

Introduction

“79 centimeters you’re gay, 81 centimeters you’re a deserter.”¹ It is a saying that just about every new recruit, parading in broad formation and lock-step exactly 80 cm behind the soldier in front, would have heard from the drill instructor at some point during initial marching exercises. From a purely statistical perspective there were likely one or two soldiers within that formation who were homosexual; they would have laughed along with the others in order not to attract attention. Gay soldiers were the object of jokes, while the term “gay” served for all kinds of disparaging comments. In 2014 the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) looked back on the treatment homosexuals serving in the military could expect from the Bundeswehr and its soldiers in the past: “Deserting fellow soldiers or drawing too near to them – such were deemed the cardinal sins of soldiery. Among recruits, gays occupied a more difficult position than deserters. True, the military police dealt with the latter. Yet at least they were spared the jokes commonly heard among new soldiers.”²

It did not end with jokes. Soldiers could land other soldiers in jail based on (consensual) homosexual activity. All it took was a report to one’s superiors, as occurred on 8 December 1962, a Saturday. As was still common practice in the first decades of the Bundeswehr, Saturday mornings saw soldiers on duty. That afternoon, their shifts now ended, the soldiers celebrated the start of the weekend in the canteen with copious amounts of alcohol. Non-commissioned officer (NCO) K. and Private S. met in the canteen bathroom in a drunken state. The second criminal division at Lüneberg Regional Court summed up the rest with loving attention to detail in its “Determination of crime and guilt”:

In the toilet stall both defendants then engaged in illicit sexual acts. Both had let their pants down. They embraced and grasped hold of each other’s genitals [...] ultimately Defendant S. positioned himself behind Defendant K., who was poised bent over with buttocks exposed, and made intercourse-like movements. It could not be determined whether [S.] introduced his member into the anus of K. Nor could other any further particulars of the goings-on be determined.³

How did the judges in Lüneberg know what had transpired behind a locked toilet door? The soldiers’ comrades had trailed in after the two and peered into the bath-

1 Hemicker, “79 Zentimeter sind schwul.” The author of this study was still easily able to recall the routine phrase from basic training, as could many of the older soldiers he interviewed.

2 Hemicker, “79 Zentimeter sind schwul.”

3 Taken from the court opinion of the 2nd criminal division at Lüneburg Regional Court, 6 June 1963. Cited in Federal Disciplinary Court, 25 August 1964, Az: I WD 69/64.

room stall over the dividing wall. A report to their company chief followed, who in turn alerted the battalion commander. What had been observed in the toilet stall quickly reached division headquarters, at which point the division commander passed the incident over to the state attorney's office. The court sentenced NCO K. to four months prison for full intoxication (conviction under Paragraph 175 did not come under consideration as the accused's state of drunkenness had left him "of unsound mind," in the court's view). The private for his part received a five-month prison term for "illicit sexual acts between men."⁴ In appeal proceedings the regional court sentenced the men to a month each in prison, finding that "both defendants met the elements of a crime under §175 (1) of the German Criminal Code by committing illicit sexual acts with each other, whereby each allowed himself to be abused by the other."⁵ The decision at the regional court was followed by the Bundeswehr's own disciplinary tribunal; in February 1964 a military service court removed NCO K. from his post and demoted him to the rank of private first class.⁶

On its own, the case points to several key elements for a work of research into the history of homosexual soldiers in the Bundeswehr:

1. The experiential aspect, i.e. individual recollections of how homosexuality and homosexual soldiers were treated among the troops – not just from those who were "directly impacted," but observers as well;
2. The contemporary appraisal of homosexuals' general level of fitness for military service;
3. The matter of homosexual men's conviction under the infamous Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code (known formally as §175 StGB), the implications it held for disciplinary law, and how the Bundeswehr punished homosexual acts internally.

The questions raised by the third point set the study within a broader legal and historical context that extends far beyond the narrower subject of sexual minorities' treatment. The reader should keep in mind that both in the past (and today), the armed forces' military tribunals had different legal interests to weigh than the criminal justice system at large. It both was and remains entirely possible, even likely, for an investigation discontinued by the public prosecutor's office still to lead to disciplinary measures in the military. The course of action pursued by the Bunde-

⁴ The original German term "Unzucht" has been translated in what follows as "illicit sexual acts". While a bit wordy, the other option of "fornication" refers specifically to sex outside marriage, while the term "Unzucht" incorporates more than that. – Translator.

⁵ Federal Disciplinary Court, 25 August 1964, Az: I WD 69/64.

⁶ Military Service Court C1, Az: C 1 VL 46/63 from 20 February 1964.

swehr's legal staff, military service courts and administrative judges was of course bound by norms of law and justice. Yet those norms were different in the 1960s and 1970s than they are today, in 2022. In 2007 Christian Lutze published a cross-section of the disciplinary and criminal measures used to punish soldiers' sexual activity in the past in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Wehrrecht*.⁷

An early media account of homosexuals in the military appeared in an article "Gays are ousted," published in 1981 in *Stern* magazine, the "flagship of sexual liberalization",⁸ which discussed the case of Michael Lindner.⁹ That same year the story of Captain Lindner, who was still serving at the time, also made it into a Rowohlt paperback: *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen: Homosexuellen und 'Gesundes Volksempfinden' von Auschwitz bis heute* (Pink triangles, pink lists: homosexuals and "sound public sentiment" from Auschwitz to the present). "For two years," one chapter reads, "Bundeswehr Captain Michael Lindner has been fighting for the same career opportunities as his colleagues. The captain, whose fitness to lead subordinates is denied as it is for all openly homosexual officers [...] will now take early retirement."¹⁰

The media frenzy surrounding the investigation of General Günter Kießling, who had been denounced as homosexual, turned another early spotlight on how the armed forces treated its gay soldiers; one read about "Soldiers as potential sexual partners," in *Der Spiegel's* phrasing.¹¹ *Die Zeit*, too, tied its reportage on Kießling in January 1984 to the discrimination experienced by a captain who had since entered early retirement, (critically) posing the question "Homosexuality – A security threat?"¹² Even a cursory look at the contemporary press thus turns up other important questions regarding:

4. The professional repercussions bound up in a soldier being discovered to be homosexual, in this case specifically his fitness for leadership positions;
5. Contemporary assessments of homosexuality as a security risk, and with it the question of how Military Counterintelligence (Militärischer Abschirmdienst, MAD) handled the subject;

7 Lutze, "Sexuelle Beziehungen und die Truppe."

8 Schwartz, *Homosexuelle, Seilschaften, Verrat*, 301.

9 Claussen, "Schwule werden abgesetzt." Lindner received multiple letters after the article via the editorial staff at *Stern* that were uncomprehending – not of the discrimination he had faced but the circumstances themselves. "A gay captain gets his pension at 37. A 'normie' goes to the grave at 65. It all gives my taxpayer's heart a good chuckle." Signed "Working stiff, also 37." Thanks are due to Michael Lindner for sharing a copy of the letter.

10 Stümke and Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen*, 377–78.

11 "Soldaten als potentielle Sexualpartner," 22.

12 "Homosexualität – ein Sicherheitsrisiko?"

6. Finally, the point at which the Federal Ministry of Defense (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, BMVg) altered its stance, and the reasons that proved decisive for this shift.

These six overarching questions can in turn be subsumed under the central research topic at hand, which is to consider for the first time in an academic study how the Bundeswehr and Ministry of Defense dealt with homosexual soldiers in the past. Establishing continuities and discontinuities with earlier configurations of the German military has been a particular interest in the process of the author's research, as is providing a comparative perspective towards the contemporary practices of other nations' armed forces. Past practices in the Bundeswehr are also set within a broader societal frame, a method that proved indispensable in contextualizing the research findings. Everything appears particular and exceptional if one's scope of vision is limited to a single organization. The question of how to approach homosexuality did not fall to the Bundeswehr alone but is one which every society and army has had to contend with, and in many places is still wrestling with. Dealing with this issue was not a problem of the Bundeswehr alone, rather it was a challenge for all armed forces. In comparing the Bundeswehr's approach to earlier German armed forces and those of other countries, it is not the *whether* but the *how* that is of interest.

Brief, introductory historical episodes form the basis of the work. Like any other window that this study opens onto the past, they do not lay claim to be complete but instead serve a need to set the Bundeswehr's historical practices within a broader conceptual and analytical framework. Specific historical vignettes are also introduced at appropriate moments throughout each chapter to complement analysis of the Bundeswehr. These "visual axes" come at particularly telling points, wherever noteworthy continuities could be found. The study concludes by considering the practices of other armed forces in the same era, broadening its scope and, critically, serving to contextualize its findings.

The six elements identified above set the framework for this study. The trajectories they reveal ran highly disparate yet contemporaneous courses that could not be meaningfully depicted in chronological fashion; only a systematic approach to the research could do them justice. Within the study's systematic divisions, changes are worked out roughly over a forty-five-year period between 1955 and 2000, preserving a general chronological perspective.

In opting to work with exemplary cases, it was important that the study not deteriorate into a collection of anecdotes, or the analysis become lost among details. A clear structure and consistent orientation toward the broad issues in this work, as determined by the six overarching areas of inquiry, aimed to guard against this.

1. Sources

At a January 2017 workshop entitled “Sexual identity and orientation in the Bundeswehr,” Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen announced a new research work to reconsider past discrimination against homosexual soldiers. The minister repeatedly underscored the importance of the study in the press, including one August 2017 interview with Munich-based queer magazine *Leo*:

Not once has our past handling of the subject been subject to systematic analysis. In preparing for the conference we tried to locate historical examples to present. In the process, we became aware of just how difficult it was to do so. That is why a study that scrutinizes the period between 1955 and 2002 is so important; when somebody was outed, the official cause for discharge was often something totally different. Reasons of health, or something of the sort. This is what makes it so difficult for us to get at the truth by way of the written records.¹³

The vast majority of written sources that proved relevant for this research are housed in the the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv, abbreviated hereinafter to BArch), Military Division, in Freiburg im Breisgau. Within the Ministry of Defense it was primarily documents from the Armed Forces Staff (FüS) and the branch staffs of the Army, Air Force and Navy that were pertinent. The author also made use of the archives of the BMVg’s personnel directorate (abbreviated as P; formerly the Personnel, Social Services and Central Affairs Directorate, or PSZ), and the Legal Affairs Directorate (abbreviated as R). With few exceptions, data protection regulations alone meant that documents pertaining directly to individuals were not available for research. The same held for documents created in the course of MAD security reviews. Disciplinary measures against a soldier that did not reach the level of proceedings before a military service court or summary dismissals under Section 55 (5) of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act (Soldatengesetz, SG) were not retained by personnel departments, but entered a soldier’s individual file once the matter had been concluded. As a general rule, the end of a soldier’s active time in service saw his or her dossier sent to the relevant district recruiting offices, as reservists remained subject to military surveillance.¹⁴ Those files were later transferred to Willich, to the legacy records deposit at the Federal Office of

¹³ Interview with Ursula von der Leyen in multiple outlets of the media group *blu* including *Leo*, August 2017.

¹⁴ Information about disciplinary action can in any event only be obtained within the narrow limits set out under Section 9 of the Military Disciplinary Code (Wehrdisziplinarordnung), e.g. by injured parties in order to exercise their rights. Thanks to Governmental Director Guido Gutzeit at the Leadership Development and Civic Education Center for this and other helpful pointers from a legal perspective.

Bundeswehr Personnel Management. The personal dossiers of soldiers from pay grade A15 and up (lieutenant colonel/commander [navy] and higher) were, and still are, made available to the military archives and stored there at the archive's request. Yet even the personnel records that were available for research were not filed under terms like *homosexuality*; looking for incidents related to the topic at hand would have been like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack. Targeted research based on concrete references provided by contemporary witnesses proved more fruitful, nearly always presaging a "hit."

Court rulings presented another indispensable source. When the author began research in 2017, however, the Federal Archives were still in the initial stages of registering their extensive collection of military service court records, with only a fraction accessible. In light of this gap, which could not be overcome during the course of this research project, the chapter on criminal and disciplinary rulings relied primarily on decisions reached by the military service senates at the Federal Administrative Court (Bundesverwaltungsgericht) and, prior to that, at the Federal Disciplinary Court (Bundesdisziplinarhof). As with nearly every decision handed down at the Supreme Administrative Court, the text of the military service senates' decisions are accessible online for viewing and research at www.wolterskluwer-online.de/. Any military service court records that were incorporated into the Federal Archives by 2019 were searched specifically for judgements pertaining to homosexuality, and the findings included in the present work. The author also searched for – and in some cases managed to find – relevant military service court proceedings based on the concrete suggestions and personal files of contemporary eyewitnesses. The legal cases that have been uncovered in the course of research and presented in what follows thus lay no claim to completeness: they do, however, showcase the spectrum of judicial and disciplinary action in effect at the time.

The dearth of personal files meant that "oral histories," or seeking out and speaking with potential eyewitnesses, took on a consequential role. Sources referred to as "ego-documents" in historical scholarship – the personal documents and records kept by such witnesses, as well as any official files related to their person – were also particularly important.

Yet historical witnesses and their individual recollections took on outsized importance for another reason as well, springing from a methodological problem that arose in the course of research. The nature of the written sources that had been preserved – court decisions, disciplinary proceedings, adverse career decisions and the complaints filed against them, and press reports from the era – meant they invariably gave voice to the difficulties homosexual soldiers came up against while in serving. Biographies that did not encounter these difficulties, by contrast, whether due to the tolerance shown by a fellow soldier or commander, or gay soldiers' discretion while in uniform, were obviously never set down on paper in

connection with homosexuality. It was precisely the uncomplicated careers that standard sources provided no information on whatsoever, risking a view of the situation as entirely problematic. Presumably this would not have captured the overall image of life in the armed forces at the time but would have resulted in an incomplete, even skewed sketch.

The disciplinary or criminal proceedings that have been archived must therefore be taken for the individual cases they were, albeit cases that allow one to draw inferences about the baseline course of action. Case studies provide characteristic answers to the question of how the armed forces addressed homosexual soldiers in its ranks at a given point in time. Those where soldiers did draw attention (i.e. the intrinsically problematic instances) must be complemented and mirrored by those where a soldier's homosexuality did not lead to problems in service. The challenge lay in uncovering these inconspicuous biographies, with the only path to them being via the people who were there. Aside from written sources, personal interviews thus formed a second key pillar of source work, filling out gaps in the archival material. As the former Defense Minister noted in her 2017 interview, it is "difficult to get at the truth by way of the written records [...] which is why we must recruit people to pick up traces along the path to then be able to tell the right stories."¹⁵

The author interviewed over sixty contemporary witnesses for this study, whether in person, over the phone or in writing. The majority were homosexual soldiers, both former and active, but also included were service members who observed and experienced how their gay comrades were treated. The author also contacted former decision-makers at the armed forces and the Federal Ministry of Defense, among them politicians, government officials, generals and officers. Interviews with previous MAD employees who engaged with homosexuality in an official capacity were particularly valuable, offering insight into the intelligence agency's work on the fraught subject, confirming what few written sources were available and filling out important aspects and details. The author remains indebted to all those he interviewed for the faith they placed in him, for opening themselves up and trusting him with what were in part highly personal and intimate memories. This study would not be possible without them. Historians must take particular care in handling "ego-documents" – all oral and written eyewitness memories underwent critical evaluation as sources, a standard tool in historical scholarship.¹⁶

¹⁵ Interview with Ursula von der Leyen in *Leo*, August 2017.

¹⁶ Conversation memoranda or notes that interviewees have confirmed can be found in the author's archives, along with any anonymous interviews reproduced here and all relevant data for the person. They are available for viewing to interested parties.

Michael Lindner served as more than an eyewitness, consistently offering invaluable research advice from Hamburg. Captain Lindner first published an account of his time in the Bundeswehr in 1983, one year after departing the service for health reasons.¹⁷ A 1985 essay followed in which Lindner looked beyond his own case to address more general aspects of the issue (or “dilemma,” in his words) including “military psychiatry, law and social psychology” – still written of course through the lens of personal experience.¹⁸ Lindner continued to fight for the rights of homosexuals in the armed forces after his own career in the Bundeswehr came to an early end, a struggle which included his own demands for reinstatement and financial compensation. He painstakingly assembled every press account, court decision and document pertaining to his case throughout, giving rise to an extensive collection that Lindner offered to the Bundeswehr Leadership Development and Civic Education Center (Zentrum Innere Führung) in 2016. The Center in turn inquired whether there was interest at the Bundeswehr Center of Military History and Social Sciences (Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr, ZMSBw). The ZMSBw’s subsequent acquisition of the collection provided an initial impetus for the present research, even before the BMVg had commissioned the study.

2. The Great Taboo: Contemporary Press and Early Scholarship

“But there wasn’t any discrimination in the Bundeswehr – everything went by the book and was vouched for legally, after all.” Such was the spontaneous reaction of a staff officer when he first learned about the research topic in January 2017. Holding down the opposite end of the range of opinion are conclusions like the one *Zeit* reached in June 2014: “Since its founding in November 1955 up through the end of the last century, the story of how the Bundeswehr has handled homosexuality has been a dark one.”¹⁹

In January 1984, the newspaper *Nürnberger Nachrichten* placed the Wörner–Kießling affair within the broader context of the armed forces’ approach to homosexuality, calling on the Bundeswehr to “finally break down the taboo of homo-

¹⁷ Lindner, “Nicht mehr mein Weg,” 88–102.

¹⁸ Lindner, “Homosexuelle in der Institution Bundeswehr.”

¹⁹ Schadendorf, “Hauptmann Uhlmann ist schwul.”

sexuality.”²⁰ Homosexuality has been the great taboo of practically every modern armed force. In the Bundeswehr, the subject was such an anathema that at one point the Army changed its otherwise universal numeration system for battalions, assigning the 17th Mechanized Infantry Brigade stationed in the Hamburg-Lübeck area number 177 instead of 175.²¹ Number 175 was too reminiscent of Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code, which made homosexual acts between men a criminal offense and – particularly at the table with drinking buddies – ranked as the synonym par excellence for being gay, as in the saying “he’s a hundred seventy-five.” *Der Spiegel* was already making noises about the irregular numeration in January 1984, noting that when it came to homosexuality, the “Bundeswehr higher-ups got all twisted up in knots even over simple questions.”²² General Günter Kießling’s false denouncement as a homosexual and the ensuing media storm first properly turned the armed forces’ treatment of gay soldiers into a hot topic: “Soldiers as potential sexual partners,” ran the headline in *Der Spiegel*. The article quoted a letter from a gay soldier seeking advice:

I’m just plain scared, afraid of being found out [...] That’s why I hold back, avoid any close contact with the other soldiers, shut down conversation. I’m forced to deny my personality, I always have the image of potential repercussions in front of me [...] There’s no more free space for me, I have to keep myself under control 24 hours a day.²³

In their lead story on the Kießling affair, the editors in Hamburg included a finished, but previously unpublished article from 1982 detailing Captain Michael Lindner’s discharge from service:

The captain had made a decisive mistake. Instead of denying his difference and covering it up in the barracks, the career Bundeswehr officer had admitted his homosexual tendencies, and thus broken a taboo. It was all the same “whether a soldier prefers men, women or animals,” one Bundeswehr psychiatrist informed Lindner, all that mattered was that he “kept it to himself.” To this day, the school of the nation still operates under this maxim in order to prevent the bothersome phenomenon of homosexuality from ever becoming an issue in the first place.²⁴

20 Fh., “Das Tabu: Bundeswehr und Homosexualität,” cited in Schwartz, *Homosexuelle, Seilschaften, Verrat*, 302–3.

21 The number 176 had already been assigned to the brigade’s field replacement battalion. For a history of the battalion, initially deployed in 1959 in Hamburg-Rahlstedt as a field artillery unit and later disbanded in 1993 as a mechanized infantry brigade, see <https://pzgrendiv6.de/brigaden/panzergrenadierbrigade-17.html>. (Accessed 12 February 2019, German only).

22 “Soldaten als potentielle Sexualpartner,” 22.

23 Ibid. quoted at further length in Wickel, “In einer Männergesellschaft nicht hinnehmbar.”

24 “Soldaten als potentielle Sexualpartner.”

In 2018 the press singled out Captain Lindner as the “first outed gay in the Bundeswehr.”²⁵ He was not. Lindner was, however, the first gay soldier to find attention in the media, though it was not by happenstance but rather active intervention on his own behalf. *Der Spiegel* first reported on Lindner in July 1981; he was at the time a career soldier who had been declared provisionally unfit for service. “Lindner headed a company from 1974 on. The officer first became a case in 1979 when he came out as gay to his superiors. Lindner entrusted those he told with the information because he no longer felt equipped to handle the ‘psychological pressure.’ In doing so, the captain breached a taboo.”²⁶

In January 1984 *Stern* magazine also broadened its view of Kießling’s case to include the general situation homosexuals found themselves facing in the Bundeswehr, quoting from first-person accounts in a piece entitled, “I put on an act for them.” By *Stern*’s account it was “common practice” to “immediately remove commanding homosexual officers from their post.”²⁷ Whether that was in fact the case is the subject of this study, and it arrives at a differentiated set of conclusions.

In 1984, the picture of everyday life for gay soldiers painted in the press was riddled with contempt and exclusion. *Quick*, a popular tabloid at the time, ran a multi-page, fully illustrated article about “troops’ morale” on the topic. The article quoted a first sergeant as saying “If a guy like that were in my company I’d have a conversation with him to clear things up then send him to the doctor, who would dismiss him from service right away.”²⁸ A lieutenant colonel also spoke up: “We’ve got no use for homos. Order must prevail. Or maybe you’d like your son to be trained by a homo?”²⁹

The first article within the armed forces’ internal press to broach the subject of homosexuality appeared in early 1981 bearing an unmistakably negative message. Beneath a conspicuous headline announcing “Current legal cases: A military superior’s homosexual tendencies,” *Truppenpraxis* magazine reprinted a decision reached at the Federal Administrative Court. “Homosexual tendencies in a military superior,” the verdict read, “specifically an officer, preclude his suitability for promotion [...] Nothing else applies concerning an officer’s fitness for assignment as a superior or further promotion.”³⁰

25 As on the show “Sachsenspiegel,” broadcast on MDR-Fernsehen 27 April 2018. Link accessed 4 May 2018.

26 “Berufliches”: Michael Lindner,” 176.

27 Krause, “Da spiel’ ich denen eine Komödie vor.”

28 “Die Moral der Truppe,” 20.

29 Ibid., 21.

30 Weidinger, “Homosexuelle Neigungen eines militärischen Vorgesetzten”; discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

Five years later in 1986 JS Magazin, a publication put out by the Protestant Church's military chaplaincy, broke with convention to publish its own report entitled "Men in the shadows: Gays in the federal government." Written in a matter-of-fact tone, the article gave a concise sketch of the legal and regulatory landscape to shine an empathetic, if cursory, light on the difficulties young gay soldiers encountered in their daily routine. Military leaders with homosexual "tendencies" experienced "additional problems." "In the view of the [defense] ministry," the article continued, "they are fundamentally unfit for the career of an officer or NCO."³¹

In the late 1990s the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), *Berliner Zeitung* and *Focus* magazine each published individual portraits of homosexual officers and NCOs who it turned out had been sanctioned by the military. The topic took up less media attention after the military liberalized its stance toward homosexual soldiers in 2000; it was not until 2014, in the wake of reports on the outing of a high-profile soccer player, that media outlets turned again to the present-day circumstances of gay service members, often interspersing reports with historical episodes from the time period established for the present study.

In 2002, the left-wing magazine *Gigi: Zeitschrift für sexuelle Emanzipation* devoted its lead article to the Bundeswehr's newfound liberalism toward sexuality in a piece entitled "A whole man thanks to Scharping," a play on the tagline of a well-known advertisement for dog food that replaced the brand name "Chappi" with that of Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping. The magazine's editors took a long view of the past, beginning in 1961 with the scandal surrounding Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces Helmuth von Grolman, continuing through the lawsuits filed by a reserve lieutenant from Münster (pointedly described as the "Plein Affair") and the "Wörner-Kießling affair," and concluding with the Bundeswehr's response to HIV and AIDS, denounced in similar terms as the "AIDS affair."³² (The incident is hardly remembered today, but at the time the media sensation surrounding Parliamentary Commissioner and retired lieutenant general from the Wehrmacht Helmuth von Grolman lasted weeks in 1961: After his homosexual relationship with a seventeen-year-old busboy came out in public,³³ Helmuth von Grolman attempted suicide. He survived. The following day Grolman called for his own dismissal.) *Gigi* repeated the claim that until regulations were changed in

³¹ Wickel, "Männer im Schatten"; see chapter 2 for more detail.

³² Cover title for *Gigi* from March/April 2002: "Ein ganzer Kerl dank Scharping. Sex. Bomb. Sex. Bomb"; in the same issue see also Mildenberger, "Vögeln für Volk und Vaterland".

³³ "Die Bekenntnisse des Krull."

2000, homosexuals “were immediately discharged from service in the event their sexual orientation was discovered.”³⁴

To date the subject has received little to no attention in historical research into the period, with scholarly publications all stemming from the social sciences or sociological writing. One of the first academic papers to consider the professional discrimination homosexuals experienced lamented in 1977 that, as of yet, the military service senates still had not adopted the “liberal turn” taken by the civilian disciplinary senates at the Federal Administrative Court.³⁵ The article’s author, Günther Gollner, took the Bundeswehr to task for continuing “into the present day” to censure “homoeerotic activity that would not have constituted a punishable offense even under the earlier version of §175 with the harshest disciplinary measures,” and even after consensual homosexual activity between adults had been decriminalized.³⁶ Removal from service was the standard procedure, Gollner wrote. Four pages down, however, one reads that there had been a “clear decline” in disciplinary rulings on homosexual activity since its decriminalization.³⁷ The Bundeswehr had also imposed a “hiring and promotion freeze” on homosexuals in leadership positions, “even in instances where homosexual activity could not be proven in the first place.”³⁸ Gollner again: “To avoid misunderstandings – the Bundeswehr should not turn into a ‘men’s brothel,’ of course. Fitness criteria, however, should be both verifiable and concrete.”³⁹

In 2006, the Working Group for Homosexual Members of the Bundeswehr (Arbeitskreis Homosexueller Angehöriger der Bundeswehr, AHsAB) published a short history of the armed forces’ relationship to homosexuality from its founding up through 2005.⁴⁰ This was followed in 2007 by an academic piece Karl-Heinz Biesold wrote for the *Zeitschrift für Sexualmedizin, Sexualtherapie und Sexualwissenschaft*. Aside from addressing heterosexual topics related to the armed forces’ opening fully to women in 2001, the article was one of the first of its kind to concentrate on the military’s approach to homosexuality between 1955 and 2005.⁴¹ Yet with these few exceptions, the same can be said for the present research topic as for research on sexuality and the military in general: “To date there has been astonish-

³⁴ Heilmann, “Helm ab zum Sex!”

³⁵ Gollner, “Disziplinarsanktionen gegenüber Homosexuellen im öffentlichen Dienst,” 113.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 116.

³⁸ Ibid., 112–13.

³⁹ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁰ In February 2020 the AHsAB changed its name to QueerBw.

⁴¹ Biesold, “Der Umgang mit Sexualität in der Bundeswehr.”

ingly little academic research [...] It's a difficult topic that is also subject to certain taboos. People do not venture into it."⁴²

Michael Schwartz's work also deserves mention in this context. While his research does not explicitly concern the armed forces or even the Bundeswehr, he covers a good deal of terrain in *Homosexuelle, Seilschaften, Verrat* (Homosexuals, political cliques and betrayal), a study from 2019 that traces the topic's appearance in politics, armies and secret services as a "twentieth century transnational stereotype."⁴³ Schwartz devotes one chapter to the scandal that enveloped General Günter Kießling in 1983–84 (although his account is based largely on earlier literature and press publications, with the exception of a more recent article by Heiner Möllers).⁴⁴ In doing so he looks beyond the affair to consider how the Bundeswehr's attitude toward homosexuals within its ranks was perceived, both at the time and subsequently,⁴⁵ and confirms the scandal's enduring effects by documenting the number of reports it received in the press. Those effects continued to make themselves felt in the new millennium, with journalists quickly reaching for the scandal of fifteen years previous to demonstrate just how significantly society had changed since politicians began to openly admit to their own homosexuality, the civil unions law (*Lebenspartnerschaftsgesetz*) passed and the Bundeswehr fully opened to gays and lesbians in 2000. "Changes in how homosexuality is treated can be made out from the scandals of the past twenty years. In late 1983, General Günter Kießling was fired," wrote the *Tagesspiegel* in June 2001.⁴⁶ According to Schwartz's account, by 2001 one no longer had to fear being pilloried in public as mercilessly as General Kießling had been in 1984.⁴⁷ He quoted an article from FAZ, which recalled "with stupefaction" that the "witch hunt against General Kießling" lay only fifteen years in the past. "It is precisely because of the speed of the change that a 'contempo-

42 Linda von Keyserlingk, an employee at the Military History Museum in Dresden. Cited in Clarke, "Das Militärhistorische Museum Dresden," 34.

43 Schwartz, *Homosexuelle, Seilschaften, Verrat*.

44 See Möllers, "Die Kießling-Affäre." Earlier literature includes Ramge, *Die grossen Polit-Skandale* and Reichard, *Hardthöhe Bonn*.

45 Schwartz quotes historian Katharina Ebner, for example, as saying that the Kießling affair showed that even in 1982, homosexuals were still unwelcome as soldiers in the Bundeswehr. It was "not so much a single person's susceptibility to blackmail and the attendant security risks" that stood behind the scandal "as a general rejection of homosexuality within the Bundeswehr." Ebner, *Religion im Parlament*, cited in Schwartz, *Homosexuelle, Seilschaften, Verrat*, 279–80.

46 Robert von Rimscha writing for the *Tagesspiegel* 22 June 2001, cited in Schwartz, *Homosexuelle, Seilschaften, Verrat*, 324.

47 Schwartz, *Homosexuelle, Seilschaften, Verrat*, 325.

rary history of homosexuality' is so important," it continued.⁴⁸ In this respect, the present study hopes to make a contribution to this emerging history.

In 2019 the Kießling affair, "the Bundeswehr's greatest scandal," served as the subject of a monograph from the pen of Heiner Möllers.⁴⁹ At the end of that year a far less dramatic but nonetheless "inglorious case study" of the scandal and the fallout for MAD appeared in Hellmut Hammerich's history of the Bundeswehr intelligence agency up to 1990. In his otherwise comprehensive work, Hammerich does not address how the intelligence service dealt with homosexual individuals under its review outside of a single specific instance.⁵⁰

Friederike Brühöfener is responsible for one of the few works that devotes itself explicitly to the legal and professional situation facing gays in the Bundeswehr. It appeared in a 2019 anthology that resulted from a 2015 conference held by the German Studies Association in Washington D.C. Brühöfener focuses on debates in the 1960s and 1970s concerning the 1969 decision to revise §175 and their impact on the armed forces. She also considers the changes made to conscription regulations in 1977 and the possibility, even obligation, that homosexual men have had since to serve in the military. Brühöfener summarized the resulting conflict in the Army's continued refusal at the time to recognize homosexuals as fit for leadership positions with the catchphrase: "Fit to serve, but not fit to command."⁵¹

Brühöfener had tackled the subject once before in 2015, delving into the sources for an essay entitled the "Discourse about the Moral Conduct of Bundeswehr Soldiers and Officers during the Adenauer Era." She came to the conclusion that West German rearmament had "offered contemporaries an opportunity to stipulate not only acceptable soldierly behavior, but also adequate male behavior in general."⁵²

Jens Schadendorf also gave the Bundeswehr careful consideration in "It's my Bundeswehr too': Queer and an Officer – Dark Tales and Fractious Civilians in

48 Allmeier, "Schwul zu sein bedarf es wenig," FAZ 1 August 1998 as cited in Schwartz, *Homosexuelle, Seilschaften, Verrat*, 323.

49 Möllers, *Die Affäre Kießling*. The quote is the book's subtitle.

50 Hammerich, "Stets am Feind!" 261–83.

51 Brühöfener, "Contested Masculinities."

52 Brühöfener, "Sex and the Soldier," 523. The article abstract continues: "In the context of heightened concerns about juvenile delinquents (so-called *Halbstarken*), female prostitution, homosexuality, and the distribution of pornographic materials, West German citizens became interested in the social and sexual conduct of Bundeswehr soldiers and officers. Whereas some still considered the military to be a 'school of the nation' and of proper masculinity, others worried about the armed forces as a possible breeding ground for immorality. Partly sharing these concerns, government representatives, members of the Bundestag, church officials, and military commanders sought to guide soldiers' behavior, emphasizing the ideal of the 'complete' (*vollkommene*) Christian male-breadwinner family."

Uniform,” a twenty-page chapter from a 2014 book entitled *Der Regenbogen-Faktor* (The rainbow factor).⁵³ Schadendorf provides a brief overview of the Bundeswehr’s first four decades based on interviews with former and active soldiers before pivoting to the changes introduced at the turn of the millennium and the resulting situation for homosexual officers and NCOs. In 2001 Anja Meisner published a concise university seminar paper on homosexuals in the military under the title “Minority in the Armed Forces.”⁵⁴

Another early scholarly publication that dealt expressly with homosexuality in the Bundeswehr appeared in 1993. “Homosexuality and Military Service in Germany,” written by the former director of the Bundeswehr Institute of Social Sciences (Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut der Bundeswehr, SOWI) Bernhard Fleckenstein, was originally prepared as a lecture in the UK city of Hull. The article only appeared in English despite the fact that an original version in German exists and about which the BMVg received multiple external inquiries.⁵⁵

The author also published a number of articles in the course of his research for *Taboo and Tolerance*, and in November 2017 the work was cited in the *Washington Post* as evidence that the Bundeswehr was giving the subject new consideration.⁵⁶ In late August 2019 Bild picked up on the topic in a detailed interview with a private who had been dismissed from the German Navy in 1964 for his homosexual orientation.⁵⁷ This book will not go into any further detail at present on the extensive literature addressing the history of homosexuals in Germany before and after 1945, or the past and present situation of homosexual soldiers in other armed forces, although relevant studies will be cited where appropriate.

53 Schadendorf, *Der Regenbogen-Faktor: Schwule und Lesben in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft – Von Außenseitern zu selbstbewussten Leistungsträgern* (The rainbow factor: gays and lesbians in economy and society – from outsiders to self-assured performers). Schadendorf picked up on formulations used by the author of the present work in a 2013 article about the Wörner–Kießling affair and homosexuality written for *Militärgeschichte: Zeitschrift für historische Bildung*, a publication internal to the armed forces. Schadendorf considered the “unequivocal admission of this part of the armed forces’ history” an exception in Bundeswehr publications. *Der Regenbogen-Faktor*, 69, in reference to Storkmann, “Ein widerwärtiges Schmierstück.”

54 Meisner, “Minderheiten in den Streitkräften.”

55 Fleckenstein, “Homosexuality and Military Service in Germany.” For more on Fleckenstein’s piece see chapters 1 and 4.

56 Storkmann, “Don’t Ask. Don’t Tell”; Storkmann, “79 cm sind schwul”; Storkmann, “Das große Tabu”; Noack, “As Trump attempts a transgender military ban.”

57 Scheck and Utess, “Was wir damals gemacht haben, war kein Verbrechen.” The author of the present study conducted an extensive in-person interview with the private, Dierk Koch, in February 2018. Koch also lent the author an unpublished manuscript of his personal memoirs with the working title “Meine Unvergessenen Freunde” (My unforgotten friends) for use in this work.

3. What about Lesbian Soldiers?

When presenting the initial results of his research, the author nearly always encountered one question: “And what about lesbian women?” It is common knowledge that up until the turn of the millennium, women’s role in the German armed forces was limited to the medical corps. Historically, this meant that the number of women serving as fixed-term or career soldiers was minuscule in comparison to the total number of people serving in the armed forces. Still, from 1975 on, and in greater numbers after 1989–91, women were able to volunteer for the medical corps and military bands, and there must have been lesbians among them, statistically speaking. With the exception of two cases from 1999 and 2000, the author was unable to locate any documents pertaining to lesbian soldiers within the extensive archival holdings of the BMVg and the armed forces for the established period of research; the same applied for military service court rulings based on sexual activity between female soldiers. It almost seems as though lesbian soldiers entirely failed to surface on the radar of the Ministry of Defense, military leadership and the Bundeswehr judiciary.⁵⁸ Nor was any reference found to how inter- or transgender soldiers were treated during the period of investigation. Based on the written sources that were available, the present study had to limit itself to the Bundeswehr’s treatment of male homosexuals. The author was and remains aware of this gap. He was able to conduct eyewitness interviews with two women who served in the medical corps during the 1990s.

⁵⁸ *Magnus*, a magazine dedicated to a gay target audience was still noting in April 1996 that “Lesbians don’t so much as enter the minds of superiors.” Glade, “In Reih und Glied!” (The BMVg kept a copy of the article for its archives: BArch, BW 2/38355).