are fought.” Each of the young men I interviewed, revealed what the phrase “at least” meant and repeatedly highlighted the fact that a war indeed involved many wars.

I have interviewed 42 young men—from Istanbul (Northwest), Lüleburgaz (Northwest), Denizli (Southwest), Izmir (West), Aydın (Southwest), Alanya (South), Serik (South), Adana (South), Çorum (Center), Rize (Northeast), Samsun (Northeast), Tonya (North), and Trabzon (Northeast) provinces and from their districts—who had done their military service in the Emergency Rule Zone between the years 1984 and 1998. I did not ask for their names, and with the exception of a few who believed “it would not matter,” the majority wanted

to remain anonymous. After finishing each interview, I was further assured of my original decision to keep them anonymous. Following an average of three hours tape-recorded interview, I had at least one or two additional hours of off-the-record conversations with each of the interviewees. This was despite the fact that the interviews were anonymous. They were afraid. They feared everybody and everything. One of the young men who anxiously said, "I cannot tell you everything," relaxed when I responded: "I don't know what you have experienced, you can tell whatever you choose to tell."

I selected the towns and provinces of the interviewees according to the representative capacity of the locality, and with a particular eye on regions where corpses of dozens of young men had returned in coffins and where ethnic Kurdish-Turkish tensions had erupted to the brink of violent confrontations. Except one, I contacted all the interviewees through friends or acquaintances. The only one I contacted directly was a cab driver from Istanbul. In the cab, I was discussing with a friend a documentary on the 1918 "Dardanelles War." As we jumped to the "Korean War," I recognized that he was listening to our discussion with his one eye on the mirror. I asked him where he had done his military service. He replied "Şırnak" (Southeast). Following a brief hesitation, I decided to ask him if he would give me an interview. Briefly explaining what I was doing, I presented him my card, and asked him to call me if he was interested. Two days later he called. When we met, he said that originally he doubted if we had led him into a trap. But later he had concluded that everything had proceeded so naturally that he had no reason to be suspicious. He had decided to speak because he felt responsible: "What we have experienced should be told, everybody should know."

Although I had contacted almost all of the interviewees through an acquaintance, I did not know them personally. In order to be able to concentrate on the testimony, I generally sought to interview them privately. Yet, in some of the cases this was not possible. Further, in some cases I had to make the interviews in public places, such as kebab restaurants, coffeehouses, or pastry shops. I recorded all the interviews except the first one in the book. This particular person requested to remain unrecorded so I just took notes of his testimony.

To each of the interviewees, I first explained my aim, "For the last fifteen years, we have been living in an extraordinary 'situation.' All, except those who have served 'there' in the Emergency Rule Zone, are speaking 'pro' or 'con' or 'neutrally.' It is very important to see the 'situation' from the standpoint of those who experience it firsthand." Both during the interviews and later during the conversations, I deliberately refrained from using a particular terminology that might have hinted at my personal approach to the "situation." I did not want the interviewees to encounter additional difficulties in expressing themselves or get

even a slightest impression that they were being directed toward a particular path. The interview comprised three groups of questions related to the periods of premilitary service, military service, and postmilitary service. Yet, despite my efforts, the interviews did not follow this pattern. Generally, as I pressed the *record* button following an initial conversation, the interviews flowed, seldom requiring any questions. In some cases, feeling that recalling bitter experiences might hurt them, I refrained from asking some of my predetermined questions. A few of the young men, at a certain point during the interview, said, “This is enough,” asking me to stop recording. They continued their testimonies on the condition that they would remain off-the-record. Inevitably, the interviews focused on the military service period, however, their reminiscences of the past or plans for the future too revolved around their military experiences.

In each interview, the basic questions such as the date and place of birth, where they currently lived, educational status, date and place of basic training and ultimate unit, and the economic status and occupation of their parents were asked. Some of them preferred to remain silent on some of these questions. The first group of questions also included their premilitary service interests, their occupations—if employed—relations with their families and close friends. The questions concerning the military service period included those on basic training, daily life in the barracks, the first duty, the first combat, relations with their buddies, feelings of pain, anger, revenge, yearnings, and love. The concepts of “enemy,” “hero,” “love for motherland,” “martyrdom,” and “fighting” were discussed as well. And the postmilitary service period revolved around questions on employment, relations with family and friends, comparisons of their situation before and after military service, and their present approach to the “situation.” Sometimes, I did not even have to ask these questions. They had already supplied answers.

There were times when I could hardly keep my predetermined distance to the interviewee. Frequently it was difficult to keep listening from my original position as a journalist and, even more difficult to probe into more intimate details through consecutive questions. It was often a dilemma whether to go further or not. I strove much in order to refrain from adopting the position of an ice-cold inquisitor as well as from falling into the trap of “curiosity” that sometimes might turn into a professional nightmare. When I first saw the young man at the impoverished Roma (Gypsy) village of Karakova of Western Denizli province, words no longer had a meaning. Having survived seven shots in a PKK execution in May 1993 on the Bingöl-Muş highway where thirty-three unarmed soldiers had lost their lives, this young man of twenty-five was bedridden, considering himself lucky to have a wheelchair. Yet he would never be able to

marry the girl he had loved since his boyhood. “That is the award of being a *ghazi*,”² he said. What else could I ask him?

In the Northeast province of Samsun, the lights in a summer camp went off as I was interviewing a young man in a tent. He was there camping with his family. The others in the camp did not care about the electricity cut. They went on partying at the dinner table. I was filled with anger at those who were not even aware of the presence of a young man who just a moment ago was recalling his nine months in the mountains, his fears during duty in the long dark nights . . . My anger was not justified. Those who knew nothing about the young man’s experiences would not be able to understand him. As usual, the youth did not speak about his experiences and we did not ask.

I felt embarrassed of my privileged position when the mother of a young man said: “I would sacrifice everything to have heard what he has just told you.” These young people, who almost as a rule recall their mothers at the most dangerous moments, would not speak of their experiences to their loved ones whom they had most missed in the front. That too, was inevitable and understandable. They felt that their mothers had been devastated during their 550 days of service; they should be protected from further suffering.

This work would have become a voluminous book of 1,500 pages, had I transcribed the recordings in full length. But I wished the young men to speak to you, not to me. You should listen to them. Thus I pulled myself out of the book, that is, the questions were the first to be left out. Then, I continued taking out repetitions and unnecessary details, such as the height of the commander or how the paperwork proceeded as they were being conscripted. In some cases I changed the original order of the conversation and, albeit sticking to the original wording of the interviewee, I sometimes converted the vernacular into the written language so as to provide a smoother reading.

As everything started in Şemdinli on August 15, 1984, the interviews too start with Şemdinli, uninterruptedly proceeding year by year until 1998.

This Preface is followed by the part “Mehmets Speak Out” and then comes the Epilogue, composed of two interviews with the relatives of discharged soldiers. The Epilogue is a substitute for the Mehmets who cannot talk: İhsan Akyüz, who has hijacked a plane, and Orhan Kara, who is accused of killing his siblings and mother. As I was doing this study, I became more and more concerned about the social impact of the experiences of the individual soldiers who had been discharged. I started reading the media coverage of the so-called

² A Veteran who has been wounded (the term has religious connotations).

ordinary crimes with increased interest under the light of their experiences. I concluded that violence, which has become a daily routine in the war zone and which, according to my interviewees “solves problems more easily and quickly,” was spreading across the country, leaking into daily life. The discharged soldiers who confessed that they had to make deliberate efforts in order to control their nerves, when losing control would either take their own lives or the lives of their relatives, or end up hijacking a plane as one, Ihsan Akyüz, had done.

The book closes with “The Figures,” a statistical breakdown of the period between 1984 and 1999. “The Figures” are based on official reports issued by the state, international organizations, or experts. Yet, behind those figures are lives . . . lives of people who, for the last fifteen years, have been annihilating or have been forced to annihilate each others’ lives, dreams, and hopes; lives of people who chase each other and who run away from each other . . . those who observe the conflict from the standpoint of the military, commercial, or political centers in the Western part of the country and the world, might add or subtract, they might hide or exaggerate or underestimate these figures. The official figures are often inaccurate and contradictory. Although they somewhat reflect the conditions people live in, the ways of seeing and the values of those who collect, record, count, and calculate these figures prevent them from understanding and sensing the fact that what they exaggerate or underestimate are the lives and fates of real human beings. Could the value of the life of a single individual be counted or calculated? After fifteen years, “The Figures” on whose lives and fates calculations and decisions have been made stand up and speak out . . . their lives fit no calculation, confirm no prejudice. Real human beings break down the role they have played in a tragedy hidden behind figures, they face up to themselves and those who rule them.

I wanted to close the soldiers’ testimonies with Ahmet, this time tape-recording it. Yet, he would not accept. He did not want to return to those days once again. “If I were fond of my frustrations, I could not get rid of them. The solution of the Kurdish question now concerns me on a macro scale,” he said.

The military experience of the forty-two young men, most of whom I came to know in 1998, had started with the order “Liiine upppp,” as they stepped through the gates of the barracks. Now, not because they are ordered to do so, but because they feel that it is high time, they have voluntarily lined up in order to share their experiences with you. When they concluded their testimonies and it was time to say farewell, most of these young men said: “I wish I had nicer things to tell you, not these . . .” Me too . . .

1

I CAME BACK WITHOUT HAVING SEEN THE ENEMY

They talk about this gendarmerie commander in Şemdinli who used to get along well with the local people. Apparently something happened and their relations deteriorated. Then the local people rebelled. They say that is the story behind the Şemdinli attack.

We were a mobile unit. Our headquarters was in Nevşehir. At some point, we were sent to Tokat as backup and stayed there for three to four months. We were able to get the three or four bodies that the Tokat gendarmerie was not able to get. I mean we had small skirmishes. We did not know whose bodies these were. I mean, we did not know who we were fighting against. No one said anything and we did not ask. They just said they were “terrorists,” that’s all.

Then we returned to Nevşehir from Tokat. We were back but before we even had a chance to rest, they put us in buses and took us to Kayseri. Then we flew . . . We didn’t know where we were going; we cannot ask; they don’t explain. Then we found ourselves in the Van Brigade. As we were waiting, the soldiers were talking about this place Şemdinli having been attacked. Who had attacked? Why? What is in Şemdinli? No one knew. One becomes curious. It’s been a while . . . so it must be the August of 1984.

We stayed in Van for a week to ten days. Then, we were taken to this place called Şemdinli with escorts. We put up our tents and started waiting. Again, we did not know what we were supposed to do or why we were there in the first place. I mean, we knew there was a problem because we were there as “backup.” The only thing we knew was that Şemdinli had been attacked. We continued with the training and we did our guard duty as usual. Then they divided our battalion into companies. I was in the Third Company. They sent us to the Konur region. A totally deprived region. Nothing there; not even a telephone. We could not call our families and they didn’t know how to reach us. We stayed in Konur for a month and a half. The training continued, we kept guard as usual, but there was no action. Because it was all calm, we all thought that they would soon

send us somewhere else. We were proven right. Soon enough we were on the road again. This time we did not go far—only as far as Derecik, where the Second Company was stationed. The road was shaped like a snake, full of twists and turns. I mean if you located yourself on top of a hill you would be able to observe everything as cars went down or up the winding road. That is what the terrorists did. They were right up there on the hill. Our company commander was in a jeep with a noncommissioned officer slowly going uphill on those curves when the terrorists opened fire. The commander died right there. The officer and two privates fell down the cliff into the creek and could not get out. A truck driver saw them, but he could not do anything. He informed us about their location and we went there immediately. We were always ready to go, anyway. We got to the attack site. Later, the commander's orderly died as well. Unfortunately, we missed the terrorists. We opened fire and kept shooting till the next morning, but nothing happened.

Then the military was informed that the terrorists would try to pass the border to Iraq. In order to prevent them, they sent us to the border in helicopters. We opened fire, but then learned that we were shooting at the mules of some smugglers. Fortunately, no one was hurt. We then walked for about ten hours and reached an army station. We stayed there till our field rations were finished. So we must have stayed there for about a week. They took us back to Şemdinli in helicopters. They had built a new boarding school in the region, but it was not opened yet. So the school was given to us and we settled there. What people talked about most was this Şemdinli attack. They talked about this gendarmerie commander in Şemdinli who used to get along well with the local people. Apparently something happened and their relations deteriorated. Then the local people rebelled. They say that is the story behind the Şemdinli attack. . . . At that time, we did not know about the PKK. We just called them "terrorists" or "anarchists." . . . Once, we were staying in this place called Çatulga when, at around 3 a.m., they woke us up saying the terrorists were coming. We opened fire. In the morning, when we went there to see how many terrorists had died, we saw dead mules.

Basic training was quite good. How could we have known that there was going to be a war? We did not experience it as war anyway. Right, this was not how we had envisaged military service, but we have to live through it, we thought. Those days left a significant mark on me. It has almost been fifteen years and there has not been a single night when I don't remember what happened there. I also think about the people there. They have no source of income. They have no social life, no schools. You can say there is no "public space" there. Their only source of income is smuggling. During the day, you don't see any men around, it's all women. When you ask where the men are, they

say, “He has gone to Istanbul.” . . . The people there have feelings of animosity toward the soldiers. I don’t know why. When I think about it now, it seems to me that perhaps we would not have had this problem if those people had been given something [i.e. if the state had brought services to them].

Military service was over. I was on a bus coming back to Antalya. I was afraid. You cannot tell who is a terrorist and who is not, but it is very clear that I am a soldier who is returning home. The person who sat next to me on the bus asked if I was a soldier. I immediately said no, although it was obvious that I was. Apparently the person who had asked the question was a soldier himself. He was open about it. When I came back, I was not myself. My father realized that there was something wrong with me. So he sent me to Istanbul to have a break. Something was bothering me. One thing I noticed clearly after military service was that I approached my family, relatives, and friends with more care. Having seen and experienced those places, I had more affection for my hometown and for the people around me.

If you ask me, the solution to this problem lies in the economy. Smuggling is the only source of income for those people. If free trade with Iran, Iraq, and Syria were a possibility, that would make a significant impact. I had Kurdish friends before military service. In fact, I still get-together with the Kurds who used to work for us. We love each other. They are from Batman. I had Kurdish friends in the military as well. I still meet up with them. I don’t see the Kurds as the enemy. Before I was conscripted, I had an image of the enemy inside my head. I thought of the enemy as a devil. My military service was over before I got to see the enemy. The enemy was perhaps among those people that I saw in Şemdinli during daytime. Perhaps I could not recognize him because it was not written on his forehead that he was “the enemy.” Who knows!

I never took any leaves during my military service. I wanted to get it over with as soon as possible. I hardly ever communicated with my family; no phone calls, no letters . . . For instance, I learned about the death of my uncle when I came back. When I look back at my experience, knowing what’s happening today, I think I was lucky that none of my friends were martyred. That was my good fortune! I was more mature when I came back. I don’t know whether my blood pressure has come down or what. I turned into a concerned, calm person. I try to be more caring toward people in general. I still watch the program “*Mehmetçik*”¹ on TV and experience those days again. The people are not that interested in what is going on in the Southeast. Except for those who have children serving in the region or those who have children who are at conscription

¹ Literally, “Little Mehmet,” this term is used as a generic term to denote the “Turkish Soldier” (translator’s note).

age, no one is really interested. Fire burns where it falls. The media shows the positive side of military service. The talk about heroes is all empty talk. Until people send their children there, they are not interested. If I had not gone there, I would never know where Şemdinli is. You become interested only when you actually see it. (November 1998, Serik-Antalya)

Born in Serik in 1964, he is a high school graduate. His father is a small merchant and he takes care of his father's business. He is number four among eight siblings, seven brothers and one sister. During his military service, he was based in Nevşehir, but spent time in places like Tokat and Şemdinli.

2

A TWENTY-YEAR-OLD YOUNGSTER IS GOING . . .

You cannot go there and do this thing without that “love of the country.” Of course, love is a function of money. The more money you have, the less love you have. You don’t even think about not going. It is not an option.

I had never heard of this place called Tunceli. They said it was a little town in the middle of a valley. You of course get excited going to a new place like that. The commanders had said we were going to a very beautiful place. The regiment commander had singled out 40 people, including me, among a group of 5,000 to congratulate. Because we were very successful during the training, they had appointed us directly, without entering our names in the computer selection system. That was the reason he was congratulating us. The basic training period was difficult of course. They push you hard in order to prepare you for the training. It was not regular military training, it was guerilla training. Things took a different turn during our time. We did not know much. In fact, I had wanted to do my military service in the West.

I went to the brigade in Tunceli and found people from my hometown. I was not estranged. I did not have to do guard duty, I was almost like a visitor, eating, drinking, going around. Because we were not familiar with the area, we were not sent anywhere for the first month. Then, late one night we found ourselves in a skirmish. It lasted nine hours. First a team surrounded the place, and then we went into a terrorist hamlet. During the first clash, one of our friends was martyred. We called out to them to surrender. They opened fire in return. When the brigadier commander heard that a soldier was killed, he ordered us to use heavy weapons. Our fallen friend had only six or seven days before his discharge. His body was sent to his hometown, Çorum. Apparently, when his father saw him he said, “So we were supposed to get his body, instead of his discharge certificate!” and had a heart attack. He died right there. When something like this happens, you experience a shock.

When it happened, we were hungry. We had gone there very late at night and the clashes continued all day. You don't think about your hunger at a moment like that . . . We had been informed that there were twelve of them there. Three escaped, we killed nine. We sent our martyred friend to the unit and handed the captured men to the Ovacık Gendarmerie. We could not get over this event for three to four months. It is very difficult to be in a situation like that, under fire. You forget about everything, you try to survive. For three to four months, we were in several skirmishes here and there. In an incident in Mazgirt, we killed nine people and captured three of them, two women and one male terrorist. They surrendered. One of the women was pregnant. Of course you feel anger when you meet the terrorists. We used to drive them to the gendarmerie and have them interrogated there. You cannot touch a terrorist. It is forbidden. Even if you speak to them, they show the victory sign in return. The gendarmerie collected all the information. We were only informed about the definite cases. We used to go and annihilate. For instance, when they tell you "there are nine terrorists there," it means you can be certain that they are there. We used to go around a lot. The villagers knew us as terrorists, not as soldiers. When we were informed about some activity, we used to go to the villages as terrorists and ask for "our friends." You don't know what's going to happen. Every time you go, you perform an ablution,¹ clean yourself. There were times when we did not take off our boots for four months. Sometimes our walkie-talkies would be uncharged and we would not be able to communicate with our unit, in which case no one comes and you are hungry. Normally, the food was very good. We ate canned food on the mountain; meat, fish . . . we also ate weed. Many of the soldiers were Anatolian lads; they knew about the different kinds of weed.

There is no running away from the duty for the homeland. We found relief in chatting with each other. Friendship was great. With the friends we liked, we shared everything. I still meet up with them. Sometimes we went to the operations with a police team. Our team commanders were mostly lieutenants. When we went out for an operation, our commanders were mostly captains and majors, rarely a low-ranking officer. Tunceli is not a developed place. I don't know if that's because of all the terror. The people were very nice to us. They are caught in the middle of the fire. The terrorist comes and talks a certain way, the soldiers come and talk in a different way. One should give them credit. They are very poor. We used to talk with them and ask them why they still stay there, with their incomes so low. They said: "What can we do? We have to live one way or the other."

¹ *abdest almak*: an Islamic way of washing yourself with the aim of cleansing the body and preparing it for prayer (in this case, for possible death) (translator's note).

I was standing guard at the gate in Bingöl when I saw my father and uncle [mother's brother]. I looked at them and thought I recognized them. And then I asked myself, "What would they be doing here?" I ran and hugged them of course. How happy I was; how happy I was to see them. Actually, it is forbidden to see your family members, but we had a cool captain who did not say a word. At that time we were staying in a boarding school. My father and uncle stayed with us for one night. In that situation, ranks don't matter. You are all like friends. We never said "Sir," we called the commander by his name. There was no beating, either. People are lying when they tell you that they were *not* beaten during basic training. One person does something wrong, three are beaten up. It is not like civilian life. What can you achieve by resisting? You just say to yourself: "Bare with this beating and let this thing pass" and you continue. Would people loosen up if there was no beating? Perhaps.

Unless we got specific orders, we were not allowed to use heavy weapons. I don't know why they did not let us use them. That is beyond me. If we were allowed to use heavy weapons earlier, for instance, we certainly would not have lost our friend from Çorum. There was only one person in that village anyway. We called out to him to leave the village. If the army wanted to do it, they would have leveled the place with the heavy weapons. A hamlet has three to four houses anyway. We were allowed to use the heavy weapons only after nine hours of fighting.

When I came back from military service, I was greeted as a hero. They sacrificed sheep in my honor. My mother was having breakfast when I arrived. Immediately, we hugged and kissed. I had married at the age of seventeen and had a child before going to the military. Of course, you miss your child a lot, it is not easy. I can't remember if he was a year old or not when I left. I learned about the birth of the second one three months later. I was always in an operation. I got my mother's letters every three to four months. When you are in clashes, you get used to the sound of artillery. The clashes have left a mark on me. The first three to four months after I got back, my friends used to say I was not like myself. Apparently, something had changed as a result of the fighting. I used to dream about it in those three to four months. That guy from Çorum was shot in the head. The bullet had gone into the head and destroyed the back side of his head. He was a poor lad. His father's death, too, had affected us a lot. I still have nightmares. You cannot go there and do this thing without that "love of the country." Of course, love is a function of money. The more money you have, the less love you have. You don't even think about not going. It is not an option.

There is no "Southeast problem" or "Kurdish problem." It is just one person who is muddying the waters. There is no such thing as a Kurd or a Turk.

If Öcalan² were not around, there would not be such a problem. There are powerful states protecting him. For instance, the late Türkeş³ had said, “Let me go and get his head in three months.” I don’t know why they did not let him do that. I watch the news and see that there are operations in the same places where we used to have operations. Nothing has changed. Actually, if you think in terms of military strength, there is no reason why it should not be over. At that time, I could not have predicted that this thing would last so long. When you look at the military situation, you see that the other side has operated like an army. The best people in the Turkish military are stationed there. I don’t know why it has lasted so long. There are people there who are normal people during the day and at night they turn into terrorists. Looking at that, they used to say, “Everyone here is like this. You cannot solve the problem without leveling the place. You need to raze the East out.” I sometimes attend the funerals of the martyrs. It is so sad. You of course ask yourself if it is worth it. A twenty-year-old youngster is gone. I have lost hope. This will continue. The Eastern problem will continue. The young people will continue to die. Who can get up and stop this? Only someone like Atatürk. Only someone like him can stop this. No other way. (August 1998, Çankırı, Central Anatolia)

Born in Çankırı in 1966, he is a primary school graduate. He did his basic training in Manisa, starting March 1986. He was then stationed in Tunceli. He is a small tradesman.

² Abdullah Öcalan: the former leader of PKK (currently in jail on a life sentence) (translator’s note).

³ The legendary leader of the Turkish ultranationalist movement, from 1960s till his death in 1997.

3

I BECAME A SOLDIER WITH A BEARD

They used to say that non-Muslims were not given ranks. It depends on whether they like you and whether there is demand. Being from Istanbul means a lot in a situation where there is a lack of trained guys. You tell the guy to turn right and he turns left.

They used to ask me why my name was such and such. No bad intentions. There were five of us, non-Muslims, coming from Tokat, where we had the basic training. I was the only *Rum* (of Greek origin), the rest were Armenians. We were sent to different units. When I learned that I was going to be stationed in the First Company, I was not happy about it. In the beginning, I used to sit by myself in the dining hall. I would not say they were marginalizing me, but not knowing anyone, and being shy, I did not know what to do. In the beginning, you don't know anyone. They had said that non-Muslims are never given arms. So I assumed that I would be given duties in the kitchen or something. However, it turned out that, as a non-Muslim, I was one of the most active soldiers. They used to say that non-Muslims were not given ranks. It depends on whether they like you and whether there is demand. Being from Istanbul means a lot in a situation where there is a lack of trained guys. You tell the guy to turn right and he turns left. Although I was not well educated, I ended up becoming a corporal. The other guys were high school graduates, but their high schools are like primary schools here in Istanbul. They were giving tests before assigning those ranks and I became a corporal as a result of those tests.

Except for the exercises we participated in, we were always stationed in Bitlis. Especially that day when PKK was founded or something, August 15, that is a dangerous day. We were on alarm on those days. Normally, we would not be ready to shoot when standing guard. On that day, our fingers would be on the trigger the whole time. Nothing would happen, but we were still on alert. They used to take us to football games in Van, Tatvan, or Bitlis. First they gave us training about how to respond to a situation during those games. There was

absolutely no shooting. We would keep the security locks on the rifles. We used to put the bayonets on the rifles, but we were asked to use the butt of the rifle if we had to intervene. The people in those towns are really scared of the soldiers. Nothing happened in the games that we were sent to.

You are standing guard on the mountain with rifles and radio equipment on your back and armored vehicles all around you. You are scared. To handle the fear, we would chat with each other. It was in those days that the small skirmishes here and there had begun. It was in the seventh month of my military service that we started having night training, shootings, and all that. During the night training, you were not supposed to smoke a cigarette. If you do, you need to cover it with your hand. The cigarette light can be spotted from five kilometers away. If they aim at a soldier with a cigarette in his mouth, they can shoot right through his head. At night, your forehead and your cheekbones shine. So, we used to darken them. We also tied the noisy parts of the rifle to something so that we could assure silence.

I now realize that it was around that time that things were getting started. The winter exercises were in the snow, which was particularly difficult. You are twice as heavy in snow. The snow-wear is one thing. You also have to put a special cover on your rifle so that it does not shine. We used to eat canned food during the exercises and they were usually rotten and inedible. In the morning, we drank a flour soup. Sometimes, we shopped with friends and put things in the storage room. If the food was no good, we got them out and shared them with the others. I was quite good at shooting. They gave a special medal for the good shooters. Of course, I was given one as well.

You are friends with everyone, but you also have a special group of friends. I ended up having very good friends there. There were no hotshots, except for a couple of rich kids who did not hang out with us. What is there to do when you go to town during the weekends? The town has only one main street. You go to the café there and they put on an action movie and you watch it. You chat with a couple of people and play pool. You have 550 days before discharge. Although I didn't care much about it during basic training, once I was stationed in Bitlis, I was meticulously crossing out days on my calendar. I did not like writing letters. I never called or wrote letters. Apparently, my mother was worried and went to the military office in Beşiktaş (in Istanbul) to ask about me.

It was toward the end of my service that I experienced face paralysis. I had had the same problem five years before military service. The doctor in the infirmary examined me, but could not make sense of it. How could he have known? I told him about its previous occurrence and explained that I was familiar with the symptoms. First, you lose your sense of taste and then it becomes impossible to close one eye. The doctor made me rest for twenty days.

The doctor told me not to wash my face. It was a cold winter. I put on a snow mask. My beard was like that of a priest. The doctor told me not to cut it or put any water on my face. I was supposed to keep my face warm. So I became a soldier with a beard. My God! Unfortunately, there was no photographer to take a picture for me to show to my friends later on. Who would believe that I had grown a beard in the military?

I was mostly spending time in the barracks—reading books, and resting. Then this new commander came to the unit. He was a short guy. One day, he came into the barracks, kicked my feet and shouted: “What are you doing? You should get up and salute me.” I did it but I thought he was joking. I explained to him that my face was paralyzed and that I was told to rest. He asked me to take off the mask. I did. He told me to cut my beard immediately. The doctor says “don’t cut your beard” and the commander says “cut your beard.” Of course, I did not. The next day he came and asked me why I had not cut my beard. I tried to explain my situation and the doctor’s directions. “Don’t get me started with your doctor,” he said. He used a lot of slang. He started beating me and told me to cut the beard immediately. What do you do in a situation like that? I had only three to four days left before the treatment was over. They were giving me reduced doses of medicine. I could feel that I was getting better, but still when I drank soup, it went into my mouth from one side and came out the other. My muscles were not functioning well.

I found a razor and shaved, cutting my whole face. When you are a private, you have to go and tell the commander that you cut your beard. I did it and he told me to go and clean the toilet. Look at the punishment! I cleaned the toilet and stood there. The noncommissioned officer of our unit was passing by. He used to like me a lot. He asked me what I was doing and I said, “The commander asked that I clean the toilets. I cleaned them and now I am waiting.” The officer then gave me another task: to work in the office. I did not let the beard grow again. I went to see the doctor again who gave me ten more days’ rest. I started standing guard inside the barrack. I was inside and good at something at the same time.

One night, people started shouting “fire.” The ceiling is burning, they said. Apparently, the down sleeping bags used during the exercises were on fire. Anyway, they cleared the barracks. First we took our rifles. Everyone had their rifles with them. They called for a lineup and started counting us. One guy, from Adana, was still inside, sleeping. We called out to him saying the ceiling was on fire. He said, “Let it burn, I am resting.” Finally, everyone lined up and the company commander came. He asked if all the rifles were with us, he did not ask if all the men were out. Why? Because the rifles are his responsibility. There are guys on guard, others in the infirmary. Not all the men are there. When they say

“take the weapons,” they mean “take all the weapons you can.” This is not much different from similar situations that have to do with life and property in civilian life.

When we first joined the First Company, there was a commander whom they called “the lion lieutenant.” He was nuts. He used to inflict serious violence on the soldiers. For instance, he would break axe handles on people’s backs. He would not hit anyone without a reason, but he was really extreme in his use of violence. How can you break an axe’s handle on someone’s back? His beating was deadly. Horrible! I considered myself very fortunate because I was never beaten by him.

The guy who kicked me was the other, short one. We used to train in short-distance aiming. We were rookies, unfamiliar with the G3 rifles. The other guy used to beat people in their most delicate spots, when they least expected it. When he came to you shouting, you expected a blow. He was the worst in terms of the beating. Of course, there were others who did not beat anyone. They were loved more than those who did.

For instance, someone shoots at his target and misses it. He tells you that he is going to show you what it means to miss your target. I somehow placed three shots on my target and two on my friend’s. When it was my friend’s turn, the commander saw him miss three shots, but he could not understand how the two shots on the target had gotten there. At least my friend was saved from the beating thanks to those shots. When we had a chance, we used to shoot for others.

Going into 1988, I was a little anxious, but if it were now, I would have been two to three times more anxious. At that time, the worst place was Bingöl. Those who were sent there used to say “my God!” When I pulled out Bitlis, I was relieved. A few soldiers were martyred when we were there. We watched the news and learned about the few things happening here and there, but they were not taken seriously. We got particularly stressed when we had to stand guard by the fences. I did that only a few times before I was promoted to the grade of corporal.

After military service, my circle of friends changed of course. Now I had my military service buddies as well. We started going to each other’s weddings. Once, we got together at someone’s wedding in Ankara. People had come from all over the country, Mersin, Düzce, Istanbul . . . We were talking about this at the barber’s, shocking the barber. He could not understand why we had come from all these different places for a wedding. Friendship at military service is a very different thing. You share a lot. Even if you share certain things for 15–20 minutes, it means a lot.

I used to write things at the backs of photographs. For instance, I wrote things like “I came for military service on November 30 / I will get discharged

one day / I can not come to see you / So I have to send myself in an envelope to you.” When we had some free time, we used to listen to music. We had found a cassette player from somewhere. Then we got caught. It was forbidden to do things like that. “Is this the American military, son?” they said, and confiscated the player. There was no library. I used to read mystery novels because that was all we could find. I was looking around to find a place like the second hand book stores in Beyazıt (Istanbul), of course with no luck. We used to listen to Sezen Aksu’s song which had the words “the traces are like bullets / the eyes on that last look” a great deal. There were no concerts in that place. It was sort of a place for exile.

Every young man should do his military service. Violence starts in childhood. You buy dolls for girls and guns for boys. The violence you experience during military service is an accepted violence. You know what is going to happen. For instance, when you disobey an officer, you know you will be beaten. With a higher officer, you risk penalties. There is no difference in my relationship to violence. I don’t mess with anyone as long as they don’t mess with me. But, for instance, before military service I used to let things go. A man would look at me on the bus, I would look at him, and then let it pass. After military service, I keep looking at them, waiting for them to withdraw their eyes. There is change at that level, but nothing significant. I believe that military service should be done, but I don’t know why that is the case. You have to go through that period to grasp certain things, I think. When I got back, I was more settled in my mind. Military service turns you into a proper man; you have to do it. At least you understand how precious civilian life is. You leave your family for the first time. If I had not gone, I would have missed something important. I learned a lot there. (June 13, 1998, Istanbul)

Born in Istanbul in 1968, while going to the Greek primary school, he worked and earned money. Since 1983, he has been making belts. He started serving in November 1988. His basic training was in Tokat (Central Anatolia), and then he was sent to Bitlis (East). He is number two among two sons and two daughters. He came back in April 1990.

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4

IF SOLDIERS HAD THE OPPORTUNITY, THEY WOULD RUN AWAY

How can they see me as a hero? I fought against my own people. I don't feel the need to tell people where I did my military service. I know I did not do a good thing. When they ask, I tell them I did it in Kayseri.

I loved the parachute. So I attended the courses of the Turkish Air Association in high school. Of course, I saw it as a kind of sport. After an unsuccessful attempt at the university entrance exam, I applied to the military office to do my military service. I did not know that my parachute certificate had been sent to the military. Because of that certificate, I was sent to the Kayseri Air Deployment Unit where I was trained as a commando. There were two options: parachute or climbing. I chose climbing. They did not give us even a minute of rest in Kayseri. There was heavy beating as well. When the three-month training period was over, they told us that we would be going to the conflict areas.

Our real unit was in Çorlu, but for one year, they had moved it to the Southeast. We were first sent to the deployment headquarters in Diyarbakır and then to our designated units. Mine was a gendarmerie unit. I was assigned to the Kismetli village close to Mardin-Dargeçit. The village is on top of a commanding hill and has a school. Because there were no military facilities, we slept at the school for a while. We were quite friendly with the students of this school. There were about one hundred of us. In the beginning, the students were not there, but after a while we shared the school with the students. The building was both a military base and a school at the same time. We were quite close to the teacher. After a while, we left the school and moved to an old barn or something of the sort that they had prepared for us. Sometimes, we would get orders to leave immediately at night and go to other designated places, which were two to three hours away from the village. If it was too far, they would drive us to a certain point and then ask us to walk.

Usually, informers would give information to the battalion commander and the commander would give us coordinates and orders to conduct operations. If it were up to him, we would be on an operation all the time. Our company commander was using his initiative to keep it under control. The company commander was a low-ranking officer. The operations were usually conducted in villages, strategic areas, or passage points. During the village operations, there is strict security. The place needs to be guarded for the gendarmerie to conduct the searches. I was in charge of security and would usually be on top of a roof when they did the searches. The villagers were in their homes during these searches. I never felt like being part of it, but when I put on that uniform, I did what I had to do.

There, the soldiers are above anyone and anything. The villagers were so afraid of the soldiers! Of course, the soldiers were doing their best to feed upon that fear. For instance, there is a curfew after 10 p.m. You are authorized to kill all living beings who are outside after 10 p.m. You can't imagine how many donkeys were killed. A couple of our friends died because of the cold. They froze to death. This was part of a large operation in the Mardin area. Once, a soldier from another unit was hit by lightning because of the radio equipment on his back. I was never in an armed conflict. A few times, we changed our routes or turned back because we felt that we would be caught in an ambush. For instance, we used to hear metal sounds while walking at night, like those of guns, and would turn back. We were sent to other areas during the *Nevruz* [Spring festival on March 21].

There were times I felt very close to death. Because I knew that they would not recognize who I was under that green uniform, I acted in compliance. That was how they conditioned people, anyway. For instance, the battalion commander would say that he would shorten the military service of those who "brought back a terrorist's head." There were few Kurds like me. The Turks were in the majority. The Kurdish soldiers were always under surveillance anyway. Two soldiers were investigated because they were believed to be PKK sympathizers before military service. One of them was exiled to another place. One of the Turkish guys ran away. He could not stand the fear and the conditions there.

When our unit completed its one-year term in the region, I had already spent seven months in Mardin. All of us together went back to Çorlu on buses. It was almost over. This whole thing is inhuman. I don't believe that you can solve this problem by fighting. Why not solve it through democratic means? Those people are innocent. I never laid an evil eye on them. They are all poor villagers, minding their own business. Here I sensed that there were people who did not want this war to be over. There are paid soldiers who are better trained than regular soldiers. I mean the Special Team. The Special Team people want to fight.

In fact, they are not doing the real fighting, but they want the war to continue. They are at ease with what they are doing and are getting amazing salaries. Who wants those salaries to go away? They have stacked the regions with the Special Team and the paid village guards. Those people make their living from the war.

There were no village guards in our village. The villagers were mostly afraid of the soldiers and thus were not very friendly. I asked a few kids to bring us eggs a couple of times and paid them for the eggs. That was the extent of our relationship. I personally tried to talk to them at times, but it was difficult because they did not speak Turkish. I used to speak to them in broken Kurdish. We used to talk among ourselves as soldiers. Those from the West did not know much about Kurds. So they would not make many comments. What do you do with that? They don't know, so they follow the official line. They were educated to do that in a way. Isn't everybody educated into that? They believed what they had read, what they had heard. I tried to explain to them that the state was in the wrong and that the people on the other side were human beings. They did not know I was Kurdish. They saw me as an assimilated person. Of course I never denied the fact that I was Kurdish. I used to say, "Originally, I am Kurdish."

The relations between soldiers and officers were very friendly in Mardin. No saluting or anything like that. Even when the highest-ranking officer arrived, it did not matter if you saluted them or not. They knew that the soldiers were under a lot of stress, so they were careful about their attitude.

My family, my friends, people close to me knew that I had gone there because of necessity. They were not judgmental. They knew that I was taken there because of my training in parachutes. How can they see me as a hero? I fought against my own people. It has been quite some time, almost five years, but I still experience the after-effects. I have very bad memories of military service. I often think that I am a very bad person. I sort of had to do it. Because military service is obligatory, I had to do it . . . I don't feel the need to tell people where I did my military service. I know I did not do a good thing. When they ask, I tell them I did it in Kayseri.

You get psychologically worn-out. You are not a normal person there. Constantly you face operations and ambush . . . I don't think I killed anyone. There were times when we thought we saw something and shot blindly. I used to shoot in the air just to appear to be shooting—so that I run out of bullets, like the others. I don't believe that this war will be over because it is necessary. At least, that is the image the current government is projecting. To see Mehmet Ağar¹ becoming the minister of justice is to know that this system will continue. You know how you see people on TV who say things like "we can sacrifice our

¹ A former Chief of Police.

lives for the homeland, we will not let anyone divide our homeland”? I don't believe that there are real soldiers who say those things. Just the paid soldiers, perhaps. Not regular soldiers. If the soldiers had the opportunity, they would run away! (July 1996, Istanbul)

Born in Malatya in 1969, he is a high school graduate. He served in the military between November 1989 and May 1991. His main unit was in Çorlu [Western Turkey], but he spent most of his military service as a mountain commando in Mardin. He used to parachute while in high school. Now, he works when he can find a job.

5

TO ESCAPE MILITARY SERVICE, YOU NEED TO STAY AWAY FROM BREAD

Of course it was not easy. I did not eat any bread. No rice, pasta or pastries. All I ate was fruit and the juice of the meal that was served.

I was determined to be certified as “unfit” and not do military service. Military service is a profession that does not suit me. Yes, I see it as a profession. You lose a year, a year and a half of your life for nothing. I see the military as a place where they try to pacify people. First it is your mother and father at home, then the teacher at school, and then your employer. They all control you. Then in the military, it is the commander. Ideologically, I am a leftist person. I am also a humanist. I categorically oppose military service. I long for a world without borders, but then you see fighting, war . . .

How could I do it? I found all the laws and regulations about military service and started reading every word. There had to be a legal possibility to keep me away from military service. There was nothing in the laws that suited my situation. I was becoming terribly desperate. The best option seemed to be a quick loss of weight to the extent that the weight–height ratio became problematic. So hunger strike was the only option. I was already a light-weight person, so I did not think it would be too difficult. When I was conscripted at Batıkışla, I got sick. Not because of the fasting, but because I had pneumonia. They gave a forty-five-day rest. Actually, the pneumonia was the present of my period in custody right before military service. Of course, when you lose weight, you become weaker. When they first sent me to the doctor, I was frank with him. I told him that even if he did not give me a medical report to certify I was “unfit,” I would manage not to do military service. I even had my clothes with me. I was ready to escape. The doctor said, “You are sick, you need a rest.” I returned to Batıkışla after this forty-five-day resting period. I had ten days left before the basic training was over anyway, so I took it easy. Of course, my diet continued. It was not

that easy. Sometimes, you smell the bread that has just come out of the oven and you want to eat. All you can do is run away from the smell. I said to myself, “If you want to escape military service, you first need to stay away from bread. You can eat all you want once this is over.” I managed to console myself and control my urge.

After the basic training was over, I was sent to Ankara, to a horrible place. After thirteen days, I was sent to the military hospital again. This time I used some influence to go there. One of the deputies of the head doctor at the hospital was a guy from my village. I gave his name to the doctor at the infirmary and had myself transferred to the hospital. I was in the hospital for seventeen days or so. Then they gave me three-month rest.

The day I returned to my unit with my medical report, my personal file had arrived. The commander said, “You are leaving now, but you will certainly come back and we will settle accounts with you.” I said, “Sir, if I am well, I will come back and do my service, but I am not well. That is why they gave me a report.” He kicked me out of his room telling me not to “talk too much.” The same day I went back to my hometown. It turns out that it was the beginning of a religious holiday. The doctor there did not want to sign my transfer papers. I told him that he would be responsible for the consequences and that he should either admit me to the hospital there or sign my transfer papers to go to the military hospital. Finally, I was admitted to the hospital there. I was so weak; he did not want to take responsibility. Later, they transferred me to the military hospital in Ankara, where I stayed for another seventeen days. They checked my whole body including the bone marrows, and concluded that I did not have a medical condition. The only problem was that there was a significant imbalance between my height and my weight. I was 1.72 meters tall and weighed 47–48 kilos. If I weighed 45 kilos, they would certify me as “unfit.” I had to lose some more weight. I tried my best; didn’t eat, didn’t drink. I was not all that weak. Of course it was not easy. I did not eat any bread. No rice, pasta, or pastries. All I ate was fruit and the juice that was served along with the meal. Without the bread and rice, I came down to 46 kilos. I talked openly with the doctors and asked them not to give me a “rest” again. Finally, the doctor recorded my weight as 45 kilos, although it was 46 and I was discharged as “unfit for duty.” I considered going back to the unit and then decided not to go. I left my shoes and clothes there and sent the discharge documents by mail. And that was it.

At that time, there was no one who came out saying “No to Compulsory Conscription,” like Osman Murat Ülke and Vedat Zencir¹ have done since then. So I did not know. Now I follow it from the news. There was a TV programmer

¹ Turkey’s first conscientious objectors (translator’s note).

who was recently penalized for doing anti-conscription programming. At that time, there was no opposition of this kind, so my own solution was to lose weight. If they were around then, I would have joined them. This “No to Compulsory Conscription” attitude is not very popular in this society. There is just one person here, three there and that’s it. Why? Because, in this country, you cannot get married unless you have served in the military. You are not treated as a grown-up man if you have not served. If the discharge from being unfit had not worked for me, I was determined to escape. I would have escaped. Now I can eat everything, no more diet. I gained a couple of kilos afterward, but as you can see I am still very thin. I never regained my old appetite. (April 1998, the *Aegean*)

Born in 1967, he is a graduate of a two-year college course. He sells books in a small Aegean town.

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6

THE DONKEY WAS LOOKING AT ME . . . SHOULD I SHOOT HIM RIGHT HERE? I ASKED MYSELF . . .

When I see a terrorist in the mountains, I will aim and shoot once, and then say "Mr. Terrorist, wait till I am ready to aim and shoot again." It does not make sense . . .

My dream was to do my military service in a place close to home. Among us Black Sea folk those who were born before 1970 were all sent to the navy. After that, we started becoming commandoes. We went to the military and, forgive my language, we were no different from sheep. Commandoes need special training. They taught us everything in detail: close-distance fighting, crawling on the ground, climbing . . . But it was not enough. They did not tell us much about the Southeast. "It is not easy to come back," they would say. The training in Isparta was quite difficult. You have to run for five kilometers in the morning with an empty stomach. Then you have breakfast and at a table for twelve, they have three small pots of honey and one quarter of a bread. The first person who sits down at the table finishes the bread, the rest eat the honey with their fingers. Lunch was great. There was a whole loaf of bread for each person. We were now allowed to take bread from the dinner table to our barracks. I weighed 100 kilos when I went there. When I came back, I had dropped down to 80 kilos.

The one-month training we had at the regiment in Siirt was very good, but also very difficult. However, that was not even close to what we would later experience in the mountains. We used to shoot at a target after aiming well. You aim and then you give out half a breath and then you shoot. I did it and tak, tak, tak, all three on the target. When the bullets formed a triangle on the target, the officer was particularly pleased. The two bullets I shot hit the same spot. The third one hit a little below. When the officer shouted "who did this?" I was scared. It was all muddy and he was hitting me on the ground, swearing

at me. My shots were right on, but he was wondering whether I had “aimed” the way he had shown me. Because for that, you need time between the second and third bullet. So, according to the instructions he had given us, I was wrong. If you ask him, you need to wait, aim again and breathe between each shot. I had just aimed once and sent all three shots to the target. How did I feel? That was the first beating I had experienced in my whole life. I had the best shots, my bullets were right on target, and there he was, blaming me.

There was another incident. We were up on the mountains. It was right after I had returned from my leave, having lost shape. Normally, I would have walked 30 kilometers without a problem. That day I barely managed to make it to the station. The colonel was on inspection. My gun was not in good shape either. We were called for a shooting exercise as part of the inspection. They made us run for 100 meters and then lie down and shoot when the colonel said, “Open fire.” My gun did not go off. “Sir, I was on leave and my gun lacks maintenance. Would you let me shoot again?” I said. He gave me two seconds. I lied on the ground and shot three times. All three were right on the target. The colonel said “Well-done!” So, the colonel, who is an important guy, says “well-done” whereas the training officer beats me because I did not stop, breathe, and aim again between my shots. When I see a terrorist in the mountains, I will shoot once and then I will say “Mr. Terrorist, wait till I am ready to aim and shoot again.” Is this how it’s supposed to happen? It does not make sense . . .

After a month’s training in Siirt, we were sent to a village called Ormanardı near Eruh. We were situated on the top of a hill. That was the base area and down the hill, there were 500 households. In the maps, the name is Bağgöze. The officers there were very friendly with the soldiers—I was surprised. In the East, there is great friendship. The company commander told us not to call him “sir,” not even to salute. Every night, terrorists came into the village. There was a friendly first lieutenant at the base who used to say, “we would kill at least three to five terrorists if we prepared an ambush below the village. Of course, we would suffer losses as well.” The first lieutenant would tell us that he knew about terrorists coming into the village every night because the dogs barked, and warned us never to go to the village at night. He was scheduled to be transferred to the West in a year. “Don’t get me martyred in my last year,” he used to say. That is what he would say, but the soldiers were going to the village every night. It was on one of my first guard duties. I saw a guy from an upper cohort leave the base. “I am going down. You have not seen me, you have not heard anything,” he said and left. I knew why they were going down. One of them married a girl from the village when he was discharged. He was Kurdish as well, but from Adana. We were there for five months and were never attacked by terrorists because our numbers were too large. There were clashes once when our teams

were on the mountains. I was not with them. There was a lack of coordination between the members of the team and the terrorists managed to escape. Still, three of them were killed.

1991 came. During the Gulf Crisis, they sent us to the border. We were already close to the border anyway. Right next to us was the Tigris river. Across the river, it was foreign territory. I think it was Syria. We were not affected by the war. The jets were bombing the mountains across from us.

Our relations with the villagers were great. We used to give them stuff and buy from them. Our doctors would treat their sick ones. However, at night, we had nothing to do with them. The military used to send us roasted nuts and we would distribute them to the kids. We left this place in the February or March of 1991. When I was taking the gendarmerie unit that would replace us on a guided tour, they saw me giving hazelnuts to the kids and scolded me: "What do you think you are doing? Why are you giving these to them? They are terrorists." I told them to lay off. It was none of their business. One of them beat the kids real hard. I said, "Brother, we used to have very good relations with these people. God help you!"

We were already in Mardin for more than a month when we heard on the radio that the base at the village was attacked, leaving ten to fifteen martyrs behind, two to three of them were officers. Who had attacked? The terrorists. Why had they attacked? Because the gendarmerie assumed control and beat the hell out of the villagers. When we left the village, the villagers were crying so badly—you don't see people crying like that when they leave their mothers. I mean they also knew what was coming.

Our regiment was exiled and scattered around because we had lost a flag. In the military, there is always a flag hidden in a room with a soldier on guard duty. If, as a soldier, you manage to get behind the guard, get a hold of that flag and take it to the commander, you are discharged. Even if it is your first day there. In return, the soldier who guards the flag is authorized to shoot at you if he catches you with the flag. That is the significance of the flag. The flag in our regiment had been snatched some time ago and the regiment was going from one exile point to another: Cyprus, Bozcaada, Siirt, and finally Mardin. After we were discharged from Mardin, the regiment was abolished altogether. So at that time, the regiment was placed in Mardin-Kızıltepe. Coming from Siirt, we first went to Ömerli and then we hit the mountains.

I feel badly for the people there. There is some kind of a curfew. You cannot go out at night, you would be killed by the soldiers. So you have no social life. You go to bed when it gets dark and wake up at dawn. No television, nothing. It is like an emergency zone. They have ten to fifteen kids that they cannot look after. They help the terrorists. There were Kurdish soldiers among us. They used

to pretend that they were terrorists and knock on the *muhtar's*¹ door at night, asking for food. Of course, they knew the difference between terrorists and soldiers. They had good communication with the terrorists, so they had special codes. When they understand that you are a soldier, they tell you to go away and leave their doorstep. I went to this village in Mardin—I forgot the name—which was totally destroyed. My God! There were three to four beautiful girls in the village. One was standing right across us. When we came close, she turned her head and I was shocked. Her face was all smashed. Apparently, there were once village guards in this village. Then there was a terrorist attack. The terrorists were shooting from one side, the guards from the other. In the end, the guards ran out of ammunition and the terrorists killed them one by one. This girl was caught in the barn. They shot six bullets at her mother, but she survived. The village was totally destroyed. The relatives of the villagers were all business people in Izmir. They were also attacked there. The state found those people and asked them to go back to their village. Although people had businesses and all that, they took their families and returned to the village. About ten families. So the state intervened and saved the village from becoming history.

At nights, we were preparing ambushes. In the mountains, we slept on snow or on rocks. On one of the rocks, they had written “the infantry is a babe in the woods, the commando is a babe in the woods, the gendarmerie is a son of a bitch.” They fear the commandoes but they also find them personable. It was the gendarmerie that had destroyed them before, so they hate the gendarmerie. All they do is kill them. I was never in an armed clash. Once we went on a long operation. Our team was not involved, but three terrorists were caught dead. They were sixteen- to seventeen-year-old kids.

When our first lieutenant was transferred to the West, we had a new guy who wanted us to go on an operation every single night. One day, we were informed that there was a meeting in a nearby village. People were seen coming into the village. So we surrounded the village and asked them to surrender. When you cordon off the village, you can easily walk into the village and find what you are looking for. We knew which house was the meeting place. So we found all fifteen of them right there. When they found out about our operation, one of them got into the bed of his friend's wife. We asked him who he was and he said “I am a guest.” We captured them around 11 p.m. There was lots of space there and a flag post. We brought them close to the flag post, blindfolded them, and asked them to kneel down. The first lieutenant was sitting on a chair. “What were you doing there?” he asked. “Buying and selling oxen,” was their reply. The guy who said this was kneeling on the ground. The lieutenant hit him on

¹ The (elected) head of the village (translator's note).

the head and he was knocked to the ground. "Lift him up," the lieutenant kept saying and we did. The guy's hands and feet were tied, his eyes were blindfolded. After every question, there was a kick. He wouldn't talk even if you threatened to kill him. The first lieutenant asked him to climb the flag post with his feet up and head below. He did and fell down on his head each time. Our previous lieutenant would not have done such a thing. The officers got promotions based on the number of terrorists they killed. This one was that kind of a guy. This went on till morning. I mean, I would not have minded it if it were the gendarmerie inflicting the beating, but the commando? The lieutenant was trying to get them to admit that they were collecting money for the terrorists. He beat those villagers for three days. No custody or anything. In the mountains, we are the judges. As for us, the soldiers, all we did was to lift the men up each time they fell. I did not even hurt an ant during military service. I have this feeling of pity in me.

We used to stay in the school with the schoolteacher. The teacher was there to teach Turkish, but of course the villagers did not send their kids to school. We used to forcefully bring the kids to the school. Finally, they closed the school down. We always went on village searches. Let me tell you this, the terrorists always knew which village we were going to search. I mean, the terrorist knows everything that the soldiers do in the mountains, but the soldiers don't know anything about the terrorists.

It is sad to conduct searches in villages. You don't want to unsettle their lives and destroy their order, but you have to do it. Hit, smash, take the bed, throw it down, you look and look and you don't find anything. They always had a shelter. The people support the commando soldiers. Of course, they support the PKK as well. If I were in the East today, I would support them as well because of what the soldiers are doing. The villagers are stuck between two fires. We never hurt a single woman, but we did marry people. Some guy had taken a girl from another village (they had eloped) and come to the village at the base. I looked out and saw people running away. I thought it was a terrorist attack. We were so fast with our guns and preparations that even the lieutenant was surprised. We went into the village and realized that it was a totally different situation. We came back to the base with the man and the woman together with a small number of men from each family. One of the officers was sort of a *hodja*,² so he married the two.

Of course the basic training was worse. If they recruited me today to serve in the same region under the same circumstances, I would go. For instance, I never lost a buddy while I was there. During our time, it was the gendarmerie that did

² Someone with religious education and authority (translator's note).

most of the fighting. If there were one hundred martyrs, perhaps ninety-five of them were from among the gendarmerie. What do I remember most vividly? One night we organized an ambush. The first lieutenant gathered all the teams and went to the lower part of the village. They pretended to be terrorists. That night I had guard duty at the worst point in the base. I had the 5–7 p.m. shift. Of course, because all the teams were in the village, I had to do the 11 p.m.–1 a.m. shift as well. From the radio I was listening to talk about terrorists being in the village. “A clash is inevitable,” it was said. Of course, those “terrorists” were our soldiers, but those on guard did not know about this. I suddenly heard some sound and started sweating. My rifle was ready for use. I took my position and started waiting. The sound was still there and my heart was beating so fast that I thought it would explode. Here he comes, here he comes, here he comes . . . finally, it was right on top of me looking down and I still did not see it. A donkey! I said, “I should shoot it right here.” But the terrorists might have sent the donkey. They might be following it. So I just threw a stone at it and scared it away. I was scared to death that night. But my most scary moment was in Siirt. It was my second month in the military. There were rumors that the terrorists would be attacking the base. Again, my guard duty was in the worst spot, at point four. Terrorists had cut the throat of another soldier who had fallen asleep during his shift at that spot. They cut his throat. I had the 1–3 a.m. shift, all alone in pitch darkness. There was news that there were terrorists running away. Again I was soaked in sweat until the end of the shift. When you are in that state, you cannot see the terrorist even if he is right next to you. Terrorists do all sorts of deadly things in the mountains.

They have banned the casinos from five star hotels. They should now ask the rich people to go and build five star hotels in the countryside of the Southeast and let them have their casinos, like Las Vegas. Would rich people get on the planes and go there to gamble? They would. They should also ask those investors to open a factory in addition to the hotel. That’s how the Southeast can develop . . .

I was in great shape when I came back. Throughout military service, I was carrying a mortar which weighed about 30 kilos. I still experience back pain because of it. The doctor keeps saying that the problem is “calcification.” It took me several months to get back to my normal self. There is still some residue, like nightmares. There would have been more if it were not for my two friends. When we came back, we hung out together and tried to spend our days in joy and laughter, trying to forget. Otherwise, it is unbearable. You come back having lost your sanity. . . . Right now, I don’t think there are any effects of this experience on me. My attitude and temperament changed after I came back. Military service puts some sense into you. It was the first time that I spent time

away from my parents. I am not the kind of person who gets angry easily. I mean, sometimes I get angry, shout and all that, but then I calm down.

I was engaged before I left for military service. I used to call my fiancée during basic training. After that, there were no phones. Sometimes I would make calls from the *muhtar*'s home. When my family called, he would refuse to accept that he knew me, but when I asked if I could place a call, he would not say no. There were times when I had no contact with my fiancée and family for three months. Now, when I watch the news, I pay attention to conflicts that take place in Siirt and try to figure out if anything has happened to the places where I used to be. I watch the TV programs "Sights from Anatolia" and "*Mehmetçik*" because the soldiers interviewed in these programs speak about our flesh-and-blood experiences . . . I never saw the son of a rich person there. They just send the sons of the poor to this region. There were many soldiers who were protesting this when I was there. They used to ask where the rich kids were and I thought they were right in asking this question!

Born in Trabzon in 1970, he is a primary school graduate, he has two sisters. The whole family is engaged in hazelnut farming. He did his basic training in the Isparta Mountain Commando School. He says that they were "officially classified not as commandoes, but as infantry soldiers." He finished his military service in Mardin in 1992.

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7

IT IS UP TO THE POOR TO PROTECT THE HOMELAND; THE RICH KNOW HOW TO GO ABOUT IT . . .

One night the battalion commander was visiting us. While he was here, some shots were fired toward the station from the village below. He told me to go down and rake the village. "How can I rake our own village?" I said, "Will you give me a written order?"

Before we left Tuzla [small town close to Istanbul with a military school and camp], we were warned about the bus companies whose buses were regularly stopped and searched by the PKK. So we were asked to avoid those companies. I remembered this after I had already made reservations with one of those companies. When I went to the bus station, I tried buying my ticket from another company, not the one I had reservations with. They realized this and came to me asking why I was not buying my ticket from them, reminding me of my reservation. And they beat me up. See, even before going to military service, I was beaten up.

After arriving in Urfa, I transferred to Viranşehir, following the advice about arriving there during daytime. A very different place. We spent the first week getting additional training about border watch. They showed us where the border was, where the minefields were, and so on. In the morning and in the evening, we were supposed to check the fields and watch for the traces of those who had passed the border. If you find any traces, you have to notify the General Staff Emergency Unit immediately. A week later, we went down to Ceylanpınar.

Before the lottery in Tuzla, we got regular team training. We fired may be three shots. After the lottery, those who had pulled out the Southeast were put in a separate team. We received special two-week training on internal security. Those of us who pulled the border received two-week training on border duty. The internal security training is more theoretical. You get your gun and 25 kilos

of weight on your back and they take you to a different place in helicopters. When you arrive, you see the terrorists running away. Or say, it is dark at night, the terrorists fire and we follow them. They have this village, much like the villages in the Southeast, set up in Tuzla. For instance, the terrorists take refuge in a house in this village and we circle them. We use real guns and ammunition as we fire and capture the terrorists. When we met terrorists as we drove in our vehicles, we were shot at. We also learned to jump into the vehicles as they moved. In those fifteen days, we had a lot of contact with guns and we learned fast. They tried to agitate us by showing videos shot by the military during armed clashes. "There were clashes here and there. Here, the commander made a wrong decision. You are supposed to put a watch on the highest point and then call the unit to pass from that spot. Because the commander did not put a watch there, fifteen to sixteen of our soldiers were martyred." These sorts of information were given. To make us feel really agitated against the PKK, they had colonels give some of those trainings. They used to tell us that there was no such thing as a Kurd. "These people call themselves Kurd because when they walk on snow, they make these 'kart, kurt' noises. In reality, they are not Kurds, they are all Turks like us," they told us in these trainings. There was constant propaganda. In order for us to lose our sense of pity, they told us horrifying things. You get influenced even if you don't want to. When I went for my military service, I was twenty-eight years old. Still, I was influenced. You can imagine how the twenty-year-olds must feel.

So we reached our company in Ceylanpınar. At first, they did not give us any weapons. They told us to go and sit under the trees. We waited till the evening, and then we had dinner. After dinner, we were still sitting under the trees, not knowing what to do. The two vehicles in the company were out checking the border. As it was getting dark, the commander came out and asked us where our weapons were. We immediately ran, got dressed, wore our combat vests, and took our guns. The border we were supposed to protect in Ceylanpınar was 21 kilometers long. They put us in the two vehicles and we patrolled the border with the commander who showed us the places around the border: "This is a village in Syria called such-and-such, and this is a Turkish village. We have intelligence that this village supports us and this other village has terrorists, so watch out. Sometimes there are shots from this spot in Syria," and so on. On the way back to the station, I saw some lights and said, "Isn't this Turkey?" The commander said, "What kind of a man are you? That is Syria." This went on for about three days. Then I was transferred to the Aksoy station and my friend from Sivas was sent to the Karadağ station. The company commander came and told me to watch the guards, walking throughout my shift. The station was about four kilometers long and we had two soldiers at our ambush spots.

Later we increased them to three. The commander told me to walk to each spot at least three times during the night to make sure that the soldiers were not sleeping.

One night, I was out walking with the sergeant guarding me. We went out around 11 p.m. to get to know the soldiers on duty that night. At midnight, the soldiers are given their night rations. After we checked out all the ambush spots (and there were about seven of them), I told the driver to start distributing the rations and head back to the station. Just at that moment, we saw lights at the station but we could not figure out what was happening. Suddenly, there were shots coming from all around. They had attacked the station! During those times, stations were attacked all the time. All of a sudden, tracer bullets were flying all over. The whole place turned upside down. I told the driver to cut the lights and drive to the station, which was about 4 kilometers away. It was pitch dark that night. They prefer such nights for attacks. We informed the company headquarters that there were clashes. The headquarters were about 17 kilometers away. If they drive at 40 kilometers an hour, they can come in 15–20 minutes. By then, everything will be over. I reached the station and we kept firing with MP3s and so on. Finally, they stopped firing.

You fire based on the sounds you hear. It is blind firing because you don't see anything. I asked the sergeant at the station what had happened. He said the dog started barking and then the fire began. So the dog sensed that they were coming and they opened fire upon the barking. I had told the company commander that we needed to set up an ambush spot right where they came in. They had come right through that spot. Apparently, this used to be a passage point for them. I checked the soldiers at the ambush spot. They had run out of ammunition. They told me that two of them had run that way and two others had gone the other way. No one from our unit was hurt, but we saw blood trails leading up to the wired fence. One of them was probably wounded. In the meantime, backup came from the company headquarters. Apparently, soldiers sometimes "created" clashes to fool around with the rookies. They found a donkey and fired at it. Later on they would say, "Oh, it was just a donkey. We did not know, sir. We saw something coming toward us." The company commander thought this was one of those incidents and started shouting at the soldiers. But then we found exactly four trails, two coming and two going. On the track field, we found a coat and a Kalashnikov with some ammunition. Because the company commander was not very experienced, when he saw the traces, he said, "This is serious. Get in the vehicles, we will follow." Everyone got into the vehicles. The guard and I were left out. I said to him, "Let us run to the trenches. They left us behind." Noncommissioned officers are under a lot of pressure. So we, reserve officers, have to constantly prove ourselves. We run toward danger aware

of the danger. For instance, the captain used to say: “What can a captain do when fifteen terrorists attack? What can a lieutenant do? And what can a second lieutenant do?”

Because the armored vehicles were at the company headquarters, we asked them to come when there were clashes. It was as if they did not want to come. I don't know what happened, but finally they gave one of the armored vehicles to the Aksoy station and another one to the Karadağ Station. I stayed in Aksoy for about a month and a half, and then at Yeşiltepe for three to four months, then again at Aksoy for seven months.

We used to go to bed around dawn and wake up around noon. After lunch, we were supposed to have “training.” That is what it said in the schedule. But, in reality, the schedule was not followed because this was a special region. For instance, the guard duty is limited to three hours in the schedule, but that was not the case for us. During the “training” hours, the guys used to watch the black-and-white TV not to lose touch with the outside world. Others would write letters, write poetry, polish their shoes, or play ball. I usually let them do what they wanted to do. I used to tell the company commander, “I am not doing the training. If you want, you come and do it yourself.” Our whole aim was not to let anyone pass the border in the four kilometer-strip that we were responsible for. If we could do that, that was enough. The commander used to say, “If you leave the soldier to himself, he will do this or that,” and I replied, “Nothing bad is happening.”

As the station commander, I used to go to the town during the weekend and shop for the following week. The company commander told us not to shop here or there “because they are pro-PKK.” Our electricity came from the village behind us. We often had problems with power supply. When we lost power, the border would be pitch dark. Our machines broke down because of the irregularity in the electric current. One day, we went to the village and asked: “What's happening with the electricity?” Our mechanic found the problem and fixed it. We threatened the village *muhtar* about the frequent power problems. So they explained: “We have told the governor may be fifty times that we are having these problems. But the TEK [the state-owned power company] employees are all PKK people. So they consciously don't do anything to fix the problem. The governor does not have arms, but you soldiers do. You can make them do it.” This was indeed the case. There was one problem we could not fix and TEK did it right away. From then on, we never had any problems with power supply.

We did not have any problems with food. The soldiers who spoke Arabic would threaten the Syrian villagers and get their sheep, which we would then cook and eat. There are no soldiers on the Syrian side of the border. The villagers can use the land that stretched up to the borderline. They had watermelon fields.

We would go there with the army vehicle and fill it up with watermelons. Once a week, I would tell the soldiers to get sheep, I mean to steal sheep. So, the soldiers were well fed.

When I came back to Aksoy from Yeşiltepe, new soldiers had arrived. They knew nothing about the rifle, they could not shoot. My first task was to explain to them the rifle, the bullets, and the target, and ask them to shoot. Of course, they could not even load their rifles, let alone shoot. The kids were afraid of the rifle because they had not used it much during basic training. We are supposed to trust them with our lives. How? At that time, the basic training was composed of marching in line, saluting, and so on. This had no use . . . When the soldiers came to us, we told them that their duty was not to let anyone pass the border. We told them that the homeland belonged to all of us and that a transgression of the border was as good as the transgression of our honor.

During another armed clash, I was again outside. They were shooting from all around. We toured the area and fired some around. Then the sergeant said that one of the soldiers, Ismail, was missing. I started shouting his name, "Ismail, Ismail" but he was nowhere to be found. I put on the night specs, because it was pitch dark, and checked each and every ambush spot. Finally, I saw a dark figure in one of those spots. I said, "Ismail?" and he stood up. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I took cover, sir!" I said, "Good for you!" The clashes are over and the kid is still "taking cover." I was so angry; I beat him up real good, saying "What kind of a soldier are you?" The next day, when we checked the area, I realized that the terrorists were about to cross the border and reach the station from the spot where Ismail was unable to fire a shot. How did I know? We found a gun there and saw the signs of them creeping toward us. I said to Ismail, "You were about to be responsible for the blood of fifty soldiers!"

Why was I there? I had the photograph of my one-month-old daughter with me. The first thing I saw when I woke up in the mornings was this photograph—and the last thing I looked at before going to sleep. You cannot do this thing with ordinary people. You need to have a more professional army. There was this Special Team, but they now have a bad reputation for having formed an illegal gang. So they were there for gang-related activities, not to fight. They engaged in drug trade and arms trade. Their leaders were all connected to the state. Where do the terrorists come from? Northern Iraq. How? Do we ever hear of any armed clashes along the Iraq border? No. So, perhaps, some people consciously let them in.

There were Kurdish guys among the soldiers. Then, they gathered all of them and sent them away. We used to say things like "look at the way he has shot through the wall!" When the Kurdish soldiers left, some guy said that he saw one of them shooting at the station. Our soldier shooting at our own station! I don't

know if this really happened. . . . Once, two Kurdish soldiers were at night duty (between 6 p.m. and midnight) and one of them—I think he was from Kızıltepe—ran away. He threatened his partner and passed through the border to the other side. The other soldier, because he did not have a walkie-talkie and did not want to leave his post, could not inform us until his shift was over. From that day on, soldiers on duty were given walkie-talkies. He could have shot the guy who escaped, but apparently he couldn't.

When we learned about this incident, we informed the lieutenant who was the acting commander. He told me to find a couple of reliable men whom we could take with us to cross the border to Syria and search for the soldier who had escaped. I took two soldiers, he took three, and we passed the border. I mean, we were doing our own little operation across the border. It was a real adventure. If anything had happened, or if the Syrian soldiers had captured us . . . Then, this soldier was requested back from the Syrian authorities; I guess through the Foreign Ministry. When he was brought back, he was shouting, "Don't surrender me! Don't surrender me!" After that incident, all soldiers who were originally from Eastern Turkey were pulled back to the inland areas, away from the border.

When I think about it now, about looking for a soldier on Syrian soil, I realize it was quite an adventure. The situation makes you do it. Part of it has to do with ambition and with the inferiority complex of being a second lieutenant. When the lieutenant says, "let's go," you go along with it. If soldiers in my position were more rational, things would be quite different. For instance, one day, the company commander came to me and said, "Let's go and do a night patrol." He usually drank alcohol at nights. Anyway, when we got into the military vehicle, I realized that he had loaded it with hand grenades and rifle grenades. As we patrolled, we used the headlights of the vehicle to check the different spots. He started throwing the grenades on the spots that we could not see with the headlights. I kept saying, "Sir, let us not do this. If they don't explode, they would cause trouble." He continued. Indeed, one of the grenades did not explode. On the way back, I reminded him and he said, "Nobody's going to go there, anyway." This was an irresponsible attitude. What we needed to do was to go there the next day and find the grenade. About two weeks later we heard that one child was killed while playing with a hand grenade and another was disabled. It was probably the grenade that we had left behind. I don't remember if there was an investigation or not. If the right precautions had been taken, those children would not have been hurt.

We were conditioned to continuously use our weapons. The privates did not care much. Who wants war, anyway? But it was due to necessity that we were there. The soldiers used to say, "If someone comes toward me, I would not shoot

directly at him, but shoot in the air.” This was true for all of us, the private as well as the company commander. What will we gain if we get into a clash and a fight?

When I came back from military service, I started giving orders to people in the street, shouting at people. I was used to giving orders. I was so tense, there were many situations when I was about to get into a fight. People would look at me and say, “Why are you shouting?” After that attack on the station that I told you about, I woke up in panic many times at night for a whole week. In fact, it continued when I came back home. I am at home, taking a nap. Suddenly, I wake up and start shouting at my wife: “Where is your cap? Why is your hair so long?” My wife first thought that I was joking. I once put my hands around her throat. I was about to beat her for not having a cap on. I mean, you become like a monster. We did not kill anyone and no one from among us was killed. Of course, this was due to luck.

Now there is some change in the way people think. I stayed in Diyarbakır for six years and did not feel like a stranger. They used to like students. Whereas with soldiers, there is more hatred. For instance, when we received shots from the village nearby, I used to ask myself: “What are we doing here? Why are we protecting the border?” This problem has got nothing to do with the economy and it is very difficult to put an end to it because there is conscious Kurdish nationalism behind it. You can bring them to their knees today, but tomorrow they will regain strength. The state does not have anyone to talk to, either. There are many Kurds who don’t like the PKK. If you were to sit down with them for an agreement and ask, “What do you want?” It is possible to teach them how to read and write or give them TVs. But nobody is telling us what would bring this terror to an end.

Does the military want to end this war? One night, the battalion commander was visiting us. While he was here, some shots were fired toward the station from the village below. He told me to go down and “rake” the village. “How can I rake our own village?” I said, “Will you give me a written order?” He tells me to “rake” the village, but he does not do it himself. What if I did it? You can reach your own conclusion about whether the military wants to end this war or not.

Who wants to go to the Southeast? What have we got to do there? We are peasant kids. Peasant kids do not have any influential connection to use to avoid going there. They send those who have no influence, others are saved. It is up to the poor, the disadvantaged to protect the homeland, the rich know how to go about it. The society does not care unless it affects them directly. If I die I am a martyr, if not I am *ghazi* [veteran]. What if I come back disabled? (May 1998, Denizli).

Born in Denizli in 1962, he graduated from Diyarbakır Law School, where he met his current wife. Right after finishing his traineeship as a lawyer, he applied to go to military service. He has two children. His basic training was in the Tuzla Infantry School and was stationed in Viranşehir, Urfa for the rest of his service. He was discharged in July 1992.

8

MY MOTHER ASKS, “WHERE IS MUŞ?”

Eight hours in fear . . . The fear suppresses the sleep. Would they be able to hit me if they shoot from this or that spot? To comfort myself, I think of Aydın and of the beach. I will go back, I have to go back!

Everyone has something to say, some advice to give. Some tell you to keep a low profile and to stay away from trouble. It is the first time I was going away from home. There was no ceremony, I just left. I was so confused that I kissed my friend Levent's hand as I was leaving. It is like you are newly born. They tell you “come” and you go. You are waiting for an order to “stand up.” The food is stuck in your throat. Forty others like me who had lost a term before going to military service were responsible for the chores of the whole battalion: carry sacks of flour, bring down the provisions, do a count in the depot, all drudgery. After forty days, we were sent to different places. We received three days of armed training. Normally, you are supposed to cover one topic per day. For us, this was five topics per day, including the technical training. They showed us how to aim inside the training rooms, around tables. That was the first time I saw and handled a gun. The next day, we were outside for shooting. Silence . . . Everybody is waiting for others to fire the first shot. You see a cartridge case fly by you, your ears ring, you cannot hear anything. You are scared. Your hands reach out for the trigger and you fire three shots with your G3. In my first shot, I was not successful. The next day, we repeated the words they told us to repeat in the oath ceremony. We were now soldiers under oath. During training, I fired a total of eleven bullets. They distributed the forty of us in four places [all in the Southeast]: Muş, Bingöl, Bitlis, and Kahramanmaraş. Ten of us to each place. “Muş,” the officer said, that was me. Bingöl and Bitlis were the worst places, so Muş was the better evil. I called home and told my mother. My mother asks, “Where is Muş?” They were really upset and it was my task to calm them down. As we left basic training, the sergeants were saying, “If you come back alive, give us a call.”

We had ten days off, which flew by. On the eighth day, we had to start the journey. Everybody was much tenser, so was I. As I sat on the bus on the way to Muş, I kept asking myself, "Are they going to kill me?" It was so obvious from our appearance that we were soldiers.

This was my first trip to any place east of Ankara. We did not get out of the bus even in the rest areas. Finally, we were in Muş. We surrendered to the Gendarmerie Regiment. No one was interested in us. They did not even take our names at first. As we were waiting for them to show us a place where we could sleep, someone said, "we have no beds left." We slept on the tables in the dining hall. When we went to the dining hall to eat our meals, they said, "We have no rations for you. If there is any food left, you can eat." There was a small *pide* [pizza-like food] place in the regiment. Those who had money ate there. Others could not. We spent a week there without a bed and hard-earned meals. "Sir, what are we waiting for?" we asked and they told us that they were waiting for others to arrive.

After a week, when they gathered us all in one place, we were happy, ready to go to our assigned units, wherever they might be. The commander first asked for volunteers to go to Hasköy. No one volunteered. Then he asked for Malazgirt. Again, no one. Finally, a friend from Kırklareli signed up and I joined him. We were friends from our basic training days. That night they sent us to Malazgirt in uniforms but in a civilian bus. When we arrived, we could not see the gendarmerie headquarters and we did not want to ask the passersby. Finally, we asked a child and he showed us the way. We were happy to have beds to sleep on although there were not enough beds for everyone. They had pulled two beds together and four people were sleeping on two beds, lying along the shorter edge. There was a shortage of weapons as well. For two months, we did not get weapons. We had duties in the dining hall, the wards, the tea room, the central heating unit, and so on. I was working in the dining hall. By the way, I had not had any contact with my family after coming to Muş. Also, I had opened a bank account in Muş, but I did not have time to withdraw my money before leaving for Malazgirt. There was only one bank, *Ziraat Bank*, in Malazgirt, which was not my bank. So my money remained locked. We were not supposed to make any phone calls. We could only receive calls. We could not leave the barracks to go to the town, either. My family apparently contacted a prosecutor in the area who called me. I was scared when I got the call. He asked me why I did not call my parents and gave me some money. Thanks to the impression he gave to others, I built some charisma in the company.

Before going to military service, I used to say, "I will not go to the military." I believed that this task had to be done by trained professionals. It did not make sense that learning how to respond to "Turn right, turn left" would mean much.

I was interested in what was happening there before military service. We used to have discussions among friends. I always thought that both the soldiers and the other side were dying for nothing. I used to say, "This is not what it should be like." You hear in the news that a certain village or someone from the village is helping the PKK and you ask yourself, "Why?" You ask yourself how he was deceived, whether he was a threat or not, and so on. When I went there, I realized that the people were very cold toward the soldiers. They did not treat the soldiers well and if they could, they would do more than that. Then I realized that this was so for a reason. The local people themselves were not treated well. For instance, when a *muhtar* comes to complain about his sheep ending up in another herd, he is put in an underground cell. You see him being beaten up and so on. He is held in contempt over the simple sheep affair. There is no discussion of whether he is guilty or not.

Two months later, thirty more weapons, G1s, arrived, but only four of them were working. Some broke down when we were shooting, others did not shoot at all. Twenty to twenty-five of us were waiting for weapons. Who is going to get them? One of the soldiers who got a weapon could not get into the lying position and was severely beaten up by the company commander. After beating him up, the commander, who had recently become a captain, told him to keep running around a particular area until the shooting was over. Then he asked me to go and fire a shot. Having witnessed the beating, I took a perfect position, very successfully. "O.K." he said, "the rifle is yours." During the roll calls, we were supposed to hold the barrels in line, but it was impossible. Everyone had G3s and I had a G1, which was much longer. The sergeant major asks me to lower my rifle, and I say, "The G1 is long. How can I lower it further?" On the first day that I got the G1, they told me to stand guard in front of the station, my first guard duty. It was pitch dark. There was a hospital next to the barracks and a school right across it. The dogs at the company were barking all the time, making me nervous, and I had to stay there till 8 a.m. Normally, the shift is only for two hours, but they said there was no one to replace me, so they kept me there till the morning. I held the rifle up in the diagonal position, which was painful after a while. Eight hours of fear. I kept asking the sergeant on duty when they were going to change me. It was October or November, so it was warm during the day but cold at night. Fear suppresses sleep, so you don't sleep even for a moment. You ask yourself: "Would they be able to hit me if they shoot from this or that spot?" You are expecting to be attacked from all sides. To comfort myself, I think of Aydın, the sea, and the beach, and the huge distance between these two realities. You tell yourself, "I will go back, I have to go back!" Some form of inspiration I used the G1 for about four months. Then they gave me the rifle of someone who was discharged. The more experienced soldiers tell you

about the armed clashes and you become nervous. You say, "Look, a star just fell" and they say, "No, that was not a star; that was a tracer bullet. It is a harassment shot." What is a *harassment shot*? No one explains.

In the meantime, they assigned the newcomers to the nearby villages. One of them was a new guy from Antep. Apparently, there were harassment shots aimed at them in this village. The commander asks them to take refuge when the first shot is fired. And then comes a second and they take refuge. The third time the soldiers are up, this guy from Antep gets shot with a single bullet and dies. He was a small, sweet guy. Pain and anger. You start developing cruel thoughts toward the PKK and even toward the villagers, the people from that region. Everyone says, "I am going to kill them when I find them and I will make them experience the violence as they die." We took the soldier to his hometown, Antep. Our commanders came as well. He was the only child and had no father. His body reached his home before his first letter. It was a real catastrophe for his family and they were looking at us as if we were guilty.

There used to be armed clashes between the tribes in the mountain villages. The commander would say, "We will go there in the morning." You cannot go anywhere at night. The commanders said, "Let them deal with each other." We would go to the sites where the clashes were the following morning and not even find a bullet case. They used to take care of their dead and the women would load the weapons and collect the empty bullet cases.

One day, I had guard duty in the prison that was about a kilometer and half away. It was incredibly foggy. There were three towers, in between them the barbed wire, and a hill on top. Six of us stood guard at the three towers, two on each tower. Suddenly, the power was down. And immediately we started hearing shots. Bullets came from all around. Then the new soldiers came for the next shift. We met up in the front, all twelve of us. Before they could take their positions on the towers, they started firing at us. Some of us lay on the ground; others took refuge in the towers. Three of us were in the first tower. We saw two of the soldiers lying on the ground, wounded. They were trying to drag themselves to a safe place. They were out in the open and we could not go for help. Bullets were coming from all sides and we had not even fired a shot yet. We could not see anything, but we could hear some shots coming from the hill and others from the houses across. They were in the gardens of these houses, firing with hunt rifles. There was a telephone in the company headquarters. We kept calling the number but no one picked up. Of course, they could hear the shots. Finally, we could get through and my friends told them, crying, that we needed backup: "Send some backup immediately, they are shooting from all sides." Two of the soldiers were at the prison gate asking the guard to open up, but he would not open up. It was against the regulations for soldiers to go inside the prison.

In the meantime, my buddy got hit on the forehead and was wounded. Other friends were also wounded. The two who were wounded at the beginning could never get up. The clashes went on for about an hour. No backup came. "We are making preparations. We will come," they said. They would have come even if they had run the distance. "Why aren't they coming?" you shout on the phone and tell them about the dead. It is very painful not to be able to help your friend when he is wounded. You are scared. You are in a state of panic. You cannot see where the shots are coming from. You start shooting, blindly, here and there. Finally, the power came back, the firing stopped, and backup arrived. Apparently, they had left in two groups, one group by jeep, the others on foot. On the way, they were ambushed and shot at. No one was hurt. We could not find anyone from the other side. We had no idea where they went, what happened to them. The same night, the regiment commander came by helicopter. Normally, they don't travel at night. He came and scolded the company commander, swearing: "Why are you having my soldiers killed? Why did you not come here on time?" Our commander gave his excuses. The regiment commander stayed in Malazgirt that night, refusing the offer of the company commander to stay at his place. Although he was a senior colonel, he stayed in the barracks with the soldiers. The two friends who had died were sent to their hometowns, Yozgat and Edirne. My wounded buddy was sent to Diyarbakır for treatment. He came back after two months. They had not managed to take the bullet out, so he is living with it.

This was my first engagement. In fact, I should call it an ambush. We learned afterward that shift change should not take place at the same time for all soldiers, that we should take turns. Each training starts after a mistake. From that point on, the shift changes were like those in the movies. One of you runs while the other protects him. The one who runs jumps and rolls over on the ground; very artistic. . . . We did it this way for about two weeks. Then, same old, same old. Afterward, you say, "We should criticize these mistakes!" No one cares. Especially experienced soldiers should not fall for such mistakes. One of those who died was close to being discharged. Those of us who still had a long way to go learned then that we should learn from these mistakes and be very careful. When we talked to one another, we never said things like "if we die we will be martyrs. We would be happy to sacrifice our lives." No one said such things. If the press asks, you do say things like that. When they ask, you realize that you have to speak this way.

We were not given information about the places we were sent to. We used to do home operations without knowing what we were looking for. Documents? Guns? We are looking for illegal stuff, but what exactly? We used to search specific houses or the whole village. Once, I remember having to search a village

the day before the *bayram* [Muslim holiday]. It was very sad. People had cleaned their houses, made preparations for the *bayram* and we were there, searching their houses with our boots on. You have to search even the most private places: beds, comforters, drawers. . . . The women said things to us in Kurdish. Rightly, they were complaining about the search. There were soldiers among us who spoke Kurdish. We asked them what they were saying. They said the women were swearing. I said, "They are right to swear." Some soldiers are careful when they are searching the houses, others just throw things around. Of course, some of it has to do with the psychology of being a soldier. Many soldiers had lost their mind. We had seen our friends die. So during these searches they turn the place upside down. I have done many searches. We never found anything significant, just a few hunting rifles.

On New Year's Eve in 1992 we were at a distant post. We were protecting Malazgirt from the east and from the west. We stayed in one place for one hour or so and then started moving. We left the vehicles and provided security on the roads, did controls and searches, and so on. We came back around 3 or 4 a.m. Those friends who were not sleeping were watching TV. What we did in the searches was to look at the IDs and do a total search of the vehicle when we suspected something. To me, this was quite absurd. Some of our commanders had a list of the suspects and the senior sergeants had memorized those names. The sergeant would ask people, "Is this person your relative? Do you know this person?" and so on. Normally, we learned who the person was and where he was from and thanked him. We looked at him sternly to see if he would do anything suspicious. We learned that look by practice. After a while, you tell yourself: "What difference does it make if I ask for his ID or not? I don't know who I am looking for anyway." We used to stop all buses and check everyone's IDs. We did the same with village minibuses. They were always packed with people and even sheep. They often said, "Brother, please don't ask us to go out, we could hardly get in." And we said, "Everybody out!" and collected the IDs of all the men and handed them over to the commander. We did not search the women, although I thought we should. But I did not know how I could do that. Then, after the ID check, we put them back in their vehicles and they left, swearing behind us. When there was a stranger, the commander showed special interest. The stranger is immediately obvious.

During the *Nevruz* [Spring festival on March 21], we did not sleep for three days. I mean, they did not let us sleep. If it were up to me, I would sleep. I had no intention of preventing the way people celebrate this special day. They just told us, the soldiers, that there would be incidents. We prepared road blocks and other barricades with the purpose of preventing people from getting together in one spot, keeping them dispersed. There was this one village, Tatlica, which was

regarded as immediately suspicious because there had been many incidents there. They told us that the leaders would come from that village. Then the crowd started coming toward us, chanting Kurdish slogans. We asked them to stop. The company commander had instructed us not to provoke the people, not to open fire unless something came from the other side. He had warned us to keep things under control. The crowd came toward us and we were facing each other, waiting anxiously. "What will happen? Will they push toward us?" I kept asking myself. We were in the middle of a huge crowd. My greatest worry concerned the use of guns. Would the guns talk? Worse still, I imagined using the rifle to hit the people if they pushed toward us. These were passionate men and women in front of us! They came very close, but upon our warning they stopped. One of them said, "I want to pass" and the commander gave him permission to pass. Another soldier stopped him and asked where he was going and he said, "My house is over there." The soldier started beating him. The commander intervened, others pulled the soldier away, and the man passed. From early morning till late night, it was a hectic day. No sleep, exhaustion A tense *Nevruz*!

During the year I was there, Muş was not a center of armed activity, but a route, a passage. In the meantime, people started talking about those PKK members who turned against their organization, confessed, and started working for the state with praise. I was working in the special room of the company commander, serving him and his guests. A tall, bearded guy with the code name *Yeşil* [Green]—we only knew the code names—came in a special car. There was quite a beautiful woman with him. They stayed for about an hour and I served them. He bragged about the numbers of people he had killed in Muş. He was also praised by others. At that time, we knew about the way the terrorists killed the soldiers they captured, after torturing them. Five of these terrorists were captured and brought to the Muş regiment for investigation. People talked about *Yeşil* taking these men to a distant spot, putting hand grenades in their mouth, shooting at them from a distance, and bringing the bodies back to the regiment. It was also said that he participated in some of the armed clashes. There were all kinds of rumors about him, almost like a myth: that he was very fast, that he could change clips while jumping in the air, that he went toward the bullets and nothing happened to him, and so on. There was a hidden admiration for the guy.¹

We are going to the Katerin Mountains on an operation. The intelligence must be very strong because there are about one hundred soldiers. It is my first

¹ *Yeşil* was later identified, by a government report, as one of the main actors in extrajudicial killings all around the country, particularly in the Southeast. He has since disappeared (translator's note).

participation in a mountain clash. Later, we learn that we have identified the regional leaders of the other side. There is a passage between the two mountains where we see three people. The Special Team is there, the commandoes are there. We fire the first shot. They are only three people in a rocky area. After half an hour, one hundred bullets and five clips are consumed by each soldier. The regiment commander comes to the spot with a helicopter. You are thinking that you are about to capture some important names. You fire without really seeing the target, just because they have given orders for you to fire. You do want to kill. All that you have experienced until that moment, the fact that your friends have died have an influence on you. Why am I here? You ask yourself. And you hold the terrorists responsible and you fire. After a while, no shots are coming from the other side. In the meantime, the heavy weapons and antiaircraft guns have come. The commander asks for two soldiers and a noncommissioned officer to volunteer, and they do. They take the antiaircraft guns up to the top of the mountain and set it up. They can see the terrorists from that spot and can be seen by them. They fire the first shot and then the machine stops. The officer stands up to pull the arm to get it to fire again and they kill him with a point shot.

No one else from among us went up there after that. The news about the officer getting killed traveled fast. We spent the night there and fired all night. Those who were wounded were taken to Diyarbakır for treatment, but the clashes continued.

At that moment, you think that you can die any minute. And you see others fall. You know that the terrorists are great shooters and have had great training. You ask yourself why you have had so little training. "If we have Special Operations, let them come here and do the fighting. Why are *we* here?" It is no use being a *crowd*; to the contrary, it is a disadvantage. At night, there was an incredible wind and it was terribly cold. The soldiers huddled closer and tried to warm each other. For a couple of hours, there was no shooting. And then it was morning. We had no food, nothing. Some people had run out of cigarettes. With daylight, missiles and bombs started flying again. All of the regiment's forces were mobilized. The rocks were all destroyed. How could they survive all this bombing? We heard single shots here and there. After the last bombing, it all stopped. "Now we are going to collect their pieces," you think. Unfortunately, we had not been able to kill them all. Disappointment . . . The commanders, especially the Special Team was very upset, they were fuming. They just shot at one corpse, and when the prosecutor came he recorded it as soldiers "not being able to control themselves and shooting at the terrorist from a close distance." How could the other terrorists run away? When we discussed this incident among friends, we asked ourselves, "Did we really need to

go?" The Special Team could have handled this. Then, it would have been two well-trained groups facing each other. Those of us with no training survived these incidents by accident.

During the same month, there was another armed clash. A terrorist was hiding in the home of the *muhtar*. This time about fifty of us were there, with the commanders. We surrounded the house and announced our warning. No one came out and it was impossible to go in. After another warning, we started shooting at the house. A rocket destroyed the door. The *muhtar* had confirmed that there was a terrorist in the house. Still, one guy manages to make a shot. There was this sergeant major who threw a hand grenade inside the house. Apparently, he had not pulled the trigger, so it did not explode. In a few minutes it was sent back to us. Luckily, it fell on an empty spot and no one was hurt. If it had come toward the soldiers, at least twenty of us would have been killed. After an hour, a cannon was sent from the Cannon Brigade. It blew up the corner of the house and the man inside surrendered. He was wounded. They took him immediately to the regiment in Muş. We never talked to him. . . . Another terrorist had fired some harassment shots at the station in the village and was shot at his heels while running away. Everyone was visiting him and I did, too. I said "*geçmiş olsun* [get better soon]. What did you do?" He said that he was a shepherd and I replied, "So you are a shepherd with a Kalashnikov!" Afterward, my friends reacted to me for having told him "*geçmiş olsun*." I said, "yes, but he is still a human being."

A station was to be built on top of a mountain village. They sent us there and we put up our tents and prepared our positions. We worked hard the whole day. We dug up the ground, put the soil in bags, circled the tents with the bags, and so on. We were very tired by the end of it. The same night, they sent us out to patrol. Later on, we learned that they did this on purpose, so that we would not fall asleep. Despite all that effort and all the warning, we still slept. We put rocks in front of us for protection and slept. I had my buddy with me who had a bullet in his head from the earlier operation. The team commander came, realized we were sleeping, and woke us up: "Why are you sleeping?" Why wouldn't we? We realized the next morning that we were a clear target that night, especially with the moon out. Anything could have happened to us that night. There was no inquiry. An officer came for one day and then left. Our team leader was a noncommissioned officer.

This was happening during May and June, it was incredibly hot. The only time one could sleep was during the chill of the early morning. We stayed there, on the mountain, for four months. There were no clashes. We had a kitchen tent, but no cook. So we all contributed to the cooking as best as we could. Even I cooked soup and fried vegetables. We shopped from the grocer in the small

village (with thirty to thirty-five houses) below us. We sometimes went to the post office in Erzurum to make phone calls. Our team commander was a young but religiously devout guy. He did slap a few soldiers, but he would apologize the next day. There were thirty-two soldiers and we would be thirty to thirty-five including the commanders. We often talked about what we would do if there was an armed clash. The company commander had warned us not to wait for backup in the event of a clash. We had to manage with the 120 bullets distributed to us until the next morning. For a well-trained soldier, even two clips can be enough, but not for us. Unless our weapons broke down, we would use all of our bullets in the first hour. Sometimes we heard harassment shots and wondered if they were trying out new weapons.

During the day, it was fine. We would set up two posts and play soccer. We even played some games with the villagers. I got hurt while playing soccer. Two of us hit each other in the head and we had injuries in the same spot close to our eyebrows. For a while, the team commander would do roll calls and check whether our boots were polished or whether our nails were trimmed. We had become comfortable with the team commander. Once, we had come back from duty, around 10 a.m., when the commander said that he would do a roll call and asked the sergeant to bring the men. The sergeant said he would not do it, "they have just come back from duty and are sleeping. What use is a roll call at this time?" The commander slapped the sergeant a couple of times and we supported the sergeant saying that having a roll call on the top of a mountain did not make much sense. The commander was angry and he said, "I know what I will do!" Of course, he could not do anything. One day, the regiment commander came. By the time they told us to get dressed and be ready, his helicopter was down and he was in our tents. Some of the men were still undressed. The regiment commander said that he came without notice for a reason: he did not want us to be burdened with preparations for his visit. He had brought *baklava* [a sweet] for us to eat and asked us if we had any complaints. Silence. Finally I said, "Sir, the tents are very hot." He said that there could be a solution to the water problem and also told us that no one could force us to go on an operation if we didn't want to, or if we had any doubts.

Once, a soldier was shot by another soldier in the foot by mistake. They bandaged the guy and sent him away for treatment. When the commander came, he said, "Your friend's blood should not stay on the ground or it will drown you all." He took out his gun and pointed it at the soldier who had shot his friend, threatening to kill him. He hit him with the back of the gun, beat him up really badly, cuffed him, and put him in the back of his vehicle. The guy stayed there all night.

The relations between the privates, the noncommissioned officers, and the sergeants were very informal, but with the officers, we could talk only when they

asked us a question. The officers say, "I will not have my privates beaten up by anybody. I will beat them myself." It was around August 20 that they called up my name from the wireless and told me that I would be discharged the following day. In short, my discharge came about thirteen months into my service. This was a surprise because it was early. I was afraid that they would call me back again.

I came to Ankara with military escort. Around the same time, two buses were burned near Diyarbakır. We were quite nervous on the way, thinking whether they would fire missiles from here or there. I got into a bus to Aydın once I was in Ankara and did not sleep at all on the way. I had a pullover on although it was very hot in the summer. When I knocked on the door, my mother first thought I was a street peddler. Before I went for military service, I used to find Aydın boring. On the way back, I wanted to kiss the ground. I hope I will never go to those places [in the Southeast] again. I know I should not say this, but that is how I feel. When you compare life there and life here, it is almost like these are two different countries. Before military service, I was more reckless. When I was there, I realized that there was injustice toward the people in that region. You see this very clearly after military service. After experiencing those moments of horror, after seeing the condition under which those people live, I started believing that something different should be done to solve this problem. Besides the armed clashes, something more essential needs to be done. Before, when I talked about injustices, I was never this passionate. My friends ask me why I have become so aggressive and I tell them, "It is much better to show some reaction, like I am doing, than not to show any, like you are doing." I get disturbed when people only talk from their own point of view. People in that region cannot go out after 6 p.m.; there is no life at night.

In the war, you first fight with yourself. You ask yourself why you are there and why you are shooting. Then you fight the person on the other side. Then you fight your own environment. . . . The most difficult one is the fight inside yourself. (April 1998, Aydın)

Born in Erzurum in 1970, his basic training was in Zonguldak between August 1991 and September 1992. Then he was sent to Muş. Son of a civil servant, he has lived his whole life in Aydın. He is number two among six siblings (three girls, three boys). His younger brother is doing his military service in Cyprus. During military service, the song he wanted to listen to the most was "Soldier Forth" from Deep Purple, but he was content with Ahmet Kaya's "Şafak Türküsü" [The Dawn Song]. He has taken a course to become a flight attendant. That is what he wants to do. He reads a lot and particularly likes Yaşar Kemal, Nazım Hikmet, and Orhan Veli.

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9

I SLAPPED HIM TWICE; HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY HE WAS BEING BEATEN . . .

A person who experiences so much poverty and deprivation can join the fight in the mountains if someone comes and gives him hope. Since he experiences similar forms of suffering where he is, with little hope for tomorrow, it is easy for him to join.

My part of the lottery was to become a team commander in the Arıcak [a small town in the Elazığ province] Commando Unit. I am the only son in the family and the youngest child. It was really bad for my family. Throughout my military service, they were anxiously watching the news for three hours each night, checking every news service. The only good thing was the telephone.

I usually look at life with humor. For instance, when our service terms were lengthened, it affected many of the guys badly. I was responsible for taking the soldiers who were about to be discharged back to the unit from the town. Can you imagine? You are ready to go, already in your civilian clothes; you have taken pictures, said your goodbyes . . . Suddenly an order comes and you have four more months to go. The guys were shattered. When I went back to the unit, the captain said “*geçmiş olsun*” [hope it will pass soon] and I asked him why he was saying this. He said, “You have four extra months of service.” At that point I thought this was only valid for the privates, not for us [the reserve officers]. I could not believe that it was also valid for us. The commander brought the written order and we realized that we were included in the order as well. I adapted fast and made a joke about it: “So we have five more months. That’s O.K. . . . we were going to miss this place anyway.”

I tried to make the best of that place. I did not experience fear or anxiety. I felt its effect on me in the five to six months after I came back here. Life there was sleepless at night because of all the ambush activity. We used to sleep during the day. I continued this pattern after I came back. I used to go to bed early in the morning and get up late afternoon. Then, I would go to the coffeehouse and

come back home around 1.30 or 2 a.m. I would stay awake till the morning and then go to sleep. If a dog knocked down a trash can at 4 a.m., I would jump from my bed. I reacted strongly against the *Ramadan* [Muslim holy month of fasting] cannon balls. I had little sense of *Ramadan* itself. When they fired a cannon ball, I threw myself to the ground. When I saw the people around me, I told myself, “Calm down, this is Denizli and what they are firing is not a rocket. It is just the *Ramadan* cannon ball.” This went on for three to four months. I met up with a friend from military service, some six or seven months later and, of course, all we talked about was that place. I told him that I reacted badly against sounds. He was worse. He had nightmares. This was despite the fact that he had not been in many armed clashes during military service.

I used to take pleasure in having wine in the rain and cognac in the snow. Now I am much more careful. It was school, more than military service, which changed me. I went to university when I was sixteen. I had started making a living on my own when I was fourteen. I dealt with my weaknesses as I worked in the construction sites. The university was very difficult at first. It is very different for the privates. Most of them have never left the village before military service; they have lived on their father’s money and fooled around. Others have worked in the fields. They come to the military and learn to say “sir,” to salute, and they carry out orders that don’t make sense to them. They have no choice. This process makes one more reserved. The revolt inside you is suppressed. Military service is essentially regarded as an obstacle. You cannot get a job or get married before completing it. Military service makes you postpone your goals in life.

The commander of sixteen to seventeen–person teams like ours was usually a second lieutenant and below him was a reserve officer. There was always competition between the two. We did not experience this. When you are a commando, the chain of order and command is not there, you are like friends. And moreover, you are in the terror zone. You go into the clashes together, you have your meals together, it is more like being in one big family rather than the usual commander–soldier relationship.

My problem was with a noncommissioned officer who had become a lieutenant. He was the company commander. Whatever he says needs to be done. “You have to take your position on this hill; the order comes from the regiment.” You have no chance of challenging the order and making an alternative suggestion. For instance, there would be a clash and the commander would need to pull the company together or give orders, but he would not have the capacity to do it. On the other hand, the captain would join us on long operations, usually those that were longer than three days. With him, I had no problems. Formally, there is a company commander commanding over the reserve officers, but when

you are out there in the field, you are on your own, responsible for sixteen soldiers. You feel the weight of this responsibility. The province of Elazığ did not have much to do with terror, but when you look from Arıcak, the town where we were, what you see across is Bingöl. The river in between separates the two provinces from each other. Because our town was on the passage route, there was quite a bit of terrorist activity. In the beginning, your body is untrained, but then you gain resilience. For instance, I never got sick during military service. There were times when we would stay in the rain for a long time or face the wind or sleep in the snow after sweating. Now, when I get a little cold, I am in bed. When you are there, your body gets used to it, it becomes automatic. If you have to get up at 5 a.m., you do.

During basic training, they really prepare you well both physically and mentally: mapping, field hikes, tactics, information about the PKK... Commanders who have served in places like Hakkari and Şırnak, and can combine theory and practice, give the training. They know about the psychology of being there as well. I was quite pleased with the training I received in Eğridir. The maneuvers, night walks, all of it eased the adaptation process. Our main disadvantage was to get training to become infantry and then to become gendarmerie. The team structure is different in the gendarmerie, the weapons are different . . . I used to have an interest in guns. I went out hunting. I liked guns but I didn't carry guns because I found them dangerous. During military service, we were using G3s. For a while, I carried a Kalashnikov just for the fun of it. The Kalashnikov is nice, but the G3 is better, more effective. G3 is my favorite weapon. In fact, there is no weapon I don't like. Each one has a different flavor. A weapon is a weapon. They all kill and wound. Whether you can aim or not is based on time and the circumstance. If your target is in front of you, you can aim and shoot. Or you can aim and shoot someone in their hiding place. Out there in the field, you are the one searching and they are on top of a hill or somewhere else where they can see you. You usually have martyrs when they first shoot at you. It is difficult to die afterward. I mean, if you have martyrs it is in the first shot. For instance, you go out on an operation and the terrorist is waiting for you on the top of the mountain. Even if you are very careful, they will see you walking and fire the first shot. At that point, you are an open target. After the first shot, when you find a rock to hide behind, you gain superiority over the situation. You can get backup, you can call in the helicopters, you have your mortars and weapons, and you have more men. After that point, they are looking for a way to hide or run away. If they can, they run away. If not, they get destroyed.

In the first clash that I experienced, I felt very close to death. A village bus had run over a mine and exploded. Four people had died. Together with the village

guards, we went after the terrorists. Following their trail marks, we came to a passage. It was a risky area and we were quite a large group. Just as we were going up the hill to secure the passage route, they fired at the group below us. Nevertheless, we were able to control one hill. After we secured the hill, I was walking around carelessly, making myself an open target. My soldiers warned me. I knew the sound of a gunshot from a distance. At that point, I learned how it sounded close by. I wondered what kind of weapon they were using. The soldiers said the bullet came from a nearby spot. For a moment, I thought of death. If the guy on the other side had moved the barrel a bit, I would have been shot. In a situation like that, you throw yourself to a more secure place or you fire back. The psychology of fighting against terrorists . . . There is no time to think of death. Then, late at night you think about all that happened that day and say, "So, it was that easy." A strange feeling. I could have been killed that day. Later on, it becomes a joke.

They ask me what it is like out there and what I have experienced. I say, "Very good . . . I am glad I experienced it. You taste freedom and adventure." This is partly a joke, but it *is* a good experience unless you get killed. You experience responsibility. It is a big responsibility because it involves the life and death of sixteen people. You talk to their parents and they ask you to take good care of their sons. If I do something wrong, they will pay for it. That is why I always led the way. If anything happens . . . I was better trained and more conscious of the situation than they were. This is what the soldier expects as well. If they sense that you are scared and that you are sending them instead of going yourself, they lose their faith in you. During my term, we had no martyrs. I mean, there were martyrs, but not in our company. Have I killed anyone? During my term, in different places and at different times, we captured ten to eleven terrorists, two of them alive. When you capture someone alive, you hand them over to higher authorities. In the meantime, you talk to them one on one. You need to question them for military reasons, of course. You ask them where they have come from, how they do what they do, and so on. I was curious about why they joined the PKK. One of them was a high school graduate. He said, "I joined for freedom, for the people." I asked him if he had found what he was looking for and he said, "No, I was not as free as I expected." So I said, "You bastard . . . what more could you have in terms of freedom? You are free to go wherever you want; you can get food and drinks on the mountain . . ." Of course, most of them tell you, when they are captured, that they were deceived, kidnapped, or threatened and try to raise pity with their lies. People there have a different culture. There is more ignorance, more false consciousness. For instance, one of them was told that he would become a pilot. Another was promised a job as deputy governor. Most of them join because they don't have a job, or because they are forced into it.

What kind of people are they? They leave their families, go around in the mountains, spend days without food and water, they get sick. What brings them there? With your university information, your first answer is “they are here for the cause,” but then you see that they don’t free the ones who want to leave after a while. They have lost hope. They know nothing is going to change. They cannot surrender because they are threatened by death. We learn about all this from the terrorists that do surrender. I think people who have enough food and money are not interested in rights or politics. It is hungry people who are. Why would he want to be beaten by the police? Why would he want to be tortured? A person can hit the mountains. I mean, a person who experiences so much poverty and deprivation can join the fight in the mountains if someone comes and gives him hope. Since he experiences similar forms of suffering where he is, with little hope for tomorrow, it is easy for him to join.

I remember how different the mood about doing military service in the Southeast was during the first days of terror, when we first started giving martyrs. In the village, there was a special interest in the first ones who came back. Now there are many more of them. For instance, in my village, thirty men went for military service and fifteen of them were in the Southeast. I mean, half of them went there. My family knows what it means to have a son in the Southeast and so feel sorry for the families of others. But, overall, people have gotten used to it. There is a strong reaction about this as well: Why don’t the rich kids do their military service in the Southeast? They find an influential connection and they get an “unfit” report. It is the poor who are fighting. Let us say a rich kid ends up in Hakkari. At least he gets a job in the headquarters, in the switchboard instead of the commando unit. The soldiers are well aware of this but there is no time to talk about it. You just deal with yourself when you are there. I had no habit of beating the soldiers, but there was this guy who had an influential connection and was refusing to do guard duty. He was not even my soldier, he was with the gendarmerie. He was refusing orders saying he had influence. When I asked him about it, he said he had a bad tooth. Now, you cannot scold a soldier when there is a commander around but that soldier stuck in my memory. Another day, I saw him in the dining hall smoking, drinking tea, and holding the duty cap in his hand. Again, he had escaped guard duty. I went there and slapped him twice. He could not understand why he was being beaten. I said, “You are the sergeant in charge. Don’t you know you cannot smoke here?” and I kept talking, “Instead of preventing others from smoking, you yourself are smoking. Your friends are fighting in the mountains. As the sergeant on duty, aren’t you supposed to go out there and visit the posts and look at what the soldiers are doing?” These were all excuses. The real reason was the other one.

Before I went there, the guys in the unit had collected some money between themselves and bought a satellite dish. We could watch two channels, TRT 1 [the main state channel] and Show TV [a private channel]. One day, we came back from five days in the mountains, a long operation, and saw people having fun on TV. "I am here for these people? Look at them!" you say. You blame people for being insensitive. This is the mood you are in. "We have done this and that for the state. What has the state done for us?" The truth is that you have no privileges. The society does not grant it to you. You want them to do something good for you because you have done your military service there, but it does not happen. You don't have any advantages when it comes to employment either.

There is certainly prejudice against the people there. As you get to know them, you start seeing them as fellow human beings, whereas before you could easily consider them as potential criminals. We used to talk with the local people in the coffeehouses. Of course, different commanders have different attitudes. Our captain was a guy who knew what he was doing and he was a good person. We did not go into any conflicts with the locals. Three or four of the villages close to us chose to become village guards, there was no problem. Even when we could have had problems, we did not. We would ask them, "Have the terrorists come here?" and they would say, "No, sir." I tried to approach the issue from a psychological perspective, so I said, "Even if they have not come to you, they may have come to your neighbor. I am a village kid myself. I know that in a small place, you know when things like this happen." He insisted that he had not seen anything. After the clashes, you find documents that suggest that the terrorists have held meetings in that village and the *muhtar* who had not seen any terrorists has provided them with some goods. Of course, you don't say anything. What are you going to do? Kill the *muhtar*? In a way, he is forced to do this. If you choose to do it, you can put pressure on him, but we never did things like that.

How did this whole thing begin? I am a democrat. I learned about the establishment of the PKK when I was at the university. I am interested in politics and particularly interested in recent history. I know that they are not given the rights they should be given. I recognize these democratic rights. But the way I see the PKK issue is different. I do not approve of the use of violence. A friend from my dorm at the university said he would join the PKK and he did. A year later, we saw his obituary in the daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* with his picture and a poem, and learned that he had died. (May 1998, Denizli)

Born in Denizli in 1969, he is a lawyer. He got his basic training as infantry in Eğridir between May 1992 and September 1993. He later became a commando in the gendarmerie and was based in Elazığ, Arıcak.

10

“I HAVE TO CONTROL MY NERVES”

When you are in an ambush position, you've got to do silly things in order to overcome your fear. For instance, you sing . . . You find such magazines as Playboy or Penthouse and read them until dark. I recall I read the same issue at least ten times. I would not want to think of anything; I would not want to sleep. You might be killed in your sleep.

I believed I had to go for military service. I wanted to be sent to Şırnak and I was sent there. I grew up in a lower middle-class neighborhood. I was influenced by school, the books I read, and the movies I saw. Moreover, there was the nationalism thing. As it is said, “We love our homeland, we are Turkish boys.” Yet, everything changes as soon as you enter through the gates of the barracks. What you face is totally different from what you have so far been told. You are psychologically crushed. Yet there is no going back after you step through the door. Soldiers who were conscripted only three months before you have the right to shout at you, to slap your face. If he wanted, a single officer could beat 400 privates and no one would stop him. You know the dirty advice: “If rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it.” I took it. And during the three months of basic training I got used to it. “O.K.,” I told myself, “Now you are a soldier.”

We are in Beytüşşebab. On my first day, the snow was four meters high on the mountains. I had never seen that much snow. It is not like basic training. No one cares for the other. That was a real disappointment. A few days later the guard duty began. If you accept the reality of that place, you can overcome it. If not, it will haunt you when you return. Many of my friends are still getting treatment. When you are there, you should see yourself as the army's property. Feeling helpless is like a death call. When soldiers get depressed, they aim their guns to themselves. One of my friends had received a letter from his wife. She said she had been sexually harassed by her father-in-law, by the boy's own father. The woman said she was returning to her family's home. The guy was so depressed that he shot himself.

I am coolheaded, and even a little bit cruel. When I am faced with such situations, I never pity myself. Instead, I try to overcome the situation. Before each operation, most soldiers wrote letters and placed them in their pockets. Scores of letters would pour out of their pockets when they were killed. They wrote such things as, "As you read this letter I am dead," and so on. Many mistakes were made because of soldiers who suffered from these kinds of syndromes.

In my first engagement, I experienced real shock. It was June. I was sleeping. My buddy pulled my arm and said, "Get up! We are under attack." I panicked. I was trembling with fear. I had of course heard gunshots before, but this was real. There is no way you can escape. If you're gonna die, you're gonna die. First I listened to the sounds and monitored the area. Nothing happened; it passed. It was in another clash that I fired my first real shot. We were in ambush position. Fire began. Soon there were shots from our antiaircraft positions. Then hell broke loose. I thought I would lose my mind. I froze and for about five minutes, I could not shoot. I wanted to raise my head but I was afraid. So I remained low. "Who sent me here?" My mind revolts. "And who am I?" I recall the movies I have seen, my home, and everything. But there is no way out. I fired the first bullet and another one, and another one. . . . Once I raised my head, I kept firing away. I was afraid, but the guy on the other side too was a human being and was also afraid. I had a gun and so did he. There was no one who was not afraid. It is a matter of life and death! In a second you might be hit, and you're gone. The shooting continued for about 2 hours. I fired some 160 bullets. I didn't see anyone hit from the other side. After it ended, we waited in our trenches until the morning. Some soldiers were wounded but we suffered no deaths. We had survived. After this incident, we told our stories to one another, "I did this and I did that." Since it was our first experience, we talked about it quite a bit. Later on, in the subsequent clashes, no one had the energy to tell stories. We used to go to bed as if it had been an ordinary day. Then came the avalanche incident and we lost seven soldiers. It was a huge operation. We were going downhill in small units. A helicopter took off from behind the hill across us, and a rocket was fired. This started the avalanche. This was around the end of 1993 or perhaps the beginning of 1994.

As time passed, the warmth in the relations between the soldiers was lost. Some kind of cold distance replaced it. I mean, no one wanted to talk, to share their fears with each other. When we talked about women and girls, it was a different story. Then everyone talked. At night, in our ambush spots, fear reigned. Fear gave me stomachache. It was unbearable. This problem continued for about a year after military service. My stomachache would begin with sunset and last through the night. When you are in an ambush position, you've got to do silly things in order to overcome your fear. For instance, you sing. . . . You find such

magazines as *Playboy* or *Penthouse* and read them until dark. I recall I read the same issue at least ten times. I would not want to think of anything; I would not want to sleep. You might be killed in your sleep. Once, one of the guards ordered a junior to stand guard as the others took a nap. The boy, being inexperienced, was listening to music from a walkman, with earphones. Naturally, he was unable to hear that they were being approached. His throat was cut first and then three others were killed. The next morning, no one came down from the hill. We went up there and there were four martyrs. What had happened? They were slaughtered. For a moment I was happy that I was not in their place. In a situation like that, this is your first thought. I know it is not normal, but it feels normal there. Our superiors denounced us for the casualties. Why had we not seen the enemy? They wanted us to feel guilty. But I didn't care.

When your friend is killed right next to you, you become furious. You are ready to kill whatever comes your way; an animal, a human being. You would not think twice. In a couple of hours, you get back to normal. If you cannot, you are in trouble. A friend of mine was killed. He was killed by a single shot. We used to cover ourselves under a blanket when we smoked, so that the cigarette light was not visible from the outside. Apparently, he had a cigarette in his mouth in the wrong place, without a cover. The bullet hit him in his mouth. They had very sharp snipers. For days, I could not go to that spot or stand guard outside. He was my buddy. That is as close as it gets. You eat from the same plate, use the same spoon. I was deeply affected. I couldn't go to ambushes. I got three days' leave. When I was in the battalion's barracks I felt myself at home. I asked for three more days. I am grateful that the commander granted me this leave.

Sometimes fear saves your life and sometimes it kills you. I too feared death, but did not refrain from doing what was necessary. There, several wars are fought simultaneously. War is not simply fought with weapons. You fight against yourself, and sometimes against your buddy. You have to win the fight against yourself so that you are ready to face other things. You should not remain alone. When you are alone you start thinking about your girlfriend. If she is in trouble, you start yearning for a leave. And you get stuck. Instead of relaxing, you get depressed. You ask for leave, but you are refused. You also think about the consequences of taking a leave. If you do, it means that you will leave the military twenty-five days before your discharge day, instead of forty-five. That makes you feel depressed as well. The next day you go to your commander and say, "Sir, I changed my mind; I don't want a leave." A day later, you want the leave again. You revolve in a vicious circle. In order to get it over with as soon as possible, I did not go on leave. Once, I was sent on sick leave because I had psychological problems. I was suffering from behavioral disorder. I was sent to the psychiatry

clinic. I had started beating soldiers, both my superiors and the others. Whenever I got angry, nothing would stop me. I was throwing plates and pots on the floor, kicking tables and chairs, and ruining everything around me. They realized they could not deal with it any more and sent me to the hospital. There, they said I had “psychosomatic problems” and gave me twenty days’ rest at home.

When I came to Istanbul on sick leave, I was in a really bad condition. When I stepped down from the intercity bus, I lost my way. Everybody was staring at me, or so I thought. I took a cab. The driver was gazing at me from the mirror. I shouted at him, “Why you are looking at me like that?” We nearly got into a fight. He stopped the car in front of a police station. I was so embarrassed. Anyway, he took me home. I did not tell him that I was a soldier. I did not tell anyone, for security reasons. At home, my parents asked me to tell them about military service. “Don’t ask me, I can’t tell you anything,” I said, “Leave me alone.” For 20 days, I fooled around and did all sorts of crazy things with my friends. I still followed the news. I was going to go back there, so I could not remain indifferent. Overall, the sick leave helped tremendously!

The company commander liked me a lot but I had problems with a lieutenant. He really picked on me. When he asked me questions, he wanted me to fail and feel intimidated by him. After a while, he became unbearable. I went to the company commander to complain. “If he goes on like that, I am prepared to ruin my military service and respond to him,” I said. I told the same thing to the lieutenant as well. The commander finally issued a circular, warning the superiors to refrain from disturbing the soldiers. The lieutenant one day threatened me, saying that he would send me to the military court, and I challenged him to go ahead. Then the battalion commander called me, slapped me on my face, and scolded the lieutenant. After that, the lieutenant withdrew his complaint.

The officers are not trained well. They are incapable of making their decisions independently. Yet they are the ones who have to decide on the spot. They are the ones who save or risk others’ lives with their decisions. But generally, with some exceptions, they are incapable of doing this. Most of the time, they learn from others’ deaths. Yet they are not gendarmes in charge of a village; they are in charge of a war. Naming it *war* is a bit too much because most rebels do not know why they are fighting. They don’t have a cause. We interrogated those who had been caught. Mostly they are drug addicts. Locals are involved in drug production: Anyone who owns a small plot of land grows cannabis or opium. They don’t use it themselves but they sell it. The PKK buys and processes it. In the military, too, use of drugs is widespread among the soldiers. Mostly they use crack. . . . The addiction comes from their civilian days. They don’t become addicts in the military. We used to get liquor too. The officers could not find any, but we could.

I have been in twenty armed clashes or so, some big, some small. The longest was the one in Beytüssebab, when the battalion was attacked. We received information that 800 of them would come, and they were ready to risk the lives of at least 400. They were reported to have aimed at hoisting their flag over the battalion. In order to do that they should kill all of us. And that night, the battalion was attacked. Everybody was very tense. In half an hour the G3s started to fire. G3 is a light weapon. In the battalion, normally heavy weapons work. When the G3s start to work, it is a bad sign. We had a very wise team commander, a lieutenant, who saved our lives. Of course it was God first, then the lieutenant. The lieutenant prevented them from approaching from the only place they could penetrate. The bed of the creek was a fatal point; it was our weakest spot. If they had penetrated from there they would have been able to surround the whole battalion. The battle lasted nearly two days. We never slept. We used up all our ammunition. We had five to six martyrs. The whole place was covered with blood; a man was shot with mortar shell and had lost his legs. According to our information they too had twenty to twenty-five casualties. We had scores of wounded. According to what the commander then told us, we had spent ammunition worth 15 billion TL. It was so bad.

I fired all of my bullets during those two days. And I was deadly scared. I could not hear the bang of my own rifle. Shots were coming from ten different points. If there are heavy machine guns around you, you have no chance; you cannot even lift your head. And I was shooting serially. Suddenly something banged on my head. I dropped my gun. I fainted. At that moment, I was suspended in the air, I thought of no one, neither mom nor dad. I was locked. I could not speak, I could not breathe. As I came to myself, I recognized that I was not dying. I was sweating but not bleeding. There was no hole in the head. But I was so scared that I could not get up for ten minutes. My friends believed I was killed. I got up and continued shooting.

I pay a lot of attention to my hair. I used to comb it regularly. During those clashes, I realized that I had lost some of my hair. I felt very bad. Most of the soldiers suffered from the same disorder. They had bald patches. Around 400–450 of us had joined the battle. When the shooting stopped, a group of us chased them. We went after them till the district border, but stopped there. They had gone. I washed my face, smoked a cigarette. I chatted with some of the soldiers, visited the guard posts, had some tea, and went to bed. “When I get up I will take care of the rest,” I thought. When I went to sleep, I had even forgotten to put my gun beside me.

We were close to the local people. We went downtown for shopping. There was a small billiard saloon. We went there to play. The locals are really in search of their identity. I have talked with many. They are conscious and solemn people.

They are illiterate but they speak out boldly. They have accepted Turkish citizenship. They don't claim a separate Kurdish state. They couldn't do it anyway. It is normal that they have certain demands. Yet some people label them as "terrorists." They live in this country and are paying their taxes; therefore they deserve to have certain rights. You cannot consider Kurds to be terrorists. Some locals have lost their families because of the PKK, how could they be on their side? People should realize this. A certain institution should explain this to the people. If we are living in this country, of course, we will live together as Kurds and Armenians and Alevi and Sunnis . . . We all have to live together. The people who live in that region should not be blamed. They need to be educated. These were not my thoughts before I went there. For instance, there are people there who work for the state as village guards. They have 10,000 people under their command. Their guns and ammunition are provided by the state; they have salaries and receive other forms of support. If you stop paying them, they will rebel. They will not necessarily join the PKK, but they will rebel. You should not turn a sixteen to seventeen-year-old into a village guard; that is wrong.

This war will never end. Or if it ends, another one will begin. Turkey has no friends, but has many enemies. Greece, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Armenia, and Russia support the PKK. And if you choose a political course, you have to start negotiations. This means you have to recognize them. This is really a puzzle. But I don't know who is capable of solving this problem. There is nothing Turkey could do there except invest in education. They know nothing but "honor" because they have never been educated. They are illiterate. Most of them do not speak Turkish.

I don't support any political party. The only thing I believe in is that we have to guard our country. The soldiers deployed there are coming from the hearth of the nation. If my father were a deputy in the parliament or a businessman, I would not have gone to Şırnak for military service. Safeguarding the country falls on our shoulders, not those of the rich.

The military is supplied with trucks full of provisions and there is widespread corruption. A captain owns a modest car, but a noncommissioned officer might very well own a BMW. This is absurd. And we die for that. Who dies for whom? There is a war for money there; a war for filling some people's pockets.

I don't consider myself to be a hero. Heroism is not a simple term. If someone would consider me to be a hero, I would be happy of course. But the real heroes are our martyrs. Many of them put their lives on the line knowing that there was no return. They had faith and became martyrs. It is a high honor to be placed in a coffin covered with the national flag. We have survived because we feared. And there are cheap heroes. A terrorist is wounded and the cheap hero

goes and shoots a bullet in his head. Not everyone can become a martyr; you need to have faith. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk [the founder of the Turkish Republic] was a hero. I have come to know only one hero. General Mete Sayar, commander of the Şırnak Brigade. He was a highly qualified, excellent soldier. I was deeply impressed by him.

I brought back no memoirs or souvenirs from there. I threw away my agenda. I burnt my uniform. I was afraid that I would bring traces of my service back home. And I did. I am extremely sensitive to guns and other similar sounds. As soon as I hear it, I get sick. It takes at least two days to recover. The day of my discharge, the duration of military service was raised to nineteen months. I was one of those first struck by that legislation. We were partying, happy that our discharge was around the corner and we learned from the TV that we had more time to serve. I cried; I got mad. When I was finally discharged in May, I surrendered my gun to the sergeant major in charge and asked, "Sir, we will not come back, right?" His retirement too was delayed, he understood my pain. "No, boy, we will not come back," he said. Papers in our hands, the three of us were waiting for the communications officer. A new recruit approached. He had been there for three days or so. He thought I was a newcomer, came to me and pulled my collar, "Look grandson," he said to display authority. I pushed him and told him not to touch me. He attempted to hit me. And the fight began. There were seven or eight of us. We started beating him. He didn't know that I was a discharged soldier. If he knew, he wouldn't have messed with me. He was so badly beaten that he had to stay in the hospital for twenty days. He said he would go to court; I replied, "I am going, bye!"

Back in Istanbul, I stepped out of the bus in the new bus terminal. I didn't know that it was built. I thought to myself, "This is not Istanbul, it is somewhere else." I had never been as happy as I was on that day. It took about a year to pull myself together. I had finished my military service, I had missed everything. Three days after coming home, I was out, sitting on a bench by the sea, watching the sea and sipping beer. Police officers came and asked for my ID. One of them ordered me to stand up and put my hands on the tree. I asked, "What have I done brother?" But one of them pointed his gun in response. I put my hands on the tree but I was so frustrated. I was the one who could do such things, not the other way around. I suddenly turned around, struck him with my elbow and took his gun. He might have indeed shot me for that. Fifty police officers surrounded me. I threw the gun away and started crying. I asked for the military to be informed. I still had sixty days in the military. So, officially, I was on leave. They took me to the police station and I gave them my military papers. I told them that all I wanted to do was to enjoy a beer by the sea. They sought reconciliation but I did not apologize. I was ready to go to prison. They closed the file.

I was not accustomed to resorting to violence. In my youth I was a speedy guy, but I never resorted to guns. I had not even carried a pocketknife. But after military service, I carried a gun for a long time. Then I sold it. After military service, I started frequenting bars, had more alcohol, and tended to use violence. I could not stand injustice. I felt like I needed to control myself all the time. I never used to be like that in the past.

After coming back home, I better understood that nothing is more beautiful than life itself. I do not want to harm anybody, but a moment comes when I lose control. Now I choose my friends more carefully. I got married three years ago but was divorced because of a single word of my wife. We are still living together but it is worthless. We used to love each other. In my relations with my parents I have become more authoritative. My wife knows some of what I have gone through in the army. I tell her of my experiences. I follow the news but I don't like reading the newspapers. I read certain magazines that focus on science and religion.

My clients' interests in what is going on in the Southeast change according to the part of the city they live in. Those from the entertainment district Tarlabası-Beyoğlu are insensitive. They make easy money. There is dishonesty and theft. Those who have recently migrated to the city from Anatolia are more sensitive. They listen to you with interest. I once drove two ladies from Istanbul's upper-class district Bebek; the radio was reporting casualties from the Southeast. I said, "What a pity, people are dying every day." I had no response. Those people just care about what bar they are going to go to that night. The old people care more.

I get angry at the insensitiveness among the people. But then I say to myself, "Not everybody is obliged to be concerned." I mean I feel the need to control my anger. I wonder if I might explode some day. You get into trouble very quickly. I drive from morning until night. People suddenly stop their cars in front of mine or do something else that disturbs me. And we start quarreling. If they curse, I get out of the car. One day I counted, I had stepped out of the car six times in order to fight. I had even hit one man through the window. Once, three men came out of the car to fight with me. This was too much. And then the police came. You cannot guess who might come out of a private car. It could be a police officer, a minister, or a criminal. When there is a conflict, I now say, "O.K. brother, I am sorry." This past week, I have not stepped out of the car. If I shout, "go slow," he will curse in reply. And then I will get out of the car and it will begin again. So I don't start that kind of a dialogue.

In my dreams I see myself as a soldier. Everybody has been discharged, but I am still a soldier. It is so real that, I beg for it to be a dream. When I get up in the morning I have a headache. I take some pills and sit down, exhausted.

I have told you all this because I feel responsible. I want others to learn from my experiences. I would not enjoy telling these things to an ordinary person.

But with you, I know that I am telling my story to thousands of people. So, they will know what I have lived through. Some will accept them, others won't. But no one can blame me because I did what I had to do. There were times when I was afraid, but I've done my duty. (September 1998, Istanbul)

Born in 1972 in Istanbul, he is a secondary school dropout. He has one brother and one sister. In November 1992, he got commando training in Dođukışla, Manisa. He was deployed in Şırnak's Beytüşşebab district. He was discharged in May 1994. He is working as a taxi driver in Istanbul.

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TIME DOESN'T PASS THERE; IT IS AS IF TIME HAS FROZEN . . .

For ninety days, day and night, they train you by saying, "terrorists will shoot you without mercy if you miss your shot, if you cannot get up."

My return was magnificent. On an airplane of course . . . There is no going there or coming back by bus or train. After the incidence of thirty-three soldiers being executed on the Bingöl highway, they take you to the airport in civilian cars with escort. When I reached my hometown, Artvin, my mother was shocked, of course. She knew that my military service was over but my coming to Artvin on that day was a surprise.

My military service was postponed until my graduation from school. When the time came for marriage, I thought I would better get my military service over with before getting married. In other words, I did not go to military service to prove that I was brave or to kill. During the training, they psychologically prepare you for combat. They say, "It is for your own good to have good training." The training consists of learning to use guns, to kill terrorists, to protect yourself, to lie down, to get up, to crawl, and so on. For ninety days, day and night, they train you by saying, "Terrorists will shoot you without mercy if you miss your shot, if you cannot get up." With this training, you start wishing for the lesser evil. "Is it better to go to Lice or to Kulp after the training?"¹ During my leave, I addressed my father as "commander." You cannot get over this psychology.

I wasn't much concerned with Kurds before my military service. I had believed that people in that region were ill-treated, but I changed my mind after I went there. The people there are ill-treated to a certain degree but the military's repression is not directed at the people. The people there are trapped between the military and the terrorists. Their daughters and sons are in the mountains; they are afraid, so they give protection and food to the terrorists. And when that

¹ Both areas in the Southeast where there has been significant fighting (translator's note).

happens, they come face-to-face with the military. The military does not have a problem directly with the people.

I didn't feel bad when I got deployed in Diyarbakır. I was happy that it wasn't Şırnak. I was very relieved to find out that there was a second lieutenant in Diyarbakır whom I knew. I spent my first night in Diyarbakır at his home. Just as I was going to bed, he came to my room and got his gun. I was frightened. Is there a fight here every night? Are they going to throw a bomb or an antiaircraft missile on my first night? I was appointed as a clerk in the finance department. Since my service was prolonged for four months, it was a very monotonous sixteen months of service. We got up at 6 a.m. in the morning. After the assembly, I was in the office to prepare the accounts, to take care of official correspondence, to write petitions, and so on. After a break at twelve o'clock, I was in the office again until 5.30 p.m. Then you are free to spend time in the barracks or in the café. It was like a job in a government office. After the office hours, the second lieutenant went home and I went to the barracks. At the end of the month he got his salary and I got my compensation. In other words, financially things were fine. My friends were rightly jealous. If you are friendly with your lieutenant, he protects you. If you have guard duty, he cancels it. I was in the region in 1993 during the *Nevruz* celebrations. Special precautions were in force. Heavy guns were ready for immediate use. Because my service was in the office, I was not involved in these precautions. But I was outside the military grounds during the night of *Nevruz*. They said that there would be a raid so everybody got their guns and went out. Something happened in the jail that night. It seems that a lieutenant was wounded in his foot. I didn't expect the night to be over so quietly. Of course, you have frightening moments. For instance, nobody talked about *Nevruz* on *Nevruz* night, I found it strange. The fact was that everybody was thinking of saving their lives, of killing somebody but nobody was talking about that. *Nevruz* comes and passes as if it was an ordinary day except that it makes you a bit nervous. There was tension of course. You get nervous. People have got used to it, *Nevruz* is celebrated, people die, and it passes away.

New Year caused a bit of a tension as well. I mean I was under stress. I was standing guard that night when civil police raided the building next to the barracks. We were standing guard. There is only a fence in between. The raided place was a civilian place. A Renault taxi stopped at the corner, two bearded civilians got out of it and started to run toward me. It doesn't write police or terrorist on their foreheads. How should I know? You only see that they have guns. I became very uneasy. We were four soldiers standing guard. Civil persons came toward me. I prepared my gun for shooting to save my life. I was ready to shoot to save my life, not to become a hero by shooting a terrorist. One of them came near me . . . At the slightest movement; I was ready to pull the trigger.

“Personnel” he said, “We are police under cover. We received some intelligence and came for a raid.” I relaxed a bit when I saw a walky-talky in his hand. I could hear the police announcements on the walky-talky. I believed him, I had to believe. You can’t ask to see his ID, you don’t even think of asking. I was pretty frightened. “If shooting starts don’t interfere. You don’t know us” they said. They couldn’t find anything and they left. On the way back from the guard post, you pass through downtown. There is a bearded civilian standing at the corner, with a G3 gun in his hand. Is he a policeman? Shall I shoot at him? You can’t shoot at him; there is no order to shoot. You have to wait, if he shoots at you and misses, then you will shoot at him. I thought he was a policeman. You are standing guard; a car passes by two or three times. Is it a police car, a civilian car, or a terrorist’s car? Is it going to throw a bomb? Uneasiness, tension! There was a berry tree in front of our barracks. One night someone was throwing stones at its leaves. I was very frightened then, too. After an incident, two soldiers are sent to stand guard instead of one. You are given 150 bullets instead of 100. You wear steel vest. You are given a walky-talky. You have to report the number of used bullets but it is so funny, bullets are everywhere, so you can get the missing number easily. You can even trade bullets.

I came across several PKK groups. They were brought to the base by trucks for interrogation. The top of the truck was covered by canvas. The people in the back of the truck were seated on their knees, head bent, eyes covered like sheep, one on top of the other. They smell; they are dirty. It is obvious that they live in the mountains. One night, my friends kicked them in the corridors, shouting, “It is because of you that our service is prolonged, that we are here.” But nobody swears much. I observed in Diyarbakır that the soldiers don’t attack. Rather, they respond when PKK attacks. During shootings, civilians who get trapped in between may die. The government builds a school; PKK puts it on fire just for provocation so that its name is heard. They burn bulldozers. “There is no investment done,” some people complain. I don’t believe it. Some locals carry cement in Mazda cars. They are that rich. They smuggle. Definitely the people in the villages continue to be poor. But those who got the taste of money in the cities became very rich.

We occasionally came into contact with the Special Force. I am a friendly type but I did not seek to make friends with them much. According to my observations, the Special Force is the God, the Prophet, everything in that region. Anyway, they had special training, these were the people who sliced off the ears, noses of the corpses, and nailed them on the walls. In this respect, they are very different from us. I don’t believe they are soldiers, they were men sent by MHP [ultranationalist Nationalist Action Party] on a special mission. You would be frightened when you see them; they are big and heavy, having no feelings,

because they believe in a cause. They believe that they will be heroes if they die, that's why they can attack, to become heroes.

The soldiers are different. Soldiers attack because their commander orders them to attack. The Special Force attacks because they believe that they will be heroes. If you order the soldier not to shoot, he won't. Except for the few who say that they are ready to die for their country, as written in the papers, everybody is trying to save their own lives. But those in the Special Forces are followers of a nationalistic cause.

You spend your spare time in the cafe, watching TV. You have a 2-hour standing guard duty. You have to go to bed early. You also have cleaning duties. So there is not much spare time left. I was listening to the radio on Saturdays and Sundays or talking on the phone with my girlfriend, family, and friends. Going downtown is problematic. On quiet days, we formed a group of five to ten persons, wore civilian clothes, and then went to town. We usually sat at a tea house, took pictures. Sometimes personal radios and cameras are collected upon an order. If you can't hide it, you cannot get it back before the end of your service.

The officers and the soldiers, as well as some of the local people, are well fed. Monthly food supply for a gendarmerie regiment cost 1–2 billion TL. They ate bananas every day. From where do they get the money, who pays for all this? There are a lot of plots going on. Some people are cheating and benefiting from the situation through corruption. It can be easily stopped if there is the will to stop it. Perhaps the problem will be solved at the table. Or, if Turkey wants, it can wipe the whole Southeastern region from the map. Turkey has that capacity. It doesn't do it, it can't, nor does it want to do it. The privates do not talk about these things. They are very ignorant. They refrain from talking. There are nationalists and Islamists among them. There wasn't anybody around who shared my point of view.

I believe that the PKK is not made up of Kurds. There are Armenians and Greeks among the PKK. They say that Kurds are a nation. I agree but there are a lot of nations in Turkey. The Laz, the Circassians . . . My father would say that the true Turks are "Ahıska Turks," but I did not do a research on the subject. I know from the official records that Abdullah Öcalan is not a Kurd but an Armenian, so he will establish an Armenian Government. The newspapers are not objective, they interpret the data, but official records are objective. Some say "Let's give them the southeastern part of Turkey." I cannot agree to that. Then let's give the Black Sea region to the Laz people. Although they do not have such a demand they would ask for it after you give the Southeast to the Kurds. I am not a nationalist but I think everyone should speak the same language. But there shouldn't be pressure. The people should not be deprived of some rights because they are Kurds, Laz, or Circassians. But if you are a Kurd, you could speak in

Turkish and enjoy all the rights. They weren't represented in the parliament previously, now they are. The difficulty is with those who announce themselves as "Kurdish." But the same is true for the Laz. They are not in the parliament announcing themselves as "Laz." My mother-in-law speaks the Laz language and the Pontus language. Trabzon was once invaded by Greeks, so their mother tongue is Pontus. I haven't heard anybody claiming, "We want to speak the Pontus language." In Turkey, women cannot walk alone in the streets after midnight. People who don't fast, who don't pray are sometimes molested. There are many violations of democratic rights. Some commit crimes but don't go to jail.

My life has changed quite a bit. I am married now. You mature during military service. Before the service I didn't have many responsibilities. I lost my trust in people during military service. Now I take every step more carefully, people seem more valuable now. Previously I had thought that every Turkish youth should do his military service, and I still think so. The problem is that the children of the elite do not go to the Southeast for their service. Plain soldiers curse that fact. I wasn't treated as a hero or anything. I stopped addressing my father as "commander" after a little while. After coming back from Diyarbakır, I became a very nervous person, an introvert. For a while, I didn't talk to anybody, I didn't say anything unless I was asked a question. I had been in military uniform; I had spent my days and nights with other soldiers, seeing only men. It takes a while to erase the traces of those nineteen months. It is not a short period of time. Time doesn't pass there; it is as if time has frozen. As if you have been frozen or sent to a totally different place, like space. (May 1996, Istanbul)

Born in Artvin in 1969, he is a high school graduate. He is an accountant. He went to Bornova, Izmir in 1992 for his initial training as gendarmerie. He was discharged from the military in May 1994.

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THE GREATEST ADVANTAGE OF THE STATE IS TO SEND THE TWENTY-YEAR-OLD YOUTH TO THE REGION

Here the dead bodies are either very yellow or very white in color. But there, maybe because of the bullet wounds, the bodies look dark, smelling of a mixture of blood and bullet. Besides, because the bodies are shot from a close range, they emit that smell even after five days. Unavoidably, your nerves break down; you can't eat or drink anything for sometime.

It was some time in March and the weather was quite cold. The life there is quite different, of course, not like here. The local people are against the military. If we left at night on foot for a certain destination, we arrived only in the morning. It is also that the region is poor and deprived. If you go downtown for shopping, whatever you ask for, they don't have it. They also discriminate against you. If you are a soldier, they don't sell you anything. But there were no threats. If we got a notice and left at night to lay an ambush, a five-year-old child would ask us if we are going to the Selam Mountain or to the Munzur Mountain. He would know what we were up to better than we did. One night, a sound-bomb exploded. The night guard caught the person who threw it. He turned out to be the technician who had repaired our television a week ago.

They are unloading a tractor close to the Yeşilyazı station. The guard starts shooting when he sees people with guns. In the mean time, the terrorists have blockaded the station. The clashes began. We were informed of the situation by wireless; the distance was approximately 14–15 kilometers. The captain of our company was preparing for a prayer for a martyred friend. The news of the raid on the station arrived as the captain finished his prayer. We opened our wireless and heard the station commander crying. We immediately got into the cars together with the captain who was a new guy. The company commander offered to go by the path across Munzur River, claiming that the other road would be ambushed. The captain didn't listen: "We need to go there fast! We heard them

screaming on the wireless.” Four or five kilometers. in front of us they had stopped the civilian cars and blockaded the road. They had chosen a spot right after a sharp curve so that those who approach it from our side cannot see the blockade until it is too late. The armored car of the captain was in the front of our group, first lieutenant’s car was the second, and our car was the third. The moment we realized that we were trapped, they started shooting. The captain got shot and died. The soldier from Sinop carrying an MG3 gun on top of the armored car was shot dead as well. Those carrying an MG3 gun travel standing on armored cars. When he was shot, he fell over the driver. They fired at the same spot three shots and pierced the window in front of the driver. The training they get is not a simple training. They know that the car is an armored car and that the window cannot be pierced by a single shot. Everybody is in a shock. The driver of the company commander said over the wireless that the driver of the car should take a turn and take the car out of the ambush. But the driver of the car refused to do so saying that he couldn’t get out of the car because of the shooting to get the body of the captain. The commander answered, “Then leave the captain there.” The last words of the captain to the driver were, “I can’t move, but son, don’t you leave the gun and the wireless to them.” Then the driver got the car out of the ambush and managed to come near us. We couldn’t get up from our shelter. At last we crawled to the ravine below the road. We didn’t shoot; I mean we didn’t have time to get our guns ready. We couldn’t stand up before the soldiers in the cars behind us blockaded the spot. One of the second lieutenants was shot in his foot. After about half an hour, we crawled up to the civilian cars. We crawled for about a kilometer but there was still a long way to the station. We crossed the river on foot. There was no need to swim, the water was waist-high, so we walked through. They carried their dead over the river by the tractor, threatening the driver by gun. We met the tractor and its driver on the other side of the river. He said, “I would have done the same for you. They threatened me and I carried them over the river.” The cars we left on the spot were taken away by their drivers. We got hold of three bodies of the terrorists on that spot. At last we reached the raided station but we could do nothing with light guns. They were very close to the station. There were no casualties at the station but there were soldiers without ears, soldiers with wounded hands, feet, and so on. The soldiers had run out of bullets.

It seems that the soldiers were playing volleyball when the raid began. So, they were taken by surprise. Most of them could not even fire a shot . . . The helicopter didn’t come and the night was falling. Even if the helicopter flies at night, they couldn’t transport soldiers to back us up. There were three helicopters at the time in the region. If one was in Diyarbakır, another was in Tunceli, and the third was somewhere else. In other words, it would take three or four

hours for the helicopter to reach Tunceli . . . That is enough time to get things done. We brought the bodies of the captain and the soldier to the unit. The captain was a new guy, I can't remember his name. He was preparing to move his family to the region. We brought the bodies of the terrorists to the unit with us. We laid down the bodies in the football field. The people revolted against our leaving the bodies in the field, in a way they protested us. Most of them recognized their dead but did not claim their bodies, they lamented. If they are 300 people, at least 200 of them were crying. They called us all sorts of names. We stayed in the Yeşilyazı station for two days with no sleep at nights. We were exhausted. The lack of sleep was driving us crazy. The first lieutenant spent quite some time to calm down the local people. They started roaming around in Ovacık, shouting and screaming. They went home when warned. None of them claimed the bodies.

What makes you go through military service are your friends, fellow soldiers. For example, you have to be very alert during your guard duty. Twenty or thirty people's security depends on you; they trust you and go to sleep. There were some who would stand guard the whole night even if they were sleepless. After the incident of our captain's death, the night we arrived to our unit, some soldiers had to stand guard the whole night. What would have happened if we were raided that night? The unit would have turned into a ghost town. At least 50 or 60 of the 200 soldiers would have been killed. I wasn't fit for a guard stand that night. I couldn't do it even if I knew I would be dead. Two nights without sleep was not easy and the days were not easier. We were exhausted; we could hardly reach our unit. When we carried out the corpses next morning, most of the soldiers could not stand up after laying down the bodies.

There is no grudge. Shooting at a dead body is forbidden, you can't waste bullets. Some would kick a corpse and curse it. They are dying for nothing. They say that they are after certain rights, but are these methods fit for the times we are living in? What can you solve in the mountains? Whose child is the soldier they kill? The soldier is his brother, if not his, then his neighbor's. The soldier is a subordinate; he has to go where he is sent. He has to shoot when he is ordered to. They should go out to the streets and claim their rights. The government cannot throw everybody in the streets to jail. If their claim is justified, they will get it.

This is a certain group of people who are Abdullah Öcalan's followers. What a pity for the soldiers . . . If anybody dies there, the body can't be buried without the knowledge of the military. For instance, if there are eighty-five to ninety graves in a village whereas there were eighty graves earlier, we order them to open up the graves. Was the body shot or was it a natural death? If we couldn't decide, we would send the corpse to Ankara. The people of the region don't give anything, not even water, to the military. We were there for them but they didn't

give a damn. Sometimes their noncooperation is so frustrating that you have no desire to respond to the news of, say, a hamlet being attacked. They would kill us if they could. They would be PKK's slaves if the PKK asked for it because they believe that the PKK fights for the rights and well-being of the Kurds. I wonder if they (PKK) have any conscience. They sometimes shoot a five-year-old child. I never saw or heard a soldier killing a baby in cradle. Such a bad image of the military has been created, or maybe it was there from earlier times, that people don't like the military. The look in their eyes saying, "You either get lost or die," provokes one. Few times on Fridays, we went to the mosque for prayer. There were very few regulars, mostly few elderly. We had to put soldiers around the mosque on guard. If they had the slightest chance, they would kill the soldiers there.

Once, there was a coffin and ten to fifteen people traveling in a minibus. We stopped the bus and wanted to search them. We asked them to get off the bus, but they refused. We asked, "Where are you coming from?" they answered, "from the fields." We said, "There is a coffin there, let us see the body." The answer was no. We said, "Then get off the bus, at least let us search you over," they refused. The only thing left to do was to take the bus to the unit. There was no corpse in the coffin, but guns, food, and so on. Most of them did not have an ID. We handed them over to the gendarmerie.

A newly married couple from Erzincan, both teachers, had been appointed to a place called Hanuşa, under our jurisdiction. They had got on to a minibus without informing the military or the police. There was a 15 kilometer-distance between two military units, so PKK could stop the vehicles and search them without being noticed by either unit. Their minibus was stopped by PKK and when PKK learned that they were teachers, they got them off the bus and killed them. We found their bodies on the road by coincidence. What a pity! They were educated; they had succeeded and become teachers. Both the government and the couple themselves were to be blamed. Being from Erzincan [also in the East], they probably thought that they would be safe. The corpses there are not like the corpses here. Here the dead bodies are either very yellow or very white in color. But there, maybe because of the bullet wounds, the bodies look dark, smelling of a mixture of blood and bullet. Besides, because the bodies are shot from a close range, they emit that smell even after five days. Unavoidably, your nerves break down; you can't eat or drink anything for sometime. Then you start thinking. During guard duty, I would stare at one point for two or three hours thinking of my family, thinking about what they would do if my dead body were to return to my hometown. Mostly, I would think of my mother. All the other soldiers were thinking the same things.

In the operations that I participated in, we never found anyone from the PKK. We searched seven caves and found only food but not them. The caves were full of food, clothing, and all sorts of things that women use, because there were women among them. Searching caves was not an easy job, either. Even if you are not scared, you know that your life is at stake. When I was in the region, there were rumors that the villages would be evacuated.

We went to the place where they had killed villagers in the Kemahiye incident. We were told that the terrorists would pass the Munzur Mountain over the top or from the side. We waited for them for about a week and ran out of food and water. We couldn't supply food from the closest station. We were 200 soldiers. If we take the food supply of the twenty-five to thirty soldiers at the station, it would last us three days and the soldiers at the station would be without food for a month. We waited for two days, hungry and thirsty; we asked for food supply but were told that the helicopters were on duty at an operation and therefore could not bring us food. It was forbidden to light a fire, even to smoke a cigarette. In the clean air of the mountains the smoke of a cigarette travels a world of a distance; you can smell it even from a 3-kilometer distance. It smells so good; cigarette is what the soldiers crave for. We were waiting for them at the top of the mountain and a commando unit from Erzincan was down at the creek. At some point, there was fighting down there. Later we found out that three of their vanguards had been hiding in the region for that whole week. The main group, thirty to forty in number, passed the mountain after we left, picking up their dead. You can't place soldiers everywhere, soldiers would be insufficient. You have twenty-five to thirty soldiers at your command, but you cannot deal with terrorists in the mountains because terrorists are continuously on the move, day and night. We get tired in a short time. Soldiers are not as determined as they are. Soldiers are the searchers and searchers are easily trapped. I mean, soldiers don't want to die . . . Terrorists know the region very well. They know under which tree they could safely sit, but soldiers don't know. How can you go after him? You can't chase as long as they run away.

I saw about forty to fifty dead bodies. I experienced serious risk on the night that the captain died. That night was a very long night. Chasing the terrorists in the following days, the screaming of the wounded soldiers at the raided station, and so on, all left a great mark on me. One thousand to two thousand soldiers take part in big operations. During the fighting, so many soldiers shoot at the same time. There were times when I aimed and shot at a human but it was impossible to tell whose shot actually hit them. We were about 150–200 soldiers. When seventeen soldiers in a group shoot at one person, it is not possible to say, "I shot him." But he is shot. It is not possible to explain how it affects one.

The listener can feel sorry for a moment only. But it is not possible to explain in words. If the soldiers were not twenty years old but over forty, they mentally couldn't stand it; they would break down. The greatest advantage of the state is to send the twenty-year-old youth to the region. The young people don't think much. The only thing they think about is "Let my military service be over, let me stay alive." They can't find an explanation for everything, they can't think. Tunceli has a very cold climate. We were appointed guard duty every 15 minutes because you could freeze if you stayed out in the open for 20–25 minutes. Frozen feet symptoms were common. We even sent a soldier with a frozen foot to Ankara for treatment. His foot looked very bad, it became completely black in color. We once found and brought to the unit a terrorist, about forty to forty-five years old, almost frozen to death. In the region they treat cold by applying cold to the frozen part. In the unit, he was first washed with cold water, and then whatever was applied to him, he came to his senses.

After I came home having completed my military service, I would open the outside door and check if the guard is on stand when I got up to piss at night, excuse my language. And most of these times I would go back to bed without going out to the toilet. Then I would remember that I was at home. That's the extent to which my experience in military service has affected me.

All the soldiers had children, mine was one year old. Most of the soldiers lose their mind, some become insane, and some wander around like children. I have friends who are still mentally unstable. Most of the soldiers come home in a coffin, wrapped in the flag. Their mothers and fathers did not raise them for that. Sometimes it is too frustrating, you rebel, you can't help it. But soldiers are definitely ignorant. When you are twenty years old, you don't think like you do at thirty to thirty-five years of age. These are the years when you feel adventurous; some even look forward to military service. Some soldiers thought that this was a chance for adventure that should not to be missed. But it wasn't an adventure. It was about killing or dying. Even if we realized that only we, the poor, were there, we believed that it was not forever. Some day, we would complete the service and go back home. We were not officers, we were conscript soldiers. We were counting our days left in the service. Sometimes zero-day doesn't come, but then it's God's will. We had no choice. What is there to choose? If you think of running away, where would you go? So, running away was not a solution. I did nothing for three to four months after I came home. When I talk about those days, I remember everything as if it happened only yesterday. You start forgetting as you start struggling with your everyday problems. For me, it is not over yet. When you are in a group of friends, the conversation inevitably comes to "military service experiences." I just sit there quietly and think to myself. Others, who have done a light service, talk about it with jokes and laughter. Even if you tell

them what you have been through, they wouldn't understand. It sounds to them as unreal as an adventure or a movie. . . . No mother's and father's child should go through such an experience. The problem continues. What ignorance! A clever person wouldn't take a gun and go to the mountains or kill for a piece of land. It is not a solution. In a way, evacuating the villages was a good thing to do. They should be educated. Yes, but then the educated join them as well. Sometimes it was a university graduate that was captured dead. I don't understand what it is that they are fighting for. Perhaps it is us who are ignorant; perhaps they are right in their claims. . . . Overall, it is not a good idea to be fighting against the military. They should solve the problem with the government one way or the other. (August 1998, Samsun)

Born in Samsun in 1972, he is a primary school graduate. He served in the military between 1992 and 1994; he started in Hatay and completed as gendarmerie commando in Ovacık, Tunceli. He sells water.

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ANOTHER REWARD FOR BEING A VETERAN IS THAT NOBODY LETS YOU MARRY THEIR DAUGHTER

My elbows work well; I can weigh on them and see you. I can't hold a spoon, but I can hold a sandwich. I was hit by seven bullets: four of them went into my legs, one into the back of my neck and one into each wrist . . . I pulled out a bullet from my wrist with my teeth on the spot.

My unit was a gendarmerie unit in Bingöl. It happened 10 kilometers to the unit. It happened on a Monday night. . . . When I opened my eyes, it was Friday, I was in Diyarbakır. I was sent to Ankara the same day. I was first taken to the hospital in Bingöl, but I don't remember it. Our basic training was over; we were on our way to our permanent unit. Twenty-one of us were in one bus and twenty-three in another. We had protection escort until noon. Doğan Güreş [who later became the Chief of Staff] was our commander at the time. He pulled off our escort in the afternoon and we were left uncovered. We were captured by the PKK around six o'clock in the evening. We were descending down a hill, about two kilometers to Bingöl, when the PKK came out behind the rocks on the side of the road. They gestured to the driver to stop. They asked us to get out of the buses. At first, we thought they were village guards. They checked our IDs. Except the two of us—we were in civilian clothes. Our buses and the drivers were civilian too . . . But our IDs were military. They took us to a village.

At first, they gathered us inside the bushes. They asked, "Why do you serve in the military?" We said, "There is no way of escaping the state. Every Turkish youngster must do his military service." They said, "Join us." We said, "We don't think so." We said, "We should not be blamed, your problem is not with us." All the women and the children in the village were watching us and were laughing at us. A five-year-old brought us bread and cheese. We drank the water but we didn't eat anything. Nobody could eat anything; we were so frightened. We weren't hungry anyway. We had eaten at the bus stop at five o'clock. And we had food in our bags. Others joined the group that captured us and they were about

forty to fifty in number. Then they took us into the mountains. There they took everything we had, our money, whatever we had with us. Our bags were gathered aside. Then they took us to another village. And from there, again into the mountains. I don't know the names of the villages. They talked to someone over the wireless. They said that if their friends in the jail were to be set free, we would be set free as well. Probably they talked to the prime minister. I think Erdal İnönü was the prime minister at the time. The prisoners were not freed, so we were taken into the mountains. They lined us up and started to shoot. I threw myself to the ground, I wasn't wounded. One of the shooters shouted, "Don't leave any wounded behind." During the second round of shooting, seven bullets hit me. We had been captured by the PKK at six in the evening, and executed at three in the morning. In other words, until three in the morning they talked and walked us in the mountains. I didn't expect to be freed. Not one moment was I afraid of dying. I didn't kill, I didn't die. My friends died. We had been forced to walk in one line. It was forbidden to talk among ourselves. Because the help came late, most of my friends died in pain in the early hour of the morning. A friend, Ahmet, was lying over me, dead; he had fallen over me after getting shot. I asked one of the unwounded friends to move Ahmet's body. He didn't. He said, "Let's go for help." A group of unwounded soldiers walked over the mountains to the closest station. The station didn't have sufficient number of soldiers, so the help did not come. The station reported the incident about six-thirty, seven o'clock in the morning. A helicopter came two hours later. I had thought for a moment to accept joining the PKK in appearance. But then they would give me a gun, line up those who had not accepted joining them, and ask me to shoot them. That's what we were thinking. How could you shoot your friends? Either way, it is death in the end. I chose to die as a human, and not, excuse my language, as an animal.

When I opened my eyes in Diyarbakır, everything had been over. My father had read in the newspapers that I had died and was coming to Diyarbakır to get my body. My former boss, from my previous job, somehow traced me and informed my father of my whereabouts. I was in the intensive care unit at the time. I told my father not to come to see me. I didn't know that I couldn't walk. I only knew about my wound in the shoulder and my finger. "My condition is not serious," I told him. My older brother came on Friday and I was transferred to GATA [the major military hospital in Ankara] where I stayed for seven months. Then I was sent to Denizli for a change. Then another month at GATA, and again Denizli, yet another four months at GATA . . . Afterward I stayed at Denizli Military Hospital as well. And then again GATA. Now I go to GATA once every year. At Denizli Military Hospital, I saw a soldier who looked like one of the PKK members who shot me. I found out that his hometown was

Bingöl. Definitely it was him who shot me. I told the gendarmerie that I was suspicious of him. He was arrested. I was placed behind a curtain in the restaurant of the unit. I peeked behind the curtain and identified him amongst the others. But then, the newspapers wrote that I recognized him. Whereas it should have been kept a secret. Somehow, the journalists got the information from the prosecutor. The PKK member was under psychiatric treatment. He was 16 or 17 years old when he was involved in the incident. It had happened four years ago. So, it all fit perfectly.

I went to military service with enthusiasm; I didn't cry. Everybody was leaving home for military service in tears but I was leaving with smiles. We organized a party at the Denizli bus station, had fun and video-taped it. I wanted to go to the Eastern part of Turkey. I was curious. Conscription was reduced to fifteen months. I wasn't going to use the one-month leave in order to benefit from the one-month early discharge, which meant that I would come back in ten months [after being deployed in my permanent unit following four months of basic training]. Everybody was complaining of basic training but I was not. Our commanders would say, "You will go to the East, so you need to be trained well." We had training until midnight. We were leaving our regiment at seven o'clock in the morning on Fridays and coming back at seven the next morning. We had only one hour of rest the whole night, but I did not feel tired. I was five days old in the regiment when I was given a G3 gun. We learned to mount and load the gun and to shoot in one week. During the training, some of us would be PKK terrorists and the rest of us would fire at them with blank cartridges. Before my military service, I used to watch news about the PKK on TV. Some soldiers catch PKK terrorists but because they listen to their commander, they don't shoot them. I was determined to kill them and not to listen to the commanders. If I don't shoot PKK, they will shoot me at the first opportunity. I wanted to catch PKK terrorists, get the information, and kill them. If they were arrested, they would stay in jail for three to five years and would do the same thing when they got out.

The Kurds will join the PKK and establish a new state. Fifty percent of the population in the East helps the PKK, and the villagers are PKK anyway. I had a fellow Roma friend during my basic training period. Everybody was treated equally. The Kurdish soldiers would dance folkdances in a ring. The commander officer on duty banned the folkdance because he thought it was a form of demonstration. Demonstration, folkdance, singing folksongs . . . The rest of us would only drink tea and talk.

All my operations were done in Diyarbakır. In GATA, I stayed at the brain surgery and physical therapy divisions. I developed wounds from lying in bed for too long, I had that operation, too. I developed the same wounds when lying

at home again and had another operation. Now, I don't have an air-bed, but I change my lying position often so that I don't develop wounds. My elbows work well so I can rest on them and see you. I can't hold a spoon but I can hold a sandwich. I was hit by seven bullets: four of them went into my legs, one into the back of my neck, and one into each wrist . . . I pulled out a bullet from my wrist with my teeth on the spot. I thought that I was going to die. I fainted and came to my senses a few times during the wait. The helicopter arrived, throwing stones at us while landing. The eighth wound was on my knee caused by a stone thrust by the helicopter. I said to myself, "If I survive, I am not going back to military service; I am going home." I have been home, in this bed, since 1994.

Traveling is expensive, the government doesn't pay our airplane tickets, and I have to hire a taxi wherever I go. This wheelchair was given to me as a present in 1994 by the chief commander of the gendarmerie. Its price then was over two billion. Most of the war veterans don't have a wheelchair; only the gendarmerie supplied wheelchairs to its veterans. Life is very expensive, I am paid about 160 million TL every three months by the government, and 60 million TL by the *Mehmetçik Foundation* every three months. Going to Ankara for treatment costs 34 million TL only for gas . . . The society is not concerned much about veterans or martyrs. If I decide to start a business, the government collects the same tax from me as everyone else. The politicians give empty promises; they try to deceive the population to increase their votes. . . . Well, the government now gives us health insurance, pays us salaries. There are so many veterans, sometimes you can't find an empty bed in Gülhane. Neither soldiers nor veterans get the attention they deserve. The fact that people value heroism, *ghazis* [veterans], and martyrs is all empty talk. I went to the state hospital, they insisted that I bring my medicine. We searched for the medicine for two hours in the drugstores, but couldn't find it. I am waiting there, all in pain, screaming . . . The doctor doesn't use the hospital's medicine. We give our hands, our legs, our lives for this country and the doctor doesn't give the hospital's medicine. On the other hand, I am very pleased with the doctors of Gülhane. During our early days there, we were in great distress, shouting and screaming, but they would bear with us.

My sleep is not bad. Sometimes I wake up in the night. Then I wake my brother up; he changes my lying position and I can sleep till morning. When the weather is nice, I go out at 7–7.30 a.m. with my wheelchair. I come back about 9–10 a.m. I have a girlfriend for eight years now. I fell in love with her when I was thirteen. Her family doesn't let her marry me. You see, this is another reward of being a veteran of war. If she would run away from home and come to me, I would marry her. She works in the textile business. After the incident I told her to break up but she didn't accept. She says that she will wait till I get well. She is twenty, or twenty-one years old now. She can't come and visit me.

Sometimes we see each other in Denizli. When we are seen together, her family is informed of our meeting. They don't want me because I am crippled although my being crippled didn't affect anything. My foot involuntarily twitches or becomes upright. My younger brother can't leave me; he can't work. In other words, my salary is for five people. That's the price we pay for being a war veteran. The state doesn't even supply an ambulance. They said that we will be given medals, but we got nothing and we don't expect it any more.

There will be no end to such things as long as there are PKK members among us. And as it doesn't end, veterans like us, martyrs, mothers, children, women will suffer losses. . . . According to Mesut Yılmaz, it is over. But it will never end as long as the PKK get help from politicians. How does so much food go there, so much gun and ammunition?

I talk to my friends on the phone. Several of us veterans plan to go to Didim next summer, to stay at a friend's house. Seaside and the sun are good for us. I use the inner tyre of a car as a boat and swim. Sometimes people ask, "Where did it happen?" and I say, "During military service." They say, "What a pity!" (May, 1998, Denizli, Karakova Village)

Born in Denizli in 1973, he is a primary school graduate. He is number five among four sisters and four brothers. His younger brother chose not to go to military service to look after his brother. He was a farm worker like his father. In February 1993, he went to Hatay for his basic training to become gendarmerie. He was wounded in the "thirty-three soldiers incident" near Bingöl on the way to his unit. He cannot walk, he can hardly hold a glass in his hands. He had wanted to pursue higher education and become a doctor.

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AT LEAST I SORT OF SAVED MYSELF

After [Prime Minister] Çiller prolonged the conscription period, July 28 became the day of death for Mustafa and a day of combat for me, instead of being the last day of our service.

I have 100, maybe 150, photographs but I cannot look at them, if I do, I get extremely nervous, and I don't like to talk about it either. I wanted to go to Şemdinli, Yüksekova, Hakkari, or the like.¹ I was disappointed when it turned out to be Van. I wanted to see what was going on there; I wanted to experience it. When I found out that my battalion was a mobile one, I said, "Not bad."

It was a five-car convoy, and a civilian truck was coming behind us, when we were attacked. The two cars in front of us took a turn on the road and the three cars stayed behind the turn. There was a stream on one side of the road. My car was partially behind a small heap so not many shots reached us. That's why our car was protected, only two died and seven were wounded. There were sixteen martyrs and two unwounded in the car in front of us. We were going back to our company after an operation in Mor Mountains near Başkale. Our morale was low because after preparation, we were immediately set to go to another operation at Mezi camp. We were taken by surprise. After Çiller prolonged the conscription period, July 28 became the day of death for Mustafa and a day of combat for me, instead of being the last day of our service. Otherwise, on that day we would have been in the airplane on our way to Ankara.

My departure for military service was not a big deal. My uncle accompanied me to Eğridir. We both cried while departing. I had even thought of legally increasing my age in order to go to the service sooner because I wanted to put my life in order and because I liked the soldiers very much. After what I had seen on TV and read in the papers, I was enthusiastic to go to the East. I wasn't from a rich family and the people there were poor so I could fit in their class. I thought, "I should be with them." I worked hard to be a commando.

¹ These are some of the remotest and, at the time, most problematic places (translator's note).

Everything in Eğridir [commando training center] was good: from food to the cleanliness of the toilets and the barracks. The soldiers were looked after well. We had a heavy initial training but still we had difficulties afterward in our units. I was appointed to antitank class. I had only used a hunter's rifle before whereas now it was "Lie down commando, get up commando!" That's how we were prepared for the East. Still we had no fear inside us, or "almost no fear" to be more honest. The purpose of the training was to overcome our fear. In general, it was a strength-building training.

I hadn't seen Van before the service. We had the same initial training all over again once we were in Van and after an orientation period of fifteen to twenty days, because of need, we were set on move before we were ready. We were a mobile unit and we moved according to the movement of PKK groups. Our first operation was in the vicinity of Şemdinli. Our first lieutenant was wounded. It was the first time I got introduced to the sound of bullets flying over my head.

I was involved in twelve combats, three of which were at such a close range that we could have thrown hand grenades at each other. My first close-range combat was the one during which Mustafa was martyred. Because we were experienced soldiers at that time, we jumped off the truck, got close to the ground, and found a cover toward the cliff. We sent the inexperienced soldiers to the back of the truck and didn't involve them in combat. The shooting was coming from behind a rock and someone had to throw a hand grenade there; otherwise he would kill all of us. A sergeant from Tekirdağ and I went toward the rock. They said to me, "Be careful, he is right behind you." We started throwing grenades toward that rock. When I came down again, they said that I was throwing at the wrong rock. I said that it wasn't possible that a PKK was behind that rock. But there was a PKK behind that rock, I found an empty drum afterward. So we missed him. If we would have thrown a grenade there he would have died. He could have killed us, but he didn't . . . After this drum incident, I sort of lost my mind. And then when we couldn't find Mustafa's body, I became even worse. So much so that when the major came and said, "Pull yourself together, you are a sergeant, an experienced soldier, you should be an example to the others," I tore off the badge and said, "From now on I am a private." And I didn't wear a badge until the end of my service. Tearing off badges had to be punished but wasn't; it was overlooked. Although it was forbidden, I was sent for a rehabilitation break. I said, "I need to visit my dead friend's family. Give me at least ten days, otherwise I will be worse." Our first lieutenant thought that I wouldn't come back. When I came back, he said, "Even if you hadn't come back, I wouldn't have done anything about it." He would have marked me on the records as "completed his service." During the whole rehabilitation break, I stayed at home. While departing, I told my mother, "Don't wait for me, I won't come

back. Pray for me!” When I visited Mustafa’s family, his mother asked me, “Why didn’t you bring me my son?” This was what killed me the most. Actually, I went back to die. If there was a post to be taken, a hand-grenade to be thrown, immediately I would say, “Let me do it!” In other words, it was not the first time I went there but this second time, I was determined to become a martyr. You just can’t shout behind a rock, “I want to be a martyr, shoot me,” but I tried everything. For example, when everybody was dead tired, I carried four wounded soldiers to the helicopter under unbelievably heavy shooting. A bullet would hiss by and I would remember my mother, “she is praying again, the bullets don’t hit,” I would think.

Generally it is unknown when we will be sent on an operation. So, we go to bed with our bags ready with sleeping bags and bullets, and our shoes beside us . . . When we got the notice, we were ready to leave in 3–5 minutes. I remember carrying 15–40 kilos on my back. Generally it was 25 kilos. Now I couldn’t do it even with an empty bag. Because the incident where Mustafa died was a great lesson for us, we were more alert. If we were going by trucks, we would leave a distance of a hundred meters between the trucks. In other words, only one and not all three trucks would fall into an ambush. During that combat, we were a bit disorganized, everything was a mess. We had two martyrs and four wounded, but what we gained was much more.

Did I kill anybody? We were extremely close with Mustafa . . . When I was back from my rehabilitation break, I asked my commander, “Can you give me a chance for revenge?” The first terrorist we captured was executed by three or four of us because he didn’t give us much information and because we were in distress on account of our eighteen martyrs. You don’t feel relieved. I even regretted doing it. I had decided not to shoot at him if he would call Allah’s name. When the others started shooting, I did too. He was very close, 4–5 meters away, if he would have called the name of Allah, I would have heard it. We used to collect the dead bodies together for the television screening. There were already twenty dead bodies on the ground from the operation and we had turned him into the twenty-first dead body.

Now I am my old self. I tried very hard to pull myself together. We had a lieutenant, he tried hard to soothe me. He would say, “Try to seem happy even if you don’t feel happy.” I was an introvert when I came back home. It was like living without any feeling . . . I never talked about my experiences with my friends. When we came back to our company after Mustafa’s incident, I hugged Mustafa’s bed and cried myself out. The others had to tear me off his bed. I didn’t care about anything. I asked my lieutenant to let me go to Yüksekova and open steady fire on the town. He said, “Are you crazy? Do you want to kill innocent people?” I said, “Aren’t our martyrs innocent? Let the innocent die on both sides.

Mothers don't give birth to sons to be targets to bullets in their twenties. Mothers also have expectations from their sons, we are not sheep to be sacrificed." I told him that I have a widow mother at home, waiting for me. Who shall I die here for? Not for the state. Anyway, I don't want to talk about this.

If I am doing my military service, O.K. I do it for my mother, my father, my brothers, and sisters, for Muslims; I am quite a believer in my religion. If I am doing my military service for myself, let everybody do it for themselves. When we are ordered to go into the mountains, we can't say, "We aren't going, we all are boycotting." We go wherever we are ordered to go without knowing anything. We go to each operation ready for combat. At times, we come back without firing a shot, and at times shooting thousands of bullets. When I was in the service, it was said, "PKK is trapped in a corner, it is finished, it is over," it is still being said so. The same thing will be said five years later or ten years later. Actually, Abdullah Öcalan is only an intermediary; if it is not him, there will definitely be someone else. I never had a Kurdish friend. I used to not shop from the Kurdish grocery in my neighborhood. I have no grudge against Kurds but I don't want to be in close relations with them. They feel discriminated because we do discriminate against them. Actually we discriminate against them because their culture is different from ours, they are not like us. I don't know if the people living in Southeastern Turkey want the PKK or not. I saw a lot of villages that helped the PKK and I saw a lot of villages that hated the PKK. The village where Mustafa was martyred was completely evacuated because it had been helping the PKK. I wasn't allowed to take part in the evacuation operation because I was in a terrible condition at that time. I was continuously drugged and sedated.

One of the PKK members we captured was a high-ranking official in the organization. He said, "As soon as we started fighting with the military forces, the government then started sending services to the region. Electricity, water, dams, etc. If we stop PKK now, the government will immediately stop the investments in the region. Therefore, we have to fight." I didn't agree with him but then we started to think about what he had said and realized that indeed there was nothing there before the PKK. When the war began, electricity supply began in the East. Still, I don't think it is directly related to the PKK. If the East hadn't been so marginalized, if, for instance, there had been industrial investments or some chances for development of the region, there wouldn't be any PKK. They say, "We don't want to migrate to the west." There are plains in Yüksekova but if it is not cultivated, it is of no use. We had caught a PKK member, a Çukurova University student. He was highly cultured, he didn't even have an accent. He was speaking so logically that he could almost persuade us that he was right. We were asking them about their life, if there were women with them, how they found food, and so on. Before Mustafa was killed, I wouldn't feel much

during such talks. But afterward, I wanted to be appointed as a guard to watch these detainees, but the commanders wouldn't let me. Maybe if I had been appointed, the detainee wouldn't have seen the daylight. And they were aware of it, so they didn't appoint me. If it was I who had to decide, and that's what we talked about among ourselves, I would have given the whole land east of Malatya and Sivas to the Kurds. I mean, give and get rid of it. . . . Better than dealing with the trouble in this way . . . If a country is what they want, they should leave our country and let us live comfortably. We would talk such things among friends. There is always the solution of "Love it or leave it!" Since you are trying to divide this country, leave it, look for a country of your own somewhere else. We all would finally come to the same point: Let's not be here, so that this fighting ends. We would never talk such things with our commanders.

During the six-months-long summer season, we were staying in tents in the open country. There was no going back to the unit before snow falls on the tents. We were comfortable when in Van. We spent our time doing sports . . . At night, we watched TV and stood guard if appointed. Because I was a sergeant, my duty was to patrol when appointed. Once, twelve soldiers died under an avalanche and we had to carry them to the unit. Yes, I carried a lot of martyrs, I thank Allah for my condition. I developed hernia in my back while in the service. If I don't carry heavy loads, I use medicine; I manage fine. The ultimate solution to hernia is surgery and I try to avoid it. It is very hard to carry dead bodies! You are dead tired yourself, and to be obliged to carry a dead body becomes torture.

The most frustrating moment? The list of names of the martyred soldiers came to the unit and they didn't show me the list. The list was in the hands of a soldier who didn't know my situation. I asked him if Mustafa's name was on the list, he looked at it and said, "yes." I threw myself on the ground and started screaming. Three soldiers couldn't manage to hold me. Someone of a high rank came and asked me my name. I threw a table at him; he ran away. It was the first time I got so mad. I said, "You can be martyred only for Allah." I can accept those who fight and die for their country as martyrs as well. You can know if the dead body belonged to the PKK or to some of us. When a PKK member dies, his body turns black, or a strange purple. A martyr's body is snow-white in color. You can distinguish a martyr among a hundred bodies.

Someone from Bingöl was captured. A soldier from Bingöl was asked to translate because he knew Kurdish. We all gathered around the captured man. The lieutenant asked, "Where are you active? What do you do? Are there other groups related to you?" He didn't want to answer. The lieutenant said, "Take care of him." The soldier from Bingöl started to beat the man; we literally heard the sound of bones. We had to intervene and stop the soldier, otherwise he would

kill him. . . . At the beginning of our service, we wondered if the Kurdish soldiers were members or sympathizers of the PKK. Later on, it doesn't matter whether he is a PKK member or not. You don't have time to think about it and be afraid. There weren't many Kurdish soldiers anyway. Sunnites get together and become friendly with Sunnites and Alevis find each other. There were even rightist-leftist fights among the soldiers. There were some communists in the unit, and I being a rightist, would have heated debates with them. We were listening about our operations being reported on the radio. We even listened to it on the radio while the operation was still going on. But very wrong information was being given. For instance, if we got maximum fifteen to twenty dead bodies during an operation, TV would report 90 dead.

On the second day of my coming home, I started to think. What did I do? You worked hard, you saved your country, your people. Actually I couldn't save them. I mean, what we saved was not our country, our people. I don't want to talk about it. Yes, at least I sort of saved myself. Now, I get extremely nervous sometimes. I had nothing of that sort before my military service. When I am pushed hard, I can get very nasty. I start trembling. Only those whose sons have gone there for their military service care about the situation. At best, the people would sympathize and say, "what a pity, another martyr there," that's all. During one of the combats, a bullet went in from one cheek of a friend and got out from the other. His chin and lower teeth were completely gone. He had twenty days of his service left. He stayed twenty days at GATA and was sent home, "Your military service is completed." He wrote me a letter, telling about it all. We collected money among ourselves and sent it to him. He was very poor. Nobody takes care of us. What are we? Guinea pigs? Sacrificial sheep? I don't know. There was a TV serial "Sights from Anatolia" that was shot among the soldiers. The soldiers who would go on the broadcast were given their lines on paper. Or a second lieutenant read the lines. It was definitely forbidden to say anything that was not written on the paper. Those interviewed would say, "We shall dry out their roots, my mother and father should not worry about me." It is forbidden to say, "I don't want to talk," we were lined up, one of us would be chosen to talk, he would say, "My name is such and such, I am from such a place, we shall definitely finish the PKK, my mother and father shouldn't worry about me, we are well looked after." There were also some forbidden words like "Apo." We see on TV that a general approaches a soldier and asks him, "what do you want, soldier?" The answer is "bank credit for marriage" and what not. Since you cannot say, "Give me back my health" . . . So many young men are involved in fighting, are martyred, if they can't be looked after, why are they involved then? They should be given wheelchairs and they should be medically treated. Nobody goes there thinking that they will get billions of TL in compensation. Their aim is to

fight for their country; they go to military service to preserve the unity of their country.

I can say that there were almost no occasions that made me proud of myself. When you do your duty as a human being, it would be meaningless to be afraid of dying. You are fighting against the PKK, against the situation you are in, against your commanders. You revolt against the commanders because they are all about discipline. . . . Of course, not all commanders are the same. Until Mustafa was martyred, I didn't think, "Let this service end so that I can go home." After Mustafa's death, days were so long that they wouldn't pass by. After the discharge, I couldn't go home because the roads were blocked by snow. Even those seven days put you under stress as if you are there for a thousand days. I was engaged when I went to the military service. I broke the engagement when I came back home. Let's say we couldn't get along well. It also has to do with what I have gone through. I couldn't share my experiences with my fiancée. I am appointed to report to Hasdal (Istanbul) for reserve duty. Now I am curious about Hasdal. What is it like to do your military service in the West, I wonder? In other words, I can't say that I don't want to serve in the military again. If necessary, I would like to serve in Hasdal. If I did not have the lower back problem, I could do it in the East as well; it makes no difference.

Born in 1973, he graduated from a technical high school. He did his military service between April 1993 and November 1995, with basic training at Eğridir Mountain Commando School and final appointment in Yüksekova, Van. His father is dead. He is the only son of his mother. He is working as a mechanic. He favors columnists such as Fatih Altaylı and Emin Çölaşan.

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ON THE ONE HAND, THERE IS GREAT RESPECT AND LOVE, BUT ON THE OTHER, THERE IS BRUTALITY

The area was set on fire by the Nazimiye Gendarmerie. I had to sign the report as “the terrorists fleeing from combat set the place on fire.” [Member of Parliament] Kamer Genç asked Hasan Kundakçı, the regional security commander general, “What happened?” The Commander answered, “The terrorists fleeing from the combat set the area on fire.” They go and ask only one person.

You have to go, there is no way of escaping it individually. As a reserve officer, I had fifty-three soldiers under my command. I wear a uniform, I shall protect my soldiers. Everybody will save himself. You don't open fire if the other side doesn't start it, but if you don't fire back, you die. I believe that those [rebels] in the mountains don't know what they are doing. We recognize the different kinds of shootings. It is TIKKO¹ if it comes from a distance, if its purpose is to show off and not to kill the soldiers, and if the shooters run away right afterward. If the shooter infiltrates among the soldiers endangering his life and shoots at soldiers, then he is a PKK member. One day, close to daybreak, a child came out of the woods. We caught him. There was a TIKKO brochure in his pocket. The battalion commander asked where he was coming from. He said, “I am going to buy bread for the friends up there.” To the question, “What are you?” he said, “I am a TIKKO member.” “What does TIKKO do?” The boy said, “TIKKO will fight for the rights of workers and civil servants; I don't know anything else.” He was poorly dressed. We dressed him with military clothes; we gave him fruit juice and canned tuna fish. He came with us. Finally, we left him in a village. He should have been detained. But the boy doesn't know anything. When the terrorists pass through a village on their way, they say, “bring us bread.” Of

¹ An underground leftist group, practicing armed propaganda. Majority of its activities are in Alevi areas (translator's note).

course, there are different situations too. We had very little contact and dialogue with the local people because we were constantly in the mountains. The situation in that region is like the turning of a small snowball into a huge mass before reaching the river. In other words, that is how the communication between the military and local people has eroded . . . A few days ago, I watched a program on TV that looked absurd. The military was shown as supplying public health services in Diyarbakır. Well, you do it to eliminate the animosity of the population toward the military, but, on the other hand, you do things to cause this animosity. The state fails to supply health service to the region and then, you play on the sentiments of the population so that they love the soldiers. It is wrong.

When I was going on leave, we came from the mountain to Tunceli by helicopter. I was to take my salary from Ziraat Bank. We had civilian cloths on. Because you always walk on uneven terrain in the mountains, the police recognizes you, knows that you are from the mountain. Your walking is unsettled, uneven. Someone grabbed me. At the time, the military service had been prolonged for five months and I had become a lieutenant. He asked to see my ID. I asked him, "Who are you?" He said, "Head Sergeant." And I was a lieutenant He apologized. I said, "Look, because you treat them this way in town, we have to deal with them in the mountains. If I were a civilian and if you would ask me my identity in this manner, you wouldn't find me anymore, I would disappear."

I was there when Ovacık was burnt. The soldiers are unsettled from walking day and night, their feet sore, their boots torn. At times, helicopters couldn't come to the region for backup and we would be afraid of going hungry. I am not sure if the expression is correct but, under such conditions you get a little bit wild like an animal. Both soldiers and officers, but soldiers are more apt to it. You walk through dense shrubs, branched trees, meadows, dry branches, and grass—a soldier lights a match. We were 800 in number. The smallest group was thirteen soldiers. There is an officer commanding each group but you can't control the soldiers at all times. A youngster in his twenties can easily get depressed. He doesn't bathe for days, months; his hair is full of lice and fleas and so on. So, he lights a cigarette and throws it on the ground. Such accidental fires are common; it happened. I personally didn't see any fire lit on purpose, only once a ranked officer started a fire but there were two terrorists in that region. When we got the information about them and their location, we went there and found their beds, all their equipment but they were not there; they had fled. They would come back after we had left the area. The gendarmerie of Nazimiye set the place on fire. I personally had to sign a report that said, "the terrorists fleeing from combat set the place on fire." Ovacık was burning. MP Kamer Genç came and asked Hasan Kundakçı, the regional security commander general, "What happened?" He said, "The terrorists fleeing from combat set the

place on fire.” On receiving that answer, the helicopter left the region. That is all. The same night, we were listening to the news on BBC radio: “Kamer Genç visited the region for investigation.” It is a lie. He flew to Malatya by the means of the state. So many soldiers were deployed and appointed for his protection. A helicopter was at his service. And he investigates by asking only one person.

A twenty-year-old is given an MG3 gun, belts, and night-vision binoculars. If you look through this binocular longer than 20 seconds, you start seeing different things. The inexperienced soldier puts the binocular on, holds it longer than 20 seconds, and he mistakes a firefly for a human being and panics. He fires his MG3, the soldier at the mortar sends a mortar, the artilleryman sets the artillery on fire, and what they see is not a human being but a firefly. Enormous waste of money, and this is the economic aspect. One night, we reached the top of the Düzgünbaba Mountain in Nazimiye. I was appointed as the captain of the company. I had fifty-three soldiers under my command. They started to eat their breakfast. About five minutes later, they started shooting at us. The sound of their guns were familiar to us; it was Kalashnikov. The combat lasted for two-and-a-half hours. They had dug holes at regular intervals. In each hole, two of them slept and one kept guard. In the early hours of the morning, all of them fell asleep. Unknowingly, we had passed through them and had formed an inner circle. I pulled my men back. There was a cliff behind us so no shooting could come from there. The group on the top of the mountain could see us but couldn't help. Over the wireless they said, “You are too close together, if we start backup fire, we can shoot you too. So, save yourselves by your own means.” We found out later on that the terrorists had thought that they had been surrounded by us and were frightened. They could see the group on the top but couldn't exactly fix our location. So, what did they do? A group continued firing and the other group fled. At the end, only one of them was left behind, shooting. Then, shooting stopped, I stood up. The ranked officer from the top ordered by the wireless, “Search the area.” And I said, “Come and search yourself, I am leaving.” I stayed in combat for two-and-a-half hours and he asks me to search the area! A little further, there was a dead body on the ground. A soldier from Adana asked, “Captain, can I take his boots?” He got them and became very happy. When you get into that atmosphere, you can't help but change. Of course, ultimately you are a human being; you feel pity and compassion for both, terrorists and soldiers alike. Again in the Ovacık region, a soldier died in combat. He was wrapped in a blanket, and with the sticks passed through the blanket he was carried on the shoulders of soldiers taking turns. On our way, we came upon a cave used by the terrorists, with stocks of biscuits, dried grapes, greens, a torch, canned meat, and so on. The helicopter hadn't come, so we were out of food. When the soldiers saw dried grapes and biscuits, they threw the body on the ground, rushed for

food. The body was stepped on. I can't forget it ever, a foggy and rainy weather. I shouted: "Your friend has died, maybe in an hour all of us will be dead and you step over his body for a biscuit or two, you impertinent men!" They were very hungry . . . Your psychology completely changes. The second lieutenant asked, "We can't carry him on our backs, shall we put him on a horse like in the cowboy movies?" I said, "The regiment commander will meet him, an official ceremony will be held, he will be wrapped in a flag and you want to carry him on a horseback like in cowboy movies?" I didn't accept it. I ordered him, "I appoint you with fifteen soldiers to deliver the body, report to me over the wireless and come back." On the one hand, there is great respect and love, but on the other, there is brutality and the disappearance of the feeling of pity.

I never came face-to-face with the PKK. Of course, there were those that we captured who gave us information and later joined us to guide us in the mountains. Those were the ones who had appealed to the Law of Penitence and changed sides. We didn't give them guns. They would come with us, show us where they passed, where and how they placed mines, and so on. They would even teach us how and where to place mines. Except those, I only saw dead bodies of PKK members. Thank God, we did not always suffer losses during combats. Of course, however long the clashes lasted, we always got hold of the area in the end because we were always greater in number. Even if there are losses in the military, you have ultimate control. Of course it was difficult when the terrorists captured soldiers and took them along like they take their own men. If they get a hold of a soldier's gun, they usually take the soldier away with them. As far as I can see, the solution to the problem should be a comprehensive solution. (July 1998, Tonya)

Born in 1965 in Tonya, he served in the army in Tunceli, between July 1993 and December 1994 for seventeen months. Graduate of the Open University [the major institution of distance learning in Turkey].

16

1313: THE NUMBER INSCRIBED ON MY ARM

In the past, I frequently fell in love; I used to cry when I was alone in my bedroom; I was deeply touched by the movies I saw. Now I cannot fall in love. I used to have a better sexual life. Now I have a sexual life but not as it was in the past. Then I was more enthusiastic. Now I am living a dead life.

Filth, discipline, cursing, and beating. I can't tell you how much I was beaten. I weighed 70 kilos when I was appointed to the Southeast, I was 49 kilos on the day of my discharge. The difference is 21 kilos. . . . It took six months to pull myself together. I was on duty 45 kilometers away from my birthplace. And this in itself was very depressing. Why were all of us soldiers from the Southeast? This is state policy. Southeasterners confront Southeasterners. Before the war, those from the Southeast would as a rule be appointed to the West and vice versa. Now it is the opposite. We were 350 men in the company and not even 50 of them were from the West.

Those from the Patnos district of Southeast Kars province were appointed to Erciş, half an hour away from their hometown. 1313, the number inscribed on my arm . . . I waited until three o'clock in the morning for my hair cut. In the end, my head was bleeding with scars, the machine was so bad. Another soldier was vaccinating us, hardly changing the injector. The injectors were such big injectors I had only seen those being used for vaccinating livestock. Only after five injections were they changed. I only had breakfast that morning before leaving home. It was three in the morning and I was yet to eat something. We were given one loaf of bread each, we shared them with our buddies. We went to bed at 5 a.m. but at 6 a.m., we were woken up. We had fifty-eight days of training, it was very much like being in a prison. All day long salute, hang your gun on your shoulder, take it off, sit down and stand up with the blow of the whistle, and tea service . . . During training I shot only six bullets, and missed all. They used to say "you should be trained well or you will die," yet the training

was rather poor. They used to agitate us: “Your ears will be cut off when you fall prisoner in the hands of the PKK.”

They say the worst is the infantry, “lousy infantry.” I was sent to Ağrı. My parents could not believe it, they were so depressed. I used to feel very sad when I heard about “martyrs” but I did not ask why this was happening because I knew what the conflict was all about. My uncle accompanied me to the training center in the Southeastern Muş province. I recall I was crying as I waved my hand in farewell. Everything was so bad: no cleaning, no proper meals, the beds were filled with bedbugs. In those first days, five of us were sleeping in two beds. The first day when I woke up, all my body was itching. I took my underclothes off and they were full of bedbugs. For a week, all my body was swollen with bedbug bites. But I got used to that, too. No one, not even those who were peniless, would eat their rations. We would better have bread with tea. Then we were appointed to our battalions. The G3s, air artillery guns, hand grenades . . . Training was good but not excellent.

When I had started, the military service was for fifteen months but it was extended to 18 months under Çiller’s prime ministry. So we were named “Çiller’s soldiers.” The first two months I never had the chance of taking a bath. I was washing the dishes. Hot water was provided only for 10 minutes, the seniors would bathe, and when they left the shower area, well, everybody knew that hot water was already gone. Since I could not clean my hands after washing dishes, a layer of fat had formed between my fingers. I was stinking like a corpse. One day, I met a friend from an earlier batch, he was working in the heater room. I was so happy to see him that I cried. They had a private bathroom. For an hour I washed and washed. They also had spare uniforms and I changed my miserable garbs.

It was winter, we were out on village searches. The first operation . . . We searched the houses. We were simply doing identity checks. In some of the houses they showed male identity cards, but no men were present, only women. We reported the situation to our superiors. You cannot expect the women to confess that “my husband has gone to the mountains.” Since I was a soldier, they were my enemies. If I had not taken them as enemies, I would have joined them. I was so unhappy, depressed, asking, “Why? Why does it happen like this?” Those people are terribly oppressed. Once, we engaged in a battle on the Tendürek Mountains. The PKK had seen us and they had hidden in a hole. We passed them by without noticing. Only the last man in the last team detected them. We surrounded them and the clashes began. We killed sixteen PKK members. We seized sixteen Kalashnikovs and one Kanas rifle. We lay down their bodies on the ground. When we got up in the morning their ears were cut off. The rightists, during night watch duty, had cut their ears. I felt terrible, I had never in

my life seen torn corpses like these. The battalion commander was very angry. He asked if there were any imams among us. A few raised their hands. He called them and asked, "Tell us if what they have done is justified. Even if they are enemies, in our Islamic belief harming the dead is a sin," he said. I felt so bad, so depressed.

As I was stretching on the bed—after every operation, you get around ten days of rest because our feet are so tired and weary—I saw a fellow soldier enclosing an ear in his letter. Those who cut off the ears mail these to their families. If I objected, he would very well accuse me of "supporting the separatists." And then they might charge you with "being a PKK militant" and send you to the antiterror unit for interrogation.

I became aware of my ethnic Kurdish origins during military service. Until then I believed all people were same. I still believe that, but initially this PKK was something unfamiliar for me. My awareness of my Kurdish origins increased particularly after completing my military service. When I came back, I applied for a job as a security guard in the industry. Two had applied for the telephone reception and I for the security position. The man in charge asked one of the other two guys if he could tackle with the security. The guy said he had applied for the telephone reception but he was employed in my place. Before going to the military, I would not understand what was going on in that situation. My father, in 1990, applied for a vacant driver's position in the municipality and passed the test with a very high grade, ninety. Yet another man from the central Anatolian town of Konya, who had procured only sixty was employed in his place. At that time I had asked myself "What does being a Kurd mean?"

During the battle in the Tendürek Mountains, a first lieutenant was injured in his foot. He had a bad previous record. He was believed to have beaten a soldier to death with a club. He had served a few years in jail for this act. Anyway, this first lieutenant got drunk one night and came to our dormitories in order to beat us. He was about forty-five, at the age of a colonel but he was still serving as a first lieutenant. Once, he came and woke me up, asked what I was doing. He tried to make me laugh. When I resisted, he started tickling me and I started laughing. Then he beat me. All our friends were yearning to kill him in a clash. When we were out on duty, he used to load five cans of beer in my backpack, five others in another friend's. He was an alcoholic. Five cans of beer weigh a lot in long-distance marches. Sometimes you would even drop your rations to get rid of weight. Yet, he loads us with his beer cans and when we make a stop, he asks to be served his beer. This first lieutenant, during the battle on the Tendürek Mountains, although it is forbidden, stood up and cursed at the enemy, and he was shot. There were sixteen Kalashnikovs and a Kanas seized from the PKK but he was shot with a G3 bullet; that is, a bullet shot by one of us.

His superiors too were convinced that he was shot by his own soldiers. The official explanation was that “he was mistakenly shot,” but everyone knew that a soldier had deliberately shot him. He never came back. All soldiers were thankful for the unknown soldier who had shot him.

In the same battle we had taken three PKK members as prisoners. One of them, upon seeing his dead comrades started crying for his dead “commander.” Another one asked, “How many of you have we killed?” The captain lined them up, and ordered us to give them our snowcaps. They did not want the snowcaps. Then the captain ordered them to undress and they did. Then he called in the team and had them shot. It was the same commander who had scolded the soldiers for cutting the ears of the dead, talking about sin. You have taken them prisoner. You could ask for a proper punishment. Who gives you the right to execute them? I had a friend from Diyarbakır; he had tears in his eyes “I would like to kill this captain,” he said. On our way, we saw two PKK corpses. Their heads were crushed with rocks by their comrades who did not want them identified. Yet apparently one of them was a woman, for her hair was long. We suffered no casualties. But one of our friends, during a nervous breakdown shot himself. He did not want to continue fighting. He became disabled and was sentenced to one or two years.

When we joined the commando units they were already in an engagement and five of them had been killed. As we loaded one of the dead to the car his poncho slipped and I saw his face, it was as if he was not dead. I felt terrible. You get depressed; you are filled with hate; you yearn for killing someone in revenge. For three successive days we had nothing to eat. We filled our mouths with snow instead of water. When we asked for rations, the officer in charge would reply, “It costs 2,000 dollars for a helicopter to take off. You should be patient for a few more days.” Finally people started fainting, and they were obliged to send food. The bread was stale, a week old. Canned beans were of very low quality, the good ones are distributed only once a week. And beating. Once I was trying to stop a fight, but one of the soldiers said I too had hit him. And a noncommissioned officer started beating me. He had beaten me so terribly that I had to stay in bed for a week. I was thin, and when he hit me I fell on the ground. He continued beating me when I stood up. I had to stand up and salute him, but then he would continue beating . . .

On the Ağrı [Ararat] Mountain, there was heavy rain and I caught malaria. We were listening to the local radio station. The radio presenter was doing a talk show. He asks the listeners on the phone, “What are you doing now?” and they reply, “We are having tea.” I yearned to be with them, I wanted to be in a warm place together with my family and friends and have tea. As I was sick, one day I lost my way back from the guard post. I was seeking the way to my tent but

I apparently headed for the opposite direction. A friend called, "Where are you going?" He warned me and saved my life. If he had not intervened, I would have become a target for the PKK members hiding in the mountain. Our captain was a very nice man. "My aim is to prevent casualties," he said. Others would sacrifice soldiers for personal success. The more successful you are the earlier you get promoted. But he would say: "I would not exchange one hundred PKK for one of my soldiers, I want my soldiers not the PKK." He would not risk our lives for promotion. "I have three siblings, you are no different from them," he used to say. The soldiers admired him. He was later appointed to the capital Ankara, but even from there he would call us every day. He struggled a lot to save us from being beaten by the noncommissioned officers.

In the division, there were 300 soldiers. All Kurds: the man in charge of the canteen, the man in charge of the dining hall; majority were the Kurds and our Turkish friends were unhappy with that. Once there was a big fight provoked by this Turkish–Kurdish rivalry. Majority were the Kurds but three of them were stabbed. It was initiated by a Turkish soldier who shouted, "Even the man in charge of the canteen is a Kurd, the Turks are discriminated against here." The fight began as he was cursing the Kurds. He stabbed all who attacked him. There your religious beliefs are weakened. The guy comes there as an imam, he heads the prayer five times a day, but he retires as an atheist. The reason is that every day you are in the training, you cannot pray as regularly as you are accustomed to. Although alcohol is forbidden, you yearn for it. Nevertheless it is risky, your military service might be prolonged if you are caught drinking. Yet, the officers are entitled to drink. A few of our friends were using crack. They were terrible addicts since their civilian days. The battalion commander was informed and he threatened all the soldiers with very heavy penalties. But they did not care.

Certainly I have killed. Though you cannot know who, for you are firing at targets 300–400 hundred meters away, no one knows whom he shoots. In the last battle they were 16 of them and we were 300–400. Millions of bullets were fired. Previously I believed in military service. I saw it as a way of safeguarding the people of the country; in the future my children too should go. Safeguarding the people from whom? From the enemies of the people. It could be PKK or Greece. Though they too are killed, it is unpleasant. But I then believed that "the PKK is evil." But now, I have seen that the people of the East are oppressed. I used to be more prejudiced against the PKK. But now I regret that I entered military service. If it were now, I would not go. My nephew was studying in the police academy; but just twenty days before his graduation he was expelled for he was a Kurd. Then why should I serve in the army? I feel terribly offended. I am counted only in the bad days, but neglected in the good days; I feel I am simply used.

There I might have lost my life. I reflected much on death. I could have returned from the front disabled, or mentally disordered. Even those who most hate the PKK would not choose to do their military service under such conditions. The happy, healthy, smiling soldiers in the TV ads are an illusion; the reality is the opposite. It is terrible. When the military service was extended I was so unhappy that I cried. I used to eat very little, after then I simply quit eating. I thought: "I will never be able to return home." When I was discharged, I wanted to leave Ağrı as soon as possible. We were transferred to another unit in Patnos. I still could not believe that I had found hot water there. I stayed in the bath for four hours, I wished I would be cleaned of all the reminiscences of my days there. I put on my civilian clothes and I did not go to bed. I was scared of those bedbugs. I did not want them to nest in my clothes. I sat nearby the heater until the next morning. Back in my hometown, on the way home, I met my father and a neighbor. They passed by. They did not recognize me. I called him "daddy." He returned, he embraced me. He felt terrible about not recognizing his own son. He cried. In the evening my uncles visited. All were in shock. In consolation, they whispered, "You will be O.K." My behavior must have been somewhat unusual. They were worried that I had lost my mind.

My mother took care of me. With good meals, I pulled myself together in three months. During my absence my girlfriend had married someone else. Since then I have had no girlfriends. I don't get pleasure from flirting as I did in the past. Then, I used to fall in love so frequently; I used to cry for her when I was alone in my bedroom, I was deeply touched by the movies I saw. Now I cannot fall in love. I used to have a better sexual life. I still have a sexual life but not as it was in the past. Then I was more enthusiastic. Now I am living the life of a dead person. I resort to violence more than I used to. When I am challenged, I start shouting. I get mad for any reason. I sharply respond to any challenge. I cannot go to sleep until dawn. I don't know what I think about. I simply sit there, null. Looked from the outside I might seem O.K., but I am not. When I am speaking with someone, I pretend as if I am listening to them, but indeed I am not. I cannot concentrate. I believe I have a heart problem, but I don't know what exactly. And sometimes I have a terrible headache. I have not gone to a doctor or a psychiatrist. But now speaking with you, I feel relieved of my sufferings. You took me to the past. I have seen the difference between the past and present.

I cannot keep names in my mind. When I am introduced to someone, I have to ask his name five times. I don't like to be among others. I would like to be away from people. I would ideally like to live in a house on a mountaintop. My youngest brother goes to high school. He would by no means like to go for military service. Sometimes I tell him about the military and he dislikes it. In the

TV news, he watches the battles and he is frightened. I am against people killing each other. I am against war. Why should I accept myself as a hero? Those soldiers who go into combat and come back, having succeeded, without any casualties are regarded as heroes. The ones who die are martyrs and the rest are *ghazis* [wounded veterans]. The PKK, when they are surrounded, they do not aim at the privates, they aim at officers. The officers rip their rank signs in order to avoid death. But the PKK still detects them, for they don't carry bags, their boots are of better quality, the man next to them carries extra load, and so on. Of course, they also target the soldiers when necessary.

Until now, I have not told others what I have told you. Indeed I don't have friends. After military service, most soldiers have been unable to recover their old selves. Old friends are gone. I don't feel enmity against anyone. But I feel that my rights are violated. A worker's salary is 23 million TL [approx. 200 dollars] and the monthly rent of a flat is 25 million TL . . . If I had the chance, I would not live in Turkey. I had an unhappy childhood because of poverty. There was no violence but I was always anxious. I never had a football; I never had a bike; I never went to a park to play. During the most beautiful days for a child, I had to go out to work as a shoe-shiner, or as a peddler in the marketplace. How could I have felt happy? I am not a conservative. I like neither the MHP [Turkish ultra-nationalist party] nor the PKK. If I voted, I would vote for ÖDP [the socialist Freedom and Solidarity Party]. They are conscious people. They inform me on all issues and they do not force me to join them. I like their approach. I have been unemployed for six months now.

An ethnic Kurd born in 1973, in the Varto district of Muş province, he is a son of a driver. He has four brothers. He was an infantry soldier between August 1993 and February 1995. He was trained in Manisa training center and appointed to Ağrı, Patnos. His family had emigrated to the Western port city of Izmir when he was 12. He has worked as a peddler, shoe-shiner, construction worker, and waiter. He is currently unemployed.

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I LOVE ALL HUMAN BEINGS;
EVEN THE TERRORISTS WE
CAPTURED

A citizen approaching the village is shot dead, without hesitation. He can be a civilian or a terrorist . . . That is the difficult part. . . . What would become of the child of that man? Personally, I would go to the mountains, with my whole family . . .

Military life suits my character; I am fond of working and discipline. I didn't think I would go to the East because I was an engineer with a master's degree. During the initial interview, people would say, "I have pain in my feet, I have a headache" in order not to go to the East. I said, "Write me up, friend."

The early days are difficult. It was rough for me, too. One can even have a nervous breakdown. The training was to prepare us for combat. As soon as we arrived at our unit, we were sent to the mountain, to an altitude over 3,000 metres. We had thought that the greatest problem was terrorism. Nothing of that sort. . . . It was only a problem in the summer months. The real problem was the soldiers. Because we were conscripts, reserve officers, civilians doing military service, we were trying to solve problems without using force, but the privates didn't want to understand that. The soldiers go to bed at the first light of day. After the morning exercises they have breakfast. Through morning exercises, training at night, training during the day, other kinds of training, we could get rid of laziness of the soldiers. I would let them play football sometimes, to break the monotony. As the night falls, they start night duty, close safety, distant safety, ambush, listening post, and so on. At first I was alone, then a second lieutenant joined us, and after some time, another one, so I had two assistants. I learned everything by feeling my way through; the latecomers were lucky. At nights, I would give military lessons or "let's be honest, let's not lie" sort of character-building lessons. Let us say a soldier is on guard duty: he shouldn't be seen, he shouldn't be heard, but he gets bored and fires his gun. Beating soldiers is not a sufficient solution, but if you beat them, you should tell them the reason. They

shouldn't be beaten if they don't deserve it. Initial training they have is not sufficient. They come as passive soldiers, but in four to five months, they become active and fit. I loved my soldiers, I still love them. We were standing guard at nights together, we counted the stars together. The first lieutenants do not go near the soldiers, reserve officers do. All the work is done by reserve officers and privates. Despite this, reserve officers are marginalized. I think that it would be better if the ranked officers joined the operations, but their number is insufficient. I was the squad commander although a first lieutenant was supposed to be at that post. Once a week, we could freely read newspapers; I read quite a number of books. My duty was at the border. I was responsible of the defense of the area. Iran was at a distance of 463 meters. I was going to Iran and back. The Iranian Kurds were relatives of our Kurds. At a certain date in the past, a border was drawn; one stayed there, one on our side. It was forbidden to pass the border. I would allow passages to the local population for visits during religious festivities. A relative of one of us had died on the Iranian side. The whole village went to the funeral. I did, too. They give you a passport for one day. I could count every stone; I could even draw the picture of an area of 7,000 square meters. In that area, you could step on a mine, you could be shot by a wandering bullet, by accident, or you could run into a terrorist at any time . . . I missed my friends, talking to them, there was nobody to talk to; wolves were howling in the mountains, cold, storm, snow blizzard. Of course, I would talk to the soldiers but it wasn't as relaxed a talk as a friend's. So, that's what I missed the most.

The night was cold; there were frequent snow blizzards that resulted in zero vision. It was a duty toward our country. Someone had to watch over the country, now it was our turn. We were standing guard. It isn't possible not to think about war, I still think about it. I used to go to the mountain with my soldiers; terrorists would be three kilometers in front of us. When we approached, they would have passed across the border. You can't solve the problem of PKK terrorism unless a political step is taken, like sitting down at a table with Apo and coming to an agreement. They say, "Apo is a terrorist, we won't address him." It is a lie. Everybody knows that they talk to Apo, unofficially, off the record. Why shouldn't they? The problem can be solved by organizing a public poll. These are the aims of the PKK, the citizens are living under such and such conditions, and ask the people their opinion about what kind of a solution can be reached.

The order comes from above. There is smuggling over the border. They say, "Shoot them." Legally, you have the right but it is not the solution. How can I shoot a smuggler? It is not possible. If ammunition and guns are smuggled for heroin, you can shoot them. But, the people are going for things like gas or

sugar; I see it. Soldiers go to the East maybe because they have to, but these people suffer because of the difficulties of this region. I don't remember anyone in good financial conditions who came to the East. Only six out of forty soldiers are high school graduates; those with good financial means find a way not to come here. There is corruption among soldiers too, like everywhere else. The prime minister said, they are "a few plundering bandits." How can a fifty-year-old person say such a thing? But the politicians have realized that they could be overwhelmed by this problem [corruption], so they started to press harder. Also, there are some citizens of the East whose interests lie in the East: tribal chiefs, gun traders, canned food producers. . . . The number of cans consumed is enormous. For instance, the boots that are normally given once a year are given there every three months. Everybody involved, even suppliers of rubber, benefit. Also, ranked officers have good salaries. They would be appointed to the East even if there were no fighting going on but they wouldn't have such good salaries. The media also benefits by the way of news. The greatest harm is shared by the PKK and the local folk who are trapped between the PKK and the military.

The military are guilty of some wrongdoings. Some commanders are cooperating, directly or indirectly, with the terrorists. For instance, they overlook the heroin smuggling. Everybody knows this, even JITEM.¹ If I were a prosecutor, I would have proved it. It is not difficult to see it. You look at a map: Wherever there are no incidents, there is something wrong there. Some of the commanders, with good or bad intentions, neglect their duties. The psychology of the population is reflected in the military too. Soldiers behave scrupulously during the first three to four months, but afterward, they don't care about anything. Terrorists are at a distance of 1.5 kilometers away, but the soldiers sleep on. The terrorists can come there, take their guns, kill them; the soldiers know this but don't care. Soldiers have no faith. I don't mean religious faith. Soldiers have problems with orientation, with having faith in a cause, and there are problems due to their low education levels. What he knows is: "There is PKK in the Southeastern Anatolia. They kill soldiers. We joined the military. We shall fight." The military headquarters send documentation, the second lieutenant lectures the soldiers according to his capacity, based on his understanding of the text. In these documentations, few sentences from the politicians' speeches appear here and there in italics, but it is mostly the ideology of the military headquarters that is purveyed.

Unfortunately, they realized the seriousness of the situation only after eleven years. I wish they would have realized it at the beginning of the problem, so that

¹ Intelligence and covert operations unit of the gendarmerie. The military denies its existence (translator's note).

many citizens of this country wouldn't have died or been forced to go to the mountains. You would feel pity if you could see the terrorists. I am not being sentimental. I know that if he caught me, he would probably kill me. This is the military side of it, but when I think about it humanely, I say, "What a pity." The person you would want to give charity to has a gun in his hands. There are human rights violations in some places, wrongdoings of some ranked officers and noncommissioned officers. I am not talking about reserve officers because they act on orders; they are not free. Soldiers in time start doing exactly what their commander is doing. Let's say a man was seen entering the village. As the village is surrounded and a search is going on, a citizen approaching the village is shot dead, without hesitation. He can be an ordinary citizen or he can be a terrorist, this is the difficulty. What would this person's child do afterward? Personally, I would go to the mountains [i.e. join the PKK] with my whole family. The military doesn't know how to deal with the situation. Do the citizens know? When the terrorist comes, they say, "Welcome, I am at your service"; then the commander comes, he says, "Welcome, sir!" He is right; you cannot get angry at him. I would do the same if I were him. Life is sweet.

There were talks with the PKK over the wireless. The captain of the company and the PKK responsible for our region were schoolmates from military war school. They talk over the wireless: "You were living at such and such a place," "Has your child grown up?" "You had a daughter, what did she do?" Such a nice conversation, and this takes place during combat. Other times, they would swear at each other over the wireless. We lost a soldier in a combat and captured a terrorist. We ended the operation after suffering a martyr. What difference does it make if you capture ten terrorists after you lose a martyr? Soldiers exaggerate things a bit, often saying "we are at an operation" whereas they are not. He goes out the door and writes in his letter, "I got that many heads." The newspapers write, "ten soldiers died," but actually it is not accurate information. Let's say the soldiers fall into an ambush and ten of them die on the spot, but twenty of them get wounded, which is not reported in the press. Later on, maybe ten of the wounded soldiers die, which again does not appear in the press. It happened to us: In an operation, at first twenty-one soldiers died, then the death toll increased to thirty, but only twenty-one dead were reported by the press. Those who die after the operations are not reported.

You work under two meters of snow, your boots get wet, and you have them on the whole day. You go in and out all the time; it isn't possible not to catch cold under such conditions. I was responsible for the medication. The soldiers come and say, "I have pain here, I have pain there." I read the prospectuses of the drugs at hand and gave them something accordingly. The helicopter doesn't come to the spot for every combat. For instance, if there are two to three terrorists and

three to five soldiers in combat, the helicopter doesn't come. As you know, it is too costly. In such a case, you should take the wounded to the nearest town or city. If the combat is a large-scale one, helicopter comes immediately and picks up the wounded. Sometimes, the soldier is wounded in an area called "the death zone"; you can't take him out from there. If you go near him, they would shoot you as well. The soldier cries there in agony and you cannot do anything.

Military service made me a mature person. I got to know myself better. I changed, I saw some things and accepted them. I realized that there is fraud all over the country and that there are unpleasant acts of fraud in the military too. We, as a nation, see the military as sacred. In that respect, you become demoralized when you see such things. I also had worked as a teacher before my military service. You feel ashamed of yourself when you pull the ear of a child, but it becomes easier in military service. When you have authority, you become more apt to use violence. But violence starts where the power of mind and reason ends. You explain something to the soldier again and again but he doesn't understand. In the end, you lose patience, give him two slaps, and everything gets in order. I can't work as a teacher in the same way that I did before military service. I would probably slap the students rather hard. Tendency for violence has increased in me, I am afraid.

For example, our army crossed the border into Iraq today. It is said, "Our A teams have been pursuing the terrorists; the region has been cleared of mines and the fighting is going on." The public expects to be informed in a week's time that "now terrorists have been captured." Nothing of that sort happens. The fighting stops that same night. The terrain is so awkward that the terrorists easily flee. I understand what is going on when I read the news in the papers but the presentation of the news is not accurate. Why has the operation been carried out? I believe that after the operations beyond the border, there will be operations on this side of the border, and after that, democratic rights, human rights, and so on will have to be approved by the government, giving in to pressure from the European Union. It is a kind of final show. . . . For instance, evacuation of the villages worked well and the military has excelled at it. In the early days, the soldier would stand guard at the door and the civilian would come saying, "Hello, I want to talk to the commander." At an opportune moment, the disguised terrorist would grab the soldier's gun, kill everybody there and walk away. Now, it is not possible. Nobody can approach a patrol station closer than 600–700 meters. Clashes will go on but will be on a smaller scale. They will not occupy the agenda of the country. Of course, enormous expenditures are incurred. If it hadn't been so, Turkey would be twice as rich now.

There were Kurds among us but it was exceptional. I think all the young men from the Black Sea region are sent to the East without hesitation, probably

because we are prone to violence. I couldn't accept the idea that a terrorist could come and kill me there. I love all human beings, even the terrorists we captured. Why? Because I feel pity for them. They too are our brothers. I cried when I was leaving my squad; I left my loved ones there to reunite with my loved ones at home. I felt as if I was betraying the soldiers there. You also worry if they will make it.

I have tried to be cool, calm, and collected since I came back. I try to think logically about everything. Some people, and they are only a few, think that I am a hero. But the public is indifferent to the conflict that has been going on for eleven years now. They hear about an incident on TV, say, over three deaths. They say, "God damn them"; few curses, that's all. The people here are definitely not interested in what is going on in the East. My going there or not doesn't concern them. I couldn't see most of my friends since I came back home. I run around to find a job. My friends are hesitant, they are curious if my personality has been scarred. This attitude makes me unhappy, of course. They could come and ask me directly. During job interviews, I show my letter of acknowledgment saying, "This was the most serious duty I did and it was acknowledged by this letter." Some take it into consideration, some not. I would prefer it if they read it carefully and objectively. Instead, they say, "Well done, tell me about your adventures." I came back and life goes on. During my early days at home, I was rather quiet. Some people would ask irritating questions, and some would say, "Here comes the hero."

If those who have been discharged would organize the necessary pressure and protests, the government would have to be more sensitive to the problem and work out a solution. But, what happens? You get your discharge and say to those left behind, "God help you!" (March 1995, Istanbul)

Born in 1966 in the Black Sea region, he has six sisters, all married. His mother and father are dead. He graduated from Anatolian University, School of Engineering; has a Master's Degree from Istanbul Technical University. He comes from a poor family. After his basic training in Tuzla-Foça, he served for seventeen months as a squad commander near the Iranian border. He is currently looking for a job.

WE TOOK OUT THE POWDER
FROM OUR BULLETS AND
INSCRIBED OUR REMAINING DAYS

The floor of the bus was completely demolished and I found myself thrown out of the bus. . . . People were tapping my back. I heard voices, "Your time in this world has not expired yet." As I lay by the rear door, I cried. I tried to pull myself up, but I could not feel the lower part of my body. I had lost my legs.

I had never seen so many young men with their hair razed to their skin. It was so funny. After this first shock, one can not pull himself together until the end of the military service. Neither your cap nor your boots fit. . . . You exchange them, barter with others. I used to be embarrassed about going around in shorts; there, you bathe together with nearly one hundred men, all naked, and you get used to that. You are appointed to your unit. You ask, "what is this Sixth company like?" The answer is, "Boy, you're in deep shit!" You are scolded all the time. They say, "It's up to you: you either learn it or you don't, but you will be deployed there."

When I was conscripted, some of my friends were applauding the guerillas. They were believed to be the only ones who could stand up to the state. Yet I was not convinced that they could be so special. I used to follow the events from the news. I wanted to go there also to find out the truth. Training gets tougher every day. Military training is unpleasant in every aspect. If it weren't so, all would yearn to undergo military training, right? We were enrolled in the infantry but were given commando training. The officers were quite good, but they forced us so hard that in the summer heat, our uniforms were soaked in mud. We used to creep on the ground at least for 1 kilometre in 40 minutes. During the training, we ambushed each other, we kidnapped, we tied each other. I could tie a soldier's hands and one of his feet with my belt from behind. I recall having to walk barefoot having lost my boots and gun to others. When your belt is seized, you look so funny in your military clothes. Imagine, your clothes are loosened, your cap is gone, and you are barefoot. . . . We were ready to go fighting. I didn't take it

badly. If it weren't me, somebody else would have to go. . . . A war was going on. And I don't blame the army. They do whatever they have to do. They are not the ones who started the war. Everywhere, the wars are started by civilians and the soldiers get killed, yet victory goes to the civilians. About 322 of the 600 trainees were selected to be deployed in the Southeast. The rest were declared "unfit." If you are doing something you, should do it well. This was my motto in civilian life as well. I loved my job, I was really attached to it. And ultimately, this too was a job.

I spent the best days of my life in the basic training center. Our commander—I recall him so warmly—was a real leader; we were prepared to die under his command. During training, they tried to unveil the war and the warrior within our hearts and souls. Aren't we all potential killers? The human being, in nature, is evil. Waging a war is much easier than negotiating.

If I had known on which side of the road the mines were laid, I wouldn't have sat on that side of the bus. You see? There I was sitting, my gun by me. It dashed through my mind, "Damn, mines might be laid here." The weather was so hot. I was about to doze off. Just then came the explosion. It threw me into the air. The floor of the bus was completely demolished and I found myself out of the bus. A short moment of darkness. I was no longer in the same dimension. People were tapping my back. I heard voices, "Your time has not expired yet." I came to my senses and realized that there was no one on the bus. As I lay by the rear door, I cried. I tried to pull myself up, but I could not feel the lower part of my body. I had lost my legs. I was so calm. . . . Am I stupid, or am I so brave? As they took me out of the bus, I wondered if there were other wounded. Someone hugged me and said, "It is all right." Yet I was aware that something had happened. Nevertheless, the explosion had not harmed as much as it could have. Plenty of ammunition was loaded on the bus—gas tubes, and so on.

There are times that one can foretell. You say to yourself, "damn, I am gonna be killed today . . ." You are unwilling to go on duty. But when you are asked, "Is there anyone who wants to stay here," you think, "if I stay my buddies will go. If it does not happen to me, it will happen to them." We have to face our fate. I had to stay in Şırnak for four or five days. Then I was taken by a helicopter. I started laughing as I was being transported. "This was your fate boy," I told myself. In Diyarbakır they were unable to operate on me. In GATA [the major military hospital in Ankara] I had four successive operations. I saw that one of my legs was already amputated. I begged the doctor: "Don't cut it, I cannot go back to mom like this." I was only concerned about my mother, I did not care about anything else. I thought of committing suicide when I was in the hospital. It was easy. The doctor said, "We cannot save it, we have to amputate it." Amputate then! . . .

From the basic training center, I had been transferred to Adapazarı. A brigade was supposed to be seated there, but actually one of the battalions was deployed in Bitlis, another one in Diyarbakır, yet another one in Şırnak. After two weeks, One hundred of us were transferred to Şırnak by train. We were dressed in civilian clothes. Until finally entering the brigade in Şırnak, we were not given arms. The city was fully controlled by the military. What luck, our task was to provide backup for the gendarmerie! The gendarmerie battalion was in Andaç. It is 5.5 kilometers from Ortaköy, a village headed by the village guard chieftain Cemil Berk. Ortaköy in the past had been a terrorist village, now they had passed on to the government's side. They staunchly resist terrorists. A little far away is Araporuç village, and after that the Serbest Gendarmerie Station of the Hakkari province. This station is attacked every three months. I was stationed in Ortaköy for four months, in the gendarmerie post up on the hill just over the village. The gendarmes were in miserable conditions. They neither had proper training nor were they equipped well in terms of arms. The Ortaköy Gendarmerie Station was not a quiet place.

I remember the dogs. . . . You should not underestimate dogs. They would not attack soldiers and would not step on the mines. Their strong sense of smell has many times saved the teams from ambushes. Many of the mules, too, would not step on mines. In the Yekmal Station, a dog named *Katil* (Murderer) had strangled a boy, torn him into pieces. There one's belief in God is strengthened. We used to go out on guard duty when the snow was two meters high, but neither our hands nor our feet would be frozen. You start to have more faith in the Creator, ok? But God takes side in these clashes. It was quarter past eleven at night. We were in the canteen tent, having tea. Forty people were preparing to go out on guard duty. The first mortar shell hit us. We were attacked. It would not take more than ten seconds. Everybody ran for their guns and surprisingly all could get hold of their own guns. This was the only clash that I ended up experiencing. It was a risky place. There were more mines than rocks. They had sprung over the ground or were disclosed. Walking was death. After the clashes, we found four corpses. There should have been more, but the PKK take away their dead. We suffered no deaths. Two village guards were wounded and one of our dog's head was crushed by a mortar shell.

In that region there was scarcely any impoverished village. The smugglers, if they are on the army's side are highly tolerated. Have you ever heard of trafficking in vegetables? They smuggle eggplants and tomatoes on mule back. They hire day laborers with mules from Northern Iraq for 80,000 TL [approx. 25 cents] a day. The guy speaks no Turkish, yet whenever he passes the border he waves his hand and I respond. Ultimately, poverty is the source of everything. A man with a full stomach would not resort to arms. They are paid as village guards. Almost

all of them owned a Toros car [domestic Fiat cars]. Cemil Berk, the village guard chieftain of the Ortaköy village, formerly a PKK supporter, owned a Mercedes, a Toyota, and a Toros. The area was mountainous indeed. But suddenly you would see orchards as surprising as an oasis in a desert. Short trees, cold springs . . .

You catch lice. There is a notorious ground louse there and it destroys you during the winter. It nests in certain parts of your sweater and remains there. It is funny, during winter, it is like dead. It does not move. But when it gets warm, it starts to suck your blood. I have seen soldiers who would scratch their backs with the barrels of their guns. I used to take a shower at least once every two days in my civilian life, but there I could not bathe for four months. You might be ambushed any moment, even during daytime. We stayed in tents. Sometimes we stood in our ambush posts for 24 hours. Then we came down to the camp, slept a little and got up for guard duty; came back at noon and went to bed again. In order to take a shower, you must sacrifice your sleep. I was fed up with drinking lentil soup and eating biscuits twice a day. I cannot drink lentil soup anymore. I received mail every two weeks. I could use the phone only once during my whole stay. The state agencies work hard indeed. They used to build up power lines and they would be cut off by the PKK. They sought to discredit the government.

After four months, we returned to the West since we were only a backup unit. This meant that we started guarding the garages. At that time, everybody in the unit preferred to be in the East. In the West, you feel useless. Your meals are regular. Night guard duty lasts only two hours. It is not even worth getting out of bed. You stroll a bit, chat a bit, and the duty is over. We were then supposed to be deployed to Karaburun on the Aegean Sea coast due to the crisis with Greece. If needed there was armed conflict, we would be transported as airborne troops to the Greek islands. However, these plans coincided with the massive cross-border Steel Operation in Northern Iraq and we were resent to the East. On March 2, 1995, as we were being deployed to our regiment, our bus went over a mine in front of the Ballı Gendarmerie Station.

Without legs, others recognize you as belonging to an inferior physical category. There have been times that I have yearned for death. When you die, your problems go away. I have accepted people's reactions, but they cannot accept my situation. They cannot take it as normally as I do. Among disabled veterans, we tease the people around us. Before going into military service, I knew a guy from my neighborhood who had lost his legs during military service. We were not that close to each other. He used to go to the park early in the morning. At that time, I lacked the courage to talk to him. How could I go to someone who has lost his leg and ask, "Hi, how are you?" After I was injured he came to me. Now we were equal. Generally I take a taxi when I go out. The drivers, since I am young,

curiously ask if I have been injured in a traffic accident. In fact, they guess the truth, but they don't want to mention it. Once, I got into a taxi in Ankara. We placed the wheelchair in the trunk. He asks, "Where?" I say, "To GATA" . . . I tell my story. He says, "I would not be a beggar, if I were in your place." My God what is he saying? The media has been useless in informing people about our situation. I personally appeared on TV to call for aid for those injured in the cross-border operation. Five times . . . When they come to GATA they say, "We love you, and so on" . . . All lies. In the end, you are all alone.

I certainly am not a fascist, but now and then I have come to understand such people who believe in force. In a way you need it, O.K.? In this country things are generally dealt with like this, in a mean way. I really love this land, I have always loved it, yet, I have finally concluded that I cannot live here anymore. If I could afford it, I would not live in Turkey, believe me. There are times when even breathing in this land becomes painful. People are dying every day. Others are robbing the rest of the people. Pardon me, but most of the public is such assholes. If the realities of this war were revealed once . . . Not only Kurds and Turks, all citizens of this country are robbed. Around 80 billion dollars is said to have been spent on this war. Imagine how many universities could have been built with that much money. They say, "The state does nothing (for the Kurds) . . ." You bastards, you have elected scores of representatives, some have become ministers. Turkey has even had a Kurdish president. Aren't these the same people who prevent public investment in the Eastern provinces? The soldiers are blamed for this and that. O.K., there are many fascists among the Special Team, but most of the army officers are real gentlemen. . . . Those who call themselves intellectuals accuse such and such parties for being fascists. But for me HADEP [pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party] is fascist, too. Take Turkish nationalism, take Kurdish nationalism . . . all the same! It makes no difference. Instead of loving each other we are making war. We have been living together for thousands of years. We are no different from one another. Look, my mother is of Pomak origin and my father is Albanian. We have been living in Izmir's Bornova district for eighty-five to ninety years.

This war will come to an end of course. But much more blood will be spilled. It needs ten or fifteen more years to end it. I believe, the PKK will continue in a different type of organization. With Şemdin Sakik's arrest [former PKK commander], at least 75 percent of the organization will collapse. Turkey has learnt this business better than many other countries. We have officers with superb training. They have become toughened in war. They stay on duty in the same region for many years and suffer so much pain that they become as hard as a rock. If the war had ended, this would mean additional financial resources for the economy. There are plenty of natural resources in the region, mines, and

even oil. If the landmines can be cleared, the area would quickly flourish as a winter resort or a trekking center. It is also suitable for rafting. I love this region. I feel myself no different than a native Şırnak inhabitant. I have left a part of myself there. We have received something from them and we have given something in turn. They (Kurds) will of course protect their culture, and they should do so, just as we are protecting our own. I am not against Kurds as such. I respect their culture and language. But there should be one official language for public communication. I am really interested in the Kurdish language. I tried to learn it but was unsuccessful. It is a little bit more complicated language than ours.

After all that I have seen, I am against considering the region particularly as a Kurdish land. Why? Because there is no standard Kurdish type. I would simply laugh at anyone who would claim himself as a pure-bred Kurd. Those from the Mardin province are totally different from those from Diyarbakır. The region was invaded by Turks in 1071. That makes it almost 1,000 years. You cannot deny that history. Turkey is like a double-edged sword. It's hard to live here and equally hard to leave it. Our country is really beautiful, I really love it. If we can solve certain problems, it will be great. Scores of ethnic cultures live here. Some speak the Laz language, some speak Kurdish, some speak Zaza. My mother, for instance, speaks Bulgarian.

I believe that war is wrong. "An address is inscribed on every bullet," they say in the military. I would like to prevent myself from being a target. Even if I am to die, it should have a sound reason. It is better to die fighting than to die accidentally. When you are fighting, you can die, but you also kill. Or, better, nobody should die. Neither you nor the other side should fire any shots. People will be exhausted after a while. That is how this fighting will come to an end. Nobody wants war, neither Turks, nor Kurds. . . . Who wins? Well, there are those who win. For instance, you have to buy a lot of weapons. One combat plane costs 30 million USD. U.S.-made hand grenades, Germany-made rifle bomb . . . War means money. At the time, it cost 30 million TL for a helicopter to take off. Why this war? It is meaningless. People are hurt. Most of the soldiers have nothing to do with the war. They go into military service straight from their turner shops, construction sites. Those on the mountains are devoted to their cause. They all die and then comes revenge and hate. This will accumulate to explode in the future, to yield more death and pain. Here in the Western part of the country, no one cares unless they themselves are hurt. They don't see us, they don't hear us. At one point, the media was exaggerating the war, reports were being flooded on the "Southeast Syndrome" and so on. . . . In reality, it is not that bad. The people preserve good traditions. Though it isn't like it used to be ten years ago, people love each other, respect each other. Nobody cares about heroism. War is not just. When I compare the war veterans here with those from

the Korean War, I see that most of those who returned from Korea were not normal. They too had lost their lives and were injured in a meaningless war. When we were there, we had faith that someone or something was protecting us. We anxiously waited for the letters of our loved ones to arrive. We took out the powder from our bullets and inscribed our remaining days or our names on paper.

Back home, they did not even allow me to marry my girlfriend. I had done nothing bad. I had not robbed the public treasury. I had not raped a woman. I had not stolen. What happened to me was not my choice. But the guy's legs are lost and his fiancée leaves him. In many places, we are treated as second-class citizens. I want to live different things. It might sound silly but I want to fool around with women. I want to live, try my chance. Yet you are injured and . . . I was indeed a very active person. I had a lot of girlfriends. I used to flirt with several girls at the same time. I was really curious about my future sexual life while I was staying in the hospital. This is indeed very important for a man. A woman might lose her fertility but this is not much of a problem for her. But when a man loses his fertility, this is his end. You are worth nothing. You are physically incapable plus you are impotent. There are people who have lost, pardon me, their penises. They were replaced by transplants. But you cannot give him back his self-confidence. His mind will always be stuck at that: "Will I be able to satisfy my partner?" I have had these fears as well. You feel incomplete. I had plenty of girlfriends after I came back. The bad side is that when you are physically inactive because of your condition, you have an increased sexual desire. For most men, the problem is early ejaculation while for those like me, the problem is late ejaculation. This can be difficult; you can tire your partner terribly.

Before military service, I was a calm person, I did not enjoy fighting. But now I easily get mad. This might be what they call the "Vietnam Syndrome." I can hardly control myself. I feel that I can beat anyone. That's partly a joke, of course. . . . But sometimes I feel I could shoot someone. Now I experience everything with greater intensity and easily become aggressive. Yesterday a very bad thing happened. I regret it. My mother is in hospital, she has undergone a surgery. I was at home with my sister, her children, and my brother. By the way, my parents are about to divorce. Problems have piled up and I am quite demoralized. Yesterday, I got a bit angry with my brother and pulled his fingers. I had no bad intentions, I just pulled, but his fingers came out. I could not sleep all night. I was deeply affected. I asked myself why and how I did this. I was really sorry and could not forgive myself. He will go see a doctor today. This somehow happened because of my father. He has great influence on my brother. I want him to continue his education. He might be excused from military service

because of my condition. I cannot decide if this would be good or bad. Somehow I feel that “one soldier is enough for one family.” Yet, there is always a difference between those who have done their military service and those who have not. It is up to him. But if he decides to go, I would like him serve in a nearby post. The best thing is that we have this right. One disabled, one hero, is enough for the family. I am always making fun of this hero business.

My first hospital stay lasted three-and-a-half months. Then I was released for three months. The second time, they were going to implant artificial legs. But I am claustrophobic and indeed the hospital is very much like a prison, though they treat us very nicely. Relieving myself from the hospital was a wonderful feeling. It was really difficult, you know! I underwent five surgery operations but all in all they made seven or eight operations on my body. They cut one part from one side, patched it to the other. They chopped up a piece of my flesh from one place and transplanted it to another part. I became surgery-phobic, afraid of dying on the surgery bed. In the last operation I suddenly jumped out of bed as they were preparing for narcosis. I was slapped on my face a couple times and I fainted. And then I became really scared of surgery. You have to face different kinds of fears. They did these injections on my spine. I was afraid of becoming disabled. I already am, I don't need anything else. Many fears to face . . . I overcame most of them. What I fear most now is being a failure. Therefore I do not attempt anything. One more thing that is different between my premilitary service days and now is that I now like guns. But guns are not good for excited people like me. It is easy to do something wrong.

I am not defending the present order. I would call myself an “anarchist” but I believe in Islam too. But if claimed that I was a “devoted Muslim,” it would be a sin. Something in between the two . . . I cannot find any justification to the war, O.K.? We kill each other. But why? Why does he shoot me? Their living conditions are so horrible. . . . Among the PKK, five men sleep with one woman fighter. If she gets pregnant, she is executed. I am even older than they are. Many of them are so young. Under such conditions, let alone fighting, even living is impossible.

I cannot sleep regularly. During the night, I wake up to stand guard or to go to an ambush post. I watch TV or play computer games. During the day, I spend time in the coffeehouse and chat with friends. In the military I was very proud of two things: First, when the military band came for banner hauling and hoisting ceremonies on Mondays and Fridays, I felt that I was a soldier. And then, I liked giving candies to the children. On the way back from road searches, children would come to us shouting, “Soldier, soldier.” I used to pat their heads and give them candies.

I am so different from my premilitary days; everything is different: friends, my relations with my family and my work. . . . You see, life is like a knife. It has two edges, but you see the sharp edge, it is directed at you. You are forced to change your previous life, to kill your hopes. The most difficult war is the one you have with nature and with yourself; fighting against the rain, snow, heat, and cold. I most hated rain there. You are also at war with the first lieutenant and with the team commander. The three of us were troublemakers. The team commander used to beat us when he got the chance. Facing yourself! And remaining all perplexed. Not being able to find a justification for the war . . . I used to ask myself, "Is this another planet?" Everything is so close and so distant at the same time; everything is so real and yet so masked. Extremely absurd. Have I killed anyone? I don't know. I don't think so. But maybe I have killed. I don't reflect much on this. But I don't believe that I could kill somebody now. It sounds so cruel. Everybody has the right to live. The only exception is that you might be in a position that you should kill or die, this is something else. For me a real hero is Hazreti Ömer [one of the four disciples of prophet Mohammed]; he was such an honest man. Since we have not consciously fought for a cause it would be absurd to name us "ghazi" [veteran]. Real victory is life itself. Seeing dawn is victory. You have survived another night. Now for me the greatest danger is life itself, in the military it was survival. My favorite weapon is G3, and it is also the weapon I hate the most when it is in the enemy's hands. Making war and killing others is not right. I feel sorry for the soldiers killed in combat. Ours are killed, theirs are killed. Finally all who are killed are citizens of this country. What I fear the most is the formation of a popular reaction. (April 1998, Izmir)

*Born 1974 in Izmir and a primary school graduate, he is the son of a tailor. His mother is a housewife. He is number five among six children. Has four sisters and one brother. His brother, the youngest of the family is about to go into military service. He was in the army between May 1994 and March 1995. Had his training in Manisa, Batıkışla training center and fought as an infantry commando in Diyarbakır. He walks with sticks. Loves Bukowski for his naturalism. He also enjoys reading Charles Dickens, Jack London, and Dostoyevsky, like many other veterans, because they write on human sufferings. He believes he would not be as attached to life as he is now, had he not identified himself with the character Pavel Korchagin from *And the Steel Hardened* by the Russian writer Ostrovsky. His favorite songs are "One" from Metallica, and "I have an excuse, I am nervous" from the Turkish group Mazhar-Fuat-Özkan. Formerly a clerk in a bookstore, he has been unemployed since his return from the front in 1995.*

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I, TOO, LIVED THAT FESTIVE DAY

Our tank worked at it until dawn. In the morning, our commander came from Silopi together with the Special Operations Team and said, "I hope there are dead bodies, otherwise we shall become a laughing-stock to the gendarmerie." Human being, animal, pig, or mule. As long as it is a living thing . . .

One cannot forget the entrance to the Etimesgut Garrison [in Ankara]. As I got in, I said, "Now everything is coming to an end." When "Cizre-Şırnak" was announced for me after the lots were drawn, I was naturally shaken up. I was going to the East for the first time. I went home for a short vacation and I told my family that I was going somewhere on the sea shore. They were happy. But when my older brother read the letter of appointment, everybody was shocked. . . . Being afraid of a terrorist attack on the bus, I bought my ticket from Tatlıses Tourism. They don't attack Tatlıses buses. I mean we hadn't heard of any attacks on their buses. The meeting point was Urfa. A day after, the military transported us to Mardin. Because it was night when we reached Mardin, we spent the night there. We traveled only during daytime. We arrived in Cizre at noon the next day. Cizre is a bowl-shaped town. There were bullet holes on the walls of the buildings. The whole town had been plundered and ruined. There were no gas station open. I was expecting to see something better, not this. A captain met us and tried to encourage us by saying, "You shouldn't be afraid, this is the Paris of the East." Cizre could be seen with the bird's-eye view from our battalion. The radio transmission center was opposite our battalion and below were the police compounds. There were continuous shootings between the transmission center and the police compounds. As we watched the traceable bullets flying in the air, we wondered if we would be attacked as well. There was fear.

I stayed at the Cizre Tank Battalion for fifteen to twenty days and then, the commander sent me to the Idil Infantry Battalion. While going to Idil by truck, we saw a civilian truck, lying on its side, closing the road. To tell you the truth, I felt frightened despite the fact that we all had guns. Was it an ambush? We pulled

back behind a rock. The commander asked the driver of the truck to pull it off the road, but the driver said, "How can I pull it? I have no tractor or tow truck." We helped him pull the truck off the road. That is how my Idil adventure began.

Being an armored division, we were responsible for the safety of the Infantry Battalion. We were on duty from 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. in the only tank there. We had a one-hour break in between. We were sleeping during the day. And there was no morning roll call. . . . The building walls in Idil were full of bullet holes, like in Cizre. Shopping was done with Dollars and Mark. Because I was fond of guns, I wanted to buy a pistol for a reasonable price. I was in a shop with a friend who wanted to buy a present for his girlfriend and I said, "If you can't find a suitable present for her, buy her a gun." The shopkeeper asked, "Do you need a gun?" and pulled off a piece of cloth. Two Kalashnikovs. Brand new.

They had not even been unpacked. "The last price is 4.5 million TL," he said. My salary was 3,750,000 TL. We had saved some money and it was with us. But how shall we take them out? Big Kalashnikov! 4.5 million TL. What shall we do if there is a search on our way back? If it were a simple gun, it would be O.K., but Guns are sold in the region like bread and cheese. I don't want to talk badly about the people of the region, there were good ones and there were bad ones. When you go downtown, they welcome you, patting you on your back but you can't know what is in their minds. There was lack of trust. Naturally, the bullet is in the barrel when you go downtown. There is fear. To be honest, I didn't feel at ease with the people of the region . . .

In time, we gained experience, we understood what our duty was. I returned to the Cizre Tank Battalion after five-and-a-half months, and after a couple of days later, the commander sent me home for a vacation. So, I was with my family during the *bayram* [Muslim religious holiday]. I didn't want to go back. Leaving civilian life for the military But I had to. When I went back there, I was sent to Silopi, a small town in the opposite direction of Idil. I was getting close to the Habur Gate [the main gate between Turkey and Iraq]. I was deployed in the Silopi Botaş Station. The spring was around the corner. Out of five tanks in front of the station, two tanks belonged to our company. Our duty there was also night duty. I was the filler, responsible for the bullets and the missiles. One tank was always parked at the station for security reasons. Two tanks were sent to the police compounds and two tanks, including ours, were stationed on the Nevçüş Hill. The Nevçüş Hill was right by the Tigris river, 50–60 meters away from the Syrian side of the river. We could see the Syrian villages, lights, working people. Someone had jumped into the river at that spot, so we were placed there. I worked there for three-and-a-half months. We spent two days of the week at Nevçüş Hill and the remaining five days at the burnt Yılık Gas Station on the side of the road. There were trucks carrying gas from

Iraq. We could listen to the terrorists' conversations over the wireless. I couldn't understand because they were talking in Kurdish. One day, our second lieutenant said, "Let me talk to them in German. Let's see if they know German." The answer came in German. Our second lieutenant said, "They even know German." We were watching them with thermal binoculars, just as they watched us. We couldn't see them but they could see us. They even threatened us over the wireless, "We will lynch those tank soldiers in front of the truck drivers." When we heard these threats, we were scared. But we would send a warning shot every night, like a harassment shot, toward Cudi Mountain and the Syrian hills. During the last month of our stay there, we were called to stand by the Silopi water depository. There were two teams laying in ambush, blockading the water depository. The Kayseri Air-borne Team had come to the Cudi Mountain, a few miles away. We could see with naked eyes the traceable bullets they used; we could hear the rockets exploding. One night, around 2 a.m., something came into sight. They were walking in a line, like soldiers—about ten to fifteen in number. We called our second lieutenant who said, "They could be terrorists, mules, or pigs." We informed our commander in Silopi over the wireless. He contacted Cizre. From Cizre, we was advised to give a "grand" response. That meant tank artillery. I filled the tank cannon. I placed the shell in the barrel and opened the safety latch. The marksman zoomed on the target and locked it. Our tank commander pressed the button and fired. With the thermal, we could see the projectile move toward the target. It was about 45–50 cm long and weighed 23 kilos. It hit the target, something big and whitish dispersed into the air. Thermal camera shows nature in black and living creatures in white color, or vice versa. We fired twelve cannonballs. Our second lieutenant was even more inexperienced than we were. Our tank worked at it until dawn. In the morning, our commander came from Silopi, together with the Special Operation Team and said, "I hope there are dead bodies, otherwise we shall become a laughing-stock to the gendarmerie." Human being, animal, pig, or mule. As long as it is a living thing . . . The Special Operation Team went down the hill. We were anxiously waiting with our second lieutenant. If we didn't hit anything, we could be punished. The price of a projectile was 30 million TL at that time. That night, we generated a cost of 350–400 million TL to our state, to our military. What we had hit were mules. Eight or nine of them had died. It was better than hitting human beings. Actually, we wanted them to be terrorists, but . . . There were four months left of my service. When the commander said that he will send me on leave again, I didn't want to go, but I had to. That's the way things work in the East. I came home again.

It was Idil again on my return. . . . This time I was sent to the station near the Sulak Village on the cliff of the Gabar Mountain. On the day I spent at the Idil

Gendarmerie, a group of discharged soldiers from the Findık Battalion were there. They were happy like newborns, celebrating in civilian clothes. “Will I see that day?” I wondered. At that moment, I wanted to live that happiness. I didn’t know whether the Sulak Station was dangerous or not. When I reached my unit, a soldier showed me a bunk bed to sleep in. The soldiers pay attention to cleanliness but it is impossible to ask for cleanliness when on duty. Everybody was going to bed and I did, too. I opened the blanket, the white sheet was full of lice. Lice there were not like the lice here. It was earth lice, they looked like ants. The sheet was not like a sheet at all. Well, I pushed the lice to a corner and lay down. They said the station wasn’t dangerous. We would get into the tank at 5 p.m. and until 5 a.m., we would chat and listen to music. What would you talk about when in the army? Of course, about girls . . . About the East, we would say, “I can’t wait to get it over with and go back home safely.” In other words, we didn’t even want to mention the East. And there were things we would regret not having done while we were civilians. I had a sweetheart, my fifteen months would not have passed without her support. After my military service, we had to break up. You have to have a sweetheart. Your morale boosts up when you receive a phone call. Finally, I got my discharge from the tank battalion. I immediately remembered those celebrating their discharge from the Findık Battalion in Idil. So, I was to live the same joy. I, too, lived that day of festivity. I put on civilian clothes. I said my good-byes and left the battalion. Tears started coming down my eyes. I hadn’t cried in the military. I did cry upon leaving my battalion.

I couldn’t sleep during the early days of my return. In the military, days were night and nights were day for me. When I came back, I said, “I want to sleep uninterruptedly for a couple of days.” The first ten to fifteen days, you can’t orient yourself. Here you are free in a way. I would be wide awake some nights. Previously, I would go to sleep like a donkey and wake up like a donkey, I beg your pardon. Now, I awake at the slightest noise—opening of a door, a tinkle. I am very sensitive to sounds. I did not use to be like that. My knees still ache from rheumatic fever. We were sitting in the same position in the cold tank for twelve hours. It was very cold there. I still don’t like nighttimes. I like the day but I don’t want night to fall. Military changes you. Before the military, I would harass a girl on the street. For instance, I would say, “Hi, how are you?” Now I can’t do it. I want to, but my voice doesn’t come out. Military causes you to slow down; it makes you more mature. Recently a military service friend from Istanbul came to visit me. He now sets sound systems for musicians. Apparently, musician Mustafa Keser was going to give a concert at the Idil Infantry Battalion and he was asked to take care of the sound system. He said that he refused to go. I said, “You had a chance to see it again, why didn’t you go? Didn’t you miss it?”

He said that he didn't feel like going there again. I don't like the places where I did my service, but I miss them. It is like a love-and-hate situation. I have missed the places I stood guard, tables at which we drank tea with friends, the dining hall, I have even missed the tanks. When a tank appears on TV, I get excited. "It is my tank" I say. I still remember the accessories on the tank, I can cite them all. I get all excited. I am sentimental as well as nervous. A mother and a soldier were reuniting on the "*Mehmetçik*" TV program. I cried myself out as I watched them.

The system has to change. I want all the existing political parties to close down and new parties to be established. I am twenty-four years old and all my life I have seen Demirel on TV. Let him go so that we see new faces. Only the military can put an end to what is going on in the East. Are the people there out of their minds? Are they crazy? What are they trying to do? Why wouldn't you stay at your homes, drink your soup beside a stove in winter time, and brew your tea? When there is such comfort, what are you doing in the mountains in the cold, full of lice and fleas? I see going to the mountains [i.e. joining the PKK] as a futile act. . . . The rich there are very rich. . . . Agha, the head of the tribe, has the latest cars, five to six armed bodyguards. You cannot interrogate him. He comes to the commander of the station. We have no idea what they talk about. He gets information, he gives information. I want this tribal system to come to an end. One leader controls five to ten villages. State inside a state, isn't that so? I don't like the people of that region; Kurds irritate me . . . I look forward to a Kurd in my hometown to do something wrong so that I can beat him up nicely. In our region here, the Serik Incident happened in the 1990s. There was a saying, "A dog can come to Serik, but a Kurd cannot." I was a child then. Serik's people are different. When Serik is mentioned, people make a pause. I am a Yörük [a nomad group living mostly in Southern Turkey]. I can accept people from seventy-seven nationalities except the Kurds. Ultimately, these Kurds will get a hold of Turkey. There is birth control, families in the West have two or three children. As you go to the East, women give birth to eleven or twelve children. Pity to these women, pity to Turkey . . .

We plant tomatoes, cucumbers, cotton, cereals, and wheat. We work twelve months a year. The result is a dirty-collared shirt. But I am happy and proud. Why am I proud? I work but I don't have money. Why? We can't make ourselves heard. We read one or two newspapers. . . . In the evening, we watch the news on TV, and some movies. In other words, we are aware of what goes on, of Turkey's agenda. I really wanted to do my military service in the East, and I did it there . . . I don't want anybody to die. Deaths should not happen. All regions of Turkey are alike, they are all ours; East and West. . . . But the fear of the terrorists should be overcome, the noses of the mosquitoes should be cut.

The rain storm has drenched all the plains
Everybody at home, only we are in the mountains
The wet dress has wrapped my body
How can you not revolt to a winter night.

The word "shoot" came out of my mouth
Guns started to fire at the first sound
We fought for hours forgetting the cold
How can you not revolt to a winter night.

Ah! Friends, what kind of enemies do we have?
They turned to target dummy three of our friends
And they hadn't slept in bridal bed yet
How can you not revolt to a winter night.

This poem was written by a friend in the Southeast. I can't forget it, and I don't want to forget it. (November 1998, Serik, Antalya)

Born in Serik, Antalya in 1974, he left high school after the second year. He is a farmer. He started his military service in August 1994 at Etimesgut Armored Division. In November, he was deployed to Urfa. He is the youngest of three brothers and two sisters. He is single and says, "I am looking for a girl."

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YOU CAN'T FINISH YOUR MILITARY SERVICE BY RUNNING AWAY FROM IT; YOU HAVE TO GO THROUGH IT

During the training, they say, "Come and do it properly so that you don't go home in the cargo section of the airplane but in the passenger seat; let the stewardess serve you." Information about the martyrs is usually archived—How did it happen? What caused his death? and so on. We got this information in Kurtalan as well: Most of the soldiers are martyred not in combat, but at their posts, when asleep . . .

The first day I went there, three of us slept in one bed. When I look back, I recall thinking, "Can one go through 548 days?" It was just the second day. . . . The marches we sang during walking, running, going to the dining hall were all heroic folksongs. When you spend two to three sleepless days and stay in the cold, you ask yourself, "Why do I stay sleepless? Why do I lead a miserable life?" And your answer is, "Because of those mean terrorists." That's how you are prepared for the experience. Those who say that they didn't try to find a high-ranking officer to interfere with the lots and prevent being sent to the East, are lying. I found a high-ranking officer who said that I have a 90 percent chance of being sent to Ankara and 60 percent to Samsun. I was laughing while marches were being sung. As the others were singing, "We will shoot, we will cut, we are coming / We will not leave stone on stone, head on shoulder," I was saying, "You go and do all these things, I will be in Ankara or Samsun anyway." If 9,000 soldiers were drawing lots, at least 8,500 of them go to the East. During the training, they say, "Come and do it properly so that you don't go home in the cargo section of the airplane but in the passenger seat; let the stewardess serve you." Information about the martyrs is usually archived—How did it happen? What caused his death? and so on. We got this information in Kurtalan as well: Most of the soldiers are martyred not in combat, but at their posts, when asleep. . . . We didn't have much of training with guns. I used about twenty-five to thirty bullets during basic training.

When they drew the lot, they said, “Siirt.” Where is Siirt? Both my mother and my father were worried. I went to Siirt and they sent me to the small town Kurtalan to be in charge of the infirmary. I was a plain gendarmerie soldier, I had no medical rank. I knew how to give injection, to measure blood pressure, and to give serum, which was an advantage. In fact, there was no infirmary at the gendarmerie. I would give a list of ill soldiers to the second lieutenant on duty just before the gathering at noon. Together with the sick soldiers, I would go to the commando unit for medical examination, would obtain the medicine from the local drugstore, and come back to our unit. I had a cupboard and something like a bed in the room of the station commander’s deputy. I would give serum to the soldier in his own bed. Soldiers lacked sleep. If their health condition is not at its best, they are prone to all sorts of illnesses. I also took part in protecting the Kurtalan Express train from attacks. Once the spring operations began, soldiers had little sleep from February to March till the end of August. We would sleep only for four hours per day.

The first time I got scared was during the *Nevruz*. I was appointed to the Kurtalan post. Fires were lit. Experienced soldiers said that if we would live through it alive, nothing would happen then on. My first guard duty was on the night of *Nevruz*. It was also the first time I was standing guard with full, ready-to-fire gun. It started at 6 p.m. and would end at 9 p.m. Instead of sending us back to the unit at the end of our shift, they added one soldier every three hours. And then, ambush team joined us at night. We were relieved of guard duty only at 5 a.m. There was an experienced sergeant whom we called “Betereci” and who had lost his whole team in 1988 or 1989. He loved the soldiers very much. He wouldn’t report those who fell asleep during guard duty, but would say, “Come on lion, wake up” and give him sunflower seeds to eat and stay awake. He was soothing us, relaxing us, and when we relaxed too much, he would say, “Don’t get too relaxed.” It is weird, during military service, you don’t think about death. You only think of the morning. My wife, who at the time was my fiancée, kept me intact. After *Nevruz*, operations began. When they received information about a possible attack, we would go to our posts and watch the traceable bullets from afar. To tell you the truth, I wasn’t involved in any serious combat.

I went as a private, but in a couple of month’s time, they liked me and made me a corporal. During the last couple of months of my service, as a corporal, I had such tasks as waking up the soldiers for guard duty, checking the guard posts. When a soldier is awakened, he can stay awake for fifteen minutes, but you can’t be sure of the sixteenth minute. Wearing fur was forbidden on critical days because it invites sleep. You will wear a light dress, feel cold, and run to warm up. There were three to four former village guards doing their military

service in their own terrain. I would tell them that I wouldn't go with them to lay an ambush. I said, "I don't trust you." And they would answer, "We, too, are children of this country."

Our unit was lucky not to have suffered any martyrs. One day, the village was raided. The *muhtar* informed us of the attack and three to four soldiers from the Special Team went to the village. Nothing happened that day. The next day, the village was raided again and a villager was shot dead. The *muhtar's* wife who saw her son being killed, shot the PKK, killed him, and stuck a stake into his head. Our doctor pulled off the stake with the help of the soldiers, stuck cotton into the hole, and buried the dead. After 150 days of my service, I started to count down. Every day, I would draw a cross on the calendar inside the door of my cupboard.

The soldier shoots because his commander orders him to shoot. I was twenty-two years old, I paid my debt to my country, completed my service and came back home. It was close to my completion date. I hadn't participated in village search until that day, so I volunteered to take part in one such mission. There is a check point on the road to Kurtalan, just at the junction. A list of suspects is distributed to the units, suspected cars are stopped, and are made to wait for about 15 minutes. The suspects are taken out of the car and the car is taken into custody. I was assigned to guard the team responsible for taking over the suspects. To check IDs is a formality. There are usually three to four people on the Wanted list. Soldiers memorize these names. One day when I was on duty at the gate, a man approached and asked my help. . . . Because the gendarmerie was right opposite our station, villagers coming for green cards [free health insurance for the poor], ID procedures approvals, and so on would ask us for direction or for help. I helped that man. Few days later, the same man was brought in as a suspect for assisting the PKK. Those caught with a Kalashnikov were directly associated with the PKK. Such people are immediately transported to Siirt, their eyes blindfolded. After that incident, I came to believe that we were being watched by the PKK. Old people would come and ask for help, we would say, "O.K. uncle" and would abide to the request, but in a few days, they would come back as suspects. Actually it isn't known if they are guilty or not. It is all based on complaints coming from the village.

Most of the soldiers are martyred not in combat but at their posts, when asleep. Many people are disabled by PKK mines, but not all. If ten people are mutilated, maybe one or two of them have stepped on mines placed by the military. When mines are placed, a map should be drawn showing the locations of the mines. Station commanders are replaced every two years. If mines are not relocated during that period and if the former commander hadn't drawn a map, the mines stay there. If someone happens to step on such mines . . . If I was to

go into military service again, I would want to go to the East. Sharing is very different in the East.

Soldiers are supposed to watch the outside of the post but they actually watch the inside. Why? If someone approaches from the outside, either he will kill me or I will kill him. Someone approaching from the inside, that is an officer, couldn't kill me and I couldn't kill him. Rather, he would give me a punishment and lengthen my service. There is grudge against the ranked officers because they punish. If the officer doesn't punish, he beats the soldier or insults and humiliates him.

Those who say that they haven't been beaten in the military, are lying. I have been beaten both during my basic training and later on, both individually and as part of a group. During the first days in service, both the beating and the humiliation were very upsetting, I couldn't have tolerated it in my civilian life at all. I think of my eighteen months in the service as not being lived. If you haven't tied your boots properly, you are beaten. If your bed is undone, everybody has their hands ready for the beating. The officer pulls off the hand-mounting part of the rifle and uses it to hit the inside of everybody's hands. You can't fight with the ranked officer, you have to do whatever he says. Fighting nature . . . the best fight we had was our fight against scorpions. During the summer, it is said, "Don't sleep, PKK will come; don't sleep scorpions will bite." We had a "scorpion fighting team." Several of us would search for scorpions. The scorpions of the East don't make you ill, they kill you. You have to do something in eight to ten seconds. During night watch, if we searched outside of the post for ten minutes, we searched inside and around the post for two to three minutes for scorpions and other insects.

When something unpleasant or upsetting happens, you ask yourself, "What am I doing here? This isn't the place for me to be." But you have to comply with the conditions there. You can't finish your military service by running away from it; you have to go through it. That's how you brainwash yourself.

Now when I think about my military service, the first thing that comes to my mind is my entry into the basic training unit. I went in and when I turned back, I couldn't see my father. The second thing I remember is my first post being on the night of *Nevruz*. The best day is the day of discharge. You take out your civilian clothes and iron them. The service ends at midnight, but there is no discharge at night. After midnight, you bathe, shave, sit up until the morning. You don't sleep. About twenty-five to thirty soldiers ask you to write something in their "Memory Books." You spend the night writing them. It is over when you pass the gate. I went to Ankara from Batman by airplane. There, I took a bus to Samsun. When we made a stop in Tonya, I lit up a cigarette. It wasn't

forbidden to smoke in buses at that time. Then I saw my younger brother outside, laughing and jumping. My family had come all the way to Tonya to meet me. I couldn't smoke my cigarette.

For two to three months, I had an adjustment problem. Preparations for marriage started as soon as I came home. I was having trouble sleeping; I was restless. Military left an anxiety in me. I started reading more. I follow what happens where. Some traces definitely stay with you. I mean, a part of you is still there. You remember incidents on every occasion. Media both exaggerate and underestimate. We are informed of nine or ten martyrs and the TV announces only three martyrs. If there are four deaths on the other side (PKK), it is fourteen or twenty-four in the media. Number of deaths among soldiers is underreported and deaths among the other side are exaggerated.

I was an edgy guy before military service. If I wanted something, I had to have it—no objection. Now it is just the opposite. I mean if my personality or my family are insulted, I definitely interfere. Aside from that, I don't make uproar for small things, I am more composed. Did military make me more mature? I don't know. Life was always precious to me; it is so to everybody. Our country is where we live, where we share whatever happens, together or alone. Military service is everybody's duty to our country but Why do we go into the service? You can't start your business or find a job or get married before you complete your military service. You can't do anything. If it were for the love of country, I would have gone to the service at the age of twenty, and not at twenty-three.

First of all, OHAL [Emergency Rule Legislation] should gradually be abolished. Even we were afraid of the Special Team when we were in the military. They all were Rambo-like men, bandanas around their heads, acting like warriors and not like a police force. Civilians were afraid of them. Actually, the solution to the problem lies on the shoulders of the local people but their power is limited. The people living in the region bear all the trouble and the agony. The war where guns talk may end one day. The people in the region fight other wars: poverty, unemployment. . . . These people should be informed, enlightened. I mean, it should be shown to these people that PKK is not the only solution to their problems. It can't be stopped by shooting. If these people live by their own culture, why would they submit to our culture? Of course, they can live by their own culture there. (July 1998, Samsun)

Born in 1972 in Samsun, he is a high school graduate, working in the textile industry. He has two sisters. His father is a dental technician, his mother a retired worker. He completed his basic training at the Birecik Gendarmerie and was deployed in Kurtalan, Siirt between November 1994 and January 1996.

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TURKEY'S BALANCES ARE DISTURBED

One day as I was riding my bike, there was a sudden spark of light and I threw myself straight on the ground. I had mistaken the thunder as the bang of a gun. People around were laughing at me. I stood up and started laughing at myself.

Having been discharged, I came back home. I felt as if I was in a big vacuum. I had problems sleeping. During military service, half an hour of sleep on the rocks was even sweeter than a 24-hour sleep in a bed. I longed for such a sleep, such a life. I felt uneasy in a normal bed, therefore I started sleeping on the floor. It went on like this for one-and-a-half years. Back in my hometown, when I stepped out of the bus, I took everyone around to be a terrorist. The civilians I met in the Southeast were either terrorists or their supporters. Of course, there are plenty of good people among them. But you never see them, you never go downtown. You are up on the mountains. Once every two to three months you come down, go out and your leave is over by the time you finish your soup in the restaurant. Once again you return to the mountains. Every day, you are engaged in a clash. A terrible, miserable life. Daily, hourly you are faced with death. And once you survive this and come here to join living, normal people, you still see them all as PKK terrorists. They are not, but they seem to be. I feel stupid. I permanently look around as if someone might shoot at me. When I see a mountain, I think to myself, "There is a terrorist there, targeting at us." I go out into the country, there I doubt if a terrorist is hidden behind this or that rock. Sometimes I throw myself on the ground, taking position.

Three months after my discharge, I started working in a new job. One day as I was riding my bike there was a sudden spark of light and I threw myself straight on the ground. I had mistaken the thunder as the bang of a gun. People around were laughing at me. I stood up and started laughing at myself. I sometimes daydream about being at the front, but at nights it is even worse. When I feel slightly depressed, my mind is filled with crazy ideas. I contemplate, "All these people around me are terrorists, I should take my gun and kill them all."

There, it is the end of humanity. You have no relations whatsoever with humanity, pardon me, you are a wild beast. The reason is that you fight in clashes and see dead people on a daily basis. They are killed, they are burnt, they are tortured. You are hungry, you are thirsty. You have to wet your bread in water or break it with a stone to eat it. Water is scarce and, when you find it, it is black. You cover your can with your handkerchief and drink the water through it. No way out, you have to drink it. For four months we did not take a shower. Without bath, without water, excuse my language, we were filthy. With long hair and beard Whoever you encounter in the mountains, you shoot without any hesitation. Until going into military service I had never seen dead people. There I saw every kind of death—tortured, burned bodies, all sorts. Now, I would not care if they slice a man with razor in front of my eyes. I have become like a stone. Some soldiers keep dreaming about these things, but I don't give a damn. But I do dream about my life in the mountains. Last night in my dream I was in a clash, we were fighting, my buddies were falling over me. You know, it is like hunting partridge on the mountains. The partridge will not become extinct when you hunt them, right? Unless you hunt the female partridges so that they cannot reproduce. The same goes for the terrorists. When you hunt their accomplices within the state or their leaders, it is much easier to hunt those on the mountains. Our state has abundant maps of the region. You can easily spot every water spring and guard them with a special team. They could withstand hunger, but they could not withstand thirst. Inevitably they would approach the springs for water. O.K., then shoot them, or poison the water, or do something else. The most important thing is to take their leaders. But those who don't want the terrorist organization finished are nested within the state.

My mother became very sentimental when I came back. I could not recognize my aunt and uncle, I could not recognize my brother. I say, "I do not recognize," and they are perplexed, asking, "How can you not recognize?" It is a very miserable life there—no human rights, no nothing. Today the terrorist goes to the village, and tortures the newborn baby to death. But when they are taken prisoners they are fed by the state. What kind of human right is this, where are the rights of those victims? How is his or her right going to be realized? They don't compensate for these. And deaths cannot be compensated with billions of dollars, either. I have no rights as a human. My right is my weapon. I protect myself with that. The man in charge orders you to go and march on the mountains. If you are killed there, you are the martyr. You protect your own rights.

I vividly remember. I arrived in the small town of Kulp, in the Diyarbakir province, in the evening. We were given arms and then we went to bed.

At 4 a.m. alarm bells rang. You are a junior, you have just arrived at your unit, you know nothing about the territory, but you are sent out for fighting. In this fight, three of my buddies lost their minds. I too lost myself. I have engaged in countless battles. If I got rest one day, I went fighting the other day. I never had to do guard duty. On the mountains you are always on guard. It was a terrible life, but I am still proud of it. Now I have a good job. I earn very well. But if I am called this moment, I would leave everything aside and join the army. I had applied to join the Special Forces Team. But they have conditions: You have to be at least a high school graduate. Silly. What are you going to make out of me? A typist or a computer programmer? You are going to send me to fight in the countryside. If my mind is working fine and if I am experienced you should employ me. Why do you investigate if I am a high school graduate or not? There are even deputies in the parliament who are not high school graduates. Primary school graduates may become deputies in the parliament but a peasant's son cannot join the Special Forces Team to fight for his state because he is simply a primary school graduate. In the Southeast you see no sons of the rich, they are all poor people. Lots of rich boys have been appointed to my unit, but they were sent back the second day. . . . Yes it was a terrible life, but I still miss it. I want to be there. When watching the TV news, I yearn to be among them.

There you fight for your country and your nation. This is the greatest pride for me. Instead of dying here for ordinary reasons, I would rather become a martyr there. In the Southeast, you see no artists, no sons of the rich. I mean, the poor love their motherland more. This love for the motherland is a strange issue indeed. In the TV shows, you hear them crying aloud, "For the country, for the nation." But, for example you see Tarkan [a famous pop-star] inventing new excuses every day to evade military service. Go out on an operation, go and fight, and let's see how much you love the country. The politicians are the ones to make decisions, but they are nothing. It is the military that is doing it all. The heroic armed forces are the ones who are combating terrorism. For instance, why don't the deputies observe the clashes from a helicopter? They go to the mosque with ten bodyguards. Why are you afraid? This is the house of God and God will protect you. Why are you taking your bodyguards with you?

People who have not been there do not believe the things you tell them. They listen to it as if it were a fairy tale. You go and fight for the nation and for the country, but no one cares about you. "You have not fought for me, you have fought for the country," they say. The state, too, does not give a damn. Inequality reigns in this country. Turkey's balances are disturbed, the side of the wealthy weighs more.

I am fighting inside myself. I share these feelings with other veterans who have fought there. Since my boyhood I had yearned to become a commando fighter one day. Whatever I had wished in my heart has come true. I went there, fought, and came back. The basic training in the Manisa, Kırkağaç base was excellent. Military service has taken me to Diyarbakır, Muş, Batman, Siirt, Bingöl, and even to Northern Iraq and back. After being discharged, I visited the region and stayed with my village guard friends. They blame the state for all that is happening. They have land but they cannot sow it. They give bread to the terrorists at nights and to the soldiers during the day. They live in war, they live face-to-face with death. I stayed there for more than a week. In the Southeast, guests are highly valued. It is not like anywhere else. Go there, just say “hello” and you will be welcomed like a sultan, they would not let you go before you have at least a cup of tea, and they would even buy your return ticket if you don’t have money. Here, in the Mediterranean region, let aside serving tea, they would not even respond when you say “hello.”

All Muslims are brothers. A handful of men out of a whole people revolts, joins the PKK to establish the “State of Kurdistan” and all Kurds pay for it. They are discriminated against and denied jobs for being Kurds. Why don’t you invest in the region? Why don’t you extend educational facilities? The children are all illiterate. Before going there, I was not expecting it to be like Alanya; I knew that it was an impoverished region. But I found it to be *really* impoverished. There, you live in nature. You share your sufferings with nature. You have already lost your mind, you speak to yourself all the time. You also fight against nature. For the first time in my life, I saw snow there.

Before going into the military, I was a normal person. I was so shy that they would tease me, “You are a sissy.” I would not drink, I would not smoke, I would not gamble. I returned here after having lost all my ties with humanity. My Turkish has become worse, I have become more conservative. The life there kills everything, kills life itself. In the past I had a girlfriend. But I don’t want one now. I prefer to be by myself, to live alone. If I had to spare time for a girl, I would be further depressed. I felt myself closest to death during a close fight, with less than ten meters between us. At this distance we were fighting with hand-grenades. Our commander was martyred. There were many wounded. You cannot take without giving. Turkish army does not have the kinds of communications equipment those bastards have.

I want equality. I want an end to discrimination, to this Turkism, Kurdism business. People in the Southeast should be educated; jobs should be created for them. The region should develop as much as the Western parts of the country. The nature is so beautiful there. Investments for tourism could be made. The children should go to school. Whoever wants to work should be provided a job.

All should feel themselves as Turkish citizens under the Turkish flag and speak the Turkish language. There should be equality. All should live as equals, and not be discriminated against as Turks or Kurds.

Born 1974, in the Mediterranean town of Alanya [in the Antalya province], he is a primary school graduate. He is the second child among three brothers and three sisters. He is the son of a farmer. He received commando training in the Kırkagaç Training Center in the Manisa province. He is unable to recall the exact time of his service, but estimates it as some time between 1994 and 1995. He works in the tourism industry.

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IF I KNEW AN ALTERNATIVE FOR EVADING MILITARY SERVICE, I WOULD ADVISE THE YOUTH TO TAKE IT

For instance high-quality canned fish is sent to the soldiers by the state. But in the front, it is forbidden for the privates and spared for the officers. What the privates get are no-name canned beans.

I wanted to go to Southeast. I had heard a lot about the war there. I was curious. But on the first day, I cried. Having people cut your hair and the way the senior soldiers or the officers treat you is terrible. In a sense, I was defeated on the first day. We were given G3 rifles and received training for MG3 and other weapons. It was a very hard training for three months. In the evenings, we received antiterrorist combat training. These lessons made me even more curious.

After three months I came to Istanbul on leave. After the leave, I was sent to another training center in the Ümraniye district of Istanbul. The training continued. I was convinced that I was going to be deployed in the Southeast. Half of the battalion was sent there by train, alongside loads of ammunition. We were heading toward the Southeast Siirt province. Night travels were forbidden. We stopped at nights and continued in the morning. It took almost a week. We were anxious. The train was very long, open to attacks. In Kurtalan, we left the train and were transported to the Siirt Infantry Battalion by trucks. We were going to be deployed in Güçlükonak, in order to establish a military station there. As soon as we arrived there, we were ordered to check the area for land mines with detectors. Plenty of mines were detected, both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, and the soldiers became scared. We were unable to move, we could not step forward. We were stuck.

We started paying visits to the villages in the region. Together with our commanding captain, we would talk to the locals. The villagers like the infantry. An old man complained to us, “The gendarmes strike, the Special Teams strike,

and the PKK strikes condemning us as ‘traitors and spies’ In this picture, commander, tell us whom do we rely on? What should we do?” I came to understand the wrongdoings of the guerrilla on the one hand and the state on the other.

We had a canteen whose profits went to the major in charge of the battalion. One can of cola was sold for 200.000 TL [approximately 2 dollars]. The privates could not afford a cola a day with their allowances. For instance, high-quality canned fish was sent to the soldiers by the state. But in the front, it is forbidden for the privates and is reserved for the officers. What the privates get are no-name canned beans. I used to sneak into the warehouse and steal the canned fish and distribute it among the soldiers. They needed it for the calories it contained.

My first guard duty was on the surrounding hills outside of Güçlükonak. My buddy and I took turns. He would sleep and I would keep guard and vice versa. Sometimes we were scared. We would sometimes see the clashes on the other side of the mountain because they used traceable bullets. We worried that they might penetrate into our territory, or approach us during a moment of unawareness. You may fall asleep for a second and you are uncertain of what might happen in that blind moment. And you are scared. I did not get directly engaged in a fight. A team ahead us was in a clash. A friend, an antiaircraft personnel was killed. Our task was to push them to a suitable spot for fighting. For instance, when we were informed that the guerrilla had penetrated into our territory, we would be deployed to the area; open fire as they approach us and call in the airborne gendarmerie troops to do the fighting.

Once we were searching for mines on the road to Güçlükonak. A vehicle passed over a mine and it was destroyed. There were no casualties. Apparently, an old couple from the village were going to the hospital on foot and were close to the explosion. One of the soldiers came out of the vehicle and shot the man. He was killed. Having searched mines in the area, we were taking a break. Upon hearing the bang, we went there. The old woman was crying. We had actually searched the area where the explosion had happened, but the detector had not signaled any mines. Some of the detectors cannot detect plastic mines but some others detect anything. Others buzz even if there is no mine, they are simply out of order. Soldiers would gossip about these kinds of shootings. Anxious soldiers sometimes shoot without warning. For instance, I was a pioneer. We did not directly approach the caves. The officer usually ordered me to throw a mine inside the cave. And I did. We often did not know what was inside. Sometimes they were empty, but other times we found weapons, all burnt and destroyed of course.

We did not do village searches because the villages had already been evacuated. If there had remained populated villages, we would burn them down. We have

even burnt down a mosque. I forgot its name; we burnt a village in the Eruh district. There were around thirty-five houses. We forced the people out of their homes. We had already surrounded the village. Our commander ordered the villagers to evacuate the village. Three teams got into the village. People were forced to get out of their homes. The houses were searched. Men, women, and children were separated from each other. The men were denounced, "You are leaving this place, you support the PKK, you give them food." And the people were forced to leave. They usually went to Siirt. What could the people say? They took some of their belongings and left. As they took out their belongings, the teams rushed into the houses. They poured gas inside and set them afire. As the village burned in flames we watched it from the top of the surrounding hills. We were close by as the surrounding team.

I saw all that I had been curious about. I got my answers. My impression is that the state wants the war to continue. If the state cared for the people in that region, met their cultural, linguistic, and ethnic needs, and improved their conditions, there would be no war. I have joined only one big operation. We were continuously moving in the countryside: Siirt, Eruh, Pervari, Güçlükonak, and Taşkonak. There had been a grand operation called the "Kırmızıtepe [Redhill] Operation" in 1994. Most of our battalion joined the expedition. We stayed at the villagers' houses. We would go to the *muhtar* of the village saying that we were going to stay in such-and-such house. He would evacuate those houses and give them to us. The officers would stay in the houses and we would be sent to stand guard on the hills. It didn't matter if we slept in a house or on the ground, we always had our boots on.

I have not encountered the PKK as such. But once they interfered in our wireless. The major was asking them to surrender. And they were responding, "It is you who should surrender." Of course the major was using bad language, he was cursing. But they were responding, "As a soldier you should refrain from such language." In the past I used to call them the "PKK," but after all I have seen I call them guerrilla for I believe the state continues an unjust war there. I was not especially interested in the Kurds before going into military service. For me, they were just like the others: Pontus, Circassian, Armenian. Before going to the military, I used to read the pro-Kurdish *Gündem* newspaper. I knew that they were a party to the conflict. But it was the only paper that reported about the war. I used to read the other newspapers, too. But they would simply report, "There has been a clash and that many men have been killed."

One day, they brought an old man along with his two mules. They were dragging him on the ground. He was being charged with carrying food supplies to the PKK. The man denied the charges. It was uncertain if he did it or not. They had caught two sacks of flour on mule back and were charging him, "You

were taking them to the PKK.” They were dragging him at the end of a rope. I guess he was around sixty. Yet you cannot know for sure, since people in that region are so oppressed that even the young look old. The man was crying and shouting.

It is suicide for the guerilla to attack a surrounded locality. I don't believe that the guerillas were responsible for the Güçlükonak incident.¹ If they had, there would have been some kind of a fight, some casualties. Even if you forget about the station there, there are ambush posts on every hill around the station. You are not protecting the village. You are always protecting your own area. There would be two to three teams on every hill. It is impossible for them not to see the guerilla approaching. The locals liked the infantry but they disliked the gendarmerie, the police, and the Special Teams. They were beating the locals all the time.

Before going there I wondered who my enemy was. Now I am done with my questioning. Who is my enemy? The ruling classes. Who else could it be? There are scores of wars. Psychologically you are fighting against yourself, fighting against your adversary. Take part in the conflict or not, you are a part of it, in that sense you have to protect yourself. Plus you also empathize with the other side so you don't want to harm them. And then there is the fight for eating the good-quality canned fish. The toughest part of the war is that you are a part of it, that you are supporting it. I mean, the fight that is always inside you, your civil war. You have to continually face this contradiction. One of our friends was martyred. He was a bit of a heroic type. He would always rush to the front.

His death was not a surprise. Striking at the PKK, decapitating the guerrillas was a matter of honor for him. Most of us were sorry for his death. I was sorry that a human being had died.

In 1994, because they wanted to exert more pressure on the PKK, they transferred us to Lice for three to four months. We joined the infantry troops there and stayed with them for about twenty days. I was not there when the big events took place, but I learned about them from fellow soldiers who took part in the operations. It is impossible for PKK to succeed in that region. It is well protected by the gendarmerie and the Special Team. When a high-ranking officer was shot, the town of Lice was burnt. The gendarmerie would guide us in the operations when we were there. They would tell us where to go and what to do there. That is what the infantry is good for: you walk and walk. When we were there, very few people had remained in Lice. We hardly spent any time in the town itself. We would normally be stationed in the commanding hills.

¹ In January 1996, eleven people (mostly village guards) from Güçlükonak were found burned to death in a van (translator's note).

When I recall my days there, I first remember my friends. The loaf of bread I shared with them, how I stole the canned fish and gave it to them. They would not give us enough socks; I used to steal socks and hand those out as well. When I was back in my hometown, Tonya [Northern Turkey], people expected to hear about what was going on in the region. I told them everything: what the PKK was doing, what we were doing, how the villages were being evacuated, how the war was being conducted. Back home, I could not sleep properly. There in the military, we used to sleep during the day and stay awake at night. At home I was out all night. Until midnight I used to chat with friends, or look for a friend to chat with.

If I knew an alternative for evading military service, I would advise the youth to take it. I have changed mentally. I now have a clearer idea about those responsible for the ongoing war and about who benefits from the war. The officers would like the war to continue, they make good money there. It is risky though; those who go to the extremes are killed. The noncommissioned officers would not join the ambushes with us but would send their inferiors. The second lieutenants, on the other hand, are always together with the soldiers. They are like our friends. I never believed that I would be killed. I was frightened only once. I was standing guard and my buddy was sleeping. But for a moment I too fell asleep. Suddenly I woke up. At that moment I was scared. We never had the chance to listen to music there.

Born in 1973 in the Tonya (Northern Turkey), he is a high school dropout. He is working in a restaurant. He is conscripted in August 1994. Having trained in the Manisa Training Center, he was deployed as an infantry pioneer soldier in the countryside of the Southeastern Siirt province. He was discharged in 1995.

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I DEFINITELY WOULDN'T SEND MY CHILD INTO MILITARY SERVICE

The family was proud. The Imam [religious leader] said, "Don't be unhappy, Allah sends martyrs to Heaven." The trip wasn't very bad. I wasn't much aware that there was a coffin in the car. A sort of estrangement. It was in the middle of winter and I was cold because we had left the rear door open so that the coffin would fit.

After the lots were drawn, I went from the Black Sea town of Samsun to Edirne by the Bulgarian border in the West. It was frightening to go to Van two days later. I had a heart problem. Because of the high altitude, I was breathless, feeling weak. In Samsun, we marched the whole day, rap rap . . . turn right, turn left! We were taught theoretical warfare, combat, cross-type attack, and so on. Those who were to go to the East were given an additional training; they gained experience in the use of arms. I was told, "Your training is over" because I was going to be deployed in the West.

There was uproar the first night. Everybody was shooting here and there as if they had seen something. Actually, there was nothing. On the second night, the soldiers on the opposite hill fired in our direction and shot a soldier. Someone said that he had seen something, the other said that there was nothing there. The next day, several women were picking herbs on the spot where it was claimed that something had been seen. We were to learn much later that these herb-pickers were not women, but they hadn't fired at us. It was definite that the soldiers on the opposite hill had fired at us. That night, a second lieutenant was wounded. I was far away from the shooting. Flying bullets could be seen from a distance. You see their lights, it seems as if you couldn't know what would happen without being shot.

Later on, our battalion had to move higher up after the snow melted. I became even weaker as I went higher up. We were three doctors, staying in the infirmary tent. As we went higher up, the soil was dug by dozers and our tents were erected in the trench to save them from rockets.

On the night we went higher up into the mountain, everybody was saying, "We spotted something." The soldiers were in such a panic. . . . Everybody was saying that they had seen two people walking as bent down. . . . In the morning, we found out that the two walking figures was actually a donkey, which was walking around the battalion, and that it was heavily shot at. The donkey was not even hit; the soldiers had missed every shot. I gradually became quite weak and the battalion commander said, "I will send you to Edirne." I was happy of course. . . . Later on, he changed his mind and I went to Van. Second lieutenants were not permitted to stay in the military guesthouses, therefore I was staying at a hotel. It was a medium hotel and I had to pay my own expenses. This was my sixth month into the service. As doctors went on leave, I would be sent to the mountains to replace them.

I had the task of taking the body of one of the soldiers who died in combat to his village. Before that incident, a soldier had died shooting himself by accident while cleaning the second lieutenant's gun. It was forbidden for a second lieutenant to give his gun to anybody else though. . . . When the soldier was cleaning the gun, he emptied the bullets, and while looking into the trigger to see how the bullet will fit in, the bullet got into his eye, piercing it. I accompanied him to his hometown as well. I was taking care of such things; besides this, I was supplying the needs of the battalion because the unit in Van was not sufficient. They would call from the battalion to inform me of their need. They would send the soldiers going on leave and I would buy their airplane tickets. I was dressed in military uniform and I would get frightened at times. When walking during the night, a person riding a bike would pass by and swear, and I couldn't say a word. Besides, I wasn't carrying a gun, I didn't know how to use it. During basic training, I fired the pistol only once.

When winter came, the battalion moved down the mountain and was stationed at Başkale. I went to visit them a few times by taking a civilian bus. People would know that I was a soldier because I am blonde. Soldiers sometimes play with hand-grenades that explode and tear their hands into pieces. I have seen three soldiers with blown-up hands and I looked after a soldier who stepped on a mine. Five from our battalion stepped on mines, one of them was a lieutenant. These were PKK mines called "heel piercing," which were plastic and couldn't be detected. I took the soldier who shot himself by the second lieutenant's gun, to Ankara and then to Maraş [Southeastern Turkey]. He lived in a Kurdish village of Maraş. The second lieutenant was a very good guy; he was against military service. He became devastated by the incident. The soldier's family didn't believe that their son had accidentally shot himself by the lieutenant's gun. They said, "You shot him because he is a Kurd." Thank God I had gone there with the local gendarmerie. They wanted to open the coffin.

They could have attacked me and they tried. The soldier had not died immediately. He lived for a few days in the hospital in Van. I was the only person accompanying him. I was waiting at the door of the intensive care unit like a family member. You feel responsible; you feel obliged to take him to his family. And I couldn't refuse. I explained how it happened to at least twenty members of the family one by one. Because he wasn't martyred, the family could not have a martyr's salary. About 200 million TL was sent to the family from the battalion's canteen income.

The other soldier I took back to his hometown had died in combat. He was from a village in Erzurum [Eastern Turkey]. I couldn't find a transport in Van, so I placed the coffin in the back of a station-wagon taxi. An escort was supposed to accompany us but they left us on our own after about 30 kilometers. We made it to Erzurum, but the village was 200 kilometers away from Erzurum. We traveled through the night. We reached the closest town and spent the rest of the night at the gendarmerie station. The next day we went to the village on a Landrover jeep. The village looked awful! It looked as if it were made with rocks. There was no school. I am not sure if there was water and electricity. It was a Turkish village. The family was almost happy that their son was a martyr. The gendarmerie commander and his soldiers had also come with us. They fired into the sky. This was the ceremony for martyrs. The family was proud. The Imam said, "Don't be unhappy, Allah sends martyrs to Heaven." The trip was not so bad. I wasn't much aware that there was a coffin in the car. A sort of estrangement. It was in the middle of winter and I was cold because we had left the rear door open so that the coffin would fit. The ranked officers avoid transporting dead bodies. For some reason, they are afraid. It wasn't a pleasant job but someone had to do it. I am not a person with strong religious belief. To be precise, I have no religious belief. I faced great hardship when I had to join others in prayer because I did not know how to do it. I stepped aside during the prayer in the funeral and it looked really bad. My battalion commander didn't know that I could not join the funeral prayer. Otherwise he wouldn't have sent me. Actually, the soldiers didn't participate in the prayer but they had guns in their hands. I didn't have one. I stood beside the soldiers in my civilian clothes.

It is said that soldiers are not being beaten, but actually they are being beaten and beaten badly. The battalion commander prepares a report when a second lieutenant whom he doesn't like beats a soldier, but he too beats soldiers or he overlooks the soldier-beating of other officers if he likes them. Noncommissioned officers have lousy character but for good reason. Their guesthouses are separate; they are treated as second-class officers.

For example, there was a battalion supplier. He was earning money from the battalion but the terrorist organization didn't touch him, probably because

he was paying money to the organization. It is a vicious circle. You give the man, the man gives to the organization. I have heard that he was paying some soldiers too, but I didn't witness it. The gendarmerie commander of the region was authorized to appoint village guards. Gossip was that he was changing village guards from time to time getting their first salaries in return. For example, if there were 1,000 village guards in the region he would dismiss 10 of them at the end of the month and hire 10 new ones telling them, "You will give me your first salaries."

You dig a ditch as an ambush post and stand guard there the whole night. Rain starts to fall and the ditch is filled with water. You can't get out of the ditch if not ordered, you wait for the order in the water. It is very bad. In time you get numb, you don't feel anything. Village guards sleep in the open, not in ditches. It was as if they knew when we would be attacked. Just before the area is searched by night-vision binoculars, they start shooting, and then all of a sudden, everybody is shooting at each other. Later, we stopped taking them with us and all that turmoil ended. We did so because they were causing confusion and disorder. There were two very poor villages in the region separated by a stream and a bridge. They weren't on good terms with each other, therefore the state had built two schools one kilometer apart. They lived in stony house-like dwellings and were very lazy. They didn't even try to work. They could at least do some farming on one part of the land. If they could, they migrated to Van. But rents in Van were as high as in Istanbul, so not everyone could move.

If I were to take part in combat, I would prefer to take the most passive post. Maybe I would run away. When we went to our ambush posts, I would stay close to the lieutenant or the first lieutenant because they would usually be in the safest position. Officers of higher ranks never go to the mountains. The medical team is under the command of the squad commander. Some of the commanders were very humane, but after a while they would go away or resign. On the other hand, some of them were too nationalistic, "Let's get their heads! Let's slice their ears off!" types. There is great difference among them. The relations between soldiers and second lieutenants is good, and between doctors even better. For instance, there were some soldiers in our battalion who had brothers in the PKK and who themselves had been in PKK in the past. A great contradiction of course. You might be forcing one brother to shoot the other. Mines were laid all around our battalion. The PKK would come at night and place our mines upside down or take them away to use against us. For instance, they would watch us for three months and mock the battalion commander over the wireless, "Do you know how many times you were in our firing range and targeted by our guns?"

I read many books during my service. My fellow doctor took my book "Doctors" into the mountains and the PKK stole his bag. The search group

found the book later on. The PKK had thrown it away. You become very nationalistic there. Even so, I never wanted “to take their heads off and slice their ears off.” You develop negative feelings toward them: “dirty Kurd” type of attitude. Now I think differently but still, I can't say that I like the Kurds very much. I don't like the Laz, either. Maybe it is because of my experience in the military service. I don't remember feeling this way before. Maybe I blamed them for my presence there and for what I experienced.

People think that those who participated in combat are heroes but I don't see myself as a hero. To those who did their service in Sarıyer [Istanbul], they would say, “Do you think you did your military service?” Doing it in the East gives you some credit among certain people. Someone from the bourgeois class would say, “Look at that fool, he did his military service,” and the ordinary people would say, “He deserves all the praise, he went and did his duty.” This is also a contradiction. Gendarmerie Special Operations Team are constantly fighting in combats, so they are very nervous and aggressive. Those who don't have jobs stay in the military as experienced sergeants. They are the ones who torment soldiers the most, they are the ones who use violence. Their personalities are even worse than the noncommissioned officers. I bought a cellular telephone because I could not be reached otherwise in Van. For instance, when the generator of the battalion got out of order, they left the huge generator to the brigade for me to take care of. How should I take it for repair? I would beg the brigade personnel for a transport vehicle and beg the soldiers to put it on the vehicle. Of course, the soldiers would not listen to me because they were not under my command. As if it were a personal favor I was asking for . . . that was the price I paid for staying in the city, Van.

Winter conditions were very bad. My fellow doctors would go on leave and I would be sent to the mountains to replace them. It was probably the worst time I had in the military. A soldier was struck by lightning. I mean, the lightning struck the wire; it traveled through the wire, and hit a soldier. He didn't die but he lost his mind and his hair got burnt. That night was awful. It started with a snowstorm, then hailstorm, then snowfall, then our tents collapsed, including the infirmary tent, which was the largest. Everyone and everything was drenched. I had taken precaution and had hung all my things on high branches. I had quite a lot of spare t-shirts, underwear, and so on. When the soldiers came back from ambush all drenched, I gave them my dry clothing. No spare was left for me and we slept all together that night. This was something different. No ranked officer would be so intimate with their soldiers. I was always trying to use my authority to its maximum against the battalion commander. He wouldn't approve of such a behavior, he believed that there should be some distance between officers and soldiers. As a health unit, I had sufficient equipment for my

twelve soldiers. I taught them how to carry the wounded, how to administer an injection, how to open a vein. Some of them learned quite well. There was one soldier who was a health worker in civilian life. He knew all this when he came. So, the night when all the tents collapsed, I would say, was my worst experience during military service. There were beds all around but we slept under the beds to protect ourselves from the snow. We tied the soldier who was hit by lightning to one of the beds.

What do I remember as being good? The first day that I was on the top of a hill. I was having breakfast with a captain that I was getting along well with—perhaps he was an atheist, too. The sun was just coming up, daybreak was beautiful. There, the nature was both beautiful and harsh. To be hit by lightning . . . I couldn't have imagined it, but I saw it happen. We carried him to the hospital, I don't know what happened to him afterward. Because I was staying in the city, Van, I used to visit the soldiers who lost their legs. Nobody cared about them. Some time later, they would be sent to the military hospital, GATA, in Ankara. An awful sight! Can you imagine entering a room full of soldiers without legs? Mines. Usually, the toes go and the heel is in place. Soldiers are always crying, you can't talk at all, it is a very acute phase. You try to console them, you say, "everything will be fine" but nothing will be fine. The other side suffers from mines too, we knew that the PKK had a hospital. Nobody could get close to it. Once, a commando team from Bolu succeeded entering it but suffered a great loss. I mean it was a place where the PKK gathered people and trained them. The PKK preferred to lay mines instead of fighting with the army. Isn't it natural? Instead of coming face-to-face with someone stronger than yourself, you try to wear them out. Of course, the best tool weapon for that was the mine. For instance, there was a "Fingerless Zeki" (Şemdin Sakık) in the region, he was constantly laying mines everywhere. I think he got caught; I read it in the papers.

When I came back to Istanbul, I felt as if I was in a vacuum. I wandered around for some time, asking myself, "What shall I do now?" I wouldn't send my child into military service. I mean, I would send him abroad or something to avoid military service. I wasn't much concerned with the Southeastern part of Turkey before my service. I saw that only about 40 percent of the incidents are reported in the media. There is a group of people who benefit from the war and don't want to end it. And I don't believe that it will end. The two sides cannot find a point of agreement. Neither side is willing to sit down at the table and negotiate. It is like the case of Cyprus: "Let them first recognize Cyprus and then we can sit down for negotiations" kind of attitude.

I left everything belonging to the military behind, throwing away some. For one-and-a-half years you wear the same dress, during daytime and, sometime, during nighttime. During my military service, my mother probably had a more

difficult time than I did because she constantly heard war stories. But that wasn't what I experienced. It was comfortable while staying in the hotel in Van, although it was hard when I was sent to the mountains. I had broken up with my girlfriend before the service. People constantly ask me about my military experience but I haven't told it to anyone. I see military service as time lost. That's why I don't talk about it. It is a part of my life that I never lived. It is not that the society doesn't want to listen, but they don't really care about what happens there. The problem is on top of Turkey's agenda, but there are many things on that agenda and the people can be insensitive to all of it. Turkish people are insensitive to many things and this is one of them. I watched the TV program "*Sights from Anatolia*" only once and the other program, "*Mehmetçik*" only last night. They showed absurd things like throwing hand-grenades into caves. Such things don't happen that way. Combats never take place during daytime, but always at night. It is all scenario on TV. When you come back, you forget about everything and everybody there. Whether you are a Turk or a Kurd, as soon as you go anywhere West of Ankara, you leave everything in the East behind. Nobody tries to solve the problem.

Born in 1967 in Istanbul, he graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in 1992. He has one sister. His mother is a teacher, his father is an accountant. He served in the military between February 1995 and May 1996. His basic training was in Samsun. Although he drew Edirne during the lots, he was sent to Van immediately afterward. He said that he went into service because it was said that a law was going to be passed banning government office to those who didn't complete military service. Such a law was never passed.

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I ORDERED THE SOLDIER TO
KILL THE DOG; THERE
WAS NO OTHER WAY

We tend to overlook the sectors that profit greatly from this war. One of the rapidly developing sectors in Turkey is the canned food industry. In the mountains, both the military and the citizens called guerillas or terrorists eat canned food. Maybe they will shoot at each other, but one eats one half of a fish and the other eats the second half of it.

I was appointed to Patnos, the same place where Uğur Mumcu¹ did his military service. Of course, you have to go to regions you would not otherwise go and experience things you would not otherwise experience during military service. From that point on, guns would talk. During basic training, the sympathizers of two nationalistic parties, MHP [Nationalist Action Party] and BBP [Grand Unity Party], were claiming to be volunteers but when they drew the Western part of Turkey, they were happy. They were psychologically preparing us for what is to come by telling us that half of us would be going to the East and that at least five to six of us would die there. I found my friends on the first day. You can distinguish people from the magazines, or newspapers they read. When I left for military service, the Gazi incident² had only recently happened. When the news of the death of Hasan Ocak³ reached us, a friend of his sister started to cry.

¹ Famous columnist and writer who was assassinated in a car bomb attack outside his home in Ankara by unidentified assailants. This case has still not been solved. He was famous for his contributions to investigative journalism (translator's note).

² After a coffee shop in the Alevi-dominated Gazi neighborhood of Istanbul was attacked by unidentified people, the inhabitants of Gazi took to the streets in protest. The police and the gendarme surrounded the crowd and the tensions increased. The neighborhood was blockaded for several days. At least twenty people were shot dead by police fire during the incidents (translator's note).

³ Was taken into custody on March 20, 1995 after which he disappeared. His tortured body was found in the Cemetery of Unknown on May 17, 1995 (author's note).

When one of the soldiers used the term “war” for what was happening, the commander scolded him, “How can you name it war?” The soldier apologized and corrected himself. I said, “I am not correcting myself” and insisted on calling it war. My mother and father were very upset that I was going to the Southeast and tried to find a connection in the military to have me transferred elsewhere. They could not find anyone.

First I went to Erzurum and I waited for transportation for three days. Four buses full of us newcomers went to Ağrı as others being discharged were traveling in the opposite direction. Besides the national flag, there were MHP [Nationalist Action Party] flags hanging on the buses. These flags and the “wolf greeting” [a symbol of ultra Turkish nationalism] made me very uneasy. It was night when we arrived in Patnos. I started my duty the next morning. It was a very primitive dormitory. The living conditions were awfully bad. We bought our own sheets. I asked the second lieutenant, “Don’t we have the right to object to these conditions? He said, “Someone did and ended up in custody.”

After fifteen days, I was sent to a mountain station on a temporary basis. The station was five kilometers away from Patnos, among rocks. You could see an approaching car from both sides of the road up to five kilometers. But as they get closer, they can’t be seen anymore. A lot of illegal activity [by the soldiers] had taken place in that region, most in the name of the PKK: bombing, shooting, bribery, taking people’s jewelry, and so on. Everybody knew about it. . . . The PKK, instead of denouncing them, had accepted responsibility for these actions. I went to Doğu Beyazıt, and then to Iğdır by a civilian minibus and in civilian clothes. Then I went to the headquarters of the company. The commander of the company was a first lieutenant younger than I was. He said to me, “We agree with your democratic thoughts but they don’t work here in military.” He was quite harsh. He gave me his orders, “You will be on duty at the Armenian border the whole night.” A noncommissioned officer was our guide the first night. Two nights later, when I got familiar with the terrain, I took my soldiers and went to the border on my own. All of the soldiers sleep on duty, no exceptions. . . . They would say, “Nothing ever happened here” and go to sleep. Even if you sleep the whole day, you feel sleepy at night, or your imagination flies away, which means that you are not asleep but not awake either. One day, when I was walking on the terrain, I realized that we had been laying ambush in an open, naked place. Here, the soldiers are actually used as pawns. Let them be shot. When the guns are fired, we will hear the sound and know that someone is passing through the border. One night, I saw a cigarette light and I told my soldiers where to take position if the shooting comes from such and such direction, and so on. One of them asked, “Shall I shoot?” I was always telling them not to load their guns while going to lay an ambush but they didn’t listen, they didn’t understand.

They would fire their guns, G3s, without really knowing how to use the gun. Their training was insufficient. They stood guard for fourteen hours, watching if anybody was crossing the border. They couldn't help it, they fell asleep. When the commander caught them sleeping, he made a big fuss about it and punished them. I would wake them up. In the beginning, I threatened them. Later on, I gave them tea to help them stay awake. I would ask them, "Do you ever talk to birds?" They must have thought "We have a crazy commander." In time, they got used to it and started to be interested in nature. I also read poetry to them and taught them cleanliness. They were all full of lice. Previously they were assigned limited time for bathing. I changed all that and made bathing available at all times. I would buy sanitary material with my own money. I made them boil all the sheets in water with soap. Finally, we got rid of lice. I taught the cook how to cook, how to serve, as well.

One day I was going along the border in an armored vehicle. In a bushy region, people with bundles of bush on their back were running away like crazy. I shouted, "Stop! Don't run away!" but the women didn't understand Turkish. I tried to make conversation with them but they didn't even look at me. I had to shout, "Come here" and they had to come near. I told them that as long as I was on duty in the region, they could get their bushes whenever they wanted. They said that previously, when caught, their bushes would be taken away from them and they would be beaten. It was the border region, forbidden area for trespassing, but they had no other place to find wood for fire. One day, I was called from the village, "The commander said hello to us. We would like to invite him to have tea with us." The villagers have missed even this much, a nice word, a friendly attitude. For instance, our lieutenant had placed a water tank on the roof of a straw storage right next to the station. The storage belonged to one of the villagers and he was not even asked. One day, the tank overflowed, making the straw all wet. When the owner said, "I need this straw to feed my animals. Why did you do this?" Our twenty-two-year-old lieutenant beat the forty-year-old villager. If the villagers complain to higher offices, no action is taken. To the contrary, they tell the officers, "Well done!" This village had fifty to fifty-five dwellings. A little further away, there was a Kurdish village of about 400 dwellings and behind that a mixed village of 70–80 dwellings. All these villages were below the Nahçıvan-Iğdır highway. The villages and plains above the highway had already been evacuated. The lieutenant who beat the villagers also beat the soldiers. Psychologically, he was not stable. When I firmly objected, he stopped beating. One day, he came with a big fish in his hand and said, "Let's have a feast." I asked him, "Where did you get it from?" It was the kind of fish the people were fishing from the Aras river. It was forbidden, but they would take the risk of being shot to fish. I said, "This fish could feed seven to eight people,

I couldn't eat it with a clear conscience." He said, "I don't give a damn." The station had dogs and the villagers had ducks and geese. The villagers eat geese eggs, geese meat, and the station dogs go and eat the geese. The soldiers laugh at the angry villagers. I ordered the soldier to kill the dog; there was no other way. I tried to do it myself but couldn't.

I would sit with the soldiers and try to talk about the problems of our country. I would tell them that it was pointless to be shot. They didn't know how to hold a gun. They were illiterate. They were counting down their days in service. I went back to Patnos after a month. The December 24 elections were approaching. We were wandering about in the town in our tanks, giving out the message, "We are here." Two days before the elections, our guard duty began; 60 hours on duty! The temperature would sometimes drop to -20 C, so I would take the soldiers to the building of the Highway Office to warm up. I saw a sergeant pouring out fuel oil on the ground and burning it to warm up. We were in the open, susceptible to steady firing, so I ordered the fire to be extinguished. During the night, MHP marches were being played in an armored police car. Of course, the captain on duty that night was also very anxious about it. I decided not to let them play these marches. The Kurdish party HADEP had their election office, but had no chance for propaganda because they could not get-together; they were afraid. People gave their votes to HADEP but we saw what happened to those villages whose votes went completely to HADEP. And who knows whether or not they voted on their own free will. On the night of the elections, the soldiers were sitting around a fire, warming themselves and watching TV. They watched the news about the elections and commented on the results. I said, "Every party should participate in the elections, including HADEP." I saw that the expert sergeants were making propaganda in favor of the MHP. I went out and told a soldier to call the sergeants out and that I wanted to talk to them. I was told later that one of them swore after me, threatening to beat me up. They came out and asked, "Who called us out?" When I answered, "I did," they said "Fuck off!" and did a hand-gesture to complete his word. I hadn't beaten anybody up until then but I hit the one who did the hand-gesture. They started beating me up. I didn't hit back; I went down, hiding my face. Later, they realized that they had done wrong. The police didn't try to stop them, but ran away. When my nose started bleeding, I reported to the brigade. The vehicle sent to take me to the brigade was the armored police car playing MHP party marches the previous night. I asked them, "Who sent you?" They said, "The Chief of Staff." The Chief of Staff was the person authorized to release me of my duty due to severity of injuries. I went to the infirmary by ambulance and got a medical report for ten days. I was asked for my defense statement when I was staying in the infirmary. While handing in my written statement, I saw my written punishment that said, "Your defense statement was taken on

such and such a date, you are punished by a cut of your salary.” In other words, the punishment was given before my defense statement was taken. I was told that the brigade commander had ordered that I be imprisoned for ten days. The sergeants would also be imprisoned for ten days to close the case. I read the Military Penal Code and wrote a petition. In my petition, I stated that the case should go to the military court because it was a public case. It turned into a stubborn fight between the sergeants and me. In time, I started to really pity them. They were taken under custody after the first meeting of the court. Their fathers and brothers were asking me to forgive them. In their statements, they had claimed that I had shouted, “Long live HADEP!” They were threatening to kill me.

On my birthday, I was deployed to the Sultantop station on the Little Ağrı Mountain. The PKK had cut the heads of twenty-one soldiers in this station in 1992, approaching it from the valley. The soldiers had taken their bayonets off and the expert sergeant in the ambush post didn't shoot at the PKK. In other words, the station had been sold from the inside. The penis of the second lieutenant had been cut off and put into his mouth. It was a terribly violent incident. Eight soldiers ended up running away to Iran to save their lives. Around 300 PKK had taken part in the attack. Later on, the roads were opened, the area was secured and combat in the region was minimized. Almost all the villagers in the Kurdish village I mentioned were guards, working for the state. Everybody in the village was from the same family, carrying the same last name. They are called village guards but they do all sort of things like smuggling, guiding the PKK over the border, and so on. If a citizen tries to take to his village one more bag of flour than his need, the flour is confiscated. If he belongs to the tribe of the region, it is overlooked. The tribe sells a bag of flour to the PKK for 100 dollars. There are 10,000 soldiers in Patnos. This is the same as the old population of Patnos. Now, due to migration, the population is over 75,000 I think. Half of the Little Ağrı Mountain had been burnt by the time I went there. One traceable bullet was the cause of the fire. It was forbidden to go to the upper part of the road to Nahçıvan and to go near the Aras River. The villagers were imprisoned to an area of two square kilometers. It is said that the station commanders PKK were offered two to three billion TL not to guard the vicinity of Tendürek mountains for a couple of hours in order to enable the illegal passage of people and goods over the border. There were commanders who took these offers and others who did not. They were asked not to send guards to that region for two hours because it takes one hour to go to Iran and one hour to come back. During my second exile to this region, a major said, “You are a fool, the state sends you there to earn money. Why do you take it so seriously?” What is that person going to smuggle over the border? Heroin!

The accountant of our brigade showed me the accounts that came from Tunceli-Ovacık. A payment order for 300–400 million TL was signed by the brigade commander. A previous second lieutenant had transferred 20,000 DM to his family. Nothing could be done about it. His salary had been 11 million TL, with additions let's say it amounted to 16–17 million TL. How could he have saved that much money? Noncommissioned officers have no domestic needs. Their domestic and personal needs are met by the markets that they work with; the markets that supply goods for the military. There was a staff lieutenant-colonel there, a real patriot, who was very disturbed by such incidences and tried to stop them. There was a captain who had lost his rank in the mountains. He used to check the accounts very carefully, but he couldn't do anything about presents. When we say "the war economy," we usually mean the arms trade. We tend to overlook the sectors that profit greatly from this war. One of the rapidly developing sectors in Turkey is the canned food industry. In the mountains, both the military and the citizens called guerillas or terrorists eat canned food. One comes from Muş, or from Malazgirt [both in the East], he is in military, the other is on the guerilla side, maybe they will shoot at each other, but one eats one half of a fish and the other eats the second half of it. Ağrı Mountain is a volcanic mountain therefore the military needs to buy drinking water. Usually the expiry date on the water was a week away. . . . Of course, the underwear sector and the sock sectors have blossomed. The soldiers go to the mountains thinking that they will be paid a salary but the salary they are paid is only 3,800,000 TL, which they spend in the canteen. There are all sorts of luxury items sold in the canteen. The real problem is eating Kemalpaşa sweet produced in 1990. The officer in charge that year had made such a big purchase of this sweet that there was no need for further purchase for the proceeding officer. The greater the amount of purchase, the greater the commission he gets. . . . It is not important if the expiry date of the sweet has passed. The money is pouring to the East but nothing of it goes to plain soldiers. There are some majors who spend all their time in trade. They choose two noncommissioned officers as deputies, organize everything together, and share the profits. The use of drugs among the soldiers is widespread, and furthermore, there are those who come there on "exile" because they are addicted. The captain knew me and my psychological approach toward the soldiers, so he put such cases under my command. I would divert their interest to nature and supply them with cigars to undermine their desire for heroin. The gardener of the brigade commander planted opium in the garden and the head sergeant found out about it. In other words, the commander himself was trying to grow it. They knew each other, they were in it together.

I came back to Istanbul after being discharged and the next day, I went to Istiklal Street for a walk. Istanbul felt more dangerous than the East. As I was walking down the street, a policeman approached me and asked for my pen. I said, "I am not giving it to you." Officially, I was still a military officer. I walked away and he shouted after me, "come here," his girlfriend was beside him. I said, "You come here." He came running and took my arm. I said, "Don't you dare do anything, I am an army officer. I don't want to hit you, so go away." If I were a civilian, not a chance. I have a feeling that people here are not aware of anything. The cities in the East, and not just the countryside, suffer from the war. The economy of Iğdır depends on prostitution. The hotel rooms are sold on an hourly basis. I had a hard time finding a hotel room in Iğdır. During the peak of PKK terrorism on the Ağrı Mountain, a representative of 100 PKK terrorists came to Iğdır, went to the Special Operations Team, told them that they wanted to turn themselves in, and they shot him. A girl who was shot dead in the mountain, was brought to the hospital in Iğdır for funeral preparations. As she was being pulled down the steps by her legs, her mother appears from nowhere, crying, "My baby!" Now, you can't stop this girl's brother from going to the mountains. I would go, too. I am from the Black Sea region, if the lieutenant would beat my father, I would go to the mountains. In my hometown, a soldier could not slap a fifty-year-old man. If he does, he would be killed. Twenty years ago, a soldier asked a man on his horse to stop, but he didn't stop and the soldier shot him. His family shot the soldier when he was on leave in Adapazarı. The Special Operations Team soldiers tie the corpses of the dead guerrillas, terrorists, or whatever you call them, to the back of their cars and drive around downtown Iğdır. First of all, it is against the law to do anything to a dead body. You can end the conflict by turning in the dead body humanely to his family, offer your condolences, telling something like "he was in the wrong." These things hurt me. If you act that way, you can prevent one more person from going into the mountains. But, there is no such intention, or I can't see it. They don't want to end this conflict. Alparslan Türkeş [the leader of the ultranationalist party, MHP] says, "Let's eradicate Kurds in six months." We have the PKK at night, the state during the day. There is no difference between the two. For instance, PKK comes at night to Bulanık, Muş, fires two shots and goes away. And the military smashes their homes to the ground.

When I came back home, my friends asked me what was happening there. They wanted to learn. For instance, TÜSIAD [the Association of Businessmen and Industrialists] announced their report today. Their business in the region is also suffering. One day the military's budget will suffer, too. . . . When they come to a point where they cannot function in the region anymore, they will say,

“that’s enough” and stop. The military is a closed box because you cannot talk to anyone about your superiors. If you do, you go to jail. The military has to cleanse itself. Of course, there was also a group of [religious] fundamentalist officers. (January 1997, Istanbul)

Born in 1967 in Trabzon, he is an engineer. He did his military service between May 1995 and July 1996 as a reserve officer. After his basic training in Ankara, he was deployed in Patnos, Iğdır, and Ağrı. He has four brothers and a sister.

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WHAT WOULD A WOMAN'S VOICE DO THERE? YOU HEAR IT BECAUSE YOU ARE LONELY . . .

You come back like a tamed lion. You are there to defend your mother, your father, your honor, your wife, your country. But the commander swears at you, at your mother, at your wife. Didn't I go into military service for my mother, my father?

Life was very beautiful, in fact rosy, before I went into military service. I had been a bit interested in the war going on in the Southeast, but to do my military service there was the last thing I wanted. I was a professional sportsman for eight years, I practiced martial arts. I told them about it during the physical examination while applying for military service and it was recorded on my application form that I played these sports. They also noted the prizes I had won. So I became, I mean they made me, a mountain commando. I can say I had the desire to be a commando as well. During the lots, I drew Hakkari mountain commando brigade. It was the Fourth Battalion, stationed in Van, duty region being Hakkari and Northern Iraq. . . .

I went to Van in mid-November where I had combat training for two-and-a-half months. As you go past Elazığ toward the East, it is a total war zone, with many soldiers, village guards, and so on. You think someone is a PKK member, but he turns out to be a village guard. You have no way of knowing who is who. As you enter a city, you pass through twenty check-points, people with guns in hands on the hills. You become aware that you are in the midst of a war. In Van, soldiers have countless number of bullets, you have a full drum and you scotch-tape another so that you have two drums. After the training, we went to Hakkari, our duty region was the Kamışlı Village Station in Yüksekova. We lived in tents, ours was a mobile unit. Spring operations had started in April, we weren't involved in the operations because we had just arrived. We were assigned to stand guard, to work as defense teams, or we had training: free shooting trainings, "what to do when night-vision is obtained" trainings, and so on. We were getting acquainted with the region. The station was right inside the Kamışlı

village. The man is a villager one day and the next day, he has gone to the mountains and is shooting at you. Eighty percent of the village population were village guards. Sometimes there were disagreements among them, or someone would get nervous and they would start shooting all of a sudden. I can never forget it: There is a place called Davus hill, it is forbidden for civilians to go there. A village guard was walking there. It was no use telling him to “get out!” He was far away, he couldn’t hear us. You can’t know that he is a village guard or PKK, they all dress the same way. A cannon was fired, the man was hit in his head and blown into pieces. He was a village guard, he knew that it was a forbidden place. The first lieutenant and I went to see his family. The higher-ranked officers didn’t ask, “What happened to his family?” they only said that we should get his gun. His gun was a Bixi, a very beautiful gun, a heavy automatic, didn’t miss its target. . . . Lodgings had been built for the village guards. We went there and met his wife, a woman with ten children left without a husband. The first lieutenant gave her quite a lot of money. It was probably his own money or may be he got it from the major, I don’t know. We had also brought her bags of sugar, flour, and so on.

Our first operation was when an ambush team at the Perhanlı Station was raided and, I think, a noncommissioned officer, a reserve officer, and twenty-one or twenty-two soldiers were martyred. We went there after the incident as a defense unit. We were subject to a harassment shooting. For example, if the station is in a location surrounded by four hills, defense teams of twenty or forty soldiers are placed on a commanding spot on each hill—team commanders, team sergeants, and so on. Shootings that originate in small hills further away are called harassment shootings. We didn’t always shoot back when we were harassed that way. This time, we did not, either. I was really frightened when it happened for the first time. During that time, we got to know each other, we were all of the same cohort, scheduled to be discharged at the same time. We stayed there for almost two months. At some point, we were informed that the station would be attacked. There were two bands on the wireless, the lower band covered distances closer than 300 or 150 meters, the higher band covered distances ranging from 500 meters to 50 kilometers. The PKK were talking on our lower band, which meant they were quite close to us. It was as if everything was over. In other words, they were amongst us and we could do nothing. When you lifted your head above the station, you could see the peshmerge on guard at the station in Northern Iraq.

We were sent to Gelişen as defense units because they were being continuously harassed. There were three to four hills in the vicinity of the Gelişen station, we had been informed that they were stationed at one of the hills, called the Resistance hill. I had been appointed as bomb team sergeant, I had a heavy

automatic rifle that shot bombs. Our teams had to go first, as pioneers, to secure an area where the helicopters can land and bring more soldiers. The aim was to kill or take them as prisoners. We boarded the Sikorsky again. By that time, you realize the gravity of the situation. We hadn't been in a combat yet but we had been hearing news like, "Today, twelve soldiers died from four or five units of our battalions. Twenty wounded, those with amputated arms, legs." . . . Now, you too are in it. I am sentimental, I think about the dead bodies arriving home—especially if the soldier is the only son. Not in the sense that he can die if he has a brother, but I mean, if he is married, if he has a child. . . . There were a lot who looked forward to a combat. I didn't have "Let me get into a combat, let me die if necessary and let me kill three of them, too" sort of feelings. I never had. The shooting had started. We were the first to land. We were to be thrown off to the ground from a height of eight to nine meters, but we refused to jump. My automatic machine was heavy, thirty five kilos, to get down with that gun from that height meant to break a part of my body or to break the gun. In other words, it would cost at least a billion TL. You think about such things, too. Now you are a soldier, when you are a civilian, you can think about saving your neck but when you are a soldier, you have to think about your gun. Finally, the Sikorsky dropped us off at a hill further away from a height of four to five meters. Without a rope or anything, you jump down with your provisions tied around your body. Nobody was wounded but it was very heavy fighting. The PKK had been stationed at a very beautiful hill, I mean a good hill, the highest one, the resistance hill. . . . Our greatest support were cobra helicopters, a perfect device equipped with fully automatic heavy machinery. They can turn around in all directions, and they can shoot. With the help of a Cobra, we seized the hill and spent the night there.

The next morning would be the worst day of my life. By dawn, we went to another hill. We were standing guard on an hourly basis. When the soldiers got tired, they would wake me up to stand guard. You can't go to sleep anyway, with stars above you in the sky, you start daydreaming. You are away from your darling, you dream about her, you miss your mother and father, their images. . . . No phone-call, no letter, nothing for three-and-a-half months. . . . To calm down, I would say to myself, "I am still alive and here" and play the game of happiness. My bodyguard was a Laz soldier, a very sweet guy. He wouldn't sulk, he wouldn't get angry. Of course, there were also times when we were very happy. Anyway, it was close to dawn, the day was starting to break, there was no sound. All of a sudden, we heard a loud noise, it was like an earthquake. Rocket fire started and we were not firing back. The range of a rocket was about 400 meters, the rockets were exploding right above our heads, at a distance of one meter or so. In other words, you could hold it if you would extend your arm.

It continued until dawn. Then we started shooting, too. I could not use my heavy gun at night. It blazes when fired, so it marks your place. They have more advanced guns that fire as far as 3,000 meters and are quite effective. Of course, we have them, too, but they are too heavy to carry. How could they carry such a heavy gun up there? Probably they had mules. We tried to hit them but couldn't succeed. This time they had superiority over us because they were using heavy guns. Now it was broad daylight, so I could safely fire my gun. There I shot at a human being for the first time. I can clearly see it even now. I didn't want to shoot. I never thought of shooting at a human being, I didn't want to, and I had a hard time pulling the trigger for the first time. But I had to shoot and I did. It made me sad. I didn't feel the same way in the shootings that followed; you get used to it. I was quite excited, and there is pride attached to it as well: you are the heavy gunner of the battalion. I had two artillery men. The bomber is automatic, round, bottom sides are green. You start to fire, count to forty, then place another forty. . . . forty shots, one after the other, bum, bum, bum. . . . Before military service, I hadn't even held a gun and I didn't know its sound. Actually, the military doesn't train you, you learn by yourself, by experience. During the training, they give you one bullet, one bomb, tell you to shoot and say, "Very good, O.K. Who is next?" When you get into a fight, you realize that things are different from what you have learned in training. So, you start training yourself.

There were no casualties and no wounded in that combat. But there were casualties on the other side. The previous night, we had seized the other hills they had controlled. The post of our antiaircraft operator was right by a cliff. There was a dead body in front of the aircraft. Our battalion commander said, "Leave it there, you can throw it away in the morning." There was about a three-meters distance between where the dead body lay and where we slept. When we woke up in the morning, it was gone. This meant that they had come and taken the body at night. The antiaircraft operator was a crazy, courageous guy, who hardly slept, but they had taken the body from right beside him. We looked for it all around, down into the cliff, but couldn't find it. At the slightest sound, all the guns would have been roaring. They must have been frightened as well. All those who go into combat from the other side are heavily drugged: pills, heroin, grass. . . . Finally, the fighting ended and they retreated. . . . You experience a mixed set of feelings all at the same time: fear, excitement, joy. . . . Later, we were told that we had to stay there about another forty-five days. Food and provisions enough for three days were being thrown down by helicopters and distributed. We didn't have tents. We made what they call a "dog tent." Using the pads and sticks on the bags and our trench coats, we used to make small tent-like sleeping quarters. Big enough for one or, if you combine two, two people can sleep together.

There was a station in the vicinity of Çukurca, I think in Pirinçtekin. It was the region that was suffering the greatest loss. A dirty region, very hot even in winter, so hot that you could wear a t-shirt. Another such place was the Sabır Mountain, it was very big, had a moderate climate, spring weather all year round. We knew that they [PKK] gathered in that region to spend the winter. The region outside the Sabır mountain was covered with two to three meters of snow, making it impossible to live. We had received information that there were people in the mountain. We came to Pirinçtekin. The station was in a ravine, hills on right and left, something like a canyon. Light had poured down the hill on the right. . . . We were approaching from the hill on the left, intending to encircle them. We were half way up the hill. Our sergeant from Balıkesir said that he heard a woman's voice saying, "Aysel, let's go this way." I said, "What would a woman's voice do there? You hear it because you are lonely." As soon as I finished my sentence, I heard it too. As we were climbing up the hill, they were climbing down from the other hill, a canyon between us. They were going to raid the station and we were going to attack them. . . . We call it "traveling news," everyone passes information to the one behind. So the news travels from one end of the line to the other. Thus, the battalion commander's order, "take post" reached everybody and posts were taken. By that time, both sides had heard each other's voice. All of a sudden a silence fell. It was pitch-dark, everybody was walking in a line, holding the backpack of the soldier in front of him. They too, had taken their posts, we felt that all of a sudden we had mingled. Cries, shouts, and so on . . . They were about forty women . . . Only that many had mingled with us; we were informed that there were 600 of them. Screams. . . . The bomber operator and I were up on the hill and the fighting was taking place lower down the hill. The soldiers were wrestling with the women, not shooting at each other, there was no firing, close combat, they were bayoneting each other. We couldn't see anything, but from what we heard, that's what was happening. Then shooting started, it was their greatest tactic: to attack from below while shooting from above. In other words, they approach under their own fire. The military wouldn't do such a thing, a bullet can go astray and hit a soldier. Life is precious. But they do it, they are trained to do it. We had watched their training on video, their training is with live ammunition and is thousand times better than ours. . . . I was using the bomber. The soldier beside me also had bombs you could attach to the bomber and fire. I ran out of bombs, so I started using my G3, putting away the bomber. I also had hand-grenades. The soldier beside me had one bomb left. He stood up to throw it. Normally, he could have thrown it without standing up but he stood up. He was a warrior type of guy, a very good guy. He had to throw it, use his ammunition to the last drop. One moment I saw a bomb leaving a bomber, the second moment

Hamza's chest was burning—an explosion, blood all over me, I felt pieces of flesh hitting me. I felt his left arm falling on the tent in our post. Hamza was only twelve days away from his discharge. Fear, agony, all together fell over me and I collapsed. I felt that the PKK women were now around us. There was a soldier, a newcomer, who had crouched in fear behind a rock, he was motionless but the shine of his gun could be seen. I laid him down on a pad, covering him with another. A woman came, I can never forget it, nudging the pad with her gun to see if there was anybody underneath . . . I could see her diagonally. Three of us were there but she didn't see us. Of course, we couldn't shoot because of the risk of hitting our own soldiers. We could kill her by bayonet but of course, we didn't. At the moment, you don't see them as women, physically too they didn't look like women. Their shoulders were wider than mine. They were strong. The combat lasted for two to three hours, then we heard helicopters working and some ran away. The next morning was the hardest to bear. They said, "There is blood all over you." With the shock of the combat, I had forgotten about the death of Hamza. The complete scene came in front of my eyes. It still does. . . . We had thirty-four martyrs, close to forty wounded, many of whom died later making our death toll forty-five . . .

We participate in combats, the Special Team, Special Operations Team collect the dead bodies and count them. . . . The soldiers are not in a state to do it. Your friend has died. To collect and count on top of it. . . . We don't think of it, everybody is concerned with himself, "Do I have a missing finger, a missing ear?" and so on. PKK's loss was between thirty-five and thirty-eighth. We had lost more than half of our team. It was Team no. 1 of Company no.11 but this team did not exist any more. In other words, four of the twenty-eight soldiers were left behind. The team commander had died as well. . . . After this operation, I was assigned to tea service to put myself together. Hamza was dead. Because we were very close, they asked me to collect his belongings. He had shown me the last letter he had written. He would always give me his letters to read. I read his last letter. He had written to his mother, to his father and to his fiancée. . . . Well, he was saying that twelve days were left of his service, he was writing about how much he had missed them. I put his belonging into three bags. He had bought a music system because it was cheap, I put that into his bag with his clothes. His body came: two arms, one leg . . . "Are they his?" you wonder. I was sure about the arm because it had fallen right next to me. All the body parts were collected in one spot, then they were separated: this one to Erzurum, this one to Erzincan . . . you don't know which body part belongs to whom. I felt miserable when we sent those body parts for funeral service. A lot of people had died but Hamza's death was very hard on me. He was from Balikesir. I went to visit his family twice. Sixteen of us from the same batch came together and visited his

family. We kissed the hands of his mother and father, we talked to them. We went to his grave and prayed. His family's pain was as fresh as if it were the first day. I don't think I will visit them again. When I go there, I experience everything all over again, my heart beats hard, I can't stand the pain. Maybe you want to forget about everything that happened. The helicopter came during this combat but couldn't do anything because, as I said, they were all around us. It happened near the Gelişen station. When the F-16 fired, I was wounded. F-16 or F-6, how many kilos is its ammunition? Let's say it is 300 kilos, its effective range is 500 meters, it hits a stone, ricochets, and wounds 10 soldiers. That's why you don't get any backup during combats.

Later on we were sent to the Kamışlı station. I was serving tea, preparing sandwiches. It wasn't a demeaning duty. Such duties as serving tea, preparing sandwiches, watching after the ammunition and the artillery are also important. But those coming back from operations were given special attention. Sheep were slaughtered as sacrifice or when everybody was eating canned vegetables, we would eat canned fish. We were highly regarded. We would tease those who didn't go into combat, "Shut up! We fight in operations while you sit here idly." We would, for instance, tease our clerk, "We fight out there and here you are writing our guard duty schedule." At last, the clerk participated in an operation although he was ill and was martyred during his first operation. It was a lesson for us. We learned not to joke about such serious matters.

Once we were in the Direniştepe [Resistance Hill] region again. It was raining. The PKK was using an effective portable bomber and an F-16 was continuously bombing them to silence the gun. A million bombs were being poured down on them but five minutes later one of them would stick out his head and throw a grenade at us. The battalion commander said, "This won't do. Let's blockade it from both sides and silence it." We approached it from two hills, climbing up from further away. If we would go straight up, it would take us ten minutes but the path we chose to approach it was a distance of two to three hours. Bombing was going on and the fighting began. I didn't have my portable bomber. Three of us ran after one of them, the battalion commander with us. The place was something like a stream bed, stony. They were very close, we could see them shooting. There, very small balls stuck into my right buttock. . . . They said that they were pieces of shrapnel but I think they were hand-grenade pieces . . . I felt no pain. About 45 minutes passed that way. We came back, and lay down to relax. . . . A sound of liquid was coming from my boot. I inserted my hand and it was blood . . . I took off my boot, it was filled with blood. I looked at the wound, a very small cut, as if something was inserted and screwed in . . . No pain. People were dying, this looked like something small. Helicopter came and took me to the Yüzüncü Yıl (Centennial Year) University Hospital in Van. The doctors

took off the big pieces, few smaller ones were left there. “The body will melt it away,” they said. I was given fifteen days for recovery. At first, I could feel them, but now I only feel them if I press hard, so they are melting away. After recovery, I participated in one more operation. The bombers of the team had been martyred so I had to go again. I wasn’t happy about it. Just at that time, my sister was getting married. They didn’t wait for my return. So I said, “Let me go and live out my fate.” After I was wounded, I was assigned as a tea-server. My days in the service were coming to an end, anyway. From then on, I was instructing the newcomers.

Van was quite comfortable for the soldiers. You do something for 2 hours then you are free to lie down or watch TV. There were bathing facilities. Fifteen days of my service was left, then I would be through; 710 of us had been deployed and 500 came back—50 martyrs, 40 wounded. . . . I was more anxious and aggressive as a result of what I had gone through . . . I got angry very easily. Five of us were walking in the battalion in Van. We were very untidy with beards, and so on; we had not even bathed yet. Anyway, we apparently neglected to salute the expert sergeant. He started to shout at us to stop and we stopped of course. We said, “What happened expert sergeant?” He corrected us to address him as commander. The situation heated up and we heard his command, “Lie down!” We were supposed to do push-ups. Nobody went down. I was in the front. I knew he would slap me. I hadn’t been slapped even by my father. I gave him two to three slaps before he could give me one. He fell to the ground. I had fourteen days of punishment. I had another seven-day punishment because of alcohol. I hadn’t had alcohol for twelve months.

In the military, you completely rely on your friend, you lie down with him, you get up with him. You don’t care if he is a Kurd, an Alevi, or a Sunni. We were six or seven Alevis in the company. People would talk in favor of or against our belief and I would try to enlighten them.

Formerly, I had been very irresponsible, now I am very different. Sometimes, I jump up in my sleep. I hadn’t told anything to anybody about my military service until now, at least not more than one or two words. When I talk about it, I live everything all over again, I remember my martyred friends, I remember their families, I feel very sad. I talked about them freely with you because I know that I will be useful. The public doesn’t know the problem of the Southeast, they believe in whatever the media tell them. If only they would ask those who did their military services there. . . . I studied psychology for some time—maybe hoping for some relief. Who had written that book *Alchemist*? I have read his books, as well as Nazım Hikmet and Erdal Öz . . . I don’t read newspapers much, sometimes I read comic magazines like *Leman*. I have always been against compulsory conscription. Why would one do military service? You would do it

for your country. It shouldn't be compulsory. Let the patriots do it. They take you into the service in the best years of your life. Just as I learned everything, understood everything, just when my feet touched the ground, it was time for military service. You come back like a tamed lion.

You are there to defend your mother, your father, your honor, your wife, your country. But the commander swears at you, at your mother, at your wife. Didn't I go into military service for my mother, my father? There is a tumor slowly spreading all over Turkey, not only in the Southeast but it has started spreading in the West as well. Everybody should know and rise against it. There is a war going on there, not a struggle, not a fight but a real war, a real massacre. It isn't ending, it will not end. Everyday, martyrs' families and the families of the disappeared appear on TV. They should support each other; there is nothing else to do. (April 1998, Izmir)

Born in 1973 in Erzincan, he grew up in Izmir, living in Izmir. He went to Egridir Commando Training Camp in August 1995. He was deployed in the Kamışlı Station as part of the Hakkari Mountain Commando Brigade. He went back to Izmir in February 1997. He has two sisters and three brothers. Two brothers served in the military at the same time. He left school in Seventh grade. He works as a construction worker like his father. He is of the Alevi belief and he thinks that his family is originally Kurdish but adds that his mother and father insist that they are Turks.

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I BECAME A TERRORIST, LIKE THEY SAID, A REAL TERRORIST . . .

“Sun shines after each storm.” I have begun to internalize this thought. “I may be sad now, but in a few days things will get better” kind of thought. I have cured myself by confronting the problem head on and by reassuring myself with these kinds of thought.

Everybody does their military service because it is compulsory, so did we. We went through special training. They were telling us about the events in the East, as part of the mental preparation. What I had learned as a civilian and what was taught to me in the military were totally different. I experienced an inner conflict about what truth was.

When I went to the East, the conflict was over. I had found my own truth. Our basic training was quite heavy. They took sixty-five of us to Çatalkaya to train us on village raids. My specialization was in mining. They used to tell us about what the people called “terrorists” did in the East. For instance, they told us that terrorists would put hand-grenades inside glasses, that we should not kick metal containers of any kind as they might contain bombs, or that we should not touch the dead. Normally when the terrorists are wounded, just before they die, they place a hand-grenade under their stomach area. When you turn them around, it explodes. You can die then and there. Instead of turning them around yourself, you should tie a string on their feet and turn them by pulling. We were told to be cautious about where we put our feet when we walked. Perhaps because our family originally comes from the East, before I went into military service, I used to believe that people in the East are right and that they face injustice. In the military, I was told the opposite story. They told us that these terrorists wanted to divide our country and that they killed children. I have a special love and sympathy for children, so I started to change my ideas. Had my learning, investigations, or observations been wrong? During basic training, my ideas about the conflict changed completely. And when I went to the East and saw what was happening there, I realized that a lot of the

things they attributed to the terrorists were in fact done by soldiers. I witnessed both. And this way, I found my own truth.

We tried to use influence so that I would not be sent to the East when the lottery was drawn after training. We were expecting to pull Samsun from the lottery, but instead it was Diyarbakır. So we went through special training in arms and antiaircraft weapons. I am a musician, so I was given a position in the Orduevi [literally military house, i.e. military recreation facilities]. I worked as a guard in the entrance door of the Diyarbakır Orduevi. We used to check the identity cards of those going in and out. According to our orders, everyone is obliged to present their identity cards. If you have the slightest suspicion, you are ordered to shoot; you can shoot. There was a captain who gave us orders. He used to say, "You should be like terrorists, people should fear you." We were pulled up when we gave thirty-five martyrs in Lice. The photographer of the Orduevi had photographed the martyrs. They showed us those pictures. They had been raped and stabbed on their legs. It was there in the pictures. They were decapitated; their penises were cut off and placed on their backs. When I saw these pictures, I went into depression. We used to pull people from the outside and hit them because they had stared at us. The captain would say, "Don't hit too hard." When the people we hit left, he would say, "This is exactly what you should do." Can you imagine? I used to be someone who would defend that place and those people and this is what I turned into. The first person I hit was a small child. They were throwing stones. Five or six of us hit him. He was about thirteen or fourteen years old; too young to even raise your hand to. There was a wall there. We used to hit them behind that wall. For instance, we see that a child is picking our flowers. The colonel would shout, "Can't you see that he has picked those flowers?" We would say, "Yes, we have seen, sir." "Pull him in, then" would be the response. We would call the child and pull him in. We would be pumped up to get together and hit him hard with the butts of our rifles. Then we would have him wash up and leave. I had started behaving in total contradiction to myself.

At one point I said, "It should not be this way, this is not me." Then I started to pull myself together and treat the children better. Because I stood at the door, the children would recognize me when I went out. They would say, "Aren't you the soldier at the door?" I stood at the door and they all knew me even when I was out as a civilian. I could lose my life. Who has guarantees? After a while, I started to behave differently. This time I was criticized because there were no disturbances, no terror, and no complaints at the door. I was put in jail for one week on the accusation that I was not performing my duty. If there are disturbances at the door, then everything looks in order. I tried to use my brains. So they wanted unrest at the door? I started to interrogate the officers. "You should

show your ID!" I would say to those who did not. Some of them would pull out their guns in response. I started to lose my integrity.

They told me to see a doctor. The major was happy and he did not mind what others said. When I messed with the high-ranking officers, I faced problems. Even when they were in uniforms, I had the authority to ask for ID cards. One day, they were expecting a brigadier general in a civilian vehicle, from Malatya, I think. I was on duty at the door, but no one had told me that a general would be coming. A car stopped, a really nice car. The doors opened and an old guy stepped out. I hesitated thinking whether I should ask for his ID or not. It was obvious that he was a high-ranking officer. I decided to ask. I told him that I needed to see his ID. He said, "Son, I am a pasha." I said, "You might be a pasha, but I need to see your ID." "Son, I am telling you that I am a pasha," he replied. My friends were making signs to let him in. "It does not matter," I said, "I need to see your ID. I cannot let in everyone who tells me they are a pasha. If you are a pasha, this is for your security." The pasha said, "Well done, stubborn" and he showed me his ID. When I realized what his rank was, I changed my posture and said, "Thank you, sir." The major came and congratulated me because the pasha had praised security at the door. If he had complained, I would be in trouble . . .

Once we hit a woman. In fact, she was mentally disabled, but we did not know. I was given an office job as a clerk, but had to train the friend who would take my place at the door. The lady was harassing this friend. We told her to go, but she would not. Normally, we are ordered to stay away from people at least by five meters. If you are too close, you can be stabbed or they could be carrying a bomb. Because she would not leave, my friend pushed her, so did we. The woman started shouting and throwing stones. Then we hit her a couple of times and sent her away. She came again and we hit her again. We had lost ourselves, we did not know what we were doing. We must have kicked her and even hit her with the butt. Some of our friends said, "Are you crazy?" when they saw what we were doing. We were so brainwashed. You have to obey orders. If you don't, the punishment is clear. You get a discipline punishment and get tried at the military court. The rules were hard. When I went to bed I thought about it: Why did I do it? Can I find her and say I am sorry? There were many instances when I fell into total contradiction with myself.

I became a clerk. We were in the building that was called the headquarters. I started reading the documents that came from intelligence. As a clerk, I had the authority to read them. They made us swear that no information would leave that room. I would read only what I had to read. Some were secret documents. They contained information about incidents in the region. They gave examples in order to demand increased caution. At one point, they called us for a meeting

because an inspector would come to check on the colonel. They told us to write all the information in the computer and print it out. We were made to swear that we would tell no one about the information we were dealing with. The colonel would go on operations to neighboring towns and provinces every day. We would be working until 1–2 a.m. at night to finish typing up the reports. He would talk and I would write. The reports were to go to Ismail Hakkı Karadayı, the General Chief of Staff. These were reports that qualified as evaluation reports from the East. While writing the reports, he would show me the documents they had captured. They included calendars that the terrorists used, their photographs taken on snowy mountains, poems that they had written. The colonel would joke with me saying, “Look at the bastard, he has even written poems.” Even when I liked the poem, I would pretend not to and say, “Right sir, look at what the bastard has done.” That is how I had to present myself. Still, they started calling me a terrorist. Five of us with leftist inclination got labeled as terrorists. We were honest people and people liked us. I never went into a skirmish, but before I went to the Orduevi, the Bolu commandoes camped close to our unit and showed us videos from the operations they had participated in. In one of those videos, they ask a terrorist lad something like “Where are the others?” You can’t hear it well because the helicopter is too loud. Anyway, they tell him that he will be set free if he tells the truth. I am summarizing for you what I can remember. The child tells them things. The filming stops at that point. Then they throw him out of the helicopter. They kill him there. That is what I witnessed. I saw transparent things in their hands and asked what they were. They were using them as key-chains. One of them said, “These are ears, man.” I asked: “What ears?” Apparently, they cut the ears of the terrorists they kill, put them in coca-cola until the cartilage comes out. Then they use them as key-chains. I mean they, too, have lost it. The Bolu commandoes were always in combat and their experiences were very different from ours. They were telling us about how, during the operations, they would find their friends dead and raped on rocks, with their pants turned the other way. These things had a lot of impact on them. There was something similar said about the events in Lice when thirty-five soldiers were killed. It must have been 1995–1996. I told you I had seen their photographs at the Orduevi. The guys who use the Cobra helicopters were talking about those events. They knew that there were terrorists in this place called the devil’s triangle and still dropped the thirty-five soldiers in the middle of it with helicopters. They had missed the coordinates. All of them were caught alive, without even the chance to get into combat. . . . It is obvious in the pictures that they were tortured because they were caught alive. They tell us about these things, and of course it has an impact on us.

When we were talking with the commandoes, they also told us about how they raped girls in villages. They had a captain called . . . who was leading the commando unit. When they went into a village, he called the women in the village and asked, "Where are your men?" The women said, "They are in Istanbul, working." He said "Bull . . .," I don't want to say the slang, "They are in the mountains fighting." He told his soldiers that they could do whatever they wanted. So the soldiers started sleeping with the women in the village. They were free to do whatever they wanted. . . . The Bolu commandoes had totally lost it, they were all in deep trouble, with lives that had lost all meaning. . . . Even though I was never in such an extreme situation, there were times when I had to terrorize people. And the conditions under which the commandoes lived were very different. As a matter of fact, the people were good toward the soldiers. I used to hang out at a restaurant. There was a friend there. He was a local of Diyarbakır. We were really close, we would drink beer together. I think these incidents occur because of the officers, not the soldiers . . . when you listen to those people, you can empathize with them.

I got married after I came back from military service. Now we are expecting a child. My life has changed; I now have more responsibilities. Now I am fine, I don't find myself too nervous anymore. My mom is always angry with me that I don't do something to cure it. I have found my own cure. I have gone through a lot of difficult things. While doing my military service, I used to pull out the gun to everyone around. I had totally lost it. I even pulled the trigger once; but the gun did not fire. They asked me, "Are you crazy?" The officers started fearing me. They started pulling out their IDs meters in advance. Like they had said, I became a real terrorist. But the opposite also happened. I moved away from civilian people and saw the lifestyle of the officers. Then I realized that what I was doing to the people was wrong. We were wasted for nothing. It is not clear whom we are serving and whom are we fighting against. The people we face are also citizens of this country. Who are we directing our weapons against?

Those people have a reason to go to the mountains. Why am I in the military? I started searching for a legitimation. I also thought about going to the mountains. That is why they were calling us terrorists. I was seriously considering hitting the mountains. They thought I was joking. I also wanted them to think I was a psychopath, so they would let me be. I extinguished a cigarette on my arm. This mark that you see on my hand was left from that incident. I wanted to break my shoulder so that they would send me off for what they call "a change of mood." I had the guys kick me so that I would break my bones and come here for a change of mood. My shoulder bone is injured because of those kicks. At that time, they gave me leave for twenty days but did not let me leave Diyarbakır.

Because they would not send me, I started to drink alcohol. After I came back, I told myself that I should be good. I tried to internalize the idea that “the sun shines after every storm.” Like, if I am sad today, it will be fine in a couple of days. Now I am doing well. I have no more problems. (August 1998, Samsun)

Born in Ordu in 1970, he lives in Samsun. He is the fourth child of the family; has one sister, four brothers. He is a university graduate. He did his military service between November 1995 and April 1997. His basic training unit was in Izmir Narlıdere. He became a commando and was deployed in Diyarbakır.

OUR NICKNAME AMONG THE TERRORISTS WAS “BATTALION OF BASTARDS”

Breathing is a very beautiful feeling. I live with this philosophy. Before military service, everything and home, home and work; there was nothing else. I was bearded, untidy, and dirty. . . . Now I am very concerned about my clothing, my talking, my shaving, everything. Why? Life is beautiful.

They say, “Sunrise in Piriktepe is somewhat different.” When you climb up the hill where the fighting takes place, you can see two peaks toward the East that belong to Akdağlar [White Mountains]. . . . You know how they draw pictures, sun rising among two mountain peaks, just like that. We had taken photographs of the scene, too. Our camera was always with us. I took the picture of the last terrorist I killed with my friends, as a souvenir. I don’t know if it was right or wrong. According to me, it was right. I have also seen the bodies of my friends they had ambushed and martyred. Have you ever seen the body of a soldier who has fallen into the hands of terrorists? One who does what they do to a human body is not human. A group of unskilled soldiers of the station close to a town in the Elazığ province, let me not give its name, was going to lay an ambush at a distance of 600–700 meters to the station. Their biggest mistake was that they had their walkmans on their ears as they did this. They were confident that nothing would happen there, since nothing had ever happened. Foolishness! They were sitting in their posts in the open, some reading magazines, some writing or drawing as if they were leisurely passing time in their homes. There was no officer there to warn them, officers didn’t go to nearby ambushes. Usually, a team sergeant or a corporal was assigned over unskilled soldiers. The PKK slaughtered all of them without firing a gun. They not only cut their throats, but they sliced their ears, pierced their eyes out, cut their penises and thrust them into their mouths. But we did worse things. Ask four to five martyrs’ families if they opened the coffins of their sons and looked at their faces . . . ask if the

families have been shown their sons' faces. They don't let them see because there is nothing left to see. I beg your pardon for crying. I had no idea it would hurt this much. . . . To talk about it makes me feel good in a way.

There was no training in the battalion. When we were back from a duty, we would have three or four days of leisure, depending on the hardship of the operation, to rest, sleep, eat, and so on. We were definitely making mistakes during every operation. We were leaving traces behind us. If you eat canned food, you are supposed to bury the can. We were throwing it away behind the commander's back. Most of the soldiers would leave the cans behind because of their weight and eat bread and crackers. I was taking with me ketchup, in a plastic bottle, mayonnaise, bread, salami, few sausages according to the duration of the operation. . . . When our friends were martyred, we cried a lot. Our battalion took the revenge of the martyrs of the Elazığ region. If a soldier was martyred, we surely took one of them down. We would immediately organize an operation after losing a martyr. Participation in such operations was only to take revenge, no other reason. Well, it was a duty but what everybody wanted was only to get hold of one of them. We were listening to their conversations over the wireless and among terrorists, our nickname was "the battalion of bastards." We would appear at unexpected places at unexpected times. If there was no ID on the terrorists we captured, how could you know if he was a Turk, a Muslim? We would look if he was circumcised, 60 percent or 70 percent of them would not be circumcised. Their names would be Manukin, Katilian, and so on. There were a lot of Syrian names, as well as Lebanese and Armenian nationalities.

We captured one of them. His name was Ali, seventeen years old, from Diyarbakır. He told us that he joined the PKK in Antalya for two million TL. He was wandering in the mountains, didn't know where he was going. We killed him, our company commander, our team commander killed him. He was shooting at us five minutes before he was caught. He denied that he had been shooting. We found his gun, the firing mechanism was stuck. If it hadn't been stuck, he would have continued to shoot. He was saying, "Brothers, forgive me, I will tell you everything."

There were five companies, including the headquarters' company, one of them being the Province Commando Company. Four of these divisions were constantly going on operational duties. Since there are 110 soldiers in each company, including the officers, 4 companies amount to 440. When you add 160–170 soldiers of the Headquarters' Company, the total would not exceed 600–650 soldiers. The people in our company were farmers, civil servants, small merchants, teachers, workers, that is members of the Turkish middle class. Only eight to ten soldiers in our company were of families with good financial means. One of them was there because his efforts to use influence through a high-ranking

officer had backfired and I was there because of my foolishness. All drivers were there because they wanted it and about the rest, I don't know anything. Eighty to ninety percent of the soldiers in our companies wanted continuous combat. A friend from Ankara said, "I would have been sad if I were sent to the West. Here, we at least have salaries." I didn't do it but most of my friends used their salaries to shop as preparation for their marriages. They bought refrigerators, washing machines, ovens, and so on. If one of us got ill, we all would help him even if we didn't like him. Such friendships end with military service. You don't have the same kind of friendships in your civilian life. These are seventeen months during which we stopped living. Actually, in the East, we had more vacation leaves, and we also had rewards. For example, my military service amounted to fifteen months, with thirteen months of active duty. The total of vacation leaves were 123 days, it amounted to four months. This leaves thirteen months of active service. The friends there were closer than family. I told them, "I will send postcards to all of you for the new year and for the *Ramazan Bayramı* [the religious holiday that follows the fasting month of Ramadan], but for the *Kurban Bayramı* [the religious holiday when sheep are slaughtered and their meat distributed to the poor], I will only send to those who have sent me postcards." We were thirty-five altogether, I sent postcards to all of them and received postcards from only three, all three being my buddies. Relationship with buddies is very special. Everybody had a nickname, mine was "Sharp." I am not bragging about it but they would say, "You would hit a fly from five kilometers away." One of them married but didn't invite me to the ceremony. I had told them that if they didn't invite me to their marriage ceremonies, I would spit in their faces. I sent him a postcard for *Bayram* saying, "You are the most indecent man in the world. I am ashamed of having you as a buddy." I still keep my blue beret and cartridge belt. I also keep my cold climate coat. I am not particularly insistent on being called "commando." When I look at the photographs, I suddenly become overwhelmed by an outpouring of compassion. When I start talking about the military or see a soldier, I remember my friends. I haven't forgotten any of them, and I can't. For example, if we would ask our commander who was going downtown, to bring us one kilo of *baklava* [sweets], he would bring ten kilos of it. We were on good terms with the noncommissioned officers as well. When we were in the mountains, our battalion commander would say, "In the dark of the night, we are equal." In the dark, you can't know from where a bullet may come.

During our first and biggest fight, we got sixty-eight heads. I was frightened. Our helicopters threw bombs on us, but it wasn't their fault. It happened, I think, because someone pressed the trigger a little early. The bombs they threw passed the peak of the mountain and dropped just in front of us. Thank God

nobody died, they dropped on the left side of a set of rocks. If they had dropped to the right of that set It was a close call. If I remember it correctly, it was sometime between April 16 and 29, we were in Arıcak, laying an ambush. On the day we were scheduled to go back, the terrorist group saw the units in their ambush posts and announced it over the wireless. It was right as we were having breakfast. After we got sixty-eight heads, the company commander distributed the heads, giving thirteen heads to our company. We were the first to get into combat, it was us who did most of the fighting. Then came the Special Operations Commando, I mean Military Special Operations. We were expecting at least half of the heads. It was not a matter of money reward, but it was the success of our battalion. For example, the Company Commander of Tunceli gave orders that the necessary attention and care be shown to the gendarmerie commando company of Elazığ, that is, us. Going downtown had been forbidden, that ban was lifted. Our food improved, our rest time increased. Canned fish, sausages, salami started to arrive. Field rations and cans were coming from the regiment and our dues in cash from Şırnak. For instance, if sweets were served consequently for two days, we knew that a heavy operational duty was due and that we were being doped. During basic training, I had seen meat with stamps dating as far back as 1981. Anyway I didn't eat anything during basic training.

We would have nice conversations with members of Special Operations whenever we met. . . . They were very courageous people. In the military, I would think of myself as "daredevil" but I witnessed the Special Operations commando running after terrorists while bullets were flying in the air. What you live there is very different. Why did I stop smoking? My friend beside me was martyred because of a cigarette. He was going to be discharged four days later and was going on vacation leave. On February 4—it happened in Tunceli. We did whatever was forbidden to do. In the field at night the light of a cigarette can be seen from five to six kilometers away. Our lives depend on only one bullet: Shall I say five grams or ten grams? After it happened, I lit a cigarette, I put it off, and I never lighted another. In the battalion, I distributed two boxes of cigarettes to friends. I said, "I will fuck the mother of whoever offers me a cigarette again."

When my friend died, I could have skinned a terrorist alive without mercy if only I would have been given one. Personally, I killed terrorists after that incident, too. I don't think that any of our martyred soldiers were unavenged. Although normally I was not a revengeful person, I became one after seeing what has been done to our soldiers. The military turns you into someone who seeks revenge. It is like answering back what has been done to you, like making the scores even. . . . The commanders read the incoming letters one by one. If there is bad news from the family, they don't let you know, they usually let you know

later. I had a girlfriend, a pervert. She would write only sexual letters. When her first letter arrived, I said, "Good, our letters are not read." Of course, I didn't think about how these letters would affect me psychologically. Her second letter was read by the team commander who called me and said, "Let her stop writing such letters otherwise we shall not give them to you." What can happen is that when you are alone in the field, you may start thinking about the letters and lose your concentration. It is very risky. There is no sexuality in the field, it is in the battalion or during bathing. Once, I didn't get down the mountain for thirty-seven days. I didn't take my boots off my feet during that time. I could but I didn't, it was depressing. You eat a-week-old bread, sometimes you have to throw the moldy part and eat the rest. For instance, one day we ate one day's ration in one meal. The helicopter that was bringing the rations went to an operation and came again three days later. Thus, we were left without food, hungry, including the highest-ranking commander. Most of those who have served in the East know which plants are edible, like mallow or golden thistle. . . . A friend from Gümüşhane [Black Sea region] would clean a thorny plant, salt it, and create an unexpectedly tasty meal. You learn to heat water in a used can and drink your tea from it.

During basic training, I was a conveyance driver and my first duty was to Bilecik. They woke me up on my tenth night there and said, "You are going." When I went to Söğüt, they assigned me to bus driving saying, "you will be going to Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir or at worst, to Eskişehir." Among 1,600 soldiers, there were only 4 of us with E type [valid for heavy vehicles] driving license. They said, "The worst is Diyarbakır." My father found a colonel, a lieutenant-colonel to favor me with the final deployment. But before he called the colonel, our commander said, "You four drivers are very lucky." I wasn't a reckless person in my civilian life and when I was going to the service, I was advised not to poke my nose into everything. Otherwise, they said, "You will be beaten, there is no logic in the military." That's why I didn't ask why we were lucky, someone else did. What can be better than not going to the East? I was relieved, I told my family that there was no need to talk to the colonel any more. When lots were announced, mine came out to be Mobile Gendarmerie Commando Battalion in Elazığ. Although I was a gendarmerie driver, I went there as a commando. I wore a cap during basic training and a beret during proficiency training. During proficiency training, I was trained in arms. During the forty-five day basic training, I fired only two shots, six bullets in total.

Of course, I was sent to the East as a bus driver, but I was also trained in driving Landrovers. I went to Elazığ, passed through the entrance gate where they said, "Go and enroll." No salute or anything, very informal. "I got into a circus," I thought. I saw an officer and said, "Have a good day, sir." Then a

noncommissioned officer said, “Welcome. What is this casualness?” I immediately got into attention position though in civilian clothes. Tak. He slapped me so hard that I couldn’t say a word. Then, he said, “Sit down.” I said, “As you order, sir!” “I gave you your slap, from now on, no more order or whatever.” “As you order, sir!” I said again, not being sure if he meant it. He asked the guard at the gate to bring us tea. To me, he said, “Don’t misunderstand me, this is the first and the last slap you will get here, otherwise, there is no beating here.” He went on, “Most probably, you will be assigned to one of the companies. You will be given a Landrover, you will go on duties, into mountains.” We were four drivers, two van drivers, a Renault driver and me, a bus driver. But there was no bus; a transportation car was used to take officers downtown and back. I said to myself, “My job is easy, a drive in the morning and one in the evening, if necessary one at noon too. . . . If that is so, the military service will be a piece of cake.” It didn’t turn out as expected. The first fifteen days, I was on duty in the dining room. It was Ramadan and everybody was fasting. It was all about meal service. The whole day, we were preparing food for 600 people in the battalion. Bring rice, wash it, bring water, dice onions, make salads, and peel potatoes . . . excessive hard work. At night, we were looking forward to going to bed. One of the seniors said, “If you go to another duty, you will have only one trouble: death. If you stay at the headquarters, you will be responsible for standing guard, dish washing, all kinds of battalion work. On the other hand, if you go on operations, when you go back home, you will be able to say proudly that you have done your military service as a commando. You will defend your country. You may be martyred, wounded, or you may not be. Or you may finish your service without facing a combat situation, as God wills.” I only listened. In other words, what he meant was, “If you stay at the headquarters, you are in deep shit.” In the companies, they were saying, “If you kill terrorists, there are rewards; you will be sent to vacation, you will be comfortable, you will be given bonus in cash and all that.” The next day, I went on duty without getting any training. My first place of duty was Karakoçan. It was so cold that for six days I froze to my bones. The discharge date of one of the drivers was due and I was a newcomer with the oldest license date. So, I was called to replace him. They handed me the car and a gun. I went on duty with a car I had never used before and with a gun I had never used before. A village was to be searched. That night, we went to a small hamlet of Karakoçan. Despite the dark of the night, the lights of the car had to be kept off. The way I sweated in the cold of that night, I will never sweat again for the rest of my life. You know, they say that those who served in the military become more enthusiastic, determined, strong, do everything better, it is true. In civilian life, I couldn’t drive a car that way, I couldn’t go in the dark, at a speed of 30–40 km on

a road I didn't know. Well, I had to and I wanted to succeed. . . . Our greatest happiness was to come back to the battalion from a duty, safe and sound.

We studiously counted the days that were left of our military service. It was called counting *dawn*. When dawn was thirty-four days, same as the number on the license plates of Istanbul, we would get on the back of a soldier from Istanbul to ride us around, ending in the canteen. The final treat was either coke or a bar of chocolate. It was cause for celebration. Man, you can't believe it's ending . . . after counting 400s, 300s When I said, "dawn 45," I came on vacation leave, which was a reward. What was my success? A terrorist's head. We got a head together with a friend. Because ours was registered, we were awarded. I got three to four such rewards. We were in our posts and I was searching the area with night-vision glasses when I spotted them. There were three of them. When you see them, there is only one thing to do: to fire. If you don't shoot at him, maybe another day he will shoot at you. Even if he was a normal villager, not a terrorist, in the dark of the night, we had to shoot at him. You don't know who is passing by. Thank God, we never killed any villager. Our company, in fact our battalion, got a lot of heads. I participated in many cave searches in Tunceli, in Ali Boğazi, in Mazgirt, in Hozat, and in Çemişkezek. A lot of soldiers were martyred but it was mostly our fault. We were so fearless that we were diving into caves without thinking. We would throw bombs inside the cave and steady-fire, but if we missed them, they would kill us when we got in. Thank God it never happened. We found food in places where a goat couldn't go. You would think that they had helicopters. It helped at times when we were hungry. We often found hazelnuts. The amount of hazelnuts I ate in the military, I didn't eat in my civilian life. Hazelnuts, almonds, all fresh of course. Chocolate, women's panties, women's underwear, birth-control pills, preservatives. . . . We found everything necessary for people to live. We would burn flour, oils, not because of any risks they carried, but because we couldn't carry them. The duty would last for three days when we went into the Akdağ mountains. It is said that napalm bombs, fire bombs are used there. It would burn for a moment but trees would not catch on fire because of the high amount of humidity. Every soldier participated in a different number of operations depending on his vacation leaves, I participated in 110–120 operations. We went on daily duties, too. During most of them, I wouldn't even get off my car. We were going to certain villages, the officers would talk to the elders of the village and soldiers would talk with children. We got our news from the children. . . . One night the weather was very cold, I got angry because the dawn would never break. I didn't understand why it took so long. Four hours seemed never to end. Those four hours seemed longer than the whole term of my service.

I would pray to God at every opportunity. It was not regularly five times a day, but that's the way it was in my civilian life as well. Of course, I do it regularly during Ramadan, the month of fasting. My religious beliefs didn't change a bit. As far as I could see, religious beliefs got stronger in the military. A friend of mine who had never fasted did so during Ramadan in the military. I called my family regularly at a maximum of ten-day intervals, the *muhtar* of the village would say no at first but would let me do it every time. Villagers are afraid of guns. We would threaten them by saying that we would take them in for interrogation or take them to the District Gendarmerie. They were afraid of the mention of District Gendarmerie because it is said that interrogation there lasts for three days.

It will come to an end, soon. The military will put an end to it. Probably an operation such as the one organized for Sakık will be organized for Apo [Abdullah Öcalan] as well. The red berets that carried out the Sakık operation don't love their mother, their father but love their country. I saw them once during an operation in Bingöl. Their only concern was the country. Country is important to me too but theirs was like an obsession or perhaps it was a result of the training they were given. . . . If, during military service, someone would say, "Die for your country," I would die. Now, if they say, "Your death will eradicate the terrorist organization," I would die. I don't have a child. My family would mourn, but I have a cousin, my brother's child, his future would be guaranteed.

Most of my friends said that I didn't change a bit, but a friend who knew me closely said that I have changed a lot. Before the military, I was very talkative; I am now much quieter. I don't talk much. I haven't gone to any wedding since I came back because of the crowd. I went to a disco once to celebrate my brother's graduation and once or twice to a cinema. I don't go to our summer house, either. The summer house should be surrounded by a wall and nobody should interfere with me. I spare one day of the week to myself. I see my girlfriend on Saturday nights. When I came on leave during my service, I would read all the papers to see if there was any fighting, if they had captured any terrorists, and so on. Now, I read rightist papers such as *Sabah* and *Yeni Asır*. In my circles, nobody favors terrorism, nobody even likes Kurds. The population is not very concerned with what is happening there, they are interested only when someone they know is martyred. And their concern is only until the funeral. In my opinion, martyrdom should not end with the funeral. The country is like a tree with its leaves. Each martyr is a leaf of this tree, the leaves become yellow, dry out and fall down. Generally, I sleep little. After the military, I sometimes wake up suddenly but I don't know why. Sometimes a noise wakes me up. Lately, it has been happening less frequently. Previously I would wake up two to three times a night. I don't dream about the military, I don't want to. I keep myself

under control a bit. I am aware of what I experienced there. Some of my friends are still under its effect. Soldiers who are at least twenty-two years old should become commandoes, not younger. For me, the greatest moment of pride was when our battalion commander was praising us calling us, "my lions" [meaning, "my boys"]. I mean, he is not complaining that I didn't shoot a terrorist, or that I didn't do such and such a duty. When I am asked if I shot anyone or not, I say, "maybe I did, maybe I didn't, how can I know?" I opened up and told you so much because my name will not be mentioned. Instead of bragging about having shot someone, it would be better if the conflict is resolved without shedding blood. I didn't feel sorry for shedding blood because they did the same. I first heard the word Kurd probably when I was in primary school. I didn't know what Kurd meant. Later on, I thought that Kurd meant someone from the East like Kars or Erzurum. When I was old enough to think, I knew exactly what Kurd meant. At the moment, according to me a Kurd is, well . . . Are all living on the soil of the Turkish Republic Turks? Yes, we are Turks. . . . The Kurdish people I saw in the East had no problems with us. The Kurdish people are not behind Apo, he doesn't even know Kurdish. A person who doesn't know Kurdish is fighting for Kurdish rights. Can a person who doesn't know Turkish fight for the rights of the Turkish people?

Economically, there is a lot of difference between here and there. First, they don't exactly know what civilization means. There is television in the village but they don't watch it. Only males of the village watch television in the coffeehouse. Through an interpreter, we asked a Kurdish woman how many years she had been married. She couldn't count. She had been married for seventeen to eighteen years but she had no idea. This woman didn't know about bra . . . let alone condoms. How could she know? In the military, I met a twenty-four-year-old who was not circumcised. He was not an Armenian. He said that it was difficult for his father to take him to town. No doctor had come to his village, he hadn't become ill and come to town to see a doctor. Later on, he had a problem with his prostate gland, came to the hospital and the doctor then circumcised him. But when we would say to a woman who didn't understand Turkish, "Shut up or I will kill you," she would understand. . . . The enemy is not worth a penny The enemy is someone who wants to harm my country, my government. Not only the PKK but those giving support to the PKK are also my enemies. I don't have a special enemy. Victory is success. In the military, it is important to complete the given duty. That is what I learned in the military. You shall do your duty as you are told, neither less nor more. What threatens me now is sorrow, in the military it was death. Military service is a duty to our country. I would do my military service even if it wasn't compulsory but I didn't think so prior to my service. For example, if it would have been said, "You will not do your military

service if you give 50 billion TL” I would have given it. Now, I think differently. Before the military, I was taking life more seriously, everything was a problem. We are in the business of shuttle transportation and when there would be a delay, I would make it a big deal and feel bad. Now I know better. I have learned that even the greatest problem, the greatest difficulty cannot be greater than death. Breathing is a very beautiful feeling. I live with this philosophy. Before military service, everything revolved around work and home, home and work; there was nothing else. I was bearded, untidy, and dirty. . . . Now I am very concerned about my clothing, my talking, my shaving, everything. Why? Life is beautiful.

In the military, I thought a lot about *Kordon* [a coastal neighborhood in Izmir] and said to myself, “I am a soldier now, I am in the military, my civilian life is over.” Among my friends, there are those who came to the military as non-smokers but went back home as addicted smokers or those who didn’t drink before but became alcoholics there. There wasn’t a formal officer–private relationship in our unit, we were friends. My commander wouldn’t order me, “Do this” but he would say, “Let’s do this.” Once, when we were in the mountains, my commander wanted me to give him my water but I said, “No.” He said that he will send me to court-martial. I answered, “shoot at me if you want but I have to use my water sparingly for three days. You have to carry your own water.” You live all sorts of things there. My military service would never end if I would have done it in the West. I can’t live by orders. I am used to giving orders, I get bored when I am ordered around too much. I have a girlfriend, she wants us to get married but I don’t think much about marriage. I left this to my family to decide, they will find me the best girl to marry. You need to have good financial means now-a-days in order to get married. There is a saying that love doesn’t fill your stomach. I came back home on April 29 at 5.30 p.m. (April 1998, Izmir)

Born in 1971 in Kemalpaşa, he lives in Izmir. He won the right to attend Law School in the Dokuz Eylül [September 9] University in Izmir but didn’t go because of family reasons. Instead, he enrolled in Açık Öğretim [Open University, two-year distance learning] and studied Management. His military service was postponed because he was a student. . . . He went to military service in November 1995. His basic training was in the Kırkağaç Gendarmerie in Manisa. He was then deployed to the Mobile Gendarmerie Commando Battalion in Elazığ. He was discharged in April 1997. He is working as a driver.

I DIDN'T LIVE UP TO THE UNIFORM I WORE

When I heard that we were going to guard the border in the East, I started to love military service even more; I worked with greater enthusiasm. My dreams were going to be realized. . . . I wanted to get involved in combat.

I wanted to serve in the East. There was more terrorist activity in the years 1993–1994 than there is now. That's why I wanted to go there. The priority was given to the people from the Black Sea region because they grow up with guns; it is a part of their lives. I had my basic training in the Ankara Etimesgut Sergeant Training Battalion. As an advantage of having a high school diploma, I served in Etimesgut as a sergeant candidate for three months. Three months passed quickly. It wasn't the way I had expected, but still they tried to give us some training. We were told on our first week there that we were going to serve in the East. They started giving us information about tanks and their internal computer system. M60 tanks had been donated by the United States. These tanks were being used for training in the West and in combat situations in the East. They had different classes, mine was an M60. This class was more powerful. It was made of steel, had more munitions, had less risk of death, and you could protect yourself. When I heard that we were going to guard the border in the East, I started to love military service even more; I worked with greater enthusiasm. My dreams were going to be realized. I wanted to get involved in combat. I was following terrorist incidents on TV and reading about them in the newspapers. Terrorists had been raiding villages and killing small children. I developed a grudge against them. I said to myself, "I have to take a head or kill three or four of them." When I was on leave in Rize after the completion of my basic training, my mind was constantly in the military. I got bored in fifteen days. A long journey of fifteen months was waiting for me. I wanted to join my proficiency battalion as soon as possible, take part in combats, and start experiencing the situation. They were harming our friends, our people, and I wanted to do my little bit in response.

I was deployed to the Tank Battalion in Doğu Beyazıt, in the Ağrı province. When I went there first, it was night, so I couldn't see much of Ağrı. I went directly to Doğu Beyazıt by bus. I was surprised because there were cannon holes on the walls of the buildings, even on the lodging house of the governor. Windows were broken, the city was in ruins. I asked the experienced soldiers about it. They said that the town was attacked by terrorists in 1993. Doğu Beyazıt is a small town, it has one main street and two side streets. The buildings had collapsed. Both sides used cannons. The terrorists attacked the town from the high mountain peak opposite our battalion. Bullet and mortar traces could still be seen in the tank battalion. PKK's primary aim was the tank battalion. They attacked at night. When our battalion answered back, the combat began. Later on, their attack was directed toward the town. The town people were poor and religiously fanatic. . . . Only a certain section of the Doğu Beyazıt population is friendly with the military. Most don't like the military. They don't make life easy for the military; they don't help the soldiers. Because I knew that the PKK had come out of the Kurdish population, I was distant to them. That is why I went to Doğu Beyazıt both willingly and unwillingly. What a backward people they are. We would drink tea together in the coffeehouse during the day and they would shoot at us at night. I couldn't understand what kind of humanity, what kind of Islam it was. I inquired about their situation and learned that the level of investment done in the West is not done in the East. Unemployment is also a problem. Because they are poor, without work and money, they get a gun and go to the mountains. I used to think of Kurds as a different race before I went to the East. They proved that. They want to establish a separate state, a different race.

I didn't stay long in Doğu Beyazıt; my rank was that of corporal until the succeeding group of newcomers came. Because I was a sergeant candidate, our training for tank command was intensified. They said, "We will send you to the border after three months." We weren't permitted to go downtown in Doğu Beyazıt but our battalion was almost inside the town. Of course, I got bored during these three months. I wanted to grab my gun and go to the mountains as soon as possible. The noncommissioned officer of our company assigned me as a warehouse guard saying, "You will stay in the company for the remaining fifteen months." The Ağrı Mountain was on one side and a monastery was on the other side . . . I said, "commander, I can't complete my service here, send me to the mountains." He didn't change my assignment so I went to the commander of the battalion and told him that he had to send me on duty. I had declared my wish to go to the East to take part into combat, to fight with terrorists. In the end, the commander gave in and said that he will send me to the mountains for fifteen days. At that stage, death was not on my mind. I was very

happy like crazy. I couldn't wait till the next morning. First, we went to the Tazeköy station. It was 30–40 kilometers away from Doğu Beyazıt. The place was close to the Iranian, Armenian, and Iraqi border. . . . It belonged to the province of Iğdır. This was not the original site of duty for our battalion. The tanks belonged to the Doğu Beyazıt battalion. We had ten tanks positioned at different stations. I became a sniper at the Tazeköy station. They told me that I will do night watch. I became even happier. I had been given fifteen days, so I was counting down. I was planning to resist being taken from that duty after those fifteen days were over. I would say, "I liked being here, I am fine, I don't want to go." The experienced soldiers told me that I would complete my military service at that post. I hoped so. They were right, I had come there for fifteen days but I stayed for three months. Three months later, when the weather became cold, they pulled us back to the Sultantop station at the foot of the Ağrı Mountain. I went there with my tank and stayed for six months. The place was the heart of terrorist activity. It was said that there were no males in the village, all of them, young and old, had gone to the mountains. . . . Rumor was that the villagers were using a secret tunnel underneath the village for communication and transportation. There was a night-vision computer and night-vision binoculars in my tank, it was possible to see everything you see in daylight at night. I was on duty with this thermal camera every night till morning. I was watching very carefully not to miss anything. I didn't allow myself to fall asleep. We had sleeping hours during the day. I would watch over the camera constantly for one hour. The tank tower could rotate 360 degrees. There were twenty to thirty Kurdish soldiers at the station but I couldn't trust them. I mean, half of the soldiers were Kurdish. Why? The headquarters claim that people of the East know East better. That's wrong. They were talking in Kurdish among themselves. I felt anxiety, fear. By fear I mean, I was careful not to fall into an ambush . . . not during combat but in the tent, in the station. There was constant fear. I couldn't trust them. I didn't know my enemy. Since I didn't understand what they were talking about, I was suspicious that they were planning something against us. Are they planning to lay an ambush on us? Although I was not going with them, other soldiers of the station were going with them on guard and ambush duty. They must be making some secret plans if they are using Kurdish. It was forbidden to talk in Kurdish in the station. Lessons were being given to those who didn't know Turkish and to those who were illiterate. If you are performing your duty under the Turkish flag, if you are a Turk, you have to talk in Turkish. You are in a station so you have to abide by the ban. Why are you talking in Kurdish? O.K., it is your mother tongue, but even so. . . . If 50 percent, 60 percent of the station talks in Turkish, you have no choice but to comply with them. Whatever the majority is doing, the minority has to comply.

During military service, for me the enemy was the local people. People did not like the soldiers even a bit. I remember buying something for 1.5 million TL while its value was 500 TL. I was shopping from someone whose nephew or brother had joined the PKK. I would greet him when we met on the street. Just as I had a grudge against the terrorists and the people of the East, they had a grudge against us. While in the East, we had some authority over the villages; soldiers had some superiority so they couldn't do anything. I didn't have much of a relationship with the officers. I didn't interfere in what they did and they didn't interfere in mine. If I would have been a regular infantry soldier, my second enemy would be the officers. Because I was an artillery soldier, I could wear a beard and long hair but regular infantry soldiers had to shave every day; they had to keep their hair short.

I made a mistake when I was shooting at an Iranian station for harassment. I left the upper lid of the tank open. We were shooting at random without aiming at any target. There was continuous harassment shooting coming from the posts around this particular station. Because I was on a high spot, a soldier fired toward me and a traceable bullet went right over my head. At that moment, all my life passed in front of my eyes like a movie. I experienced it just like that. I wouldn't believe others who said such things, but I experienced it myself. You don't think of death at that moment because you want to do something. But you see death. I lived through combat situations three to four times and I felt like a hero. Maybe I didn't get anything [heads of terrorists] and didn't live up to the uniform I wore, but if it weren't for my tank or for me, they would have attacked the station, would have taken the head of our noncommissioned officer, and danced in victory. I felt like a hero for being there at that moment; anybody else in my place would have felt the same way. I felt that way three or four times during military service. After I came back, people did not really make me feel like a hero, but still, in certain circles, I am treated with respect for having done my military service in the East. They say, "if you weren't there, if you weren't on duty in the East, we couldn't sleep in peace here in Rize. When you were standing guard the whole night there, when your spit was freezing, when you were fighting in combats, we were sleeping in our warm beds." They were trying to make me feel as a hero but I had only done my duty. I never felt like a hero in civilian life.

I had four soldiers under my command. As a tank operator, I had my own soldiers. One of them owned a spice shop in Ulus, Ankara. Financial means of his family was good but he hadn't wanted to go to university so he was working in his shop, selling spices. Another one was working in a textile factory in Istanbul. The third one was an Arab from Urfa, grandchild of a tribal leader. I didn't know

anything about tribes. He explained a bit what a tribe was. I didn't have any dialogue with the regular soldiers of the station.

Upon completion of my service, I was partly happy to be discharged. I was leaving something of myself behind, I mean that ear . . . I had a feeling of deprivation for not being able to hang the ear of a PKK member on my neck. If I would be called on duty now, I would go and do the same duty again. I learned afterward that my family, my friends, people in my environment constantly worried about me. Now the population has become more conscious; they understand what is going on. Now I am a civilian but there are still soldiers in the East, still terrorists, still the PKK . . . Maybe I didn't personally experience much but I saw what was going on. There were times when I felt death behind my ear, my neck.

Back home, I couldn't easily get used to civilian life. I would be afraid of the night. I couldn't sleep peacefully at night; I couldn't walk with ease in the street. I felt estranged. People had changed quite a bit during the two years I was away. I would wake up three to four times a night. One night, they say that I woke up and asked for my boots. Apparently, I was having a bad dream, shouting, "There is an attack!" and screaming. I woke up in cold sweat, finding myself in my bed. . . . It went on for about a month. Then, it stopped. I had adapted. From time to time I watch TV programs like "*Mehmetçik*" and "*Sights from Anatolia*." I watch the TV news to see if the soldiers are successful against the terrorists and to see if there are any deaths. In the TV program "Sights from Anatolia," they talk about the reality of the soldiers who do their military service in the East. This is a war with the PKK and it will end; of course it will take time. No one can achieve anything by dying because both sides are Turks. I guess the PKK enjoys harming people. . . . They must be enjoying killing since they are still going on. The military wants it to end. Anyway, we are fighting to finish terrorism. Of course, not everybody is going there willingly. . . . As for the roots of the PKK, there is no single source. One moment you see them among the people, next they are inside the National Defense Ministry, next in the parliament. . . . Just as a tree has forty to fifty branches so does this PKK. . . . The majority of the people in Turkey want this to be over with. Those who have certain interests from this war or those who give PKK support in turn for some profit probably don't want it to end. Certain officers had an interest in the situation, had particular aims. What were they? To get rid of the uniform and to smuggle materials to Turkey from abroad—that's how they join forces with the PKK, but the hunter gets hunted.

When in the service, I listened mostly to a folk song named "Give Way Mountains, Give Way." I would sing songs to myself while on duty. I also read

books. I like reading—stories, novels. I was reading a book written by Sait Faik Abasıyanık. I couldn't finish it and I don't remember its name but it was a good book. . . . I read newspapers. I don't miss reading the *Türkiye* newspaper, as well as *Sabah* and *Hürriyet*. (August 1998, Rize)

Born in 1974 in Rize, he is the youngest of five sisters and a brother. He works in tea agriculture. He is a graduate of Vocational High School, electricity division. His mother and father are not living. He went to military service in December 1995. He had his basic training in Ankara Etimesgut and was deployed in Doğu Beyazıt as tank operator.

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THEY CALL IT THE “INVISIBLE ENEMY”: MY ONLY FEAR WAS THE LANDMINE AND I STEPPED ON ONE . . .

“Our soldier is the greatest soldier!” We all go into the military for the same thing; we are all great soldiers. Dancing, rejoicing . . . We said “Farewell Istanbul” and left. Yılmaz Morgül’s song “Farewell Istanbul” had just come out. I identified that song with my military service.

(Showing photographs): Look, this is Camp Şive, this is one of the deserted villages, and this is when we were out on a patrol . . . Here we are watching a football game, a Fenerbahçe game, together with friends from GATA. We lost the game; the score was 1–0. . . . This is the minister. I forgot which minister, the Health minister may be. We get confused because each administration changes the cabinet at least three to five times. . . . Here I am with the psychologist. He is only a couple of years older. This photo shows me after I came out of the operation. Here you can see my two feet tied to each other so they won’t move. This photo is from the Eğridir Commando Training Camp. I made ten copies of this and sent it to friends and family. This one is from one of our operations, the Sparrow Hawk Operation. Soldiers are crazy about photos. We could get them developed in Siirt, but they kept the negatives for security reasons. This is one of the trenches; not one that I made, though. In this photo, we are in the Training Unit. It was forbidden to take photos but we took it anyway. This is on new year’s eve. We were celebrating it with the nurses. The year 1996 is over and 1997 is on its way. My favorite hobby is photography. I have about 300–400 photographs from those days. This one in the picture is one of those guys you see on TV saying, “My legs are gone, but long live the country.” He would wish that his legs were fine and that he would go and finish his military service. This nurse in the picture was sent to Diyarbakır and was very happy about this assignment. Now she is crying, “Come and get me out of here!”

This is my best friend from military service. His is the right leg and mine is the left. This one was taken at the Silivri beach before military service, I am fifteen . . . I was in the Mortar Unit. The mortar is in the shape of a pipe. . . . They took a muscle from my stomach and put it in my leg, and another one from my armpit . . . and this photo is with my sibling . . . every moment has its own beauties. I was in the hospital for five-and-a-half months. For three-and-a-half months my feet were tied together. . . . Yes, I am smiling in all these photos. . . . This headband absorbs the sweat. . . . I don't know the names of the mountains; they all have different names. Their local names don't match those in the military maps. This is the Botan Valley. And this one is during an operation; we were given fruit juice as part of our field ration. I did not eat the food in the ration. Dardanel [canned tuna fish] is the only one I could eat, other kinds of canned food were not edible. . . . Here you can see us climbing the mountain. The way the helicopters land and take off is tremendous, I loved taking their photographs. Here we are going into an operation; sometimes we were taken by helicopters. . . . This is a village. We were transporting a teacher to the village. This is my own weapon. You wash it regularly with soap and warm water, rub it with oil, dry it. We did not show that much care even to ourselves. You just have to take care of your weapon. . . . Here, we are eating a meal. When we had tomatoes we would fry eggs and make *menemen*. It never tastes better than it tastes on the mountain. . . . And here are the mountains across, where I got wounded. . . . This is another deserted village. A demolished village . . . the Botan river . . . vehicles going for an operation. As a matter of fact, the scenery is quite beautiful. You might even go there for vacation. But when will that be? In the space age? Perhaps the day will come . . . yes, perhaps when we send a rocket to space, it will be possible. . . . This is a photo of me with my beloved cap. We did it all for this cap, so to speak. It is gone; I don't have it anymore. But I would have loved to keep this scarf. Normally, when people finish military service, they save these things for their grandchildren. But when I was wounded, I could not think of my cap or anything else. I was happy I could make it to the hospital. You see this cap: I would not change it for anything else. It has its own beauty and special look. . . . I wanted to go to the Southeast because of the cap, the sense of adventure, and the desire to do something good. I could have become a bodyguard for the pashas, but I wanted to make use of my body and my technical abilities. Because I was an athlete, they took notice of me. They even asked me to do a karate show. If my friends did five push-ups, I did twenty to twenty-five. You get incited by what you see on TV and what people tell you about military service. That's what I thought then. Now I ask myself, "Are the people who do their military service here [in the West] better off?" Of course, their job is much easier. I guess this is luck! They say "Every soldier has his mine," some step on it

and some don't. That woman, Princess Diana, died, but she did a lot of good things about this issue. After all, the leading countries that produce and sell landmines are America, China, Russia, and France. They are the same countries that have signed the landmine treaty. The landmine I stepped on was plastic. If it were a normal one, the detector would have located it. When there is a normal landmine, the noise that the detector makes echoes all over the mountains, but with plastic, not a sound is heard.

When I was going into military service, I got together with all my friends. We were two friends from the same neighborhood going to Eğridir. We got into two minibuses. Everyone was shouting, "Our soldier is the greatest soldier!" We all go into the military for the same thing; we are all great soldiers. Dancing, rejoicing . . . We said, "Farewell Istanbul" and left. Yılmaz Morgül's song "Farewell Istanbul" had just come out. I identified that song with my military service. There is a saying in the military, "If you don't shed sweat during training, you will shed blood during the war." Eğridir is the best training camp in Turkey, yet I cannot say that the training we received in the camp was sufficient. PKK has given years to this place and has completely adapted to the conditions in the mountains. I mean, those guys are doing guerilla warfare. Even if they are heavier than us, they are better than us because they know the mountains, the caves, the paths. Our training in weapons was good. People usually shoot one bullet during training, I shot about twenty-five to thirty bullets. I got on the plane and first went to Gaziantep, to the Urfa Armored Brigade. Then we went to Mardin in a convoy. . . . On your first day, you just want to go around and see the place, but for security reasons, you are not allowed to do that. The most famous commandoes in Turkey are the Midyat commandos. I was with them in their last days. Then we moved to Siirt and built a brigade from scratch. We had been there barely for a month when we were sent off to the mountains around Eruh. At that time, there was an operation to Northern Iraq. We went to the mountains. There was nowhere to stay or sleep. So, we set up the tents. It was raining heavily. You try to guard the machines, but it is all muddy. . . . It is at times like this that units get ambushed. We tried to secure ourselves; teams were sent up the hill to check the environs and to see where there might be an ambush. That night I had my first patrol duty and was very scared. I was all alone, it was raining and windy, we had closed off the mortars with nylon. There was a village nearby. If they used a heavy gun in the two-kilometer range, we would be hit immediately. I don't know how I completed that two-hour shift. Then the friend who would take over the shift came and we did his shift together. It was his first patrol duty as well. . . . I said to myself, "I live in Istanbul, why should I care about terror?" Before me, there is the army, the police, the soldiers. . . . Some people have to go there, but it is best for those who can have that sort of capacity to go. You both regret it and . . . For

instance, in my case, if the mine had hit a weaker person, the result would be much worse. My physique saved me; that's what the doctors said. I had seven operations, one after the other, from one narcosis to another . . . I remember coming out of an operation and, after ten minutes in intensive care, going right back in for another operation.

During military service, I did cleaning and washed the dishes all the time. In the military, there is this cohort thing. You learn from and obey those who have come before you. The inexperienced soldier acts the same way as his "grand father." If he used to break glasses, so does the "grandson." This whole thing is not good, the new ones do all the job. The guy sits in the military cafeteria and you wait for his orders. Now he wants water, then he wants tea. . . . You get up at five o'clock in the morning. Whether it's raining or muddy, or the worst time of winter, you have to go out and look for wood, clean the tables, prepare breakfast, and so on. You wait anxiously for ninety days so that the next cohort will come and take over your responsibilities. Then if you are very tired and sleepy, you can just sleep during breakfast time. You would not exchange a good sleep for the best breakfast. I was on a 24-hour shift. It means you work one day and sleep the other day. You work for 24 hours. Of course, you can't help sleeping on duty. We were ten people, so one or two of us always slept. We used to talk a lot, have fun. . . . We used to talk about how we wanted military service to end as soon as possible, about work, about our fiancées, sweethearts. . . . If you are married or engaged, military service becomes a devastating experience. Thank God I did not have a sweetheart—although, sometimes you long for one. You wish you had a sweetheart and she would call you, you would hear her voice. . . . My nephew was born during military service. I would ask them to make him cry on the phone so that I would hear his voice. After breakfast, you clean things up, do the ordinary stuff, put things in order, and so on.

I made a beautiful trench, but I never had a chance to use it. When I finished it, we went out for the operation. In the Güllhane hospital, there was a guy from a younger cohort who had lost his two legs after stepping on a landmine in Northern Iraq. He told me how people had talked about me after I left. I was a little tough. I could not stand injustice. After all we are not slaves of one another. He told me how beautiful the trench was and how they ate and drank inside it. I had used sacks all over, but I never had a chance to stay in it. We had a big industrial cooker. The food would either burn or not cook properly. For breakfast, we boiled water and put in some parsley, so it became soup. Sometimes, our supplies would arrive late. We would eat cabbage for a few months and then beans for months. . . . The meat was not good, it was not fresh . . . Some of the meat I saw there did not look like cow meat at all, it looked like camel meat. I don't eat meat even at the hospital now. This something I picked up from

military service. I don't like meat with a lot of fat anyway. I love rice. . . . For a while, I worked as a major's orderly. Until he left, I was not harassed by anyone. Then I participated in a couple of operations with the heavy armory troop. Because we were the mortar squad, we used to accompany them and protect them from top of the hills. I never came into direct contact with the PKK. Leaving Siirt, we went to Diyarbakır, Lice, and Kulp. Our first night in the operation, we had an engagement. Quite a few terrorists were killed. . . . The next day, they fired harassment shots and we responded. . . . During the Sparrow Hawk Operation, there were thirty-three martyrs. One of the companies was severely hit. We were on the mountain as well. It was Ramadan, a couple of days before the *Bayram*. When people heard about the martyrs, they lost their minds. We were in Eruh, close to the Botan river when it happened. To our left and right were the crossing paths of terrorists. The companies before us, apparently, had not bothered much with them. They had "The snake that does not harm me can live for a thousand years" kind of attitude. It was a very risky area.

In the middle of the day, I saw clashes in the mountains. You watch with binoculars. We came back from duty and the major realized that the situation was bad. He was a huge man about forty to forty-five years old. Altogether, we started running. He literally conducted an engagement from the map and we killed four to five terrorists with our mortars. We got up in the morning and saw the helicopters bombing the whole area. It is the gendarme and the infantry who do the initial search, I mean it is us who go into the real danger. Our side has heavy weaponry. They do, too, although theirs is not as heavy as ours. They don't get into an engagement. They shoot and then run away. If they hit, they hit, if they don't, they don't. And we locate the source of the shooting and aim at the 2-meter range. When you hear a gunshot, you throw yourself on the ground and first secure yourself. Then, if the target is in your range, you shoot. Or the heavy weapons start working. There was the fear of death as well. Even when I got wounded, I did not think of myself, but of my mother. I was afraid she would have a heart attack or something. For instance, I had a grandfather and I did not want anything to happen to him because of me. You find comfort in being with the people you trust. Soldiers sometimes move around in battalions, or in teams, other times they go as a brigade, which means there are hundreds or thousands together . . .

To fight your fears, you think of your family. I thought of my mother the most. . . . You think about things that you want to do in life; you daydream. I was engaged in sports for about five to six years. One of my dreams was to open a sports facility. But these days it is very expensive to open such a facility or a restaurant. . . . I actively participated in one operation and two clashes. But because I worked as an orderly, I was always under an officer. . . . And that is not

easy. Until the man sleeps, you are responsible for his shoe shine, his clothes, his bath, his water, his food, his tea, everything. You cannot go to sleep until he does. Sometimes you stay up until two or three o'clock at night. And you have to be up by five. We were on good terms with the infantry second lieutenants. They were also conscripted soldiers like us. . . . They hold the power, yes, but they ask for our opinion. For instance, when they decide to open up a canteen, they ask us what we want. We even had ice-cream delivered to the canteen. And certain special things like alcohol Normally, alcohol comes only for the officers. If the driver is your friend, you can also get some. People had all sorts of addictions: tobacco, drugs, alcohol, even cologne. . . . The other day, I heard that a soldier drank eight bottles of cologne and died. . . . That much cologne cannot be a substitute for alcohol. Sometimes people suffer from depression and some are psychopaths.

My closest experience with injury was my own. We were in an abandoned village, a former terrorist village. I mean the village had been evacuated earlier on because of terrorists. Around the village were mountains, hills, and a valley. We were there, in the Eruh region, to help out another battalion. We prepared the heavy armory. Apparently, there were mines around. All others passed by . . . fate . . . I heard a loud noise. I said to myself, "We are hit either by one of their teams passing by or by rockets." I was numb. My ears were ringing. Until I fell to the ground, I did not realize it was me who was hit. I fell into the mine pit, with rocks burning my feet. Mine particles . . . those particles were burning my body like an oxygen weld. I was shouting "Allah Allah" and also saying "Don't tell my mother." They asked for a helicopter. Everyone was shouting, but it is one's cohort that is touched the most. Because you eat together, drink together, get your training together. . . . They were the ones crying. The helicopter came in 15–20 minutes. The brigade has four battalions and four helicopters. It was a rocky area making it difficult for the helicopter to land. That was my sixth ride on the helicopter. The crew was familiar. The officer held my hand and said "It's O.K. boy" and told the pilot to fly faster. Of course, the helicopter has a limited speed, but in a situation like that you just want to go as fast as you can. . . . Pain, pain from burns, pain from nerves. . . . The doctor in the company did two tourniquets on me. Then two other interventions, one in Siirt, one in Diyarbakır. I must have fainted. I came to my senses the next day. On the fourth day, I was in Ankara. I asked them not to call my family for about a week. When they called, my parents and uncles came to Ankara.

When I think of military service, I first remember the moment I stepped on the mine. That morning I was thinking about the possibility of stepping on a mine. I was saying to myself: "What if I step on one . . ." And I did. I used to say that I was not afraid of the PKK, but of what they call the "invisible enemy."

Landmines were my only fear. That day it had somehow occurred to me that I would step on a mine. I was very careful, looking right and left all the time. I guess I was meant to step on it. I stepped on the mine in the most unlikely place. I have a friend who lost both legs. Thirty vehicles went past the same road before his vehicle, which was the last one. Twenty minutes before that moment, he gets a photo taken, thinking that they might come across a mine. The vehicle was a wreck and he lost his legs. Now he is undergoing treatment.

Once, before an operation, we came to the brigade. We went out into the city. We went to the *hamam*. You miss good food, so we ate *lahmacun*. We bought journals, took photographs. In ten months, that was our second day out. Inside, there was the movie channel Cine 5 and local radio broadcasting, mostly Kurdish. We listened to some radio shows, but mostly to tapes. . . . I listened to Sinan Özen, Coşkun Sabah, Sezen Aksu, Tarkan, and Çelik. . . . Certain songs were especially popular. When they came up, like "Yaban Eller," we used to turn on the volume real loud. . . . Of course, none of this was at night, only during the day. It was forbidden to have any contact with the villagers. We had turned a tent into a *mescit* [prayer room]. We were doing the Friday prayers there. Before I went there, I was thinking that I would refuse discharge and stay there. When I saw those conditions, I realized I could not stand it. I also thought of joining the Special Team, and then I said, "It won't be worth it." The Special Team people go into heavy and difficult battles, and get paid on the basis of each terrorist they kill. When soldiers go into battle together with the Special Team, the terrorists killed by the soldiers are given to the Special Team, soldiers don't take them.

I divide my life into two: Before and after the military service. I became mature, I grew up. . . . I had plenty of hair. Stress and the medicine has had bad effects on my hair. I don't like talking about what I went through. The one who goes through it all doesn't like talking about it. The one who doesn't, makes it up. Before you go, you say "*vatan-millet-Sakarya*."¹ Now, things have changed. Why does this happen? If the state really wants to do away with this, they can. But the arms merchants, canned food suppliers, and those who support the PKK outside of Turkey don't want it to be over. They incite the Turk and the Kurd against each other. It is friendship that matters. I have Kurdish friends as well as Alevi friends. There are cultural differences and differences of tradition and customs. They like me at the hospital. They are now expecting me there. . . . They come to the hospital every now and then and say, "Friends, we will do this,

¹ Literally, "Homeland-Nation-Sakarya," Sakarya being the name of one of the major battles during the Turkish War of Independence. This is a popular phrase that denotes nationalism (translator's note).

we will do that . . .” They do nothing, it is all for show. I received 270 million TL as compensation and 100 million from the *Mehmetçik Foundation*. The foundation gives more to those wounded in the first three degrees. For instance, those who have lost their arms and eyes, those who have lost both legs. . . . My wound is in the sixth degree. Let it not be worse and let the money be less. . . .

Mother: I hope no one goes through this kind of pain, but it is one thing to watch it and another to live through it. It is a very different feeling to experience it personally, not something you can express. They show someone who has lost both arms, and you feel bad. Raise your child until he is twenty and he comes back home as a martyr. Sometimes when I am all alone, I become emotional and cry . . . I see someone who has lost both legs and my own pain gets lessened. Then I tell myself, “Forgive me, God, what am I thinking?” You go through mixed feelings like this . . . when I see a soldier, I cry. I feel bad inside. Then I say, “I went through it, now it’s your turn.” That’s how I feel. Still I thank God . . . Why? I ask myself. Turkey is not in a war So what is this? That is what kills you, it’s all politics. I cannot find the answer to why this is happening.

Born in Istanbul in 1975, his family is originally from Şebinkarahisar. He is a high school graduate. His father, who is fifty-six years old, still works as a construction worker. His mother is retired. His younger brother used his right not to serve as the younger brother of a veteran. He went to the Eğridir Commando School in December 1995, then to Mardin, Midyat, and Eruh. He was hospitalized at GATA for a very long time. His treatment is still in progress. He goes to Ankara for the treatment. Now he reads a lot—Steinbeck, London, and Balzac. Sarı Zeybek and Father Goliot are two books he did not like in the beginning, but now can’t put down.

I WAS FRIGHTENED. INSTANTLY,
I THOUGHT OF DEATH, OF
DYING . . .

In the military, I saw soldiers who regularly cut their bodies with razor blades and others who put off cigarettes on their hands. I am not a psychopath but even I was putting off cigarettes on my hand. See the marks on my hand . . .

It was exactly midnight, the moon was setting, and we were on the Türk Ismail peak. My buddy was smoking a cigarette, the soldier at the thermal camera in front of us was also smoking but the light of his cigarette could not be seen. The first rocket exploded five meters in front of us. One of our soldiers was using a big mortar. When he pulled the illumination cartridge, he exposed the location of the mortar. I shouted, "Lie down." We were visible to the enemy. A soldier got wounded on his shoulder. The medic at the station gave instructions over the wireless, "If his wound is bleeding, apply tampon." There was no officer with us; it was only me as sergeant and a secondary team sergeant. The soldier was bleeding; he was in fear of death. . . . We didn't know where his wound was. We were only a couple of meters away from him, but we could not go near him, afraid that we would be shot the moment we stood up. Of course, the wounded soldier still had his gun in his hand. Some soldiers were pulling the pin of hand-grenades; others were pulling the illumination cartridges by mistake. The explosion caused a bleeding in my ear and I couldn't hear well. Our post was a higher-level food and munitions supplies post. The combat location was 2-3 kilometers away from the Iranian Station. Because of the short trees and shrubs all around us, I couldn't see anything through the thermal camera. It was impossible to distinguish a human being from a tree or a rock. The location was under heavy tank fire. I don't know how much a tank bullet costs but the amount of bullets fired there could topple down the economy of a country. It was my first combat and I was frightened. Instantly, I thought of death, of dying. I thought of running away but I couldn't. I didn't fire back, I didn't want

to. Of course, you could get hit by a bullet or shrapnel any moment. Most of the soldiers didn't throw their hand-grenades far away, just 5–10 meters away, so close that stones and soil poured over us. We were all frightened. There was no backup. The lieutenant had said that he didn't want to go out to lay an ambush that night so he had sent us firmly ordering that nobody should fall asleep. The fighting ended as the day broke and we had a wounded soldier. . . . It was at three in the afternoon, we hadn't eaten anything yet and the wounded soldier had become pale. . . . Helicopter could not land in our area and we knew that it wouldn't. Then we were taken to the nearest station, with dirt and soil all over us. On our way back, the commander said, "Say that I was with you." What else could I do than say that he was with us? Otherwise it lead to beating and cursing. . . . You will either endure it or quarrel and fight against it.

A fear developed in me that the next time I got into a combat situation, I would run away. I don't know if we fought with terrorists in this combat or with Iranian soldiers. It was in the dark of the night and there was no way of knowing who had shot at us. The dead had green clothes on and were armed with a Kalashnikov, antimissiles, and two or three hand-grenades. Of course, the officers said that we had fought with the PKK. The team commander was asked to fill in a form, writing the names of all the soldiers who took part in combat and getting their signatures.

Erbakan was the prime minister then. Fetullah Erbaş [one of his ministers] had come to Van and I was his bodyguard. I also participated in the rescue of a soldier named Alaattin from Iran. Alaattin had stayed in the PKK's hands for about five months. I don't know if it was the PKK or the Iranian soldiers. One night, seventeen of us were again waiting in an ambush, this time with the team commander accompanying us, and we were chatting. We asked him, "What would you have done if your friend or all of us died in that attack while in the ambush to which you hadn't come?" He took it as a kind of joke and didn't answer us. During daytime he would say, "One soldier goes, one thousand soldiers come." At night, while in ambush, he said that he won't forget any one of us and that he will visit our families. We were glad to hear that. When we started the same argument again during daytime, asking him about the ambush he did not participate in, he was angry with us. On our way to ambushes or guard posts, we would pass through fields, gardens, and grass bales. The night would be dark, with nothing to do. You look for fun and just out of boredom, you throw your burning cigarette on the ground. The officer wouldn't interfere. There were shrubs all around, so it would catch fire immediately and spread all around. I did it, too, I don't know why. I thought about it later on and couldn't find out why I burnt out the shrubs, grass that the villagers piled as food for their

animals. While going back to our unit, the officer would order us to search the civilians we would come across. You see someone from far away, you assume where he is going and you wait in ambush. In other words, we would cut his way. You stop him, lay him down on his belly, bend his knees, cross his hands on his back, and thrust the barrel of your gun into his back. Your gun is full, if he resists, you may shoot and kill him. I didn't do it, I avoided such occasions. I had regrets about the incident of burning grass. Why did I burn them? Why did I do such a foolish thing?

If I count all the bullets I fired, it would not be more than five or six. At the end of a fight, you can take off your cartridge, and empty it. You can put a full one into your gun, fire few shots, and that's all. I did this during my first combat. Nobody is looking at what you are doing. Some even ask for your spare cartridge when he fires too many shots. My second combat was in Northern Iraq, quite far away. Tanks, antimissiles, guns for far long-distance targets were used. Information was that the villagers were supplying food to terrorists at the Kotur Camp. We were woken up early in the morning and weren't told where we were going. We went for an hour by Landrover, then walked up to a peak. The nearest river to the Kotur Camp was the Semseti River, which was 100 km away from Zaho toward Iran. Usually a person who knows the region well or a former PKK informer would be taken as a guide while going to combats. It lasted for two hours but not a single shot was fired at us. We stayed in Iraq for ten days. I was in a back-up team during this Northern Iraq operation. I was in the Turkish territory. There were sixty days left to my discharge so they didn't involve me in combat. We were receiving orders to take civilians we met during our field search to the nearest station. We were also ordered not to interrogate those civilians. Of course, we met such civilians, most were children. They were about eight or ten years old, had corny hands, carried a bag on their backs with a piece of bread, cheese, and few lumps of sugar wrapped in a piece of paper, nothing else. They were tending cattle and we would take them to the station. I saw it with my own eyes at the station. The station commander, I can give his name, slapped the child in the face. I objected, "You can't slap him." I was beaten, too. I stayed in the station under custody for two days, I was freed the third day. I said to the commander, "I will tell, not keep silent about this" and he threatened me, "I will not let you finish your service, I will constantly punish you and prolong your stay in the service." For a certain period, we were taken from the ambush team and only sent to field and road searches. The aim was to prevent smuggling. Our officer in charge was thoroughly searching all cars except those cars with plate numbers 34 [Istanbul] and 65 [Van], was asking for money, and was sometimes getting it and sometimes not. If a truck full of sheep didn't have

papers proving where the sheep were going, he would ask for money to let it go. I didn't know how much it was but I saw the exchange of money.

Once I saw a dead PKK member, some were kicking it. I couldn't stand it and I cried. My friends asked, "Why are you crying?" I said, "How can you treat a dead person that way and kick it?" He was left naked, a friend took his sports shoes from his feet. They had found some cigarettes, a lighter, hand-grenade, bullets, and some handwritten notes that could not be read on the dead body. He had no money. He was taken to the nearest station. The highest-ranking officer ordered the soldiers to come and see him. When they came, he kicked the dead body and said, "I leave him to you." Some tore off his clothes, some took his shoes.

While in ambush my buddy and I would play a game. We would imagine that we were in Antalya, at the beach, together with our girlfriends. We had to refresh ourselves because that mountain, that cold frightens you. We would be searched before going out for ambush duty. We were not supposed to take radios with us. Of course, there were some who took a radio with them and we would listen to music on the TRT FM band. It was also strictly forbidden to smoke during ambush but we somehow managed to do it. We would empty the charger of our automatic gun, take out the bullets, the button at the bottom and the spring, insert the cigarette into it and cover it with our hand. When you do it that way, the light isn't seen from the outside. Once, when I came back from an operation, I slipped and fell down, hurting my spine. I stayed in bed for forty days, reading books during the whole time. Our company commander was from Sivas and was a very democratic person. I mean, he treated the soldiers well. He was reading a book named "PKK and Apo" and when he finished it, he gave it to his orderly who gave it to me saying, "You are a leftist." I started reading it but didn't finish it. We could only find the weekly *Aktüel* magazine, so I was reading it for distraction. I was explaining to my friends whatever I read. I would show them a photograph and say, "Look, here the man, his wife and his children are having a good time in Antalya, eating, drinking, and bathing." His son had not done his military service yet, but was strolling with his car. We were here in the mountains, standing guard for our country and they were there, eating, drinking, and sleeping. Everybody here was grinding their teeth at the rich. Rich guys were having fun and some singers like Ozan Orhon or Tarkan either didn't do their military service at all or did it in a military restaurant. On the other hand, we were counting days in these mountains to complete eighteen months of service.

In the military, I saw soldiers who regularly cut their bodies with razor blades and others who put off cigarettes on their hands. I am not a psychopath but even

I was putting off cigarettes on my hand. See the marks on my hand. . . . In general, we change in a negative way, for the worse. You become very nervous, unable to endure offenses. I was engaged. I was dreaming of getting married if I got back safe and sound. I was dreaming of starting a different life, of having my own home, of working. But there, there are no guarantees you will make it back.

I came back from the military twenty days later than my date of discharge, but the reason was something else. The cook at the station who was from Ankara said to one of the soldiers, "I can't give you meal because you are an Alevi." And we were at that station as backup. I revolted to that kind of treatment, so I was also discriminated against. Kapıköy Station, tied to Özalp. The commanding officer said, "I will deal with you when we go back to the company headquarters." If I have to do my military service again, I would do what I always wanted to do but couldn't: I would run away. I will definitely refuse to wear that green uniform and accept the chain of order and command. If I am called into service now, I will definitely run away. My country can make war for me, too, but let it do that on paper, let it solve the problem by a signature, or in some other way, but definitely let there be no war. Blood is shed by both sides. It is possible that I would not be here to talk to you. My friends would have said, "We had a friend, he died while doing his military service in Van." Human life can't be that cheap. Our relatives say, "Welcome home. God saved you. You came back without a scratch, without a bleeding nose." Good for you! You made it! I put on an act. I mean, I look at the whole thing universally. To the people around me, I say, "Don't always look at things from the bottom of the well, but sometimes look from the sky, see the pressure, the injustice, the cruelty there." I have always had sleep problems and I still can't have a peaceful sleep. During the first five to six months after I came back, I had dreams about the military. My mother says that I talk and shout in my sleep. It is a year now that I am back home. I am more nervous now. When I get angry, the only solution that I can think of is shooting. . . . I am trying to get rid of it but I can't help it. My mother said several times that I changed in the military. I didn't ask her, "In what way?" When I start telling people about my military adventure, they walk away. They want to talk about something else. People don't want to know, they don't want to hear. They hear about it in an exaggerated way from the media. There was a vacancy for office personnel in the military office in Trabzon. I am a high school graduate and in addition, I did my military service in the Southeast. So I thought I had a chance. I knew that there was an 80 percent chance that someone with influence would be chosen, but I gave it a try. It was said that having done military service in the Southeast was a plus point, but it turned out not to be so. I applied for the job, took the exam and lost. My wife says, "Let it go, don't talk about

those military experiences.” I went there, saw, and experienced what was going on. I saw for whom this war is fought, I saw who profited and who lost. People become brutal, they turn into monsters there. (July 1998, Tonya, Trabzon)

Born in 1972 in Trabzon, he is a high school graduate. His father was a worker in Germany and died when he was six years old. He is the youngest of three sisters and one brother. Married. He did his military service between February 1996 and July 1997. After his basic training in Seferhisar, Izmir, he completed his service as an anti-aircraft commando in the Van region.

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WE KEPT ASKING, “WHY US?” BUT THEN WE REALIZED THAT THERE WAS NO WAY OUT . . .

He threw his arm around my shoulder and said, “Do you know what day it is today? It is Mothers’ Day. Now, some guys are going home from work, carrying flowers, or presents to their mothers.” He stopped, “And where are we going with these guns?” Did he know that he was going to die or was he just talking? “It is our fate,” I said, “Hopefully, next year, we will do the same.”

I have a driver’s license and I speak two languages, English and French. While hoping to be join the tourist gendarmerie, I was sent to Söğüt, Bilecik for training in driving after a commando training in driving of two-and-a-half months. I learned how to be a driver to a general, how to talk to a general, how to serve tea, and so on. When lots were drawn, I couldn’t hear well, but I heard the sound “sh,” which made me think of Eskişehir. I thought it would be bitter cold there and felt sad. When the officer who drew the lot said, “Don’t be sorry,” I got suspicious. He said, “Şırnak.” It was like boiling water had been poured over my head. My mates held me so that I wouldn’t fall down. I had a girlfriend and we were in love. How was I going to tell this to her? Only two days ago, I had joked on the phone and told her that I was going to Tunceli. When I phoned home and delivered the news, everybody started to cry. So did I. I phoned my girlfriend, she thought that I was still joking but then she started to cry as well. Three of us out of 300 had drawn the Southeast, so everybody showed compassion as if we were sheep to be slaughtered. I came to Alanya for vacation. I was so frightened . . . Those who never talked to me showed interest in me, which was both nice and alarming.

We spent the first night in Urfa. The following day, we were taken to Mardin in a convoy of armored cars. Urfa was the first shock. It was an environment I was not used to. And afterward, Mardin, such a cold place . . . An unknown journey in the dark. Scary. I saw a friend I knew from Devrek. He was a carpenter

from Kasımpaşa, Istanbul. He was deployed to Beytüşşebab. I knew Şırnak but I had never heard of Beytüşşebab. We stayed in Şırnak for two or three days. There were mortar shootings. Then to Balıca, Uludere, and finally to Beytüşşebab. When we arrived there—under extraordinary precaution—we were received warmly by the soldiers, which made me very happy. I was very touched and I cried. The noncommissioned officer that I knew from our battalion, one of the three good officers I had met, wanted to see us. He asked us our profession. I told him that I had come there as a driver and that I knew two foreign languages. He said, “Your knowledge of foreign languages means nothing here.” There were five companies there. There were 50 of us in a squad, 22 of which were the guards of the regiment commander and the rest were assigned to office, kitchen, dormitory and intelligence duties . . . The regiment commander was an infantry colonel and his car, a *Toros*, was given to my responsibility. There were two meters of snow outside, and the car wouldn’t work. They said, “Let’s assign you as the regiment commander’s orderly.” It was a hard job and a very bad one. When you go on an operation, you carry 30–40 kilos of guns and ammunition on your back and, in addition, the colonel’s weight. If you are not in an operation, you wait at his door, bring this, do that, and so on. It was against my character, so I said, “I can’t do it, assign me to a team.” Our battalion was on a hill above the town. Beytüşşebab was a very small town. My first guard post was a little bellow a two-story stony building where our officers stayed. Three of us were on guard, our guns were loaded. It was the 8 p.m.–10 p.m. shift. The upper term soldier made me a favor and didn’t assign me to stand guard until I got accustomed to the life there. My post was at a height of 50–60 meters above a road. There were three or four houses around. I could see a light behind the branches. I was constantly peering down the slope. There was also a small path on the edge of a cliff. Someone held me from behind, I immediately turned around. It was a noncommissioned officer. He said, “I could have been a terrorist and you would have been gone. Are you new here?” He asked me my name and where I was coming from. When I answered, “From Antalya,” the other non-commissioned officer heard me. He was also from Antalya and his name was the same as mine, too. He was a good man. They were barbecuing and drinking. He brought us meat and two beers. “Don’t tell anybody,” he said. Drinking beer on guard duty was great. I became friends with him later on. By nature, he was not a dictator. I didn’t go on operations for three or four months. I stayed close to the battalion. The rumor was that Apo said, “I want Beytüşşebab, nothing else.” The teams were constantly going for ambushes, but I didn’t go. Being the guard of the regiment commander was like being in an elite corps. Generally, the guards were high-school graduates. Upon the request of the regiment commander, we were selected and sent there. We were not participating at the roll calls, either. We used to get up at around 10 a.m.

The noncommissioned officer who was the team commander gave us training from November till March. In April, we went to the Kato Mountain, right across the town of Beytüşşebab. We stayed the night there and came back. The next day I said, "What kind of an operation was this?" The commander knows how to find them, how to kill them but he also knows that he will lose some of his soldiers if he does all that. He didn't want anybody to die while he was there. He was going to retire soon. His dream was to become a general but he wasn't a staff officer so he didn't have much of a chance. He had a mobile toilet, he wanted it to be carried wherever he went. It was a rectangular shed with an open door, with a toilet and a closet where he could wash his hands. We were in Northern Iraq. The colonel was in the toilet when the propeller of a helicopter that was delivering ammunition knocked down the toilet. The toilet with the colonel in it was rolling around. A sharp cliff was close by. We were going to die of laughter. One day an officer used his toilet without his permission and was beaten in return.

On May 9, we left for Northern Iraq. All the units were gathering at the Ballı battalion near Uludere. Altıntepe, which was on the left of Zaho, could be seen in front of us. Helicopters and airplanes were bombing Altıntepe. The colonel's plan was to take it, in other words, to make a big success and to earn the rank of general. We were a gendarmerie battalion but we were not professional soldiers. There were people who were doing it for money. A month ago, an operation was organized to capture the peak but the Special Operations Team that carried out the operation couldn't succeed, resulting in eight martyrs. Kayseri Air Landing units couldn't secure it, either. I don't remember how many people they had lost. The colonel gathered us and gave some kind of a farewell speech, "It is a very honorable duty, it is up to us, the gendarmerie commando regiment, to capture the hill." We thought that the regiment commander was going with the helicopter, but no, he stayed behind. Since we were his guards, we thought we would stay behind as well. No, we were going as the second team, right in the front. We were new soldiers with no fighting experience but we were selected. We were about 300 in number . . . I was in the eighth row of the second team. A friend from Istanbul was wondering, "Who won't be among us on our way back?" and he was martyred. He threw his arm around my shoulder and said, "Do you know what day it is today? It is Mothers' Day. Now, some guys are going home from work, carrying flowers, or presents to their mothers." He stopped, "And where are we going with these guns?" Did he know that he was going to die or was he just talking? "It is our fate," I said, "Hopefully, next year, we will do the same."

During the operation, I had pain in my foot like rheumatic fever, and I couldn't walk. I told the commander about it, but he didn't excuse me from duty. He sent me away. Someone came and joined us. I found out later on that he was the

major general. He asked us who smoked and how many cigarettes the smokers had with them. He then said, "Colonel, let's send some cigarettes to our boys." I didn't mention the pain in my foot to the colonel. We started to move. Teams were walking in a row, one after the other, five or ten meters distance in between. We were going to descend to a stream then walk up a slope, across another stream, and finally climb up a cliff. I was carrying a backpack that weighed 40 kilos minimum. I could hardly walk with the pain in my foot. My mate walking behind me took my arm. The stream was running wildly. There was only a thin wooden board across it and we had to walk over it. At that moment, I heard a noise: My friend had lost his balance, and was hanging on to a tree branch. He was going to fall down into the stream. I pulled him up. I looked around, there was nobody in front of me, I couldn't light the torch because we should not be seen. We continued walking and joined our team. They were sitting and waiting for us. While I was crossing the bridge, an order was given, "Stay low." Upon such an order, you kneel down and listen. There were two roads in front of us, most probably the terrorists had laid an ambush on one of them. Our guide was a terrorist who had become an informer; a native of Beytüşşebab. He said that an ambush had been laid. The board over the stream was squeaking. I said to myself, "Oh God, there are hundreds of soldiers. Why did this happen to me? This order of kneeling down right on the bridge? A narrow board . . . What if it collapses?" I said to my mate, "let's not be too close together." I was afraid of falling over it. The board used as a bridge was too narrow, my bag was too heavy and it was hard to keep the balance. We passed a very small part of the stream with the use of a lighter. Five meters above us was a peak, right there I saw a shadow. I nudged my mate and showed it. We couldn't inform anybody. If you light a fire, maybe half of the battalion would be dead. Later on, I lost my team again. There were three paths in front of me. Which one should I take? I would determine the fate of those coming behind. Two of the paths would take us to terrorists. There was a mate from Antep, a sniper. He got the lead, getting in front of me, and saying, "Why are you afraid? We have guns. Follow me." We walked on, no pain left in my foot. We went on for about an hour, trying not to talk over the wireless because the terrorists were listening. I couldn't see one meter in front of me. It was that dark . . . I fell down and was scared. We had started on our way at 8 p.m. and we had been walking for four hours when we passed through a village. I was cold, I was sweating. Smoking was forbidden. We passed through a village, over a hill.

When we reached our destination, I told our commander that I had seen a terrorist. He asked, "Why didn't you tell us?" I said, "We had lost our team." He kissed my forehead and said, "It would have been worse if you had said anything." We came just below the mountain peak, everybody exhausted . . .

The captain ordered, "Spread around." We were so exhausted that while climbing up the peak, I would take one step forward but fall three steps backward, it was so steep. I said, "I am not going anymore" throwing my bag on the ground. Three of us slept for one hour. It wasn't snowing but there was snow on the ground. Later on, we caught up with the group in front of us and reached the peak. We were finally at Altintepe [literally, Goldenpeak].

Three to four Cobra helicopters flew over us throwing stars and signs. We applauded. On one side of the peak, there was a smaller, rocky peak. Order was given for two teams to go there to secure the peak. The commander said, "Defense team: take the lead." We proceeded in one line. There were eight of us, six walking in front of me. Just as I was getting beyond the rock, I heard the sound of something passing by and at the same moment a rocket exploded. Tuck, tuck, tuck . . . Ali fell down, Muharrem fell down. I threw myself behind the rock. Ali started to shout, "I got shot, I am dying." We couldn't lift our heads. Two or three more rockets were fired. Our soldiers couldn't fire because we were there. The soldier on my left was also in the open, he got shot in his buttock and fell into my lap. I pulled him under cover, tore his clothes, pressed cotton over his wound and tied his leg. The two soldiers in front of me were still alive but in the open and I couldn't pull them over. We were behind the same rock with the soldier from Bursa. He had a Bixi automatic weapon and I had a rocket but we needed at least 26 meters space behind the rocket launcher in order to fire it because, when fired, an enormous flame is emitted from behind. My position was not suitable to fire and I couldn't move to a better place without getting shot. The soldier with the Bixi started the fire alone. We learned later on that there were four women shooting at us. The shooting was so heavy that we couldn't lift our heads. I was shocked . . . I could cry. It was noon, we had been there for five hours. Then, two Cobra helicopters came and we were relieved. Cobras opened fire at them while flying over us. When Cobras stopped the fire, the terrorists began to shoot. Three fearless village guards and a non-commissioned officer came to replace us. We pulled back. I got the wounded soldier over my shoulder and carried him back to safety. I carried both him my bag as well. At that moment, two helicopters came for the wounded. Ali was dead, the other two who were wounded were still alive, which made us happy. The three who died had stayed alive for quite some time, we knew it. If only they could have been taken away in the next hour, they would have had a chance of survival. We slept in our posts that night. Our morale was very low. When thermal camera arrived two days later, we understood that we were there to stay. Our regiment commander also arrived. The infantry battalion that was responsible for the safety of the general were starting to fire at the slightest move or the slightest sound. For two nights, none of us fired a single shot. The general said,

“The commandoes will guard me from now on, you are useless.” We were happy to hear it. The regiment commander’s orderly said that the commander wanted to see me. I was not lucky. I was placed at the thermal camera. I said, “I can’t use it.” I didn’t know how to use it but I turned into a thermal cameraman. The camera was very heavy. We were two teams, some carried the camera and some took its cables. The officer ordered us to keep a close watch and then shouted, “Have you heard me?” I said, “I heard you, why do you shout?” He swore, saying that he would deal me later on. I said, “This is the mountaintop, you need me and I need you. Your rank doesn’t mean anything to me.” We reached the Gregimar peak. We spent the night at a post close to the edge. There was a post on our side and one below us. I was to sleep until two in the morning and then take over the thermal camera. As soon as I took it over, I saw three or four movements and the shooting started. They had approached within 50 meters of us. The expert sergeant said, “Don’t fire.” The antiaircraft in the post below had got stuck. Shootings were heard. Bullets started reaching us. We started shooting again, throwing hand-grenades. An hour passed, no shooting could be heard from the post on our right. They had died. A soldier came from the post behind us, they didn’t want to use the wireless. We were ordered not to do anything, not to move. We hadn’t been spotted. Just then, a few shots were fired at us by a Kalashnikov, we went down immediately. The soldier was new, he got excited and started firing. The response was such a heavy fire that we couldn’t lift our heads, let alone fire. Apparently, the soldier from Çorum saw a terrorist crawling toward us. I heard a sound. The soldier jumped on me, I couldn’t move. His head fell down and died. I was stunned. He had seen the grenade coming and he jumped either as a reflex or because he wanted to throw the grenade back, I don’t know, but he saved our lives and gave up his. We continued throwing hand grenades. In the morning, we saw that two of them had died from the hand-grenades. The others took one of the dead bodies with them leaving the other behind. The soldier from Çorum was all in pieces, his face was dark purple . . . It was said that he had a six-month-old baby. We wrapped him in a blanket. We pulled back at the first light of day. At the post on our left side three soldiers and an expert sergeant were martyred. I could have died that night. I kept asking, “Why me?” There is no use in crying and complaining. My teammates were at ease because they were away from combat. I didn’t want to die, but I was too proud to ask for a replacement. If you say that you are afraid, then they don’t send you on duty. One soldier did say that he was scared. If you say that you leave a bad impression, as if you have done something shameful. Besides, everybody wants to live. We conquered Altuntepe, suffering six martyrs. Before the operation, hundred coffins had been sent to Ballı for us. In other words, they were ready to sacrifice that many people for that peak. We stayed there for two

more nights. We ate canned food and drank tea from cans. I was talking about my girlfriend to one of my mates. He asked me if I would find a girl for him when he comes visiting. I told him, "Forget about girls! Let's first get home safe and sound." I felt bad. "Here we are, starting together, but there is a chance I will go back and he will not." That is what I thought as I was talking to him and he indeed died.

On the third day, we came back to our base. It was said that this time we were going to go to the Kantur Mountain above Zaho. Because we were guards, we stayed behind. We were transported there by helicopters in the afternoon that day. The helicopter was a very old one, we were afraid that it would fall down. The following night, our thermal camera was spotted by the terrorists. It was placed in the open almost as an invitation, "Attack this way . . ." We took the thermal camera to a secure place. The expert sergeant said, "Take as much hand-grenade with as you can. We won't sleep tonight." It was 2 a.m. already. There was a small peak where I saw three or four heads. I turned the thermal camera to the right and saw that they had encircled us all around. The sergeant ran to inform the major and gunfire started. From one side anti-aircraft fire, from another side heavy Kalashnikov fire; it was awful. There were too many of them. The fire heading our post was all from heavy guns. Three to four rockets were fired at us. The expert sergeant ordered us to stop shooting. We were throwing hand-grenades every half-a-minute to prevent them from approaching. He ordered, "Pull the pin of your grenades and lie down." There was a 15–20-meter distance between us and the next post. That post was destroyed. We were left on the edge. My mate said, "A hand-grenade has been thrown" and the expert sergeant jumped out of the post and fled. The two of us were left alone. We were waiting for the grenade to explode any moment. We threw away the grenades whose pins we had pulled off. One of them didn't explode, we found it the next morning. A terrorist had died, a woman. We buried her. Some photographs taken in Antalya were found in her pockets. There was a martyr and a wounded soldier on our side. Three to four days passed and no sound yet. During this time, we were on bad terms with the fleeing sergeant, vexing each other. He was forcing us to do chores he was supposed to do as he slept. I couldn't talk to him directly about it but I made my displeasure felt. One night, while I was on guard with the thermal camera, I was hit by a few fists. I lost my control. I wanted to hit back but couldn't see in the dark. Angrily I went to the post and complained about the commander to the first lieutenant. I said, "I will shoot him." He was warned and he left me alone, didn't bother me again. Forty-five days passed. His unit was sent back. I was among the last to leave by helicopter for the Ballı Station. Just as we were saying that the operation was over, we were told that there would be another operation to the Cudi mountain. Can you imagine? We

were exhausted and dead tired. Our morale was very low. While going to the toilet, I passed by three officers. They were sitting but I didn't notice them. One of them said, "Young man, you are such an artist." I answered absentmindedly, "Thank you." He said, "Well, well. You are indeed an artist." This time I realized who I was talking to. My mind was in Iraq . . . I was slapped in the face two or three times. I said, "What is going on?" He said, "I will take off my rank badges and fight with you." "Do you need to prove yourself commander?" I asked. He complained about me to the first lieutenant of my battalion. I talked to the major and didn't participate in the operation to Cudi.

When we came back to Beytüşşebab, it was green all around. Tap water was running water, it was like heaven . . . Everybody and everywhere was clean; meals were good. A new regiment commander had arrived. Everybody was friendly. I had special meals; I was shown special attention. The bed was very comfortable. I hadn't had a bath for so long; I was black all over. I heated the water and had my best bath ever. I felt like a bird. I wore clean clothes. In Iraq, we all got infested with lice. Soil lice is really awful. We weren't assigned guard duty for several days. My girlfriend was calling constantly. When I called back, she started to cry over the phone. The new regiment commander was repeatedly saying, "It is not important if you die, it is for your country." In other words, he was really saying, "Go and die." He was so fearless that Beytüşşebab became a mess after he took charge of the regiment. He too was ready to die. I asked him for leave and he refused, saying, "It is forbidden." With the help of a colonel who was on duty in Diyarbakır, I got leave for fifteen days. He said, "If you prolong it even for one day," pardon me, "I will do something to your somewhere." I told the others who couldn't go on leave that my mother was ill.

My hometown had a different charm in the summer and I had missed my girlfriend. When I arrived to my hometown at noon, I looked at the sea and still couldn't believe that I was there. Only days ago I was in Iraq. I was a hero and everybody would be expecting me; red carpets would be laid on the ground, so to speak. That's how I felt. In reality, everybody was indifferent to me. My girlfriend threw her arms around me and didn't let go of me, crying her heart out. I cried with her. My leave ended quickly. I didn't want to go back. I didn't go back for twelve days. I was saying, "I am not a soldier." I knew that I had to go back and I cried. I turned myself in when I came to Urfa. I stayed in Mardin for ten days. Faxes had been sent from my unit everywhere stating that I was on the run. I arrived at Beytüşşebab right before the report of my absence was signed. I had a bad boil on my foot and couldn't walk. There were operations going on in the Beytüşşebab region. The regiment commander asked for me and said, "Didn't I tell you not to prolong your leave?" I answered, "It was wonderful. It is summer time and I have a fiancée." The colonel was glad that I answered

truthfully and said, "If you hadn't told the truth, I would have deleted your military service up till day and make you redo it from the beginning." I was assigned to stand guard at the entrance of the battalion. After a month, I would be discharged. I drank vodka while on duty. During the morning gathering, the regiment commander said, "Take a step forward." He said something like, "Men like him sell their country by doing such and such things. He slept during guard duty," and slapped me a few times in the face.

Two days later, while I was still on sick leave (because I couldn't wear shoes due to the boil on my foot) we took photos while drinking at the table. We were caught again. The punishment was to prolong our service terms for forty days. In other words, I would go home forty days late and, in the meantime, get a good share of beating. Later on, when an officer told the commander about our operation in Iraq, the commander tore off the report about my misbehavior. During the last month of my service, I was bored because I was not assigned any duty. I was looking for something to do. So we caught a homosexual. We asked him who his sexual partner was. We woke up everybody asking him, "Was it him?" There was a policeman among us who was doing his military service. He was an expert on interrogation and he made him confess, frightening him, inflicting some a sort of torture . . . Then, we informed our noncommissioned officer. They gave the guy a pink-colored discharge paper. On the day of discharge, I put on civilian clothes. There was a lot of snow outside, the roads were frozen. There was no convoy for us, so we couldn't sleep. I angrily tore off my clothes, not bothering to unbutton. At night, an order was delivered to organize a convoy. We, the discharged soldiers, hugged each other, screaming with joy. We saw girls at the airport. We landed in Istanbul. My friends met their families, kissing and hugging . . . I stayed in Istanbul for ten to fifteen days.

My brother met me when I went to Antalya. It was January. I couldn't talk to anybody until May. I would relax after drinking a little alcohol. I got tired of the questions, "What did you do? What did you go through?" I didn't talk to anyone about my experiences there. I can't fall asleep without looking at the photographs. I want to live there. It draws me as if it has a mystical power. If I am told to go to Beytüşşebab this very moment, I would go. I wasn't afraid of dying. I was afraid of not dying. The possibility of becoming disabled . . . I still have marks left from shrapnel wounds. I had received little psychological guidance. It was partly because of the previous regiment commander. The new regiment commander was more successful in terms of motivating us. More martyrs were reported after he arrived to the battalion. We used to believe that we were representing an unlucky group left to its fate. At the beginning, we kept asking, "Why us?" To put it selfishly, I made it through. But there are still some who are fighting there like I did. When you think about it, those we fight against are human

beings, too. They shoot at us and we shoot at them. But our motivation is different from theirs. Heroism, embodying the *Mehmetçik* . . . We are sent to fight with all these feelings of love for our country, the whole “*Vatan-Millet-Sakarya*” thing, which is present in about ninety percent of our people. Whereas here, everybody wants to raise their social status, to live a good life, to live a better life . . . Before my military service, I was a more active, more social person. I was a good speaker. I have become more passive. I don’t like noise. Before military service, I hadn’t read much. After I came back, I read quite a lot of books by psychologist Doğan Cüceloğlu. Books about psychology—I like reading them. They should organize courses or seminars for the discharged soldiers to re-orient them to civilian life. I mean, it shouldn’t simply be “Your military service is over. Get you discharge paper and go.” Previously, I wouldn’t take a decision without consulting my family. Now I take more definite decisions. I explain my thoughts more freely. I used to be very short-tempered. Now I am more calm. People there are dying for nothing. Just for nothing. I believe in martyrdom. I am a believer, a religious person. I believe that if I had died, I would have gone to Heaven. The society is not concerned with this conflict, people are only interested in their social status and well-being. Yes, the society is concerned with unearned income. (November 1998, Alanya)

Born in 1976 in Alanya, he is a high school graduate. He passed the university entrance exams but didn’t attend any university. The youngest of five brothers and two sisters. In June 1996, he went to Devrek, Zonguldak for his basic training. He came back from Beytüşşebab in December 1997. He was a gendarmerie commando. He is a small merchant like his father.

REAL MILITARY SERVICE
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The corpses were in a terrible condition; as if they had been taken out of mud . . . Their eyes were open. They were covered with blankets. I had to lift the blankets up. I can never forget that sight. It was the first time I was looking at a corpse so closely and with such psychology. There was still blood coming out . . .

One day they asked for an ambulance to the helicopter landing area at the operations headquarters. I went there with the second lieutenant who was a friend. An expert sergeant and two privates had died in combat and they were bringing their bodies back to the base. I had to take them to the morgue and identify the bodies. I had been wondering when I would have to do something like this. We took them down from the helicopters in stretchers. There was anxiety among the soldiers. Everybody rushed to the landing area to find out who had been killed. Suddenly I found myself in a responsible position. We put the boys on the stretchers and started carrying them to the ambulance. The soldiers around were crying and running to see the bodies. The corpses were in terrible condition; as if they had been taken out of mud . . . Their eyes were open. They were covered with blankets. I had to lift the blankets. I can never forget that sight. It was the first time I was looking at a corpse so closely and with such psychology. Their mouths and noses were filled with dirt. They must have struggled on the ground quite a bit before they died. There was still blood coming out . . . I am a calm person by nature, so I don't lose control in such situations. I concentrate on my responsibilities and on what needs to be done. We tried to calm down the soldiers who were crying and hugging their dead friends. Everybody felt the pain. They had said there was one martyr, but there were three. Martyrs should not be left unaccounted for. Many soldiers experience these scenes without much questioning. And when you tell them that they should now go to the mountains to kill the people who killed their friends, nothing can stop them. The ambulance has beds. The stools turn into beds. We put all three corpses on the beds. The sergeant's arm kept falling on the side and

I kept placing it on his chest as if he were alive. I did that automatically, maybe three or four times. I cannot forget that scene, either. As we moved, I was thinking about how beautiful the weather was. It was autumn; the leaves were falling. I also noticed the people who were staring at the ambulance in the streets. It was forbidden to use the sirens so as not to instigate the PKK. If they heard the sirens, they would know that they have caused casualties. Since I am a photographer, I was also thinking about how the sun would allow for good photographs. The sun was playing shadow-and-light games on the ugly buildings along the road. With the beautiful orange light of sunset, I imagined many gorgeous photographs as we went by. I came eye to eye with one of the dead boys as I thought about this and then diverted my eyes to the outside again. At that moment, I saw three faces in the street and I still remember them. One was the face of an old man and the other two belonged to two girls. I don't know if it was my perception in those circumstances, but one of the girls was truly beautiful; she had gorgeous butts. And then I asked myself, "How can you see and think about such details in this situation?" Life goes on. And you are in an in-between state: in a short while, you may be running toward that girl or in two days, you may be in the place of the dead boy. You experience true loss of meaning, true nonsense. It is as if I am now experiencing Camus' books, experiencing the joy from reading "The Stranger," for instance. The boy is dead and the girl is going. I can talk to the girl and arrange a date. Everything becomes mixed up. In such a moment, you do not say "God damn the war!" at least I did not. After completing the formalities, I went back to the infirmary. For two days, this was all I could think of. When it was sleep time, my conscience would wake up: "These young lads are gone and here you are, sleeping in your warm bed." It hurts you to be sleeping in a comfortable bed. You don't think about Istanbul. All you do is register this place as a surreal place. Who can I share these experiences with? Things here have turned into the operation of a scoreboard: three privates have died in such and such combat, there are two wounded, this many terrorists have been captured . . . There are no names. It is all internalized. You experience how lives turn into figures. You experience what is "news." Before military service, I had the sense that I could not live in another city, that there was no life outside of Istanbul. This has changed. Wherever you are, even in the harshest conditions (and military service is one such condition), there is a sociality that comes from communication. Everybody finds the people close to their heart and have fun times with them. I would not have imagined that I would have good times in Bingöl before going there. Except the kinds of experiences I just talked about, of course . . .

Second lieutenants die in disproportionate numbers because they have not received the kind of training other officers have received. That is why it is said

that there are many second lieutenants who have lost it . . . You are a doctor, you are a painter, you simply belong to a different world, and suddenly you find yourself in the middle of a war, with many soldiers under your responsibility and with numerous weapons around you. It is said that second lieutenants die in disproportionate numbers because they cannot handle this pressure and because they keep asking questions such as “Why am I fighting?” and “Why are people dying?” I did not go into military service for a long time. And once I did, there was no point of asking why I was there. I know why I am there and I also know that, given the opportunity, I would not want to be there. Instead I told myself: “I am here, so I should turn this place into an observation plateau and try to experience every aspect of it.” I tried to experience it, feel it, and observe it. Another day, we took the first-aid kit and left with the second lieutenant doctor to calm down the wife of the head sergeant who had recently died. His wife, mother, and two babies were there and the wife was having a nervous breakdown. We gave her some sedatives, but it didn’t help. Other members of her family were also trying to calm her down: “He died for the country, don’t cry!” Then came a high-ranking officer and said, “Take her away. Let her not cry in the middle of . . .” He gave an orthodox epic speech: “They died and reached the highest stage of honor. Their blood will not be left on the ground.” So, what is reality in this picture?

Trekking is my hobby, so I have seen three-fourths of this country. But Bingöl is not a place I would have visited if it were not for military service. I knew nothing about its history or culture. When someone says Bingöl, everyone remembers the “33 soldiers incident”¹ and jokes about it. My mother became very sad when she heard that I would be going to Bingöl. I saw the Special Team for the first time in Bingöl and it felt like being part of a movie scene. There were thousands of soldiers ready to turn themselves in, both officers and privates. We first went to Elazığ which was like a concentration camp. You don’t know when you are going to leave it. Some play ball, the more experienced soldiers make demands from the newcomers; the late ones wash the dishes, and so on. Finally, we were put in a bus to Bingöl. We left by daylight. The heat was unbearable. We watched the road: Here is the place where the thirty-three soldiers had been killed. Escorts, waits, searches . . . a road that would normally take an hour, an hour-and-a-half, took six hours to travel. Finally, we turned ourselves in at the Bingöl military base. The buildings were old and dirty. The uniforms of the

¹ The assassination of 33 soldiers by the PKK in May 1993 that ended the truce declared by the PKK. While sometimes attributed to leadership dispute within the PKK, the assassination of these 33 soldiers, at a time of self-declared truce, convinced even the skeptics that the PKK was not to be trusted (translator’s note).

soldiers were worn out and pale from exposure to the sun. In the evening, we started hearing shots. The expert sergeants and noncommissioned officers started running around. I told myself that I should get used to it. On the other hand, I felt as if I was on the movie set of a Vietnam film. The base was used like a station. Two people sleeping in one bed, no sheets or pillow covers, not even a proper bed. I did not even open my bag for a week and a half. I just took the stuff I needed, clothes, soap, toothbrush. . . . I did not take a bath for a week and a half and started feeling filthy. We had no duties for one week. Then I was assigned to the helicopter operations. I would record the registration numbers of the helicopters that landed and took off, note their operation routes, and so on. The *Leaf Fall Operation* was going on. I spent 15–20 days at that post, with little sleep at night. One day, a helicopter came with a 12–13-year-old girl, eyes blindfolded. The soldiers were fighting against terrorism and, as in this case, terrorism was embodied in a person, a terrorist. I guess she had turned herself in. The way the soldiers treated her was full of sexual suggestions. They talked about how they could do her, how she smelled, and so on. She was just a little kid and so were the soldiers who were treating her that way . . .

The bodies that are captured in the operations are placed on the ground in the helicopter landing area for identification and recording. In the past, when people talked about the PKK, I would be flexible in my thinking, I would, open parenthesis, express doubts. Now, I have no sympathy for them. If the military, or the state, or the police are dirty, so is the PKK—dirty toward the people by whose support they have risen. The Emergency Rule has become normalized and the PKK has played an important role in this normalization. Consider this 12–13-year-old girl. What if she is all about “the cause”? I see no justification in using children this way. There, you see death. You realize the enormous gap between our reality here and the reality there. And you cannot do anything. The talk about the economy, human rights, or democracy is partly a demagogy. There is a gap of 50–60 years between the Western part of the country and the Eastern part. And the PKK, as an armed force is contributing to the maintenance of this disparity. PKK sends these people to the war and people die. In return, Öcalan is playing a very different game. You hear about the bodyguards of the Fingerless Zeki [one of the PKK commanders] being all women and there are rumors about what they are used for. Even if they are exaggerated . . . In the mountain, it is naturally the guerrillas that view women as sexual objects. Among the soldiers, the talk is mostly about the fighting aspect of the war: “Damn the PKK, long live the Turkish Republic!” You develop an aversion toward both sides when you are there and see how violence breeds violence. When you talk to the soldiers, both officers and privates, who have burned villages, beaten or killed people, you conclude that they are forced to do these things, whether they

want to or not. The solution should come from the politicians; there should be a political solution to the problem. But the politicians are not after a solution. The war has created its own interest groups. This low-intensity war that has been going on for thirteen to fourteen years has created an infrastructure that can make it last another fourteen years. This is a kind of business. For the PKK as well. As long as its illegal gains continue, they will keep it at this low-intensity level. The Turkish military has indeed weakened the guerrilla capacity of the PKK. Now, the term “low-intensity warfare” is more appropriate. Everybody is a part of, and benefits from, this mechanism: the Special Team, JITEM, the military Special Team, the politicians, the tribal leaders, as well as the small merchants. When the military leaves the area, the people will go hungry. The teachers, the civil servants, and the soldiers are their only source of income. The soldiers keep the economy alive. The conscripted soldiers make up the most innocent group in this picture. They are so susceptible that they easily find themselves engulfed with feelings of animosity with no chance of questioning. The private goes through that gate totally surrendering himself. He has never experienced this kind of a power over himself and he finds himself surrounded by a set of unbreakable rules. He gives in . . . If he doesn't do it willingly, he is forced to accept the situation. You have to do as you are told. If you don't, here is the courthouse, here is the prison. We used to joke among ourselves saying, “They have turned all village idiots into commandoes.” They were afraid of the needle. I would remind them that what they experienced in the mountains was much worse. There was a political kid who said, “Don't tell me about the needle. I can take in three bullets, but no needle.” What irony: he is afraid of the needle, yet he does not know if he will come back alive from the operation that he participates in the following day.

After the helicopter operations, I was assigned duties in the infirmary, the pharmacy, the dental center, and the laboratory. I became the sergeant responsible for the infirmary and learned to give medical assistance. I learned to stitch up wounds, take blood, give IV, and read prescriptions. It was the longest vacation of my life. I lived in the same building with a dentist, two practitioner doctors, one commando doctor, one second lieutenant, and the company commander. We had our own beds with clean, white sheet. We could go around in sportswear. It was like staying in a pension. In the evenings, we would chat, discuss the events, and organize chess and backgammon parties. I read a lot of books, studied English, and also learned to put stitches on people's heads. I had the chance to interact with the local people more than most of the other soldiers. Well, my interaction was actually limited to the pharmacist whom I would visit several times each day. The Municipality was run by the religious Refah Party. The mosques and the coffeehouses were always full. There were many men with [religious]

beards and no restaurants that served alcohol. Those who wanted to drink had to go to a restaurant close to the town of Genç. On the other hand, there were many jewelers, as well as Mercedes and BMW cars. The local people look very poor but they have many relatives working in Germany. They also make money from the heroin business, which probably instigates an interest in gold. The Special Team was too much a part of the daily life in the city. State intelligence MIT, gendarmerie intelligence JITEM . . . I mean, all those people and institutions that are denied on paper existed there. The local shop-owners would never talk about the war, even if you insisted. As long as you have your uniform on . . . this is what they made you think: “We are Kurds as well and we have something to say, apart from the PKK. We demand to preserve our mother tongue and culture, and we demand our democratic rights.” This was a clear message, but they would not say it directly to the soldiers. After all, we were the ones who were responsible for the injustice they experienced. Everybody I talked to wanted the war to be over. They were distanced to both the soldiers and the PKK. They were bothered about the embargo. I followed the *Susurluk*² events and participated in the protests afterward. I turned off my lights at 9 p.m. for several nights in protest, without anyone noticing. The officers also supported these protests.

It was possible to use the public phones to call my family. When my parents learned that I was not living in a life-and-death situation, they were relieved. My mother would empathize with the pain of both the “mothers of the martyrs” and the “mothers of the terrorists,” as they were called. She would curse against the politicians. At some point, it was said that suicide bombers from Sivas had come to Bingöl. I was afraid. It was forbidden to leave the military grounds unarmed. I would take my weapon with me, all loaded and would watch the veiled women that passed by me with great anxiety because it was said that they would hide themselves as veiled women. It lasted for a couple of days. Because we were right at the center of town, it was difficult for them to do something that would cause a lot of commotion. Therefore, we relaxed. I did participate in operations but I never witnessed any fighting. We would wait at a distance and move in closer only when needed.

² A small town between Istanbul and Izmir, where a traffic accident put a notorious right-wing hitman, a member of parliament from the Southeast, and a senior Istanbul Police Chief in the same Mercedes with assassination guns in its trunk. The traffic accident triggered a major investigation against them and their connections and *Susurluk* became the shorthand reference to major Iran-gate-like scandal, relating to the alliance of covert law enforcement with various illegal personalities in the fight against the PKK (translator’s note).

Military service has changed quite a bit in my life. I realized that Turkey's most important problem has turned into a dead-end. Unless someone intervenes, it can go on for years. The people here talk about how much they care, but it is no use unless they experience it firsthand. It is totally different from how the media presents it. The war can end with political will, but no one has that will. The Turkish military has indeed evolved into a good fighting force; they do their job well. I did not sense any effort for peace among the officers, but there are also officers who say such things as: "How can you talk about democracy in a country that has an institution like the National Security Council?"

I did not miss anything particular about Istanbul. There was this general unease about having my freedom taken away from me without my will. I had a difficult time when I returned. It was like a depression. Starting with your first day back home you have problems adapting to the new life. I realized that life in Istanbul had moved on without me and not much had changed. I had just taken a short break from it. The city did not look good to me at first, it looked too crowded. I didn't have the same kind of relations with the people around me. Our agendas had changed. People would say things like: "How is it going? Were you doing your military service? When did you come?" What are you saying? I experienced the rupture of my life there. I cannot tell you about it in two words. Even if I do, you would not understand it. I had behaved in the same ingenuine way toward others who did their military service before me. Two totally different worlds. . . . It is difficult to leave one behind and move into the other. "The Kurdish question," the war . . . I experienced how different the reality is from what is said about it. I, too, used to make absurd comments about it before I went there. . . . It is not easy to get rid of the traces. It has been thirteen months since I came back, but I still miss it there. Real military service starts here . . . (March 1998, Istanbul)

Born in 1969 in Istanbul, he is a chemical engineer, but works as a photographer. He has one brother who has not done his military service yet. He went to Amasya in July 1996 as an absentee conscript and received his basic training there. He did his eight-month military service as a medical sergeant in Bingöl. He likes reading Albert Camus.

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WE SHOULD BE THE ONES WHO SANCTIFY LIFE, NOT DEATH!

There were soldiers who thought: "Why have they brought this infidel here when there are so many Turkish kids, Atatürk's kids?"

I was a member of the military band deployed in Tunceli. If you remember, on June 30 there was the first suicide bombing in Tunceli where four noncommissioned officers and four soldiers were martyred. We were sent there to replace the martyrs. Every Friday, we hoisted the flag after a ceremony and every Sunday we took it down. Naturally, I was a little afraid. Our company commander told us on our first day that they were expecting more suicide bombings. The brigadier general had dramatized the situation even further and told the soldiers in the band the next morning, "Even if they destroy every single musical instrument that you have, you will continue to play the National Anthem with your gendarmerie whistles." Courage and loss of morale at the same time . . . There were professional musicians in the company. A guy named Ahmet from the 76/1 term, who was from Hatay and had come six months before I did, was a trumpeter and was packing his bags to go on leave when another guy, a gypsy from Bursa who played with the famous musician Ibrahim Tatlıses, asked him to rewrite his letter to his mother on a clean sheet, saying, "Your handwriting is much nicer." Ahmet wrote the letter, attaching to it a poem that he himself had written titled "If I die, if I become a martyr." They say that the guy from Bursa objected to this, thinking that his mother would be upset, but Ahmet insisted, "Man, soldiers write these kinds of poems and it is a beautiful poem." Apparently, the female suicide bomber exploded herself along with Ahmet. The other guy, who had his letter rewritten, was wounded. He received the letter when he himself went home on sick leave. You protest against this whole thing: "Damn, why have you killed Ahmet and exploded your damn self?" Excuse my language, but this is how I express my protest. Of course, I never met Ahmet. I just saw his pictures. The noncommissioned officers who died were all twenty-three to twenty-four years old. One of them was about to be transferred to

Ankara, his fiancée had just sent him a plane ticket. Another one, Ibrahim Sever, had only twenty-four days left before his discharge. He had carved “Ibrahim Sever, Dawn 24” on his chair.

I am a non-Muslim living in Turkey and I am in the middle of this war. Who do I talk to? What do I do? What do I think? The flag ceremonies would take place inside the military base itself. We did the first ceremony after the events. I was lucky. Three months later I was elected as the company commander’s orderly, I mean his secretary, his cleaning staff, everything you can think of. . . . No officer in Tunceli has a private life. They cannot go out at night and they have no connection with the local population. Why was I lucky? Because I did not have to stand guard and that meant that my life was saved. Let me tell you about the company commander, I should do some justice to him. He was a highly religious man who read the Islamist newspaper *Akit* and there I am, a non-Muslim, his orderly. One day three workers came from the local post office to connect telephone lines to his office and we had a nice chat. The following week, one of those guys came to the base with registered mail for the commander, but I did not let him in. I was the sergeant in charge. They had always told us that the main entrance to the garrison was the most dangerous place, that the terrorists would normally try to get in through the main gate. The head sergeants were angry with me for having been so stubborn, they thought I was being an artist. Several days later, a terrorist was caught right before he blew up the Elazığ bus station and it was the post office guy whom I had turned away. If he had come in and blew us all up that day, at least fifty to sixty people would have died, making this the biggest act of the terrorist organization. I mean, when you are there, you cannot but take a side. You cannot take into consideration the economic, cultural, or political contradictions behind the situation. A military vehicle passed over a mine and exploded, killing two soldiers and one expert sergeant. A girl and a man [terrorist] kept shooting at the survivors until they died. One day, I called a friend from Istanbul and told him that the police were after him. And I added, excuse my language, “They will f. . . you.” He was surprised to hear me use that language. If you are a Turk, a Sunni, and if you have grown up in a neighborhood kind of place, you become a Turkish nationalist, and if your family is religious, you become an Islamist. For those people, there is no need for propaganda; they are already full of it. There was a lot of psychological propaganda during basic training, but it did not work on me much, perhaps because I was not a Turk believing that this was a just war that we were fighting. . . . After basic training, the war has a particular impact on you. They are killing us and they are dying as well. You become one-sided. I was not like that in the beginning, but after a while you lose the other perspectives you used to have and you are left with a single viewpoint. I never went into direct

combat, but we constantly experienced the fear. We were told many times that they were informed about a possible attack before we went out for the flag ceremony. We participated in all those ceremonies and nothing happened, but soldiers in Adana were blown up during the flag ceremony.

How should I exist? As an Armenian, as a Turk, or as a citizen of Turkey? These questions lead you to a particular political position after a while. I became a leftist. During the university years, I started questioning religion. I had very close friends who were religious people. I realized that there is something wrong with the way religions relate to one another, but I had no answers. Before military service, I was a leftist, but very militant. I used to read a lot of books. I was interested in the Kurdish question as well. There is no question that the Kurds face injustice. In fact, as the Armenian community, we are much better off: we have our churches, schools, newspapers, and the right to use our mother tongue. I did not really care much about whether the genocide was done by the Armenians or the Turks? I used to think that the PKK had justified reasons when it first came out, but I did not really sympathize with the idea that the PKK should be seen as the only defender, only representative of the Kurdish people. Fine, they were right about the urgency of the Kurdish question. It was in the agenda of the whole world and the Kurds were having a hard life. Everyone knows this. . . . The Turk knows this, the Kurd knows this, and I know this. . . . But the result is too heavy to bear. I don't see the whole responsibility of the situation in the PKK. The Turkish military, the Turkish political system, and the Turkish interest groups all have a stake in this situation as well. I mean, in the leftist circles, I was marginalized because I questioned the use of violence. I also thought that as an Armenian, I would never be sent in to combat.

A fellow soldier from Ankara, an ultranationalist, was very surprised to learn that I was a non-Muslim when we met, but he treated me really well. It is interesting; the second person I was very close to during military service was also an ultranationalist. Whatever you experience in your everyday life, you experience the same things during military service. Some people react at your name: "Man, what kind of a name is this? Are you a non-Muslim?" None of this surprised me. There was also a different attitude, "He is a non-Muslim, let's protect him so that he is not oppressed." I mean, I experienced the negative as well as the positive. It is like that everywhere you go. When people learn that I am a non-Muslim, there is usually a strange look on their faces followed by strange questions. Afterward, some people stop talking to me and others insist on giving me a job. There is also another complication: in general as far as the Kurdish question goes, being an Armenian is worse than being a non-Muslim.

We were inside the town of Tunceli, but still horrible things were happening. On August 30, the Victory Day, there was going to be a flag ceremony right by

Atatürk's statue downtown and a march in the Stadium. And we were going to play in the band. Before the ceremonies, they distributed the pictures of the suspect suicide-bombers. It was no joke. Those in the pictures blew themselves up in Sivas and in Adana on the same day. We were in the military band, but that does not mean you are safe when you are in the East. We were right inside the war. It was more about attacks than operations and combat. Three of them come close and fire harassment shots and the soldiers respond. Or they attack a station. When you use the term "head" it meant a dead terrorist, and a "martyr" was a dead soldier. We experienced this cycle for one-and-a-half years. The best working institution in the East seems to be the Police Special Operations Unit. I don't know if it is because they are paid well or because friendship among them is stronger. For instance, if two soldiers are killed in their ambush posts at night, the army does not follow the terrorists. If they do, they give more martyrs. They don't know the area well. When the Police Special Operations Unit gives a martyr, they follow the terrorists until they catch them. And when they do, torture begins. In Tunceli, all of the local population sympathizes with the PKK. Every family has a young member in the PKK. They say that TIKKO¹ used to be stronger in Tunceli, but now it is the PKK. Everybody knows about this: the police, the civil servants, the military. . . . The soldiers don't like the locals at all and vice versa. When you are there, you have to take sides. Let us say that they have taken us to villages to transfer the people from one place to another and, on the way, my friend B. is killed. What do I do? The psychology of war is at work. The Kurds are right, but so is B. You cannot say, "It is unfortunate that he died." You say, "They killed him!" Who killed? A village killed him. So you go to that village and there is little left in you to treat the villagers well.

Of course, it is not a single war you fight. The war is everywhere and at all times. There was a noncommissioned officer who would wake up a soldier in the middle of the night and say, "Make me a toast, I am hungry." He would wake him up again half an hour later and ask for another toast. And another one half an hour later . . . That kid can barely sleep for three to four hours. I did not suffer from this kind of attitude because I was under the commander's orderly. When that kid was woken up that night, I woke up as well and protested against the situation. With my intervention, noncommissioned officers were forbidden from having toasts at night. There was no way the noncommissioned officer would let me get away with this intervention. When I came here on leave, the company commander was transferred elsewhere. They sent me a message asking me to pick a station to spend the rest of my service. There was an ultranationalist

¹ An underground leftist group, practicing armed propaganda. Majority of its activities are in Alevi areas (translator's note).

noncommissioned officer who would pick on me because I was a non-Muslim. I was a non-Muslim, with a prestigious post, and on top of all that I was messing with them. They had all the reasons to be my enemies. I managed to prevent the upper cohorts from oppressing the lower cohorts, from beating them and giving them punishments. Death is very simple. It is a part of life. But just as you cannot live with the fear of dying in civilian life, you cannot spend your days in the military with the same fear, either. You have other problems such as those I described, or about the food being bad, or about not receiving a phone call from your girlfriend. I mean, the fear of death becomes a side issue. Your psychology should be really messed up for you to go through eighteen months with a constant fear of death. You get over it, one way or the other. There is a noncombat side of military service and we experienced it very intensely. It was difficult, but I felt good about making a positive impact on the lives of seventy soldiers with my interventions.

The noncommissioned officers are a real problem in the military. The proper officers do not want to serve in the East. Our company commander was supposed to be a captain, but we had a head sergeant instead. Among some of the noncommissioned officers, there was a grudge against me because of my prestigious post and because I was a non-Muslim and they were ultranationalists. I might have had an easier time if I were an innocent guy, who was not as visible. I am thankful that I did not have to use my weapon against a live target. On the rare occasions that I stood guard, I would ask myself, "What would you do if you saw a seventeen or eighteen year-old girl terrorist just now?" If I shoot, it is a horrible offense. If I don't, she can kill me and twenty other people inside. I would say to myself, "Come on, girl, why don't you turn back and go? Let me not have seen you" We used to see the dead soldiers; those who had been shot in the mountains. Like I said before, you cannot expect anything civilized from me if my friend B. is shot right next to me. The war turns you into a beast. You cannot expect the soldiers or the officers to be civilized. I am not saying this to justify what the soldiers are doing there. I am just trying to explain that the dirty side of war has two sides to it because the other side does the same thing.

When I came back, I reacted strongly against the accusations that I had become a rightist. The only thing to worry about, to feel sorry about should be death. There is nothing more dramatic than death. This should be the first concern of a human being. This is something beyond the Kurdish question, the Turkish question, Kurdistan or Turkistan. The fire burns where it falls. I realized that it was absurd for me to have read about the Kurdish question in libraries and to have talked about it while living my normal life. Only the families that have sons in the military care about the situation. Or those who have loved ones

in the mountain. Only those who experience it firsthand go through the pain and suffering, no one else.

Death should not be sanctified! Damn, you go and die then! When a bullet goes into your body, there is no more socialism, no more Kurdistan, no more ultranationalism. The first thing on your mind is how to stop the bleeding. Do you see what I mean? Those who sanctify death are committing the biggest crime in history. No one from the Turkish military or from the Turkish politicians can explain Ahmet's death to me. Neither side can explain why that boy returned to his mother's lap in three pieces. I am angry with the leftists. Perhaps an ultranationalist can easily send his followers to death. It is easy for the religious fundamentalists to send people off to die for *Jihad*. The leftists should be much more wary about sending people off to die. We should be the ones to sanctify life, not death! Instead of the ideologies in the books, we should sanctify life as it is experienced in practice. We should not say, "Go and die so that the next generations can be happy." Perhaps no one says it this way, but in practice, this is how it is experienced; it is all cheap heroism. You die and they send your family a little money. That's it! Martyrdom is nothing more. We had received a communication that said, "Don't become wounded and don't die because martyrs and veterans cost this much to the military. Do not put this burden on the state budget." How can you compensate for taking away a person's ability to run, to walk? Is it possible to pay for it?

I told my friends a lot about military service. We had many discussions. For instance, while we sit at a table, drinking, I tell them how I illegally drank during military service or tell the story of a commander beating me for no reason. Before military service, I would give more value to war and militant struggle. I would consider those fighting on all three sides as "courageous boys." Now I get angry with all this. The war goes on and people are still dying: Alevis, Armenians, Turks, Kurdish militants, as well as ultranationalists. . . . When you look at the war from Tunceli, you see a different picture. The officers and state officials get double salaries when they are there. Why should they want the Emergency Rule to be over? They make good money. Many of them stay longer than they are expected to. They want to make more money, even if it means putting their lives at risk. I don't think it should be left to these people to end the war. The Turkish people should develop an independent initiative to end the war. The initiative can even come from the capitalists, it does not matter. The hegemony that prolongs this war should be done away with. We are at the end of the road; no one has any interests left in giving more lives. TÜSIAD [Association of Turkish Businessmen and Industrialists] has done research on how many martyrs were given in each city. The comic magazine *Leman* had a nice caricature about it, which showed a worker in his working clothes asking

a TÜSIAD member how many martyrs their members have given from among their sons. This is a snapshot from real life. Eighty percent of the conscripted soldiers in the East come from poor families. They are the sons of workers and civil servants. There are a few rich kids who have not managed to find an influence and a small idealist bunch who are there on their own will. Despite the fact that the military is one of the least corrupt institutions in Turkey, money talks there as well. With military service, I internalized the idea of death. It does not seem that far away any more. In terms of violence, you can say I am even more distanced from it now. I have in fact become more sentimental. I have difficulty controlling myself. I get angry more easily, I am more emotional, but I think about this as a state that will pass. (May 1998, Istanbul)

Born in 1976 in Istanbul, he went to the 16th Gendarmerie Private Training Regiment in Çanakkale in August 1996. He came back from Tunceli in February 1998. He graduated from the Private Pangaltı Armenian High School and studied History in the university. He has enjoyed Hakan Taşçıyan's song "It is Sad" since his military days. He likes Ahmet Altan's book Dangerous Tales. His father has passed away. He works with his mother.

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SOLDIERS ARE THE ONES
EXPERIENCING THIS PAIN,
I MEAN THE CONSCRIPTED
PRIVATES . . .

I saw a red rose and gave it to my commander. I can't remember it clearly now but the conversation was indirectly about the war. I gave the rose to the commander and said, "I want this." He looked at it, smiled and understood what I meant . . .

I was alone as I passed through the entrance gate into the barracks. We were trained for war. We were given Kırıkkale-made guns during basic training and G3 guns at our proficiency units. The guns were registered in our names. If anything happened to the guns, we couldn't afford to pay for them because they were old, historical guns. If the Turkish army is so powerful, why are old guns like that still being used? I liked the morning exercises. It made us feel fit. Exercising during hot weather was a problem. It would have been quite unpleasant if we weren't close to the water. Before the lots were drawn, we were asked if we had a brother serving in the East or if we had an acquaintance who was a member of the Grand National Assembly, a commander or an officer. This was probably to give us a final chance. Among the soldiers in our squad, nine out of ten were sent to the East and one to Cyprus. When they assigned "Gaziantep" for me, I was glad. Gaziantep was not in the Emergency Rule Zone. There were soldiers with all sorts of political beliefs. The ultranationalists were defending nationalism, but they were trying their best not to be sent to the East.

As soon as I reached Antep, I had to get a haircut. I was a stranger in the city. Everything around me looked different: the people, the way they dressed, the way they talked, everything. It is a small town, there was not much to see. Because I got bored, I went to the base to surrender around noon, but they made me wait for three or four hours. I was sent there as an artillery sergeant. They made us wait in the division for about a week, waiting for everyone to arrive. We had many problems during that week. Some of our friends had their things

stolen. They did not have enough beds for us to sleep. There were all kinds of people, including those who regularly cut their bodies with a razor.

There were about hundred of us waiting in these conditions. When it was time for duties to be allocated, we felt relieved. We were now in our own barracks, able to protect our stuff. Most of the soldiers were from the East. At that point, I was just interested in myself. When a guy from Malatya came and asked if I was "Alevi," we became friends. Most of us were Alevis. There was of course discrimination. There was also discrimination based on where you were from. People favored soldiers from their own province and discriminated against others. There were some religious fanatics among the soldiers, although everyone tried to look like a good Kemalist. This goes for the officers as well. The soldiers from the East would hang around together. If one had a conflict with another soldier, they would all stand by him. Occasionally, there were fights. I tried to stay away from fights. As in civilian life, when people hear that you are from Tunceli, they immediately label you as a "communist." Not everyone is the same; you cannot make everyone the same. Is there a country where everyone thinks the same way? They gave us each a G3 weapon. Now we had real weapons. They call it "woman," for instance, they tell you to "take your woman." You need to take good care of it. The artillery unit is different because of the harsh discipline they maintain. We were an artillery unit but we also got infantry training there. It did not make sense. We could not take a shower after the training. We could only shower twice a week, but the food, the showers, the sanitary conditions were all good.

Our first operation was five months later. It was an operation into Northern Iraq. We were glad to hear about the operation because we were bored with the training. We thought that change would be good. At the same time, we were sad because we were going into war. When I heard "Northern Iraq," I did not feel good at all. Kurds were living in Northern Iraq. Of course, there are Kurds living in our own borders who share the same language and culture with them. They were taking us there because of the PKK, whom they called "terrorists." It did not make sense to us to look for the PKK in Northern Iraq. It did not feel right to go into another country and smash it up because we "want our terrorists." We were joking amongst ourselves about going abroad without a passport. When we went into Zaho, the first thing we noticed was the children. There were too many children! I did not know that the military had so many vehicles. . . . When we came to Zaho passing from the Habur gate, we were welcomed by the people. They were cheering and waving at us. Those people have suffered from the war as well. We wanted to get out of Zaho as quickly as possible to avoid a possible ambush. We went quite far. I think our first stop was in the Levo region. We settled in tents and placed our cannons in positions that would keep us secure. It was April and we were experiencing water shortage. It was also very hot. As far

as I remember, we left on the first day of the *bayram* [religious holiday]. So, we were there throughout April and May. We stayed in Levo for about a week, changing positions every day. Our second stop was the town of Camsusak. Each time we settled in a new place, we would dig trenches, put sacks around them and place our weapons.

From the first night onward, two or three of us would stand guard together for three hours. In the night, we used night-vision binoculars to search the area. Our commanders went on patrols every night. During our guard duty, we would talk about many things from our civilian lives to what we would do in the case of a combat. There, you forget about everything. You will either save your own life or your friend's. We had become like a family. Friendship was really beautiful. When I was all by myself, I would sometimes think about death, but I was never afraid. It was very difficult to make a phone call. You would have to wait for hours. We were able to call our families maybe once every three weeks. Letters were not reliable. The fact that I was in an operation in Northern Iraq made my family very tense. When I came back, I learned that my mother had cried all day when I was there. And my father had developed high blood pressure. My other brother was also in the military at that time. He was serving in Balikesir [West]. Sometimes we watched TV. The programs that talked about us as heroes were great for our morale. Of course, we were in a position to make a difference about terror in our country. There were constant clashes, but because we were the artillery unit, we would not be in the frontlines. The worst clashes took place in Suri. It was when we first arrived. They had set up an ambush. We captured quite a few of them and several of the [Iraqi Kurdish] peshmerge, who were with us, died in the ambush. We buried them and prayed for them. An old woman was passing by saying something in Kurdish. Of course, I understood and translated for my friends. She was saying, "You, the Turkish soldiers are responsible for their death." She was crying and the others were trying to console her. People looked very sad. . . . Some of the local people showed great interest in us. This came mostly from the children and the young people. We settled in the area and started staying in a village. They would constantly bring fruits, vegetables, and bread to sell. Doing trade with us was good for them and it helped us meet our needs. The people looked quite miserable otherwise. We would ask them if the PKK visited them or if they put pressure on their villages. Mostly, we did not get much of a response. They would simply say, "They only pass by." They also claimed that they faced pressure from the PKK. Some people from the village had been kidnapped by them. We could not communicate with the locals much because it was forbidden. Whether they were village guards or peshmerge, we were not allowed to talk to them. Of course, there were moments that we secretly talked to them. Most of them spoke Turkish anyway.

I was responsible for placing the cannon ball in the cannon. Another friend would fire it. It was quite heavy. The ball was 100 kilos. If it falls on you, you cannot survive. When it was fired, it had an impact on 100 square meters. They say that dead bodies would fly in the air when there was a hit. Our cannons were very effective and this was painful to know. I was against the war and against weapons, but I would probably shoot them if we came face-to-face. The first thing is to save your life. It is not easy to kill a human being and to see blood. It helped to be in the backstage. I was glad that we were away from actual combat. The main threat for us was the mine. I was never under fire. If they had powerful weapons, they would have killed us all because we were very close to them. They could not do it because they did not have the weapons to do it, or so I assume. It was very difficult to differentiate the PKK from the local Kurdish population there. They spoke the same language. It is possible that they had approached us pretending to be local villagers. For whatever reason, nothing serious happened to us. It was only on our way to Suri that we were hit. This was when the peshmerge died, along with eight terrorists. We were never under fire and we came back without suffering a loss. We stayed in Northern Iraq for two months. We had also spent a month at Füzî. This meant that we were away for three months. We would wait to receive orders to fire. When we came across terrorists, they would give us the coordinates and we would fire our cannon balls. Throughout this period, we slept in tents, which was not very healthy. It was very hot and we also suffered from some rain. On the other hand, it was fun to stay in tents. We would bathe every ten days or so. We would go to an area that had water, set up a big tent for showers, and shower for three minutes each. When you are there, you cannot think. You become like a robot. It is as if someone has stolen your thoughts. You cannot even dream or think about your family. You do what you have to do. We would sometimes play soccer or volleyball. In that atmosphere, even these games have a different taste. I had a girlfriend and we had recently separated. There was the pain of that separation as well. The superior commanders would visit us and ask us how we were doing. Were they coming to trick us with trivial stuff while something serious was going on? We could not tell. Our own commander, a captain, was a really good person. He stubbornly refused to make us do daily physical exercises. When the brigadier general came, we had to exercise for two days. We were given good salaries, about 10 million TL. Plus, all our needs were covered. Our only luxury was music. We listened to Haluk Levent and Fatih Kısaparmak. After those two months, we came back to the brigade and stayed there for a couple of days. We did not know if we had been successful in Iraq. Our only source of information was the television. Of course, there was talk about our artillery unit being very successful. We were commended for our success. . . . This felt good.

After we came back from Northern Iraq, I went on leave to see my family. I wanted to see them as soon as possible. When I came out of the bus in the terminal, there was great joy. It is impossible to put it into words. My mother was waiting for me at the door. I learned that my grandfather had passed away. I also noticed the grey hair on both my father and mother. They had suffered a lot because they knew they could, after all, lose their son. Not everyone around me knew that I was doing my military service in the East. Our commanders had warned us to be careful. For instance, there was a chance that the village guards would be pro-PPK as well. That is why my family kept this information to themselves. My father told me not to share it with all of my friends. Of course, my close friends knew. I was telling them about what we had done, but not in a proud way.

We would go on operations from Antep, mostly to the Maraş region. I used to be curious about the Nurhak region because I had read about it in books about Deniz Gezmiş.¹ So, I ended up seeing the Nurhak mountains during these operations. We were never in combat. Our trips to the mountains would be fun. The surroundings were beautiful and we would not put ourselves in a stressful mood. Sometimes, we did searches in villages. The Special Operations units would come to the villages with us—both their infantry and commando forces. The search would begin around 3 or 4 a.m. We would walk in a line encircling the area and slowly approach the village. Then we would go into the village. Our task was to secure the outskirts of the village. So, we did not know what went on inside the villages. Most of the villages had already been evacuated, so there would only be a few people in the villages. The villages that were searched because of suspicion would turn out to be clean. It was strictly forbidden to speak to the villagers. We would use our binoculars to watch the village from its outskirts. When we did village searches, we went into the fields and collected fruit. There was some entertainment in Antep. Sometimes, musicians would come and give concerts. But there were no “aç-aç”² events. I did not enjoy such events anyway. We had night classes that were very boring. After all the stress and exhaustion of the day, it was unbearable to sit in a night class. Sometimes, we fell asleep. The classes were mostly about Atatürk and his principles. Sometimes, there were slide shows. Usually, they lasted for two to three hours. We would also need to do guard duty after all that. . . . When you get close to your day of discharge, you become more anxious. Everyone was preoccupied

¹ One of the student leaders of 1968, executed following the military coup of 1971 (translator's note).

² Evening entertainment that include female singers and moderate stripping (translator's note).

with crossing out their “dawn” charts. Because there were a couple of religious holidays toward the end of our service, we came back home a little late. It would have been great to be back home for the *bayrams*. During the *bayram*, we had vacation time, just like in civilian life. Everyone in the base would get-together to celebrate each other’s *bayram*. The training would stop during the *bayram*.

In a certain sense, military service has been beneficial. You get to know people. In fact, you can almost read their minds. You experience a lot! You realize that politics or the parliament are all empty inside. It is all a joke. . . . You see what really is going on, for instance the Turkish–Kurdish or the Alevi–Sunni differentiation, with your own eyes. I believe that these sorts of problems should be settled through dialogue, not war. Why are our soldiers martyred? Soldiers step on mines and become disabled. Is the state aware of what that soldier or his family are experiencing? Soldiers are the ones experiencing this pain; I mean, the conscripted privates . . .

Since I came back, I get dizzy when I am in vehicles. I mean, it has become a challenge to travel by car or train. I am now curious about everything. I read a lot. Following the daily newspapers requires a particular budget, but. . . . For instance, Northern Iraq: We went there and did what we did. But what was the result? I want to learn more, deepen my knowledge. The families of the disappeared gather in Galatasaray (in Istanbul) every Saturday. One day, I saw a notice in the newspaper and learned that one of my relatives is missing. He is still missing. O.K. you have captured some terrorists, but how many soldiers have died? Do we know the number? We need to know certain things. . . . When I came back, it was as if I had forgotten my friends. I was estranged from everyone and could hardly have a chat with them. Slowly, I have begun to open up. I am comfortable with my friends over the phone, but when we are face-to-face, I become anxious. I guess there is something wrong with me. . . . Sometimes, I suddenly forget things. For instance, I went on this Northern Iraq operation, but I have totally forgotten about it. I guess, I don’t want to remember. My friends ask me to tell them what happened, but I have no desire to tell them anything. When I get-together with my closest friends, it is as if we are strangers; we only exchange a few words. I want to be alone. Yet when you are alone, you remember. I don’t want to, but I start remembering what happened there. I ask myself, “Have you really been to Northern Iraq?” I still cannot believe that military service is over.

Both the Kurdish people and the soldiers suffer from the war, but we don’t know why all this is happening. It is chaos. As much as they claim that this is a “struggle against terrorism,” it is not. We were not able to figure out what the state was doing there. We did not talk much about these things while in the military. One day, and it was a Spring day, I saw a red rose and I gave it to my commander. I can’t remember it clearly now but the conversation was indirectly

about the war. I gave the rose to the commander and said, "I want this." He looked at it, smiled and understood what I meant. . . . I wish military service were voluntary. Those who want a war, can go and fight themselves. I did not go into military service willingly. (March 1998, Istanbul)

Born in Tunceli in 1971, he is a graduate of a Vocational School. He is one of three children. He lives in Istanbul. Two brothers were in the military at the same time. He served as an artillery sergeant. His basic training was in Bornova, Izmir and his proficiency unit was in Gaziantep. Between September 1996 and February 1998, he traveled to Northern Iraq, Nurbak and Cudi mountains. He is looking for a job.

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MOTHER, I SURVIVED ANOTHER DAY

Here, the telephone cards go into the machine vertically. There, they go in horizontally. Why is this difference between Denizli and Şırnak if we are all living inside the Misak-ı Milli [National Borders]? Because it is a different Turkey here and a different Turkey, there.

At ease, attention, lie down, stand up, crawl, yes sir! They read the results of the allotment: “The sixth Infantry Brigade, Headquarters company, First Team, Şırnak.” The license plate number of Şırnak is 73. In fact, it is more like a small town than a province. My father would wire money go to my account, I would go to the bank a month later, and still it would not have arrived. Before I went there, I imagined Şırnak to be like Ankara or Izmir. I thought I would be able to shop from the supermarket chain *Migros* or eat fast-food in my spare time. The first difference I noticed was in the telephone cards: Here, the telephone cards go into the machine vertically. There, they go in horizontally. Why is this difference between Denizli and Şırnak if we are all living inside the *Misak-ı Milli* [National Borders]? Because it is a different Turkey here and a different Turkey, there. There, you can buy baklava from the coffeehouse and meat from the liquor shop. The guy runs a money exchange office, but also sells meat and green groceries.

Can I forget the first guard duty? On our first night, we spotted some terrorists. Both sides fired. I was behind a small rock with bullets flying all round me. A real combat on our first night. Of course we were afraid, it was like hell. It was not a two-hour duty. We would stand guard from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. No sleep. The cold, the winter, the rain, the snow, the mud . . . around midnight, you get your night ration. Of course, it is not *döner* [gyro]: canned beans, about 200 grams, for two people to share. We were not supposed to light a fire, smoke a cigarette, chat, make noise, nor have any kind of light with us. We would eat our rations very slowly, trying not to make a noise. There is one ideology: sound and clarity. You sometimes tell your buddy to take turns in taking a nap for half-an-hour.

If your buddy is strong, you take turns. If not, you both end up sleeping. Of course, it is like bird's sleep, very light. Your feet touch the feet of your buddy. In the morning, you go back, have some breakfast, shave, and go to sleep until around noon. This means four hours of sleep followed by lunch and roll call. You analyze the day's events with your superiors. Did you spot any terrorists? If you did, what did you do? This is followed by a night of ambush duty. You patrol the environs of Gabar going to places like Gevredere, Gevrekızı, Sessizli, and Akdizgin. The distance between our brigade and the Twenty-third Gendarmerie Division of Şırnak was 120 kilometers. Our home brigade was in Hasdal, Istanbul. I mean, on paper, we were stationed in Istanbul. We would patrol in several groups. Ten or fifteen of us would go from one side, and ten or fifteen from the other. Around midnight, we would meet up and wait for a "pardon." The pardon would be orders that said, "O.K. you can come back." But it would not come until the morning. The commander is right, but so are we. Normal shift was for a duration of 6 or 8 hours, whereas we would have to patrol for 12 hours. In Manisa, where I had for a duration of basic training, the training composed of preparation for service in the East.

When I learned that I was assigned to the East, at first I was glad. We are all here for this land and this is our state. This was my ideal. We saw the ones who were martyred and how their mothers cried for them. When you are there, you get to know the people. There are language differences and differences of perspective. There is no logic in their thinking. There is no way you can explain something to a Kurd in the mountains. He will not understand. The village guards followed us during the operations, which made me feel anxious. You don't know if they are going to shoot at you or not. You don't trust them. During one operation, we were sent to the Ballı Station, which was only six kilometers from the border. It was a station that always received a lot of harassment shots. Long range mortars were sent in response. We started climbing the Altıntepe Mountain at 8 a.m. By 9 a.m. the next morning, we had secured the mountain. I had about seventy kilos on my back: water, food rations, a tent, and blankets. We would only wet our mouths with water and not really drink it. Otherwise, it causes indigestion. Just as we came to the border to start climbing, the F-16s started bombing the mountain. This was last year on April 13. The PKK was shooting at us from above. Of course, we knew that there were PKK on those mountains. There is a Gendarmerie Commando Unit in Beytüşşebap. A friend from that unit was killed. He was hit right from the forehead. His dead body remained there for a day. We made it up the mountain. You go over a mountain, pass a stream, and go over another mountain that has another stream on the other side. The PKK was cornered so they were shooting at us with all their might. We tried to set up an antiaircraft gun on the border stone, but they did

not let us. One friend was shooting from one side and the other was shooting from across. They were guided by another who had the binoculars. Still, they were not shooting at a target they could see. But if you shoot from two sides like that, ultimately your target gets hit. That night, they martyred another one of our friends. When we reached him, his aorta was still pumping. We kept shouting for help, but of course not much could be done. We wrapped up his body, left it there, and moved on. It is a very strange feeling. Your friend has died, but you have to move on. Life goes on. Finally, we were able to secure the Altıntepe Mountain and take our positions. The combat lasted for thirteen hours. The Sikorsky helicopters and the F-16s also kept bombing the *Peygamber Deresi Geçidi* [the Prophet Stream Pass] all night. The village guards did not even shoot one bullet. I must have used more than 5,000 bullets. I was carrying an MG3 heavy automatic weapon that weighed 13.5 kilos, along with 500 munitions. Two of my munitions soldiers were also carrying 500 munitions. This totaled to 1,500 munitions and Sikorskies brought us additional munitions. I stayed there for eighty days.

One night, two of our friends slept on duty. There are three main mountains there: Tarıktepe, then Altıntepe, and behind it Bayraktepe. We had gendarmerie friends from several provinces, some from Şırnak, others from Silopi and Cizre. When two friends on Bayraktepe fell asleep, apparently the terrorists approached and killed them, cutting their throats. The next day, we went there to search the area. Among the terrorists, a seventeen or eighteen-year-old boy and two girls had died and three girls had surrendered. Everybody in our team was an educated, sensible person. We shared our food and blankets with them. They gave us information about PKK's positions. All three were university graduates, who had majored in subjects like political science and public relations. We asked them why they were after such an adventure. Some were after an adventure; others had joined following a friend. For instance, there was a doctor who had graduated from the Istanbul University Medical School. All the first lieutenants and captains asked them the same question: "Why did you join the PKK?" They said things like, "We are after freedom. Our rights have been taken away from us." In fact, they were regretful as well. They have a point from where they stand, but when night falls, they shoot at us and we shoot at them. Survival comes first. We took them to the Seventh Army Corps in Diyarbakır. I mean, we did all that was necessary to respect their human rights. As a team, we captured approximately eighty people. Every time we went to an operation in Gabar, we would capture some. They have caves there. Some of them live there like animals. Others have brought deodorants, perfumes, and Adidas shoes with them. The girls had sunglasses with them. Some of them knew the territory well and also knew where the soldiers would be coming from. For instance, there was a girl with the code

name Leyla who operated a Kanas machine gun. She was said to be a university graduate. We could never catch her. With the Kanas, she could shoot from 4,300 meters. We would use our binoculars to locate her and we would, but she would be 10–15 kilometers away. We even knew what she had for breakfast. She would eat butter and honey. We watched her exercise every day. Our primary aim was not to shoot her down. We wanted to capture her and get information from her. We could have shot her down from a distance if we wanted to. This Leyla girl has the reputation similar to Sibel Can and Hülya Avşar [both famous stars] in the East. People have also seen her in Hakkari and Tunceli, but no one was able to catch her. We would listen to her talk on the wireless. She gave information to others about where the soldiers would be coming from. We also used the wireless to mislead her about our movements.

In the twenty or twenty-five days I stayed in the brigade, I was always on the mountains. In the beginning, it is nice to go around in the mountains, but of course you are not there to camp. You don't see any animals, not even a canary or an eagle. We would use the binoculars to watch the deer from a distance. I was feeling depressed. Our food rations did not come regularly. It was cold and we could not change our clothes. Sometimes, we spent the whole night in wet clothes in very cold weather. We could not light a fire. Water, heat, cold, everything was a problem up on the mountains. We were living on orders. You become like a robot. You go into an operation and pass through an area with mines—126 people pass in front of you, you are the 127th, and the next person steps on a mine. That happened to me. I was the 127th person and the 128th, a friend, stepped on a mine and died . . .

There is your war against others. Sometimes, no food would be left, or your food would be cold. You might have a hole under your boot in –45 degree Celsius, which would make your foot freeze. There are no extra socks for you to change socks every once in a while. You go around with lice on your body at all times. Even the brigade commander had lice. We could not find a solution to the lice problem. It was as if the lice were eating us slowly, sucking our blood. There were scorpions to avoid in the summer. You cannot sit on a rock or they will come and bite you. They were the seven-jointed African type. You fight against the scorpion in the summer and against the lice in the winter. You take a bath and wear new clothes. In five minutes, you take off your t-shirt and you see several lice. You bear with the difficulties thinking that you have to because you are doing your military service, but it all seems illogical. The guy makes you wait in attention position in pouring rain. He will go to his warm quarters and hang out with other officers and you will freeze in a canteen with no heating. The canteen was a closed building, something like a wedding hall, but there was never any coal or wood to burn in the heater. Even if there was, what can a small heater

do to heat a big place like that? We used to listen to Cihan Seven's song "*Bir Memet bir Memiş*" [One Memet, one Memiş] and Sibel Can's song "*Askerimiz Gariptendir*" [Our poor soldiers]. We managed with one walkman.

I did my military service as a sergeant. If one of your superiors tells you to wait, that is what you have to do. The best friendship is usually the one during military service. People say it is all "For the Country" but in fact, it is all about getting past those 550 days. If they tell me to do it again, I will do it again because it is my duty toward my country. But I would like the people and the overall setting to change. I don't care about the difficulties, the cold or the heat, but certain attitudes should change. For instance, you come back from an operation and you are exhausted. Finally, you reach the brigade and the company commander beats up a soldier there. This demoralizes the whole team. Demoralization can drive you mad. There are situations when a soldier is not valued as much as a bullet. The guy can be dead tired coming back from duty, with no time to shave, and a commander can beat him up like hell telling him to shave and polish his boots. When you are out on an operation, the company commander calls you "My lions" [my men] and tells you that he supports you. It is one thing in the mountains and another thing when you are back in the brigade. There are some commanders who are the same on the mountains and in the brigade, and people have a lot of respect for them. There are certain lieutenants or first lieutenants who themselves complain about the superior officers. The sergeant complains about the second lieutenant, the second lieutenant complains about the company commander, the company commander complains about the brigade commander. . . . It is like a ladder. You see many soldiers at night using razors to cut themselves as a way of blowing off steam. A soldier who had grown up in orphanages was beaten up by the company commander and he ran away. Then he came back. He was cutting his whole body with broken glass and razors. The second lieutenant psychologists themselves need psychological help. They say things like, "Hey man, what is your problem?" They don't really try to help the guy solve his problems as they would do in civilian life. When we wrote letters, we would write, "Mother, I survived another day." The letters would be brought to those of us in the mountains by Sikorsky helicopters. Otherwise, no communication. There were times I could not call my family for three months. I love my country and my nation, but I love my own life more. Why don't you investigate if any captain or major or businessman has a son serving in the East? They had sent the son of the major who worked under the Army Commander Ismail Hakkı Karadayı to our brigade by mistake. When he came, he told us that he would probably be taken out of there in two days. Indeed, two days later a Sikorsky transported him to Diyarbakır. God knows where he went after Diyarbakır. So, these things happen in the military. What has the poet said?

“What makes a flag a flag is the blood on it / What makes a country a country are those willing to die for it” So, where are your sons? Where are the sons of politicians like Tansu Çiller or Mesut Yılmaz? Why are they not serving in the Emergency Rule Zone? They are the ones who decide on the war. They should at least put a spoon in the soup. You ask a soldier where he is from and he says, “Bingöl.” With that psychology, you treat him differently. Of course, there were Kurdish friends soldiering in Şırnak, Tunceli, or Hakkari who were much better than our own Turkish ones. But Turkey should not trust the village guards. One day you see a village guard in the village, the next day he is caught dead in an operation. In other words, he turns out to be a PKK militant.

The distance between Afyon and Denizli is 70 kilometers. On the way back, it seemed much longer! I was so homesick. . . . My mother cried when I first arrived. We hugged and kissed. One day, I was waiting for the shuttle cars to İstiklal. After waiting for half an hour, I asked someone, and he said, “Don’t you live here? They have been moved elsewhere.” In the beginning, even crossing the street can be a challenge. You cannot decide when to cross. Even the way you walk has changed. Your friends have a nice chat with each other and you cannot join, you sit there listening. My sister asks me why I don’t laugh any more. I have not got over the stress yet. When I hear a honk as I am walking in the street, I hear it as a hand-grenade. I want silence. I cannot handle the sound of television. I cannot sleep until 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. I sit around with friends, but after a while they become sleepy. I wake up around 11.30 a.m. Every day, I go out to look for a job. Having served in the Southeast does not change much when you are looking for a job. I used to be a cool person. Now, the sound of a horn can make me mad. I talk with my friends from military service regularly. We are thinking of getting together. They are in a similar psychological state. I watch the TV program “*Mehmetçik*” regularly, to see what my fellow soldiers are doing. Before, I was not interested in the news. Now, I watch it every day. I am thinking of going to a psychologist. When you are a soldier, you dream about civilian life at night and it makes you relax. Two days after I came back, I had a dream about an operation. My parents came into the room and I thought my father was a superior officer. I was about to get dressed for the operation. It was something between dream and reality. I know that I have shot at least one person during combat. Now I feel a bad conscience about it. You pull the trigger and he falls. If you don’t do it, he will shoot you. This thought makes you believe that you were right in shooting him and you loosen up.

What I missed the most were my parents. I also missed my sisters and the whole family atmosphere. Lovers and friends come last. Military service should be done. You start a different life after military service. You want to find a job and get married. In the military, you learn about the value of life. You get to

know people much better. You learn how good, how bad, and how pessimistic they can be. If the Emergency Rule were lifted, the whole PKK thing, the whole terror would end. Some people don't want it to end because they have an interest in it. From the governor to the officers, people make more money in the Emergency Rule Zone. How much money would they make if they came here? Some officers stayed there for a second term just to make more money. They bought cars and houses with the money they saved. For instance, I was paid twenty-six million TL every month. If I had served in the West, this would have been four million TL. I saved about sixty million TL, which I am spending away because I have not been able to find a job.

Born in Denizli in 1974, he graduated from a Vocational High School. He was sent to Doğukışla, Manisa on November 21, 1996 for his basic training. In April 1998, he came back home from Şırnak. He has four sisters. His father is retired and his mother is a housewife. He is looking for a job.

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THESE WERE MOMENTS WHEN
WE MISSED DEATH

. . . caves I would normally be afraid to go into. . . . At that time, I went into them voluntarily because I wanted to be shot, wounded, or killed. We had no hope left. You know how they say, "Military service never ends." It has been two months since I came back and I still cannot believe it.

We were greeted by a noncommissioned officer and a couple of experienced soldiers, who said, "Welcome to hell!" Nice joke! The military has a structure of its own. You go into it and disappear. I disappeared. I was on the verge of crying. There is no such thing as avoiding military service. Moreover, I did not think military service would be like this. I did not expect it to be like war. To avoid going there, I would either need to bribe someone or get an "unfit" report, which is not an honorable thing. It is difficult to get the report and the people discriminate against those who don't do their military service. If this discrimination and this whole honor thing did not exist, ninety percent of the youth would avoid military service. Even if you don't believe in all those things they say about military service, you have internalized the idea. Before I went, I was expecting it to be a different kind of environment. I was expecting to march in my boots, "rap, rap, rap." I had at least minimal sympathy for it. But I had no idea it would be this way. When the team sergeant lined us up to ask us what we were thinking about, it turned out that everyone was thinking about their civilian lives. He said, "You will forget about your civilian life. You will forget about your loved ones, your mother, your father, everyone . . ." "It was true. By the ninth month, the forgetting process had begun. I even forgot the names of my own brothers. I tried to make a list of all the girls I had gone on dates with, marking them out as "the most beautiful" or "the most sentimental" so as not to forget, but it turned out to be incredibly difficult to remember their names. I spent days trying to remember.

There were about six to seven soldiers whose duty was to shave thousands of soldiers like me. The machines did not work well, either. By the end of it, there

was no hair left. During registration, you take your clothes off. You are left with your underwear. Someone comes and gives you two shots, one on each arm, without even telling you what they are. Some say tetanus, others say alum. They do a thorough check on your body to see if you are using drugs, if you have any gun wounds or surgery marks, and to identify your bone and muscle structure. They wrote my company and my registration number on my wrist. Then we went for lunch. I had not seen such chaos before. Everyone was on top of each other. Some managed to eat, others couldn't. I did not eat anything. After lunch, they gave us our training uniform, another uniform to wear when we went outside the base, boots, socks, underwear, and a green bag. People were swearing at each other, shouting. . . . There was no one I knew. They showed us our beds and we pushed our bags under the beds. It is not easy to wear the military uniform if you are doing it for the first time. Those who cannot figure it out are given a hard time. We started training on the first day. In fact, we even participated in the evening sports-and-jogging training. After dinner, they make you wait in front of the barracks for hours. Sit down, stand up, sit down . . . this goes on for about half an hour. By the end of it, your knees give up on you. For the first two weeks, the training is composed of sports or such things as saluting, walking in line, and so on. After two weeks, the weapons training begins. We got used to the heavy training after a while. In fact, doing sports helped us relax. The training also involved an intense mental struggle. People swear at you, you get beaten up. . . . In fact, 80 percent of military service is about this mental struggle. Otherwise, military service is not that hard. When we jogged, we used to chant marches. We also lay down and dragged ourselves on the ground. They helped us blow off steam. "The ruined mountains across / the desolate mountains across / the commando are here to cross / strike, the mountain commando, strike" I cannot remember all of it. This is a gendarmerie march. We received commando training, but in the books, we appeared as gendarmerie. They say that this is because the state has to report to NATO that they have this many commandoes, this many infantry, this many marines, and so on. We never learned what the gendarmerie did or how they behaved in particular situations. We underwent commando training. They told us that 99 percent would go to the Southeast, but we did not believe them. I mean, there was always hope. After a while, they imposed on us the idea that the Southeast was no different from Ankara, Izmir or Istanbul. We got used to the idea. We heard the term "death" at least hundred times every, day. The marches, the talk, everything was about death. Even death became natural. Our commander would tell us about combat situations and about how and why we suffered casualties. My mother came for the oath ceremony. She did not want me to go to the Southeast. She stayed there for three days and by the end of it, she had got used to the idea. Most people

wanted to go. Military service is one month shorter when you go to the Southeast, plus there is more action. When I became an antiaircraft sniper, I knew that there was no chance left. I would surely be sent to the Southeast. I had not even owned a toy gun; my father had refused to buy me one. On Fridays, we spent the night in the mountains and got further training there.

Indeed, 99 percent of us were sent to the Southeast. I surrendered in Urfa. I saw soldiers on the street in the local dress, but it didn't seem strange. It just seemed different. I spent four days in the Province Gendarmerie Headquarters. They were going to allocate us to different stations from there. There were no beds. We slept on the tables. Then I was sent to a station that only had twenty soldiers, three officers including a noncommissioned officer who was the station commander. The superior sergeant who was supposed to be our commander was someone who had served more than a year in the military prison. He was a mean, harsh guy. The good thing was that he visited the station only once a month or so. When he came, it was hell. We would all look for a place to hide. He did not need a reason to beat you up. You were a soldier, that was enough. Many superiors in the military view the soldiers under their command as their slaves, as if they can do anything they want with them. The two expert sergeants did not spend much time in the station, either. They usually found a couple of soldiers they could trust and left them in charge. That was me. Neither the commander, nor the expert sergeants were at the station. I had to do everything for them. I was in charge of the soldiers, the paperwork, as well as matters of security that included laying ambushes, maintaining road security, conducting village patrols, and dealing with the criminals. On paper, we appeared to be laying ambushes every day, but indeed we did not. For about six months, I signed papers about ambushes that did not exist. Those were my orders. Then the station commander changed and a more sensible officer came. For those six months, they expected 24-hour service from me. I could barely sleep for three to four hours every day. There was no wireless and no telephone. All communication was coded and I was the only person who knew the codes. It was incredibly hectic for those six months. In terms of combat, it was quite calm. We used to receive harassment shots from the mountain across us, but because it was far away, we were never hit. Harassment shooting is a favorite tactic of the PKK. If they receive a response, they know that there is guard duty in that spot. A well-trained soldier does not respond to harassment shots. I didn't, but some others did. The soldiers would be very scared when it happened. If the harassment shooting went on for a long time, there was a risk that they were approaching us. So, then, we would respond using heavy weapons.

My relations with the villagers were great. In the Southeast, the noncommissioned officers or sergeants in charge of a station behave as if the state can do

anything it wants to the local population. For instance, our noncommissioned officer became angry and he cut the water supply of the village for three months. The villagers had to carry their water in tankers from a distance of forty or fifty kilometers. It gave rise to water trade. Some people would fill up the tanker and sell it to the villagers. The villagers value their dogs so much that it becomes a matter of honor when something happens to their dog. An officer shot a dog that had come into the station. The villagers complained to the Urfa Gendarmerie Headquarters. That is why the commander cut their water supply. The villagers complained again, this time about the water. The commander had already been appointed elsewhere, so he did not care. I used to secretly give them water at night. When the new commander came, I told him that we had to reestablish the water supply, and he agreed to do it. In the meantime, the villagers had dug up wells and used the water from the wells for everything. The governor gave us orders and we constructed taps for each house. For eleven months, we did not have a telephone line. When I went to Urfa on duty, I would make my calls there. If there was something urgent, I would ask for permission and go to the gas station nearby to place a call. The letters took two months to reach. If our families got worried and called the headquarters to learn about our condition, they would scold us for letting information out, "How does your family know what you are doing here? No information is to leave this place." Once, a bomb dropped over the backyard of the station in the middle of the night. If it had dropped over the front part of the station, the sleeping quarters would have been destroyed. The PKK used our area as a crossing path. In the Urfa province, they only looked for getting information. They did not have an interest in getting into combat. According to the officers, this was because Öcalan's hometown was in Urfa. Supposedly, he did not want his people to be oppressed. I spent the first nine months in the dark. I would take the guards out, assign them to their posts, and control them with night-vision glasses throughout the night. There was no electricity. These were moments when we missed death. I really wanted to die. I think of all the caves that I went into. Normally, I would be afraid to go into them even if I knew there was nothing inside. At that time, I went into them voluntarily, because I wanted to be shot, wounded, or killed. We had no hope left. You know how they say, "Military service never ends." It has been two months since I came back and I still cannot believe it. I spent the first month always looking back to see if anyone was following me. I had the fear that someone would take my arm and say, "Come to the military!"

I suffered more from military discipline than I suffered from the PKK. The local people constantly caused problems as well. They would plant opium and engage in smuggling. There was also bribery. I witnessed several of our officers accepting bribes. Issues such as drugs, weapons, and smuggling all depend on

the officers to control. We would catch many Kalashnikovs, G3s, and other rifles being smuggled. Ours was a small station with a twenty soldier team. The rest were support staff: orderlies of the officers, secretaries, weapons maintenance specialist, communications officer, and so on. Half of the team would stand guard during the day and the second half during the night. I, as the team sergeant, was always on duty. If you get into any kind of argument with the commander, he starts accusing you of being a PKK member. According to military logic, even the slightest attempt to ask for your rights is enough to label you a PKK sympathizer. It was the same for the villagers. It is enough for a villager to complain that they don't have a road leading to their village for him to be labeled as a PKK militant. The officers say that they are all Kemalists, but most of them have no idea who Kemal Atatürk is or what his ideas are. Only those who are graduates of the Military Academy, or those who have had a certain level of education really know Atatürk. There are very few noncommissioned officers who have educated themselves and even fewer such expert sergeants. There were nine Kurdish soldiers in the station and they would speak Kurdish among themselves. On the other hand, it was forbidden to speak Kurdish. It was these soldiers who showed the greatest reaction against the PKK. There were a couple of those who did not support the PKK, but did demand the right to freely speak their language and sing their songs. It was never my personal aspiration to go into combat and kill this many militants, but as a member of the military I had to abide with the goals set up by the military. I would say that 80 percent of the privates were like me. I don't know about the officers, because they have a hard shell, like that of a walnut, around them; you cannot see through. When you are there, you have no sister or lover or friend, I mean it is a cruel world out there. It was as good as "parenting" when a fellow soldier tapped my back and asked me why I had not eaten much that day. There is a rumor that quite a few officers have been shot by their own soldiers. I believe that. You can do anything in that psychological state. I mean, you do turn into a bloody criminal. No one from our team died, but there were some who were heavily wounded. One of the privates had been cursed at and beaten by an officer. He shot himself while he was on guard duty. He was alive but heavily wounded. When he gets better, he will probably be punished for a couple of years. Of course, the officer will probably be punished for beating a soldier on duty. The logic is that you are there to "protect the unity of the country." At some point, I used to go downtown regularly in civilian clothes to gather intelligence. I even had a beard. Because I have had some kind of university education, they were trying to get me into the university. I did visit the university a few times. I also took a look at the places that were visited by villagers from our region. I would sometimes chat with the university students, but they would never make a comment about the situation. My visits

to the city were less about gathering intelligence than about going around freely. Once, I had a chat with a PKK militant in a café. I listened to him explain their logic, "Joining the PKK is about being a good patriot; it is about working for your country." Their logic was no different from the logic of our Turkish soldiers. I refuse the kind of patriotism that incites people to kill others. The same goes for our patriotism. In the report that I wrote, I did not mention this student. But of course, I was facing a contradiction. What if he kills someone the next day? On the other hand, I should also respect his ideas.

When you are there, you face many contradictions regarding your previous life. You try to get used to military life, but as you do, you are estranged from your own ideas, your own philosophy of life. This situation first hits your nerves, and then you start losing your self-esteem. Then there is death. . . . Your feelings die and one day they tell you that your military service is over and that you are free to go. As if these are not the same people who shouted at you, cursed you, and beat you up. They throw you back in the middle of society. I had so many dreams about coming back. I dreamed about walking freely in the streets, about having nice, long chats with people, whereas now I am afraid of people and of the society in general. On my return, I asked my family to meet me at the port. I had really missed walking on the coast of Samsun and I did that on my first day without getting some sleep. Freedom. Yet I could not feel free. I had forgotten about human relationships. I was having a hard time relating to people. I would freeze when I started talking to someone. Deep down, I want to talk to people and tell them that the reality is quite different from how it is portrayed. The Turkish military is not as heroic as it is said to be. Neither is the Turkish soldier. In fact, they make you suffer tremendously in the name of heroism. For instance, there are times when soldiers do not sleep for five or six days and walk long distances without food or water. I am amazed that one can handle this, but one does. Now, I cannot handle hunger for more than three hours. I don't know if it is because of the idea that "As soldiers, we have to bear with this," or not. We would stand guard without moving in freezing weather and nothing would happen. If there is heroism, it is in our struggle against medicine. We have succeeded in proving that we can challenge medical assumptions about the human being. Who has really won a war on the surface of this earth? I don't know. Yet people are still fighting. Thousands of people died in the Second World War. Turkey's revolution was also a civil war. What good did it do? Before military service, I was against the war, against weapons, and during military service, they gave me the heaviest weapon. Before, when I got angry, I never fought back. I chose to avoid conflict and express my feelings verbally. I maintained this attitude for a while during military service as well. There were times when I got very tense, but I never went into a fight, I never beat up any of the soldiers. Now,

even the slightest thing can make me mad. And sometimes, things that should make me mad have no effect on me. For instance, when someone bumps into me on the road, I get so angry that I want to break the neck of the person who has hit me. I don't do it, but I do feel like doing it. And there are other times when I am very calm in situations that would normally make me mad. For instance, if someone insults me or if I am in a position to demand my right to do something, I sometimes stay silent. Before military service, I always demanded my rights. But when the response was violence, I never went along with it. Now, I can say that I am more prone to using violence. Violence does not solve problems, but it does make certain things easier. There are many people around me who are having a difficult time after coming back from military service. Everybody is trying to deal with it in their own way. Half of them are not aware that there is a problem. They label it as "becoming mature." Those who realize that there is a problem they need to deal with, don't know how to get help from a psychologist. Either because they cannot afford it, or because they cannot accept the situation, they don't go to a psychologist. There is a widespread assumption that only the insane go to psychologists. It might also be because people don't know whom to trust.

I spend my days getting bored. The conversations I have with friends are usually quite superficial. We don't talk about anything meaningful. I try to read books. I have started reading the *Alchemist* and like it. I hope to finish it. I usually buy books, start reading, and before I have read half of it, I get bored. Before military service, I used to read a lot: novels, psychology books. . . . It was forbidden to read anything during military service. At night, I would read romance novels in candlelight, if I could charge it, with a small night light. Can you hear the song "Come to the Mountains, to the Mountains" playing outside? There is nothing in the mountains. We cannot save the cities by going to the mountains. I don't want to dismiss the society by saying that "they are no good," but I have indeed lost my faith in people. I have the sense that they would not understand me if I told them what I experienced there. They don't even make an effort to learn. Soldiers stand guard out there for the security of others. For instance, there are soldiers who are standing guard out there for my security and for the security of my loved ones. This was my mentality during military service as well. I tried to instill this mentality extensively among the soldiers. This way, we did not think about ourselves or about death. I had respect for what I was doing. Although I did not believe in war, I had to respect what we were doing. War makes people inhuman, I think. If masculinity is about being tough, you become tough. If it is about becoming insensitive, you become insensitive. In that sense, the war makes you more masculine. You feel the soil, you see blood, you may be captured . . . all of this makes you numb. So much of what you

value as a civilian loses its significance. There were soldiers who left their sweethearts during military service. You would expect it to be otherwise, right? (July 1998, Samsun)

Born in Samsun in 1973, he has one sister and one brother. His father is a retired teacher. He did his basic training in Bilecik in November 1996. He was then deployed to Şanlıurfa. He served as a Gendarmerie Private Sergeant. He has been trying to get used to civilian life since May 1998. He is unemployed.

AM I AN IDIOT? ARE THE PEOPLE WHO GO THERE IDIOTS?

We had searched the mountains for terrorists for so long. It would be foolish to miss this chance. I did not want to kill anyone and I missed this chance. In return, they killed my friend. You cannot think rationally when you are there.

Once you internalize military logic, you even start enjoying military service. You need to get used to discipline, act as an authoritative figure, avoid discussion, and handle excessive pressure. The training was very heavy indeed, but once you go there, you realize that you need all of it. In fact, we could have benefited from more training. Your first aim is to keep your soldiers alive. If you can also kill some terrorists, that is great success. Going out into the field, laying ambush, transfers, the right way to move during transfers, using maps, weapons, leadership training, the history and aims of the separatist terrorist organization, the countries that support them, the right way to treat the local population, the ways in which you can distinguish between pro-PKK and pro-state villages . . . it was not easy to put all of this into practice. You go into the villages with prejudice. After all that training, you look at everyone as a potential terrorist. They teach you to think this way during training, but of course, it goes a little too far. If I did it all over again, I would go to Egridir voluntarily. If you are going to do something, you need to do it well. I would not currently define myself as a nationalist, but when I was there I believed that those people were creating commotion. I mean, they might lack certain things, but they carried their demands to the political platform and no solution was proposed. Also, I firmly believe that all of this activity is supported by foreign countries and that the aim is to divide Turkey. I wanted to do my military service as a commando in the East, but it was really very difficult. . . . If I went there now, it would be worse. These are not normal things. I often thought to myself, “Am I an idiot? Are the people who go there idiots?” But someone has to do it. I had a short leave after the basic training in Egridir. I was walking in the Alsancak neighborhood of Izmir, looking at young men with earrings and long hair, and asking myself, “Is it

worth doing it for these people?" Then I remembered that I used to go out with girls when I went to school. Surely, there were soldiers in the mountains at that time as well. I guess it is partly about your fate.

During our first engagement, I got really scared. There was a town called Karliova near Yedisu, where we were. They came into contact with the terrorists first and called for backup. When we reached Karliova, the skirmish was the almost coming to an end. We blocked the way out and it worked well. It was a beautiful job. We just had one soldier whose heel was injured and we captured nineteen terrorists, six alive, thirteen dead. . . . It is one thing to shoot at a target and a totally different thing to shoot at a human being. Actually, I am against capturing them alive. That means that the state will have to feed them with our taxes. Those people have lost their humanity. During these clashes, I asked myself, "What if they tell me to take one down, to kill my first terrorist?" I would probably not be able to do it then. There was a chance they would then label me a traitor. My attitude changed in time. What you experience there changes you dramatically. Now, I would not hesitate to shoot them down right away. This was an ambush spot in a wooded area. Altogether we were about twenty soldiers, one-and-a-half team. It was night, so I could hardly see anything. I was also quite tired. You become afraid when you are surrounded by gunfire. After a while, you lose that sense of fear. Our position was beautiful. They were trapped in a hollow spot, so we could see them well. In fact, we could even see some of them trying to dig trenches to protect themselves as we shot at them. I could not hit anyone in that shooting. In the beginning, I could hardly shoot. Forty days had passed after the training in Egridir and I was feeling out of shape. I was really in terrible shape. I had cramps in my legs and started massaging to them. Then I heard the sound of a bullet pass right above my head. I chose a secure spot and started shooting, but I was not shooting at a particular target. In fact, the backpack of one of the noncommissioned officers was hit. When you see such things, you become afraid. When you become afraid, you secure yourself well and don't shoot for the sake of bravery. When this goes too far, you cannot shoot well; you cannot even lift your head from your position. The mountains had already turned green. In the military, they say that it is not good to be in the mountains when it has turned green, because you cannot see anything. We used to treat the terrorists who were killed in the months of July and August as retards. They say that even Apo has asked his men to kill those terrorists who are visible from a distance of three meters. It was so green, you could hardly see anything.

Life on the mountains is very difficult. It is a political mistake to let them live there. They have set up settlements wherever they wanted. You see electric lines going to the top of a mountain. Yedisu is officially a small town, but it has only

two shops and two greengrocers. It does not even have a bank. You take your salary and go downtown, but you come back not having spent any of it because there is nothing to buy. Still, the state has taken its services there. There is a medical center and a school right next to each other. After the events began, all the schools and medical centers in the region were evacuated and shut down one after the other. Yedisu was on the crossing path of terrorists, at the intersection of Erzurum, Erzincan, Tunceli, and Bingöl. When I was there, seventy terrorists were caught dead and twelve alive. One woman terrorist surrendered. We had little communication with the villagers. We just asked them questions about what we needed to know. Wherever you go, they serve you food. And they do the same to the terrorists. There are those who give all they have to the terrorists and save a little for the soldiers. You go to a village to search it, you are dead tired, and they prepare a good meal. Yet you don't leave the village thinking that they have treated you well. In the beginning, you see everyone as a terrorist. In time, you start learning your way around and turn into a normal person. I was in two clashes. I told you about the first one. It was when we had all those carcasses. In the second one, we could not nab any terrorists and we suffered two martyrs. This was right after I came back from a leave. A fellow second lieutenant, who was a doctor, and his buddy, the infirmary guy, were martyred. It was again a wooded area. This time, we had attacked them, but they used the woods better than we did and we paid the price. It was very difficult to get over the shock of losing them. I had slept in the same room with my friend, the second lieutenant. He had been married ten months ago. I participated in a couple of operations, but there were many village searches. Among the population, there are those who consciously support the terrorists and those who side with the state. And there are those who, out of fear, don't know what to do. When the unit commander, the company commander, or a high-ranking officer told us to arrest people in a village, we did. The commander has the authority to take people into custody. The gendarmerie can do it as well. In the beginning, I did not treat the villagers well, but in time I started differentiating between them. Not all five fingers of your hand are the same, are they? In general, we were good to the villagers. For instance, before our doctor died, they used to bring their sick for treatment. If terrorists visited a particular village regularly, of course that would change our perception of that village. When I went there, most of the villages had been evacuated. I stand behind this policy. Yes, it is a pity for the villagers, but we should also pity the soldiers. . . . Aren't there soldiers who give arbitrary punishments? Yes, I am sure there are. We used to hear many rumors, some of which were hard to believe. But it is very difficult to generalize.

During military service, I came back here on leave. I even had surgery. On my return, I promised myself not to be warrior-like. Before I left, I knew that the

team would go into combat, but I still wanted to take my leave. Some soldiers criticized me saying, “If something happens to your team while you are away, how can you explain it?” But I went anyway. We had searched the mountains for terrorists for so long. It would be foolish to miss this chance. I did not want to kill anyone and I missed this chance. In return, they killed my friend. You cannot think rationally when you are there. Before military service, I got irritated when I saw people talk in Kurdish. I realized there that people do not know Turkish. That is why they are talking in Kurdish. I mean it is like being forced to talk to your mother in English because you are in America. Of course, there are also those Kurds who speak it in order to get on your nerves, in order to tease you. For instance, in shuttle buses they sometimes do that. I read the book *Dağdakiler* [Those on the Mountains] by the journalist Kadri Gürsel and did not like it. I mean, it disturbed me that he presented the terrorists as God. I also read the book *Hüzünbaz Sevişmeler* by Yılmaz Erdoğan¹ and tore it apart. I used to like Erdoğan a lot, but not in this book. Not because he is a Kurd, but because he is doing Kurdish politics in the book.

I was quite shy and reserved when I was a child. I did fine until high school. In high school, I was a bad student. I could not even get into the university the first year I wrote the exam. My psychological state changes fast. I am an Aquarius, but I don't carry the leadership qualities of my sign. I don't like being in the public eye, yet I enjoy having initiative. I am generally a cheerful person, but when I have something on my mind, it preoccupies me for several days.

To tell you the truth, military service has not changed me much. It did make me more mature. I felt estranged from my surroundings when I came back. I never enjoyed crowds, but now I hate being in crowded places. I don't really feel like talking to anyone. When people ask me about military service, it is mostly out of formality that they are asking. I don't get the sense that they really listen to me or that they believe what I tell them. The society in general is not really interested in this issue. It is like gangrene. When the TV reports that there are three martyrs, I don't believe that there are more than a few who say, “God be with him!” I talked about my experiences in detail with my fiancée. But of course, you cannot tell everything. I have also shared them with my mother. The other day I asked my mother whether she had seen my brevet. She said, “What do you need it for? You can get a general's brevet from the market.” You see, she does not understand. It is a bad feeling not to be understood.

When there are five or six people around, I don't like people to be talking to me. The other day when I was saying something, I suddenly forgot what I was

¹ Famous (Kurdish) actor, stand-up comedian, writer, poet, and director, originally from the Eastern town of Hakkari (translator's note).

about to say. This has happened a couple of times since I came back. I mean, I don't experience this thing called the Southeast Syndrome. I was not really affected by it. I don't even think about having served there. I only remember it if I dream about it or if I look at the photographs. In my dreams, I sometimes see myself in combat. I mean, I don't have this syndrome thing. The only syndrome is unemployment, that's the only problem I have. One needs to see the Southeast. I did not like it, but I saw it; I experienced it. It's a good thing. Now, I am proud of myself for having done my military service in a place like that. Before, I was hesitant to hit people, to get into fist fights, because I was afraid something would happen to the other person. Since I was a big person, many people withdrew before getting into a fight. I enjoy the violent video games. In the military, I had the chance to beat the soldiers when they did something wrong. For instance, if I caught someone sleeping, I could slap them. I never did. I did not even shout at them. But if I had a terrorist in my hands . . . but you never catch them alive. Our external enemies want Turkey to continue to be the "Sick Man." The Southeast region has certainly been neglected, but it is a rough terrain surrounded by mountains. Some people would ask, "Has Atatürk seen these places? Would he have taken them if he had seen them?" There is ignorance among the local population, but it is the state that has left them ignorant. And now, they don't let the state correct this mistake. They destroy the state's vehicles, kill its teachers, and shoot at its soldiers. This is wrong! Give the state a chance! A determined person can change all this and create rosy conditions.

You fight against yourself, against nature, against your superiors, as well as against your inferiors. . . . Your fight against yourself is probably the most difficult. You need to keep yourself together, stay strong. And on your return, you need to begin a new life. You may get into combat, shoot at others, or be shot at. That is Allah's will, you cannot do anything about it. There are probably devout people among the PKK as well, although it is a little hard to believe. All soldiers have faith in Allah. Some people fast even when they are going out on duty. I always say, "Allah is protecting the soldiers." Allah is with the soldiers. . . . I think I have managed to succeed in the war against myself. It is as if I have never been there. Of course, I experienced good things there. My mind is still there. I sometimes call them. You really leave a part of yourself there. Then you tell yourself, "This is a relay race. I did my turn, now it is someone else's turn." It is not a bad system. There is a similar system for the officers. They go there for a couple of years and then they are transferred back to the West to enhance their morale. Normally, I am not a revengeful person. I may say things like "I will get my revenge," but then I can't bring myself to harm another person. But, there, it was a different story. Nothing is more painful than your friend being martyred. I had a friend called Devrem who was killed in Karliova. When I say

revenge At that moment, you want to kill them all, you don't want his blood to remain on the ground, so to speak. In order to survive there, you need to kill. We would call a dead terrorist "carcass" and a wounded one "skunk" In the military, you never talk about death, no one does. Of course, you do think about it. My father is a retired noncommissioned officer, but he has not brought his gun back home even once. I had no interest in guns, or no experience, before I went into military service. I don't have a gun now, but if I were given one, I would enjoy having it. Once you hear that sound . . . it is a great machine. I mean, you can have an impact on something at a distance. . . . I have brought back my dagger, my commando knife, my beret, and my brevet back with me. They make me feel proud. I am thinking of making a display corner for them at home. Of course I had an agenda book with me when I was there. I would write to my fiancée everyday. Yet the letters took at least two months to reach her. I wrote the letters as if I were writing a diary. I also used a "Dawn Chart" that marked the days left before discharge. Having a fiancée back home makes life difficult there. Your mind remains partly here; you have a hard time concentrating. I am a very jealous person; so is she. It was a difficult period, but we somehow managed. (April 1998, Izmir)

Born in Izmir in 1973, he is a university graduate, with an Economics major. His father is a retired noncommissioned officer. He went to the Eğridir Commando School in November 1996 and was discharged from Yedisu, Bingöl in March 1998 as gendarmerie commando. He likes the columnists Emin Çölaşan and Rauf Tamer, and enjoys reading Zola and Tolstoy. He follows the newspaper Hürriyet for vacancy ads. He had no favorite music before, but during military service he started enjoying Arabesque. He believes that it energizes the listener. He listened to Ibrahim Tatlıses on his way to operations and to Canan Erçetin on the way back. He used to play basketball and soccer. After Eğridir, a place that, in his words, "tires you off of sports," he stopped playing.

WHILE EVERYBODY IS SUNBATHING
AND ENJOYING THEMSELVES, WE
GO INTO AN OPERATION!

Another mine explosion. As they were controlling its trap mechanism, they made it explode by mistake. One first lieutenant and a soldier were wounded. Before combat comes the mine. . . . You can see terrorist groups, but you cannot see the mine hidden in the ground. You don't know when you are going to step on one.

I could not even locate Batman on the map when I learned that I was going to be sent there. My mother had seen the mothers of soldiers who were deployed to Şirnak and Hakkari cry. She was trying to lift my spirits, saying, "Batman is good." The soldiers started getting into the psychology of death after the lots were drawn. You need to be at least 1.74 meters to be a commando and I was only 1.70. When I was interviewed in Batman, I told them that my right ear could not hear well and that my right arm was also not fit. I had a medical report from my basic training unit in Tuzla, which said that I was excused from push-ups because of my arm. The commander of the Battalion said in response, "Then you will keep your eyes and ears open!"

We were sent to Northern Iraq with ceremony. It was the May 1997 operation. It was my first experience in the field with the team. "Will I go into a shock during the first combat? Will I be able to protect myself from bullets?" I was afraid. Beyaz Dağlar [the White Mountains] was in the southern part of Zaho. The terrorists would either flee to Iran or pass through where we were stationed to go further south. First, the combat planes bombed the area and cleared it for us. Because we did not know the territory well, we had Mesud Barzani's¹ soldiers with us, although the officers did not trust them much. I was not used to carrying so much load on my back. I gave some of it to the other soldiers, but there

¹ The leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), as was his father. Along with Celal Talabani, he is one of the two major tribal and political leaders of Kurds in Northern Iraq (translator's note).

were still 10–15 kilos left. The privates had more load, of course. There were all those mountains I had to climb, all that road to walk, and then there was the threat of mines. Each step can be a death step. After a while, they dispersed the companies to different hills. We came to our first night post. We prepared trenches and placed soldiers to the critical spots. A fellow second lieutenant spotted some terrorists and we threw some hand-grenades. I tried to get used to the sound of a hand-grenade. The second day, as one of the companies was searching the area, another fellow second lieutenant stepped on a mine. You become sad and afraid at the same time. Fortunately, he had not stepped on it completely, so there was no tissue lost. He was immediately transported to Diyarbakır by helicopter. On the same evening, another mine exploded. As they were controlling its trap mechanism, they made it explode by mistake. One first lieutenant and a soldier were wounded. Before combat comes the mine. . . . You can see terrorist groups, but you cannot see the mine hidden in the ground. You don't know when you are going to step on one. Finally, we reached the steep hill where we were to set up the base. We went to sleep for two hours taking turns. I had fifteen soldiers under my command. I was the assistant team commander. I used to think to myself, "Will I be able to shoot at a PKK when he shoots at me?" It was this question that preoccupied me; I had no sense of the enemy. Later, I recognized the mine as the enemy. We had orders to kill such animals as the mule when we saw them because they were used for transportation purposes, but I could not kill. The privates were more eager to kill. At least I protected the animals by not giving the "kill" order for them. Our operation in the Beyaz Dağlar Camp lasted for about a week. Then they transferred us to Çukurca, this time to watch the Zap camp. When the territory was cleared, we were taken by military vehicles to the Turkish side under the guidance of Barzani's soldiers. We stayed in the upper Çukurca, which is very close to the border. We slept in the primary school building there, together with the students.

The following day, the second Northern Iraq operation began and we were taken by planes and helicopters to an area a little further away from the combat zone. The Zap camp was quite close to Turkey, on the Malaka hills, right below the Üzümlü station. When darkness falls, the shootings would begin and last throughout the night. It was heavy fighting; the kind that could make you deaf with its sounds. We would also see the traceable bullets. We were happy with our position, but then we were asked to move to the combat zone as backup. There were many casualties. The helicopters were transporting them back. The soldiers were in horrible shape. Thousands of empty cartridge cases around, exhausted pale faces . . . We were ordered to stay on the side. We asked, "Who is there? Who are we going to backup?" The Van Special Operations Team was placed in the same post before us, but they suffered too many casualties and were sent

back by helicopters. Another company that had come out of combat was right by us; looking all exhausted. We dug up our trenches and settled. As a second lieutenant, I had a difficult post: right by the antiaircraft weapons where they were most likely to approach. On our first night, we spotted some terrorists and heavy shooting followed. We knew that it would turn into combat. The first two nights, they attacked the same hill. We listened to the wireless and heard screams, people dying, and restless running all around. It affects you. The casualties were quite high. Soldiers stepped on mines placed there by both sides. We learned that a second lieutenant had died, but they would not tell us his name in order not to demoralize us. I constantly questioned myself about how I would behave if I went into combat. We stayed there for about ten days as part of the Second Northern Iraq Operation. We would change our posts each day in order not to be spotted. The unit that gave the largest number of casualties—I think it was the Şırnak Commando Brigade—was pulled back. We were moved to a post closer to the border. We spent a few days in the Üzümlü station, which was in terrible shape. At 2 a.m., we were supposed to pass the border into Northern Iraq and escort the company commander back the next morning. We were to pass over a mine field. We lined up one after the other to reduce the risk. We would warn the soldier behind us about the mines we spotted, but then we would lose the person in front of us. And it was dark. At least, there was the moon, which made things a bit easier. We had to run and spot the mines at the same time. After a while, the terrorists started shooting at us, harassment fire. Our passage was delayed. We called in the helicopters to spot and fire at the terrorists. We heard the terrorists talk to the helicopter pilots through the wireless, “Just as we brought down the other helicopter, we are going to bring you down as well.” The media had reported the fall of the helicopter as an accident. Later, they had accepted that it was shot down. Anyway, we were able to pass the border and make it back to the Üzümlü station without any casualties.

The PKK had started attacking the station with heavy mortar weapons, so they asked for backup. Tough luck, we were the backup unit assigned to this task. We were to stay there for fifteen days. Fortunately, the battalion commander did not give in, “My soldiers have been in the mountains for a month now; they are exhausted. They have not even had a chance to talk to their families.” So, they transported us back to Batman. The families had heard that we were coming so they were all lined up on the roads. So were the soldiers, who greeted us and offered us food and drinks. The families of the officers and the noncommissioned officers were staying at the base. Many of them were crying, holding the hands of their little children. It was a sentimental scene. I called my family as well. They had been calling the battalion constantly and inquiring about our

position. My mother knew that I was coming. She was crying on the phone saying, "Thank God you came back alive!"

The privates take more risk. As the commander, you don't have to shoot. All you have to do is command the soldiers. We used to be very close to the soldiers, sleeping in the same trenches, sharing your life with them. We developed good friendships. Once, when we were on duty in Diyarbakır, I was sharing the trench with a soldier and he fell asleep. I woke him up because we were standing guard. He said, "In my dream, my mother was asking me what I am doing here. In this rain and mud, I saw my mother in my dream and had a nice conversation with her." We needed to keep our spirits high. He could die in my arms in the next combat. I shared everything with him. He is with me today, but he may not be there tomorrow. I was a university graduate with no combat experience. People around you die or become disabled. . . . The privates did not question the situation much. I commanded two teams, both were like that. They were mostly poor peasant kids. At the end of September, I became the team commander. Going back to Batman was like starting life all over again. This time we had become a base unit and were being sent to combat areas. We would do shelter and cave searches. In the shelters, we usually found medical kits, needles, sedatives, pain killers, dental material, as well as guns and bullets. One night in Diyarbakır, as we were in our ambush posts, it started to rain. We could have died that night because the station we were staying at started firing illumination cannons whose shrapnel fell on us. There were pits as deep as 2–3 meters in the ground. After the Northern Iraq operation, we did not experience much fear. It all seemed normal, whether we were out on an operation or not. You get used to sleeping in the mountains; the night shares all your secrets. Among the soldiers who came from the commando training camp in Eğirdir, there were policemen and ultranationalists. Even for the nationalist type, the last days would pass with great difficulty. Nobody wants something to happen in the very last minute. People think, "We have survived so far, let us go home safe." I had a friend from Van whose parents did not understand Turkish. Because he was afraid that someone would misunderstand, he could not freely talk with them in Kurdish over the phone. Some soldiers listened to nationalist kind of music, like Ozan Arif or old military marches. I did not like that kind of music. I like rock or the softies from 1960s and 1970s. I like peace songs. . . . For instance, I sang from Yaşar Kurt who is an antimilitarist, an anarchist. He had a song that said, "They want me to join the military / they tell me to lie down / they tell me to get up / they are eating my brains mother . . ." I have been influenced by both anarchism and socialism. I would not say I am a total anarchist, let us say an anarchist with leftist tendencies. In the military, I was careful about not getting into political discussions with the other soldiers. There were religiously devout soldiers, as well

as nationalist conservative types. . . . Because the military is not very flexible about religion, the devout soldiers would do their prayers inside the barracks. I went into military service thinking that I would have some time to spend by myself and get my act together. The conditions I faced there were much worse.

This photograph is from the Diyarbakır operation. The trip to Sağgöze was indeed very difficult. It is somewhere between the towns of Lice and Kulp. This is the Zori region in the Batman province. Last week, I heard that there were some clashes there. Apparently, the soldiers found shelters in that region. I was very skinny there. We hardly ate anything. The canned food was no good and the heat was unbearable. In this picture, you see us having breakfast in Diyarbakır. Under the scarce conditions, we had to use our imagination, like turning plastic bottles into drinking glasses. . . . In the border station, I came across second lieutenant friends with whom I had shared a barrack during basic training. This is the photograph of that great meeting. . . . Here you see the things we had captured in the Northern Iraq operation: satellite dishes, televisions, hand-grenades, gas, bullets, and other ammunition. . . . Here, we are going into the Bingöl operation. The photo is taken on the coast of the Hazer Lake [near Elazığ]. There are summer houses by the lake. While everybody is sunbathing and enjoying themselves, we go into an operation! You may die or you may survive. I enjoyed the nature during military service. I would find small bonsai-type trees, organize them, or trim other trees. Everybody found something to put their minds off the situation. For instance, some people followed the stock market, while others enjoyed the natural surroundings, like me.

My parents met me on my return, but they could not recognize me. I had gained a lot of weight. I also met the families of several soldiers with whom I had traveled back home. It was a nice moment. One of the fathers thanked me for bringing his son back home alive. In the beginning, I spent a lot of time at home. I did not want to go out. Even when I did go out, I rushed back home. I get tired of being in crowded places, I don't like it. I was always a little antisocial, but During military service, I learned to share. I also got to know other people better. Life means so much more now than before. But still, I don't feel like doing anything. In the beginning, I would dream about the clashes. I know this has to do with the unconscious mind. I follow the TV program "Sights from Anatolia" to see if there is any news about my battalion. In fact, I am trying to stay away from anything that has to do with the military, but I can't help it. Before military service, I was never interested in such things. For instance, when I heard news about clashes and soldiers dying, I would not pay much attention. It is very different now. For a while, you miss your friends from military service. You want to share things with them. You want to tell them about your troubles and your feelings, and you want to learn about theirs. My mother did not really

know what I did there until she looked at the photographs. I try to keep things to myself so as not to worry them. Sometimes I want to use force against those who resort to violence, but it does not go anywhere. There are many wars inside the war. You fight against yourself, against nature, against the people around you. There is the war with weapons and there is the psychological war. The most difficult one is the war with yourself. I believe that I was successful with that one. I managed to fulfill my responsibilities. You walk on a thin line; sometimes you just stare at the horizon and get lost in your thoughts. (April 1998, Istanbul)

Born in Adana in 1971, he lives in Adana. His father, who runs a small establishment, is a Kurd originally from Elazığ and his mother, a housewife, is a migrant from Salonica, Greece. He is a landscape architect. He was in the military between December 1996 and March 1998. His basic training was in Tuzla, Istanbul. He had further training (for forty days) in Foça on the Aegean coast. He was deployed in Batman as gendarmerie commando. He likes Murathan Mungan and Ahmet Arif, and enjoys reading mythology.

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THEY CALLED ME “THE OLD SOLDIER”

Those who fight have no interest from the war. In fact, they lose from the war; they lose their lives. When pain goes away, people forget and sit back. All the people in this country, all the families of the soldiers should want peace. People who lose their loved ones from both sides should be the pioneers of peace.

When the police took me under custody, my record was disclosed. They realized that I was searched and not found to appear at the court. Anyway, I had been acquitted in my absence. The records also showed that I was an absentee conscript, that I had been evading military service. They took me around from one police station and military office to another. Finally, I spent two-and-a-half days in -15 degree Celsius weather at the Province Gendarmerie in Maslak [Istanbul]. My cell was ten-feet long and ten-feet wide. I warmed myself by walking 2,000 steps in that cell. I would feel warm for five minutes and then start freezing again. There were about fifteen of us detained there, all absentees. When I reacted to the soldiers for making us naked and beating us, they got ready to attack me. “Bring out the bayonets, heat them over the heater, and beat him up” kind of readiness. Of course, they are privates doing their military service as well. When they said, “Take off your underwear, we will control your butt,” I took off my underwear and faced them with my front. They became furious. When the sergeant explained that I was different from the others, that I was the political type, they backed off a little bit. They tied my feet to the chair I was sitting on and my arms to the people sitting on my sides. I told them that I had no intention of running away. I had been caught after running away for twenty-one years. With cuffs on my hands and feet, they surrendered me to my unit.

As I went through the gate of the garrison, I said to myself, “Dear mind, dear logic, you cannot go further; you will have to stay here at the gate.” When they learned that I was working at a pharmacist, they gave me medical duties. This meant that I did not participate in the lessons that the other privates participated in.

I came across one lesson where they were talking about conquering Athens and making the world miserable for the Greeks. The soldiers sang marches like, "Apo bastard, we will come and do you good." After basic training, I had a ten-day leave. Following the leave, I directly went to the Tatvan Sixth Armored Brigade. They greeted me really nicely. They asked me if I had knowledge about computers and if I had a driver's license. I said I worked at a pharmacist and knew about drugs. They assigned me to the laboratory in the Tatvan Military Hospital, which had about one hundred beds. I had no idea what I could do in the laboratory, but they taught me and I started doing tests. We had both wounded and dead soldiers coming to the hospital. We would transfer the wounded soldiers to the doctor in the morgue. We had to do many blood tests, as well as follow up certain patients on a 24-hour basis. We had to monitor the blood pressure of some of the patients every two hours. All of the patients were soldiers. Once, they brought two guerillas for display. They had been killed by the soldiers as they came out of a house in a village. The owner of the house had informed the soldiers that the guerillas were eating at his place. They had cut their ears before they died. I did not want to see this sight. So, we would have soldiers, their families, and those who got wounded in the operations coming to the hospital. The first wounded soldier I saw was a noncommissioned officer. He had been shot from a distance by a Kanas assassination gun. His brain was all out. The four soldiers around him had been wounded from their arms and legs. It was as if they had consciously hit the officer and shot at the arms and legs of the other soldiers so that they would not be able to carry him. When we needed blood, we would ask the other units for blood donation. We applied several tests like HIV-AIDS and Hepatitis to the blood we received. Hepatitis is very common in Turkey. We were very careful with these tests. We would send the heavily wounded soldiers to the Diyarbakır Hospital after an initial intervention. Dealing with the wounded has a considerable effect on you. You often find yourself on the verge of crying. Young men in their twenties come to you in pieces; it is heartbreaking. Once, we had four soldiers who came to us in pieces. It was close-range shooting. The soldiers had laid an ambush, but had been ambushed themselves. Another time, we had a thirteen-year-old girl who had surrendered to the military. She was not wounded. Apparently, she had run out of bullets during combat and had surrendered. She was a small, dark, skinny girl. She was following one of the officers around. Soldiers talked among themselves about whether she would be of use sexually. The soldier who says this probably has a daughter who is that age.

The soldiers were mostly wounded during combat. There were mine cases as well. A second lieutenant had lost his leg by stepping on a mine. It happened in one of the remote stations. As he was going around with another soldiers saying,

"Last year, a noncommissioned officer stepped on a mine in this place," he stepped on one. We would often talk with the wounded about how they got wounded, how many were dead from the other side, I mean we would talk about the overall situation. They were given special attention when they first came, but later it would dawn on them that nothing can bring back a lost leg or a lost eye. Even if they are given an artificial leg, it is not the same thing. Similarly, you cannot replace an eye. Both psychologically and mentally, they would wear out. The guerillas go to the mountains voluntarily, but the soldiers are doing it because they have to. We placed a soldier on the bed to get his blood and he started screaming. His mother couldn't handle the screams and went to the other side of the corridor. At about the same time, a soldier who had lost his leg the previous day arrived. You start thinking about both mothers. One could not even bear the screaming of her child because of the needle, and the other will soon learn that her son had lost his leg. I am sure she will say, "Thank God, he is alive."

I have an allergy against guns. I don't like them. During basic training, I did not have a gun. In Tatvan, they had me shoot a few times and told me that I was a lousy shooter. Once, a woman first lieutenant asked me why I looked so down, and I said, "It is because you have given my enemy to my hands." She was surprised, "How can the gun be your enemy?" They would go and check the targets after we made our shots. Before she went to the targets, the first lieutenant said, "Caution, there is a person at the target." In response to this, I said, "Commander, the target *is* a person." She asked me what I meant and I explained, "You will bear your child for nine months and then give birth to him with great pain. You will raise him till he is twenty years old and then send him off into military service. He will get killed by a bullet for an unwarranted reason. Will you be able to accept his death?" She froze. "Even the thought of something like this makes you pale, commander. All the men who die here are the sons of mothers. That is why I am against weapons."

I stayed in Tatvan for five-and-a-half months. During this time, they had prepared and sent my file. As soon as it was received, I was exiled.

Erciș! I had a general idea about why I was exiled. As soon as I reached Erciș, I went to the company commander and explained to him why I was an exile. I wanted him to know it before my file arrived and give me a duty accordingly. He assigned me to a duty I used to call, "the corridor ministry." My task was to stand at one end of the corridor and watch it. This was the Erciș Tenth Infantry Brigade. Then they transferred me to the pharmacy of the brigade. I went to the Health Office and explained my position to them, as well. I was sent to the town every day to buy the necessary drugs. There were five contract pharmacies. Each week we would buy our medicine from a different one. It was very easy to run

away. I could have, if I wanted to. About a month and a half later, they called me from the military intelligence office. The Chief of Staff was sitting at a desk with my file in front of him. He asked me why I came to do my military service so late and other similar questions. The night before, I had guard duty, so I had not slept at all. I was also starving. He kept me standing up for about half an hour in that condition and asked me a dozen questions that were written in the file. They wanted to know if I was joining the soldiers in the physical training hour. In the military, they don't force training on you if you are older than thirty-five. So I was exempt from it because of my age. When the Chief of Staff told me that he wanted me to do physical training from that point on, I was surprised. He also called the representative of the Health Office and scolded them for having signed my papers. The captain answered, with a blush, that it was the Chief of Staff himself who had signed the papers. Later, the captain complained to me, "You had not told me that you were a member of the Human Rights Association." I explained, "I told you all about my legal record, about my court cases, sir. The Human Rights Association is a legal association." He told me that they had no problems with me personally, but that they were ordered not to work with me any more, and he apologized.

After this happened, I asked for leave and came to Istanbul for two weeks. When I came back from leave, they assigned me to night duty as the telephone operator. What I did was count the minutes when people used the phone and asked them to pay for the call accordingly. I was awake all night and I slept during the day. The telephone traffic would intensify before the soldiers went on operations and right afterward. By the end of my service, there weren't all that many operations, but the soldiers of our brigade formed a mobile unit and they were sent to what was called the Euphrates Operation. The soldiers mostly talked to the mothers and told them things like, "I just came back from an operation." It is difficult to judge the psychology of the mothers when they heard these words. Some of them would imply that they had just come back from an operation, whereas I knew that they had not gone to that operation. For some, this is a show of power.

They called me "the old soldier." And of course, they would ask me why I had not done military service until that age. And I would say, "I don't like weapons. Since I cannot kill people, this really is not for me." They were very surprised to hear something like this, of course. I worked there till the morning of the day when I was discharged. At some point, they confiscated my books. I usually read history books, mostly about the Mediterranean, mythologies, and novels. I had taken some of my books with me. You cannot find books there; only newspapers and magazines. I used to watch TV. After they took my books, all I had left with was the TV. Ultimately, they returned the books. At night, only a few soldiers

came to make calls, so I had a lot of time to read during my shift. One day, as I was watching TV and zapping, I came across Med TV [the illegal Kurdish channel], which startled the Kurdish boys in the unit, "Brother, please close this. You will get us into trouble," they said.

The way the soldiers got wounded, or the state in which they came back from the operations . . . You don't want anybody to get hurt, to experience pain. There were also those who had very different thoughts. For instance, some used very ugly language when they talked about these things. They would say things like, "We took a carcass," when talking about the dead from the other side. There is a lot of talk about religion. When you look at it from a religious perspective as well, you need to pay respect to the dead, whoever it may be. Some would seem proud of what they were doing there. When you are in the middle of all this, you realize that you are indeed at an equal distance to both sides. I would feel terrible about the soldiers who died at age twenty. He is a human being after all. He has parents who have spent a lifetime looking after him. It is not certain why he has died. For what purpose? They had shot Erdoğan in the head from far away and killed him. I wrote this after him, "Goodbye, Erdoğan. You will not experience any pain and suffering from now on. They will soon take your coffin out, and, as always, they will make a polished speech after you. Goodbye, Erdoğan." He was a twenty-four-year-old noncommissioned officer. A fresh graduate, a young guy. As they took the coffin, we heard prayers coming from the speakers. They would also sacrifice sheep after the dead. There is nothing anti-fundamentalist in the structure of the military. When necessary, they put Islam at the center and used it for their own purposes.

You know how they talk about friendships military service developed in being very special, very close. It is not really like that. The 1980 generation has a character of its own. It is made up of selfish individuals who are now in the military. The saying, "Fire burns where it falls" is quite accurate. In our society, people don't care much about what is happening. Until you yourself are hurt, you don't really care. The soldiers, when they are in the military, feel like they are heroes, but that ends with the end of military service. They are no longer heroes when they go back home. They are given many promises, but they are all empty promises. Perhaps they are given a wheelchair if they need it, but that's it. Even that is not always available. If all these people protested to these conditions . . . Osman Murat Ülke [a conscientious objector who was jailed] is protesting military service, but he is all alone. The society should not talk from its stomach. Those who are fighting should develop a strategy against those who are making them fight. Those who fight have no interest from the war. In fact, they lose from the war; they lose their lives. When pain goes away, people forget and sit back. All the people in this country, all the families of the soldiers should want

peace. People who lose their loved ones from both sides should be the pioneers of peace. Unfortunately, it has only been the Kurds who have cried for peace. We have not heard anything from the other side. When the Kurds become the pioneers of peace, they are treated as separatists. I believe that peace activists should attend every single funeral of a dead soldier and pay their condolences to the family. . . . We live with numerous people without legs or arms. They went into military service in one piece, and came back disabled. It is a meaningless, stubborn war. The state has been “eradicating them from the root” for fourteen years now. Not only is it not eradicated, it is in fact multiplying in number. It is clear that you cannot solve this problem by killing people. It is necessary for large masses to cry for peace. Peace will not be accomplished if it is only left to the Kurds to struggle for. The Kurds suffer from this situation, but they are not the only ones. The war cannot go on forever. It will have to end, otherwise this country will end. This war against the Kurds has been a serious burden on the Turks. I mean, it has become a burden on the workers, the civil servants, the small merchants. Those who don't bear this burden continue the war and continue to profit from it. (June 1998, Istanbul)

Born in 1956 in Adıyaman, he is a high school graduate. He works at a pharmacy in Istanbul. He evaded military service for twenty-one years and was caught in January 1997. He was in Isparta for his basic training and spent the rest of his service in the Tatvan Military Hospital and the Tenth Infantry Brigade in Erciș. He was discharged in June 1998. He is an active member of the Human Rights Association.

NO BLOOD-FOR-BLOOD

Everyone would want to do his military service in the West. Why should I join the war? Who would want to end up in the middle of a war? Many say they want to go, but we don't really know what they want inside. I mean people's official view and nonofficial view often differ.

On our first day, we went up the Gabar Mountain. I had a friend who was a non-commissioned officer from Çankırı. He got me into his team, and looked out for me. They were firing bullets and cannons to see how the newcomers would react. When we were all standing in one area, cannon balls went off, and everyone ducked for their lives. I stood still, I did not run away. When you are in the artillery, you don't need to go to the frontlines of the fighting because the artillery can hit from up to ten kilometers away. Ordinarily, there is a basic training camp for artillery, but that is not how I ended up in the artillery unit. I became an artillery man, when a noncommissioned officer whom I knew, enlisted me there, saying, "This way, you won't go off to operations; you will often be inside." The training we got in Amasya was minimal. After the training, we virtually knew nothing. I had merely shot three bullets. I knew that 70 percent of us would end up in the Southeast. A week before the deployment lottery, I called home saying I was off to Şırnak, but they did not believe me. I was just kidding, but it turned out to be true: I picked Şırnak! My family was of course very upset . . . they were crushed. But, I had to go.

Before military service, we would go around with a gun and practice shooting. I loved guns. During military service, my greatest fear was losing a friend. I was lucky. I did not lose any friends; all went well. During our first days, the soldiers on guard would say, "I don't care if PKK is coming or not, I am going to bed. Just make sure that the officer in charge does not come by here." As days went by, I became the officer in charge, and straightened up the routine. Those going off on operations had it easier than us. When you are always in the barracks, you stand out. It looks like you are doing nothing. But, when they were off on operations, we did not get any sleep, and keep pounding the area till dawn. I also went on

operations, usually short ones . . . I went to Northern Iraq. We stayed there for eighty days and were engaged in fighting for seventy days. We traveled through all of Iraq. We passed Zaho, and continued inside. Our permanent position was at the top of a mountain in the worst part of the Southeast. There was not that much fighting, but we were stuck there the whole time. There was little water . . . we could rarely bathe. When you got water, you looked for a way to heat it up. Sometimes twenty days went by without taking a bath. In the winter, we would melt the snow to produce bath water. Water from snow is a little oily; when you bathe in it, you itch. Our sleeping quarters were also dirty. They would give us six or seven barrels of water for a team of fifty people. Our reserves were barely enough. It used to snow up to two meters. We did get water in the winter. We could watch the whole world with our satellite antenna. We could have our pictures taken, or play sports in the morning. We built a small field at the top of the mountain and we used to have games during the weekends. It was nice.

I had never been there before. We are originally from the Southeast . . . we migrated long time ago as a tribe. I can understand Kurdish, but I cannot speak it. I did not have difficulty in dealing with the people since our language and customs were so similar. Because we were in the mountains, I had little interaction with the local people, but in Northern Iraq, we had a lot of contact with people. Because they speak really fast in Northern Iraq, I could not understand them all the time, but I could make myself understood. I did not suffer for being a Kurd, because my ID card said I was from Çankırı [Central Anatolia]. My friends knew that I was a Kurd, but nothing happened because my friends were democrats and I did not dwell on these issues. My friends were not thrilled to be there, either. Many start out enthusiastic, but lose their enthusiasm along the way, when they realize there is nothing to be excited about. I had broken up with my girlfriend when I left for military service. I communicated with my family once every eighty days or so. We would find a car phone; I would call, saying, "I am alive. I am here. I am well," and hang up. When we were in the barracks, we had phones. We could not call them, but they could call us. In Iraq, we stayed at a village. People are very poor; they only have wheat and rice from Turkey, to eat. They give oil in return. Turkey does not feed them for free. We went as a team of sixteen or seventeen. They were all good people. We had very good relations with the people. Because we behaved differently than others, the locals were very fond of us. We would eat with the children . . . they would sometimes bring food from their homes . . . our relations were that good. There were times when we would go without sleep for four to five days or stay on watch for a whole day. We had Special Operations units with us. The fighting went on and we fired shells day and night.

We built a building with stone at Gabar Mountain. There is a big building for soldiers to stay there. We also have a road; It was a narrow track before, but now

it is good enough for vehicles to use. For weekends, those of us with little time left could hitch a ride to town with the convoys from Şırnak. There was no social activity there. Every other week, we would organize a special evening and play music. If you can bring up the ingredients from the town, you can cook anything. There is a war with the PKK, but in the winter, there is also a war against nature. Of course, there is also constant spilling of blood, constant death, which gets you thinking. We would discuss things comfortably. Commanders have different attitudes, but we had a great officer and we would discuss with him all the time. They too are not happy that this war goes on without end. They too go on operations. They get a salary, but damn the salary. They've had it. Everyone has had it, I mean. There is an incredible war of will going on between the two sides. I don't think it will end. We will suffer a bigger blow and maybe then it would end. Then, there are people making money off this war. For example, people of the region make money from the presence of soldiers. Go and see Şırnak today. You will find every brand and every product. Or, villagers would bring us tomatoes and sell them to us for 100,000 TL when the same tomatoes are 30,000 TL in Şırnak. They make money. If he sells 20 kilos every day, he would make a comfortable living. 60 million TL a month just from tomatoes. We asked them to tape cassettes for us and they charged 2 million TL.

It has been three weeks since I have been back, and I feel bad. I have nothing to do. I am unemployed, and this destroys me. I did things for my country, I fought in difficult combat situations, and now I am redundant. I was expecting some leeway in getting a job. I will set up my own business. My father has retired. So, we will try to do something together. I did not live through the so-called Southeast Syndrome. They ask me, "What did you do? Did you get into any fighting?" I tell them what has happened. People ask a lot of questions, expecting to hear, "I did this. I did that. I killed so many people," but I don't tell them things that will excite them. Why should I trigger their hatred with the numbers of death when peace is an option? Some people's interest in us is not genuine; it is only about giving rise to certain feelings by using our stories. I see this in Çankırı and I suspect this is also true for other places.

I did not dwell too much about serving in the military, to tell you the truth. I went with the flow. I was not too concerned about death. What could you do even if you were concerned? You are at the top of a mountain; you cannot run away; you cannot go anywhere; you are obligated. Everyone would want to do his military service in the West. Why should I join the war? Who would want to end up in the middle of a war? Many say they want to go, but we don't really know what they want inside. I mean people's official view and nonofficial view often differ. The nice only thing I recall from serving in the military, is friends and nothing else. As for "not nice," I remember the commanders. . . . We did not like them that much. We did not have much contact with our superiors. The

ones we had contact with, such as expert sergeants, we did not particularly like. They too had their problems. Normal officers serve there for a couple of years, and get assigned to the West. Expert sergeants have to do a minimum of four or five years in the region. It is not easy. . . . Many of them are married. I don't find too much fault with them either. I like authentic music. I could listen to whatever music I liked. It was easier to listen to music there, even in the presence of commanders, than I could in Çankırı. I even listened to Kurdish music. For example, I could listen to tapes of the Kurdish musician Şivan Perver that I had bought in Northern Iraq. It was nice, I mean.

If your friends are not good, you will have a difficult time. But, I had a good time because we built some great friendships. I still see some of my friends from military service. I have called them, and met up with them. They also call me. They too are people who have gone through the same things as I did . . . not more, not less. There were no rich kids among us. We were all children of peasants and workers. I did not meet a single son of a doctor, there. I read the newspapers. I follow the region closely. I still have friends serving in the army. One cannot help wonder. I call them up often. As I said before, I am distressed these days. I woke up at 1 p.m. . . . I had gone to bed at 4 a.m. I stayed up all night and watched TV. Because I don't have anything to do, I sleep during the day and stay at home in the evenings. I used to read before I went to the army, but I don't read much since I came back. My mother is a little ill, so we shuttle back and forth between Ankara and Çankırı. I attend to her . . . she has diabetes. I have been fine in the last two days. I let myself rest. I have not managed to establish a normal routine, yet. What can I do without work? What should I do after I wake up at 8 a.m. tomorrow? I was a mellow guy before the military service, as well. I am a healthy person, not the sort that enjoys violence. I get angry . . . I used to get very angry before, but I know how to calm myself down. I keep a lot to myself . . . I wish I could share more with others. If I could, some of the stuff will be emptied out. One needs to increase the consciousness of the people. The way I see it, the people of that region are weak and they have always followed their interests. Those not like them have left the region already. So only those hankering after their own interests are left behind. People here say, "If I lose a son, ten of theirs should be lost," but they are wrong. No blood-for-blood, I mean. (August 1998, Çankırı)

Born in Çankırı in 1976, he is the youngest of three children; he has one brother and one sister. He went to Amasya for his basic training in February 1997. He returned from Şırnak in July 1998. He is still looking for work.

I DON'T EVEN OWN A PIECE OF
LAND AS BIG AS THIS ASHTRAY;
WHICH LAND AM I GOING
TO DEFEND?

We went there as the children of middle-class families. When we got hurt, we said, "If I don't get hurt, if you don't get hurt, how can we turn darkness into light?" That is why we went there. We got hurt, but no darkness turned into light. They don't get hurt, and they can't lighten up this darkness, either.

Five or six years before I went into military service, I used to tease my mother that I would go to Şırnak. I mean, even when I was a child, I used to have this kind of envy. I would listen to the elderly tell their stories of military service. There was so much pride in those stories. Neither my father nor my elder brother has served in the military. My goal was to go to a decent place and do my military service for all of us. I felt something was missing. My father could never talk about his "military experience" and tell stories. I wanted to have stories I would be proud tell to my son. I had sympathy for the people of the Southeast. I was curious about them. What do these men, whom we call terrorists, want? What is their problem? I partly went there to find my own truths. My wife and my family did not want me to go there. They even tried to find someone with influence in the military. The training I had in Hatay was survival training. They prepared us for the East, telling us all about the place and what we should expect. We were the Special Team. Fifteen of us were selected to join the Special Team from among 370 soldiers. I came first in the shooting exercises among 5,700 soldiers. I have loved weapons since my childhood. They gathered those of us who were physically fit and good at shooting and sports into a separate team. I was in the Hatay Special Forces, First Company, Second Team.

I gave exactly 11 kilos. There is no other way; you have got to lose some weight. It is impossible to gain weight. All soldiers in the Special Forces are very thin. Athletes in Turkey do fifty push-ups; I do one hundred. I can run for thirty

five kilometers with a full load. There is a saying in the military, “I carry like a mule and live like a lion.” If you don’t carry your ammunition, you will pay with your life. If you don’t carry your food, you will starve. I tried to be the best. I told myself, “I am going to be here for eighteen months anyway. I should do justice to it and do it as best as I can.” I did it willingly, so it did not turn into agony. This homeland belongs to all of us. It cannot be defended just by me and the son of the mechanic Mehmet. I would also like to see the sons of our ministers there. Go and talk to the soldiers, and you will find out that the wealthiest one will own a small shop. I don’t even own a piece of land as big as this ashtray. Which land am I going to defend? I want to see the sons of the Sabancı family or Tansu Çiller’s son there. These are the troubling aspects of military service.

There were sixteen soldiers in our team. We all knew each other well. It is very important to be with people you trust. You should be able to turn your back on them without fear. We were assigned to a place called Gülyazı in Şırnak. Before going there, we imagined it to be a beautiful place. They said that its code name was Karayazı. It was surrounded by mountains. Cudi and Gabar were right there. It was only four hours away from Northern Iraq. With our binoculars, we could see the Habur gate [between Turkey and Iraq] as well as the Turkish–Iranian border. It was a small village in a valley on the Uludere Silk Road, six hours away from Şırnak. We were stationed at the Third Operations Company of the Gendarmerie Battalion. Before we arrived, they had received our files. We could not do much for the first two months because there was too much snow; only a few minor things to maintain security in the region. There wasn’t much terrorist activity, either. In other words, it was a picnic during the winter.

Then the snow melted and the sun came out. Operations began. We went to the top of the Kato Mountain on May 9 and stayed there for about a month. We conducted searches in the area. The terrorists had caves and shelters. They had planted a zillion mines. We searched for mines and destroyed them. There was also direct engagement. We tried to disarm them. Our first engagement was in Geymüşile, in a place called Kopki secured by the infantry. There were M60 tanks and one of them got hit by a rocket. We were sent there as backup and we also had the peshmerge on our side. Geymüşile had been attacked a year before and six soldiers had been martyred. A guy was telling us about this attack, “150 of them came and shot many of the soldiers from their backs.” Five of us from the team went there. The infantry were searching the area for mines. We passed a curve and I sat down to have some biscuit. It was summer time. My buddy asked for some biscuit and drinks, too. I put my bag down and took out the biscuits and the drink. He wanted me to throw them to him. He was sitting on a small rock. I said, “You come and get them. You won’t be able to catch them in the air.” He made a move to come toward me and bum! He stepped on a mine.

He jumped into the air and his right leg detached from his knee. There was flesh hanging from his knee. He was frightened and started crying. Still, he kept his calm. I took off the laces of his boot and used them to tie his feet to his leg. I did everything they had taught us as first aid. The helicopter came, but it was having a difficult time landing in the area. We had to move him to the other side of the hill so that he could get on the helicopter, but there were mines all over the place. I could easily step onto a mine myself. At that moment, I forgot about everything else and put my buddy on my back. The helicopter pilot said that they were running out of gas and had to leave. The team commander was asking them not to leave without taking our friend. Another friend raised his gun and said, "I will shoot you if you go." The helicopter left, but then came back from the other side. It came close to the ground so that I could hold its legs and lift myself up. Then, I reached down and lifted my friend up onto the helicopter. He was thirsty, so I gave him some water. He fainted. I landed in Şırnak. I was in terrible shape. I had not even shaved for a month. The helicopter pilot called for an ambulance and I accompanied my friend to the hospital. The head sergeant at the hospital gate asked me if I was a soldier or a peshmerge. He was teasing me about the blood all over my face and body. I told him I was a peshmerge. I was about to attack him, but others prevented me. I was so pissed; I could have taken his nails out. They took my buddy into surgery right away and cut his leg. He was half awake when he came out of the operation. In military hospitals, they usually do surgeries with local anesthesia. When the mine exploded, the flesh that came out of my buddy's legs was all over my face, inside my mouth. For a long time, I could not eat anything. I kept spitting and it turned into a habit. My friends would complain, "Why are you spitting like a machine gun all the time?" I was trying to swallow, but it felt like my friend's flesh was still inside my mouth. When he came out of the operation, he held my hand and said, "Don't leave any one of them alive! Kill them all!" Then they transferred him to Diyarbakır and gave him an artificial leg. His lover left him after he lost his leg. He was always talking about how he would marry her after military service. Now he drinks a lot. We would dig trenches and then destroy them after the operation. The next time, you dig new trenches. Sometimes, the PKK come, place mines under the stones in those trenches, and place the stone back in place. When it is time to prepare the trenches again, soldiers step on the stones and explode. Two guys from our company stepped on those mines. One lost a small part of his leg; the other lost the whole lower part below the knee.

I had hernia surgery in June. Beside me, in the hospital, lay an informer from Cizre who had spent six years with the PKK. He had been injured by a different kind of mine, one like a cable, used for illumination. His face and hands were all burned. He was very afraid of us. At age twenty-three, he had three kids. He had

turned himself in to do his military service. The military makes use of informers to get information about the organization and to guide the soldiers in finding out PKK hide-outs. He had been in the mountains for ten years, but he had never seen Öcalan. These guys are on the mountains and Öcalan is living his life elsewhere. The conditions in the mountains turn you into a monster. You get into a weird syndrome. One day, an eighteen-year-old surrendered to us. The terrorists had kidnapped him as he was on his way to the military office for registration. He had walked from Başkale to Zaho in twenty-one days. He found us at 5 a.m. and surrendered. His father was the head guard of a village in Başkale. He had seven uncles, all village guards. Why would the son of a head guard in Başkale become a terrorist? I have a friend who is from that region. His aunt is a terrorist. He told me the story of his friendship with another boy. They grew up together till they were about eighteen. Then, my friend did his military service and became a village guard, whereas his friend joined the terrorists. One day, they came face-to-face with their weapons directed against each other, but neither one fired a shot. One went this way, the other one went that way. Poor people! A guy has five uncles, three of them are village guards, the other two are terrorists.

You go on an operation and stay out there for forty to forty-five days. Then you come down, bathe, and go up to the mountains for another operation. . . . We had two to three day leaves in between. You are constantly on the wait for terrorists. You get information about their whereabouts, go and lay an ambush, and wait for them to come. I was in about ten combats that involved direct engagement with the terrorists. There were many who surrendered. One mortar guy had surrendered bringing the crucial parts of his mortar gun to us. We had treated him like a king. He had also been kidnapped. If a mortar shell falls on us, it can kill twenty-five to thirty people. He was tried in a court afterward. The military has a different mentality now, it is not like before. They are trying to dissuade them in a constructive way. For instance, we would not just shoot at anyone we saw. We would identify those who were shooting at us and target them. I have probably killed some. But they don't leave their dead behind. They slash the dead bodies into pieces, pack them up in their backpacks, and take them away. It is the same with us soldiers. If you can't take your dead buddy back, you might as well die. Whatever it takes, you carry them back. The terrorists dismember the dead and carry them that way. I have seen many bodies that had been dismembered. I saw a guy who was trying to put the pieces of his friend's body together. I mean, he had totally lost it. He was one of us. One day, we found the dead body of a fifteen-year-old girl who had died on the wired fences while trying to pass to our side in order to surrender. They usually put blankets or wood on the fences to pass easily. This one had failed, losing a leg

and then dying. One unbalanced soldier cut her fingers. If you don't have respect for them when they are alive, of course, you have no respect for their dead . . . I mean, there is no need to cut parts of their bodies.

We were called the C Team. It is a team made up of conscripted soldiers, but it goes on more operations than normal soldiers. Our difference was this: We would wait for them to come and shoot; follow them; and then catch them or shoot them. Everybody knows about and fears the C Teams, including the terrorists. When you are not on duty, your conditions are quite good. You can watch TV, including the movie channel Cine 5, and you have access to other facilities. How can you walk for 10–15 hours with military boots? We would wear sports shoes instead. They were both lighter and would not make you sweat. Those in the Special Team are policeman. They were very different from us. We did not talk with them much. They usually work in the towns, not in the rural areas like us.

We would go on patrols to secure the border stone. One day, we were attacked by terrorists when we were at the stone. They blew it up from a distance and started shooting at us one by one. One of our friends was martyred. The Kanas bullet went from his back and came out of his heart. His chin had fallen down. I tied his t-shirt on his head. May he rest in peace! The helicopter came an hour later from Şırnak and took him away. You are shattered when something like this happens. He was your friend. You have worked with him on many occasions. They usually shoot from such places where it was impossible to see them. Whatever weapon you have, you cannot bring them down. But that day we killed five of them and they could not even take them away. I wish no one would die, neither the soldier, nor the terrorist. There is no difference between Turks and Kurds. We had many friends from Dersim, Tunceli, Kars, and Ardahan. I was the only Westerner in the team, all others were of Kurdish origin.

Why do they become terrorists? The newspapers suggest that these people are ignorant and uncultured. Nothing of that sort! They are all university graduates. Of course, there are those among them who are illiterate as well. The people in the Southeast have little choice. They will either become village guards or terrorists. The village guards sometimes complain that they don't want to do this for 20–25 million TL. Why not? I come from Lüleburgaz and fight here to protect your mother and father, and you complain about the money. Why? Sometimes, the PKK would talk on the wireless about their demands. They wanted the discrimination against the Kurds to end; they wanted the Kurds to live a decent life in this country. But they already live decent lives. . . . The wealthiest families in Lüleburgaz are Kurdish families. Some are real-estate developers, some sell carpets, others own twenty shops. What if they declare Şırnak to be a liberated region? They can take the whole Southeast . . . There is not even

100 square meter of land that is on a plain; it is all mountains. You cannot do anything on this terrain. Once, we were listening to two lovers making up on the wireless. Our Kurdish friends were translating:

—“You left me and went away. Why did you go away? I will kill you.”

—“I love you. Let us meet up . . .”

I had a friend from the Ağrı province. He would trick terrorists and chat with them over the wireless pretending to be a terrorist himself. Those people have been deceived. You get angry with them and pity them at the same time. Of course, they also have a point. It is not only the terrorists' fault. The military has committed many mistakes as well. They have treated all of the Kurdish people as terrorists. They have gone into their homes, smashing the guy's face in front of his wife and children. There is no way his children will have sympathy for the soldiers. They hate the soldiers. The terrorists have all become inhuman. Why are you fighting for? We would go up to the mountains and spend forty-five days there, but the state would take care of us. No one took care of them. They had to watch out for themselves at all times. Some ultranationalist guys go to the Southeast thinking that they will “get them all and finish the job.” Of course, their ideas change along the way. On their return, this is not what they say.

It was very difficult to make phone calls. I had very little communication with my wife. We would write letters to each other. They took about twenty-five days to arrive. She would send me my son's pictures. My mother was sick and my wife was only eighteen years old. I worried about them all the time. I knew it was very difficult for them. I participated in a Northern Iraq operation. The Commander of the Army Corps gave me an award of recognition in the name of my team. I had received similar awards during basic training in Hatay, as well.

Soldiers had come from all over the place for the Northern Iraq operation. The Van Commando, the Kayseri Commando . . . We were sent to Haftanin, Kato. Others climbed the Cudi and Gabar Mountains. There have been many operations to Northern Iraq. Each time, the military claimed that the PKK was finished. But the terrorists are not only in Haftanin or Zaho or Kopkin or even in Eastern Turkey. Now they are also in the metropolises of the West. The villagers liked the soldiers. The Gülyazi village, where we were stationed, was one of the most dependable villages in the region. They would want this to be over with. “We are suffering tremendously and losing our sons. They are deceiving our people,” they kept saying. They are the ones to suffer when terrorists die. They are also the ones to suffer when the village guards die. So, they suffer either way. They are trapped in a contradiction. They don't want this to

continue. The participation in the PKK has diminished. The locals don't join them anymore.

You gain confidence once you pull the trigger. You tell yourself that you are only "responding" and that gives you confidence. When you cannot respond, then you want it to be over with as quickly as possible. There are some uneducated soldiers, mostly from a particular party, who talk about wanting to kill them all because they have ruined our country. This is all empty talk. I don't want anybody to die. Why should people die? The soldiers and officers there, I mean the second lieutenants, the captains, the majors, as well as the soldiers, are all committed people. When I talk about this with the people here, they don't understand. They have no idea what is going on there. And they aren't interested in learning about it. When I was there, my wife, child, and mother suffered a lot, but they did not suffer as much as I did. The military wants this war to be over. They don't want more soldiers to die. Still the terror in the Southeast continues. Why? Some people say it is because the officers and other state officials get paid more when they serve there. Would you trade 50 million TL worth of additional money for your life? A noncommissioned officer in Gülyazi earned 450 million TL. His wife and children were also there, going through all of this with him. He certainly deserves that money. There is no such thing as a "Kurdish problem." What they lack is employment and educational opportunities. Educate them and give them a job, the guy will defend you for the rest of his life. This issue cannot be solved by war. What if they shoot more soldiers? What if the soldiers shoot more terrorists? If you choose terror, you will spend fifty years getting to where you would normally go in ten years. They cannot understand this.

When they gave me my discharge papers, I could not even think about taking off my uniform and changing into civilian clothes. When I first came here, I was stupefied. My father has a beautiful house in Lüleburgaz. I went there often, turned off the lights, opened the windows and watched the mountains across. It reminded me of the East. I would close the shop, go home, and put on my sportswear clothes and go jogging. My wife would ask where I was going. I would jog till 5 a.m. For the first two weeks, I jogged every single day. Then I stopped. I don't share what I have experienced there with my wife. I suffered a lot, I don't want anyone else to suffer. My family is aware of my problems. My wife is an intelligent person. She understands even if I don't talk about it. She also knows how to treat me, so we don't have any problems at home. Sometimes, I have nightmares. One night, I apparently woke up and strangled my wife. She held me by the arms and woke me up. When I woke up, she did not say anything, just gave me a glass of water. Then I went back to sleep. Sometimes I doze off and wake up to the slightest sound in fear. I was not frightened at all

when I was there. I could easily fire 500 shots and not be afraid. I did not think about dying, either. When you think about dying, it is usually too late; you are almost dead. You have to get shot to be afraid of dying.

I used to be a nervous person before I went to the military, but I would not want to hurt anyone. Like they say, “The snake that does not harm me, can live a thousand years.” I would not fight with people. Unless someone hurt my brother, son, wife, or mother, I would not touch them. Now, I am telling people not to get on my nerves and to avoid fighting with me. If they do, I don’t know what I would do. I can cut their throats and get myself into trouble. I lose myself when I get into a discussion or a disagreement. My tastes have changed as well. I don’t enjoy things that I used to enjoy before. For instance, I had a Kawasaki motorcycle when I was fifteen or sixteen years old. My hair went down till my belly; I would wear leather pants and jackets, and go to the rock bar *Kemancı* in Istanbul to dance till the morning. I don’t enjoy any of that now. I used to play the guitar. . . . Now I think about all the people who are dying, all the people who are hungry and feel guilty. I brought everything back with me: my name tag, my beret, my military ID card. . . . This piece of cloth is also a souvenir. I cut it from the head cover of one of the terrorists who had surrendered. I liked the guy a lot. He was eighteen and very scared. When I reached for his head cover to cut the piece, he got frightened thinking that I would cut his ear or something. He stayed with us for a day. The next day, a helicopter came to pick him up. His father was also a village guard. He had tried escaping several times, but got caught. He said that, once, they tied him on a tree for five to six days and beat him up really badly. They told him that they would kill him if he tried to run away again. The kid had finally managed to run away when he was standing guard in foggy weather. Then he had waited till the next morning to surrender. Even if you shout during the night, you would be killed. So, he waited till the next morning to shout across to us. We heard him and went down to pick him up. He was a beautiful boy, tall and very handsome.

During military service, I enjoyed listening to Zülfü Livaneli’s song “*Memik Oğlan*” and Yaşar Kurt’s “*Korku*.” I knew Yaşar Kurt before his album came out. I was able to sing eight or nine of his songs by heart. When university students, particularly girls, listened to the song “*Korku*” [Fear], they cried. It is an anti-military song. If you listened to my repertoire of favorite songs, you would wonder how I managed to go through military service. I am a different kind of person. My son is two years old. When I came back, he did not recognize me. I asked him “Where is your father?” and he showed me my photograph in uniform on the TV set, saying “My father is a soldier.” One day, I put on a military uniform so that he would see me that way. Now he calls me “dad.” My brother calls me “an idiot” because I did my military service. Now I have a son. I don’t

want him to be like his grandfather. If necessary, I can go to the military for him. If there is a threat that Turkey faces, I can go. But I don't want my loved ones to go. Still, I cannot sleep before 4-5 a.m. I watch TV with my wife, play video games, or just talk. I have not managed to set up a life I feel good about. Nobody helps me, I feel all alone. People pity me, but I am not someone to be pitied. Why do they pity me? I get really pissed. I have about twenty award documents. I played all kinds of sports before military service. Now, I cannot find a job. The owner of a bar in Istanbul offered to hire me as a bodyguard. Of course, I was not interested. I am determined to find a decent job and earn money. Some people want to join the Special Forces in order to get a good security job afterward. Many Special Forces soldiers are hired as private security guards.

The heroes are the martyrs lying in Çanakkale [from the Dardanelles War in 1915]. Of course, you don't want to kill anyone, but you are forced to. I did not go there to kill or to hurt anyone. I did what I had to do. No one can ask me what I did there or why I did it. Even if they ask, I won't tell them anything. I did what everyone else did. Why are they asking me? We did it, we experienced it, and we came back. It was nice. If there was no terror, it would have been much nicer. I have not shown my award documents to anyone. No one is interested, anyway. Some people think that I have gone mad. I suffered terrible conditions for eighteen months. If I explained to someone about what I did there, show him my award documents, he would not be able to understand. Why do we have to bear with this misery? Why can't they find a solution to this problem? What can I do? I can write to the Chief of Staff, with the signatures of more than one hundred people I fought with, and ask, "Why does it continue this way?" Is it up to me to ask? I would get into trouble if I did something like this. You know how the system works in Turkey. I have never discriminated between Turks, Kurds, or the Circassians, or between the poor and the rich. We went there as the children of middle-class families. When we got hurt, we said, "If I don't get hurt, if you don't get hurt, how can we turn darkness into light?" That is why we went there. We got hurt, but no darkness turned into light. They [those who don't go] don't get hurt, and they can't lighten up this darkness, either. I have never voted and I never will. I am not a leftist or a rightist, not a communist or an ultranationalist, not an artist, either. I am a humanist. As long as I am not hungry, as long as I have a ball to play with, I will be happy. If the war comes to an endNobody would get hurt. But it is not coming to an end. Ahmet dies, Mehmet diesYou know, I cannot figure out why it does not come to an end. (June 1998, Lüleburgaz)

Born in 1976, he married for four years, has one son. His basic training was in Hatay between November 1996 and February 1997. He was then deployed in

*Şırnak, until May 1998, as a member of the Gendarmerie Special Forces. His father is retired. He has one brother. He used to play the guitar and sing. He did boxing for four years, and also played soccer, basketball, and table tennis. He likes swimming and enjoys reading Nazim Hikmet. The most recent book he read was Erdal Öz's *Gülünün Solduğu Akşam*.*

IN PLACE OF THE ONES WHO CANNOT TALK

The father of Ihsan Akyüz, the plane hijacker, asks, “Those who die become martyrs, those who become disabled become ghazis [veterans]. How are we going to name the troubled kids like ours?”

Is there anyone who does not know that the answer to father Akyüz’s question is “hero”? These “heroes” are the subjects of clichéd expressions such as “Hero Mehmetçik” or “the *ghazis* who are proud to have given one of their legs for the country,” which regularly appear in the media. Even if they accept these ideas during “Dawn 550,” once they finish military service, they stop feeling themselves like a hero. On the other hand, the media also forgets what they had written about these “heroes” and starts searching for new names for their new state.

A cab driver who works in Istanbul says, “It has been six years since I came back from military service, but I still find it difficult to control my anger. When I get angry, I try not to get out of the car. If I do get out, there is no guarantee I will be able to control myself.” This driver seems to have a point. What we read in the newspapers, usually in single-column pieces, reveal the extent to which things can indeed get out of hand, both in terms of what happens, and in terms of how it is presented:

* *Twenty-nine year-old Ali Iğdır, an inmate in the Bakırköy Woman and Child Detention Center, has tried to burn himself upon being denied permission to see his friend Oktay Zortu, who is also detained in the same institution. Putting one liter of gas in a barrel and adding some water to it . . . Iğdır started swearing at the people around him, went to the entrance of the Detention Center, and poured the diluted gas on his body. When the police came to the setting, they tried to talk Iğdır out of burning himself. . . . Saying that he has done his military service in Siirt and has one artificial leg, Iğdır shouted to the police, “I am a war veteran, I lost one leg during military service, and you don’t let me see my friend!” (October 30, 1998, Hürriyet)*

- * *In the small town of Saray in Tekirdağ, Serkan Ada, a soldier from Şırnak who had come home on leave, crushed the head of a fifty-six-year-old woman who refused to have sexual relations with him. (February 2, 1997, Demokrasi)*
- * *Dursun Ali Keskin, who did his military service as a mountain commando in Hakkari and was discharged two weeks ago, has killed the person who had raped his sister fourteen years ago, as well as the parents of the culprit. (December 18, 1996, Sabah)*
- * *Two months after his discharge, Ali Rıza Eker, who had lost eight of his friends during clashes in the town of Kızıltepe, Mardin, committed suicide using a hunting rifle. He lived these two months like a soldier, as well. (November 2, 1996, Sabah)*
- * *A traffic accident much like suicide. Nihat İlçi, a retired major, has died in a traffic accident that looks more like suicide than an accident. İlçi had been retired at a young age for going into a depression as a result of his participation in the fight against terror. (December 11, 1996, Sabah)*
- * *In a Special Team Wedding, Demir, a local politician from the People's Republican Party (CHP) dies. Bullets coming out of more than 150 guns have turned a wedding in Antalya into a nightmare. Among those participating in the wedding were members of the Special Team who have been sent from the Southeast to Antalya for two years to boost their morale. (June 27, 1995, Evrensel)*

These are only a few examples of the kinds of news we read in the papers regarding former soldiers. The period of their lives that have turned them into “heroes” only take up a line or two in these news pieces. These young men are presented to us as “heroes” when generals, prime ministers, and ministers visit the Gülhane Military Hospital (GATA) on special days like the *bayrams*. However, they are not presented as “heroes” or “veterans” in other contexts. For instance, Ali İğdır, who shouted out that he was a veteran, is not presented as “Veteran Ali İğdır” in the newspaper. Nihat İlçi, Ali Rıza, and Demir are all dead. How about those in prison: Serkan, Dursun, and others whose names we don't know? Do we know what they are doing?

* * *

- * *Hijacking for rehabilitation.* Ihsan Akyüz, politically a “rightist,” hijacked a Turkish Airlines flight. Upon surrendering, Akyüz claimed, “I have done this because I am depressed.”
- * *Plastic gun.* Turkish Airlines flight from Ankara to Istanbul, an Airbus 310, was seized by the hijacker Ihsan Akyüz at 20.47 p.m. The plane landed in the Trabzon Airport under heightened security.
- * *The passengers did not know they were hijacked.* At 22.30 p.m. all seventy-five passengers were evacuated from the plane, leaving the hijacker and the pilots

behind. It was reported that Akyüz wanted to take the plane to Chechnya. The passengers learned that they had been hijacked only after they had evacuated the plane as a result of the calm that the flight attendants were able to maintain.

* *The excuse is unclear.* Akyüz surrendered at 22.45 p.m. It was first claimed that Akyüz, who lives in Çorum, had hijacked the plane to protest the veil ban in universities. Later, it was suggested that he was protesting his “maltreatment during military service.” (September 15, 1998, Radikal-Online)

Ihsan Akyüz stays in a crowded prison in Trabzon. He has little communication with the other prisoners. When his elder brother Mustafa went to the prison to visit Ihsan, with the kebabs that he had brought for him, he learned that Ihsan had been hospitalized. Because he was too weak from not having eaten anything, he was taken to a hospital to be fed by serum.

Satı, a housewife, and Turan, a civil servant at the post office, got married in 1968 and had two sons and one daughter: Mustafa, Hülya, and finally, in 1971, Ihsan. The Akyüz family did everything in their capacity to provide good education for their children. Mustafa became an architect and Hülya an accountant. The youngest, Ihsan, was studying at a two-year vocational college to become an electrician. He decided to leave school before graduating and registered to complete his military service. Father Akyüz had always been a disciplining, if not a little authoritarian, father. Ihsan had grown up to be an honest, serious person who was very respectful of those around him. He was never a naughty boy as a child and when he grew up, he spent most of his time at home, rather than at the local coffeehouse like other teenage boys. He did not have many friends, anyway.

For his basic training, he was sent to Doğu Kışla in Manisa. His proficiency unit was originally Kırklareli in the western Thrace region, but, on a temporary assignment, his unit was deployed to Şırnak. He continued to be a quiet, reserved person in the military as well. He wrote little more than greetings for his family in the letters he sent during military service. The family did not hear at all from their son for the first six months. His mother, father, and brothers were shattered during this period of noncommunication. All their attempts to get information through official channels failed. Just when they had lost hope about their son, Ihsan called them to say he was “fine.” He did not explain why he had not called his family before and they did not ask. He did not use his leaves and, after he came back to Çorum, he did not talk much about his military service experiences. All they knew was that he had taken part in many operations. When his father says, “It was in our times that people told stories about their military service experience. This is no longer the case,” the message he is trying to convey is that his son is no exception in this regard. Despite all this silence, there was one story that he kept reciting to his family. We learn about it from his mother, Satı: “My son told us about a friend of his who was engaged. Three days before his

discharge, they were going on an operation and his friend begged the commander to excuse him from this operation. Apparently, the commander did not listen to him. My son used to say, 'My friend had to participate in that operation. He did and he died.' He told this story to us numerous times."

Despite the fact that Ihsan did not talk much, his family was aware of his problems. For the first six months after military service, Ihsan chose to sleep on the concrete floor instead of the bed that his mother prepared for him day in and day out. His sleep was so light that the family members stopped wearing slippers, afraid that they would wake him up. The father, Turan Akyüz, found a job for him hoping that he would be able to sleep from exhaustion. Ihsan started working in a market loading and unloading food. He resigned after six months. He was very honest and he expected those around him to be honest as well, but that was not the case. His second job was at a bank, Toprakbank. After a while, he resigned from that job as well, saying that "I will get into trouble if I keep working there." He regretted leaving that job afterward, but it was too late. What he wanted most was to work as a state employee. He took many exams for the open positions, but he never succeeded in getting a job. According to his father, "It is very difficult to get a state job unless you know someone with influence."

The only option left for Ihsan was to work in his father's small drapery shop and make 10 million TL a month. Even his social security could not be paid. Ihsan was very angry with the media. He believed that both the media and the society were being hypocritical. According to his father, he was not involved in any political organization, either. One day, he left home and they saw him on television. He had kidnapped a plane. Now, he serves time in the Trabzon prison. His case is still being tried. He has been dispatched to the Istanbul Forensic Unit and is waiting his turn to be transferred to Istanbul.

His mother, Satı Akyüz, says, "Those who die in the Southeast are saved. Trabzon is rather far. It is difficult for us to go and visit him often. He is not in the hospital and is very weak. He is so depressed that he does not eat anything. I wanted to take him to a doctor, but he kept saying he was fine. He is a grown-up guy. We could not just hold him by the ear and take him to a doctor. Two weeks before this event, he told me that he did not want to go to the shop because when there were no customers, he started thinking about his military experiences."

The father, Turan Akyüz, asks: "When they take them for military service, they do a thorough check-up. On their return, they don't. They should be checked after finishing their service as well. Is it the same thing to do your military service in the East as it is doing it in Istanbul? We just watch them come back from war. These are all poor kids. How can they get a treatment on their own? If these things had not happened, I would not be talking, either. As a

father, I would not have wanted my twenty-five-year-old son to suddenly be named a 'terrorist.' After this incident, at least fifty families from Çorum alone came to us to say 'May he come out soon' and 'Our son is in the same state.' Everybody experiences these problems on their own. We all go through it alone. These are the children of this country; we should be taking good care of them. When they are there, they are treated as heroes. When they come back, they are no longer heroes. I mean, I ask myself, 'Who are these boys?' I would not want to discriminate between rich and poor, but all those I have seen are poor boys. We are giving our blood and our lives for this state, but the state should do something for us as well. Since he came back, Ihsan has been quite harsh toward me. He could not handle any kind of injustice, and he had a hard time tolerating me. He did not tolerate any ideas that were not his own. I tried to appease him. I knew that all of this was due to his experience of soldiering in the East. Fire burns where it falls. No father wants his son to be in this state. I am making a call to the media from here. They should tell people the truth. This country has a lot to gain from honest reporting. After the incident, they encircled us, as if we were going to run away or something. I have been as much hurt by what the media has reported as what my son has done. Before, I used to feel sorry when I saw the scenes of people breaking the cameras of reporters. Now, I realize that they deserve it. There are many young men like Ihsan who have experienced similar problems after serving in the military. They should not hide their sickness. They should voice their opinions and let everyone know of their troubles. If they keep it all to themselves, they are going to explode one day. Just as it happened with us. Everybody, both those with rightist political beliefs and those on the Left, are our brothers. We do our military service altogether. But upon discharge, the young men fall into the hands of the politicians. Our young men are called on to serve in the military and that is fine. But at least they can be given jobs on their return. Whether you get a job or not depends on influence. Each political party discriminates among applicants based on their political belief. Our situation is like the film *Umut* [Hope] by Yılmaz Güney."

The neighbors of the Akyüz family say, "I hope that you will write all of this down so that the government knows. They should discharge these young men after a medical examination, provide them with vacation facilities for a month, and then give them a job. Çorum has given many martyrs. The parents are the ones who suffer the most."

* * *

* *Discharged soldier has killed three. In the Ersizlerdere village outside Kastamonu's small town of Küre, twenty-two-year-old Orhan Kara has killed his*

mother, sister, and brother using a hunting rifle. He was discharged from the military three months ago and was suffering from depression.

Orhan Kara, after going into an argument, the reasons of which remain unknown, with his family, used his father's hunting rifle to randomly shoot at the family members. As a result of the shooting, Orhan Kara's mother Şaziye Kara (age fifty-two), his sister Gülten Kara (age twenty-eight), and his brother Erol Kara (age twenty-five) were killed on the spot. Orhan Kara is currently on the run, while the search for him is under way. It has been suggested that Orhan Kara was discharged from the military three months ago after having served in Diyarbakır and that he was suffering from mental problems. (October 1, 1998, Radikal)

Orhan Kara was born in the village of Ersizlerdere in 1976. After primary school, he was sent to work at a restaurant in Istanbul so that "he would learn about life." His father, Nazmi Kara, retired from his job as a mine worker in 1992 and moved to Beykoz, Istanbul to open up a filo bakery. This was to become Orhan's job as well. Orhan was known to be a "very serious" boy. He did not talk much and did not have many friends. He would open up a stand in the local marketplace every week and sell more filo dough than everyone else. He was very honest. If a customer left a bag of bananas on his stand, he would carefully weigh it, learn its cost, and bring it home to his siblings. When the same customer came the next week, he would tell her that he ate the bananas for they would go bad in a week. He would then pay the customer for the bananas.

Nazmi Kara (age fifty-five) married Orhan's mother Şaziye thirty years ago, and ten years ago, he married his current wife Fadime. He had an official marriage with his first wife and an Islamic marriage with his second wife. He has a total of thirteen children from his two wives, three daughters and ten sons. Two of his children were killed by Orhan Kara, who is now in prison. The Kara family lived in the Ersizlerdere village until father Kara retired from his job and moved to Istanbul with his second wife six years ago. Now he had two houses, one with his first wife in Ersizlerdere and another with his second wife in Istanbul. Orhan (born in 1977) went for his military service in February 1997 and became a gendarmerie commando. His basic training was in Kırkağaç, Manisa and his proficiency unit was in Diyarbakır. As a backup unit, they were sent to the mountains as they were needed. His family does not know if Orhan participated in any operation. They never asked and he never talked about it. When he was there, they knew that Orhan was doing fine in the military, or so he told them. Orhan was discharged on August 5, 1998. He came back to Istanbul and stayed there for a week. He did not talk much about military service during this week. Orhan kept talking about the nature in the Southeast, nothing else.

Although Orhan slept in the same room as his father, the family does not know whether his sleep was regular because the father left home around 3 a.m. to go to the bakery and Orhan slept until noon.

Then Orhan left for the village because he had missed his mother, brother, and sister. In his initial days, he helped his mother with house chores, fixing things in the house, and making preparations for the winter. Gülten, his sister, had recently divorced her husband and was living with her mother. When a close relative spread rumors about Gülten, she went to his house with a gun and challenged him to face her, "I may have divorced you, but does that mean that I have become a whore?" The family believes that the road to the murders at home started with this incident. That day, Orhan visits the relative who spread the rumors and has drinks with him. The family believes that he then went back home to "clean the family's honor." Father Nazmi Kara cannot figure out why he killed his mother and brother. Orhan remains on the run for two weeks after the incident. Meanwhile, he calls his father and tells him that he had no fault in what happened. His father manages to persuade him to turn himself in to the prosecutor, which he does. Orhan tells his lawyer that he knows that he killed his sister, but not that he killed his mother and brother. Orhan also shares a secret with the lawyer: "I got a little sick during military service. Sometimes, I get this pain under my feet and it affects my brain. When it happens, I usually lose myself. When it happened during military service, I would go mad. When I came back, I was planning to tell this to my father and see a doctor about it."

Now this "child" who is 1.78 in height and 90 kilos in weight is detained in the Inebolu prison waiting for his case to be tried. According to the father, his son is "finished."

The *muhtar* of the Ersizlerdere village recites, "I opened the door to the first room and saw his brother, shot dead. I opened the door to the second room and saw his mother, shot dead. And his sister was in the third room. . . . Three dead bodies . . . I did not know Orhan Kara personally but everyone in the village, said 'He is a good person, a calm person.' When he turned himself in, I rushed to the Courthouse to see him. Some friends here say that those who served in the Southeast have these kinds of sudden fits. I mean, they say that this is the result of his military service experiences. I mean, we were unable to figure out why he did it. During the two weeks that he was on the run, nobody went out, even to visit their next-door neighbor, because they were afraid. People feared that someone who has killed his mother could do anything. I am almost sixty years old and I have not witnessed such an incident in this village. I have not heard anything of this sort from my ancestors, either."

Orhan's primary school friend Metin Gökgöz speaks, "I remember him from primary school. He would not talk to any of us. He was a very reserved, silent

kid. He did not participate in our games, either. I was not very close to him, but then no one was.”

His father, Nazmi Kara speaks: “Just as they do medical examinations before they take them into the military, they should do the same when they are discharged. Just as they received them in good health, they should send them away in good health. We raised our son, he passed this medical examination and he joined the military. He went there at age twenty-two. I have not even twisted his ear all his life. He was a very respectful boy. He was in Diyarbakır as gendarmerie commando. . . . His height was 1.78 and he was a commando. . . . The commander of the military station in Küre has served in the East. It has been a long time since he came back, but he says that he still feels that he is at war when night falls. He still has not been able to get over it. He still dreams about being in combat and losing his friend. He wakes up in fear and it is his family that consoles him. The commander told me all this because he wanted me to understand Orhan. He said, ‘Don’t misunderstand me, but you know how they talk about ‘mad blood’ to define young men. Indeed, when your blood goes mad, you lose yourself.’ We have a request from those in charge. We have respect for those things that happen during military service. They might lose a leg or lose an arm, that is fine. But before they are discharged, the military should give some training to the soldiers, for fifteen to twenty days, and tell them how they should behave outside, with their mothers, fathers, neighbors, and their youngsters. I mean, they should not just take their weapons and tell them to go . . . I am not just talking for my son. We learn about other children from television. The boy tells his parent that he will catch up with them and then they find him dead. He has hung himself. I mean, they should put these boys in a camp for fifteen days and train them. . . . We would never be disrespectful toward our country and our nation. . . . Neither would our sons. . . . In our culture, a man who has not done his military service is not treated as a proper person. People would not even greet them in the street because they are traitors. If they escape military service and I escape military service, then who is going to do it? Your son should not go. Nothing should happen to your son. . . . Is your son’s life worth more than the other’s? Let nothing happen to any of our sons . . .”

NUMBERS . . .

63,286 In a press conference reviewing 1998, the then president, Süleyman Demirel noted, “From the beginning of terrorist acts in August 15, 1984, till December of this year, 5,555 members of our security forces have been killed and 11,168 have been wounded in 32,853 incidents. In attacks against the civilians, 5,302 have been killed, and 5,877 have been wounded. The total loss incurred on the terrorists is 35,384; Of these, 23,938 have been killed, 749 wounded, 8,693 captured alive and 2,304 have surrendered by themselves.” (December 28, 1998, *Cumhuriyet*)

50,607 “In the name of the General Staff, Staff Colonel Bülent Dağsalı said the following to elucidate the progress made in the struggle of the Turkish Armed Forces against the PKK since 1984: In the struggle against terrorism that started in 1984, 40,407 terrorists have been rendered ineffective. In this struggle, 243 officers, 221 noncommissioned officers, and 3,526 conscripted soldiers, totaling 3,990, have been martyred. In addition, 157 policemen and 1,115 village guards, totaling 1,272, have also been martyred. In terrorists acts, 5,238 citizens have been killed.” (May 8, 1998, *Hürriyet*)

29,868 “The Governor of the Emergency Rule Zone, Aydın Arslan, has stated that during the 11 years since the beginning of Emergency Rule, 26,415 terrorists have been rendered ineffective. He also suggested that there has been a 40% decrease in the number of incidents from last year. In the press conference organized to overview the struggle against terror in the last 11 years, Arslan gave the following numbers: As a result of 16,527 terror incidents, 21,041 terrorists have died, 580 have been wounded, 2,612 have been captured alive, and 2,182 have surrendered by themselves. In the same time period, a total of 4,606 members of the security forces have been martyred, with the following breakdown: 196 officers, 363 noncommissioned officers, 2780 conscripted soldiers, 178 police officers, and 1089 village guards. In addition, Arslan stated that a total of 4,399 civilians have been killed, including 3,398 men, 508 women, and 493 children. In these 11 years, 22,563 long-range weapons and 6457 guns have been captured along with more than 4,000,000 bullets. Governor Arslan

explained that in the first 6 months of 1997, 277 terror incidents had occurred in the region, while the number for the same period in 1998 has been 197, marking a 40% decrease. Stating that this number only included armed attacks and clashes, Arslan said the following, ‘These incidents include all terror organizations in the region. In the first 6 months of 1997, we gave 290 martyrs. In the first 6 months of 1998, this number has come down to 147. In terms of the number of civilians who have died, the number for 1997 is 55 and for 1998, it is 48. This year, 1,122 terrorists have been captured dead, 20 terrorists wounded, and 86 terrorists alive; 86 terrorists have surrendered to the Security Forces by themselves. Hence, a total of 1314 terrorists have been rendered ineffective in 1998.’ (July 3, 1998, Anatolian Press Agency)

300,000 “The Turkish Security Forces fighting in the Southeast include the Army, the Air Force, the gendarmerie and the village guards. Of the 300,000 strong force deployed in the region, 140,000–150,000 are in the army, 10,000 in the Air Force, 40,000–50,000 in the gendarmerie, 40,000 in the police force, and 67,000 are village guards . . . one-fifth of the army has been allocated to counter-insurgency operations in the Southeast.” (*Arms Transfers and Violations of the Laws of War in Turkey*, Belge Publishing)

21,000 “Only in Europe, there are more than 5,000 party-front workers. In the Middle East, there are more than 1,000 party-front workers. In the mountains, there are nearly 15,000 party-front workers . . . there are some 5,000 professionals whom we can call PKK cadres.” (March 1994, Ragıp Duran-Ertuğrul Kürkcü, Interview with Öcalan, “Awakening Complete, Liberation Next”)

10,000 “The Minister of Interior (Nahit Mentеше) notes that the PKK has 10,000 militants, 50,000 militia and 315,000 sympathizers.” (December 1994, Stephen Button, *Military Review*)

95,000 “Today, there are 95,000 village guards; 62,000 are permanent and 33,000 are temporary. With their families and tribes, they make up a very large community. In the past, everyone between 18 and 65 years of age, were given this job, regardless of their suitability for the job. There is 12% crimes rate among the village guards, including such felonies as drug and weapons trafficking, and provision of logistical support to the PKK.” (April 27, 1998, *Yeni Yüzyıl*, Monday Interviews by Neşe Düzel, Interview with the Minister of State, Professor Salih Yıldırım)

3,787 “It has been noted that 3,787 of the 70,000 temporary village guards participating in the struggle against the PKK in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey were tried and relieved of their arms for their involvement in illegal activities. It is noteworthy that 1,899 of the village guards who received arms and salary from the state for fighting against the PKK were tried for supporting the PKK.

Another 1,073 were tried for drug trafficking and other organized crime charges. Village guard system was stepped up after the PKK activities commenced in the Southeast in 1984. With the establishment of the governorship of the Emergency Rule Zone in 1987, the numbers of temporary village guards reached 70,000. . . . There has been an increase in complaints involving village guards after 1987. There were investigations about thousands of village guards in that period. 3,787 who have been found guilty in their trials were relieved of their arms; All of their contracts were cancelled. Large numbers of village guards who have been found guilty received jail terms. Majority of them are still serving their sentences. According to the Ministry of Interior, crimes committed by village guards who were subjects of constant criticism by civil society organizations, human rights groups, and citizens in the regions, are as follows: ‘108 bribery, 1,899 supporting the PKK, 196 murder, 161 bodily assault, 280 arms trafficking, 57 kidnapping; 13 breaking and entering, and 1,073 drug trafficking, organized crime, etc.’ ” (January 26, 1999, *Cumhuriyet*)

6,200 “The numbers of Special Police Forces that currently stand at 6,200, will gradually be reduced to 5,000. Minimum of 60 and a maximum of 300 personnel will be employed by the Special Force Units. 3,000 will serve in the East and the Southeast.” (November 3, 1998, *Yeni Yüzyıl*)

426,000 “According to information provided by the General Secretariat of the Chief of Staff, there are 200,000 people at the age of military service, who have not applied to postpone their military service or not reported to duty without providing a justification. Absentee conscripts are concentrated in the large cities of immigration and emigration. The majority of the cases, it is reported, are students whose documentation has not reached the proper authorities, double entries, people serving time in prisons, and people whose justifications have not been received in time. People studying or working abroad, people serving time, and people with health problems will be categorized as noncompliant if their justifications are not communicated in time. The Chief of Staff has a figure of 226,000 for Turkish citizens living abroad who have not completed their military service.” (December 21, 1998, *Hürriyet*)

96,000,000,000 “Ambassador Uluç Özülker, Deputy Undersecretary in charge of bilateral political affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, noted in a recent statement that Turkey has spent 96 billion USD—a sum, almost equaling all of Turkey’s foreign debt—in the 14 years of its struggle against the PKK. According to military authorities, Turkish Armed Forces spend 1,250,000 USD daily in its antiterrorism efforts, excluding the expenditures of the gendarmerie and other security forces. While the monetary value of arms, ammunition, and equipment seized in operations in 1996, was 3.1 million dollars, this number increased

threefold and reached 10 million dollars. In the Southeast, 6,153 villages have been evacuated; 2,322 schools and 160 health centers have been closed. Animal husbandry and agriculture has come to a stand still.” (November 14, 1998, *Hürriyet*)

500,000,000,000,000 “100% of the oil in Turkey is produced in the Southeast. The monetary value of this oil is 200,000,000,000,000 TL a year. Tigris and Euphrates rivers make up 30% of Turkey’s fresh water basin. The value of electricity produced with these two rivers is nearly 250,000,000,000,000 TL a year. As you will see, the annual revenue from oil and electricity alone is ca. 500,000,000,000,000 TL. In addition, even in today’s circumstances, 100% of Turkey’s phosphate production, 95% of pistachios, 10% of wheat, 14% of cotton, 75% of lentils, 15% of barley comes from the Southeast. Furthermore, an area covering 1.7 million hectares, which is five times larger than Çukurova [Turkey’s traditional high-yield, high-irrigation agricultural area] will be irrigated by GAP [Southeastern Anatolian Project] and yields will increase three–four fold.” (Assistant Professor Ahmet Özer, former secretary general of the Union of GAP Municipalities, Chair of Methodology Department at Mersin University, *Görüş*, February–March 1998.)

283 “The population of Diyarbakır has increased from 380,000 to 1.5 million in seven years due to immigration; In other words, the population has increased fourfold in seven years. The same is true for other big cities in the region. For example, the population of Van has gone from 151,000 in 1990 to 500,000 in 1997; Batman from 149,000 to 400,000; Urfa from 226,000 to 700,000; Gaziantep from 627,000 to 1.5 million; and Bismil, which is a sub-province, has gone from 38,000 to 150,000. According to UN data, it costs 385 USD to have 254 calories a day, which is the minimum that a person needs to survive. This number also constitutes the poverty line. Surveys show that 85% of the people in Diyarbakır have income below this line, and the percentage is even greater among the immigrant communities (TMMOB Report, 1997). Official statistics report 28,000 people to be employed, and a mere 312 people are reported to be looking for work. However, the real unemployment rate is 70% (Diyarbakır Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 1997). While per capita GNP is 2,500 USD in Turkey, the same number for Diyarbakır is 283 USD. This number is applicable to all the settlements in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey. (Assistant Professor Ahmet Özer, former secretary general of the Union of GAP Municipalities, Chair of Methodology Department at Mersin University, *Görüş*, February–March 1998)

1,006,000 “According to the State Statistics Institute’s Household Income Distribution Survey, top 20% of the Istanbul households receive 64% of the total income, while the bottom 20% receive 4%. The household with the

highest income has an annual income of 1,006,000 USD (300,180,000,000 TL), while the household with the lowest income has an annual income of 700 USD (21,000,000 TL).

In Ankara, the wealthiest 20% receive 46% of the total income, while the poorest 20% receive 6% of the income. The household with the highest income has an annual income of 633,333 USD (100,900,000,000 TL), while the household with the lowest income has an annual income of 143 USD (4,292,000 TL).

In Diyarbakır, the top 20% of the households receive 51% of the total income, while the bottom 20% receive 7%. The household with the highest income has an annual income of 65,600 USD (1,000,968,000 TL), while it is not known how the poorest family in Diyarbakır makes ends meet.

Istanbul has 27.5% of the income in Turkey, which means that the top 20% in Istanbul, while constituting 3% of the population in Turkey, usurps 20% of Turkey's income." (Mustafa Sönmez, *Regional Inequality*)

145,231 "In the last four years, 2,333 children under the age of 18 have been tried at the State Security Courts (SSC). A parliamentary query submitted by the Democratic Leftist Party Member of Parliament Sema Pişkinsüt has revealed that large numbers of children between the ages of 11 and 17 are tried at the SSC. According to the Ministry of Justice statistics, 73 children between the ages of 11 and 14 have been tried at the SSC in 1994, 28 in 1995, 78 in 1996, and 32 in 1997; 694 children between the ages of 15 and 17 have been tried at the SSC in 1994, 440 in 1995, 712 in 1996, and 276 in 1997; 145,231 people including children have been tried at the SSC since 1989 when the ministry started to collect statistics. Accordingly, 7,894 people were tried in 1989, 12,564 in 1990, 12,058 in 1991, 17,402 in 1992, 18,792 in 1993, 22,158 in 1994, 18,583 in 1995, 15,583 in 1996 and 20,197 in 1997." (August 12, 1998, Anatolian Press Agency)

19,962 "In the last three years, there has been a 9.1% increase in the share of cases with unidentified assailants in the SSC. According to data collected by the General Secretariat for Legal Records and Statistics, there were 13,665 cases with unidentified assailants at the SSC in 1995. This number represented 56.4% of all the cases.

In 1996, the cases with unidentified assailants increased by 4.5% and reached 14,923. The last available data from 1997 points to 19,962 cases with unidentified assailants. They constitute 65.5% of all the cases.

According to data from the last three years, there has been a 9.1% increase in cases with unidentified assailants, at the SSC.

In 1995, Diyarbakır SSC had the highest numbers, with 11,699 cases. Malatya SSC had 879 cases, Erzincan SSC had 695 cases, İzmir SSC had 177 cases, İstanbul SSC had 83, Ankara SSC 73 cases, Kayseri SSC 37, and Konya SSC 22 cases.

In 1996, Diyarbakır SSC had 12,523 of the 15,321 cases with unidentified assailants in all of Turkey. Malatya SSC had 1,026 cases, Erzincan had 687 cases, Ankara had 396 cases, İzmir had 112 cases, Konya had 106, Kayseri had 56, and Istanbul came in last with 14 cases.

Last year, the number of cases with unidentified assistants increased to 19,962. As with the previous two years, Diyarbakır had most of these cases. Diyarbakır SSC had 13,344 cases, Van SSC had 2,940 cases, Malatya had 1,233 cases, Erzurum had 807, Erzincan had 699, Ankara had 441, Adana had 158, İzmir had 134, Konya had 112, Kayseri had 63, and Istanbul had 31 cases.

In 1995, 255 of the cases with unidentified assailants were solved. In 1996, 272 cases were solved. In 1997, the number of cases solved increased to 3,096. One also observes a change in the waiting time of these cases over the years. In 1995, the life of an average case was 3,294 days. In 1996, this increased to 4,348 days. In 1997, there has been sharp decrease and the average waiting time dropped to 1,385 days.” (July 27, 1998, *Anatolian Press Agency*)

7,012,000,000 “According to SIPRI data, Turkey was the third largest importer of arms in the world, as of 1997. Turkey ranked third after Saudi Arabia and Taiwan with purchases worth 7,012,000,000 USD between 1993 and 1997. In this survey, covering 72 countries with purchases over 100 million USD, Turkey was ranked second for the 1992–96 period. SIPRI data show Turkey’s arm purchases to be 1,276,000,000 USD in 1997, 1,127,000,000 USD in 1996, 1,253,000,000 USD in 1995, 1,373,000,000 USD in 1994 and 1,983,000,000 USD in 1993.” (*SIPRI Yearbook*, 1997)

58,244,000,000 “According to US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) data, Turkey’s military spending for the 1985–95 period was 58,244,000,000 USD. As Turkey’s per capita GNP went from 2,100 USD in 1985 to 2,714 USD in 1995, the share of military spending hovered between 4–4.6% of the GNP. The share of defense spending in the overall budget was 17.9% in 1985 and 17.6% in 1995, with a brief spike of 22.5% in 1986. According to a 1995 ranking, Turkey was nineteenth among 175 countries in terms of overall military spending. In 1985, per capita military spending was 97 USD and this increased to 108 USD in 1995; 805,000-strong Turkish army was the largest in Europe and the sixth largest in the world in 1995. Turkey has 25% of all men-under-arms in Europe. In spite of a decade-wide decrease in the size of the military, there was an increase between 1991 and 1995.” (ACDA, *Military Spending Report*, 1996)

7,000,000,000 According to CIA figures, Turkey’s military spending for 1996 was 4,300,000,000 USD, “excluding counter-insurgency expenditures of 7,000,000,000 USD in the same year” (CIA Factbook)

74 According to State Planning Organization (SPO), 63% of the per capita health spending of 117 USD in 1995, was covered by the state budget. Public health spending was 74 USD per capita. (SPO)

3.2% According to UNESCO, Turkey spent 3.2% of its GNP on education.

4,300 “Between 1994 and 1995, 2.7 tons of heroin has been seized entering into Turkey, and 1.6 tons has been seized leaving Turkey. In 1995, close to 4 tons of heroin have been seized. Turkey’s import of the chemicals used in heroin production also reached a record of 21 tons in a single installment. As a result of national and international factors, Turkey has become the number 1 importer and exporter of heroin with Western European countries. . . . In 1995, 53.3 tons of chemicals used for heroin production have been seized in Turkey. The ‘Kemalist’ officers and former intelligence (MIT) officials have confidentially told the Paris-based OGD (The Geopolitical Observer of Drugs) that the hundred of tons of heroin captured in the operations against the PKK have not been registered and have been traded by Turkish nationalist organizations to the ports in Spain without being recorded. Most of the drug trade in Turkey is controlled by the village guards, some intelligence officers, and the ultranationalist organizations. It is believed that 800–1,200 kilos of heroin captured from the PKK remain unregistered each month.” (ODG, 1997 Report)

557% “There are 606,470 registered guns in Turkey, according to a July 1998 statement by the National Police Headquarters. Yet, 67% of the crimes are committed by unregistered guns. Between 1991 and 1996, murders by registered guns went from 63 to 204, while murders by unregistered guns went from 344 to 597. During the same period, number of injuries by registered guns increased fivefold, from 143 to 707, and injuries by non-registered guns increased from 846 to 1,911.

Cases of discharging a registered gun in settled areas ranged from 249 to 2,300, while for unregistered guns, the numbers ranged from 809 to 2,537. There were 1,691 violations of the firearm law in 1991. With a 553% increase, there were 9,435 violations in 1997.”

520 “Numbers of the disappeared missing-while-in-custody are increasing every year since 1990, especially in the Emergency Rule Zone. Applications to the Human Rights Association (HRA) have reached 543. HRA believes that the actual cases are more since people refrain from filing applications in the Emergency Rule Zone. The breakdown of 520 missing cases according to HRA and other organizations, is as follows: 4 in 1991, 8 in 1992, 36 in 1993, 229 in 1994, 121 in 1995, 68 in 1996, 45 in 1997, and 9 in 1996” (Statement by the *Saturday Mothers*)

908 “There are a total of 908 murders by unidentified assailants. . . . From the Ministries of Justice and Interior, we have received information about such cases from a total of 34 provinces. Diyarbakır tops the list with 259 murder cases by

unidentified assailants. Diyarbakır is followed by Mardin with 155 murders, Istanbul with 145, Batman with 125, Şırnak with 34, Malatya with 25, Adana with 23, and Tunceli with 15. Murders by unidentified assailants are often carried out by handguns; we see 468 such cases. There are also 234 murders by generic weapons, followed by 55 murders by Kalashnikovs, 22 by bombs, 14 by automatic rifles, 14 by knives, 10 by long-barrel guns, 9 by hanging, 8 by suffocation, 6 by ropes, 4 by a hard object, 4 by hitting, 4 by a piercing object and 2 by a bat. There are also other means of murder by unidentified assailants.” (October 14, 1994, *Report of the Parliamentary Investigation Commission of Murder by Unidentified Assailants*)

107,965 “As seen in the attached table prepared by our Bonn Embassy, some 100,000 of our citizens enter into Germany every year, and 20,00–30,000 of them seek asylum. It is probable that a substantial part of the asylum applications come from Eastern and Southeastern Turkey. Turkey tops the asylum application to United Kingdom with 17,784 applications. Of these applications, 1,749 were accepted and 4,841 were denied; 5,600 were denied refugee status but were given extraordinary residence permits; 6,143 applications are still pending. We predict that 20,000–30,000 of our citizens reside in France, illegally. Between 1988 and 1996, 7,687 of our citizens traveling to Belgium have applied for asylum, and 1,607 of these applications were approved. As of April 1997, 79,600 Turkish nationals live in Switzerland and 4,806 of them have refugee status. 17,688 refugee applications by our nationals are being reviewed. We note that substantial numbers of these applications are from Eastern and Southeastern Turkey, especially from Bingöl, Adıyaman, Gaziantep, and Kahramanmaraş.” (Letter of İsmail Cem, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Parliamentary Investigation Commission of Murder by Unidentified Assailants, dated September 1, 1997)

2,200 “The number of cases against Turkey at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has reached 2,200, and Turkey had to pay 5,000,000,000 TL in fines. In the meantime, there has been an increase in applications against Turkey at the European Human Rights Commission, the preliminary body before ECHR. It was reported that one of three applications to the Commission is against Turkey. While there were 52 applications against Turkey in 1990, this increased to 180 in 1992, 220 in 1994, 270 in 1996, and 352 in 1997. Turkey has been sued most frequently for torture, freedom of expression and of press, for incidents in Cyprus and the Southeast. Number of cases that Turkey has been found guilty at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, become precedents for future cases against Turkey. One striking example of these cases is the *Elekçi Village Case*. When Turkey was found guilty in this case, all other burnt and evacuated villages got the right to apply to the ECHR. From now on, Turkey will be responsible for rebuilding the evacuated village in every case.” (July 12, 1998, *Yeni Yüzyıl*)

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