

II Among Comrades: Life as a Homosexual Soldier through the Lens of Individual Memory and Experience

Military culture rests on the unquestioned assumption of heterosexuality and heteronormativity.¹

In 1999, a gay staff sergeant was interviewed for the magazine *Focus* about his experiences among the troops. Asked “how [he] responded to homophobic comments during [his] time in the service,” he replied that when he confronted comrades as to “why they made fun of minorities” what came back was “mostly hot air.” Soldiers would verbally abuse fellow soldiers for their homosexuality, calling them “ass-fuckers” or “gay sows who belonged in the psychiatric unit, not the Bundeswehr.” Superiors intervened “all too rarely, unfortunately.” The problem, the sergeant continued, was “intolerant and ossified leadership in the Bundeswehr and Ministry of Defense.” “They would have preferred having only heterosexuals in the Bundeswehr. The prevailing opinion was that gay soldiers had authority issues and would see sexual partners in subordinates.”²

Speaking in 2016, one sociologist professed to know that “anti-gay and misogynist turns of phrase [still] play a widespread role in everyday life in the military. Homophobic speech is not perceived as a form of discrimination, but a constitutive element of training.”³ And in 1970 a physician at division level found that “one part of homosexuals [were] good soldiers,” one part demanded to be released from military service and a third “undoubtedly” suffered difficulties amid the “male society of the Bundeswehr.” He cited one homosexual soldier as evidence with what were (allegedly) the soldier’s own words: “You try taking a shower with three cute girls.”⁴ With the comparison, the doctor was apparently looking to illustrate one of the everyday dilemmas homosexual soldiers encountered.

In 1980 Dr. Rudolf Brickenstein, a Bundeswehr psychiatrist who had positioned himself as (or at least claimed to be) *the* specialist in treating homosexual soldiers, delivered a presentation on the daily challenges homosexuals faced in military

¹ Botsch, *Soldatsein*, 207.

² “Schwule in die Bundeswehr.”

³ Botsch, *Soldatsein*, 214–15.

⁴ BAArch, BW 24/7180: Division physician for the 6th Mechanized Infantry Division to the BMVg, 2 April 1970.

service.⁵ “Living in tight quarters with their comrades [presented] a truly great burden” for some; in “tempting situations” it was often difficult for them “to keep to themselves.” They rarely knew how to proceed “when roommates pressured them to share their own sexual experiences with girlfriends after a weekend off. Such men are usually quite sensitive, they fear that their homosexuality will be discovered and then they’ll be shunned or made a laughing stock.”

The question, Brickenstein continued, was whether the instructions given by troop physicians and unit leaders were in fact “working in the direction of the heterosexual majority showing greater tolerance to the homosexual minority.” A “certain percentage of soldiers” exhibited tolerance while a further portion was “indifferent,” “yet the overwhelming number of soldiers of all ranks [...] holds the position ‘These gays are simply awful. We don’t even want to give them our hand, because we don’t know where they just had it.’ This phrase is taken as representative of many and comes from a colonel at the Ministry of Defense, incidentally.” Brickenstein reported coming across “mostly highly qualified fixed-term and career soldiers who had so quieted their homosexual desires that they did not have any run-ins with disciplinary or criminal law, but experienced difficulties while serving nevertheless.” He had found

especially sensitive soldiers, often with artistic ambitions, who set everything on keeping their homosexual orientation and activities hidden from their comrades, subordinates and superiors. Yet they live with the perpetual fear that it will come out after all, for example if other soldiers see them in the company of their boyfriends or visiting certain locales, or because they do not report back on heterosexual adventures like the other soldiers.

The contemporary account tallies with those of many former, and some active-duty, soldiers interviewed for this study. One lieutenant colonel, for example, reported that as a young lieutenant he would not visit the gay scene in the large city nearest to him but travel farther afield to rule out the danger of being seen by comrades.⁶

Brickenstein also drew from clinical experience in 1980 to relay the case of a captain who had kept his homosexuality secret from comrades – until, that is, he met someone “who completely turned [his] life around and gave it a new meaning.” The career soldier applied for demotion to fixed-term service, at first without listing homosexuality as a reason. When his application was denied he appealed, this time

5 BArch, BW 24/5553: Lt. Col. (MC) Dr. Rudolph Brickenstein, “Sachverständigenreferat aus psychiatrischer Sicht” delivered at a meeting of the BMVg medical advisory board’s committee on preventative health and care and military examinations 18 April 1980 (the following quotes from the same source). Also available in BW 2/31225.

6 Interview with Lieutenant Colonel D., Berlin, 12 February 2018.

disclosing his sexual orientation. This too was rebuffed. The rejected appeal was forwarded to him via every department, leading to nasty commentary from several comrades. The captain fell into a severe depression.⁷ Anyone who thought Brickenstein might be demonstrating empathy for homosexual soldiers in the problems they faced was disabused of the notion just a few sentences later: "Here too, the question arises as to whether it is possible, desirable or permissible to instruct the military environment in a form of tolerance that is often alien to its nature, with such education sometimes perceived by heterosexuals as impinging on their dignity."⁸ Note that it is the human dignity of heterosexuals which is of concern here, not the discriminated homosexual minority (an absurd train of thought compared to today's standards, though equally so in 1980).

Brickenstein also reported on a counter-model to the "timid" officer living "with the perpetual fear" of discovery, and that was a group of fixed-term and career soldiers who "openly and unreservedly" admitted their homosexuality and demanded equal rights and treatment from their military environs. Their candor left them invulnerable to blackmail; they demanded they be allowed access to classified material, and that they should not encounter any difficulties in pursuing a military career. Brickenstein characterized the position of these officers as being that "it has to be just as easy for a homosexual to become a three-star general as a heterosexual. It simply is not true that a homosexual superior lets himself be led more forcefully by personal inclinations and antipathies in handing out assignments than a heterosexual officer."⁹ This was in 1980, mind you, long before the BMVg would hear the exact same argumentation from a gay soldiers' interest group in the 1990s.

1991 saw simultaneous publication of the article "Gay and in the service?!" in military periodicals *Heer*, *Luftwaffe* and *Blaue Jungs*. The piece sought by the editors' own admission "to break with taboo and prompt debate," answering the question "Gays in the military – are they even there?" with a succinct "Of course they are."¹⁰ "The vast majority" would keep their sexual orientation concealed in service, for "many reasons." "Most gays take up the constant charade for fear of being discriminated against and isolated if they do not." The article quoted soldiers directly, one with the comment that "gay jokes, moronic prejudices and

7 BArch, BW 24/5553: Lt. Col. (MC) Dr. Rudolph Brickenstein, "Sachverständigenreferat aus psychiatrischer Sicht," delivered at a meeting of the BMVg medical advisory board's committee on preventative health and care and military examinations 18 April 1980. Also available in BW 2/31225. A summarized account is given in: Lindner, "Homosexuelle in der Institution Bundeswehr," 225.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Haubrich, "Schwul und beim Bund?!" 34.

crowding about one's sexual prowess do not exactly encourage you to come out as gay." Another countered, saying he had "hardly experienced anything of the sort on staff duty in *Abi-Quartal*."¹¹ The author of the article, by all accounts a conscript himself, made out two tendencies: "The more educated people are, the more tolerant they are toward gays," while the "manlier" someone felt himself to be, the more decisively he rejected them." The author found the Bundeswehr to have made a crucial misstep on this count, for instead of urging greater tolerance on the part of the discriminating majority, it blamed the victim. "Would you admonish a soldier teased by his comrades for short-sightedness and thick lenses to wear glasses in secret?!" the article quoted another soldier as saying, before summing up the general dilemma gays in the military faced: "If you confess openly you're considered a potential risk; if you hide, you're considered liable to blackmail and a threat to security." One soldier introduced as Mark had the final word: "I really don't understand the Bundeswehr. By treating gays as deviant and dangerous, those very prejudices, and with them the problems, become entrenched."¹²

Section Füs I 4 in the defense ministry responded directly to the public criticism three months later. "Mark's" view was incorrect by mistaking the cause for the effect; to understand the Bundeswehr's behavior toward homosexual soldiers, the "social reality," or society's stance on the matter, had to be taken into account. The "prejudices and dislike" that existed among the majority of the population exerted an influence on the "behavior and sensibilities" of individual actors toward homosexuals, ranging from "slight distancing" to "complete rejection."¹³ This created a risk that "homosexuals would be deliberately provoked or made a laughing stock." As a force of conscripts, the Bundeswehr was "impacted to a special degree by the positions, attitudes and judgements in society that work their impact on a young man for close to eighteen years before he enters the Bundeswehr [...]. The social reality vis-a-vis homosexuality is a factor for the Bundeswehr in terms of its reputation, acceptance and operational readiness."¹⁴ Only with changes in society's overall attitude toward homosexuality, the ministry informed its soldiers, would the Bundeswehr would follow suit.

Heer, Luftwaffe and *Blaue Jungs* were journals all directed primarily at young soldiers and conscripts, and the piece focused on problems specific to them. Nine-

11 The *Abi-Quartal* was a colloquial term for new draftees who were called up every year on July 1 after completing their Abitur, or high school examinations.

12 All quotes from Haubrich, "Schwul und beim Bund?!" 34–35.

13 Statement issued by the BMVg office Füs I 4 in "Reaktionen und Stellungnahme zum Thema 'Schwul und beim Bund?!'." The statement is also available in BArch, BW 2/31224: BMVg, Füs I 4 to Füs I 3, 4 November 1991.

14 Ibid.

teen or twenty years old on average, most who were homosexual would still be in the process of coming out, or just before doing so. Did serving in the Bundeswehr speed up the process? “On the contrary – all the pressure disturbed [it] in my case,” came one soldier’s reply. “The internal pressure grew and grew, I only made it through the last three months using sedatives.” The “natural solution” was switching to a barracks close to home, which helped one soldier a great deal. “There I could go home at night and be with my boyfriend. That made it no problem for me to keep the two separate and act ‘inconspicuously’ on duty.”¹⁵ The soldier’s account is in line with the memories of other former conscripts interviewed for this study; most were stationed close to home after basic training, where after work they could return to their normal lives with boyfriends or partners without it impacting their military service.

Three months after “Gay and in the service?!” was published the magazine editors picked up the hot potato again, this time publishing letters from readers which had reached them. One NCO lauded the editorial board for its courage in broaching the topic: “[It was] at least a start to dispense with all the generally idiotic prejudice.” Being gay himself, he wrote that “it’s fine if somebody knows, but I’m not just going to let everybody in on it.” The NCO hoped that “at some point” it would be “possible to say ‘I’m gay,’ even in the service.”¹⁶ The editors quoted praise from another soldier whose eyes had “grown wider than ever before” when he spotted the headline while leafing through the magazine. It was “a fantastic piece.” For him fitness to serve in positions of leadership did not depend on sexual predisposition, which made denying it legally “pure discrimination.”

The opposite is true. A considerable number of the soldiers I know to be gay are among the best. Dismissing these soldiers wouldn’t just be a loss for the Bundeswehr. It wouldn’t just mean affirming prejudice. It would also be taking their purpose in life from them. For me, as for most gay soldiers, being a soldier means more than simply pursuing a career.¹⁷

A lieutenant colonel also wrote in. “Well then! The taboo has been broken, the existence of homosexuals in the Bundeswehr is no longer being denied [...] The sexual

¹⁵ Haubrich, “Schwul und beim Bund?!” 35.

¹⁶ Reactions and statements on the article “Schwul und beim Bund?!” As with many other letters to the editor, the BMVg kept the NCO’s letter for its files unredacted with a service address (BArch, BW 2/38355: BMVg, Füs I 4). Evidently the editors at the troop magazine forwarded them to the ministry (on request?).

¹⁷ Ibid. Copy of a letter to the editor (anonymous) in BArch, BW 2/38355: BMVg, Füs I 4.

revolution of the 70s, the gay struggle for tolerance and freedom – has any of this gone on in the Bundeswehr?”¹⁸

“Sooner or (rather) later,” changing notions of morality, marriage and family, love and sexuality would also overtake the Bundeswehr. For the time being things still looked different – conscripts were “very young and immature,” and even if they were homosexual themselves “they either were not concerned yet with their own coming-out and all the problems associated with it, or were far too preoccupied.” Officers and NCOs were “on the treadmill” and conformed to the expectations of their social surroundings.¹⁹ Comparing the reprinted excerpts with the full range of letters archived at the BMVg revealed that the magazines’ editors did a good job in selecting the overarching concerns and key passages for publication.

Praise for the courage of the author and editors also came from Michael Lindner, an early leader in the struggle for the gay soldiers’ rights.²⁰ Lindner, a former captain and company commander who was given early retirement after being declared unfit for service due to health challenges, wrote that he and other officers had been “truly astonished” by the piece. “What it means to be allowed to read something like this in official magazines can only be fully appreciated by someone who has experienced how the Bundeswehr as an institution has worn people down and broken them in this respect.” Even at the time of Lindner’s writing, with the article’s appearance in troop publications, “a handful of tragic developments had [again] come into view.” Clearly writing with a view to homosexual officers he knew personally, Lindner described the “callousness” with which they were treated. “They have to leave the Bundeswehr,” one lieutenant colonel had said.

Lindner also wrote to the article’s author, Wolfgang Haubrich, directly.²¹ Haubrich had “hit the bullseye smack dab in the middle” with his piece; “many cannot believe that it could have been printed at all and still consider it a ‘mistake’ [...] But it also took courage for whoever approved it, and hopefully they will not get too much grief now.” Lindner wrote that the article would help people with a same-sex orientation “find their place in society sooner.” For many comrades, the author had taken up the role of “fate” with his article.

¹⁸ Ibid. Copy of a complete letter to the editor (anonymous), also in BArch, BW 2/38355: BMVg, Füs I 4.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Letter from Ret. Captain Michael Lindner to the editors of troop periodicals *Heer*, *Luftwaffe* and *Blaue Jungs*, 8 January 1992. A copy is available in BArch, BW 2/38355: BMVg, Füs I 4.

²¹ Ret. Captain Michael Lindner in a letter to the author Wolfgang Haubrich, 6 January 1992, copy in BArch, BW 2/38355: BMVg, Füs I 4.

Then there are the discussions ranging throughout the barracks and canteens, which are now forcing everyone, even those who do not see themselves as impacted by it, to think again [...] The fact that a young heterosexual conscript has brought about something that should have been done long ago by the armed forces command staffs leaves one speechless. But it was already clear beforehand, and it does not only apply to this army, that rigid military structures simply cannot do without the intelligence of conscripts.²²

The 1991 article was not the first of its kind to appear in a periodical intended for soldiers. JS magazine had broken with conventions once before in 1986, publishing a one-page report on “men in the shadows.”²³ The article devoted words of great empathy to the group in question:

It is often precisely during their time in the Bundeswehr that young conscripts detect signs of their same-sex orientation. Knowing their surroundings reject the tendency, at first they try to repress it. They are often still quite away from homosexual experiences, let alone self-acceptance. Superiors rarely suspect that a personal struggle of the sort even exists, and are generally helpless if they do come into contact with it. Help in emerging from seclusion and hypocrisy related to sexual orientation is just about the last thing a soldier can, or does expect from his superior. Everyone in the barracks brags about their sexual escapades with the ladies on returning from the weekend. The homosexual conscript – around twenty years old, still unsure of himself – can hardly put up with it, cannot keep up [...] he may even hang a picture of a girl in his locker.²⁴

1. Memories of Rejection and Tolerance

Eyewitness interviews provided an indispensable mainstay for this study. All interviews required critical evaluation as sources; memories of events dating back thirty, forty or even fifty years in the past are inflected by subsequent experience and may have evolved over time. Recollections and perspectives that were perforce subjective could only be verified in a handful of instances. The author has done just that, however, as far as was possible and within a justifiable period of time, managing in the process to identify a number of inaccurate statements and stories

²² Ibid.

²³ Wickel, “Männer im Schatten.” Next to the article the editors printed a text box with a number for the “Pink Telephone” service of the gay counseling center “Rosa Hilfe,” and offered to send contact information for regional “homosexual and church” groups upon request (“mailed impartially, recipient addresses will be destroyed immediately.”)

²⁴ Ibid. These sentences did not come from Wickel. Rather, he copied them verbatim, with some omissions, from an essay published in 1985 by Michael Lindner. See Lindner, “Homosexuelle in der Institution Bundeswehr,” 222–23.

and rule them out for further use. Eyewitness memories that could not be confirmed were evaluated on the basis of their plausibility. One challenge throughout consisted in setting written and oral sources into meaningful dialogue with one another wherever possible, juxtaposing them and weaving them together to depict the facts of the matter.

Everyone was subject to medical examination prior to entering military service. Down to the last, all those interviewed affirmed that they were not addressed about their possible homosexuality. Surprisingly for an era whose regulations still declared homosexuals generally unfit for service, it seems the topic did not come up.²⁵

Interviewees also unanimously recalled not having the time or energy to spare on any grandiose sexual thoughts of comrades during the first weeks and months of service; basic training had been “far too stressful.”²⁶ Following basic training the range of recollections expands. Most homosexual conscripts were stationed close to home and would return there every day after duty and continue living with their boyfriends or partners as accustomed, without it affecting their service. Gay soldiers who were not stationed close to home were likewise able to leave the barracks any night they were not on duty; there was no need to keep a look out for sexual partners among comrades as they could follow private whims and fancies “outside.”

Speaking before the Bundestag in 1984, Parliamentary State Secretary Peter Kurz Würzbach himself referred to the opportunities soldiers had to go about their private lives undisturbed beyond the barracks gate. “Differently from previous armed forces [...] every evening around five, five-thirty or six o’clock the barracks gate practically stands ajar, unless one has a specific assignment, of which there are not very many [...] The majority of soldiers can head out into their garrison city, wherever they like.”²⁷

One conscript who entered the air force in 1973 did not recall his homosexuality “ever being an issue,” either during basic training or later on. He had not “entered the service to get to know men, but actually to learn something.” When he “noticed the tendency, it made [him] unhappy.” Nobody had known about his

²⁵ One former soldier did not recall being asked his sexual orientation or bringing it up when he underwent inspection at his local draft board in 1971. That had been just fine by him; he wanted to go into the service. Under no circumstances did he want to be found unfit based on his orientation – “I was living in a small town,” he said, “I wanted to get out, live a little.” Interview with K., Cologne, 9 April 2019.

²⁶ For example, eyewitness interview with K., Cologne, 9 April 2019.

²⁷ German Bundestag, 10th legislative period, 47th Session, 19 January 1984, typed transcript, 3378.

sexual orientation, however, so he “wasn’t ever teased about it either.” In general homosexuality had been a taboo subject, “you weren’t allowed to show that you were different.”²⁸

Another interviewee who served as a conscript in Schleswig-Holstein from 1959 to 1960 brought a heterosexual perspective to bear.²⁹

Something wasn’t right. The office NCO received me with a warm hand squeeze. It didn’t take me long to work out that he was homosexual. Gaby, the secretary told me so as well. Somehow they had searched me out using my passport picture, maybe seen me at some point. The staff sergeant and the new first sergeant were obviously buddies and the staff sergeant wanted to do the [first sergeant] a favor, who wanted to do one in turn for the desk sergeant.

After basic training the interviewee had thus been assigned to the office. There the “desk sergeant” (sergeant on staff duty) had left him and his coworkers “in peace.”

Everyone knew he was homosexual. That’s just how it was. Nobody bothered about it any further [...] One time though during winter maneuvers in Münsingen, he couldn’t keep hold of himself. I had to spend the night together with him in a big bucket truck. There were two benches. For sleeping. One each. That night he came over to me and said ‘Now let’s have a quick fuck for once’ [...] I said [to him] ‘If you so much as touch me I’ll make a woman out of you!’³⁰ That settled the matter. He didn’t try anything ever again.

There were two gay privates first class in the same company.

They drove trucks. Everyone knew that they got along together. They were proper lads and comrades, we had sympathy for them more than anything. There were never any mean words. Even in the common shower with twenty-five men, nothing more than the usual obscenities between soldiers. I personally found all the antics about soldiers’ homosexuality in the media and Bundeswehr administration pathetic. They should just be left alone. It’s not like you have to go bed with them.

Another witness recalled almost exclusively positive experiences of tolerance looking back on his time in the Bundeswehr in the early 1970s. Drafted into the light infantry in 1971, then reenlisting a year later as a fixed-term soldier and candidate for NCO in the reserve, following basic training the interviewee had been assigned to a support company in Hessen where he had been quite open about his

²⁸ Interview with M., Hagen, 19 February 2019.

²⁹ Email from Roland S. to the author, 25 July 2017.

³⁰ In plain English, he was threatening to cut off the gay man’s penis and/or testicles without saying it directly.

orientation.³¹ All twelve soldiers in the unit he led were aware of his homosexuality, he “never hid it.” There were other homosexual soldiers in his company, too – he “took a look around and spotted others.”³² The interviewee, K., could think back to numerous homosexual encounters with soldiers within his own company and others in the battalion, and stated expressly that he had never witnessed homosexual comrades experiencing discrimination. Not even homophobic slurs – otherwise a regular feature of soldiers’ speech patterns – had been heard within the company. The eyewitness accounted for the uncommonly broad acceptance with the large percentage of happy-go-lucky Rhinelanders in his company (“We had a more relaxed view of everything”) and homosexuality’s taboo status. “Even in a company as tolerant as my own, homosexuality wasn’t discussed openly. We just went ahead with it, though we didn’t talk about it with other, non-gay soldiers. Homosexuality didn’t exist as a topic, it was taboo, which was exactly why it could be pursued without a big fuss.” The company sergeant major had also had a considerable hand in creating the tolerant environment; speaking with reference to a handful of the soldiers in his company who were open about their homosexuality, the sergeant major had said it was all the same to him what they did in bed, the main thing was that service was completed properly. The soldiers would not want to know what he got up to in bed with his wife either, he added.

Two years after finishing his first fixed term as soldier and leaving the army, the eyewitness was reassigned to his old company for a fixed term before being promoted to NCO in 1975 – all despite the fact that his sexual orientation was an open secret, even generally known about within the company and battalion. He recalled the next four years as being almost entirely positive, with only a single negative incident sticking out. At the barracks mess hall, the NCO had once had an “unpleasant encounter with a group of sapper engineers also stationed in the barracks.” He no longer had the exact exchange of words in mind, but as he went to sit at the engineers’ table they had more or less replied there was no room for gays at the table. A number of soldiers from the NCO’s own company came to his side, voicing their support. One thing led to the next, and in the end fists flew. A report

31 Interview with K., Cologne, 9 April 2019. The following sketch of his time in the service is based on this conversation alone, and ultimately could not be verified. Only the parts deemed plausible are reproduced in what follows.

32 “All the gay soldiers knew each other,” K. added. “You could also tell someone was gay by the uniform. We always wore our uniforms tight up against our bodies, and would order one size down in field tunics and pants for our dressing at the uniform store. ‘But won’t you have to be able to move in your pants!’,” the ladies in the store asked in shock. We had other priorities than comfort: “That’ll be just fine!”

to both companies' superiors followed, and all involved parties had to report to the company chief.

None of the soldiers gave the actual reason for the fight when questioned, however – the insulting words spoken to the homosexual NCO by the sappers. This let the company head rule the incident a common fight between two companies and branches of service, and file it away.

On the whole, the eyewitness, who retired after his term of service was up with the rank staff sergeant in 1978, had “never experienced discrimination in over six years in the Bundeswehr; nothing, not a thing – no insults, no punishment, not even nasty words (aside from the incident in the mess hall with the sappers, though that did not have any other negative consequences). I have nothing bad to say about the Bundeswehr.”³³

Other service members were similarly able to think back to comrades' tolerance, albeit less during the 1970s than in the 1990s. One first sergeant in the reserve for example recalled meeting his first boyfriend during basic military service – not in the army, but at the same time – after entering the Bundeswehr “not entirely of my own free will” in 1994.

It was obviously all quite confusing to me at first, so there was no possibility of coming out; I had to get clear with myself first. Fortunately, I was in a six-bed room at the time and there were only two of us. My roommate was really fantastic. He could see my insecurity and helped me a great deal in making peace with myself. When my boyfriend would come to visit me in the barracks over the weekends (you had to ask the company sergeant for permission and pay a fee, but otherwise no other questions were asked), my roommate didn't have any problems with my boyfriend being in the room. For a long time the three of us were really close friends.³⁴

Many former heterosexual soldiers agreed in retrospect that “being gay” was taboo, and never discussed openly as a topic. “It wasn't allowed to exist so it didn't, apart from some talk behind closed doors.”³⁵ Others characterized fellow soldiers' approach as “if someone wasn't married, all it meant was he wasn't married” – but homosexuality was a forbidden topic.

³³ Interview with K., Cologne, 9 April 2019.

³⁴ Email from Sergeant First Class in the Reserve S., 5 April 2018.

³⁵ For example, Hagen S., interview, 19 January 2018.

a.) Tolerance and Intolerance within the Ranks

Regulations notwithstanding, far greater tolerance did in fact prevail among the troops in the 1990s. One fixed-term soldier (with a final rank of sergeant first class in the reserve) who entered service in 1994 had “a great deal to thank [the Bundeswehr] for, and never had any bad experiences.”³⁶ Another officer who eventually rose to the rank of general shared a surprisingly early example of tolerance from within the ranks when he found himself confronted with a “very particular” problem as a company leader in 1967.³⁷ The company sergeant and spokesperson for the enlisted troops had come to him about F., a gay private who was “causing trouble.” Ordinarily there were not any problems with the soldier or his orientation, either in the barracks or the platoon. The “trouble” began, the delegation reported, when he drank alcohol; the highly athletic and muscular private would tend to become sexually aggressive toward weaker comrades, running the risk of abusing them sexually. No crimes had been committed as of yet, but there was a real danger. A rapid solution had to be found, with a priority on shielding the soldiers from bodily harm. Aside from his alcohol-induced bouts, the private was considered a valuable soldier – “square” and “stalwart” in the parlance of the day – “nobody who saw him would suspect he was homosexually inclined.”

The company leader weighed his options. Simply instituting disciplinary procedures or forwarding the matter on to a military or public prosecutor would have placed a heavy weight on the private’s future. §175 was still in effect in 1967, on top of which came suspicions of attempted sexual abuse. “I wanted to spare the man from becoming a pariah,” the witness recalled. He considered evaluation by a troop physician or medical expert with the aim of determining the private ineligible for service, but that would go down in the man’s file – also a serious liability for his professional future. Together, the company commander, sergeant and troop spokesman came to a pragmatic “internal” solution. “To protect him from himself, and the other soldiers from him,” they agreed that whenever the private consumed alcohol or felt that “his hormones were starting to go haywire” he was to report to the NCO on duty. He would then be locked in a storage room in the basement, where a cot was set up especially for him. This sort of consensual detention played out repeatedly over the next months. The arrangement obviously was not kept a secret within the company, and even today the company head is surprised that the solution found the backing of every soldier who knew about it. Nobody reported “upstairs.” The private was able to complete his military service without

³⁶ Email from Sergeant First Class in the Reserve S. 5 April 2018.

³⁷ Eyewitness interview (kept anonymous upon request).

serious incident and return to civilian life without any entries in his personnel file. The company commander himself was left with creeping doubts as to whether the man's tendency toward aggressive homosexual behavior when drinking would not cause him problems in the future. A pragmatic solution had been found for the man's time in the Bundeswehr, but the commander had been plagued by the thought of having committed a breach of duty in solving the issue internally. "I would have had trouble had it come out."³⁸

The episode reveals that it was not uncommon for problems within everyday life in the military to be resolved "without spilling ink," i.e. outside regulations and without reporting to superiors. The notion that more often than not problems were sorted out "among ourselves" formed a part of companies' self-image at the time – the fact that no soldier made a report serves to express their membership in a tight-knit, sworn collective.

Still, homosexual incidents were generally regarded as a matter serious enough for "internal" solutions like the kind described above to remain the exception to the rule. In 1960 or 1961, for example, one lieutenant and platoon commander ran up against a lack of understanding from surrounding soldiers and superiors during a training course. In this case it was not his sexual aggression that "drew attention" but something else: more than once while showering after sports, the lieutenant had not been able to suppress fully his sexual arousal around other classmates. Others had noticed it at least, and reported him. "From one day to the next" and without notice, the lieutenant was dismissed.³⁹

A staff sergeant was "withdrawn" from his unit just as quickly in 1966 when (however and for whatever reason) he drew attention as a homosexual. "We assumed he had initially been suspended from service and later dismissed," an eyewitness recalled, at the time a battery commander in Bavaria. The staff sergeant had been a "tall, attractive young man"; "nobody would have thought that of him."⁴⁰

In 1967 disciplinary proceedings against a first lieutenant ended in the second instance with the officer's dismissal from service. The officer was charged among other things with multiple counts of masturbating together with an NCO in his battalion.⁴¹ An otherwise "classic" case was made noteworthy by the two having known each other from before their time in the Bundeswehr – they were continu-

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Interview with a retired major general (a classmate of the lieutenant in 1960–61), Potsdam, 15 May 2018.

⁴⁰ Email from Albrecht G. to the author, 10 November 2017.

⁴¹ For a more detailed account with supporting court documents see chapter 3, section 4.

ing, both in the barracks and at home, something they had known from younger days. Yet now they were separated by military rank, with all the associated regulations and expectations. The NCO was quickly dismissed without trial or further notice under §55 (5) SG.

A chance contact with an eyewitness revealed that the same case nearly cost another officer his career in the Bundeswehr. In his youth the contact had belonged to the same scouts group as the two convicted officers. After graduating high school, the now officer cadet revealed to his parents that there had been “something” to the rumors of sexual activities in the group, largely initiated by the troop leader. The cadet himself had never been affected.⁴² His father made the “matter” public, further alerting his son’s company head and battalion commander to the facts when his son entered service in 1965. “My father had been an officer on the Wehrmacht general staff and was probably thinking ‘reporting makes you free.’” It ended with the cadet also being brought under investigation by the state prosecutor’s office for violating §175, although the inquiry was suspended without any results. Yet the mere suspicion of homosexuality continued to weigh heavily on the aspiring officer. His father’s report forced him “to live out the coming years constantly under the traumatizing stigma” of his superiors’ suspicions. In 1966 the officer candidate was even forced to undergo a painstaking ten-day “examination” at the psychiatric ward of a Bundeswehr hospital, an experience that was just as disturbing when recalled more than fifty years later.

Despite “credible assurances that he felt no homosexual tendencies of any sort and had also had girl friends,” the cadet could not rid himself of the stigma of homosexuality. It later jeopardized his appointment as a career officer; once again his father was called in before the commander of the army officers’ school, and the young officer had to assure everybody that he really was not homosexual but involved with women – this was in the late 1960s, mind you, not the 1950s. The commander himself had received the father’s words about the unresolved suspicions of his son’s homosexuality with astonishing equanimity, even nonchalance: “There’ll be ass-fuckers from time to time.” To the mind of the experienced general, it was no reason to destroy the young officer’s career. The lieutenant was accepted into a military career.

In a separate series of events from the 1980s, one officer came across a tolerant classmate while enrolled in a course at the army officers’ school in Hannover. The course itself consisted of young officer cadets studying alongside longer-serving or older lieutenants who had already graduated from (or prematurely dropped out of) studies at Bundeswehr universities, and were now completing their officers’

42 Eyewitness conversation (anonymized), 19 June 2018.

course after switching career tracks. A young cadet in the class at the time recalled an untoward nighttime encounter after a party, in which one of the older lieutenants had entered the cadet's room as he already lay in bed, sat down close beside him and made "explicit sexual advances," though they were purely verbal and did not involve any kind of touching. The surprised cadet had refused the advances, upon which the lieutenant stood up and left the room, though not without asking the cadet to look past what happened as a comrade, and "not give him away." The cadet promised to do so as much and (until his conversation with the author) never let slip a single word about the incident.⁴³

A present-day lieutenant colonel assigned to lead a platoon for a signals training company in 1989–90 recalled having "at least" one gay conscript in his unit. Once at a party, some of the other soldiers had made joking insinuations as to the soldier's sexual orientation. "The soldier took it all quite easily, though; he was fully accepted as a member of the platoon as far as I can recall. I didn't pursue the matter any further as platoon leader, much less report it. And why should I have?"⁴⁴

A former navy officer who is not gay himself recalled serving aboard a high-speed patrol boat in the mid 1990s with a signal man whose homosexuality had been an open secret among the crew.⁴⁵ Everybody on board had known, though the man had not experienced any recognizable difficulties because of it. The same officer had witnessed other scenes of tolerance before: When a navy cadet came out during his time at Bundeswehr University Hamburg in the early 1990s it had not caused a stir or led to any discernible career setbacks. "Nobody gave a damn," as the eyewitness phrased it. A separate incident from the early 1980s did ruffle feathers by contrast, if the memory of another eyewitness served him correctly.⁴⁶ During exercises for an armored reconnaissance battalion a conspicuously long silence fell on a radio exchange with a forward observer in a combat vehicle. Perturbed, the commander drove to the forward position, where he found the two crewmen having sex in the vehicle. The soldiers may have taken their *Hotchkiss*, the type of armored vehicle, as a call to arms, the eyewitness commented sardonically. The commander did not find it as amusing and took measures in response. The NCO was immediately dismissed under §55 (5) SG but not the other soldier, a conscript "who certainly would have liked that." He was transferred instead to another battalion and made to complete the rest of his service there.

⁴³ Eyewitness interview with a lieutenant colonel, Potsdam, 22 January 2018.

⁴⁴ Email from Lieutenant Colonel B., 24 January 2017.

⁴⁵ Interview with J. from Freiburg, 30 May 2018.

⁴⁶ Interview by phone with R., 23 May 2018.

A heterosexual major still in active service today recalled two different episodes.⁴⁷ In 1995 a walk-through bed inspection of a company in basic training had revealed an object sticking out from beneath one conscript's flattened bedspread. It turned out to be a sex toy. The dildo had not been planted there as a joke by one of the other soldiers though, but belonged to the conscript himself. While the soldier had thus been outed in front of everyone, he had not suffered any sort of discrimination "aside from stupid phrases." This ultimately tallies with the regulatory landscape considered in the preceding chapter, whereby conscripts in basic service generally did not have to fear any consequences in the event they were identified as homosexual.

The eyewitness encountered the same topic the following year. A conscript serving in a small subunit assigned to him had an uncle who as a first sergeant was both his nephew's unit commander and immediate superior. The two had a troubled family relationship, not least because the nephew's homosexuality was a thorn in the uncle's side. The first sergeant would often speak openly and with great contempt about his nephew's sexual tendencies, taking out "words from the deepest part of the gutter" in doing so. While every soldier in the company thus knew about the private's sexual orientation, he did not experience any discrimination aside from the insults coming from his uncle and superior. Only once had the eyewitness overheard a derogatory and insulting comment, coming from an older, longer-serving nonrated soldier. The eyewitness took the man to task and forbade him from making similar comments, citing the duty to camaraderie enshrined in §12 SG.

On his second-to-last day in service, after turning in his uniform and equipment, the private took the liberty of sending a clear signal: Instead of normal civilian clothes, he spent the rest of the day going about the barracks in women's clothing and heavy makeup. When the eyewitness asked him whether "he also went around like that in private," the private responded in the negative. He had borrowed the clothing and makeup from a girlfriend of his to send an indisputable sign of protest against his uncle's intolerance. The eyewitness looked back critically on the fact that nobody in the company, including himself as a staff member in the battalion, had put a stop to the sergeant's insults, much less brought disciplinary

47 Interview with a major, Potsdam, 18 January 2018, and in what follows. A former master sergeant recalled a very similar story. During an inspection in 1991 he had discovered lubricant and a sex toy in a conscript's locker that revealed him to be homosexual. The reactions from the conscript's roommates and the members of his platoon had ranged from "dismissive to insulting." There is little need to reproduce the terms used here. Interview with Ret. Master Sergeant W., Ulm, 29 March 2018.

action against him. Yet “twenty years ago it was another Bundeswehr. Life is lived in forward and understood in reverse.”

Another heterosexual officer in the armed forces during the 1990s was witness to both tolerance and intolerance.⁴⁸ One chief of inspection at a school for troops “had the general reputation of being homosexual, without it ever being said out loud or brought up by him.” The rumors had led to “an unpleasant situation for the [inspection chief] and his comrades” during an excursion into the Alps. When dividing up rooms on an overnight stay in a mountain hut, the lone officer equal in rank to the inspection chief fought shy of rooming with the latter, speaking in terms that were unambiguous to all present. After a protracted back-and-forth, another officer declared himself willing to share the room, initially drawing equally unambiguous comments from the others for his troubles. To the observer, “the embarrassing behavior violated the duty to camaraderie as well as the honor of the officer trailed by the rumors.” At the other end of the witnesses’ recollections stands a memory of a battalion in Baden-Württemberg, where a homosexual relationship between a company chief and a young sergeant in the same company had been an open secret. The company chief, a married father, had taken “astonishingly little trouble to keep his liaison with the sergeant a secret.” Neither the battalion commander nor any other superior had intervened so far as the witness knew, although the commander must have been aware.

Another former soldier (also heterosexual) could only think back to experiences of tolerance in his unit.⁴⁹ Drafted into the Bundeswehr in the summer of 1989, entering the service had led “to a wealth of new encounters, among them the topic of sexuality.” His home unit had been the first place he met someone who was open about their homosexuality. He was not aware of any action taken against the soldier. “The general approach seemed to be quite easy-going instead. While magazines in the vein of *Playboy* were usually consumed in most places, he would have issues of *Playgirl* lying open beside his bed just as often. I remember him as a good pal and a faithful, reliable manager at the fueling station in our transport group.”

During his first foreign deployment in 1998, as a reservist for the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia’s Rajlovac, the same eyewitness had another comrade who openly admitted his homosexuality, which “hadn’t seemed to pose any difficulties for him as a Cologne native and carnival participant.” The eyewitness could not think of any sanctions or consequences in this case either, nor any other problems despite the close living and working quarters. “There was no lack of caprice from

48 Interview with Lieutenant Colonel K., 14 December 2018.

49 Email from Frank W. to the author, 3 April 2018.

leadership and sanctions for plenty of cases during my time in the service, but never any regarding sexuality or sexual tendencies from what I can recall.”

A present-day master sergeant who first entered the Bundeswehr as a basic conscript in 1996 had conflicting experiences to report.⁵⁰ Before being called up, the eighteen-year-old had bet his gay circle of friends he would make it into “the toughest branch of the service,” which for him were the paratroopers. He won the bet, but during what was in fact a truly demanding basic training, had been forced to put up with terms of abuse and open rejection from his instructor and group leader on account of his “quite obvious homosexuality.” (“I was somewhat feminine at the time, so the soldiers quickly spotted what was going on.”) Forced to take a position in the mud during one drill, his superior had loudly said “There she is, a fag in the shit.” “The NCO had it in for me,” the master sergeant concluded. Yet basic training also brought with it the experience of true camaraderie. “My roommates stuck by me. If others had gone after me like the group leader did, I would have quit.” This sense of solidarity encouraged him to extend his military service before it ended and become an NCO. He no longer disclosed his same-sex orientation at subsequent posts, however, “otherwise I wouldn’t have become what I became.” He embarked upon a full military career in 2003.

Throughout the interviews, acceptance into career service emerged repeatedly as a landmark after which soldiers were more open about their homosexuality. After entering career service as a staff sergeant in 1996–97, one officer since retired in the rank of master sergeant took it upon himself to inform his new superiors of his homosexuality whenever he was transferred.⁵¹ None had ever had a “problem” with it; no sort of issue ever arose from his homosexuality while in service. “All my superiors were proper and fair with me.” He had already shared an apartment with his boyfriend in Sonthofen years before, “a small town of little importance where everybody knows each other, especially the soldiers stationed there.” While this led him to assume that his living situation was also known about at the military school there, he had never been approached about it, nor encountered any other difficulties throughout many years in service.

A former officer (quoted at greater length in chapter 4 below) recalled his own openness with his sexual orientation as a first lieutenant, initially in Brandenburg an der Havel and later in Berlin.⁵² This had not led to any run-ins with fellow soldiers or superiors in his case either – on the contrary, he found “a lot of encouragement.” Encouragement was certainly something the first lieutenant stood in need

⁵⁰ Interview with Master Sergeant H., 29 March 2018.

⁵¹ Interview with Ret. Master Sergeant S., Freiburg, 21 June 2017.

⁵² For a more detailed account see chapter 4, section 9.c.

of at the time; starting in 1997 the officer became enmeshed in a battle with the Ministry of Defense and the personnel office after demanding a dialogue from civilian and military leadership at the Bundeswehr about homosexual soldiers' rights. A single incident stuck out – after an officer's party in Brandenburg an der Havel, a high-ranking comrade had tried to “talk him into having sex, putting him under a great deal of pressure.” When his efforts did not meet with success, the same officer had attempted to foment negative opinion within the battalion toward homosexuality in general, and the lieutenant in particular.⁵³

Tolerance for its own sake was not the only reason that homosexuality might be tacitly accepted among the troops, as one former staff officer pointed out.⁵⁴ The officer, himself not gay, often saw “simple human inertia” at work instead. “As long as service operations weren't disrupted you looked the other way.” When asked who he meant by “you,” the witness replied superiors with disciplinary power (disciplinary authority in today's language), specifically company chiefs. A disciplinary procedure always meant a lot of paper work.

That sort of incident couldn't be resolved by normal straightforward educational measures ('Write an essay, two pages size A4!'). So, company chiefs kept their eyes shut as long as they were able. Most only got involved when service operations were disrupted, and in that case “bowing sooner to necessity than their own impulses”⁵⁵ [...]

The NCOs, platoon leaders and sergeants all stuck to the same script. Less because of the extra work though, and more out of a combination of indifference and tolerance based on a sense of solidarity. The lower-ranking superiors would only report to the boss if service operations were disrupted or the obvious could no longer be overlooked.

As a recruit in 1973, the former officer had been witness to one such disruption to daily routine during basic training. One evening an NCO had run “stark naked across the company floor over to the phone in the sergeant on duty's room to ring for medical assistance.” The naked soldier was coming from the room of a first sergeant who had been injured during sex; in great concern and evident panic, the NCO had neglected even to throw on his trunks. Rumors had long circulated within the company about the relationship between the first sergeant and the NCO from the orderly room, “though never anything concrete.” There was now something very concrete following the nighttime incident, forcing the company commander to act. The eyewitness could not say anything for sure about the consequences for either party involved. The first sergeant kept his assignment as a platoon com-

⁵³ Email from Erich Schmid, 5 December 2017.

⁵⁴ Interview with a retired lieutenant colonel, Bonn, 20 February 2019.

⁵⁵ Paraphrasing Schiller, *The Bride of Messina* (1803).

mander but the NCO was never seen in the orderly's room again; whether transferred or dismissed it was no longer recalled.

At least during the 1990s, many soldiers experienced far greater tolerance among troops than what the personnel guidelines stipulated. One company chief's homosexuality had been an open secret within the company in the mid 1990s, but "you didn't talk to the chief *about* something like that."⁵⁶ It could be added here that you might well talk about the chief.

A former battery commander (himself not homosexual) recalled his predecessor's homosexuality as being an "open secret, but not an issue" within the battery during the late 1990s, not even in hindsight. The "regency" of the allegedly homosexual chief "didn't have any negative effects, at any rate."⁵⁷ A senior NCO in the same battery had a different recollection of the internal conversations.⁵⁸ When the preceding battery commander had come out to the battery unit leaders at their first meeting, it elicited "highly differentiated" reactions. Three out of the twelve NCOs, battery sergeant major included, had reacted with open disapproval with phrases like "Well then, we don't have to do anything at all now. He can't tell us anything!" Behind this and similar statements stood a loss of authority for the chief, a situation that may also have threatened discipline within the unit. (This was exactly the sort of scenario that the BMVg and administrative courts were constantly invoking, and which was used to justify the assumption that homosexuals were not fit to lead.) All the other unit leaders, among them the battery staff sergeant, "didn't respond with approval but remained neutral" and kept their loyalty to the chief. The battery staff sergeant in particular "didn't have any sympathy for the commander's homosexuality" but saw it as his responsibility to remain loyal and maintain discipline within the battery.

The case is noteworthy not merely for the warring loyalties among battery NCOs, but principally for the fact that against personnel policy, the chief stayed in office. Nobody reported "upstairs," not even the few NCOs who ventured dismissive reactions. Such a report, as numerous parallel instances from the 1990s show, would have forced the commander and thus the personnel office to enforce the regulations and remove the chief.⁵⁹

One officer, since retired, recalled that his sexual orientation became known to his roommate and three other soldiers during an officers' training course in 1990–91. His roommate was also gay and had introduced him to a number of bars

⁵⁶ Interview with Ret. Master Sergeant R., 7 February 2018.

⁵⁷ Interview with Lieutenant Colonel N., 23 February 2018.

⁵⁸ Interview with Ret. Master Sergeant R., 7 February 2018.

⁵⁹ See chapter 4 for greater detail.

in Munich, though the two did not have any sort of relationship or sexual contact. Another officer, gay himself, had also known of the interviewee's homosexuality during his time as a young platoon commander in a light infantry battalion in 1991–92. There had not been any sexual contact in this case, either.⁶⁰

A young man who entered the air force as an officer candidate in 1992 experienced his own coming-out at the officers' school in Fürstenfeldbruck.⁶¹ He recalled that "coming out" was not an accurate term, however; it had to be kept a secret at school, otherwise he would have risked cutting his professional life short before it had properly begun. Nobody was allowed to know except for one person – his first partner. The two shared a lecture class; a friendship developed out of a sense of camaraderie – and out of friendship, love. They spent the weekends together, but took care that their relationship went unnoticed during the week at school. Discretion held top priority. Leading a double life at the officers' school had been a "handicap" that cost effort. Looking back self-critically at a bygone era, the former candidate confessed he had been unable to act freely, treading cautiously and acting self-consciously around other soldiers, and unwillingly drawing a line between himself and others. The two men initially stayed together after training in Fürstenfeldbruck before their professional paths, and soon their private lives, diverged.

Lesbian soldiers who served in the medical corps in the 1990s also spoke of widespread tolerance within the ranks. The fact that a troop doctor lived with her partner in the small nearby city was an open secret at work, for example. From time to time sexist, oafish or at the very least unthinking comments would of course be made. Once a missing jack during the card game *Doppelkopf* elicited the comment "Our doctor doesn't play like that with jacks anyway." (Throughout her first assignments as troop physician she had consistently been the first woman the soldiers had seen in uniform holding the position, an unfamiliar sight reflected in their referring to her as "Ms. Doctor.") The casual term of address gave her momentary pause, though she did not find it negative, much less insulting. Other comments that stick out in her memory include "We know in your case that you didn't sleep your way to the top," or "Our doctor will never be deployed, she's from the other team." The words of one colonel stayed with her as well, though: "Doctor, if someone picks on you because you're with a woman just let me know and I'll smash his face in!"⁶² The physician is still active in the Bundeswehr, and confirmed that she had never experienced any problems in service due to her sexual orientation.

⁶⁰ Email from Erich S. to the author, 5 December 2017.

⁶¹ Interview with K., Munich, 18 May 2018.

⁶² Eyewitness interview, 28 November 2019.

A female NCO who served from 1994 to 2008 could not report on any problems or discrimination either, although she had not “really been open” about her sexuality in the service and only came out to those “in the same or a similar situation,” i.e. other lesbian and gay soldiers. Still, “a lot of people knew about it. I didn’t hide myself away, though I didn’t communicate openly about it either.”⁶³ Even when falsely accused of interfering in a colleague’s marriage after serving abroad, she did not cite her orientation as an exonerating circumstance. (The NCO’s friendship with another doctor on assignment had been misinterpreted by other soldiers and shared with the doctor’s wife. The wife then filed a complaint, leading to the eye-witness being interviewed by superiors.) The reasons for her continued reticence, even after 2000, came less out of concern for herself than a gay male soldier in her unit with whom she had a close-knit friendship. The two were seen as tight companions, and at the time she thought that if her sexual orientation came out it would immediately lead others to draw conclusions about her friend. She wanted to “protect” him. “Among men it was always something else, difficult.” Whenever she was asked about a husband, she spoke of a “de facto spouse,” not answering with the masculine in German but in gender neutral terms, as was typical in the Bundeswehr. Using the term among soldiers was a clear signal that other homosexual soldiers, male and female, would have immediately understood.

b.) Bundeswehr Campus Memories

From the accounts of the officers interviewed for this study, the pressure to dissemble and hide tapered off significantly with their transfer out of the troops and into the Bundeswehr’s university system as cadets or young officers. Recollections from their time as students thus deserve special consideration.

Amid the freedom of student life and the breadth of opportunity that the university towns of Hamburg and Munich offered, many, if not all, student officers eventually relaxed regardless of orientation, with a number who were homosexual quickly ceasing to hide it in the 1990s. The contrast between one’s relative freedom as a student and the ongoing rules and regulations – a dynamic that was at play in every aspect of life at Bundeswehr universities and was moreover entirely intentional – was reflected in part by how aspiring officers were treated. Any number of interviewees recalled increasing openness about their sexual orientation over the course of their studies, allowing gay students to get to know one another in the process.

63 Interview, Ret. Sergeant First Class Martina Riedel, Hamburg 23 January 2020.

One former candidate described Munich's gay life as "like being rescued" after he was transferred to the Bundeswehr University there in 1991.⁶⁴ For the preceding fifteen months in training for the navy he had done everything in his power to ensure that homosexuality "didn't come up" as a topic. Munich was the first place "he finally found his way to himself" and managed to develop what had previously been a rather indistinct sense of self. The aspiring officer came from a conservative family; his father had also been a soldier. His son's admission came as a "shock" to both parents, leading the father to seek out a military pastor in his distress.

Another former officer recalled exploring the "unknown freedoms" of Munich during his time as a student in the early 1990s, a city known even at the time for its large and worldly gay scene.⁶⁵ Time and again it happened that he would chance upon other students in clubs. They knew others in turn, eventually giving rise to a circle of more than twenty officer candidates and officers. Affairs and partnerships also developed naturally between the men, with many couples who met in the 1990s in Neubiberg (the town where the university was located) still together more than twenty years later, in 2018. The men made up a "tightly sworn circle" at university. They all shared the same problem – if the higher-ups at the university found out about their sexual orientation, it meant the end of their careers in the armed forces. Yet even this scenario did not scare at least some student officers from taking an active part in university life. A number ran as representatives to the student advisory council, soon making up the majority as one recalled. Their involvement in campus life went further to include arranging celebrations, parties and concerts – and appointing a "gay envoy" to the council.⁶⁶

Another officer studying in Neubiberg at the time recalled that as he had started to come out to a "select" cohort, rumors also spread about him on campus, though he neither confirmed or denied them.⁶⁷

People could think whatever they wanted. Nobody ever talked to me directly about it though, even other gay students. Homosexuality began to be talked about more and more often at university after 1994. In seminars, committees, publications and among soldiers too, of course. A liberal attitude took hold that was palpable, especially among younger soldiers but also our superiors.

The occasional "piece of gossip or cliché" might have gone around campus, but he had never detected "hostility, or even simple avoidance."

⁶⁴ Interview with L., Munich, 7 June 2019.

⁶⁵ Interview with K., Munich, 18 May 2018.

⁶⁶ A fuller account comes later in this chapter.

⁶⁷ Email from Erich S. to the author, 5 December 2017.

One officer studying at the Bundeswehr University Hamburg in 1992 or 1993, himself not homosexual, recalled another student, a lieutenant, coming out in public at a meeting with the head of the (military) student division.⁶⁸ The head, a navy captain, was the highest-ranking military man at the university and had responded dryly to the public confession with a “Hrm, aha!” The incident quickly made the rounds. The lieutenant was a paratrooper, and “the idiotic jokes about gay paratroopers [meant that] a number of other paratroopers at school likely saw themselves forced to draw a clear line between themselves and their comrade.” Overall, the officer said, “the incident didn’t entail anything further to my knowledge. But I didn’t bother myself any more about the subject either.”

Two further witnesses had opposite experiences to share from the late 1990s, a time at which there were still restrictions in place on officers identified as homosexual. The first had no negative responses or consequences for his subsequent career in the military on which to report; openly homosexual since his studies, he went on to enter career service and soon became battalion commander. The second witness did not experience any negative reactions from his superiors, either – not at first.⁶⁹ It was only as his course of study drew to a close and his transfer into the troops approached that his earlier admission became an obstacle. He was informed that under the current regulations (which remained in effect up to 2000), he could not be assigned to lead or train soldiers, nor was he eligible for a military career.

The full story? When he first entered the service in 1993 as an NCO candidate in the navy before eventually switching to the career track of an officer, the witness had had to sort out his sexuality for himself and did not see any “compelling ties to the service.” Then he had met his partner while studying in Hamburg (who was not at the university himself). By this point the cadet had long since accepted his homosexuality and now decided for the first time to confide in his immediate superiors. While his trust would later turn out have been misplaced, his superiors initially seemed to warrant the confidence. When the leadership changed in 1998, the now senior cadet went to tell his departing superior himself before the new one took over. The captain prefaced their conversation with the words “If what you want to tell me is what I think it is, you’d really better not!” If he did, the captain would have to “get some paperwork ready” and make a report “upstairs,” and it would end with the officer candidate being removed from his course, bringing about a change to the career track of a senior NCO and a reduction in service time. The cadet was spared all this; he took the advice and kept silent. It then turned out his predecessor

⁶⁸ Email from Lieutenant Colonel B. to the author, 24 January 2017.

⁶⁹ Here and for the following set of recollections, interview with Navy Commander Alexander Schüttpeitz, Berlin, 24 January 2019.

appraised his new superior of the situation, despite claims to the contrary. The new captain spoke openly with the cadet about his homosexuality, stressing that he did not have any problems “with it” and that there would not be any official reports “upstairs.”

Yet as his course drew near its end the captain asked to speak with the student, by now a second lieutenant. He did not want to see the student in his office, however, but for a walk in the park. On their walk the captain explained that he had “a problem” – he had to give the lieutenant an evaluation, and had doubts as to whether the lieutenant would be able to assert himself as a troop leader, something he intended to express clearly in the review. The captain was as good as his word. The lieutenant filed a complaint against the assessment but it was turned down, and he returned to the navy from his studies bearing a document that attested to insufficient powers of enforcement. It was only years later and at the intercession of later commanders that the interviewee, today a commander (navy), made the leap to career soldier.

The two conflicting, nearly contemporaneous accounts reveal once again that it ultimately came down to superiors’ individual behavior. One went strictly by the book; another struck a more tolerant and liberal tone. Back among the troops the second officer stayed true to himself, remaining open about his homosexuality. “Open, but not aggressive,” the commander emphasized. He needed to discuss his sexuality only on rare occasions as hardly anyone asked about it, although he confided in a handful of close colleagues. As so often in life there had still been rumors, and when the lieutenant encountered them in a course in 2001 he decided to seize the initiative. The next morning he spoke up in the lecture hall: Yes, he was gay and no, he did not want people talking about him behind his back. Classmates had “reacted in one part by knocking approvingly on the tables, and in another with icy silence and ‘sour looks’,” though there had not been any explicit retorts or grievances. Later, the class teacher conducted confidential one-on-one conversations with everyone in the class to get a better picture. In doing so he found that the class did not seem to have any problems with one of their fellow students being gay. Yet the teacher did not speak with the lieutenant himself – he had not seen any need to, given what in his mind was a positive situation in the classroom. Shortly before departing, the lieutenant asked the lecturer for feedback. The latter replied that he did not see any need for action at the moment (concerning his future career as a navy officer), while also advising the lieutenant that “he wouldn’t have it easy in the navy” as an openly gay man, especially aboard ship, and that he should “reflect carefully” on whether he wanted to go to sea. The lieutenant did.

The comparatively free and informal nature of life and service at the Bundeswehr universities meant the otherwise taboo topic of homosexuality was handled more loosely than in the troops. One relatively early example from 1979 came in

the form of a piece written for a student publication on the Munich campus.⁷⁰ The article quoted four anonymized sources at length, all of whom were studying to become officers. “You’re in the Bundeswehr? There must be a lot of great stuff to get up to there, right!?” one officer was repeatedly asked by other gay men who were not in the service. For his part, the officer could only “respond with a pained smile.” Yes, the Bundeswehr was a “male society,” but one “painfully bent on its heterosexual self-image.” Another interviewee reported that not a single superior knew he was gay. “I’m almost positive not one of them suspects it. There is one other soldier who knows. He’s very tolerant and discrete.” None of the four interviewees counted on the tolerance of other soldiers; it would be “highly risky.” One of them considered the tolerance among officers to be low, although he himself had different experiences. Here, the student newspaper implicitly pointed to the gap between the experience of tolerance and the anticipation or fear of rejection. “I cannot just jump in and brag about the great guy I met on Saturday when the others are talking on Monday.” The “ghettoization and tight living quarters in Neubiberg” did not always afford the necessary privacy. Still, things were much better at Bundeswehr University Munich than they would have been in a town or small city. They could not count on being able to convince personnel leadership that their partner should come along if they were transferred to the minute town of Hammelburg in Bavaria after their studies, for example.

The same officer voiced his fear of disclosing he was in the Bundeswehr when he went out in Munich, “however well guys in uniform went down in the gay scene.” In fact, “if someone in a green uniform came into a gay bar, you could be sure he wasn’t in the service.” Practically all homosexuals lived in fear, the student newspaper concluded, speaking not only with reference to the armed forces but society as a whole. “He lives constantly under disguise, ducking for cover as quick as a flash when need be. Sometimes even when it’s not necessary.” Overcautiousness and fear characterized the four officers’ behavior. “I make an effort to be discrete [...] I have to exercise greater self-control [...] I can’t watch after a beautiful man walking through the barracks for as long as my comrades would watch after a beautiful woman.” A regular meet-up among gay students in the dining hall should actually be part of “a real university,” but that sort of thing would not be quick in coming. Nor would a “gay action group [...] be so quick” in coming to the Bundeswehr.⁷¹ The article was published in 1979; fifteen years on, exactly that sort of group came into being, formed mainly by students from the Bundeswehr universities – the Federal

70 ATÜ “Homosexuelle an der HSBw.” A copy is available in BArch 24/14249 and BW 24/32089.

71 All quotes from “Homosexuelle an der HSBw.”

Working Group of Gay Soldiers (Bundesweiter Arbeitskreis schwuler Soldaten, BASS).⁷²

c.) “Gays in the Military”: A 1994 Article in *Junge Soldaten*

In truth, all he wants is to be just the way he is. In truth, he loves his work and is fully engaged. In truth, he wants nothing less than to appear in the newspaper. But Michael Müller has a problem – one he doesn’t see as a problem to begin with, in truth. Michael Müller is gay and in the Bundeswehr – and those two still don’t go together easily, even twenty years after Paragraph 175 was revised.⁷³

Staff Surgeon Michael Müller’s name and picture had now been printed in *JS*, a magazine published by the Protestant military chaplaincy for “people in the service.” The article quoted Müller both directly and indirectly:

Michael Müller has been a fixed-term soldier in the Bundeswehr for twelve years now. “I was naive at first, thinking what could happen to me as a gay man?” [...] “It’s no problem, sexual orientation has nothing to do with medical officers,” came the first written responses from the defense ministry in Hardthöhe. Yet when Müller wouldn’t let up with his petitions and inquiries, Hardthöhe’s policy of excommunicating gays fell on him as well. He now learned that the position of troop physician was out of the question for him, and that his acceptance into a full career had also been ruled out. Müller knew long ahead of time what the reasoning was, because it has been the same for decades. “A gay commander might abuse his position”; the “general rejection of homosexuality undermines the authority of a gay commander”; “it would jeopardize discipline and operational readiness” [...] Since then Michael Müller has worked [...] as a laboratory physician under the motto that it is “undesirable [for him] to treat fellow soldiers” [...] Personally, Müller hasn’t ever had problems with superiors or subordinates [...] Even his conversations in Bonn met with understanding. “Person to person they are more tolerant than I thought they would be.” But understanding is of little use to him, as it changes nothing about the basic stance of not promoting gays in the military [...] “My superior is a woman. But nobody considers her liable to seduce someone.”

By referring to women in positions of authority (at the time in 1994 women were still limited to serving in the medical and music corps), both Müller and the article’s author anticipated the line of argumentation that would bring an end to restrictions against gays in 2000. Things had not progressed that far yet, however:

“Seduction,” “creating dependency in subordinates,” “sexual practices” – the buzzword of homosexuality seems to conjure up little else for Bundeswehr officials than sex games in the

⁷² See chapter 4 for a full account.

⁷³ Here and what follows, Spiewak, “Schwule beim Bund.”

shower and intercourse in the dorms. “As with heteros, a gay man’s life doesn’t consist of sex 24 hours a day,” as Michael Müller says [...] “There are gay service members in every rank, in every garrison.”

The name and picture of another officer who studied at the Bundeswehr University Hamburg featured in the same issue (though without his rank listed).

“The Bundeswehr usually goes about bragging how it’s a mirror to society. Why should it be any different on this point?” asks Oliver Dembski [...] Only a handful of gay soldiers openly profess their true love out of fear of mockery and sanctions. Most lead a double life. “From 9 to 5 they’re hetero, after that they’re gay,” in Oliver’s words. The split in identity leads to grotesque games of hide-and-seek. One’s partner becomes “a friend” or “girlfriend”; a picture of a naked girl hangs in the locker for disguise. Many keep altogether silent about their personal lives. “Gays are good actors,” Oliver says [...] The official line from Hardthöhe does its best to encourage this sort of double-dealing, for only those who admit their homosexuality are barred from positions of leadership. Anyone who disguises himself in proper Bundeswehr fashion remains eligible. “They force us into a dark corner, so that every gay soldier is subject to the whims of his superior,” Michael Müller says.

Müller and Dembski now sought to change that. “The two are no longer willing to accept the degrading self-denial [...] ‘We want to show gays in the Bundeswehr that nobody has to keep their problems to themselves.’” That had been the motivation in making their names, photographs and telephone numbers public. The magazine encouraged other readers to contact the two.

That readership included the Ministry of Defense, which retained a copy for its archives featuring a handwritten note at the end that read:

1. The article is factually incorrect and one-sided;
2. The article claims a ‘problem’ for a very small minority, which is not in fact a problem in the Bundeswehr;
3. The Protestant Minister’s Office for the Bundeswehr is being kept apprised on an ongoing basis as to reader reactions and the content of their letters;
4. It will be decided on this basis whether the BMVg will issue a statement in *JS*.⁷⁴

Prospective officers who had been studying at the Bundeswehr universities in 1994 were still able to recall how important the article had been for them and their process of coming out. Students from Munich contacted the staff surgeon and Hamburg student whose names and photos had appeared in the article and a network sprang up; the *Junge Soldaten* article provided an initial spark.⁷⁵ What

⁷⁴ BArch, BW 2/38335: BMVg, handwritten note in the files of Section FüS I 4 from 12 April 1994.

⁷⁵ For example, interview with L., Munich, 7 June 2019.

up to that point had been smaller circles of personal acquaintances and friends within the two universities coalesced into a national group, the “Federal Working Group of Gay Soldiers.”⁷⁶ Group members sought to advance a common cause and achieve visibility as gay soldiers. One step in this direction came a good year after the article appeared in *JS*, when in 1995 the post of “gay envoy” was established for Bundeswehr University Munich.

d.) The “Gay Envoy” to the Bundeswehr University Munich

The story behind the “gay envoy” at Munich also turns up in the BMVg archives. The event which led to the “incident” was a newspaper report in *Junge Freiheit* shortly before Christmas 1995: The Bundeswehr university had “finally succeeded in bridging the gap to contemporary trends at civilian universities,” with the “clientele” of the “gay envoy” at Neubiberg encompassing fifteen student officers to date.⁷⁷ News reached the desk of the chief of defense after a retired major general brought it up in a letter to the BMVg. The head of the student division for military affairs at the university subsequently detailed the facts of the matter. In March 1995, the council had set up a small administrative section that functioned as a counseling center for any questions student officers or officer candidates might have regarding homosexuality in the Bundeswehr, while also serving as a point of contact for similar centers in Munich. Up to that point, the chairman of the student advisory council had attended to the work himself on the side. Clearly looking to forestall any unwanted conclusions, the colonel emphasized that no “inferences could be drawn about the representative’s homosexuality” based on his work portfolio, while the current “gay envoy” similarly occupied the post “for the function alone.”⁷⁸ The figure of fifteen students mentioned by *Junge Freiheit* had not been released externally, he continued. The council was (and is) composed of chosen representatives from among the students and officer candidates and had acted within the framework of student self-government; it had not overstepped any bounds or disregarded any regulations in setting up the administrative section – only an “expedient preliminary discussion” with him, the student division head, had been missing. This omission notwithstanding, the colonel gave his wholehearted support

⁷⁶ For a full account see chapter 4.

⁷⁷ “Bundeswehrunis: Spiegelbilder der Gesellschaft,” a copy is preserved in the BMVg archives, BArch, BW 2/38355.

⁷⁸ BArch, BW 2/38355: Bundeswehr University Munich, student advisory council chair, 22 January 1996.

to the post of “gay envoy.” It could only be expected that “out of more than two thousand young men, a need to talk or receive counseling around the topic of homosexuality would arise among those who were potentially affected.”⁷⁹

The “gay envoy” at Neubiberg kept the BMVg busy throughout the winter of 1996. The ministry’s legal staff affirmed that no breach of official duty which “justified intervention” had occurred, even if “the designation ‘gay envoy’ certainly seems provocative, and designating an ‘equality envoy’ that represented other minority interests as well would be preferable.”⁸⁰ Füs I 4, the ministry desk for leadership development and civic education, saw no legal grounds to object, nor did military leadership at the university regard any intervention on the part of superiors as necessary. For their part, both the commander of the Armed Forces Office as the university’s direct superior and his legal advisor viewed banning the “gay envoy” as a distinct possibility. Yet Füs I 4 warned against it; military involvement might “wake sleeping dogs and lead to unwelcome publicity,” “even in the event that watertight legal options could be found.” The matter had not aroused any media interest to date beyond *Junge Freiheit*, and had not harmed the reputation of the Bundeswehr. Instead, Füs I 4 recommended that the ministry “accept the way things stand with composure.”⁸¹

Staff departmental leaders on the Armed Forces Staff took up the matter in early March 1996; the minutes record the chief of staff “considering it unnecessary to install gay representatives at Bundeswehr educational institutions.”⁸² After consulting with the deputy chief of defense, responsible among other things for the universities, the legal staff was going over the matter “with a fine tooth comb” – there was no need for the Armed Forces Staff to take action.⁸³ The deputy chief of defense had inserted a further note to let the whole matter “rest.”⁸⁴

One eyewitness similarly recalled the commander at the university, a colonel, having “no problem whatsoever” with establishing a gay envoy when he found out, even advising the informal predecessor organization to BASS.⁸⁵ The account was

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ BAArch, BW 2/38355: BMVg, VR I 1, 14 February 1995 (correct date: 14 February 1996).

⁸¹ BAArch, BW 2/38355: BMVg, Füs I 4, 22 February 1996.

⁸² Ibid., BMVg, staff officer at Füs chief of staff, short protocol for StAL conversation 5 March 1996.

⁸³ Ibid., BMVg, staff officer at Füs chief of staff, 8 March 1996.

⁸⁴ Ibid., BMVg, note on consulting with deputy chief of defense, with handwritten comment “completed 9/3.”

⁸⁵ For example, in an email from Erich Schmid to the author, 5 December 2017. From 1993 to 1996 Schmid was a member of his faculty’s departmental council, a member of the student council and deputy representative for his year. Between September 1994 and September 1995 Schmid also served as the chairman of the student advisory council and edited the university newspaper *Campus*.

confirmed by another student involved with the student council at the same time; he also recalled an “emissary” sent by the defense ministry who appealed to the council to abolish the post of “gay envoy,” or at least rechristen it. The final title for the post was “representative for drugs, gambling problems and homosexuality,”⁸⁶ turning what had begun as an optimistic step toward greater openness into a catch-all position. Meanwhile, out beyond the relative freedom of campus life, most homosexuals in the armed forces continued to shy away from opening up about their sexuality throughout the 1990s.

2. Forced Mimesis: Concealment, Repression, Denial

Even if entrance regulations had allowed, indeed required, gays to perform basic military service since 1979, in practice soldiers would “desperately conceal” their homosexuality, *Stern* magazine wrote in January 1984.⁸⁷ The article quoted one officer candidate who had been in service for fifteen months. The cadet had invented a girlfriend, complete with a picture to pass around to other soldiers at the barracks, the bar or officers’ club. “I put on an act for them and tell them about I what did with my boyfriend as though it had been with a girlfriend [...] You have to have a girlfriend, then you’re normal among them.” *Stern* summarized the fear of exposure as often leading to “over-accommodation and feelings of inferiority.” “The higher his rank, the more difficult life becomes for a homosexual soldier, and the greater the pretense, the self-denial.” This was supported by quoting a major whose “private life doesn’t fit with what [he does] professionally.” Asked whether he felt his homosexuality “conflicted with it,” the major’s reply was brief: “Yes.” The thirty-six-year-old could not imagine living with a boyfriend, “because that doesn’t really happen either.” He got “sexual satisfaction from occasional ‘escapades’ with anonymous partners.” *Stern* also quoted an active general to prove its point:

The fifty-year-old [...] succeeded in keeping up appearances before comrades and superiors. He’s married, living happily with his wife and children he didn’t father. “Sometimes I have no idea who I’m even putting this charade on for,” he said in the interview, “at times I’m really quite desperate. I know that it isn’t becoming of a general. But it’s not becoming of a general to be gay either, is it? There’s a deep-seated feeling of unworthiness that gnaws away at you. Not because you’re actually unworthy or inferior. No, it’s because the damned moral code stipulates it.”

⁸⁶ Interview with K., Munich, 18 May 2018.

⁸⁷ Krause, “Da spiel’ ich denen eine Komödie vor.”

As with all quotations from officers who were allegedly interviewed, today these statements can no longer be verified for their authenticity. *Stern* quoted the general as resigning himself to the conclusion that it was “nonsense to want to start a discussion about homosexuality in the Bundeswehr with my position and rank.”

The letter of one homosexual soldier seeking assistance already mentioned in the introduction was reproduced in a 1984 issue of *Der Spiegel* and reached retired Captain Michael Lindner, by then a public figure. Lindner quoted from the letter at length in his own writing in 1985.⁸⁸

Who am I supposed to, who can I talk to? My only choice is to admit that I’m “different” or to adapt, to keep quiet, constantly at risk of being “exposed” as gay by one wrong statement, one false move. I’m forced to deny my personality; I suffer from the constant charade, feel like I’m being watched [...] I have to keep myself under control 24 hours a day. It’s terribly difficult for me to constantly be shuttling between two conflicting worlds; the “free” world on the weekends and the narrow world of the barracks [...] So, I’m simply afraid, scared of being found out. That’s why I withdraw, avoid all close contact with other soldiers, block out conversation. I’m all alone in a large “community.”

Many shared quite similar recollections. One lieutenant colonel, who has since retired, explicitly asked the author not to let the “non-operational aspects of extreme psychic burden” from the era go unmentioned: “Concealment, double ‘identities,’ permanent fear of being discovered and the professional repercussions, the danger of harassment and bullying by fellow soldiers, ‘professional lies’ in one’s private life, different private and professional codes of behavior.”⁸⁹

One witness, himself not homosexual, recalled a former classmate who had been remarkably open about his orientation at school since he was fifteen. When he began basic service in 1998, however, he resolved to “hide” his homosexuality in the barracks and serve out his ten months “without attracting attention.” Otherwise quite self-possessed as a gay man, in the barracks he did not want to be recognized as such. The act reached the point to where he put up pictures of naked pin-up girls in his locker.⁹⁰

One remarkable series of events from 1978 or 1979 points to the even greater pressure homosexual officers could come under at times, some of whom even resorted to breaking the law to escape it in extreme cases. A lieutenant colonel at the time had asked the whereabouts of a close acquaintance of his, an officer

⁸⁸ Lindner, “Homosexuelle in der Institution Bundeswehr,” 223, quoted subsequently in Wickel, “In einer Männergesellschaft nicht hinnehmbar.”

⁸⁹ Email from Lieutenant Colonel D., 13 October 2018.

⁹⁰ Interview with K., Potsdam, 22 October 2019.

who shared his rank of S2. The officer was responsible for military security in the battalion and had not been seen in service for days. The battalion commander responded drily that the first lieutenant in question had deserted – the commander had received a postcard from Morocco informing him that the lieutenant would not be returning for the foreseeable future.⁹¹ When the perplexed lieutenant colonel asked the reason why, the commander replied that the S2 officer had “likely gotten wind that he was being investigated for illicit sexual acts with dependents.” So far as the eyewitness knew, the first lieutenant was being investigated for *consensual sexual activity* with an NCO directly subordinate to him. MAD had also stepped in before the officer deserted due to the highly sensitive nature of the battalion’s range of duties and the officer’s position, which held security implications.

As the witness told it, the first lieutenant returned to Germany ten years later, “right on time, after the statute of limitations was reached.”⁹² Here he was incorrect – the story could unmistakably be mapped onto a ruling handed down by the military service court in Koblenz from April 1979. The deserting officer returned to Germany after just two and a half months in Morocco, at which point a local court sentenced him to four months on probation for unauthorized absence. The military court imposed a heftier penalty, dismissing him from service.⁹³ The officer stood accused of four relatively minor counts of attempted homosexual advances and touching subordinate soldiers or others, which had been rebuffed in each case. The court found an aggravating circumstance in the fact that the first lieutenant had not returned to the barracks from vacation in early May after disciplinary proceedings had been opened in April 1978, but instead left for Morocco for a spell. Speaking before the court, the first lieutenant explained that he had wanted to gain “clarity about [his] position” in the upcoming disciplinary proceedings, and to “get some solid ground under his feet again.”⁹⁴

A lieutenant colonel currently active in the military reported having “made a secret of his homosexuality for decades in both his professional and personal environments,” and of being at odds with his orientation, not acting on it for a long

⁹¹ Interview with a retired lieutenant colonel, Bonn, 20 February 2019. As a side note, the eyewitness recalled the battalion commander giving a surprisingly relaxed impression despite the incident. The commander explained that the deserter was currently on assignment at a training course, so the matter lay in the hands of the school commander. The school commander did not fail to report to Army Office that 16.6% of the course had deserted, prompting a flurry of phone calls between the office and the school. The explanation was as simple as it was typical of the Bundeswehr – reports were requested in percentages, and the course only had six students.

⁹² Interview with a retired lieutenant colonel, Bonn, 20 February 2019.

⁹³ BArch, Pers 12/45192: Ruling at Military Service Court Center, 1st Division, 11 April 1979.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

time.⁹⁵ He had not applied for career service at first, unsure of whether and how he “could hide or even suppress” his sexual orientation over the lifelong career he was thinking to spend in the military. In the words of the officer, “I was cowardly. Fear eats the soul. But at some point the wall gets too low and the water too high, and it spills over.” Gradually, the officer found his way through the chasm between service and sexuality, and adapted. It was only after the officer decided to enter career service after all and was accepted, thus shoring up his professional future, that he first ventured out into the gay scene, more specifically a gay sauna. The officer’s story confirms a recognizable pattern from other interviews, of acceptance into career service serving as a milestone after which soldiers were more open about their homosexuality.

Even if a homosexual soldier did escape notice, a study commissioned in 1985 by the armed forces’ military psychology branch argued that a “male community” like the Bundeswehr would always expect its members to pass muster in “heterosexual trials” if they wanted “to earn the group’s respect.”⁹⁶ A soldier identified as homosexual, on the other hand, would come under constant “pressure of legitimation,” always having to prove that “he had not entered the Bundeswehr because he saw better options for his sexual tendencies there.”⁹⁷

a.) The Paradigm of “Military Masculinity”

The everyday experiences of homosexual soldiers have also been considered in the social sciences. Alongside interviews with a number of heterosexual soldiers, in 2014 Kerstin Botsch spoke with three gay soldiers in active service: a twenty-four-year-old studying at a Bundeswehr university to become an officer in the air force, a forty-year-old senior NCO in the army and a thirty-one-year-old whose military branch and rank went unnamed.⁹⁸ Over the course of her interviews Botsch ascertained that despite the decrees and regulations bringing an official end to discrimi-

⁹⁵ Eyewitness interview (anonymized), Berlin, 17 December 2017.

⁹⁶ BArch, BW 2/32553: Armed Forces Office, Dept. I, Military Psychology Section, February 1985: Max Flach, “Sozialpsychologie Stellungnahme zur Homosexualität in den Streitkräften,” 15–16. Also available in BArch, BW2/531590: BMVg, PII4, AzKL-1-85.

⁹⁷ Homosexual individuals developed various “compensatory mechanisms” in order to withstand the constant and excessive psycho-social pressure: “Hyper- or hypoactivity,” “avoidance behavior,” “adopting roles (authoritarian, distanced),” “an exaggerated sense of ambition related to self” and “somatization of unprocessed motivational energy, i.e. diversion to organ systems resulting in psychosomatic disturbances (e.g. migraines, stomach ulcers, heart trouble),” *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Botsch, *Soldatsein*, 339–40. A sample of individual interviews.

nation against homosexual soldiers in 2000, homosexuality itself continued to be a taboo subject well into 2004, even if homophobia had shifted to other forms of discrimination. Speaking about homosexuality in the present day (2014) represented a “discursive limit.” Just like their heterosexual comrades, soldiers with a same-sex orientation would “use the paradigm of militarized masculinity as their point of reference.”⁹⁹ “Whatever is manly,” Botsch continued, “cannot be homosexual. This logic of homosexuality’s imputed lack of compatibility with the military is also plain to see in the distance adopted from homosexuality.”¹⁰⁰ Military homosexuality thus filled “military requirements for masculinity exactly, since adapting to the models of military masculinity and normalization played such a central role in the institution.”¹⁰¹ By looking to the “paradigm of militarized masculinity,” Botsch and other social scientists saw homosexuals enacting a form of “mimesis,” “assimilation” or “presentation,” taking their cues from “social situations and actions that expressed institutional and individual norms without the actors necessarily being aware of it.”¹⁰²

Mimesis for Botsch “brings (at least) two worlds in reference to each other – the first world is assumed to exist (although it can also be fictional, ideal, or made up of interpretations), while the second, mimetic world exists in a real sense of physical sensation. The difference between the two worlds is perceived as a threat.”¹⁰³ The threat emerges above all in “sexualized” moments or situations “in which physical proximity and nudity are a present possibility, e.g. on foreign deployment or in the shower.” “Showering demands controlling or habituating one’s glance in a way that presupposes practical knowledge (in this case about modes of behavior when showering).” One of the homosexual soldiers Botsch interviewed is quoted with the words “Yes, you look around [...] during sports for example it’s obviously critical because you don’t know how to look, and in the shower of course it’s really dumb [...] you cannot attract attention.”¹⁰⁴ Within an academic context, Botsch translates individual experiences that other homosexuals have certainly either shared or can relate into a distinction between “seeing and being seen.”

In this light, the interviewees are placed under constant possible surveillance by the all-seeing gaze of their comrades [...] The potency of this potential surveillance is internalized and

⁹⁹ Ibid., 208–9.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 245.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 249.

¹⁰² Gebauer and Wulf, “Soziale Mimesis,” 75. Similarly in Botsch, *Soldatsein*, 252.

¹⁰³ Botsch, *Soldatsein*, 254.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 254–55.

incorporated by Soldier U – self-monitoring replaces the actual or imagined possibility of surveillance.¹⁰⁵

Botsch wisely conducted all her interviews well after the Bundeswehr had fully opened to homosexuals in 2000. Yet they continue to offer important insights into the behavioral patterns of gay and lesbian soldiers. In the preceding era, the adaptive forms of behavior Botsch describes and analyzes would likely have been much more pronounced.

In the end, the forms of behavior gay soldiers imposed on themselves wound up reflecting other soldiers' prejudices and clichés. Looking back on his early days in the Bundeswehr, one homosexual officer said he had never been a “permanent fixture in the shower,” picking up on a popular phrase.¹⁰⁶ Sexualized situations, “an everyday part of life in the military” that was “at odds with the desexualized demands” of ministerial orders and regulations, were particularly sensitive.¹⁰⁷

Among homosocial male communities, an emotional connection arises through latent homoeroticism [...] Homosexuality cannot, however, follow from homoeroticism [...] Still, within homosocial communities sexual practices strengthen bonding among the men [...] Paradoxically, as long as they are set within a heterosexual context, practices like group masturbation do not threaten the narrow line between homosocial and homosexual, and homosocial and homoerotic [...] Consuming pornography together while masturbating can without doubt be seen as a homoerotic act that can only take place within the safety of a heterosexual group of men. Masculinity is also staged via shedding emotional and physical inhibitions. Not just drinking games, but ritual masturbation demonstrate a form of going beyond one's borders, and setting the individual within the collective.¹⁰⁸

Within these intimate circles there also sat (unidentified) gay soldiers. Games like these presented a particular tightrope walk for them, a “forced activity.” Retreating from the circles would be “precarious, because your heterosexuality would come into question.” Focusing too intently on other soldiers as they masturbated would be just as precarious.¹⁰⁹

Botsch's sociological work and interviews on this specific account tally with what a former soldier in the navy told the author for the present study. Called up to serve in 1995, he spent several months aboard a ship in the Persian Gulf. Shortly before the end of his time there two sailors had been dismissed on account of their

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 256.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Lieutenant Colonel P., Berlin, 17 December 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Botsch, *Soldatsein*, 257.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 257–59.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 260.

homosexuality, according to rumors on board. A seaman at the time, the soldier had kept his own homosexuality to himself, and his behavior totally inconspicuous so as not to jeopardize his deployment in the Gulf. A number of situations he recalled matched those in Botsch's study. In the crew's sleeping quarters, nightly porno films and communal masturbation sessions among those present (usually six to ten men; the shift system for guard duty meant the twelve men quartered in the room were never all present) had been the rule. Mutual touching had also been common practice without it being seen as homosexual. "Everyone present took care not to be identified or seen as being gay," although the eyewitness had noticed some of his comrades "looking less at the screen with the porno as they masturbated and [instead] directing their gaze stealthily, but still recognizably, to the excited soldier next to them."¹¹⁰ Aside from the nightly masturbation sessions, the interviewee did not have any further sexual, let alone explicitly homosexual, contact on board.

Had he been spotted as gay, it would not merely have signaled certain exclusion from the intimate nighttime gatherings, but probably a premature end to his deployment in the Persian Gulf as well. On board, homosexuality was considered a "criterion for exclusion," which meant coming out was out of the question. Instead, much in Botsch's terms, the private consciously placed every action on board "under constant possible surveillance by the all-seeing gaze of [his] comrades," adapting himself and unconsciously choosing a strategy of mimesis.¹¹¹ Here the eyewitnesses' experience match the social scientist's findings neatly:

The homoeroticism inherent in these types of practices can be labelled heterosexual by disregarding or negating homosexuals, or homosexuality itself. The presence of homosexuals would reveal the line that has been drawn and destroy it. Male homosexuality is not just avoided as a topic, it is not only communicated about in a certain forms (e.g. in jokes), but is also subject to taboos that relate [...] to action.¹¹²

Eyewitness experiences likewise strongly corroborate Botsch's general findings. Conversations about private matters or "partners" would feature "mimetic elements," with homosexual soldiers adopting the speaking or thinking patterns of their (heterosexual) comrades, and making themselves similar, a habit that "includes constantly disavowing and keeping silent about one's own partner and leading a double life."¹¹³ (The assertion that homosexual soldiers led a "double

¹¹⁰ Interview with S., Freiburg, 15 June 2017.

¹¹¹ Botsch, *Soldatsein* 261.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 261.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 262.

life” can be found in BMVg documents from 1966 on.¹¹⁴) Botsch draws the conclusion that social mimesis may be seen as necessary for homosexuals to pursue their everyday life in a military setting.¹¹⁵

A majority of interviewees stressed that, prior to the year 2000, they either kept their sexual orientation a secret or at least did not “broadcast it.”¹¹⁶ A present-day master sergeant who initially entered service as a conscript and was later accepted as an NCO recalled that his own homosexuality had been an open secret at his post. He had also had sexual experiences with other enlisted men (themselves heterosexual, in fact) and NCOs in his unit. The secret to his “success”? “You simply have to be able to keep your mouth shut.”¹¹⁷ His transition to career soldier in 1998 similarly went off without a hitch despite the secret.

Another officer had similarly “kept his mouth shut” after completing his degree.¹¹⁸ Back in the navy, he returned to being extremely circumspect about his homosexuality; his external image mattered a great deal to him as a young officer, a position of authority aboard ship. Specifically, he was afraid of being seen walking hand-in-hand with his partner around town, a distinct possibility with a crew of three hundred. Out of five young officers aboard ship, three were gay, something the eyewitness, today a commander in the navy, only discovered years later. He regretted not having known at the time – “if we had [...] we could have protected and supported each other.” He became increasingly easy-going about his sexual orientation in subsequent assignments on land, and today it is a “lived normalcy” for him and his husband.

One captain recalled his time as a sergeant and platoon leader of a training company in 1985, where young officer candidates were also set to gain their first leadership experiences within the ranks.¹¹⁹ Based on a shared schedule for time off and weekends as fellow superiors, the sergeant struck up a friendship with one of the candidates that eventually turned into a sexual relationship. When the cadet’s father (himself a staff officer in the Bundeswehr) caught wind of his son’s relationship with the sergeant he threatened to report the two, and thus see to it their careers ended. As it stood, the sergeant, who was carrying on an illicit sexual rela-

114 BArch, BW 24/3736: “Erfahrungen bei der Entdeckung homosexueller Verhaltensweisen von Soldaten.” In BMVg, InSan: “Beurteilung der Wehrdiensttauglichkeit und Dienstfähigkeit Homosexueller,” 1966, sheets 56–63, here 59.

115 Botsch, *Soldatsein*, 264.

116 In the words of Ret. Master Sergeant W., Ulm, 29 March 2018 and Master Sergeant R., Potsdam, 5 January 2018.

117 Master Sergeant R., Potsdam, 5 January 2018.

118 Interview with L., Munich, 7 June 2019.

119 Interview with Captain H., 12 June 2018.

tionship with a direct subordinate, would in all likelihood have had disciplinary proceedings instituted against him. The cadet likely would not have had any disciplinary procedure to fear for his part, although his father's report would have brought an immediate end to his time in the Bundeswehr. As a known homosexual, he would be subject to immediate dismissal as an officer candidate under the current regulations. The son yielded to his father's threats and cut off contact with his sergeant and friend; his assignment within the ranks had ended anyway and he returned to training school.

Thirty-five years later the former sergeant, by now a specialist officer, chanced upon his former company sergeant major, now retired. The former "sarge" still easily recalled the cadet and replied, when the latter mentioned in passing he had married a man, "ah ha, so he did have a 'good gut instinct'." The retired sergeant told him he had once suspected the young cadet's homosexuality at the time but never brought it up. The eyewitness learned that things could turn out differently as well when he came out to his family in 1998 and met with curt rejection from his conservative parents. When he left the next year on foreign assignment, his mother reportedly told his sister that "hopefully a bullet gets him." (This sadly recalls Magnus Hirschfeld's testimony from World War I. At the request of an officer who had been dismissed for his homosexuality, Hirschfeld spoke with the officer's mother to gently explain her son's impending return from the war. The mother had replied she would have preferred Hirschfeld "bring the news that [her] son had died."¹²⁰

Eyewitnesses provided vivid and compelling accounts about the great pressure under which they suffered as homosexual NCOs and officers, in some cases for years, in others decades. The daily, unrelenting obligation to betray themselves or risk their professional future swayed above them like the sword of Damocles. Many moved between service and their private lives "as between completely divided worlds, one the world of the barracks, the other past the barracks gate."¹²¹ Maintaining a strict divide between the two and keeping one's private life separate from the service was essential to keeping or advancing one's career as a soldier. As the threat of §175 had done before, this inflicted a psychological burden in a number of cases, even depression. The number of cases of suicide that had homosexuality as their actual background is impossible to determine in retrospect.

¹²⁰ Hirschfeld, *Von einst bis jetzt*, 152–53.

¹²¹ As described in an interview with Master Sergeant H. in Berlin, 2 July 2018.

b.) Suicide or Marriage?

In the throes of deep depression, the later French general Hubert Lyautey found himself faced with a decision in 1909: commit suicide or get married? He opted for marriage, choosing the widow of a captain he knew.¹²² Lyautey's career only properly took off after the wedding, landing him atop the French military as Minister of War during World War I, and later as a Marshal of France. Lyautey is a prominent example of matrimony serving as an effective shield against the potential stigma of one's homosexuality becoming public knowledge. In actual fact Lyautey was astonishingly "open [about his homosexuality], regularly seducing the best and brightest of his lieutenants as part of their military education."¹²³ In getting married, however, Lyautey acceded to the social conventions demanded for a truly great career. All the mockery behind closed doors notwithstanding, Lyautey achieved the greatest military honors France had to offer, with the nation according the marshal a grave of honor at Les Invalides in Paris.¹²⁴

Soldiers are particularly adept at camouflage. Officers seeking safety in the port of marriage appear repeatedly throughout history, as they do in literature. Thus does Max René Hesse's character Ernst Partenau, a gay first lieutenant in the 1929 novel named for its protagonist, seek the classical escape route of marriage. When Partenau's passion for a cadet is revealed before the assembled officer corps, the lieutenant tells his superior that he intends to "call upon" a lady from the area. The elderly captain has known Partenau longer – and better – and makes "an embarrassed, unhappy expression." Hesse has the captain rub salt in the wound in describing the purported escape marriage offers.

So, you're ready then, to get up before the baroness and her clan, before the regiment, and fail at the courtship dance, fail completely, and for the sake of the boy, all for the sake of the boy [...] you'll pull yourself together, even if it is while burning in seething oil. After four weeks' vacation [...] the boy will be in another regiment. You'll marry Baroness Streifelt, or try to [...] You've got your family, a couple boys, and all the other intoxicating and magical potions now taste stale and tepid [...] all that matters is your agreement that I arrange everything silently

¹²² Biographical writing on Lyautey freely gives away the fact that he "did not have sexual relations with his wife." Quoted here from a series of biographical sketches of well-known homosexuals.

¹²³ Hussey, *The French Intifada*, 281–82.

¹²⁴ Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau was said to have described the general and former war minister as an "admirable and courageous fellow who always had nuts below his backside. Unfortunately, they were rarely his own." ("Ca, c'est un homme admirable et courageux, qui a des couilles au cul. Dommage que ce ne sort pas souvent des siennes.") Hussey, 282.

with [Colonel] Mafai. Shake on it [...] And that's how it will be Ernst, you can rely on it. You won't be let down.¹²⁵

Both the personnel records kept by military service courts for individual military members charged with homosexual activity and the higher instance of military service senates contain a striking number of references to the accused either getting married in the meantime, or becoming engaged and intending to marry soon.

Oftentimes, and especially in the case of appeal proceedings, the incident in question would be separated from the disciplinary proceedings by at least a year, sometimes several, giving anyone suspected of homosexuality ample time to seek out the relative safety of marriage. In many respects, matrimony seemed a safe way to mitigate the social ignominy of one's same-sex orientation drawing notice and having it put on trial. Many such men married in the conviction that "it definitely offered the best protection" against persecution by the police and the courts, not to mention social exclusion.¹²⁶ Current research indicates that matrimony was also seen as a way out in the early days of the Federal Republic; the threat of punishment loomed large over the lives of these men. "Even after liberalization, many still were not able to work out a free form of sexual expression since they had not been able to do so for many years, usually formative [...] Some men who married for cover likely still carry a guilty conscience today toward their (former) wives."¹²⁷

Untangling the deciding causes behind a suicide after the fact is possible only in certain instances; when a note is left behind, for example. The Bundeswehr does not keep tabs on potential motives in its statistics on suicide, making it impossible to draw any reliable statistical conclusions about the relationship between a soldier's suicide and potential homosexuality. What the author has been able to do here is reconstruct a handful of cases based on eyewitness accounts.

In a case discussed at greater length at the end of the present chapter, the restrictions against a company chief and his partner of many years, a conscript serving in the company, ended with the conscript's attempted suicide in 1981. The

125 Hesse, *Partenau*, 240, 243–44.

126 Such at least was the opinion of Hans. G, a policeman initially sentenced to death for homosexuality in 1943 then shipped to the Neuengamme concentration camp when his sentence was delayed. Having survived the camp, he saw marriage as the best protection against renewed persecution after 1945 and "had to live through many unhappy years of marriage." Eyewitness report from Hans G. in Stümke and Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen*, 301–6, here 306. Another Wehrmacht soldier convicted of "illicit sexual acts" and sent to serve in a penal battalion also married after the war. "There was no way that could go well," he recalled. "I myself found out years later just how miserable it could be." Eyewitness report Harry Pauly in *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen*, 312–16, here 313.

127 Bormuth, "Ein Mann, der mit einem anderen Mann Unzucht treibt," 53.

conscript reproached himself bitterly for what had happened, taking the blame for the trouble his partner had run into. The suicide attempt was discovered in time, and the young man's life was saved.¹²⁸

A later surgeon general recalled that during his time as a paramedic team leader for the Richthofen fighter squadron in Wittmund during the mid-sixties, an enlisted man hanged himself.¹²⁹ While going through the soldier's locker, they found a number of unsent love letters to a lieutenant colonel in the fighter squadron. "The two soldiers clearly had a relationship." The squadron's wing commander questioned the lieutenant colonel, eventually reaching the decision "[you] cannot stay here!" The lieutenant colonel was transferred to another base. "With that the matter was cleaned up quickly and straightforwardly, that's how things were handled at the time."¹³⁰ As far as the witness could recall, it "had never occurred" to the wing commander, a highly decorated fighter pilot in World War II, to open disciplinary proceedings against the lieutenant colonel for his homosexuality, let alone call in the public prosecutor (at the time homosexual activity was still subject to punishment under §175). The eyewitness could not say whether personnel staff was informed about the backdrop to the lieutenant colonel's transfer.

In November 1967, a twenty-two-year-old petty officer tried to end his life by cutting his wrists after being discovered naked in bed with a seaman apprentice who was his direct subordinate during evening inspection.¹³¹

As early as 1908, one army insider was reporting on homosexuality, or rather its rejection as a possible cause for soldiers committing suicide. Writing in the inaugural issue of the *Zeitschrift für Sexualwissenschaften* (Periodical for the Sexual Sciences) with reference to reports of five suicides, a "judicial employee" (likely from Magnus Hirschfeld's institute) complained that:

In the last month alone, between 20 November and 20 December that is, the German Army lost at least three officers to the notorious §175: Captain S. in M. to suicide, according to the 20 November *Berliner Tageblatt*, and, according to the *Täglicher Rundschau* of recent days, two lieutenants to court-martial conviction in Neiße and the first guard division [...] It may be due to chance that this month was been particularly busy. On the other hand, anyone sharing the tendency will have checked himself in the past few months and many a case will not have gone public, so that one may assume a monthly average of three such instances [...] It has cost

¹²⁸ For a full account see section 4 e, this chapter.

¹²⁹ Interview with Ret. Surgeon General Dr. Horst Hennig, Cologne, 14 February 2018.

¹³⁰ The wing commander had also been considerate enough to select a base close by to the lieutenant colonel's current one, so that he wouldn't have to change his private place of residence. Interview with Dr. Horst Hennig.

¹³¹ For a full account see chapter 3, section 3, below.

NCOs, soldiers, state officials, and other respectable citizens much more, but can be estimated all the less.¹³²

Partially contradicting the forced “mimesis” of concealment and denial is the notion that homosexuals make ideal soldiers, and was there was no lack of gay soldiers who saw themselves in this light. As one officer candidate who entered the air force in 1992 put it, “gays were and are the ideal soldiers after all, no kids, no family obligations of their own, eligible for transfer anywhere and therefore particularly well suited for foreign deployment. It was dumb of the Bundeswehr not to use this potential, but reject it.”¹³³

3. “The Ideal Soldier”? Self-Assurance through Alexander, Caesar and Prince Eugene

When he ran into other soldiers in the 1980s who welcomed the Bundeswehr’s restrictions against homosexuals, one eyewitness had automatically replied that Prince Eugene himself had been gay. “We’d all be Turks today if they had demoted him.”¹³⁴ Another former soldier recalled that referring to Prince Eugene of Savoy and his battlefield triumphs against the Ottomans had managed to “‘pacify’ even right-wing comrades.”¹³⁵ Born François-Eugène de Savoie-Carignan in Paris in 1663, the prince has surfaced repeatedly in the accounts of homosexual soldiers seeking to affirm their sense of self. Speaking on Austrian national public radio in the midst of the Wörner–Kießling affair in 1984, one Austrian doctor recalled a medical exam during which an officer had told him that his homosexuality was not a problem at all, “because Prince Eugene was one too after all.”¹³⁶ Ever since his victories in the Turkish wars and the War of the Spanish Succession, Prince Eugene has been lauded as one of history’s greatest military commanders. Rumors about the warlord’s private life abounded during his lifetime; unmarried and without children, he operated under the principle that “for a man of war, a woman is obstructive furniture.”¹³⁷ Vienna scarcely lowered its voice when it spoke of the “Mars without a Venus.”¹³⁸ Numerous contemporary reports point to Eugene’s

¹³² Leexow, *Armee und Homosexualität*, 104–5.

¹³³ Interview with K., Munich, 18 May 2018.

¹³⁴ Eyewitness recollection of S., Freiburg, 17 August 2017.

¹³⁵ Email from Lars R., 4 May 2018.

¹³⁶ Hecht, “Gay ORF?!” 18, cited in Schwartz, *Homosexuelle, Seilschaften, Verrat*, 296.

¹³⁷ Schulz, “Der Multikulti-Prinz.”

¹³⁸ Ibid. Meanwhile, the phrase “Mars without a Venus” shows up in practically every biograph-

homosexuality, a trail of gossip that leads back to the rumor mills of seventeenth century Paris and has lasted centuries in the prince's case. In the early twentieth century he was taken up (today one might say "outed") by the incipient gay emancipation movement as one of the most famous cases in the history of homosexuality – by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1914 and before that by Albert Moll in 1910.¹³⁹ In 1910, even the most scoffed at, marginalized, persecuted and often ridiculed of gay soldiers could take heart from Prince Eugene's example. Just as little as all the talk swirling about Eugene had been able to diminish the awe with which his talent for war, industry and aesthetic sensibilities was regarded during his own lifetime, his outing as a homosexual could not undermine his revived status as a twentieth-century hero. In this the prince shared a similar fate to Frederick II or, farther back in the past, Alexander the Great, King Nicomedes, Caesar, and the Roman emperors Titus and Trajan.¹⁴⁰ The examples of Prince Eugene and Frederick the Great chosen by Hirschfeld and other early campaigners for homosexual self-esteem would also have been due in no small part to their uninterrupted popularity. The homosexual Reichswehr lieutenant in Max René Hesse's novel similarly cites the established canon of Alexander, Caesar and Frederick of Prussia in looking to shore up his own love for men.

Alexander was believed to be the son of Jupiter Amon, but you don't hear anything about women around him, only [male] companions. Rarely, only very rarely does a man who fulfills the promise of his younger self [to become a fighter] belong to someone as King Nicomedes did to Caesar [...] You don't see a single woman around Frederick the Great from the day he takes command.¹⁴¹

ical sketch of Prince Eugene, often accompanied by new and imaginative ways of paraphrasing something that is never directly expressed, but still plain to see. "There was no Eugenia for this Eugenio. A Mars without a Venus." Roos, "Der bittre Ritter."

139 Hirschfeld, *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*, 661–62; Moll, *Berühmte Homosexuelle*, 36. Hirschfeld in turn quotes Vehse, *Geschichte des österreichischen Hofes* (published 1852). On page 259, Vehse writes that Prince Eugene was known as a "passive pederast" in Paris at the time, and alternatively dubbed "Madame Simone" (the name of a prostitute who was known city-wide) and "Madame Consienç." Hirschfeld took up Vehse's account of the age-old Parisian rumors, making them truly public for the first time. This led Konrad Kramar and George Mayrhofer to ask in a 2013 book "whether he's been outed." The authors quoted Liselotte von der Pfalz by way of an answer. "He [Eugene] doesn't trouble himself with women, a couple of lovely pages are more his thing." Ultimately, however, gay relationships were widespread among the young French nobility. For a full account see Kramar and Mayrhofer, *Prinz Eugen*, both quotes on p. 87.

140 All names can be found in Hirschfeld's 1914 work, *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*, 650–73.

141 Hesse, *Partenau*, 93–94. Amon, or Amun, was an ancient Egyptian god of war. He corresponded to the Greek father of the gods Zeus, and the Roman war of God Jupiter. Nicomedes IV of Bithynia

The first lieutenant's words convey an elite sensibility that was not entirely unfamiliar among officers, gay officers included. Or was it precisely among gays that such thinking was widespread? Throughout history, homosexuals' sense of being different, the marginalization and dismissal they have felt from mainstream society has in some cases (though by no means every case!) led to an internal sense of superiority, or a higher calling. This form of elitism has found expression among homosexual painters, sculptors, authors and other artists, politicians and not least – perhaps especially – soldiers. The shared thought behind the conviction was that dispensing with the distractions of marriage and a swarm of children enabled one to commit fully to one's artistic talents, affairs of state or the art of warfare.¹⁴² Nor is it uncommon to find examples of homosexual officers and sergeants from the more recent past who were convinced that a total lack of family distraction enabled them to look after their troops in their care or, if they harbored greater ambitions, to immerse themselves in studying the high arts of strategy. Ultimately the former Bundeswehr soldier who cited Prince Eugene's military accomplishments was not doing so merely as a way of criticizing current restrictions. Subliminally, a steady note of self-assurance came through in recourse to "gay heroes" of the past; one is not, or was not a worse soldier for loving men and may even – like Eugene himself – have been a better soldier on that very account.

In 1908 Karl Franz von Leexow, mentioned in chapter 1 above, responded negatively to his rhetorical question of whether "homosexuality [harmed] a race's military efficiency." Among other sources, he supported his claim with numerous quotations from a work that had come out the year before, *Die dorische Knabenliebe* (*Dorian pederasty*) by Erich Bethe. The ancient Athenian Pausanias had once proclaimed that "the strongest army will be the one made up entirely of lovers," while Plutarch contended that "lovers are unparalleled fighters, and never once has the enemy broken through a couple or come back out from between them in one piece," as history showed: "Man beside man, the lovers of the Sacred Band of Thebes covered the battlefield of Chaeronea."¹⁴³

Surprising similarities appear in the relationship between knights and squires during what is often superficially referred to as the "dark ages" of medieval Europe. Reports of love affairs between knight and squire came especially from particularly strict orders of religious knights. Squires were allowed to bear arms and fight

(reigned ca. 94 to 74 BCE) and Caesar were rumored at the time to have a homosexual relationship, though it is not confirmed.

¹⁴² Ibid., 188–189.

¹⁴³ Eric Bethe, *Die dorische Knabenliebe: Ihre Ethik und ihre Idee* (published 1907), cited in Leexow, *Armee und Homosexualität*, 30.

starting around age fourteen, but the most important charge was caring for their knight. Engaging on an endangered knight's behalf was tied in one part to a sense of camaraderie, as it later came to be called, but was also generally an expression of the love between the two, including physical love. It is love itself that is regularly described as the deciding factor in European knights' victories on the field, a clear parallel to antiquity. The sources hardly permit much more than speculation about what went on beneath the armor. Squireship lasted up through age eighteen, at which point the squire could himself become a knight. If he did not have the means to finance his own knighthood, he would either stay on with the knight or look for another to serve.¹⁴⁴

Leexow goes on to list Alexander, Caesar and Emperor Trajan as heroes of antiquity rumored to be homosexual. "He, the victor over Dacia, the Euphrates, Arabia, did not let a tendency toward his own sex prevent him from developing the most outstanding abilities as a soldier."¹⁴⁵ While the book does not lack for what might go by namedropping or "outing" today, the author does qualify the rumors, writing that "we don't know whether Frederick the Great really had homoerotic sentiments."¹⁴⁶

The same line of argumentation appears in a letter "personally" addressed to Defense Minister Wörner in February 1984, in which a Hamburg doctor writes that "it isn't uncommon for homosexual officers to make for particularly adept and conscientious troop leaders."¹⁴⁷ The immediate point of departure for the note was the scandal surrounding the (heterosexual) General Kießling's provisional suspension from duty. Speaking about the Kießling affair before the Bundestag, Antje Vollmer of the Green Party referred to "great and renowned armies" whose chieftains and soldiers had "practiced what in this case [i.e. the Bundeswehr] is viewed as a security risk and a potential disruption to a male community of soldiers."¹⁴⁸ Parliamentary State Secretary Würzbach replied for the BMVg that both he and "many of us here [are] familiar with great figures in a variety of fields – literature, art, in administrative leadership and certainly in the military as well – with similar dis-

144 Email from Ret. Major General Hans Uwe Ullrich from 11 January 2021. Ullrich has conducted extensive research into chivalry in the Middle Ages.

145 Leexow, *Armee und Homosexualität*, 39–41, here 41.

146 Ibid. The anonymous author, whose sympathies lay with Prussia and the German National People's Party, was clearly loathe to cast a dent on the proud figure, and made do without the hero in his argumentation.

147 BArch, BW 1/378197: Letter from Dr. S., Hamburg, to the BMVg, Manfred Wörner, 25 February 1984.

148 German Bundestag, 10th legislative period, 47th Session, 19 Jan 1984, typed transcript, 3378.

positions. But in this case, I'm not talking about those chieftains you mentioned but the normal, everyday routine in our barracks."¹⁴⁹

In 1997, Alexander the Great found renewed relevance for the Bundeswehr and its gay soldiers. Under the title "Alexander the Great wouldn't even make field sergeant today," an article in *Neue Deutschland* denounced "Rühe's Army" as "one of the most anti-gay institutions in Germany."¹⁵⁰ Five years before journalists had looked to the "many examples of homosexuals fit to serve throughout human history" in criticizing a 1992 ruling against homosexual soldiers at the Federal Administrative Court, "from Julius Caesar to the Spartans, the legendary Amazons to 'Old Fritz,' the Prussian king Frederick II rumored to be homosexual."¹⁵¹

Leexow's observation of and conversations with homosexuals in the Prussian Army who were carrying on more or less secret love affairs similarly led him to conclude in the early twentieth century (1908) that homosexuals made more ideal soldiers than did heterosexuals.

Homosexuality seems to me to increase among the higher posts, despite the persecution to which the invert is subjected. This gives pause for thought. It likely comes from the fact that even today, intimate friendship makes one particularly well-suited to being a soldier [...] While those with a normal sexuality see from the very beginning a straight line before them, the homosexual is by his very condition given to brood, and much thinking deepens the spirit. No traps threaten the normal soldier; only the invert must keep a watch out to steer his ship through life's perilous junctures. Even under other conditions, this lets one see clearly. And the homosexual officer is an artist. There is something that drives him to embellish the drab monotony of service, to elevate it and give it a human warmth, and I am certain that more is achieved through such work than through drills and dully cramming in the required exercises. While the normal soldier performs his service for service's sake, the homoerotic soldier performs it out of love. It is often touching to see the care with which the superior enfold his subordinates, how he encourages the apprehensive, instructs the clumsy, restrains the careless, supports the weak. A short while back one officer went mad with grief after his orderly drowned while bathing the officer's horse. But such love – please don't take the word in its sensual sense – also breeds affection within the ranks, an emotional bond encircles their hearts and binds them more tightly than mere camaraderie or oaths sworn. When the author once asked a homosocial non-commissioned officer whether sexual things that inverted

149 Ibid.

150 At the time, Volker Rühe was federal minister of defense. Heilig, "Alexander der Große wäre heute nicht mal Feldwebel."

151 Schwartz, *Homosexuelle, Seilschaften, Verrat*, 283. Schwartz gives the example of an article by Andrea Theyssen, "Heißer Tip," which appeared in *Abendzeitung* on 1 July 1992. For more on press criticism regarding the ruling at the Federal Administrative Court's 2nd Military Service Senate on 30 July 1991, see chapter 3, section 9.c.

officers may have committed while drunk weren't easily divulged by the enlisted men, he responded with words heavy in meaning: "But we wouldn't betray the best."¹⁵²

Shifting attention from the Prussian Army to the Bundeswehr turns up similar, nearly identical accounts. Former officers were almost unanimous in recalling the broad acceptance they found among the troops as company head or platoon leader, or at least felt they did. Such was the case with a senior NCO who once "allowed himself a slip-up" while overseeing a sergeant training course. After a night of heavy drinking at a class party he had clearly "come on" to one of his soldiers, probably trying to kiss him as well. When the incident came up for discussion over the following days, the eyewitness had been left wanting to quit the service "out of shame." "You always have to be able to look yourself in the mirror." Yet his course participants, fellow instructors and commanding officer all reacted quite differently than feared. Nobody brought the events at the party out against him; to the contrary, everyone encouraged him not to leave the service. The interviewee drew the personal conclusion from this formative experience that it always depends on the individual, his standing and accomplishments in the service, but most of all on his character. In that case, even a misstep would be overlooked out of a sense of camaraderie.¹⁵³

Subordinate soldiers' acceptance of homosexuality does not just emerge subjectively in the memories of commanding (homosexual) officers, but shows up in written testimonies as well. A brief 1981 report in *Stern* about Captain Lindner's intention to retire due to illness (a case discussed at length elsewhere) elicited a number of letters to the editors at the magazine, including two from soldiers Lindner had led.¹⁵⁴ One NCO in the reserve wrote with a big "tip of the cap" that he had served under Lindner and could only endorse him with "hymns of praise." "It's regrettable that a highly praised superior [is being] 'ousted' here."¹⁵⁵ As a "non-gay" but "an understanding person," he wished the captain all the best. An officer candidate in the reserve who had served in Lindner's platoon as a conscript during 1970–71 was equally full of praise: "You were tough as nails, but fair with a great deal of heart! In many matters you were our model! For all of us, down to the least gunner, you were the best!"¹⁵⁶

When a lieutenant was relieved of leading a platoon in an air force security squadron due to his sexual orientation in 1998, the enlisted men under his

¹⁵² Leexow, *Armee und Homosexualität*, 109–11; also cited in Hirschfeld, *Von einst bis jetzt*, 150.

¹⁵³ Interview with Master Sergeant R., Potsdam 5 January 2018.

¹⁵⁴ Claussen, "Schwule werden abgesägt."

¹⁵⁵ Letter from Wolfgang S., Eutin, to *Stern*, 25 June 1981.

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Wolfgang J., Itzehoe, undated. Stamp of receipt at *Stern* 1 July 1981.

command spoke out, with twenty-one men in the platoon signing a letter to their commander. The lieutenant, the letter read, had “always led his platoon as one might expect a platoon leader to do.”¹⁵⁷

Soldiers often only found out many years later, and then by chance, that former comrades from the 1980s or 1990s were homosexual, comrades “of whom they never would have thought it.”¹⁵⁸ In many cases it had been the most athletic or “toughest” soldiers in the company. Looking back, eyewitnesses wondered “what life together and camaraderie would have looked like back then if soldiers could have been more free and open with their sexuality.”¹⁵⁹

Soldiers’ testimony and their memories of time spent in the Bundeswehr recall similar arguments from the time of the German Empire. Leexow quotes an acquaintance who had served in the foreign legion, whose transhistorical argument culminates in the following plea:

The homosexual is an especially good soldier, the born careerist. He is especially courageous and given to sacrifice, full of thinking discipline. In no way does that contradict the feminine impression that many give. A troop which has many homosexuals has a much greater communal feeling of camaraderie [...] An officer whose heterosexuality is so strongly pronounced that intimate proximity to another man is revolting is not suited for training young soldiers.¹⁶⁰

Leexow rhetorically asks whether “it mustn’t now lie within the endeavors of a great modern power to harness forces that lie fallow, such as those of homosexuality, and to ennoble them?”¹⁶¹ Writing in 1922 Hirschfeld reached for the heights of pathos, quoting from “Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden” (a popular mourning melody which he termed “a song for old friends”): “But to many it meant more, and to some it meant all.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ BArch, BW 1/502107, sheets 65–118: Constitutional complaint of First Lieutenant Stecher from 23 December 1998, here sheet 107, annex 8: Letter from the enlisted men of Platoon II / Air Force Base Battalion 3, 1 April 1998.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Master Sergeant H., Berlin, 2 July 2018.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Leexow, *Armee und Homosexualität*, 97.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 66.

¹⁶² Hirschfeld, *Von einst bis jetzt*, 151.

4. Five Military Lives in Personal Recollections

The current chapter concludes by sketching the working lives of five soldiers in their entirety: That of a private released from his fixed-term contract after less than two years in the service; a captain who took early retirement due to health reasons; another captain who was demoted from career to fixed-term service at his own request; and a first sergeant and lieutenant colonel, both of whom completed out their service under normal conditions.

a.) “It was as if my world collapsed.” A Private is Forced Out

As a young Hamburg man living in the Rhineland, Dierk Koch, volunteered for the navy in 1962, gladly anticipating his entry into the service in April 1963 for the new set of responsibilities and professional perspective it would bring. “My hopes and dreams of becoming a proper sailor in the navy were within reach.”¹⁶³ Yet just a year and a half into service, in November 1964, his future career came to an abrupt, unwelcome end. The beginning of the end lay months previously, with the sexual advances of a petty officer second class. The officer had offered to support Koch after the latter failed a training course; when Koch, a seaman apprentice had encountered tentative physical contact on his first visit to the officer’s room, he initially resisted.

But then [...] maybe because it had been in me for a long time, I gave into the pressure and took comfort in his physicality. It went on like that for several days, and I enjoyed it. After a petty fight I accused him of having used the promise of help only as a lure, and having no real interest in my professional future [...] From then on, I refused, while he sent me very clear signs that he was my superior in rank. The rift deepened. I confided in my company leader and asked for a transfer. At the time I had no idea that he would report my revelation to the naval personnel command.¹⁶⁴

Koch’s transfer request was granted. After successfully completing his course at the end of September 1964 he applied to serve on one of the “large traveling units,” and received call-up papers to serve on the frigate *Emden*. There were rumors circulat-

¹⁶³ Dierk Koch, from an unpublished manuscript of his life experiences with the working title “My forgotten friends” (“Meine unvergessenen Freunde”).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Also from an interview the author conducted with Dierk Koch in Hamburg on 22 February 2018. *Bild* magazine also took up the topic in late August 2019, publishing an extensive interview with Koch: Scheck and Utess, “Was wir damals gemacht haben, war kein Verbrechen.”

ing within naval circles that the *Emden* would accompany the training vessel *Gorch Fock* that October on its visit to the 1964 Olympic Games in far-off Tokyo, Japan.¹⁶⁵ Yet the *Emden* set sail without Koch; the apprentice's earlier report had caught up with him.

It must have been early October when I was ordered to the garrison commander. There I was told short and sweet that the naval personnel command had decided to rescind my orders to report to the *Emden*. 'We can't send a soldier tied up in a matter like that out into the world.' I was very disappointed, my dream had burst like a soap bubble. I was supposed to continue my service in the typing pool of a training company. Several weeks later, on a Wednesday, I was ordered to report again. Without any warning it was revealed to me that I had been demoted to plain sailor and discharged dishonorably from the navy. I was to quit my post effective immediately and leave the barracks as a civilian by that coming Friday at noon [...] It was as if my world collapsed, inside of me things must have looked black and empty [...] My mind was a muddle of confusion and conflict. Where should I go? Come Friday at twelve noon I would be without home or any means of surviving!¹⁶⁶

The leader of the naval personnel command had reached the decision to discharge the seaman apprentice on 12 November 1964; it took effect three days later on 15 November.¹⁶⁷ The dismissal could not proceed quickly enough for the service; it did not even wait until the end of the month but settled the matter overnight so to speak, without notice. The entries in Koch's military service book attest to his summary dismissal with official seal and signature.

Only one week after my last home leave, which usually came every four weeks, I was back at my parent's door [...] near Düsseldorf. My family greeted me in astonishment, 'Why are you back already, and without telling us?' I replied reluctantly that I had left the navy and wouldn't be returning. I asked my father, who had served as a naval officer during the war, for a private conversation. 'If it's that important, we'll go to the garden.' There, among the blooming dahlias and roses, I revealed that I 'had gotten involved in a homosexual encounter and been demoted and discharged dishonorably from the navy.' I was met with a deep and at the same time gentle look, and a friendly pat on the back of the head. 'Then we'll have to see about finding a job for you. And by the way – we shouldn't tell mom about any of this.' I loved my father at that moment! I couldn't have guessed what his reaction would be. It was one of great human decency and warmth.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Email from Dierk Koch to the author on 6 September 2019, and a phone interview on 7 September 2019.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. Also available in excerpt form in Scheck and Utess, "Was wir damals gemacht haben, war kein Verbrechen."

¹⁶⁷ BMVG, R II 1, 1 August 2018, Decision on the dismissed private's application for restitution, as well as entries in Koch's military service book.

¹⁶⁸ Koch, "Meine unvergessenen Freunde."

The apprentice immediately petitioned against his release, which was later rejected on 8 October 1965, after nearly eleven months.¹⁶⁹ Be that as it may, research has shown that Dierk Koch did not miss out on his hoped-for trip to Tokyo after all, because such a trip never took place; no record of it exists either in academic literature or naval archives.¹⁷⁰

The seaman apprentice's dismissal and accompanying loss in rank did not mean the matter had ended for the navy, however. Rather, it passed the case on to the public prosecutor, so that in 1965 the young man found himself back in Cuxhaven local court.¹⁷¹

b.) "Remain a Soldier or Become a Human." A Captain Remembers

I turned 17 in June 1961. With that, everything became clear. On July 3 I volunteered for the service [...] It was a Monday and we were welcomed with lentil stew [...] The question of sexuality didn't come up, not in the least. I didn't have any interest in women though it didn't bother me, and as for homosexuals, you really only heard about them when they were convicted, and everything was probably justified on that account [...] The NCO corps was always having some kind of party or another [...] Even those who weren't married brought women along, of course. Somehow it was always a problem for me. On the one hand I didn't have the slightest interest in women, and on the other there was so much snickering it got on my nerves. I would make an excuse not to go to the parties if I could manage it in one way or the other [...] Apologies had to be more explicit when I became an officer. In summer 1967 we had to take our annual leave during a fixed period as officer candidates. I wasn't ready and asked a comrade of mine – slender, blond, blue-eyed – if he knew where he wanted to go. We quickly decided on Spain, with an auto and tent. On one of the very first nights Jürgen asked [...] if I was homosexual. Crystal clear, straight out. That caught me unprepared [...] I denied it with total indignation. How could he even come up with something like that? We'd both masturbate in the tent though, half in secret, it was never talked about. Neither of us wanted to be openly gay. At the end of the trip he said 'If you rat me out it's all over.' His concern was understandable but unfounded, all I wanted myself was to get out of the situation. Later, 1970, after the first criminal code reforms, I visited him in Frankfurt; he had long since been released from the Bundeswehr and was studying. It was like before, but without any fear [...] *so this is sexuality*, the thought flashed across my mind [...] I was twenty-six the first time I shacked up with a guy. It was indescribably beautiful [...] 1971 was probably the most important year of my life thus far [...] That was also the year I met Torsten [...] Torsten was an officer candidate

¹⁶⁹ BMVg, R II 1, 1 August 2018, Decision on the dismissed private's application for restitution.

¹⁷⁰ Alongside the *Karlsruhe*, the *Emden* set sail for the Mediterranean on 12 September 1974, stopped over in La Valetta Malta between September 19 and 24, then returned to its home port on 30 September 1964. No further trips abroad are documented for the year 1964, and thus no trips to Japan. See Hildebrand, Röhr and Steinmetz, *Die deutschen Kriegsschiffe*, 61.

¹⁷¹ For a full account see chapter 3, section 11.

from another battalion housed in the same barracks where I had an apartment as a lieutenant colonel [...] Meeting him shook me to my core. He wasn't afraid of gays at all, unheard of at the time for a twenty-year-old [...] He met his current wife in 1973. She, not he, made the decision. In 1976 she married him. Throughout all those years we had been able to maintain a precarious state of equilibrium. We had somehow come to terms – until this woman showed up [...] It was Torsten who finally left me certain that I could no longer run away from my being gay. Remain a soldier or become a human – that was the immediate question.¹⁷²

In 1973, a platoon leader set to take over a company the following year, the fate of then lieutenant colonel Michael Lindner rested on the edge of this stark question. Lindner decided to remain a soldier despite his homosexuality, becoming a captain and company leader in Albersdorf's ABC Defense Battalion 610.

When I went to discuss my situation with my commander, he told me to my face that as far as he was concerned, homosexuals were perverse. He was my direct superior. You don't get to choose your commander [...] Finally, in 1977 a new commander arrived who knew and appreciated me. My assignment as leader was extended [...] Yet my mood grew worse and worse, without clear reasons for it at the time [...] The prospect of an entire lifetime of hiding, of giving up on freedom itself, exposing myself to abuse and blackmail made me ill [...] Soon I could hardly sleep, I was overtaken by nightmares.¹⁷³

In January 1980 he was admitted at his own request to the neurology and psychiatry department at the Bundeswehr hospital in Hamburg, where he met the unit head, Dr. Brickenstein.

They sent all the gays to him in the hopes of being free of them. But he would often send them back, saying he didn't see any problem. He explained to me that the Bundeswehr was the most progressive in the entirety of NATO. He had seen to that himself. The thing about not being promoted was an issue of course. But that wasn't something he was responsible for [...] On 4 February 1980 I was dismissed from the Bundeswehr hospital as fully fit for service and went back to my company [...] joined the [current] exercises and was right back in it [...] Psychically too it was going better for me now, just like that, the pressure had completely gone. So, you could lead a company as a homosexual.¹⁷⁴

A few weeks later Captain Lindner read about a ruling at the Federal Administrative Court that found that homosexual tendencies made a soldier unfit to serve

¹⁷² Lindner, "Nicht mehr mein Weg," 89–94. A more complete account exists in another unpublished manuscript of Lindner's from 1985, "Das halbe Leben halb gelebt" ("A half life half-lived," the author has a copy in his possession).

¹⁷³ Lindner, "Nicht mehr mein Weg," 95.

¹⁷⁴ Lindner, "Nicht mehr mein Weg," 98–99.

as a commanding officer.¹⁷⁵ As a company chief at the time, Lindner recalled that learning of the decision had been devastating: “I didn’t know whether I was even allowed to be company head as a homosexual.”¹⁷⁶ The judgment came as a “shock” to him, rattling his already fragile self-confidence as a homosexual officer, and his trust in the military to an even greater extent. As it was, the regular end of his time as company head was scheduled for April 1980.

Three days before [...] the commander had me called in. I had to remain until further notice. I found out the reason why from another source – at a going-away party my intended successor [...] had gotten involved a homosexual “situation” of his own and it had gotten out, and was now no longer fit to serve as company head.¹⁷⁷

(What comes across as a tall-tale was in fact possible to research and verify with court decisions from Military Service Court South in Ulm.¹⁷⁸ The captain who had been designated to succeed Lindner was discharged from the service.) Months later, in July 1980, Captain Lindner took up an assignment on a Hamburg brigade staff. Lindner was subsequently declared unfit for service in September 1980 with the return of his psychological difficulties, and received an illness certificate. Two years later at age thirty-eight, the captain was given retirement on 30 September 1982 due to illness under §44 (3) and (4) of the SG, for “depressive neurosis, homosexuality and psychopathy,” as *Der Spiegel* reported.¹⁷⁹ “The continual game of hide-and-seek and the fear of rubbing someone up the wrong way made the officer a case for the psychiatrists. Three reports with conflicting results sealed an early end to a story-book career,” the article continued.¹⁸⁰ Lindner himself recalled that:

The formal act of retiring, having my dismissal certificate handed to me, took place in an ice-cold atmosphere. A single word would have been too much. The whole thing barely lasted a minute, and I was back outside. No cognac, no coffee, no word of thanks, no farewell. Even if they hadn’t brought any fault upon themselves, the rules of camaraderie didn’t apply for homosexuals.¹⁸¹

175 Federal Administrative Court, 1st Military Service Senate, ruling from 25 October 1979, Az.: BVerwG, 1 WB 113/78. For a complete account see chapter 4, section 2.

176 Interview with Michael Lindner, Hamburg, February 2017. The quote itself comes from “Berufliches: Michael Lindner,” 176.

177 Lindner, “Nicht mehr mein Weg,” 99.

178 Ruling by Military Service Court South, 1st Division on 7 October 1980, Az S 1-VL 10/80. For a full account see chapter 3, section 9.

179 BArch, BW 1/503302: BMVg, PSZ III 6, 29 June 2001; *ibid.*, BMVg, PSZ I 8, 20 June 2002; also mentioned in “Soldaten als potentielle Sexualpartner,” 22.

180 “Soldaten als potentielle Sexualpartner,” 22.

181 Lindner, “Nicht mehr mein Weg,” 101.

Even before he left active service but especially after, Captain Lindner directed all his focus and energy on changing the way homosexual soldiers were treated. It is no exaggeration to say that for a time it became his chief mission, his purpose in life.¹⁸²

c.) Trailed by Rumors: Thirteen Years as an Officer

The memories of one officer given early dismissal in 1992 illustrate both the havoc that contemporary regulations wreaked on military members' career hopes as well as the broad discretionary powers given to personnel management. The officer joined light infantry as an officer candidate in 1979, entered career service in 1987 and achieved the rank of captain and company head before requesting demotion to fixed-term soldier in 1992, with the end of his military career following shortly thereafter. He described leaving the Bundeswehr after thirteen years as a "traumatic experience" for him.¹⁸³

Flashback to 1980, when the cadet entered the former Bundeswehr academy in Hamburg at age twenty, still in the process of searching for his own sexuality. "From the perspective of a young man in search of his sexuality," the Bundeswehr's well-known restrictions on homosexuality were "highly problematic." At the time it became clear to him that he would not be able to live out his homosexuality openly "without great risk to his career prospects."

After his studies the officer was initially assigned to lead a platoon, where there was talk of his possible homosexuality. Yet after a minor incident that on its own is hardly worth the mention, his position in the platoon and the company rapidly deteriorated, leading to disciplinary measures for the young lieutenant and his removal as platoon leader. The officer's sterling service record led the battalion commander to refrain from passing the matter on to the discharge authorities, potentially exposing him to censure by a military service court. The lieutenant "got off with a slap on the wrist," as he conceded; he was transferred, and the incident forgotten. The officer was subsequently promoted to lieutenant colonel, and years later assigned to lead a company.

His time as company commander also came accompanied by rumors about his homosexuality, all without a single specific incriminating incident (or so the retired

¹⁸² See chapter 4 for a full version.

¹⁸³ Interview with W. in Hamburg, 4 April 2019. The following sketch of his service is based exclusively on the interview, and ultimately couldn't be verified. Only the parts deemed plausible by the author have been reproduced here.

captain maintained; his account could not be verified). Ultimately, the rumors led once again to the escalation of an incident that on its own was harmless. The precipitating event was a blood drive in the barracks. The battalion commander purposefully arranged to go to the donation point with the officer (and others) to observe whether the company chief's blood donation went off without a hitch. In response to the troop physician's routine question about any trips abroad, the company head mentioned a recent vacation to Kenya, with the result that he did not have any blood taken. The commander, however, interpreted the incident as confirming the rumors about the company chief's homosexuality. The soldiers in his company for their part came up with their own reasons as to why the blood donation had rejected him, bringing his suspected homosexuality back into the conversation. (Sexually active homosexuals are considered a high-risk group to this day and are not supposed to give blood due to the anticipated risk of HIV, a regulation or recommendation that has long been criticized by homosexual associations and their supporters.) The commander took action, petitioning personnel leadership to dismiss the captain from his post. The captain was initially transferred to the brigade staff; his career prospects "looked bleak." When he asked his personnel manager and the manager's superior to give him a "fair chance," the section head replied that the captain should note that he was not being unfair. And after receiving excellent marks on subsequent assignments and superior grades in basic training at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College, the personnel office did in fact assign him to lead another company. This second assignment brought the captain to the paratroopers, a period he considered his best years spent in the military in retrospect. The winning streak came to end however when he was not approved for general staff officers' training; his personnel manager had not so much as presented him at the selection committee. In 1992, primarily out of disappointment at no longer being able to achieve his career goals, he requested demotion to fixed-term service, and with it an end to his time in the service. He was dismissed from the Bundeswehr at the end of September 1992 as desired, along with the mass of conscripts in his company.

d.) "Your Reputation May Precede You." A Staff Sergeant Looks Back

In 1996, with twelve years in the service now at an end, a staff sergeant drafted a thirteen-page single-spaced report on his experience in the military and sent it to the parliamentary commissioner for the armed forces.¹⁸⁴ The sergeant recorded all

¹⁸⁴ BArch, BW 2/38355: Reserve Staff Sergeant K. to the parliamentary commissioner for the armed forces, 15 August 1996.

sorts of experiences and occurrences, in one part pertaining to his sexual orientation. At no point in time had it been “an issue” for him “‘to take hold of’ another soldier.” He had been drafted in 1984, a time when the majority of young gay men preferred civilian service “for any number of understandable reasons.” He himself had wanted to “fulfill his duty to society of serving the fatherland” and not “just loaf about as a draft-dodger.”

Neither at his medical inspection nor his fitness or assignment exams had he been asked about his sexual orientation (or “sexual self-determination,” as he phrased it consistently throughout the report).¹⁸⁵ Nor for that matter had anyone asked during basic training or in his first unit, a mechanized infantry company, initially leading to his reassignment as a normal enlisted soldier occurring without issue. Every once in a while “two soldiers might share a bed for the night” in his company, but it had not ever been a “big topic for conversation” or “any cause for issue.” Instead, a “so-what mentality” had prevailed. A “good-looking” roommate had once asked the sergeant outright if he was “interesting” to the sergeant, who in turn acted “as though I hadn’t understood.” This came both “out of conviction” and his upcoming reassignment and training as a driving instructor.

The following years as a sergeant and driving instructor also passed by without incident, with soldiers never demanding to know anything about his private life – until 1992. One March evening at the NCO club, another driving instructor asked the sergeant “somewhat in passing” if it was true that he was gay. The sergeant did not deny it, instead replying “‘What of it?’ What followed was aggravating, to put it mildly [...] At any rate I noticed right away that something was up [...] there was ‘something afoot’.” The sergeant was questioned by his superior, who he had to assure “more than once” “that he’d never had anything to do with even a single student driver.” His boss had also demanded he “keep his hands off anyone where there might be a connection to the (Bundeswehr) uniform.”

From this point on the sergeant was only assigned office duty, no longer used as a driving instructor. His disappointment was great enough that he considered an early end to his service. Driving instructors were in demand but his superior wanted to hear “nothing at all” about thoughts of the sergeant transferring to another driving group; “your reputation might precede you.” With good cause, he found himself asking whether “it no longer mattered from one day to the next that for years I’d been able to show the best training and exam results in that driver training group?” Another staff sergeant and driving instructor each admitted their homosexuality to him, but only in confidence. They had no intention of publicly

¹⁸⁵ An exclamation point lies next to this passage on the photocopy of the report sent to the BMVg, which was taken into the ministry’s files.

admitting it, with his own experiences “clearly [serving as] enough deterrent.” On the second to last day of a course in 1993, one student driver had come to the sergeant and told him they “were on the same wavelength.” He did not react – “What else could I have done in my situation at the time? [...] The topic being taboo made open conversation impossible.” The student came back on the following, final day of the course: “You understood correctly yesterday, staff sergeant sir!” Again, the sergeant did not react. “If the ‘pressure’ (which the Bundeswehr itself created) hadn’t been there, we might have had a conversation at least [...] without any second guesses!” As it was, the “situation” forced him “to leave the driving school area immediately after work [that day].” Reading the sergeant’s report, one cannot help but think of the words of another eyewitness cited in this study: Fear eats the soul.

In 1993, the sergeant was transferred after all and became a subunit leader of four conscripts. He recalled wondering, “did my disciplinary superior really have that much trust in me?” After three days he called the four soldiers together, speaking “in plain language. ‘You know what they say about me. But I’m not looking to satisfy any personal needs with you,’ was the message in brief.” At no point in time did he encounter problems managing to enforce even difficult commands. With the “highly beneficial, especially psychological support” of his disciplinary superior, he finally succeeded “in dealing much more openly with [himself], which had been both impossible and unthinkable in driving school, unfortunately [...] When I reported to my superior that I was leaving in January 1994, he expressed his deep regret that [my] planned reassignment hadn’t come about.”

e.) “Then All Hell Broke Loose.” A Company Commander Is Discharged

He assumed command of his first company at the age of twenty-seven and by 1981, at the age of thirty-one, the first lieutenant was serving his third turn as company head. He was recognized among colleagues and the soldiers in his company alike for his accomplishments and leadership qualities, while exceptional assessments gave cause to hope for a bright future ahead. Then suddenly, none of it mattered anymore – the captain was gay. “All hell broke loose” when it came out, as he recalled.¹⁸⁶ It was not that he had disclosed his sexual orientation, much less made any public demonstration of it, but rather a cruel chain of coincidence that brought his private life to the attention of the military. In 1981 the officer’s long-term partner was drafted into the service, and after basic training sent to serve

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Ret. Lieutenant Colonel N., 20 July 2018.

as an orderly in the officers' club of a barracks. Within the chain of command, the orderly just so happened to be assigned to the very company the captain led, making him the direct disciplinary superior to his life partner. The captain did not see any way of preventing his partner's assignment to his company without raising questions, so he opted for a strategy of "Grin and bear it!" Everything would turn out alright. On the horizon however, storm clouds were already gathering.

The relationship between the men had drawn notice and gone on file before the younger of the two was called up. Before Christmas 1980 the two had taken a road trip to West Berlin, taking the prescribed transit highway through GDR territory. When they reached the checkpoint at the Drewitz border crossing, the uniformed border patrol units of the Stasi took the opportunity, common at the time, to engage the captain, who would have been recognized as a military officer at the latest upon his exiting the GDR. "Good day, captain sir!" The border guard's attention came to rest on a gay travel guide for West Berlin that lay open in the car. "What's that then?" the guard asked. Now seeing himself at risk of being approached by the GDR intelligence service he had reported the incident to MAD; the officer did not see any threats to his professional career with his partner not yet in the service. His sole concern lay with preventing possible compromise by an enemy intelligence service, and by reporting the incident to MAD he was certain of having done his duty. Nor did any negative consequences come about at first; neither MAD nor personnel leadership contacted him. "I was naive, I thought my relationship with Ralf wouldn't be an issue in the service. I had been with him long before he became a soldier, after all." Shortly after the events at the Inner German border, however, the issue became a problem, starting behind closed doors at MAD. As the captain later found out, upon evaluating his report MAD had passed on news of the relationship directly to divisional headquarters, upon which the battalion commander and brigade commander had intervened on the captain's behalf.¹⁸⁷

The battalion commander remembered the captain as an especially effective leader who "could really get things done." He had asked division to wait on measures until he returned from vacation (he was set to leave the following day for two weeks). Upon his return, his deputy informed him that the company chief had already been removed from his post – and the service. The battalion commander was "seriously worked-up" that such a course of action had been decided over his head as the company chief's superior. Practically nobody in the company knew why their chief had been removed. The soldiers evidently believed the explanation they received during roll-call, that their former head was urgently needed at division staff to prepare for an exercise. The soldiers did, by contrast, learn the

187 Ibid.

reason for the removal of the captain's successor just a few weeks later. During an overnight stay on training grounds, the new company head had made physical advances on his driver against the latter's will in the commander's vehicle. The battalion commander decided to remove the new head at once and forward the case to the disciplinary prosecutor. The division immediately took the case up. Through inquiries at the personnel office, the battalion commander learned that the captain had "already been known in this regard." This led him in turn to file an official complaint about the brigade, as to "how [personnel leadership] could make such a man chief," all the more so in a company that had recently had a similar, albeit "incomparably less dramatic case." He never received an answer.¹⁸⁸

The brigade commander for his part had told the divisional commander "but nothing actually happened,"¹⁸⁹ upon which he received a phone call from the commanding general of the corps asking "whether he was one too," seeing as how he was defending the captain. If these subsequent memories are accurate (they could not be verified), it would be a further indication that soldiers and officers in the troops could at times show greater tolerance than higher-ranking generals, BMVG jurists or higher command posts.

The battalion and brigade commanders' interventions changed nothing; in August 1981 the division decided to immediately remove the captain from his post as company chief and transfer him to a division staff. This was merely on paper, however, as at the same time the captain was provisionally released from service, forbidden to wear his uniform or enter the barracks, and had half of his salary withheld. The company chief had to be relieved of command quickly but methodically; it was essential to maintain the impression of a "proper" transition for company soldiers to prevent any additional disquiet from surfacing. Once they had lined up as they did every morning, the soldiers and NCOs of the company were thus surprised one day to learn from the deputy battalion commander that their former company head had been transferred to division staff for pressing responsibilities effective immediately. It was only with difficulty that appearances could be kept up for the "parade of lies," in the words of the captain. "A mood reigned over the grounds like at a burial."¹⁹⁰

The captain's petition to repeal the disciplinary measures – his termination as company chief, provisional removal from service, prohibition on wearing a uniform, and retention of half of his salary—was denied by the division commander.

¹⁸⁸ Phone interview with Ret. Colonel R., 21 September 2020.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Ret. Lieutenant Colonel N., 20 July 2018, and in what follows.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

By order dated 10 July 1981 disciplinary proceedings were instituted against you for standing suspected of having had a homosexual relationship with an infantryman under your command. You yourself confirmed this suspicion upon questioning on 7 July 1981, not only admitting to the existence of a same-sex relationship since 1977 with [...] but also to feeling homosexual tendencies starting eight or nine years ago.¹⁹¹

The officer's younger partner Ralf was likewise immediately transferred to serve in another barracks' NCO club. He reproached himself bitterly for what had happened, taking the blame for the difficulties his partner had run into. The only way out that Ralf saw lay in suicide. The attempt on his own life was discovered in time and he survived, after which he was given early release. (The men's relationship did not survive the turmoil, although the two remain close friends today.)

Aside from holding serious concerns about his partner, the captain was drawn into a legal battle against the Bundeswehr. "It was a stressful time," the officer recalled. He saw himself as being in the right and never once thought of giving up. He had been naive before; now he was fighting, though on his own behalf and "not out of some sort of principle, and definitely not as a champion for the homosexual movement."¹⁹²

In his capacity as a disciplinary prosecutor, the division's legal advisor brought proceedings before the military service court with the stated aim of removing the captain from service. The captain explained his point of view in a letter to Military Service Court South in Ulm:

I was furthermore of the view that it could not be of interest to the service how an officer behaved at home within his own four walls, and what form of sexual activity he undertook, all the more so as it represents an essential feature of the free development of personality guaranteed in the constitution. I was unaware of any culpable breach of duty – on the contrary, I was of the opinion that I had demonstrated an exceptional sense of duty by immediately informing military counterintelligence of the series of events that occurred while returning from a trip to Berlin on the stretch between Berlin-Hirschberg, even if doing so revealed my homosexual contact with X. I was so convinced of being in the right that I even testified to continuing to have sexual intercourse with [...] after he became a soldier. I made this statement deliberately in order to demarcate my legal options and know as well that the Bundeswehr tolerates my actions on the basis of our laws.¹⁹³

By today's standards and regulations, the captain had not done anything wrong; his position that "it could not be of interest to the service how an officer behaved at home within his own four walls, and what form of sexual activity he undertook"

¹⁹¹ BArch, Pers 12/45130: Commander of the 10th Panzer Division, 19 August 1981.

¹⁹² Interview with Ret. Lieutenant Colonel N., 20 July 2018.

¹⁹³ BArch, Pers 12/45130: Captain N. to Military Service Court South, 25 August 1981.

entirely matches the altered regulatory landscape after 2000. Unfortunately for the captain, he was about twenty years ahead of his time. In 1981 there was only one way the Bundeswehr knew how to react when it discovered the captain's relations with the soldier: temporary suspension and disciplinary proceedings seeking his removal. No heed was paid to the fact that the officer and soldier had known each other privately for years before the latter's conscription into the Bundeswehr, and according to investigation files, had a "relationship akin to marriage." The captain mentioned explicitly, and in his view consistently, that his intimate relationship to Ralf predated Ralf's entry into the service on 1 April 1981. As such, it "did not constitute a breach of duty under the jurisprudence with which I am familiar, as homosexual contact with non-members of the Bundeswehr does not violate service obligations."¹⁹⁴

The division commander, and the investigating disciplinary prosecutor after him disregarded this prehistory, concentrating solely on the relationship between subordinate and immediate superior that had existed since May 1981. So convinced was the captain of the legality of his view that private was private, he initially declared himself unprepared to break off contact with his partner when first questioned by the disciplinary prosecutor. Taking heed of the sharp response his statement elicited and the regulatory situation, he subsequently stated his willingness to break off contact with Ralf through to the end of his military service, and that he had not been sexually active with his partner since the latter was called up. Through his attorney, the captain agreed to be assigned elsewhere on staff rather than as company commander going forward. As the lawyer phrased it, "although the claimant's heart lies with his soldiers as a former officer in the troops, he would for better or worse toe the line with a decision to that effect."¹⁹⁵

It was no use; the gears of the Bundeswehr judiciary were already in motion. In September 1981 Military Service Court South in Ulm rejected the captain's petition to repeal his provisional removal from service and the ban on wearing a uniform. The ruling stated that the captain had, "during his first examination, admitted to the conduct he was charged with, then just a few days later stated that he would not break off his homosexual relationship to mechanized infantryman X." Under established case law, the military service senates viewed "homosexual conduct on the part of superiors with subordinates [as] such a serious breach of duty that the person concerned can no longer be left in service but had to be removed."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ BArch, Pers 12/45130: Lawyer's letter to Military Service Court South, 26 August 1981.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., Ruling at Military Service Court South, 1st Division 22 September 1981.

The court ruled on the merits of the case two months later. The military judges in Ulm did not follow the disciplinary prosecutor's request to remove the captain from service but decided instead on a reduction in rank to first lieutenant. The court considered it proven that the soldier had continued a homosexual relationship with his partner, here referred to as a witness, that began years before the latter entered the Bundeswehr as a conscript. The chamber considered this a deliberate breach of duty to respectful and trustworthy behavior outside of service (§17 (2) Line 2 SG), and therefore a breach of duty under §23 (1) SG, for which the soldier was under increased liability as a superior under §10 (1) SG.

A company commander who maintains a homosexual relationship with an enlisted soldier commits a serious breach of duty. Nor have the shifts in attitude toward homosexuality among parts of the population or the liberalization in criminal law in this area done anything to change this. Same-sex activity between members of the armed forces is intolerable. A commanding officer who acts in this way makes himself dependent on his partner; undermines his own authority and erodes discipline to a high degree; his reputation suffers considerable harm and he offers a point of attack for enemy intelligence services. As a rule, this means the relationship of trust between the service and the soldier concerned is totally destroyed. Particularly incriminating the soldier in this case is the fact that he continued same-sex relations with Witness B. even after the witness had transferred into his company, making him the witnesses' direct superior.¹⁹⁷

Yet weighty factors also spoke in favor of the captain. The relationship had not begun with him as a member of the Bundeswehr, which meant he could "only be accused of not immediately breaking off the relationship once his partner entered the Bundeswehr." In addition, the officer had never attempted "to pursue any kind of homosexual contact with other Bundeswehr service members."

Beyond that the soldier was an irreproachable leader and received above-average assessments. Nor did his misconduct come out within the battalion, such that the court does not view it as essential for the soldier to be removed from service. He has however disqualified himself from his service rank of captain with the position of company chief, such that it seems appropriate to demote him to the rank of first lieutenant.¹⁹⁸

Both parties appealed the decision, the defense aiming for acquittal, the military disciplinary lawyer still with the goal of removing the soldier from service. The captain's future now lay in the hands of the judges at the Federal Administrative

¹⁹⁷ Ruling at Military Service Court South, 1st Division, 17 November 1981, AZ: 1 VL 15/81.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Court, whose second military service senate acquitted him on all charges of breach of duty in May 1982.

Formally, the judges grounded their acquittal on the fact that the men's statements not to have had sex with each other while the younger partner was in the service could not be refuted. Both had stood steadfastly behind the claim every time they were questioned and in court. Yet only sexual relationships between superiors and subordinates were of interest where disciplinary law was concerned, not an otherwise platonic form of friendship or love.

The soldiers' appeal brought success. The senate was unable to rule out any final doubts as to whether the soldier was guilty of the breach of duty with which he was charged in the letter of accusation. The letter of accusation charged the soldier [...] with having maintained a homosexual relationship with mechanized infantryman X., who came under his direct command in May 1981. The accusation turned expressly on a homosexual love affair, not for example a homoerotic relationship in the sense of mental and psychological devotion or fulfillment, such that in order to reach a conviction it had to be shown for the soldier that sexual activity between him and X. had occurred within the period of time in question. Ultimately this went unproven [...] Under these circumstances and in accordance with the principle *in dubio pro reo*, the senate had to assume the most favorable set of facts for the soldier that could not be ruled out, namely that no (more) sexual activity occurred between him and infantryman X. in the alleged timeframe. This meant the soldier was not guilty of a breach of duty as laid out in the letter of accusation, so that the contested decision had to be revoked and the soldier acquitted. Consequently, the military disciplinary prosecutor's appeal seeking heightened measures was turned down.¹⁹⁹

In their decision the judges also pointed to the fact that during the appeals process, the captain "had not left behind an impression of wanting to engage in a fight over homosexual issues beyond relations with [...] his partner]. Nor do the soldier's assessments show any sign of a lack of realism on his part."²⁰⁰

Herein presumably lay one of the reasons for what was an astonishing ruling by comparison to many others. Beyond the obstinate denial of both men and the principal of "when in doubt, for the accused," the captain's clear disavowal of any sort of combative argumentation on behalf of homosexual rights may have proved decisive for the judges. By explicitly setting his own concrete case off against the plight of homosexual soldiers in general, he gave the judges an opportunity to decide in favor of the accused in this single instance without it setting legal precedent. A campaign over legal principals as conducted by so many other officers both

¹⁹⁹ Ruling at Federal Administrative Court: BVerwG, 2nd Military Service Senate, 11 May 1982, Az 2 WD 4/82.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

before and after him would in all probability have sent the captain packing. By adopting a shrewd defense strategy instead, the officer and his attorney succeeded.

The captain reentered service just one week after acquittal, no longer serving in his old company but on a brigade staff. While everyone knew there knew the story, he experienced a great deal of support from colleagues. His work in the brigade's G3 division consisted in preparing for military exercises and maneuvers, with a similar assignment following on division staff.²⁰¹ Throughout, the obstacle remained that he was still denied security clearance for documents classified as confidential or secret. The captain filed a petition against this measure as well, this time unsuccessfully, although it was not particularly harmful to his work on the staff.²⁰² The captain received the division's badge of honor upon retiring, though not directly from the divisional commander but his deputy – "you already know the reasons why."²⁰³

His next assignment was managing a lecture hall at a service branch school; the officer that Bundeswehr jurists and generals had wanted to throw out of the armed forces five years before was now charged with leading and training young officer candidates. He stayed on for four years. The responsibility of training future officers ranks as one of the preeminent assignments an officer can receive; personnel leadership had entrusted the captain with the task, placing the young candidates in his care despite a dossier thick with the years-long legal battle surrounding his homosexuality, or, put another way, his fitness as a superior. His following assignment was as a deputy battalion commander, after which he was given command of a battalion as lieutenant colonel. Each subsequent assignment stood in opposition to ministerial orders, which explicitly ruled out using homosexual officers and NCOs in leadership positions. (Incidentally the officer was not aware of this particular decree throughout his career, first learning about it during his interview for this study in 2018. He was all the more surprised that the leadership positions had been conferred on him.)

The saga seems once again to confirm the truth that there is always an exception to the rule. Neither personnel management nor his superiors seem to have viewed this particular officer's sexual orientation as any obstacle to senior leadership roles; evidently his personality profile and track record were convincing enough. The case also demonstrates that in the end, there was always a way to assign outwardly homosexual soldiers to leadership or training roles if nothing spoke against it in that specific instance. How many decisions and careers followed

²⁰¹ Interview with Ret. Lieutenant Colonel N., 20 July 2018.

²⁰² For a full account see chapter 5.

²⁰³ Interview with Ret. Lieutenant Colonel N., 20 July 2018.

a similar course remains to be seen; such cases distinguish themselves precisely for not being linked to homosexuality on paper. It was a lucky strike for historical research that this particular set of unhappy circumstances (from the officer's perspective) left traces in court records, which could be researched and later confirmed by interview. Today, the retired lieutenant colonel looks back on a "excellent career as an officer," recalling his 1981 removal as company chief and the years-long legal struggle without rancor. "I'm not angry with the service. I didn't suffer any lasting damage from what happened."²⁰⁴

The NCOs and officers interviewed for this study reported clearly and credibly about the great pressure under which they stood for years or decades as homosexuals in the Bundeswehr. At the same time, many eyewitnesses recalled experiencing a great deal more tolerance within the ranks than what the regulations actually permitted. During the 1990s in particular, any number of officers and NCOs whose homosexuality was an open secret served as superiors, at all levels of leadership.

204 Ibid.