The Janissaries

The Janissaries were the military organization of the Ottoman Empire. The institution evolved from the practice by the Ottoman leaders in Anatolia of employing captured prisoners as mercenary troops.

1. What were the Janissaries?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

From the 1380s to 1648, the Janissaries were gathered through the enslaving of non-Muslim boys notably Christians. Turkish administrators would scour their regions every five years for the strongest sons of the sultan's Christian subjects. These boys (usually between the ages of 6 and 14) were then completely severed from their Christian families and given to Turkish families in the provinces to learn Turkish language and customs, and the rules of Islam. The recruits were indoctrinated into Islam, and supervised 24 hours a day.

2. How did Turkish administrators assemble the Janissaries?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

3. Why were the young boys turned over to Turkish families?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

They were subjected to severe discipline, being prohibited from growing a beard, taking up a skill other than soldiering, and marrying. The more able children were enrolled in the palace corps of pages and trained to become administrators and officials in the state bureaucracy, the Ruling Institution. The remainder were given a military education and became members of the famous Janissary corps, recognized in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as the best trained and most effective soldiers of Europe. As a result, the Janissaries were extremely well-disciplined troops, and became first-class citizens or of the military class.

4. What were the young Janissaries subject to?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

5. How were the "more able" children treated?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

For all practical purposes Janissaries belonged to the Sultan and they were regarded as the protectors of the throne and the Sultan. Janissaries were taught to consider the corps as their home and family, and the Sultan as their father. Only those who proved strong enough earned the rank of true Janissary at the age of 24 or 25. As a symbol of their devotion to the order, Janissaries wore special hats called "börk". These hats also had a holding place in front for a spoon. This symbolized the "brotherhood of the spoon", which reflected a sense of comradeship among the Janissaries who ate, slept, fought and died together.

6. Who did the Janissaries belong to and what were they taught to consider?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

7. What did they wear as a symbol of their devotion to the order? What did it symbolize?
______________________________________________________________________________