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# One Battle and Two Accounts: The Turkish Brigade at Kunu-ri in November 1950



Mesut Uyar and Serhat Güvenç<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The recent revival of academic and popular interest in the Korean War in Turkey has played an important role in instigating the production of new books and documentaries. In Turkish accounts the Battle of Kunu-ri (November 1950) figures more prominently than any other event during the entire conflict. However, the Turkish Brigade's performance at this battle remains controversial. This paper assesses the impact of U.S. military assistance on Turkish military's transformation, compares and contrasts the official U.S. and Turkish accounts of the battle (known in U.S. sources as the Battle of Chongchon), and discusses why the official perspectives of the engagement diverge substantially.

After decades of silence, the Turks have begun to rediscover and revisit their country's military involvement in the Korean War of the 1950s. The Turkish national team's participation in the 2002 World Cup Finals, jointly hosted by South Korea and Japan, served as a reminder to the Turkish public at large that

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their troops had fought a distant war in Korea in the early years of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> Two years before the World Cup, the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Kunu-ri (November 1950), where the Turkish Brigade made its combat debut in Korea, had passed almost unnoticed. Nevertheless, in the first decade of the new millennium, a new wave of memoirs was published by relatively low-ranking veterans such as two reserve officers who served as interpreters and a noncommissioned officer (NCO) from the engineering corps.<sup>3</sup> A number of posthumous memoirs compiled by relatives or friends of those who fought in Korea have also found their way into print.<sup>4</sup>

The sixtieth anniversary of the Korean War (1950–1953), in contrast to the fiftieth, was marked in Turkey by a significant revival of interest in, and a wave of new publications as well as documentaries<sup>5</sup> and conferences on, the Korean War. Almost without exception, these works on the Korean War emphasize a common theme, the need to remember the sacrifices of Turkish soldiers for world peace and security. Hence, the Turkish public at large and the popular and social historians have finally turned their attention to the forgotten war and to their “forgotten” soldiers.

In both the old and the new Turkish accounts of the Korean War, one particular battle figures more prominently than any other event that took place during the entire conflict. It is the Battle of Kunu-ri, the Turkish Brigade’s first major engagement with the enemy. Kunu-ri was also the birth place of “the legend

2. See, for instance, Gürsel Göncü, “Kore Savaşı: Unutma Beni” [The Korean War: Don’t Forget Me], *Atlas* 113 (August 2002): 94–142.

3. Tuna Baltacıoğlu, *Savaş İçinde Barış: Kore Savaşı Anıları* [Peace at War: Korean War Memoirs] (İstanbul: Yapı ve Kredi Yayınları, 2000); Hasan Basri Danışman, *Korea 1952: Situation Negative* (İstanbul: Denizler Kitabevi, 2002); Ali Ekrem Erkal, *1950–1953: Resimli Kore Savaş Anıları* [Illustrated Korean War Recollections] (İzmir: Albayrak Matbaası, 2005).

4. Bülent Rusçuklu, *Kore Savaşı: Unutulan Savaş ve Gazi Faruk Pekerol’un Anıları* [The Korean War: Forgotten War and Memoirs of Combat Veteran Faruk Pekerol] (İstanbul: Alfa, 2005); Turhan Seçer, *Kore Savaşı’nın Bilinmeyenleri* [Unknown Aspects of the Korean War] (İstanbul: Toplumsal Dönüşüm Yayınları, 2008); Nuri Pamir, *316 Gün Küçük Kartal’ın Kore Günlüğü: Albay Nuri Pamir’in Kore Savaşı Günlüğü ve Mektupları* [316 Days, the Diary of the Little Eagle: Colonel Nuri Pamir’s Korean War Diary and His Letters], ed. Puna Pamir, Erhan Çiftçi (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014).

5. Cem Fakir, *Şimal Yıldızı: Son Kore Gazileri* [The North Star: Last Korean War Veterans] (İstanbul: NTV Yayınları, 2010); Necdet Sakaoglu, “38. Arz Dairesinden Haberler” [News from the 38th Parallel], *NTV Tarih* 24 (January 2011): 36–37; Cangül Örnek, “Cepheden Mektup Bekleyen Ülke” [The Country that Awaited Letters from the Front], *NTV Tarih* 24 (January 2011): 38–39; Cem Fakir, “Kunuri Cehenneminde bir Teğmen: Bahtiyar Yalta” [A Lieutenant in the Kunuri Ordeal: Bahtiyar Yalta], *NTV Tarih* 24 (January 2011): 40–41; Cem Fakir, “Kaybolan Şehitleri Aramadık, Sormadık ve Anmadık” [We have not looked for the MIAs nor have we remembered them], *NTV Tarih* 24 (January 2011): 42–43. A documentary by Cem Fakir and Murat Öztarcan, *Şimal Yıldızı: Son Kore Gazileri Anlatıyor*, first aired on NTV on 2 January 2011. It was also offered as a special supplement to a popular history magazine, *NTV Tarih* 24 (January 2011).



*Military high school cadets reenacting the Kunu-ri battle in a stadium in İstanbul in 1951.*  
[Authors' collection]

of the Turk in Korea.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the Turkish Brigade's performance at the Battle of Kunu-ri remains contested as the U.S. and Turkish official accounts of the battle differ substantially.

The main aim of this paper is to compare the American and Turkish official narratives of this battle and to identify dynamics that have contributed to the emergence and reproduction of two almost diametrically opposed official narratives. It draws on published official accounts and unpublished after-action reports from both U.S. and Turkish perspectives, as well as secondary literature, including memoirs. The paper begins with an assessment of the impact of U.S. military assistance on the transformation of the Turkish military in general and on the Turkish Brigade that was deployed to Korea in particular. Moreover, command and organizational considerations will be examined as they influenced the initial performance of the Turkish Brigade in combat. They will be followed by a brief account of the battle that draws on the existing literature. Finally, this paper will

6. Canadian historian Gavin D. Brockett summarizes the legend efficiently: "Even today Turks remember their country's participation in the Korean War with tremendous pride and emotion . . . it was in Korea that their compatriots attracted international attention. It was there that Turks reputedly demonstrated skills—particularly with the bayonet—and devotion far surpassing those of soldiers from any other country. Turkish casualty rates may have been extremely high, but those soldiers who died did so as martyrs confronting the evils of international communism and coming to the rescue of none other than the United States." Brockett, "The Legend of the 'Turk' in Korea: Popular Perceptions of the Korean War and Their Importance to Turkish National Identity," *War and Society* 22, no. 2 (October 2004): 112–13.

compare and contrast the official U.S. and Turkish accounts of the Battle of Kunuri and discuss the reasons why even two friendly or allied nations might produce such diverging official perspectives on the same battle.

### **The Transformative Impact of U.S. Military Aid to Turkey**

Just three years after becoming a recipient of U.S. military assistance under the Truman Doctrine of 12 March 1947,<sup>7</sup> Turkey deployed a full-strength combat brigade in Korea. The brigade's deployment coincided with the process of transformation that the Turkish military underwent with the guidance of a sizeable U.S. military mission based in Turkey. There is no suggestion in the available accounts that the aid was initially meant to stimulate a full-fledged military transformation in Turkey or Greece, the two beneficiaries of the Truman Doctrine. Instead, the original idea was to supply the recipients with modern U.S. weapons, equipment, and vehicles to boost their military capabilities in the aftermath of the Second World War.<sup>8</sup> For Greece there was the additional element of providing support in its fight against a Communist-led domestic insurgency. In that respect, a comprehensive military transformation or reform was not contemplated or intended by the supplier or the recipient. In contrast to current U.S. practice which puts training first and equipping second, at that time the order seemed to be just the opposite. Indeed, the volume of equipment

7. "Recommendation for Assistance to Greece and Turkey, Address of the President of the United States," 80th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 171, pt. 2 (12 March 1947); *Public Law 75—80th Congress*; Minutes of a Meeting of Secretaries of State, War and Navy, 12 March 1947, in *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS] 1947*, 5:109–10. Also see "Aid to Greece and Turkey," *Department of State Bulletin Supplement* 16, no. 409 A (4 May 1947).

It is important to note that Turkey received British military aid, though limited, before the declaration of Truman Doctrine, which was essentially born out of the need to fill the vacuum created after Britain's postwar retrenchment from its traditional international role. The U.S. government faced serious problems in trying to convince the U.S. Congress and other important decision makers to include Turkey in the aid package. Because Turkey, unlike Greece, did not suffer the disasters of World War II and civil war, but more importantly, because of Turkey's wartime neutralism and, in a sense, pro-German position, its prestige and reliability were not considered high in much of the Western world. The Ambassador in Turkey (Edwin C. Wilson) to the Secretary of State, 4 March 1947, *FRUS 1947*, 5:88–89; George McGhee, *The US-Turkish-NATO Middle East Connection: How the Truman Doctrine Contained the Soviets in the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 4–6, 19–26; Denis M. Bostdorff, *Proclaiming the Truman Doctrine: The Cold War Call to Arms* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2008), 49–51, 114–17.

8. Some American officials were well aware that mere provision of modern weapons would do little to increase the Turkish Armed Forces' power of resistance. They understood that the Turkish military required a very large measure of re-equipment and considerable training but still went along with the policy of sending surplus weapons and equipment with a limited number of advisors. Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State (Dean Acheson) to the Secretary of State (George C. Marshall), 24 February 1947; The Ambassador in Turkey (Wilson) to the Secretary of State, 4 March 1947, in *FRUS 1947*, 5:44–45, 91.

funneled to Turkey overwhelmed the relatively small contingent of U.S. advisors. It was soon realized that material modernization alone would not be sufficient to transform the Turkish military into a modern and potent force. Since those items supplied to Turkey were designed and built to cater for the requirements of a particular (if not a peculiar) way of war, the job assigned to the U.S. military instructors grew into recasting the Prussian/German-styled Turkish military in accordance with the U.S. paradigm and its culture of soldiering.<sup>9</sup>

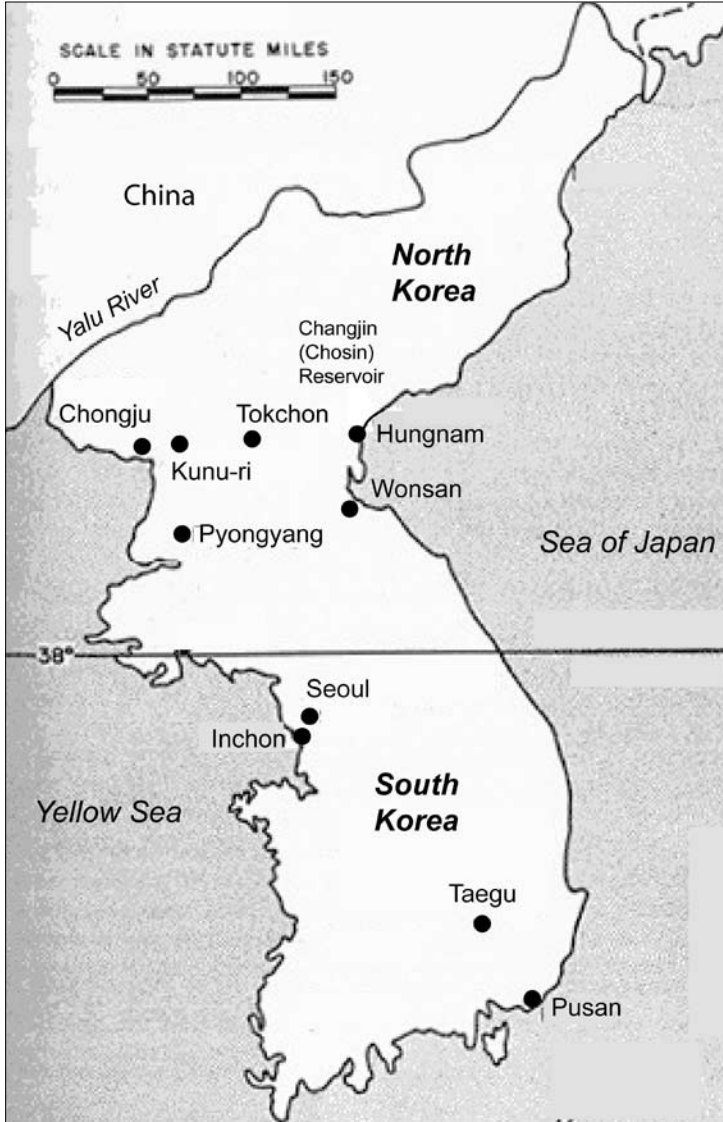
The idea of such transformation resonated well with the Turkish political leadership of the time. For instance, when the Soviet ambassador questioned rather cynically the extent of the U.S. military assistance's contribution to Turkey's defenses, which according to their estimates, would be sufficient for only thirty days of combat, the Turkish foreign minister is reported to have said, "What if this should be true? Their technique and tactics will stay with us forever."<sup>10</sup> Along with the expansion of the scope and the objectives of military assistance, the mission itself grew from a few hundred advisors and instructors to several thousand U.S. military personnel to oversee the Turkish military transformation.<sup>11</sup>

Three years after the U.S. military assistance to Turkey began, the Korean War broke out when forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) moved into the Republic of Korea (South Korea) on 25 June 1950, and the United States led the United Nations' military effort to repel the invasion. Turkey had recently gone through a major political change. The war coincided with a transition to genuine multiparty politics after decades of single-party rule in the country. The newly formed Democratic Party (DP) won a landslide victory in the country's first free and fair elections in May 1950 against the Republican People's Party (RPP), which had monopolized government since the foundation of the republic in 1923. This change of government did not result in a change of course in the Western-oriented foreign and security policy of Turkey. Nor did the new rulers of Turkey disown the previous administration's bid to integrate Turkey into the emerging U.S.-led Western security community. In other words, they were no less enthusiastic than their predecessors about U.S. military and economic

9. Memorandum by the Officer in Charge of Turkish Affairs (C. Robert Moore), 25 September 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 5:1322-1324; Howard Adelbert Munson IV, *The Joint American Military Mission to Aid Turkey: Implementing the Truman Doctrine and Transforming US Foreign Policy 1947-1954* (Ph.D. dissertation, Washington State University, 2012), 73-74, 77-78, 88-93; Craig Livingston, "One Thousand Wings: The United States Air Force Group and the American Mission for Aid to Turkey, 1947-50," *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 4 (October 1994): 789-815.

10. "Memo on MAP Missions," Brigadier General R. P. Shugg to Chief of Staff, the Department of Army, (18 February 1951), (111/18/79), Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Record Group (RG) 330, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

11. The American Mission for Aid to Turkey (AMAT) under the act in March 1948 comprised 182 personnel, including 51 civilians and 71 Army Group, 34 Air Force Group, and 13 Navy Group personnel. The numbers initially increased gradually to 363 at the end of 1948, but the mission gained momentum and reached its peak of almost 25,000 in 1960. McGhee, *The US-Turkish-NATO Middle East Connection*, 38, 43-44.



assistance to Turkey.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore the new Turkish political leadership—with the support of some generals—realized that the Korean War might provide an

12. Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to the President, 22 May 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 5:1262–63; John M. Vander Lippe, *The Politics of Turkish Democracy: İsmet İnönü and the Formation of the Multi-Party System, 1938–1950* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 202–8; Barın Kayaoğlu, “Strategic Imperatives, Democratic Rhetoric: The United States and Turkey, 1945–52,” *Cold War History* 9, no. 3 (August 2009): 334.

opportunity to show the Americans the value of Turkish military potential<sup>13</sup> and enhance Ankara's hand in pursuit of membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>14</sup>

However, the politicians' enthusiasm was not generally shared by the Turkish high command. On the other hand, the U.S. military assistance played a catalytic role in gradually empowering junior officers in the Turkish military. Adopting the American culture of soldiering cancelled out the edge that the older generation of officers (who, according to Major General Horace L. McBride,<sup>15</sup> the head of the Joint American Military Mission for Aid to Turkey [JAMMAT], still carried a "Balkan war mentality") enjoyed due to decades of experience and accumulated knowledge in the profession. The senior officers, too, had to train with the junior officers to learn a new way of war. The training of the officer corps without regard to rank and seniority inevitably created a level playing field and meant a new beginning for everyone. Hence, it put ambitious young officers who were more receptive to new ideas in a more advantageous position. Consequently, the transformation process offered an opportunity to rejuvenate the Turkish military and in particular to overcome the resistance to change by the old guard (nicknamed "the Prussians").<sup>16</sup>

The new rulers of Turkey seemed to share the young officers' enthusiasm for change and military modernization with U.S. assistance. Shortly after the DP government

13. During a high-level military meeting Major General Yusuf Egeli, chief of the Operations Division of the General Staff, forcefully declared: "It will be [the] greatest crime in Turkish history if we fail [to] take advantage [of] this opportunity." The Ambassador in Turkey (George Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State (Acheson), 24 July 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 5:1282.

14. Although American diplomats cautioned Turkish leaders against drawing the conclusion that the Turkish offer of assistance might result in NATO membership, this was not an entirely wrong deduction. Several American politicians and officials—including Republican Senator Harry P. Cain from the state of Washington—made encouraging statements. During a news conference in Ankara on 25 July 1950, Senator Cain replied to a question by stating: "I can say we are going to be much more sympathetic in helping those who helped most in Korea." From the Ambassador in Turkey (Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State (Acheson), 31 July 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 5:1286, fn. 2.

15. Horace Logan McBride (1894–1962) was commissioned as an artillery officer. Although he was better known for his role during the Battle of the Bulge during World War II, McBride spent quite a long time in various educational institutions as an instructor and commandant, including Yale University, Field Artillery School, and Command and General Staff School. He also had some diplomatic experience. McBride initially served as the de facto head of AMAT (the American Mission for Aid to Turkey). AMAT was transformed into JAMMAT (the Joint American Military Mission for Aid to Turkey) and McBride was officially assigned as its head in October 1949. *FRUS 1949*, 6:1641, fn. 7; *The National Archives Catalog*, <https://arcweb.archives.gov/id/10611242?q=General%20Horace%20L.%20McBride>, accessed on 25 January 2016.

16. Memorandum by the Officer in Charge of Turkish Affairs (Moore), 25 September 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 5:1324; Memorandum of Conversation by the Politico-Military Adviser, Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asia, and African Affairs (Robertson), 10 April 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 5:1248–49; Ekavi Athanassopoulou, *Turkey—Anglo-American Security Interests, 1945–1952: The First Enlargement of NATO* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 206.



was formed, Foreign Minister Fuat Köprülü invited General McBride to discuss the situation in Korea. Their conversation took place three days after the Korean War began and soon shifted to the state of the Turkish military. The Americans had always carefully presented in public a positive overall assessment of the Turkish military's fighting capability after U.S. military assistance began.<sup>17</sup> In private, however, General McBride expressed the opposite view. He stated that "the conditions in the Turkish Forces could be considered alarming as there were no units in the Turkish Military Forces that were capable of taking the field and performing credibly in combat."<sup>18</sup>

This conversation alone hinted that Ankara had already begun considering a military contribution to the UN effort in Korea for a number of reasons. First, the meeting with McBride was requested by the foreign minister rather than the defense minister.<sup>19</sup> Second, the purpose of the invitation was to discuss the Korean situation with the top U.S. military advisor in Turkey. Turkish sources also confirm the accuracy of this account provided by McBride in U.S. diplomatic documents.<sup>20</sup> McBride's grim assessment of the Turkish military situation was related to the new President Celal Bayar, who then brought up the issue with U.S. Ambassador George Wadsworth. Although Bayar assured Wadsworth that once fully equipped with U.S. weapons, the Turkish military would become a potent fighting force, McBride's blunt statement seems to have alarmed the DP government. If Turkey was considered a burden rather than an asset militarily, this could hinder Ankara's effort to integrate into the Western security system and endanger Turkey's bid for NATO membership.<sup>21</sup>

A high-level official meeting was held at Yalova (then a county of Istanbul on the southern shores of the Sea of Marmara) on 18 July 1950. It resembled a war cabinet meeting with President Celal Bayar, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Deputy Prime Minister Samet Ağaoglu, Foreign Minister Fuat Köprülü, Defense Minister Refik Şevket İnce, and Chief of General Staff General Nuri Yamut in attendance. Its purpose was to discuss measures to be taken to strengthen and modernize the Turkish military. The agenda of the meeting was reported personally to U.S. officials by Foreign Minister Köprülü. The meeting culminated in a decision to work on the issues identified by General McBride. The conference did not discuss the Korean situation or a Turkish troop contribution to the United Nations Command (UNC) in Korea.<sup>22</sup>

17. "Türk Ordusu Takviye Ediliyor" [Support to Turkish Army], *Milliyet*, 10 August 1950; "Ordumuzun Modernleşmesi [Modernization of Our Army]," *Milliyet*, 17 March 1951; "Türkiye'ye Yapılan Yardımlar" [Aid to Turkey], *Milliyet*, 27 June 1951.

18. "Records of Conversation between Fuad Koprulu and Maj. Gen. McBride" (28 June 1950), Correspondence TGS, (250A/9), Records of Interservice Agencies, RG 334, NARA.

19. At that time the Turkish General Staff was subordinated to the Ministry of Defense.

20. Mehmet Saray, *Sovyet Tehdidi Karşısında Türkiye'nin NATO'ya Girişi: III. Cumhurbaşkanı Celal Bayar'ın Hatıraları ve Belgeleri* [Turkey's Admission to NATO in the Face of the Soviet Threat: 3rd President Celal Bayar's Memoirs and Papers] (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2000), 217.

21. Ibid. See also Vander Lippe, *The Politics of Turkish Democracy*, 207.

22. The Ambassador in Turkey (Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State, 22 July 1950, in

Nevertheless, a few days later the U.S. Embassy in Ankara was notified that the Turkish government was considering a troop contribution to Korea.<sup>23</sup> There is a substantial body of literature on the Turkish decision for involvement in the Korean War from political, economic, and strategic perspectives.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, this paper will not elaborate on why the Turkish government took such a dramatic decision. For the purposes of this article, two considerations stand out in shaping the Turkish decision to commit troops to the Korean War. The first was to make up for the Turkish military's lack of experience in modern wars. The second was to prove to the Americans that their military aid to Turkey was a worthy investment and produced results. In practical terms, it was meant to eradicate the doubts cast by General McBride on the effectiveness of the Turkish army.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, in Washington—against the opposition of the key American military leaders, including General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, head of the UNC<sup>26</sup>—an expectation developed regarding the nature and size of a potential Turkish contribution to the U.S.-led effort in Korea.<sup>27</sup> Hence, U.S. Ambassador

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*FRUS 1950*, 5:1280; The Ambassador in Turkey (Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State, 31 July 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 5:1287–89.

23. Turkey turned out to be the first country, after the United States, to respond to the UN appeal for a military contribution to Korea. McGhee, *The US-Turkish-NATO Middle East Connection*, 77.

24. See, for instance, Füsün Türkmen, "Turkey and the Korean War," *Turkish Studies* 3, no. 2, (2002): 161–80; John M. Vander Lippe, "Forgotten Brigade of the Forgotten War: Turkey's Participation in the Korean War," *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 1 (January 2000): 92–102; Cameron S. Brown, "The One Coalition They Craved to Join: Turkey in the Korean War," *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 2008): 97–108; Myongson Kim, "The Politics of Troop-Dispatch: Why Did the Europeans Send Their Boys to Korea?," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 227–51.

25. The Turkish government filed its second formal application to join NATO just a week after its offer of a troop contribution to the UNC. For Turkey's quest to be a member of NATO or a regional security pact, see Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State (McGhee) to the Under Secretary of State, 1 May 1950; The Secretary of State (Acheson) to the Secretary of Defense (Johnson), 31 August 1950; Paper Prepared in the Department of State, 11 September 1950; Memorandum of Conversation by the Secretary of State, 19 September 1950; The United States Delegation at the Tripartite Preparatory Meeting to the Secretary of State, 2 May 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 3:79–80, 257–61, 279–84, 333–35, 975–76; Saray, *Sovyet Tehdidini Karşısında Türkiye'nin NATO'ya Girişi*, 217.

26. General MacArthur and his staff had serious doubts about the military effectiveness of the Turkish army and requested that Pakistan instead be approached for ground troops. Memorandum by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (Livingston T. Merchant) to the Assistant Secretary of State (Dean Rusk), 19 July 1950; From the Deputy Under Secretary of State (H. Freeman Matthews) to the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense (J. H. Burns), 25 July 1950; From the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense (Burns) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews), 27 July 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 7:432–34, 473, 482.

27. There were several reasons behind the American administration's decision to accept the Turkish offer of a sizable ground force. First of all, they thought that the presence of Turkish troops

Wadsworth conveyed Washington's view to Ankara that Turkey could prove its loyalty to the UN by committing a fully equipped regimental combat team to Korea. General McBride stated that the regimental combat team would

consist of an infantry regiment, artillery battalion and appropriate headquarters, anti-tank, anti-aircraft, engineer, motor transport, signal, ordnance and medical units . . . a fully self-contained combat unit of between 4,000 and 4,500 officers and men approximately 10% above war strength.<sup>28</sup>

General McBride's description suggests that he had in mind a battalion- or regiment-size combat unit that could be attached directly to any standard U.S. infantry division deployed in Korea. At the time of the Korean War, U.S. infantry divisions retained their triangular organization whereby each commanded three regimental infantry combat teams.<sup>29</sup> On 25 July 1950, the Turkish government announced its decision to commit troops to the U.S.-led effort in Korea. Although the American civilian and military leaders were advising a symbolic presence, the Turkish government desired not only to fly the Turkish flag but also to make a serious military contribution to the war effort. Therefore they initially contemplated deploying a full infantry division to Korea.<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly, Turkish eagerness to send a large contingent was received coldly by the U.S. military leadership—including General MacArthur—whereas U.S. diplomats had been trying their best to increase international contributions to the coalition. The military leaders were concerned that Turkish units in their current condition might become a liability rather than an asset.<sup>31</sup>

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would help ease Asian anxiety about "colonial forces" fighting in Korea. Additionally, the overriding political consideration was to maximize the number of flags flying in Korea under the United Nations Command. Second, there was a certain fear that a negative answer might embarrass the new Turkish government, offend Turkish public opinion, and cause loss of faith in the United States. Third, the U.S. State Department did not share the military's pessimistic and poor description of the Turkish army. From the Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews) to the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense (Burns), 25 July 1950; Memorandum of Conversation by Lt. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway, 8 August 1950; Memorandum by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (Merchant) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews), 26 October 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 7:474, 541, 997–99.

28. The Ambassador in Turkey (Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State (Acheson), 24 July 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 5:1281.

29. Richard W. Kedzior, *Evolution and Endurance: The U.S. Army Division in the Twentieth Century* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Arroya Center, 2000), 16–18.

30. Brockett, "The Legend of the "Turk,"" 115; Allan R. Millett, *The War for Korea 1950–1951: They Came from the North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 262–63.

31. Memorandum by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Merchant) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk), 19 July 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 7: 432–34. After the unexpected Chinese offensive beginning in November 1950 and the humiliating defeat of the UNC troops, the U.S. administration with the support of American field commanders decided to request more ground troops from Turkey in December 1950. The Turkish government, however, received the request coldly and demanded a full-fledged U.S.

This coldness did not deter Turkish leaders. After some deliberations, the Turkish offer was accepted, with some reservations. Ankara's decision to commit an infantry brigade (essentially a brigade headquarters commanding a three-battalion infantry regiment and various battalion- and company-size combat support and service support elements) represents a compromise between the two options. In other words, Ankara accommodated the U.S. demand by downsizing its commitment to the brigade level, on the one hand, but it definitely exceeded the regimental combat team level suggested by the United States to provide for a higher level of representation in command and for improved combat and logistics support capabilities.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, since the brigade's Tables of Order and Equipment (TO&E) were completed in consultation with JAMMAT, it may be argued that Washington did not object to such an upgrading of the Turkish contribution.<sup>33</sup>

### **Raising, Equipping, and Training a Brigade for Overseas Deployment**

After the nature and size of the Turkish contribution were finalized, the Turkish army had to tackle the more practical challenges of raising, organizing, equipping, manning, and training the unit for its combat deployment overseas with the help of JAMMAT. These challenges were multiplied by the pressure to make a combat-ready unit available in a very short time. The Turkish General Staff set the deadline for the activation of the brigade, which was officially named Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri (Turkish Armed Forces), on 20 August 1950. From an organizational perspective, the choice of making a brigade from an infantry-dominated unit was odd and nearly unprecedented in the Turkish army. Previously, only cavalry and armored units had been organized into brigades. In this regard, the Korean brigade would be the first of its kind in the Turkish army of that time.<sup>34</sup>

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security commitment to Turkey and financial assistance. The Americans were ready to provide more funds but stayed away from any promise of a security commitment. American requests for or encouragement for sending more ground troops continued into the next year. From the Secretary of State (Acheson) to the Secretary of Defense (Marshall), 5 December 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 7:1412; From the Secretary of State (Acheson) to the Secretary of Defense (Marshall), 23 February 1951; From the Secretary of State (Acheson) to the Secretary of Defense (Marshall), 26 April 1951; From the Secretary of State (Acheson) to the Secretary of Defense (Marshall), 16 August 1951, in *FRUS 1951*, 7:194, 382, 827.

32. The Secretary of State to the Turkish Ambassador (Feridun C. Erkin), 19 August 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 5:1296; Bahtiyar Yalta, *Kunu-ri Muharebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler (26.XI.1950–24-.I.1951)* [The Kunu-ri Battles and Retreats] (Ankara: TTK, 2005), 43. Meanwhile, General MacArthur drastically changed his position and very warmly supported the Turkish offer of a brigade. Extracts of Memorandum of Conversations by W. Averell Harriman with General MacArthur in Tokyo on 6 and 8 August 1950, 20 August 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 7:544.

33. Celal Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler: 1950–1951* [The Turks in the Korean War] (İstanbul: Akgün Matbaası, 1963), 73.

34. Hüseyin Hüsni Erkilet, Tevfik Bıyıklıoğlu, and Hayrettin Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri (1950–1953)* [Turkish Armed Forces' Battles in the Korean War (1950–1953)] (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1975), 67.

Moreover, the Turkish military leadership initially preferred to raise the brigade from scratch instead of using an established unit as an umbrella organization. In theory, units across the country would place their best weapons, vehicles, and equipment at the disposal of the brigade. The expeditionary force would be manned by professional officers and NCOs and conscript other ranks, screened and selected from a pool of volunteers.<sup>35</sup> In other words, it would be a unit put together and specially tailored for the first overseas combat deployment of the Turkish Republic's military.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the merits of this decision were on paper, it wreaked havoc in practice. While volunteers flooded the selection boards, most unit commanders wanted to keep their best personnel for themselves and nominated less than ideal candidates for service with the brigade. Similarly, some units found this process to be an ideal opportunity to dump their faulty and problematic weapons and equipment.<sup>37</sup> Personal accounts of some officers suggest that JAMMAT was actively involved in nominating officers for appointment to the brigade. A case in point was Captain İhsan Gürkan, who would command the brigade's motor transport company in Korea.<sup>38</sup>

After several chaos-ridden, bitter weeks it was decided that an infantry regiment would provide the core around which the brigade's combat strength would take shape. To this end, the 241st Infantry Regiment, an organic sub-unit of the 28th Infantry Division with headquarters in Ankara, was selected. Although the entire regiment was earmarked for deployment, only those officers and troops of the regiment who volunteered and were medically fit for overseas service were allowed to remain in its ranks. Then it was gradually brought up to war strength (over the 10 percent above war footing status that had been suggested by General McBride), with volunteer conscripts selected from the 23rd, 39th, and 66th Infantry Divisions. The 28th Infantry Division also provided the umbrella for the engineering, signal, ordnance, and motor transport companies of the brigade. The medical company was detached from the 5th Armored Brigade, the antiaircraft artillery battery from VI Corps, and the field artillery battalion from the 2nd Armored Brigade.<sup>39</sup>

While the brigade's troop strength grew with new arrivals, many officer billets, including top command positions, remained unfilled until the third week

35. At that time universal conscription was implemented rigidly in Turkey, where all able-bodied males had the right and obligation to serve in the military without exception. Although officers and NCOs were professionals, all other positions—including technical and specialist posts like master gunners, drivers, and operators—were manned by conscripts, most of whom were peasants.

36. Yalta, *Kunu-ri Muharebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 40–43.

37. *Ibid.*, 44.

38. İhsan Gürkan, *Bir Generalin Askeri ve Akademik Anıları* [A General's Military and Academic Recollections] (İstanbul: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2002), 46.

39. Tahsin Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tuğayında Kore Hatıralarım* [My Recollections from the First Turkish Brigade in Korea] (İstanbul: Ülku Basımevi, 1963), 59–60; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Muharebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 43; Erkiyet, Bıyıkoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri*, 67.



*Turkish Brigade  
Commander  
Brigadier General  
Tahsin Yazıcı being  
awarded with  
Silver Star by U.S.  
Lieutenant General  
Walton H. Walker  
on 13 December  
1950 [Authors'  
collection]*

of August 1950, not because of lack of volunteers or eagerness for war but due to the slow and flawed selection-assignment process. At that point, the 241st Infantry Regiment had only twenty-two officers on strength and many had yet to report for duty. The brigade's command staff began to take its final shape with the appointment of Brigadier General Tahsin Yazıcı as commander.<sup>40</sup> Born in Monastir (modern day Bitola in the Republic of Macedonia) in 1892, Yazıcı graduated from the Ottoman Imperial Military Academy and was commissioned as a cavalry officer in 1912. A veteran of the First World War and the Turkish Independence War, Yazıcı trained with French cavalry units and schools between 1926 and 1928. In 1934, he was appointed commanding officer of the Turkish army's first tank battalion, activated in Turkish Thrace with Soviet T-26B tanks and BA-6 armored cars. Thereafter, he served continuously in the emerging armored corps. He was promoted to brigadier general in 1949.<sup>41</sup> General Yazıcı was the commanding general of the 2nd Armored Brigade in Ankara when he was selected to command the Turkish Brigade sent to Korea. Even though Yazıcı was a highly successful officer and looked like a very good choice, one well-informed

40. Erkilet, Bıyıkoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Müharebeleri*, 28; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Müharebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 43–47; Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 61–62; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 9–12, 16–18.

41. His biography was compiled by his son, the late Bali Yazıcı, and is available in the Yazıcı Family Collection. See also Genelkurmay Personel Başkanlığı, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri General ve Amiralleri Albümü* [Album of Generals and Admirals of Turkish Armed Forces] (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1991), 169. For a recently published biography on Tahsin Yazıcı, see Erhan Çiftçi, *Şark Cephesi'nden Kore'ye Bir Türk Generali: Tahsin Yazıcı'nın Askerlik Serüveni* [A Turkish General from the Eastern Front to Korea: Tahsin Yazıcı's Odyssey] (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2015).

witness argues that he was handpicked by the Chief of the General Staff, General Nuri Yamut, another native of Monastir. The two had known each other since they were cadets in the military high school in Monastir. Upon his appointment, Yazıcı formed his brigade headquarters staff mostly with armored corps officers.<sup>42</sup>

The training of the brigade, particularly of its infantry regiment, was hampered by limited time and lack of equipment. Officers were mostly busy with the administrative details of a newly activated brigade. Since the brigade's own officers could not spare time for the troops they would be leading into combat,<sup>43</sup> the job was left to an American close combat specialist, Lieutenant Colonel François d'Eliscu,<sup>44</sup> who was running a guerrilla warfare course in Çankırı (a small town near Ankara).<sup>45</sup> He and about forty Turkish officers attending the course then took over the training of the infantry units. The idea was, however, dropped very quickly when d'Eliscu's style and toughness caused resentment among the Turkish officers and conscripts.<sup>46</sup>

As for the equipment, the most serious problem was a lack of U.S. M1 Garand infantry rifles.<sup>47</sup> The brigade was slated to receive them in Korea. The United States had supplied large quantities of military equipment and heavy weaponry to Turkey since 1947. However, the aid initially did not include items such as M1 rifles, automatic rifles, machine guns, helmets, or uniforms that would be crucial for combat in Korea. The Turkish UN Brigade Advisory Team, headed by Colonel Thomas S. Gumby, stepped in to arrange shipment of 300 M1 rifles from U.S. units in Germany. These rifles were rushed into training only a week before the brigade's departure for Korea.<sup>48</sup> Some combat support and service units trained separately and were considered luckier

42. Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 61; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Muharebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 45–46.

43. Yalta, *Kunu-ri Muharebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 48–52; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 18–19.

44. D'Eliscu was an unorthodox officer with a private mission to introduce martial arts training and philosophy to military training. He was also the author of a popular close combat drill book. François d'Eliscu, *Hand to Hand Combat* (Fort Benning, Ga.: Infantry School, 1945).

45. For some time, Greece and Turkey remained the only hosts of the U.S. Military Missions in Europe. As such the missions in these two countries presented relatively exciting peacetime assignments for the seasoned and ambitious officers (especially reservists) of the reduced U.S. military. And until the establishment of NATO in 1949, there was no competition for assignments in Greece and Turkey. See "Memo on MAP Missions," Brigadier General R. P. Shugg to Chief of Staff, the Department of the Army, (18 February 1951), (111/18/79), RG 330, NARA.

46. Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 65–66; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Muharebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 48–49; Erkilet, Bıynkoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri*, 69; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 20.

47. The Turkish army's standard rifle was the modified 7.9 mm German Mauser rifle (M 1903 or its older versions M 1890, M 1893), most of which were obsolete and worn out.

48. The Ambassador in Turkey (Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State, 24 July 1950, in *FRUS 1950*, 5:1281; Erhan Yücel, *Kore Harbi: Kore Türk Tugayı ve BM Askerlerinden Alınan*



*Turkish soldiers getting familiarized with American weapons and equipment in Korea. [Authors' collection]*

than the 241st Infantry Regiment. Building team spirit and unit cohesion proved to be very difficult even for the support and service units for the reasons noted above: lack of time and the means for socialization and frequent rotation of personnel within units.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, the brigade had to be committed to combat without sufficient training or familiarization with its officers and weapons.

The brigade left Turkey on 29 September 1950 and after a long sea journey set foot on Korean soil on 18 October 1950. By that time, UN forces had taken control of much of South Korea and had begun crossing into North Korea. The Turkish Brigade was initially stationed in the southeastern city of Taegu, where it trained with the newly issued infantry weapons and equipment and underwent reorganization.<sup>50</sup> Committing a brigade organized around an infantry regiment

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*Dersler* [The Korean War: Lessons Learnt from the Turkish Brigade and UN Forces in Korea] (Ankara: KALDEM Yayınları, 2000), 22; Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 66; Erkilet, Bıyıköğlü, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri*, 69–70.

49. Gürkan, *Bir Generalin Askeri ve Akademik Anıları*, 43; Erkilet, Bıyıköğlü, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri*, 68–70.

50. Erkilet, Bıyıköğlü, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri*, 73–78; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Muharebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 76–109; Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 85–108; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 27–49; Millett, *The War for Korea 1950–1951*, 263.



caused serious command complications as soon as it was deployed in Korea. The Turkish Brigade was no different from a regimental combat team in terms of combat power and strength. Its combat teeth consisted of the three infantry battalions of the 241st Infantry Regiment. The brigade headquarters could not exercise direct command over these battalions due to the existence of the regimental echelon in between. To streamline the command, General Yazıcı reorganized the Turkish Brigade in the field on its arrival in Korea. To this end, he disbanded the 241st Infantry's regimental headquarters and placed the three infantry battalions directly under his command. He justified his decision on the grounds that

The regimental headquarters was an impractical echelon. The brigade's main combat strength stemmed from the regiment. In a combat mission, the command responsibility would lie with the brigade whereas the executive authority would rest with the regiment . . . [This arrangement] rendered one of the two echelons between the brigade and the regiment redundant and even harmful. One of them had to be removed.<sup>51</sup>

The brigade commander's field reorganization understandably did not go down well with the 241st Infantry Regiment's commanding officer, Colonel Celal Dora, who filed a protest with the Turkish General Staff in Ankara.<sup>52</sup> The brigade was initially attached to the U.S. Army 25th Infantry Division and deployed by trucks and train to Munsan-ri forty-six kilometers northwest of Seoul on 15 November 1950 for counter guerrilla sweeps in the rear area.<sup>53</sup> The Turkish Brigade went to this assignment without the regimental echelon. Even his appointment as deputy brigade commander did not diminish Colonel Dora's displeasure over the loss of his regiment. Hence, the Turkish Brigade would make its combat debut at a time of a crisis of confidence between its commander and its second in command. Dora preferred to stay away from the brigade staff and spent his time with the battalions. Additionally, he increasingly questioned the orders coming from the brigade and openly discussed his misgivings with his subordinates, thereby creating a duality in command.<sup>54</sup>

51. Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 126; Erkilet, Bıyıkoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 79–80; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Mubarebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 149–52.

52. Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 77–79; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Mubarebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 150–53.

53. Erkilet, Bıyıkoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 80–84; Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 141–43; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 83–89.

54. The General Staff overturned General Yazıcı's reorganization and reinstated the regimental echelon after the Battle of Kunu-ri. Interestingly, this echelon was eliminated in the subsequent Turkish brigades rotated to Korea. Years later, an official military publication on lessons learned in Korea praised the soundness of General Yazıcı's decision to place infantry battalions directly under the brigade. Yücel, *Kore Harbi*, 26.

### Official Military Histories: Underappreciated or Unreliable Sources?

Official military history by definition is authorized and sponsored history. It naturally sees its subject through peculiar official lenses. Traditionally, official histories of wars dealing with campaigns, battles, and operations are published once a reasonable amount of time elapses after the cessation of hostilities. Career serving or retired officers have usually been commissioned to write such official histories. The commissioned work ordinarily goes through a meticulous process of review before its publication. Due to the classified nature of the war documents and their late release, official histories are generally the first serious publications on any given war. Therefore they gain primary source status at least until the full release of the documents. These histories are expected to serve a number of purposes. They are indeed more than a means through which the militaries disclose what they did in a certain war. They are also meant to provide an opportunity to reflect on, and stimulate intellectual exchanges about, the experiences gained and lessons learned from a particular conflict. As such, they may set in train and justify immediate changes in training, organization, and equipment based on lessons learnt from the war. In short, the official military histories reflect a functional approach to history.<sup>55</sup>

However functional they may be, official military histories are generally not written until the termination of hostilities. The initial focus is usually placed on publishing books or booklets of a technical and tactical nature, such as on weapons and equipment, pending the writing of comprehensive official histories. In some armies, military journals provide a forum for debate, exchange, and dissemination of experiences and ideas in the interim. A case in point is the Turkish military journal *Askeri Mecmua*, which served as a medium for intellectual exchanges on the Ottoman campaigns in the First World War and the subsequent Turkish War of Liberation well into the late 1940s.<sup>56</sup>

Work on the official history of the Turkish Brigade in the Korean War was marked by a speedy and professional beginning. Original or translated works on tactical and technical aspects of the war were published during or immediately after the war.<sup>57</sup> Shortly after the truce became effective on 27 July 1953, Erkanı

55. Martin Blumenson, "Can Official History be Honest History?," *Military Affairs* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1962–63): 153–58; Robin Higham, "Introduction," in *Official Histories: Essays and Bibliographies from Around the World* (Manhattan: Kansas State University Library, 1970), 1–4.

56. Mesut Uyar, "Osmanlı Askeri Rönesansı: Balkan Bozgunu ile Yüzleşmek" [The Ottoman Military Renaissance: Confronting Balkan Defeat], *Türkiye Günüğü* 110 (Spring 2012): 72–73.

57. *Koreden Alınan Dersler* [Lessons Learned in Korea] (Ankara: Genelkurmay 1 No. Basımevi, 1951) [Translation of U.S. training circulars no. 2, 3, and 4]; *Kore'de Kullanılan Mayın ve Bubi Tuzakları* [Mines and Booby-traps in Korea] (İstanbul: Askeri Basımevi, 1953); İhsan Gürkan, *Kore'de Savaş Ulaştırması* [Combat Transportation in Korea] (Ankara: Erkanı Harbiyei Umumiye Matbaası, 1953); Mehmet Varol, *Kore'de Piyade Takımının Mubarebe Keşfi* [Combat Reconnaissance by Infantry Platoons in Korea] (Çankırı: Piyade Okulu, 1953). In addition to these publications, Turkish translations of numerous American pamphlets and circulars had been sent to units as annexes to orders.

Harbiye-i Umumiye Harb Tarihi Dairesi (the Military History Division of the General Staff) began work on an official history volume, and the process gained momentum with the selection of authors in September 1954. It is evident that the team of authors was selected after thorough consideration. It consisted of prominent military personalities and reputable military historians such as Major General (Ret.) Hüsnü Emir Erkilet (author of a highly praised volume<sup>58</sup> on the Ottoman campaign in Palestine-Syria in the First World War), Colonel (Ret.) Tevfik Bıyıkoğlu (former private secretary of President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and a founding member of the Turkish Historical Association), and Colonel (Ret.) Hayrettin Artun.<sup>59</sup> Venturing into writing the official history of a relatively recent (even current) Turkish military campaign at such an early stage was unprecedented by Turkish standards. Such quick action may be attributed to the desire to respond to the ongoing controversy in the press and public about the performance of the brigade and attendant personality issues, triggered by the publication of some Korean War veterans' memoirs and translations of works in English.<sup>60</sup>

This team of writers—supported by translators—did not limit their research to the Turkish records and U.S. official publications available at that time. The officers who played key roles in combat were officially requested to submit their recollections and views in writing. A majority of these officers responded to the request and turned in their reports to the Military History Division.<sup>61</sup> The contents of some of these personal reports would subsequently be disputed in courts.<sup>62</sup> Having finished the first draft of the volume, the team of authors once again called upon General Yazıcı, the commanding general of the first Turkish brigade to serve in Korea, and his chief operations officer, Major Faik Türün, to help them sort out a plethora of outstanding

58. Hüseyin Hüsnü Emir, *Yıldırım* [Thunderbolt] (Dersaadet: Matbaa-i Askeriye, 1337 [1921]).

59. Because the brigade was replaced annually, three different Turkish brigades served in Korea between 1950 and 1953. According to the division of labor, Erkilet took over the First Brigade period and Artun took the periods of the Second and Third Brigades, while Bıyıkoğlu covered the rest, including a concise history of Korea, military geography, and international political developments.

60. Turan Ergüngör, *Kore'de Birinci Türk Tugayı* [First Turkish Brigade in Korea] (Ankara: Karınca Matbaası, 1954); Nazmi Özoğul, *Kore'de Niçin Savaşım? Kominizm Mezalimi Korunma Çareleri (1950-1953)* [Why I Fought in Korea: How to Protect against Communist Oppression (1950-1953)] (Ankara: Karınca Matbaası, 1954).

61. Erkilet, Bıyıkoğlu, Arun, foreword to *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri*, 115 and 117.

62. In his report Major Nazmi Özoğul questioned the competence of Colonel Dora and blamed him for the disintegration of some units after the night attack at Sinnim-ni because he had left the battlefield without permission along with some service support detachments. The confidential report was leaked and Dora sued Özoğul for defamation and insubordination. After much deliberation and discussion, the military court convicted Özoğul and sentenced him to six months in prison. The court case seriously damaged the reputation of the official historians and caused a loss of confidence. "Dora'nın Dava Ettiği Binbaşı Mahkum Oldu" [Major sued by Colonel Dora convicted], *Milliyet*, 19 June 1957.

matters—including problems related to the Battle of Kunu-ri. This uncommon practice was most probably born out of a need to untangle complex and conflicting accounts and a lack of crucial details in official reports. Hence, Yazıcı's and Türün's opinions found their way into the final text and were attributed accordingly.<sup>63</sup> In spite of the death of the lead author, General Erkiilet, on 3 April 1958, the final manuscript was ready in late 1958 after hectic efforts by the team of authors.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike the preceding volumes in the official military history series, the Military History Division first published an abridged version in 1959, instead of the full manuscript. This decision was probably driven by the need to test the reactions of the general public and the Korean War veterans in view of the pending court cases.<sup>65</sup> However, the 27 May 1960 military coup and subsequent political turmoil hampered any public debate on the Korean War in Turkey.<sup>66</sup> The situation went from bad to worse for the team of authors when Colonel Bıyıkoğlu, who succeeded General Erkiilet as the new lead author, died on 24 November 1961. Colonel Arun was thus the only surviving member of the original team of authors commissioned to produce the official history volume on the Korean War. When the publication of General Yazıcı's memoirs in 1963 stimulated debate in a Turkish daily<sup>67</sup> and Colonel Dora's responses to Yazıcı's memoirs were published in book form the same year,<sup>68</sup> there was no official history to serve as a framework within which the long overdue public debate about the Korean War could take place.

The debate that continued in the daily newspapers, magazines, and books during the 1960s eventually died down. The Turkish public lost interest and some key veterans like Yazıcı died in the meantime, paving the way for the publication of the unabridged official history volume. The book that had been ready in 1958 was eventually released in 1975 after receiving finishing touches from General (Ret.) Cemal Akbay.<sup>69</sup> The legal and public considerations that had delayed the release of the official history volume also affected a translated work, *Kore: Kore'de Cereyan Eden Muharebelerden Alınacak Dersler* (Korea: Lessons to be Learned from the Battles Fought in Korea), compiled by General (Ret.) Lütfü Sel in the

63. Erkiilet, Bıyıkoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri*, 88, 94, 98–99, 111, 117, 130, and 135.

64. Hüseyin Hüsni Erkiilet, Tevfik Bıyıkhoğlu and Hayrettin Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri (1950–1953) Özet* [Turkish Armed Forces' Battles in the Korean War (1950–1953), Summary] (Ankara: Erkanı Harbiyei Umumiye Basımevi, 1959).

65. For an example of a court case, see footnote 62.

66. After his retirement as major general in 1954, Tahsin Yazıcı was elected to the Turkish Parliament as a deputy on the ruling DP ticket in 1957. After the coup, he had to stand trial along with many other DP deputies before a tribunal with extraordinary powers. He initially faced the death penalty, but was subsequently acquitted. Fifteen members of the DP were sentenced to death for crimes against the constitution. Of the fifteen, ousted Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, and Finance Minister Hasan Polatkan were executed in 1962.

67. Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, passim.

68. Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, passim.

69. Erkiilet, Bıyıkoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri*, passim.

1960s. It would be published in 1979.<sup>70</sup> There is no trace of any public interest or debate following the publication of these two books.

The United States, on the other hand, embarked on writing an official history of the Korean War much later than Turkey did. Although the Office of the Chief of Military History (later renamed the U.S. Army Center of Military History) had around twenty army historians (in eight groups) deployed in the battle zone or stationed in Japan throughout the Korean War, the writing of the *United States Army in the Korean War* did not begin until the late 1950s.<sup>71</sup> Individual volumes of the six-volume series were not released consecutively. The second volume, published in 1961, was the first of the series to be released,<sup>72</sup> followed by the fourth volume in 1966,<sup>73</sup> the first volume in 1972,<sup>74</sup> the fifth volume in 1987,<sup>75</sup> and the third volume in 1990.<sup>76</sup> The sixth volume (Theater Logistics) remains unpublished to this day. The delay resulted mainly from the introduction of new historical methods and the huge volume of archival records collected. The delay gradually became self-perpetuating as the flow of newly available information continued in large quantities.

There had been a very limited experience with oral history during the Second World War, but now this method of information collection was used on a mass scale for the first time. Oral history interviews were conducted not only with high-ranking officers but also with all key personnel as well as with prisoners of war (POWs).<sup>77</sup> At the request of the United States, the scope was eventually extended to cover officers and troops from all allied nations involved in the Korean War. For example, every single Turkish POW released by the North Koreans was interviewed by U.S. Army historians or intelligence experts.<sup>78</sup> The available documentation indicates the astonishing scale of the effort undertaken and the depth and level of detail pursued.

70. Lütfü Sel, *Kore: Kore'de Cereyan Eden Mubarebelerden Alınacak Dersler* [Korea: Lessons to be Learned from the Battles Fought in Korea] (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1979).

71. Allan R. Millett, *The Korean War* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2007), 156–57; Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea 1950–1953* (New York: Anchor, 1989), 978.

72. Roy E. Appleman, *South to Naktong, North to the Yalu: June–November 1950* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1961).

73. Walter G. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966).

74. James F. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1972).

75. Albert E. Cowdrey, *The Medics' War* (Washington: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1987).

76. Billy C. Mossman, *Ebb and Flow: November 1950–July 1951* (Washington: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1990).

77. *Armed Forces Oral Histories: Korean War Studies and After-Action Reports* (Bethesda, Md.: University Publications of America, 1989), vii–ix.

78. Albert D. Biderman, *March to Calumny: The Story of American POW's in the Korean War* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 159, 205; Eugene Kinkead, *Why They Collaborated* (London: Longmans, 1960), 164.

Delay in the production of the official volumes may have been partly due to problems with author selection. For instance, Roy Appleman, who was assigned to write the third volume, decided to leave the official historian post and was subsequently replaced by Billy Mossman at a relatively advanced stage of production.<sup>79</sup> All designated contributors to the official history volumes were either retired officers who had seen action with frontline units or army historians who had served in Korea.<sup>80</sup> The British experience after the First World War had already exposed the pros and cons of relying on combat veterans to write official military histories. In this respect, the Americans probably relearned a lesson already learned by the British.<sup>81</sup>

### A Brief Account of the Battle of Kunu-ri

Before addressing the controversial aspects of the respective official histories' reconstruction of what happened at Kunu-ri, a brief account of the battle is required. In November 1950, the UN forces launched a massive but cautious offensive to drive the North Korean forces beyond the Yalu River, the border with China. At that point, the UNC had little doubt that peace would be secured before Christmas as a result of what came to be known as the "home by Christmas offensive."<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, the Commander in Chief of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army, General Peng Dehuai, managed to build up his forces in North Korea by secretly infiltrating thousands of Chinese troops into the theater. His ultimate aim was to ambush and annihilate the UN forces.<sup>83</sup>

79. Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 979; Roy E. Appleman, *Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront MacArthur* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), xiv–xv.

80. Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, xiv.

81. The British experience with engaging officers who were veterans of the First World War to write the official military history of that war highlights several problem areas and structural limitations. First of all, most of the veteran authors had shown reluctance to criticize their former colleagues. They preferred to write cautiously and raised their criticisms discreetly. Second, they paid more attention to their own war experiences and observations instead of following the documentary evidence or other personal war accounts. Third, due to the prepublication review and editing processes by higher commands and interested parties, they generally wrote in a noncontroversial manner, paying more attention to safe areas like battalion-level tactics and techniques but staying away from real problem areas such as strategic and operational decision-making and senior leadership failures. Fourth, official British historians felt more relaxed in discussing and criticizing the performance of their allies than those of their own army. Last but not least, the passage of time directly affected the quality of their work. Andrew Green, *Writing the Great War: Sir James Edmonds and the Official Histories 1915–1948* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), passim; B. H. Liddell Hart, "Responsibility and Judgment in Historical Writing," *Military Affairs* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1959): 35–36.

82. "Substance of Statements Made at Wake Island Conference on 15 October 1950," in *FRUS 1950*, 7:949; Appleman, *South to Naktong, North to the Yalu*, 758–60; Millett, *The War for Korea 1950–1951*, 274–90.

83. Xiaobing Li, *China's Battle for Korea: The 1951 Spring Offensive* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 28–41; Millett, *The War for Korea 1950–1951*, 295–97, 300–301, 317–18.

The Turkish Brigade's combat debut coincided with the Chinese Second Offensive, which drove UN forces out of North Korea. Its mission commenced with an order received on 26 November 1950 at 15:30 hours from Major General John B. Coulter, the commanding general of the U.S. Army IX Corps, to which the Turkish Brigade was assigned. The brigade was to secure the town of Tokchon by moving up the Kunu-ri–Tokchon road. Coulter and his superior, Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, the U.S. Eighth Army commander, were hoping to establish a strong defensive line without giving up territorial gains. Communication with the Republic of Korea (ROK) 7th Infantry Division, presumed to be deployed in the area, had been cut off for some time; signs of a major Chinese counteroffensive were not yet fully recognized.<sup>84</sup> The brigade began to move in a mixed formation of foot and motorized troops. Its organic motor transport capability allowed motorized deployment of only a single infantry battalion. The brigade reached its forward assembly area in Choyang-myong later that night. The next day at 14:30 hours, while the troops were advancing in two columns, a new order was received from the IX Corps headquarters that changed the brigade's objective from Tokchon to Yongdong-ni, which stood halfway between Kunu-ri and Tokchon. After a long and confused day of marching and coming across hundreds of civilian refugees and elements of fleeing ROK soldiers, General Yazıcı came to the conclusion that his brigade would not be able to reach Yongdong-ni in good order and decided to return to Wawon instead. As an ardent believer in mission command, Yazıcı, who famously belonged to the "Prussian School," did not see a problem in making a drastic change without getting approval from IX Corps. As far as he was concerned, how to do his job remained within his initiative and should not concern General Coulter.<sup>85</sup>

The motorized units of the brigade, in particular, had difficulty in turning around on the narrow dirt track along the River Tongjukkyo in a densely wooded deep valley. It took a ten-to-twelve-hour ordeal to get them to Wawon. The Reconnaissance Platoon was originally the lead element in the brigade's deployment. However, when the brigade was ordered to turn around, it got stuck in the rear of the sluggishly moving mixed column of foot and motorized troops. The enemy forces closed in, and eventually caught up with the rear guard. Moving on the high ground, the Chinese ambushed and decimated the Reconnaissance Platoon and the other stragglers in the rear at 01:00 hours on 28 November in Aril-ryong (commonly known by Turkish units as "Gez"), just a few kilometers

84. Erkilet, Bıyıkoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 88–92; Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 145–50, 152–53; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Mubarebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 240–42, 274–80; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 93–100; Mossman, *The Ebb and Flow*, 71; Millett, *The War for Korea 1950–1951*, 336–37.

85. Erkilet, Bıyıkoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 93–98; Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 154–61; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Mubarebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 282–94, 325–38; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 101–9; Mossman, *The Ebb and Flow*, 77.

away from the brigade command post. Worse still, they also destroyed the crucial wireless set that was the only direct link to IX Corps.<sup>86</sup> Later that morning, the brigade's covering force came under persistent enemy attack and all units came into contact with the enemy during the day. This defensive action, called the Wawon battles, succeeded in repelling the enemy attack.<sup>87</sup>

Faced with terrible uncertainty in not knowing the developments in neighboring American and Korean units, General Yazıcı used his discretion yet again to withdraw to Sinnim-ni rather than to hold Wawon. Again, he thought that as a field commander with firsthand information about the enemy, he knew better than General Coulter far away. The Turkish official history criticizes not his decision but his apparent lack of concern in not informing IX Corps in time. The units reached Sinnim-ni by the evening on the same day and were setting up their defenses while the brigade command staff was stationed in Kaechon a few kilometers back. On the night of 28–29 November, enemy elements infiltrated the Turkish lines through an unguarded river bed and attacked the 3rd Infantry Battalion, the Artillery Battalion, and some support elements of the brigade, which were deployed inside the village of Sinnim-ni. This ambush threw the whole brigade, which was poorly deployed and unable to bring its full weight to bear, into disarray. Only the 1st and 2nd Infantry Battalions were able to hold their positions on the high ground and fought on. The brigade command came to grips with the gravity of the situation only when a large number of troops in the rout flooded to the rear. The brigade staff managed to keep most of them from retreating farther. Reinforced by a U.S. Army infantry battalion (the 3rd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment), the brigade established a new defensive line. Having stabilized the situation and with its rear covered by the U.S. Army infantry battalion, the brigade launched a small scale assault in the direction of Sinnim-ni to enable two isolated infantry battalions to fall back to the brigade's new line. The Turkish official history allocates a subchapter to discussing the reasons behind the defeat and poor performance of the brigade, including Yazıcı's command decisions. Unconventionally, quotations from private war narratives were used to describe the complexity of the situation and the reactions of key decision makers. Although it is not stated openly, it is still apparent from the text that both Yazıcı and Dora made terrible mistakes and fell short of standards expected of a commanding officer.<sup>88</sup>

Later, the U.S. infantry battalion's unexpected withdrawal compelled General Yazıcı to use his discretion a third time and pull back his brigade to Kunu-ri.

86. Erkilet, Bıykoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 99–103; Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 161–62; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Mubarebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 340–42, 348–62, 367–74; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 109–10.

87. Erkilet, Bıykoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 103–8; Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 162–71; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Mubarebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 376–432; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 110–24.

88. Erkilet, Bıykoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 109–18, 121–30; Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 172–90; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Mubarebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 436–625; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 124–37.



Under heavy enemy fire, the retreat quickly spun out of control with units mixing, collapsing, and disintegrating. By the morning of the twenty-ninth, only the 1st and 2nd Infantry Battalions and several disparate elements from other units had showed up in Kunu-ri. The rest of the brigade, including Colonel Dora, the deputy commander, had already pulled back all the way to Pyongyang on the trail of the withdrawing U.S. units. The units left in Kunu-ri had to fight their way out through the Sunchon Road to Pyongyang (the infamous episode of “Gauntlet”) along with the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division, under unrelenting enemy attacks.<sup>89</sup>

In the battles of 27 to 30 November 1950, called “the Battle of Kunu-ri” in Turkish sources and “the Battle of Chongchon” in U.S. sources, the Turkish Brigade suffered extremely heavy casualties (767) including 218 killed in action, 94 missing in action (counted as POWs later on), and 455 wounded. It also lost the bulk of its artillery, mortars, vehicles, and other heavy equipment.<sup>90</sup>

### Conflicting Accounts of the Battle in the Turkish and American Official Histories

Lack of agreement between the two allies’ official accounts of the Korean War is the most striking feature in their interpretations of the Battle of Kunu-ri. It should be granted, though, that Turkish military historians relied on several translated U.S. books and journal articles available to them<sup>91</sup> at the time they wrote their works. These were publications mostly written during the war and, as such, no substitute for an official history volume or series. Apart from these, there is no evidence that the Turkish military historians requested access to the U.S. archival records in writing the Turkish official history. When writing their own official history, the U.S. Army historians did not consult the official histories of Turkey or other allied nations.

The Battle of Kunu-ri is covered in the third volume of *The United States Army in the Korean War*. Its author, Billy Mossman, bases his account of the Turkish Brigade’s operations primarily on a single official document with references to some secondary literature as well.<sup>92</sup> The official document in question was prepared by

89. Regrettably, the Turkish official history does not cover the retreat from Sunchon to Pyongyang effectively, during which a series of Chinese ambushes caused more casualties than the Kunu-ri battles. Similarly, other Turkish sources allocate only a few pages to it. Erkilet, Bıykoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 118–21, 130–35; Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 190–97; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Mubarebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 626–59, 670–95; Dora, *Kore Savaşı’nda Türkler*, 137–52.

90. Erkilet, Bıykoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 137–38.

91. Mark Clark, *Tuna’dan Yalu’ya* (Ankara: Yıldız Matbaacılık, 1957) [Turkish translation of the English original *From the Danube to the Yalu*]; *Koreden Alınan Dersler* [Lessons Learned in Korea]; *Kore* (Ankara: Amerikan Haberler Merkezi [U.S. News Center], 1953). Most of the Turkish translations of the American official publications that were used by the official historians have not been published.

92. Mossman does not cite any other official documents including unit records while describing the actions of the Turkish Brigade.

the Turkish UN Brigade Advisory Group, which had been attached to the brigade since its activation in Turkey.<sup>93</sup> Even though the Advisory Group consisted of five U.S. Army officers—Colonel Thomas S. Gumby, Lieutenant Colonel Maynard B. Weaver, Captain Billy L. Robinson, Major Orville O. Munson, and Captain Michael J. Lorenzo—only the first three prepared the report due to the facts that Munson had been seriously wounded in action and Lorenzo had been captured by the Chinese. The document is dated 27 December 1950 and describes the key events between 20 November and 13 December 1950 in the form of a war diary submitted to the U.S. Eighth Army headquarters.<sup>94</sup>

What is interesting for the purposes of this paper is that though Mossman liberally cites this report throughout the text, he describes the turn of events based on the knowledge of others (not identified in the text) or his own, and he occasionally even contradicts the report of the Advisory Group. Leaving aside the issue of unidentified or unidentifiable sources on which Mossman relies, three points can be made in contesting his treatment of the Turkish Brigade's first showing on the battlefield, and each of them warrants closer examination from a comparative perspective.

The first point is whether or to what extent the brigade's U.S. superiors in the chain of command exercised their command and control responsibilities. The command issue figures prominently throughout the whole account of the battle from beginning to end. The version in the Turkish official history proceeds along the lines below. The brigade was sent to its mission without any clear instructions except a brief order received from the U.S. IX Corps headquarters on 26 November 1950. It was not informed of the friendly and enemy dispositions in the area nor was it provided with appropriate transport and fire support to fulfill its mission. Worst of all, it was totally unaware of the massive Chinese counteroffensive in progress. In short, according to Turkish official historians, General Coulter did not set clear achievable objectives and provide the required resources or means. The motorized communications team (jeep-mounted radios) detached from IX Corps was among the units that were ambushed in the rear of the column with the Reconnaissance Platoon on the night of 27–28 November. Hence, the brigade lost its only means of communication with IX Corps headquarters. Later, when communication was eventually restored by the introduction of runners, the orders from IX Corps were usually inappropriate because of events on the ground. Since the Turkish army liaison officers assigned to IX Corps headquarters and later to the 2nd Division were neither involved in the planning nor briefed about the plans, this channel of communication could not be utilized either. Yazıcı and his staff were not even aware of General Coulter's decision to place the brigade under the command of Major General Lawrence B. Keiser, commander of the

93. Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 80; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 37.

94. Turkish UN Brigade Advisory Group, "War Diary. Section IV: After Action Report" (hereafter *War Diary*), pp. 8–5, 1A BA 98, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Fort McNair, D.C.

2nd Division, on 28 November for two more days. Keiser did not post a liaison officer to the Turks, and the Turkish liaison officer, unaware of changing command relations, remained at corps headquarters. The brigade was therefore left in the dark and had to fight with no grasp of the bigger picture.<sup>95</sup>

The official U.S. Army version, on the other hand, gives the impression that the U.S. superiors passed on to the brigade all intelligence at their disposal. The U.S. account also reveals the extent of micromanagement practiced by U.S. commanders. Americans initially interfered in the brigade's troop movements down to the battalion level, which greatly irritated General Yazıcı. The disruption of communication between IX Corps and the Turkish Brigade merits attention only in the context of post-28 November events. Before that date all orders the brigade received are considered to have been either misunderstood or misinterpreted by its commander. For instance, on 27 November, "Misunderstanding Coulter's message, General Yasici [Yazıcı] turned his forces around and took them to positions astride of Kunu-ri road just east of Wawon."<sup>96</sup>

Similarly, General Yazıcı's decision to pull his brigade from Wawon to Kunu-ri without instructions "did not conform to the [2nd Division's] orders for a line through Wawon."<sup>97</sup> He thus compelled the U.S. units to carry out an early withdrawal from their positions to "the dismay of General Walker." Furthermore, the Turkish Brigade, which fell back on Kaechon following the enemy ambush in Sinnim-ni, completely disregarded the 2nd Infantry Division's orders to recover the previously held positions and instead began its retreat towards Kunu-ri when the enemy unleashed its mortar attack.<sup>98</sup> In subsequent pages, the U.S. Army official history implies that the Turkish Brigade was to blame for the heavy casualties the 2nd Infantry Division endured in retreat when its rear was completely exposed as a result of the Turkish Brigade's collapse and failure to carry out orders.<sup>99</sup>

95. Erkilet, Bıykoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 7–103; Mossman, *The Ebb and Flow*, 80. Some unofficial U.S. accounts corroborate the official Turkish version. See Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 449–52; Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 89–90; T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War* (Dulles, Va.: Brassey's, 2000), 211. It is important to note that the British 27th Brigade headquarters experienced similar problems of communication and command with their U.S. superiors. See Jeffrey Grey, *The Commonwealth Armies and the Korean War* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1988), 79–81.

96. Mossman, *The Ebb and Flow*, 71, 77. Certainly language was a barrier to communication between the Turks and U.S. commanders. Initially, tactical symbols constituted nearly as big an obstacle to communication. Until 1947 all Turkish officers had gone through Prussian/German-modeled officer training in the Turkish Military Academy and branch schools. They were used to the German-style tactical symbols. Only lieutenants from the class of 1947 went to the branch schools established and run by the U.S. advisors. When the brigade received its first orders with the tactical situation marked on the maps, the senior officers had difficulty reading them. The U.S.-trained platoon leaders volunteered or were called in to "translate" the tactical situation to their commanders. Authors' interview with Bahtiyar Yalta, 8 January 2009, Ankara.

97. Mossman, *The Ebb and Flow*, 81.

98. *Ibid.*, 108–9.

99. *Ibid.*, 112, 119–27.

In contrast, the Turkish official history claims that the brigade operated without support and that its commander, General Yazıcı, used his discretion in many instances to carry out the orders that had been given by the U.S. commanding staff without regard to the terrain and the enemy dispositions. The divergence in interpretation obviously stems from the different command styles of the two armies. The Turkish army officers were trained in the Prussian/German art of war which places a premium on a commander's discretion (*Auftragstaktik*—mission command), whereas the U.S. Army strictly adhered to the managerial approach to command which emphasizes centralization. The mission command system advocates that commanders merely point out objectives, aims, and intentions; assign general tasks and allocate resources; and then allow their subordinates to perform the required tasks using their initiative. Apparently the Turkish official historians who were also trained according to the Prussian/German system were at a loss to understand the American way of command while conducting their research and writing their respective sections. As far as they were concerned, Yazıcı certainly made several mistakes, especially in Sinnim-ni, but the American generals' zeal to exercise complete control and their constant interference in how to carry out orders while not providing intelligence and other sources were simply alien concepts.<sup>100</sup>

Further to problems of misunderstanding, the Turkish soldiers, unlike the U.S. troops, moved on foot, which negated the brigade's ability to respond to the fluidity of the tactical situation and the changing orders. To make up for their limited mobility, they had to skip meals and/or rests. As for the Turkish Brigade's motorized units, they were equipped with older, hand-me-down U.S.-built vehicles, prone to frequent breakdowns<sup>101</sup> and operated by inexperienced drivers.<sup>102</sup> The success in Wawon is attributable to the discretion General Yazıcı liberally exercised. If he had strictly followed orders, the Turkish troops would have been far more vulnerable to the Chinese attack on the march. Similarly, during the Chinese assault on Sinnim-ni, while the initial deployment was faulty and some units of the brigade withdrew without order, the remaining troops performed the brigade's primary mission of delaying the enemy advance and managed to disengage from the enemy in an orderly fashion.<sup>103</sup> Finally, the withdrawal from

100. Erkiyet, Büyükoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 98, 109. See Eitan Shamir, "The Long and Winding Road to the US Army Managerial Approach to Command and the Adoption of Mission Command (*Auftragstaktik*)," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 5 (October 2010): 645–72.

101. Yalta, *Kunu-ri Mubarebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 44. Also see Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 61.

102. The Turkish drivers were notorious for their reckless driving in Korea. Chief operations officer of the Second Turkish Brigade Turgut Sunalp recalls that the MPs would not even bother to argue with a driver who replied "Me Türk." Turgut Sunalp, *Kore Harbi* [The Korean War] (İstanbul: Harb Akademileri Basımevi, 1954), 125. Also see Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 119–20, 124; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 64–65, 81; Gürkan, *Bir Generalin Askeri ve Akademik Anıları*, 58, 60.

103. Erkiyet, Büyükoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 102–31.

Kaechon is linked to the withdrawal of the U.S. infantry battalion from the defensive line without warning which, according to the Turkish interpretation, presented the brigade with the risk of enemy encirclement.<sup>104</sup>

The second point of contention is that a number of incidents in the course of the battles are reported in diametrically opposed fashion in the respective official histories. One striking example is the treatment of the ROK troops whom the Turkish units stumbled upon while attempting to throw back the enemy. In his reconstruction of the battles, Mossman relates a detail in a footnote which argues that the ROK troops driven out by the Chinese were caught between the Chinese and Turkish troops. Mistaking them for the Chinese, the Turks captured the ROK troops and sent them to the rear.<sup>105</sup> The origins of this description of events can be traced to two unofficial histories of the Korean War. S. L. A. Marshall published his book, which depends heavily on oral history, in 1953. Roy Appleman, whom Mossman replaced as the author of the third volume of the official history, published a book on the Chinese offensive and the collapse of the Eighth Army during the winter of 1950 after he retired from his official assignment. Both of them based their accounts mainly on oral history interviews and information they personally gathered during their assignments. They claim that the Turkish Brigade did not actually fight the Chinese at Wawon but mistook the retreating ROK troops for the former. The Turks therefore attacked and killed most of them, while capturing the rest and sending them to the rear as POWs. For these historians, there was no victory at Wawon but instead a grave mistake committed by the inexperienced and poorly trained Turkish troops. They argue further that the U.S. military authorities rushed to cover up this horrible mistake and the public never knew what really happened at Wawon, which went down in history as a Turkish victory.<sup>106</sup> A number of other works depict the Wawon engagement along similar lines.<sup>107</sup>

The official Turkish version of the Wawon incident does not mention any such mistake or case of mistaken identity. Instead, it establishes with certainty that the Turkish Brigade endured the charge of the Chinese troops, who were supported by mortar and rocket artillery fire. As for the capture of the ROK troops by the Turkish units, the official account relates that it had taken place a day before in deployment but not at Wawon.<sup>108</sup> The Turks had gained experience in dealing with communist guerrillas and bands in their earlier assignments. The brigade's commanding staff, including General Yazıcı, became suspicious of the Korean stragglers, some of them unarmed, whom they encountered along the way. They ordered the military police (MPs) to round up these stragglers and accompanying

104. *Ibid.*, 131–32.

105. Mossman, *The Ebb and Flow*, 81.

106. S. L. A. Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet* (Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Books, 1982), 164–65; Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 88–89.

107. Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 451; Edwin P. Hoyt, *The Bloody Road to Panmunjom* (New York: Stein and Day, 1985), 83.

108. Erkilet, Biyıkoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Mubarebeleri*, 103–11.

civilians for shipment to the U.S. POW camps. Published memoirs of Turkish officers corroborate the official account. The existing literature on the Korean War in Turkish does not include even the faintest indication that the authors of the official history volume or the veterans who published their memoirs were aware of any such claims of fratricide involving the Turks and the South Koreans.<sup>109</sup>

The report written by the U.S. advisors of the brigade, which constitutes the basis of Mossman's account of the Turkish Brigade's first combat mission, identifies the adversary unequivocally as Chinese troops. Although it grants that several Koreans were apprehended on suspicion, there was no mention of any attack on the ROK troops.<sup>110</sup> Since these advisors remained with the troops in the front line and even occasionally engaged in fire fights with the enemy—one of them, Major Munson, was actually wounded during this battle—there is little, if any, reason to question their description of events.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, there were civilian Korean interpreters at the headquarters of every battalion and of independent companies. None of them reported any fratricide during or after the war.<sup>112</sup> One reason Mossman might have felt compelled to include this claim in his work is that the issue had already been brought up by Marshall, Appleman, and others,<sup>113</sup> although there was no hard evidence or record to substantiate it. It should be noted that the old and new Korean official accounts, published in 1977 and 1998 respectively, do not include any reference to such a horrible mistake. On the contrary, both report a Chinese assault on Wawon.<sup>114</sup>

The third and final point of major disagreement between the Turkish and U.S. official histories relates to the Turkish Brigade's overall combat performance during the Battle of Kunu-ri. They indeed profoundly differ in their assessments of how it fared. According to the Turkish official history, the Turkish Brigade's primary mission was merely to delay the enemy advance, and "its actions gained the US IX Corps and by extension the whole US Eighth Army three crucial days to withdraw."<sup>115</sup> As such, the Turkish Brigade stood out as a brave unit that did its best even under the direst conditions and absorbed great losses in fulfilling its

109. Ibid., 96; Yazıcı, *Birinci Türk Tugayında Kore Hatıralarım*, 156–57; Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 107; Yalta, *Kunu-ri Muharebeleri ve Geri Çekilmeler*, 231–40, 319–21, and 345; Gürkan, *Bir Generalin Askeri ve Akademik Anıları*, 69.

110. *War Diary*.

111. Ibid.

112. One of the interpreters, Sang Ki Paik, published his memoir after the war. Sang Ki Paik, *Kore Harbinde Türklerle* [With the Turks in Korean War], ed. Nazım Dündar Sayılan (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1996).

113. Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet*, 164–65; Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 89.

114. *The History of the United Nations Forces in the Korean War*, vol. 6 (Seoul: the Ministry of National Defense, the Republic of Korea, 1977), 383–90; *The Korean War*, vol. 2 (Seoul: Korea Institute of Military History, 1998), 252–54.

115. Erkilet, Bıyıkoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri*, 131. Also see Dora, *Kore Savaşı'nda Türkler*, 123; Gürkan, *Bir Generalin Askeri ve Akademik Anıları*, 69.

mission throughout the battles, though, as the official history admits, some crucial mistakes were made in the process, such as Dora's decision to retreat against the orders of Yazıcı; the limited attention paid by Yazıcı to the security of the corps's communication team, which was therefore lost at the first clash; and the 2nd Battalion's blunder in taking the wrong track and therefore losing half a day.<sup>116</sup> The U.S. official history, on the other hand, portrays it as a unit that "misunderstood" its orders, committed "grave mistakes," failed to maintain effective command and communication, disregarded its American superiors' and advisors' counsel, immediately withdrew under enemy pressure, and therefore compromised the action of U.S. units around it.<sup>117</sup> Mossman's official U.S. Army history volume indeed pales in comparison to the unofficial or popular histories and journalistic accounts of the Korean War in English that offer an extremely critical (even occasionally prejudiced) perspective on the actions and performance of the Turkish Brigade at Kunu-ri.<sup>118</sup> For instance, Clay Blair makes an untenable claim about General Yazıcı's military career. Quoting John H. Michaelis, the commanding officer of the U.S. 27th Infantry Regiment in the Pusan perimeter, he argues: "The Turks were commanded by an aged brigadier who had been a division commander at Gallipoli in 1916 [*sic*] fighting the British! He was highly respected high up in the Turkish command and took a bust to brigadier to command a brigade."<sup>119</sup>

Similarly, Appleman wrongfully declares that all Turkish soldiers had carried short swords in addition to their bayonets, basing his claim on a single oral history interview with a Turkish Korean veteran years after the war.<sup>120</sup> In reality Turkish soldiers' weapons and personal equipment were exactly the same as the Americans'. Later on, they even began to wear American uniforms with minor changes due to logistical difficulties in receiving replacement uniforms from Turkey. Obviously the European historical legacy of seeing Turks as vicious warriors for many centuries, their different physical appearance (especially their notable moustaches), and their

116. Erkölet, Bıykoğlu, Arun, *Kore Harbinde Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Muharebeleri*, 97, 102–3, 117–22.

117. Mossman, *The Ebb and Flow*, 71, 77, 80–83, 108–12, 115–16.

118. Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 90–92, 207; Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 451–52, 455, 477; Marshall, *The River and the Gauntlet*, 165; David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (London: Pan Books, 2009), 442–43.

119. Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 451. This is a good example of the problematic nature of personal war narratives. Michaelis is simply exaggerating in order to create a colorful account. Yazıcı was commissioned two years before the First World War. It was absolutely impossible in the Ottoman army for a junior lieutenant to be assigned as a commanding officer of a division at Gallipoli. The youngest division commander at Gallipoli, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was thirty-four years old and was commissioned ten years before Yazıcı in 1902. In reality Yazıcı, as a junior officer, commanded only cavalry squadrons and served as a staff officer on the Caucasus Front—not at Gallipoli—throughout the war. In terms of his age in Korea, he was just three years older than Major General Lawrence B. Keiser, commanding general of the 2nd Division, who was also a veteran of the First World War.

120. Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 88, 406.

individual aggressiveness all played instrumental roles in the creation of several myths and legends surrounding the Turkish Brigade—including gruesome stories about Turkish soldiers cutting off the ears of dead Chinese soldiers in order to get credit.<sup>121</sup> The problem obviously lies in the lack of serious academic attention and deliberation which has persisted to this day.

### **Conclusion**

The common ground of the U.S. official history and other Western military histories about the Kunu-ri (or Chongchon) Battle is their heavy reliance on oral history interviews and the authors' personal war experiences. These oral history interviews and personal experiences certainly open new vistas of historical understanding and lend much-needed color to the events. Nevertheless, these historians apparently neglected to seek confirmation in other sources; to look for internal consistency; and to be aware of potential bias, partiality, and distortions. In their quest to understand the largest defeat suffered by the U.S. Army since the Battle of the Bulge (1944–1945), they paid limited or no attention to comparing American—mostly oral—accounts with those of their allies.

Although the official history volume authored by Erkilet, Bıyıkoğlu, and Arun is a relatively solid work, there are many controversial and questionable elements in the official Turkish narrative of the Battle of Kunu-ri in particular and the Korean War in general. The list will inevitably grow if the scope of inquiry is extended beyond the official history narrative. The point here is that although in the more than sixty-five years after these battles, volumes of books have been published and archives have been opened to researchers, the belligerent nations have remained content with their own narratives, which have been repeated and reproduced time and again to build and sustain national myths that have grown out of proportion to historical facts. “The legend of the Turk in Korea” is but one.

121. Jerry N. Hess, “Oral History Interview with Bruce C. Clarke (Commanding General of the 1st Armored Division),” 14 January 1970, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/clarkeb.htm#transcript>, accessed on 5 October 2010; Stanley Sandler, *The Korean War: No Victors No Vanquished* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 162–63.