With My Friends In The Military

I, Nesim Alkabes, was born on July 21st, 1920 in our brick home that was 30 m. further from Galata Kulesi [A neighborhood on the European side where Jews congregated in the beginning of the 20th century] with the help of a midwife. All my other siblings were born in this house like me. My father bought this house with his savings. We lived on one flat and rented out the other 3 flats. We lived there between 1920-1928. As far as I remember, it was not a big house. The entrance opened up to a hallway, at the end of it was the bedroom of my maternal grandmother, but it was such a small room that she did not have a bed, she would make one for herself every night on the floor. We had a closet we called "Yükli" in this room. We would put items such as mattresses, comforters in there. The system of sleeping on a floorbed worked for all of us, we all slept on the floor. We warmed the house with a coke-burning stove as well as a Belgian stove called "Salamandra" where you would feed it coals from the top and remove the ashes from the bottom. The maid lit these stoves. In the bathroom of this house, there was a shower boat, we didn't have a tub, once a month, in accordance with the rules of kashrut, we would go to a hamam in Kasimpasha together with all the ladies of the house (because I was still young). We would go there with a horse-carriage, this was a big event for us (paseo). The men would go to "Galatasaray Hamami" every Friday. My first school was where Neve Shalom Synagogue is located now [A neighborhoodcalled Sishane that Jews preferred at the beginning of the century]. We had a synagogue called Knesset there, below the Synagogue we had our Jewish primary school. After I studied for 3 years in this school, I went to Saint Benoit for junior high and graduated. When I was only 8, my father provided me with 5 years of religious education in the form of two hours twice weekly from Rabbi Gabay who came to our house, just as his father had done for him. My father was very wealthy; we would pay the Rabbi 2 liras a day, sugar cost 28 kurus (the cost was decided by Atatürk then. "bu iki lira babama bir bardak su gibi gelirdi" "These two liras were like a glass of water for my father" [this is his saying]. As result when I celebrated my bar-mitzvah, my Hebrew and knowledge of the Torah was excellent. We celebrated my bar-mitzvah ceremony by inviting three priests from my school and our relatives to our house on a Sunday.