

Foreword

In January 2017, Federal Minister of Defense Dr. Ursula von der Leyen commissioned the Bundeswehr Center of Military History and Social Sciences (Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr, ZMSBw) to write an academic study on the German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) relationship to homosexuality between 1955 and 2000. After three-and-a-half years, on 17 September 2020, her successor in office Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer presented the public with the results of the research: “We must not beat about the bush. For decades after its founding in 1955, the Bundeswehr [...] systematically discriminated against homosexual soldiers.”

Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Klaus Storkmann has written a pioneering work, one which for the first time considers the relevant legal and regulatory frameworks, illuminates gay service members’ day-to-day experiences in the Bundeswehr, and delves into the key topics in political and public debate. In doing so, the author has drawn on extensive written records from the German Federal Archives, numerous rulings at military service and administrative courts, and the testimony of more than sixty contemporary witnesses. Building on this solid foundation, Dr. Storkmann has proceeded to analyze criminal procedures against soldiers’ homosexual activity and the Bundeswehr’s own internal forms of disciplinary action, the historical status of homosexuality as a security risk, and the professional consequences that discovery of homosexual activity entailed.

Up to the turn of the millennium, homosexuality counted as both grounds for exclusion from a career as an officer or non-commissioned officer – and as a security risk. The author reconstructed a select set of military careers that were impacted by these policies, allowing him to portray the fates of the individual soldiers in detail. The consequences arising out of an otherwise abstract regulatory framework are thus made both palpable and traceable in their effect on the soldiers’ professional and private lives.

While presenting the study in September 2020, Minister Kramp-Karrenbauer also laid the groundwork for a law on legal rehabilitation, avowing that “it is not a matter of indifference to us how people were treated at the time.” On 25 November 2020, the Federal Cabinet approved the Rehabilitation Act for Homosexual Soldiers Discriminated against in the Bundeswehr and the National People’s Army (Nationale Volksarmee, NVA). The Act’s inclusion of East German soldiers discriminated against for their sexual orientation can be seen as a further step toward achieving Germany’s inner unification.

Lieutenant Colonel Storkmann decided at an early point to go beyond the actual task at hand – considering the Bundeswehr’s previous attitude towards

homosexuality – and to consider NVA policy as well. In doing so, he adhered to the ZMSBw's methodological tenet of considering both German states and their armed forces in the study of military history after 1945 wherever possible and relevant. *Homosexuality in the German Armed Forces* thus takes its place among a series of composite, often comparative German–German military histories. Dr. Storkmann's historical perspective on previous German armed forces and his lateral view of the armies of other states set the Bundeswehr's practices in a wider context, as do the comparisons he draws with other public service institutions. Sexual minorities' treatment within the armed forces is an illuminating topic for much more than contemporary German history.

Historians' work seldom leads to concrete political decisions, much less new laws. In this case, however, the Federal German Parliament (Bundestag) unanimously adopted the gay and lesbian soldiers' Rehabilitation Act in May 2021. The ZMSBw and the author of the present work can look with pride on what are highly gratifying results for those who experienced discrimination in the past. I would like to thank Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Storkmann for his accomplished research, in addition to the ZMSBw publications department, under the leadership of Dr. Christian Adam, for its dedication and continued professionalism in successfully bringing this English publication into print, and especially to Mr. Noah Harley from the State of New York for his outstanding translation work. I wish this book a wide readership, both throughout the Bundeswehr and among the wider public. May it serve as an impetus for many future studies.

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