

The Role of Military Cultures in Selected European States with a
Particular Focus on Soldier Identities

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For those who serve.

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1 Introduction

The international efforts to bring lasting peace and stability to Afghanistan and to build democratic state structures have failed. After the announced withdrawal of the United States and international troops, the Taliban recaptured the country faster than many observers and experts would have suspected. The failure became abundantly clear in August 2021, when pictures of desperate Afghan civilians crowding Kabul airport to be flown out of Afghanistan made worldwide news.

A good twenty years after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, which have shaken the existing world order, the question remains as to the meaningfulness of the mission and the sacrifices made for it. This question particularly concerns the soldiers who fought in Afghanistan. The debate about the sense of the mission and its political and strategic mistakes affects them to a far greater extent than it concerns the civilian population of their country. In the course of their duties, the deployed soldiers have accepted great restrictions on their private lives, have been exposed to dangers, some have lost comrades, and others have returned home traumatized. The question of what politics and society owe their soldiers is answered differently in each country.

The armed forces of a country are a mirror of the political and social system in which they are integrated. The identity of each soldier does not emerge in a vacuum, but is shaped by a politically and socially imposed understanding of his role, as well as by a personal self-positioning within this system. The military culture and the civil-military relationship of the country that a soldier takes an oath to protect is therefore decisive for a soldier's identity. However, military culture and the civil-military relationship are not rigid constructs, but are subject to constant change. Since the Cold War, changing global security requirements have forced many European militaries to restructure and, in some cases, redefine their armed forces. In addition to the classic task of fighting and deterring violence, the modern soldier should also be able to apply humanitarian and social capabilities. The concept of military action had to be redefined, encompassing the responsibility to protect, stabilization missions, civil wars, reconstruction assistance, and beyond. Indeed, soldiers in the 21st century must evolve their skills and capabilities in a variety of ways. Hardly any other profession is as strongly influenced by political and social interdependencies as the profession of a

soldier. Since it is closely linked to political action, the changing reality of deployment as well as the aforementioned expansion of military purposes in Europe have always had a strong impact on the social structure within the military and on soldiers' identities. Changing security policy frameworks, for example, not only affect military operational reality and protocol, but also the opinion of the population in the soldiers' home countries - a context that intervenes in the personal space of the soldier himself and thus becomes an identity-forming element of the soldier. But what does this mean on a micro level for the individual soldier?

This thesis examines the impact of national military culture and the civil-military relations on the formation of a soldier's identity. In a comparison between Germany and Denmark, interviews with Afghanistan veterans were used to examine how the military cultures of the neighboring countries, some of which are very different, affect the identity formation of their soldiers. The ISAF-mission in Afghanistan serves as a frame of reference.

After almost two decades, the deployment of international troops in Afghanistan officially ended in 2021. For the troop-contributing countries Germany and Denmark, this marked the end of the most intensive and highest-casualty deployment of their armies since the end of the Second World War. Whereas at the beginning of the mission, solidarity and the general willingness to deploy were comparatively high in both countries, in the course of the mission, and especially with increasing combat intensity, clear differences became apparent in the national approach to the mission and, above all, to the deployed soldiers. While Germany largely avoided dealing publicly with homecoming soldiers and, in particular, with those fallen in combat, veterans and the war dead were publicly honored in Denmark. While German politicians were constantly creating new words to avoid using the word 'war' in public, Denmark developed a new self-perception of the warring nation, which became a new element of Danish military culture.

The very different approaches to the handling of soldiers and veterans in the countries under consideration can be explained by the differing characteristics of the respective national military culture and the associated civil-military relationship.

In this thesis, the causes for the different characteristics of military cultures and their civil-military relations will be examined. The central question is how the different military cultures with their civil-military relations affect the soldiers themselves. This is associated with the thesis that the differently perceived national support plays a central role in the development of soldier identities.

1.1 Problem Statement and Study Aim

In political science and sociology, the military has become widely established as a field of research. While the military as a whole has been and continues to be well researched in its function as an instrument of the state's foreign and security policy, little scholarly attention has been paid to the soldier at the micro or individual level. This in part may be due to the fact that access to the soldier as a research object is limited in part by the military organization (see 1.5).

Nevertheless, as Haltiner and Kümmel note, an organization can only be as good as its members allow it to be: the individual is the human capital of any institution, the human factor that determines the extent of the discrepancy between aspiration and reality in the realization of the tasks and functions assigned and entrusted to the institution and corresponds to practice and theory (Haltiner and Kümmel 2009, 75). While it is therefore appropriate to consider the soldier as a subject from an organizational perspective, the challenges facing soldiers today make it particularly important to consider their identity. The military culture in which soldiers are socialized has an impact on their identity equal to the civil-military relationship in which they interact as a soldier subject. In particular, the challenges faced by soldiers on foreign deployments, which may involve combat operations, shape their identity not only in professional terms, but also have an impact on their civilian lives. In this respect, the homecoming experience of soldiers on deployment abroad is of particular importance because it reveals possible tensions between the publicly and politically proclaimed appreciation of the soldiers' work and the perceived and experienced appreciation of the soldiers themselves.

The following work will illustrate that the profession of soldier may be universal in its task profile, but that it nevertheless leads to differently defined soldier identities in national comparisons. It will be shown that professional identities must be understood in a national context and are shaped by different factors. It is hypothesized that soldiers who perceive the value of their work to be high will develop different soldier identities than those who perceive it to be low.

To support or to disprove the hypothesis, the following research question is posed:

How do national civil-military relations impact soldiers' self-identity?

What is the relationship between democratic societies and the military and how is this expressed in the respective soldier image? What social and political requirements are given for the respective soldier image in society? How is the practical concept of the soldier's profession conceived in the respective democracies and what are the reference points and ideals for soldier identification?

The aim of this study is to examine the normative understanding of the military and the soldier itself in Denmark and Germany by looking into the state's history, external influences, general principles and political guidelines as well as public polls and existing empirical studies.

1.2 Approach and Research Design

Data Collection

The empirical data collection was conducted in the form of a total of 20 individual interviews with Afghanistan veterans in Germany and Denmark. The interviews were conducted as guided interviews. The design of the interviews followed Witzel's model of the problem-centered interview, which enables the investigator to elicit in particular the subjective perception and processing of social reality (Witzel 1985, 227). Accordingly, the Interview guideline was designed in a cross-case approach at the beginning and modified with case-specific questions. The successive adaptation of the guide to the results of the initial interviews allowed for a flexible, yet precise treatment

of the in-depth questions. The construction of the guideline was based on the topics identified in advance through the reception of the state of the research.

Interview Sample

In selecting the interview participants, care was taken to ensure that as much diversity as possible could be represented. Thus, female and male soldiers, ranging in age from 27 to 66, were interviewed in various ranks and in various capacities during their deployment abroad. The ranks interviewed varied from staff corporal to lieutenant colonel. Soldiers who were stationed in barracks in large cities were surveyed, as were soldiers from rural areas. The wide selection of service ranks, age and gender, and urban-rural differences ensured that the soldiers' experiences of the civil-military relationship in their home country and the shaping of their soldier identities were not viewed through a specific lens, but could be depicted holistically.

Implementation

The interviews were conducted over a period of two years between 2018 and 2019. The duration of the individual interviews varied from 30 minutes to two hours, depending on the elaborations of the individual interview participants. The conversations were recorded on a smartphone using a dictation application. A transcript of each interview was subsequently produced on the basis of the audio file. The conversations were held in different settings; partly in military institutions like the Veteran Centre in Ringstedt and Holstebro in Denmark, partly in non-official environments such as co-working spaces or Cafés in Kiel, Berlin, Potsdam, Copenhagen and Haderslev. Three interviews were, as a result of the distance, held via internet using Skype.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire for the guided interviews consists of two parts: The first part focused on the identity-shaping factors of the soldiers. Thus, questions were asked regarding the soldiers' self-perception, their professional image, their ethos of the military and

their role in society. Questions were also asked about how the soldiers perceive themselves and their profession from outside, for example, among their friends and family. In addition, they described their experiences in public while in uniform.

The second part of the questionnaire focused specifically on the soldiers' experiences during their deployment in Afghanistan. The soldiers were asked about their preparations in the run-up to the mission and about their experiences in the field during the foreign mission. They were asked about their homecoming experience and how they perceived the recognition of their foreign mission among their home population.

1.3 Challenges

A special feature of the field of research entered is its external demarcation. Research in the military field as an external scientist was therefore difficult in many respects. Both for reasons of secrecy and because of the very specific organizational culture of the military, research was characterized by a high degree of restrictions. As already made clear in earlier scientific studies (Haltiner and Kümmel 2009; Vom Hagen 2012a; Leonhard and Werkner 2012), this research also confirms that a large part of the military activities are only accessible internally. Leonhard and Werkner note that the military partly restricts access to the subject of research on account of the political sensitivity of the research topic. For instance, certain questions may not be investigated, or only under the condition of non-publication, and some studies are not published at all, only partially, or belatedly because of their potentially politically explosive results. Access to the soldier as a research object proved to be a challenge in the course of the work. The German interview candidates were identified both by the researcher and the association Bund Deutscher EinsatzVeteranen e.V.. In Denmark, the Veterans' Centre in Ringstedt provided support in finding interview partners. Therefore, a special appreciation is given to the associations for their kind and dedicated support of this scientific contribution.

1.4 Empirical Analysis

The first part of the paper presents the most important theories and research strands on the topics of soldier identity, military culture and civil-military relations in the form of a literature discussion. Based on the existing literature, the different historical perspectives as well as the political backgrounds of the two states will be described. The public debate in each country will be examined to obtain an overview on how the military is being looked at within the countries, medially, politically and socially. For this purpose, medial and political debates will be pointed out, as well as public polls.

The empirical analysis was conducted in the form of a mixed-methods approach. The aim of the empirical approach was to be able to map, analyse and compare the complexly constructed soldier's identities of the two countries under consideration.

Therefore, the interviews were processed with the help of Mayring's Qualitative Content Analysis.

"The central idea of Qualitative Content Analysis is to start from the methodological basis of Quantitative Content Analysis (...) but to conceptualize the process of assigning categories to text passages as a qualitative-interpretive act, following content-analytical rules (...). In this respect, the Qualitative Content Analysis is a mixed methods approach: assignment of categories to text as qualitative step, working through many text passages and analysis of frequencies of categories as quantitative step" (Mayring 2014, 10).

Within qualitative content analysis, the empirical approach can be inductive or deductive. In this study, the approach was inductive. Inductive category formation is a technique of summarization. The aim is to reduce the entire material to the essentials. The aim of this summary is a so-called category system, which consists of categories that abstractly represent the material and are related to each other, e.g. by superordinate or subordinate categories. Qualitative Content Analysis thus makes it possible to examine qualitative content more independently of the researcher's interpretation. By creating categories, which can also be confirmed by other researchers, sorting and quantification of qualitative information is possible. In this way, the advantages of the qualitative evaluation of a deductive, open problem-centered interview can be brought together with the more objective form of quantitative research.

1.5 State of Research on the Soldiers' Perspective

While social research, as Ruth Seifert denounced in the 1990s, had excluded the subject perspective of soldiers as a research object for decades (Seifert 1996), the number of studies addressing the soldier as a subject has increased in recent years (Ohm 2010; Dörfler-Dierken 2010; Haltiner and Kümmel 2009; Kümmel and Lauprecht 2014; Leonhard and Biehl 2012; Vom Hagen 2012a et al.). The recent scholarly preoccupation with soldierly identity can among others be attributed to the enhanced number of autobiographies in which deployed soldiers recount their personal experiences. In particular, as the Afghanistan mission progressed, the number of books, essays, and newspaper articles describing the mission from the soldiers' perspective increased.

In his book "Four Days in November," Johannes Clair describes his personal experiences as a paratrooper on combat duty in Afghanistan. Clair portayes the challenges of the mission abroad for him and his comrades and depicts in detail the fear of death he felt during open combat. He tells his personal story of the Afghanistan mission and how it changed him as a person. (Clair 2017). The collection "Feldpost" contains letters, emails and text messages sent by German soldiers on deployment abroad to their relatives and friends (Baumann et al. 2011). Operation Homecoming by Sabine Würich and Ulrike Scheffer is a collection of German soldiers' reports on their homecoming experiences from foreign missions in various conflict regions, including Afghanistan. The central theme of the book project is how society relates to returning soldiers. In the 70 portraits, it became apparent, that many of the soldiers gained a different perspective on their lives at home in Germany as a result of their experiences in the crisis regions (Würich, Scheffer, and Baumann 2014). This topic is also addressed by Marcel Bohnert and Björn Schreiber in their book "Die unsichtbaren Veteranen: Kriegsheimkehrer in der deutschen Gesellschaft" (Bohnert 2016). The book is based on a collection of texts by active and former soldiers, as well as social scientists, politicians and journalists, and addresses the question: who are veterans in Germany? and thus contributes to the incipient debate on veteran culture in Germany.

While research on soldier identity is slowly becoming established in Germany, no comparison of soldier identity between different nations has been undertaken so far. How do the military culture and the civil-military relationship of a nation affect its

soldiers? The present study contributes to closing this scientific gap with a direct comparison of the military cultures of Germany and Denmark and the handling of Afghanistan veterans. The case of the comparison between Germany and Denmark was chosen because the neighboring countries, despite very similar external influences – as both countries are NATO allies, for example, and have a correspondingly high degree of similarity in their strategic culture – have developed distinctly different military cultures, which is particularly evident in the expression of different soldier identities, as will be shown in the course of the work.

1.6 Study Structure

The first part of the thesis provides the theoretical frame of reference on which the following investigations are based. The basic conceptual ideas of soldier identity, military culture and civil-military relations are presented and the relevant research strands with their interrelationships in the three areas are discussed.

A classification of the formative factors influencing the identity formation of soldier subjects will be made. It will be shown that both military culture and the civil-military relations in which the soldier subject finds himself are a central frame of reference for the in the formation of soldier identity. Accordingly, the theoretical foundations of both, military culture and civil-military relations in Germany and Denmark are to be examined and central concepts and identity-forming elements for the soldiers of the two nationalities will be presented. In the third section, the interviews are evaluated. The analysis is carried out in three subchapters, which are divided into *Joining In*, *Being There* and *Coming Home*. In a final step, the fourth part of the paper presents a concluding evaluation of the findings.

2 Theory

2.1 Soldier Identity

2.1.1 The Subject Acquisition of the Soldier

Can soldiers be subjects? Researchers and philosophers have been concerned with this question since decades. Talking about soldierly subjects is delicate, because there is already disagreement about the concept of the subject and its definition in philosophy and sociology¹. The question of who or what a subject is and what it is capable of is being endlessly discussed and becomes even more complex when it comes to the subjectivity of soldiers (Dörfler-Dierken and Kümmel 2010; Leonhard 2012; Warburg 2010; Apelt 2010; Croissant and Kühn 2011; Vom Hagen 2012a). Until recently, soldiers have mostly been scientifically perceived as objects. Their actions in war are usually understood as the execution of a superior order. Many of the existing studies that examine a soldiers' profession or a soldiers' role within the military, still tend to look at soldiers as objects or instruments of political and military action. Even within the field of military sociology, studies either don't consider soldiers as individuals or they consider them as objects of the military body (Seifert 1996, 16). Until now, when a soldier as a subject did come into view, it was mostly in the context of tragedy or heroism (Warburg 2010, 246). The scientific view of soldiers as objects within the military has long since ceased to meet the social demands of our time. Fortunately, there are now more and more scientific papers that have recognized this problem and the soldier is increasingly viewed at the subject level (Dörfler-Dierken and Kümmel 2010; Orth-Peine 1990; Vom Hagen 2012a; Warburg 2010). The recognition that a soldier is a subject in his own right is significant in many ways. Even in the context of military obedience, a soldier retains his ability to act as a subject, since obedience and subjectivity are not contradictory: in every situation, a soldier acts with a high degree of personal responsibility. This means that the soldier as a person is and feels responsible for his own actions within a mission. As a result, soldiers on missions can

¹ A detailed historic review of the evolution and definition of subjectivity in philosophy and sociology would go beyond the scope of this dissertation but can be found in the study of Hannelore Orth-Peine (Orth-Peine 1990).

become victims and perpetrators in equal measure (Warburg 2010, 247). In particular, the sense of responsibility plays a major role when it comes to dealing with traumatic experiences and outcomes of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The view of soldiers as executing objects of command and obedience, which has predominated in academia up to now, can no longer take sufficient account of the complexity of the soldier's profession. For the intended analysis of soldier identities, the recognition of the subject status of soldiers is therefore evident.

2.1.2 The Process of Individualization

Indisputable, the identity of every individual has retrospectively come to a growing significance. Identity has always been based on values and convictions of the time and respective society a person lived in. In the 18th and 19th century the individual identity was closely bound to the collective and its values. A reflexive self-identity of individuals was not prevalent and the process of individualization was highly influenced by tradition and nationality (Orth-Peine 1990, 225). Love towards the homeland accompanied a high valuation of the military and certain norms that in a modern light seem to be distinct to the military, such as obedience and subordination, had general validity. Like this, any process of individualization was closely connected to a general affinity towards the military (Seifert 1996, 31). In the 20th century, especially after World War II, identity was no longer exclusively bound to the state and the military. Instead, subjectivity and identity of individuals grew and became differentiated. A new individualization characterized the relationship between society and any individual from now on. Individualization in that sense meant the extinction of societal categories like social class and stratum and the tension towards a societal mixing ratio (Beck 1986, 206). Accompanying, traditional norms and values that influenced the everyday life of the individual so far loosed their impact. From now on, the individual needed its own interpretation of reality without any historically grown societal imperative that dictates its life and identity. Instead, the process of individualization and the pluralization of norms challenged the individual to think, plan and act independently (Seifert 1996, 34). The phenomenon of individualization and the change of values and norms over time are essential to the understanding of a soldiers' subjectivity and identity.

2.1.3 Identity Formation

The soldier's identity is influenced by and develops from several variables. In order to approach the soldier's identity, it is relevant to examine various external influences that lead to a particular identity. The most important influencing factors will be outlined below.

Self-Perception

Every person has an own identity made up of different elements. The identity of individuals primarily describes their specificity, that is, what distinguishes one individual from another. Like this, identity is characterized above all by individuality. This difference appears not only externally, but especially mentally: identity consists in the reflexivity of the individual, in the way a person thinks about himself, how he justifies his own behavior and actions. It is thus the result of the self-perception of each individual and it always emerges in reference of external influences and self-reflection (Dörfler-Dierken and Kümmel 2010, 8). Identity and self-perception are also formed through a continuous self-location in the social environment and are therefore subject to constant change. The soldier's identity always depends on the respective general conditions and therefore varies in different times and cultures (Ohm 2010, 45). Consequently, identity formation is never complete. Even adult persons can come to a new or changed identity due to experiences and learning processes, or due to certain defining events. In the course of a lifetime, self-concept and self-image are thus continually reconstructed. According to Dörfler-Dierken and Kümmel, a person's identity can also be divided into a cognitive and an emotional component. The self-concept already mentioned, forms the cognitive component. As an emotional component the self-esteem is added. Through questions of meaning such as: Who am I? How am I? How would I like to be? These two components give rise to feelings of self-esteem which, together with self-perception, determine a person's identity. The task of the individual is to combine the two components. In this context, it plays a major role whether the individual considers his or her own actions to be morally good and meaningful (Dörfler-Dierken and Kümmel 2010, 9). Equally relevant is how the individual's actions are reflected and perceived from the outside. Here, too, there is a great interdependence between self-perception and external perception. This is all the

more evident in relation to the soldier, since the soldier, especially on deployment, is professionally forced to act in ways that are considered morally wrong within civil society.

Role Expectations: The Occupational Profile

Every individual has to face certain role expectations. Those role expectations appear in private, for example role expectations as man or woman, being a father or a mother, a partner or a friend, as well as there are role expectations that derive out of the profession of each individual.

The professional profile of a soldier is based on certain requirements that every soldier must meet. These requirements are usually laid down in written form, for example in service regulations, instructions or orders, but they can also be inherited or result out of certain (oral) traditions (Dörfler-Dierken and Kümmel 2010, 10). Certain standards are of outstanding importance for the profession of a soldier. These standards can be, for example, to act ethically and fairly, to be particularly tough or assertive, to be combative or disciplined, or neat and structured.

In order to be able to carry out their profession in full, soldiers must be prepared for the utmost. The utmost for a soldier would be to hurt or kill another person, should it be necessary, or to be willing to sacrifice their own life. In order to prepare soldiers for this extreme case, certain, sometimes rigid, command structures and disciplines were introduced in most military facilities, for which there is no equivalent in civilian work life. These command structures and standards are intended to ensure that a certain operation can be continued even in extreme situations and when physical and psychological stress is high (Vom Hagen 2012, 58).

Any other occupation alike, the role of a soldier is given. The soldier as such has to meet certain requirements and role expectations to fulfil his tasks and to fit into his occupational profile. The soldier of today has to face a variety of role expectations. Soldiers in different ranks should be able to lead and to train their subordinated comrades as well as they are expected to be experts on their corps and weapon system (Ohm 2010, 42). Specialists in IT, logistics or business administration are as common job descriptions as linguists, scientists, lawyers or information officers and

enlarge, together with many more, the job profile and variety of a soldier in today's militaries.

This new range of tasks is of great importance, especially for the soldiers themselves, and at the same time presents them with new challenges. The operational army goes along with "new armed forces" (von Bredow 2006) or a "hybridization of armed forces" (Haltiner and Kümmel 2009)

2.1.4 Public Image

From Warrior-Heroes and Victims

In 1996 Ruth Seifert conducted research into the existing standard of knowledge regarding military culture and identity research and tried to close the scientific gap concerning the social construction of a soldier in the 1990s (Seifert 1996). According to Seifert, soldiers cannot be seen as an institution that is segregated from society or as a pure instrument of a state's policy – quite on the contrary, she postulates that the soldiers are determined and influenced by any process of society. She used the term "interdependence" to describe how a soldier can be shaped by society and – vice versa - how military subjects themselves can affect society (Seifert 1996, 10). This interdependence is significant to a soldier's identity: The dominant image of soldiers within a society is an external factor that has a determining impact on the shaping of soldier identities.

The social construction of images of soldiers is historically anchored in society. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, certain stereotypes of soldier images were prevalent in Europe: the (warrior)hero, the victim and the villain (McCartney 2011) These contradictory images have been (re)produced through novels, toys, comics, books, and film. The portrayal of soldiers as heroes was particularly popular. By portraying soldiers as heroes and fighters, a legitimacy of war itself and the act of war as an act of selflessness was proclaimed at the same time. Michael Paris notes that "The image of the warrior (was) the most powerful heroic icon for boys and men" (Paris 2000, 258). Today, the narrative of the soldier as hero continues to be used in some countries. Helen McCartney, in a study of prevailing images of soldiers in the UK, found

238 newspaper articles in one year with the words "soldier" and "hero" in the title. In the same year, a population survey of the British Army found that 9 out of 10 respondents said they thought soldiers were heroes, ahead of social workers (McCartney 2011, 44). Also the Danish anthropologist Birgitte Refslund Sørensen confirms the emergent public image of soldiers in the public sphere as warrior-heroes. This type of representation of soldiers can thus be seen as a conventional representation of soldiers that is valid both across countries and across time. The general definition of heroism is always linked to the experience or exercise of violence. The image of the soldier-hero is therefore inseparable from the concept of violence. "Violence in war also produces heroes. Having endured violence, survived battles, exercised violence to save innocent lives and defend the nation, even death in combat is intrinsic to (national) heroism" (Sørensen 2015, 234). McCartney notes here, that the original connotation of the hero as the one who killed the enemy has beyond that been replaced by new levels of meaning. Today, when speaking of the soldier as a hero, an altruistic motive is usually addressed: The soldier who risks his life to save others. In this context, the focus is increasingly on the newer tasks of soldiers, such as state building, aid missions and engagement with insurgents. Less frequently, soldiers are also referred to as heroes when they are killed during a mission. Heroism thus implies a moral superiority: "Those killed or wounded in war have traditionally been seen as heroes because they have made the supreme sacrifice and given their lives in the service of others for the greater good" (McCartney 2011, 45).

In addition to the portrayal of soldiers as (warrior-)heroes, there is another common conceptualization in public portrayal, that of the soldier as a victim. In the wake of the return of combat soldiers from international theatres of war, the portrayal of soldiers as victims of these wars has been driven forward. In particular, the emergence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of these wars has driven the victimization of soldiers in the public gaze (Sørensen 2015, 235). In this context, Mc Cartney points to the changing perception of psychologically wounded soldiers that has taken place in recent decades. Although the public had already become aware of the psychological consequences of war on soldiers during and after the First World War, it was not until the Vietnam War and its effects on U.S. soldiers that a new milestone was reached in the study of psychological wounds: "By the 1980s, a new diagnostic classification of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) had been introduced to explain the behavior

of the stereotypical Vietnam veteran who was perceived to be alienated and dangerously unpredictable” (McCartney 2011, 46). In the course of international reporting on the war in Afghanistan, the image of soldiers as victims of war once again entered the public perception. This is partly due to the number of soldiers killed in action, and partly to the Taliban's tactics, such as roadside bombs and improvised explosive devices, which are often portrayed in the media as cowardly and unfair. The subsequent "rise of the trauma culture" (McCartney 2011) in the following decades has led to the diagnosis of psychological consequences of war becoming socially acceptable and has brought public sympathy to traumatized soldiers. The wider social acceptance of the victim status of emotionally wounded soldiers has, in part, led to greater and easier access by returning soldiers and veterans to both public recognition and government support. Today, in contrast to the image of the soldier as a warrior-hero, the image of the soldier as a mentally or physically wounded war returnee is even more accessible to the broad population. Sørensen notes, however, that both categories of soldier images, that of the soldier as (warrior)-hero and that of the victim soldier, are subject to constant reinterpretation in the social context, and that while the portrayal of soldiers and veterans in both categories can bring social recognition and support, to the same extent they also contribute to the stigmatization and exclusion of soldiers within society (Sørensen 2015, 235).

2.2 Military Culture

As already shown, each individual has a completely unique identity. However, the soldier as such does not stand alone. Rather, a large part of his identity formation takes place within the military organization with its specific military culture. The special features of military culture and the resulting field of tension in which soldierly identity finds itself need to be discussed. To this end, the central characteristics of organizational cultures were first outlined.

2.2.1 Organizational culture

Culture as a term or category can operate on many different levels of analyses, as the variety of culture studies shows (c.f. inter alia: Alvesson/Billing 1997; Hovstede 1991; Martin 1992; Winslow 2000, Hannerz 1992). Most people will have a natural, intuitive feeling about what culture means and what it implies. That appears likely, since everybody is surrounded by culture somehow or other in everyday life. Culture is shared by many group combinations such as for instance families, schools, sports organizations, regional communities, churches, but also greater unions like nations and states (Soeters, Winslow, and Weibull 2003, 238). In ethnology, culture is understood as a group-related, internalized, non-static, partly subconscious orientation system that influences our being, acting, social interaction, thinking, feeling and our way of being (Tomforde 2010, 196).

Culture always derives from the social context a person is living in. The identity of the individual is initially not relevant. As Soeters points out, culture is a group phenomenon, hence leaving the impact of personality structures outside (Soeters, Winslow, and Weibull 2003, 238). Culture can be expressed in evaluative standards like values and beliefs of actions, as well as in cognitive standards such as rules and methods of action. Ann Swidler, for example, characterizes culture as a “tool kit of habits, skills and styles from which people construct *strategies of action*” (Swidler 1986, 273). Brooks states that culture is “frequently articulated in the symbols and practices of actors and the society in which they participate” (Brooks and Stanley 2006, 16). The culture of an organization is created, lived and handed down by its members. It connects and holds the organization together. Elements such as communication behavior, structures and rituals are of particular importance here (Tomforde 2010, 197).

Within an organizational culture, subgroups or subcultures can develop. These subcultures emerge when a group of members regularly interacts and communicates with each other and identifies itself as a specific group (Tomforde 2010, 197). The larger and older the organization, the more likely it is that subcultures will form. Each subculture is linked to its own identity and is distinct from other sub-elements within an organization: “Within the subcultures clarity and consensus exist, but the subcultures are only pieces of a whole. [...] This cultural perspective emphasizes the homogeneity

within the subcultures but the heterogeneity of the group's or organizational culture" (Tomforde 2010, 198). A division into internal world and external world serves within organizations for orientation and identity formation (ibid.).

Accordingly, organizational culture is a group-based orientation system that influences the social interaction, being, thinking, feeling and actions of each individual. Culture hereby defines the actors in a society and shapes their behavior. Likewise, culture itself is defined and shaped by different actors in and mutually influential context.

2.2.2 Specifics of Military Culture

Building on the preceding explanations of organizational cultures, the specifics of military culture will now be presented.

The concept of military culture refers to the special practical forms of the military field, which result from the main task of the military, namely the prevention, preparation and execution of warlike attacks. It is a culture of armed force (Vom Hagen 2012, 43). Military culture is understood as the orientation system that underlies the military organization. This orientation system is traditionally and informally transmitted by the soldiers and thus influences the socio-cultural practices in the armed forces (Tomforde 2010, 199). Military culture is on the one hand influenced by both the balance of power within the military as well as outside the military, that is to say within the political landscape of the country, its inner as well as its foreign policy and world order.

On the other hand, military culture is a subculture within society and in turn divides into other subcultures. These subcultures are formed along different lines. For example, the military branches of the Army, the Air Force and the Navy have their own subcultures, the same applies to the individual troops and platoons of the armed forces and the specific military ranks. Tomforde also makes a further subdivision assuming that a subculture of its own, "deployment," emerges during foreign missions (Tomforde 2010, 198). Each of these subcultures has its own identity and is distinct from the other elements of the military organization.

Conscription

In the modern era, at least since the French Revolution, universal conscription became a common recruitment system for the modern mass army. Due to this duty, all young and fit men were registered and then trained as soldiers for a certain period of time. Von Bredow notes that conscription has been an ideological collective phenomenon since the 18th century, when a general compulsion turned into a "service to the nation". The soldier recruited in this way is ideally imbued with a sense of nationalism and patriotism, but at the latest after having gone through the "school of the nation" in the armed forces. Compulsory military service was used on the one hand to plant certain (national) values in the minds of conscripts, on the other hand also to strengthen loyalty to a superior command (Bredow 2015, 201). In the 19th century, with the "industrialization of war," the number of recruits grew abruptly. The changing nature of wars and their increased potential for destruction through technology demanded larger armies. From then on, wars were no longer limited to the battlefield fighting of political differences between ruling elites through their armies. Rather, civilian society became involved in the processes of preparing for and fighting wars, which led to the rise of mass armies in the 20th century. In order to fight the wars of the 20th century successfully, a large number of soldiers were needed. Here, conscription proved to be the most effective recruitment system for populous states. The introduction of reservists, who were available in case of emergency and could be called up at short notice, was summarized under the term "Aufwuchsfähigkeit". Von Bredow points to the Battle of Verdun in World War I as an example of the use of mass armies, in which both the German and French sides suffered extreme losses. With no clear victor, both sides stopped the battle after ten months in December 1916, with France suffering 167,000 casualties, Germany suffering 150,000.

The end of World War II also marked a turning point in terms of mass army recruitment. New ways of fighting wars put new strategic military demands on modern military organizations. This development also affected conscription (Bredow 2015, 202).

The decline of the mass armies

The end of the twentieth century also marked the end of mass armies as they had been used for centuries. As already explained in 2.1.2, the individual underwent a process of reevaluation at the end of the 20th century. At the same time, the nation lost its significance as a point of reference for collective identity. This development also affected compulsory military service:

“The driving forces of these processes are the technological progress and the market penetration into all spheres of life and society. This development implies an increasing degree of individualization and normative pluralization as well as a decreasing importance of traditional values and an erosion of the norm of compulsory military service“ (Burk 1992, 47).

Globalization, technologization and economization have led, particularly in Europe, to an increasing reliance on highly trained professional soldiers. In the 1970s, only the armed forces of Finland, Greece and Switzerland met the criteria of a true conscript army, a so called *hard core conscription force*, with a conscription ratio over 65% (Haltiner 2006, 370). Germany and Denmark have been listed in Haltiner's categorization as pseudo conscript forces since long before the suspension of conscription: The armed forces of the countries in this category consist mainly of volunteers, although recruiting can be resorted to via mandatory conscription (Haltiner 2006, 370). Since 2005, Denmark has been a voluntary army with compulsory military service. Germany suspended compulsory military service in 2011.

Military Order and the Use of Force

The greatest distinction towards other organizations though derives by the military's task: the military can be seen as a social subsystem which holds the monopoly on violence given by a constitutional consent to protect the civil society from outer threats (Edmonds 1988, 26). Vom Hagen goes even further when he speaks of the monopoly on violence as the social good of the soldiers. This very special feature distinguishes the military and its members from other areas in the civilian sphere (Vom Hagen 2012, 9). Holding the monopoly on violence, the military is the only organization which is by law allowed to and capable of fighting wars. This disposition builds a general opposition to the universal norms of civil society in which the renunciation of power and peaceful attempts of conflict resolution are significant. Sørensen thus describes violence as "a

ubiquitous but delicate matter” for military personnel because it builds “a core element in the construction of moral worlds and subjectives”: “Violence assumes such importance here because it is the matter of sine qua non of the difference between military and civilian moralities. While the social norms governing civilian life prohibit and sanction violence, it is central to the soldier’s profession” (Sørensen 2015, 233). Apelt emphasizes this disposition as the dilemma of the military when she states that on the one hand the military is part of a society while on the other hand its potential to destroy the society itself becomes an excluding moment (Apelt 2010, 8). A central value of military cultures is therefore the organized use of violence in the course of state regulation, with the fundamental possibility of injury or death in the performance of professional duties (Vom Hagen 2012: 44).

The members of a military institution must be able and willing to destroy the lives and material foundations of other people and to accept the risk of their own lives in return, but only on orders and within the framework of the organization (Apelt 2010, 10). To fulfil this task, the military needs specific characteristics, norms and expertise which differentiate it from the civilian sphere to a different extent than other professions.

Military Values

Thus, military practice is characterized by certain elements that are common to all armed forces. Elements such as hierarchy, discipline, camaraderie and tradition are redundant in all military cultures (Tomforde 2010, 200).

“Discipline, obedience, responsibility, camaraderie and togetherness. All of these terms have become dazzling [...] they are largely empty and non-binding. And yet they are the basis of life for every soldier's community, the elements of the working atmosphere” (von Baudessin 1969, 142).

Hierarchy is one core principle of military culture, it defines the relationship between the different ranks and distinguishes between subordinate and superior. According to Hagen, this relationship of subordination and superiority reflects above all the state bureaucracy. He even describes the military in peacetime as a “bureaucracy par excellence” (Vom Hagen 2012, 44). “Hierarchy is the backbone of all military performance, of all rights duties, and of the entire process of personnel allocation. It is

made visible in uniforms, badges and titles” (van Doorn 1975, 31). Integrated in the element of hierarchy is the system of order and obedience, which, again, characterizes the hierarchical relationship between subordinate and superior. This principle is particularly strong in the military, as coordination must be ensured, especially in combat situations (Vom Hagen 2012, 45).

Discipline is now also related to this. Discipline ensures that soldiers do not deviate from their learned behavior in the field and under combat conditions. Soldiers should have internalized certain behaviors to such an extent that they can recall them without hesitation even in extreme situations. This is intended to ease situations that might otherwise overwhelm a soldier in extreme cases (Vom Hagen 2012, 47). Discipline thus serves to control the military leadership. In modern armies, sport has become an important factor in this context. Military sport not only trains the body's ability to perform, but at the same time it also trains stamina, tenacity, privation and thus, in the end, the principle of discipline (Vom Hagen 2012, 47). Other values inherent in the military that are trained through sport are loyalty, bravery, sacrifice and comradeship.

Comradeship

Comradeship is a central reference point of military culture. Within the military, the common good is always put first and above the well-being of the individual: “The military ethic is basically corporative in spirit. It is fundamentally anti-individualistic” (Huntington 1981, 64). The outstanding position of the community is again derived from the military's combat mission. In classical warfare, numerical superiority was always decisive, and the strength of an army was essential for the outcome of a battle (Vom Hagen 2012, 56). In modern technologized warfare, the size of an army has become less decisive. Nevertheless, the individual soldier is highly dependent on the cohesion of his associated group. Individual groups in the military are subunits structured according to functional aspects. The subunits are further divided: a soldier is part of a team, which usually consists of 2-7 soldiers. The team is part of a squad of 8-12 soldiers, which is integrated into a platoon of up to 60 soldiers. The scheme of command and obedience reapplies within the subunits. A prerequisite for the military effectiveness of the subunit is its cohesion, identification, mutual trust and comradeship. The individual soldiers are highly dependent on each other's behavior,

since in an emergency, comrade assistance must be guaranteed (Vom Hagen 2012, 57). Comradeship goes along with a high degree of identification with a group and its moral support. Comradeship is thus an important mechanism for integrating soldiers into the military organization.

Segregation

Both camaraderie and identification with the military organization in general are further strengthened by living together in the barracks and through military exercises. Another feature of military cultures, therefore, is the spatial and social segregation of their members. Each member of the military is subjected to special training, education, and socialization in advance: recruits are isolated from civilian society and trained in military barracks. Uniforming, limiting personal possessions, and eliminating privacy and intimacy render the individuality of subjects obsolete, creating a sense of inner belonging through isolation from the outside world and strong internal cohesion (Apelt 2010, 10). Previously learned civilian norms are to be relegated to the background in favor of military patterns of action. Recruits must learn a system of precise rules and fit into the military hierarchy (Apelt 2010, 10). In the military, there is usually no separation of professional and private life, as is the case in most other professions. By participating in maneuvers and foreign deployments, as well as in training courses and exercises, soldiers are sometimes separated from civilian life for extended periods of time. In addition, many soldiers live in barracks or other military accommodations during the week. Because of barracks accommodation and frequent transfers, life in the military has far-reaching effects on soldiers' private and family lives, even in peacetime. In this context, the term "total institution" has become accepted (Vom Hagen 2012a; Näser-Lather 2011).

Tradition

The term tradition is derived from the Latin 'tradere' and denotes the process of passing on. It is semantically equated with necessity, regional customs, origin and habit. Military tradition refers to the upholding of centuries-old patterns and codes. The military is a social sphere in which traditions are particularly visible. They are another

element that distinguishes the military from the civilian and contributes to the formation of a specific culture. Important military traditions include uniforms and insignia, military songs, symbols and rituals, and ceremonial pledges such as the grand military tattoo (Biehl and Leonhard 2012, 317). Traditions provide guidance and contribute to the transmission of valued cultural assets, practices or moral principles. Traditions thus also have a stabilizing and identity-shaping role (Vom Hagen 2012a, 63). Military traditions are not to be equated with military history. In Germany in particular, this distinction is important because of the National Socialist past and the deliberate differentiation of the Bundeswehr from the former Wehrmacht. Rather, tradition attempts to pass on only those elements of history that are considered worthy of preservation. The Bundeswehr has adopted tradition decrees with regard to these issues; consequently, tradition in the Bundeswehr is officially only what has been written down in the tradition decrees (Biehl and Leonhard 2012, 317).

Biehl and Leonhard distinguish four functions that tradition fulfills in the military context: Behavioral and orientation security, external self-presentation, internal self-presentation, and stabilization and education. Expanding on their line of thought, the function of behavioral and orientation security of military tradition refers to the regulation of behavior among members of the military and is applied as a benchmark for individual behavior. An example of this is the hierarchy within the military, through which patterns of action are created for the behavior of soldiers among each other. According to the two experts, self-representation to the outside world relates to the military's communication with the civilian environment. The decisive factor here is the image of the military that is conveyed to the population. Military traditions can be expressed both martially and civilly. Biehl and Leonhard see an example of this in the naming of barracks after certain personalities or the presence or absence of military parades or honor guards. The definition of the civil-military relationship is therefore also measured in terms of the self-image conveyed by the military. Internal self-presentation, they continue to argue, serves to communicate shared values and attitudes. Tradition as a point of reference to common role models and the use of common symbols strengthens internal cohesion and the sense of community. One example of this is the wearing of uniforms. While uniforms and insignia maintain hierarchical structures within the organization, the wearing of uniforms and insignia creates an overall sense of collectivity among soldiers. They express a common

lifestyle that conveys a sense of specialness. The reference to certain historical role models also conveys a common canon of values, which is linked to the appeal to pass these values on to future generations of soldiers. The last function of tradition according to Biehl and Leonhard also ties in with this. Stabilization and education refers to the maintenance of military tradition, or more precisely, to the preservation and transmission of skills and knowledge on which the structure of the organization is based. This ensures that a certain standard of military skill is preserved (Biehl and Leonhard 2012, 318-320).

In general, it can be summarized that certain traditions are inherent in all military cultures, regardless of nationality. Military tradition basically emphasizes the hierarchical structure within the military, specifies chains of command and ensures the general principle of command and obedience. Traditions also provide certainty of action in certain procedures, such as greeting rituals or the way in which conversations are conducted. Through a previously determined canon of values, military tradition determines certain values and preserves them by passing them on (Vom Hagen 2012a, 64). Through tradition, military customs are made visible in the form of parades, ceremonies, rituals, symbols and uniforms. Whereas certain practices of military tradition are independent of any nation adapted, national differences arise primarily in terms of strategic culture, ethos and leadership practices (Tomforde 2010, 200).

Subcultures

Identities are expressed at different levels. In addition to the general soldier identity, there may be other, specific sub-identities that result from a particular area of responsibility within the military or from belonging to a particular troop type within the military, such as the Special Forces. The sense of belonging and the form of identities may vary. For example, a soldier may identify highly with his or her subunit and feel a strong sense of belonging, while identification with the military itself may be weaker, or vice versa. Another subculture within the military culture can be found in foreign deployment.

Modern armies are involved in a variety of out-of-area missions. This is associated with a generation of soldiers with operational and combat experience who bring their

lessons learned into their home armies as a cultural element. Tomforde notes that participation in a foreign mission represents a kind of second military socialization for the soldiers deployed in which new socio-cultural patterns of action and thought are produced (Tomforde 2010, 206) Accordingly, this give rise to new forms of soldier identities, namely mission-specific soldier identities.

The most important element of the subculture of deployment is the soldier's narrative. In their descriptions of their deployment and combat experiences, the soldiers themselves become the shapers of this subculture. The traditional deployment experiences mostly deal with border situations, combat operations, but also general stresses and strains to which the soldiers are exposed while deployed abroad. Furthermore, the subculture of deployment is also characterized by particularly strengthened comradely relationships and new informal procedures and patterns of action, as well as in a multitude of symbolizations and subcultural customs such as for instance special uniform parts or equipment that are oriented to the requirements of the missions. Through the narratives within the military, many soldiers already have a precise idea of foreign deployments and participation in them becomes an identity-shaping moment. In this way, the desire to participate in a foreign deployment is awakened among soldiers in many units, and informal status groups of those with deployment experience are formed (Fritz 2017, 2).

2.3 Civil Military Relations

The term Civil Military Relations (CMR) generally refers to the relationship between the institution of the military and the civilian population. Within the study of CMR, one of the questions examined is whether there can be a general compatibility between the military and civilian society (Vom Hagen 2012, 88). In a wide understanding, CMR can be understood as the interactions between the military and all other subsystems of society such as economy, technology, culture, society and politics. The entirety of these subsystems has to be looked at to analyze the stand of the military within a certain society (Croissant and Kühn 2011, 17). A narrow understanding of CMR is mostly linked to the interactions of the armed forces with civil actors such as governments, parliaments, administrations, political parties and other political

organizations. The scientific interest in this understanding of CMR is mostly centered on political influences on the military and vice versa as well as the process of decision making in foreign and security politics (Croissant and Kühn 2011, 18).

The theory of CMR found its origins in the USA of the 1950s. The American scientific debate about the military as an institution, its strategy and effectiveness became a central concern with the formation of NATO 1949 and the Korean War in 1950 (Tierney 1978, 206). Back then, two researchers, namely Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz, set new benchmarks in the field of scientific military studies. Their books “The Soldier and the State” (Huntington 1957) and “The Professional Soldier” (Janowitz 2017) influenced military studies all over the world. Both of them recognized the tension of a growing gap between the civil society and the US-military, respectively the officer corps. They both found very different answers to the question of how to insure civilian control over a military institution and on how armed forces should relate to the state they serve. This study will put some of their findings to the test. The discourse on the general compatibility of military and civil society, however, goes back further in history and will be presented below with its most important representatives.

2.3.1 Theorem of Incompatibility

At the beginning of the 19th century, French philosopher Auguste Comte wrote his “Course of Positive Philosophy” in which he posited the general incompatibility of a modern society and military affairs in the century of industrialization. Comte argues by means of his framework *law of three stages* in which he draws specific stadiums of society-development. With every stage that society enters the military loses more of its impact. The first stage is the theological-military stage, followed by a second stage, namely the metaphysical, or abstract stage and the positive or scientific as the last and final stage of society improvement.

His main thesis within his theorem of incompatibility is that through means of industrialization the productivity was raised in such high means that war as a source of income became obsolete (Comte 2012). In the theological-military stage, war is the main theme because, according to Comte, war always determines development. He

argues that war teaches discipline, law and order and that without war, chaos and anarchy will prevail. In this context Comte refers to the school of war (Comte 2012, 161). Comte also postulates that war divides society into two groups: an armed one and a civilian one. The majority of the society is not indulged in armed conflicts and is therefore able to do industrial work. The greater the reign ship, the more people work in industries, and by doing so they improve the industrial spirit (Kruse 2010, 28). According to Comte, the military as an institution and the process of industrialization mutually defines each other, until the military gets ruled out by industrialization: Comte postulates that the military inevitably becomes detrimental to the modern system of the last stage he drew (Richter 2012, 77). Thus, he reasons the anachronism of his theory: By improving the societies' development, the military makes itself redundant. Where there is spirit of industrialization there cannot be military spirit and without military spirit, there will be no war.

As stated by Comte, military and economy are incompatible and consequently the military needs to disappear in a century of industrial acquisition (Kruse 2010, 29). Indeed, with the process of industrialization in Europe, warfare shortly lost its economic aspect, determining the changing role of the military within European societies – not only that warfare lost its material justification, it also seemed to debilitate the economic and social improvement (Wachtler 1983, 15). But history proved Comtes' predictions wrong and within only one hundred years after the publication of his "Course of Positive Philosophy" (Comte 2012) the society experienced two World Wars.

Theory of Incompatibility revisited

Soon after the end of the First World War the theorem of incompatibility of military power and civil society seemed to be obsolete. The general capability of societies fighting each other was the crucial outcome of the war and proved the assumptions of Comtes theory wrong. A scientific renunciation of the theorem of incompatibility was the answer to the political reality of that time. Another World War followed and over one hundred years went by before a new approach of the theory was made by scientist Ludwig von Friedeburg (Friedeburg 1966). He modified the theorem of general incompatibility in the 1960s to his current context of society and made four new basic assumptions. The first assumption addresses the functional loss of the military, which

means that within the political cost-benefit-analysis, warfare lost its power over the enforcement of politic interests. The second assumption postulates a structural incompatibility of fighting war: Modern societies are not able to fight wars without the risk of self-destruction. His third assumption marks the loss of a war's economic inducement. War became economically unviable and the high costs of providing weapons and strategically preparing war were better spent in measures of preventing wars. Finally, the military lost its legitimacy. The collective use of force is outdated within the framework of a modern society – entailing the extremely difficult task to establish a modernized picture of the standing army (Kernic 2001, 95-97).

Von Friedeburg reinvented the theory of incompatibility during a relatively peaceful period in Europe: In the 1960s, the Second World War was over and Cold War had not begun yet. In the following twenty years the theorem was adapted by many researchers of peace and conflict studies, holding to the general idea that in a civil society, military force is obsolete. But, unlike Comte, who predicted a linear history development towards the military redundancy, most scientists did not postulate the extinction of the military. The modern theory was modified in consideration of the new society context.

Two orientations of the theory emerged: The first tendency emphasizes the incompatibility of war and society in view of the development of nuclear technology. According to this, the use of military force for a political reason in the Clausewitzian sense is absolutely illegitimate in view of the new overkill possibilities that nuclear technology brings with it. Accordingly, the military cannot be a means of rational politics in the present and future (Croissant and Kühn 2011, 26). Wolfgang Vogt even states that in a century of nuclear weapons, war is not the persecution - in the Clausewitzian sense - but the end of politics and people (Vogt 1986, 81). The second scientific tendency argues that in a democratic society war and military become dysfunctional because the economy provides all the necessary benefits for society. Maintaining military capacities will therefore automatically lead to a diminishing economy. Moreover, a modern democratic and liberal society will not be compatible with a military institution because its values of hierarchy and obedience will counter-work to every liberal movement and self-development in society (Croissant and Kühn 2011, 26).

The theory of incompatibility revisited contradicts any assumption that military can be integrated into society and predicts a trend of alienation. The isolation of the military will likely lead to new forms of military subcultures that will notably differ from any civilian sphere (Kernic 2001, 99).

2.3.2 Civil-Military Problematique and Primacy of Politics

The civil-military problematique is one of the core areas of CMR. This problem refers to the paradox that democratic societies enable a non-democratic institution to defend the civil society against external existential threats. To do so, the military owns specific means which it can and does – and this is the heart of the problematique – turn against the civil society. Peter D. Feaver makes this problem the heart of his book “Armed Servants” and summarizes it as follows: “The civil-military problematique is a simple paradox: because we fear others we create an institution of violence to protect us, but then we fear the very institution we created for protection” (Feaver 1996, 150). This cumulates in the question about who guards the guardians:

“This coercive power may take the form of a military organization established to protect the interests of one political group against the predations of others. Once established, however, the coercive power is itself a potential threat to the interests of the political group it is meant to protect. Managing the coercive power of the military – making sure that those who govern do not become a tyranny to the govern – is the central focus of civil military relations” (Feaver 2005, 4).

Feaver argues in his studies by means of his own rationalist framework following the school of classic democracy theory. He especially looks at the “why” of the military, referring to the right to exist.

Finer and Stanley, however, wonder how the military with its broad spectrum of power suborders itself to civil policy-makers without opposing. Following his argumentation, one generally needs to wonder not why the military ever rebels against its civilian masters, but why it ever obeys them (Finer and Stanley 2002, 6). Warburg and Heins put it in even more provocative words by asking why men that are holding guns obey men that are holding pens (Heins and Warburg 2004, 51).

To address this dilemma, it is important to maintain the primacy of politics. The construct of primacy of politics ensures that politics itself takes precedence over military or economic interests. To achieve this, the construct of the primacy of politics must be enshrined in law and recognized by the members of the military. Vom Hagen suggests that soldiers must take an oath to this law so that obedience to this construct becomes self-evident. The military must then commit to these values (Vom Hagen 2012, 98). According to Peter Feaver there are two ways to achieve this goal: One option is to only recruit and affiliate those groups of people who are extraordinarily loyal to the state itself and let the principle of order and obedience become a defining characteristic of a soldiers' conception. The other mechanism to secure the primacy of politics is to provide financial incentives. Candidates that apply to the military out of financial reasons are more likely to accept the hierarchy within the military, in order to secure the employment. In practice, most of the features complement one another (Vom Hagen 2012, 99).

2.3.3 Civil Military Gap

The Civil Military Problematique and the concept of the Primacy of Politics are not new to the scientific discourse. Modern CMR, as it arose out of the discourse between Huntington and Janowitz, set a new focus on the debate on the growing gap between the civil society and the military in the USA of the 1950s. The gap debate is based on the assumption that the existing military and the civilian sphere are being strictly separated from each other.

Culturalistic Approach by Huntington

Huntington is widely considered the founder of an exclusive approach of CMR-research. He investigates the civil-military relations regarding the ability of a state to act strategically at the outside and at the same time keep the national security level high on the inside. Huntington sees the civil-military relations as the principal institutional component of military security policy because, according to him, only those

nations that have a balanced pattern of civil-military relations have an advantage in the search for security (Huntington 1957, 2).

The most fundamental thesis within his findings is the concept of military professionalism: "The modern officer corps is a professional body and the modern military officer is a professional man" (Huntington 1957: 7). Only a high level of military professionalism ensures a functioning national security policy. To achieve this professionalism, soldiers must have a high level of expertise and a sense of responsibility. In addition, a strict separation between the civilian and military spheres must be maintained. Only in this way, according to Huntington, can the military operate with maximum efficiency (Vom Hagen 2012, 99). Accordingly, the professional military must be separated from the civilian world as much as possible (Gruber 2015, 3). According to Huntington, civil-military relations can only function if, on the one hand, the military commits to abide by democratic rules and, on the other hand, politicians commit not to politicize the institution of the military. This demand is illustrated by Huntington's "model of exclusivity", distinguishing between subjective and objective control. Both the subjective and objective control pursue the aim of minimizing the military power and simultaneously reaching the maximum of protection against outer threats, the so called "functional imperative".

The functional imperative gives the military the right to exist: serving to protect the state. In addition to the functional imperative there is also a societal imperative that challenges the military to the values of civil society:

"The military institutions of any society are shaped by two forces: a functional imperative stemming from the threats to the society's security and a societal imperative arising from the social forces, ideologies, and institutions dominant within the society. [...] The interaction of these two forces is the nub of the problem of civil-military relations." (Huntington 1957: 2).

The concept of objective control by Huntington postulates that the tension between the two forces can only be overcome by strictly separating the civilian and the military norms, and that a correlation is not possible as long as the civil society is liberally based (Vom Hagen 2012, 99)

The concept of subjective control has these lines blurred. According to Huntington, the great danger in subjective control is that the military can be exploited by politics: "Subjective civilian control achieves its end by civilianizing the military, making them

the mirror of the state” (Huntington 1957: 83). Huntington assumes that this would lead to a higher political influence of the military and simultaneously to the loss of independence and professionalism of the armed forces.

In contrast, the objective control maximizes military professionalism: „The essence of objective civilian control is the recognition of autonomous military professionalism; the essence of subjective civilian control is the denial of an independent military sphere“(Huntington 1957: 83). The model of objective control aims to strictly separate the two spheres to help ensure professional integrity of the military and to efficiently serve the state. The strict separation prevents conflicts within the civil-military relations. Conversely, “the subjective definition of civilian control presupposes a conflict between civilian control and the needs of military security“ (Huntington 1957, 84). According to Huntington’s thesis of objective control, the autonomy of the military is the basic requirement for military security, this in turn being the basis for military professionalism.

Empirically, the assumption of two segregated spheres can be debated. Vom Hagen, for instance, questions the very radical view of professionalism Huntington outlines: He assumes that the soldier has the heart of a warrior, always pursuing the central role of winning wars to secure a nation’s security. He argues that only a military culture with very conservative values such as subordination and absolute obedience can enhance professionalism in Huntington’s sense. Furthermore, vom Hagen criticizes that the military could never adapt to any change in civil society if both were strictly separated from each other. He argues that as a consequence, the military would lose its capability to fight (Vom Hagen 2012, 101).

Rationalistic Approach by Janowitz

Morris Janowitz contradicts Huntington’s theory: His portrait of a soldier can be seen as the counterpart of Huntington’s theory. His book “The professional Soldier. A social and political Portrait” (Janowitz 2017) was published in 1960 and reacts to “The Soldier and the State”: According to Gruber, Janowitz “aims to address the same conundrum and uses the same basic assumptions as Huntington but arrives at the opposite conclusion” (Gruber 2015, 3). Janowitz postulates that the interaction of politics and military is inevitable and stands for an inclusive approach of civil-military relations.

Even though the military doesn't directly participate in the political dynamics, it is still bound to politics and will always play an important role in it. Janowitz states that the military is a mirror of the society it is associated with. According to Janowitz, military professionalism is the outcome of historically grown civil-military relations that were shaped by their interaction and not, as Huntington argues, by their separation (Janowitz 2017).

Military professionalism can be seen as a constantly changing result of civil socialization and civil integration in political culture: "The military profession, however, also requires a new set of self-conceptions. The use of force in international relations has been so altered that it seems appropriate to speak of constabulary forces rather than of military forces" (Janowitz 2017, 420). According to Janowitz, these constructed constabulary forces pursue the general goal to keep the domestic security high and preserve the peace. He claims that as a result, it is important for the officer to underline his professionalism by always keeping the political and social outcomes of his military actions in mind. Thus, the consideration of the civil values becomes one of the crucial issues a constabulary officer is confronted with and that he has to adapt to—resulting in a civilization of the military (Janowitz 2017, 420).

In spite of the Cold War, Janowitz wisely predicted that the role of the military would change. He witnessed the traditional tasks of warfare shifting to new tasks of international crisis management and peacekeeping and witnessed the mass-armies of the Second World War shrinking to forces that were recruited from volunteers that only got together for a certain period of time and a certain task (Croissant and Kühn 2011, 32).

Both Janowitz and Huntington claim that there is a division of spheres, respectively a gap between military and civil society. Both made the gap a key component of their research and discussed the primacy of civilian control. While Huntington sees a division of military and civil society as the only way to effectively reduce civilian control over the military, Janowitz speaks up for a wide integration of the armed forces into society, an idea that since then has been incorporated by most of the modern armies.

2.4 Intersection

On the basis of the preceding, it has been shown that soldier identity cannot be viewed in isolation, but rather in the interplay of military culture and civil-military relations.

For a better understanding of the approach of a soldier's identity, the model of Haltiner and Kümmel is consulted. They achieved to depict the self-perception and the public image of a soldier in a three-dimensional model:

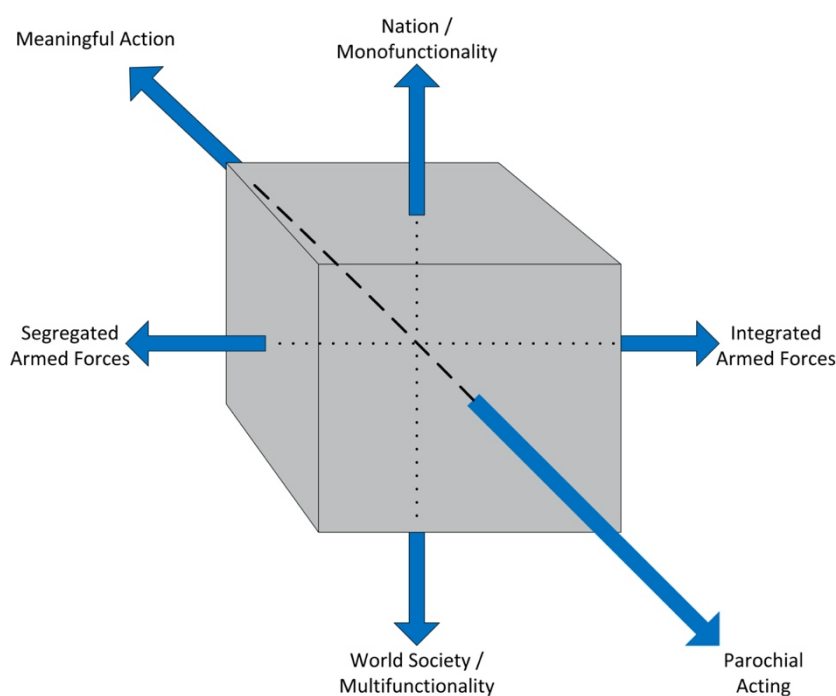


Figure 1: Soldierly Identity (Haltiner and Kümmel 2009, 77).

The individual soldier identity derives out of the position within these axes.

The first axe describes whether the soldiers' actions are motivated by an "end in itself" or by a greater ethnic or political context. An "end in itself action" is defined as an action resulting out of pure obedience, carrier goals or economic reasons. A greater, more meaningful action lies in the belief of the soldier in working for a good purpose and an ethical and political acceptance. The second axe describes the civil-military relations and refers to the classical debate of integrated or separated militaries in society, symbolic represented by the Huntington and Janowitz. While Huntington stands for an

ideal type of separated spheres between the military and the civil society (Huntington 1957) , Janowitz promotes the integration of military personnel into civil society (Janowitz 2017). The third axe refers to the background and the different scopes of a deployment. Kümmel and Lauprecht distinguish between a relatively narrow coverage of a national deployment with classical tasks like defense and deterrence and a wider deployment in an international and cosmo politic context like Peacekeeping, Responsibility to Protect, state building and other humanitarian tasks (Kümmel and Lauprecht 2014, 21).

In addition to the influencing factors mentioned by Haltiner and Kümmel, other important identity-forming factors were listed in the preceding section.

The term identity is closely bound to terms like self-perception and external perception. Both, self-perception and the perception of others arise in constant reflection with oneself and the respective environment. Certain role expectations and professional expectations are placed on each individual. The soldier in particular faces special challenges. That special status may be deduced from a significant variation of the military personnel from other occupations: soldiers often not only work, but live in military bases, they get special trainings in special schools and academies, they share certain values and wear uniforms that make them very visibly distinct to other professions (Soeters, Winslow, and Weibull 2003, 237). The individuality that defines each person as an individual is in tension with the group identity. Any form of group identity distinguishes people as part of a group defined by common characteristics. Soldiers in particular are mostly perceived as a group. Especially the uniforms signal a homogeneity that contradicts any form of individuality. It is therefore to be expected that the construction and expression of identity can be a problem for soldiers (Dörfler-Dierken and Kümmel 2010, 8). Military culture thus embodies specific ethics and dispositions that dictate the members' everyday life within the military and towards each other. The specific attitudes combined with strict rules and operational procedures make the military an institution with high cohesion (Tomforde 2010, 200). Furthermore, the soldier than is regularly crossing the border between two living worlds – the civil world and the military world. Even though the military became more modern and open in the last decades, still it can be seen as an own microcosm with an own culture and a high level of restrictiveness that also produces a certain kind of mentality and personality. That means that every soldier is bound to a stress ratio in which he

needs to find a way to handle the ambiguity of norms between the civilian and the military sphere (Seifert 1996, 36). The very challenge of the soldier is to locate its own identity within the military culture. The identity of soldiers is also formed along civil-military relations. How intensively or extensively a society integrates its military is decisive for the shaping of the identity of its soldiers.

In the following section, the most important factors influencing soldier identity in the military cultures under consideration will be presented in the case studies.

3 Case Study: Germany

3.1 German Military Culture

A comprehensive and in-depth description of the developments in German military history would go beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, attention should be drawn to the immense changes in the German armed forces in a comparatively short period of time. Important works on the emergence of the Bundeswehr should nevertheless be mentioned. In addition to the works cited in the following sections, these include, in particular (Bremm, Mack, and Rink 2005; Rink 2015; Schlaffer and Sandig 2015; Hammerich 2006).

The changes of scenery of Germany's armed forces within the last 100 years are exceptional: from the German Empire via a quasi-military regime at the end of the First World War towards the Weimar Republic followed by the Third Reich (Kümmel and Lauprecht 2014, 25); from an army fighting for world supremacy to complete disarmament, from hero worship to soldier contempt (Kutz 2012, 117). From the division of Germany to the reunification with the integration of parts of the National People's Army (NPA) from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) into the west German armed forces; from the disarmament and restructuring of the Bundeswehr to an intervention army with modern out of area deployments towards the suspension of compulsory service in 2010 (Kutz 2012; Kümmel and Lauprecht 2014; Krause 2013; Meyer 2006; Neitzel 2022).

In order to get closer to the self-image of the German soldier today, the following section describes the origins and guiding principles of the Bundeswehr from its founding to the present day.

The German Bundeswehr² emerged only few years after the end of the Second World War and the total collapse of both state and society (Krause 2013, 42). Rearmament took place against a backdrop of enormous resistance, both from the victorious powers (Schubert and Brinker 1978, 26) and from parts of German civil society (Krause 2013,

² In the following I am only referring to the development of the west German armed forces; for the history and development of the armed forces of the former GDR see Kutz, Baron, Bechheim among others.

42). The “delicate procedure of rearmament compatible with democracy” (Kutz 2007, 64) was essential for successful rearmament and posed a challenge to the founding fathers of the new emerging German armed forces (Abenheim et al. 2016, 2). At the time, people were very conscious about breaking with the past and its traditions. A prerequisite for the armament of the newly established Bundeswehr was therefore a narrow institutional anchoring of limits: The armed forces were not to be able to threaten European neighbors externally nor the young democracy internally (Krause 2013, 43). The outside-limitation followed the wide integration of the Bundeswehr into the international structures (Kümmel and Lauprecht 2014, 25). Structurally, the Bundeswehr was consequently subordinated to NATO with waive of strategic planning or management organization. The German army, the air force and the marine were bound in command structures in forms of NATO Earmarked, -Assigned and -Command Forces. Simultaneously the Western-European Union (WEU) had procedural the wide-ranging armament control (Krause 2013, 43). The Bundeswehr of the Bonn Republic leaned closely on the Western interpretation of the Cold War world order and focused on its role of defense and deterrence (Kümmel and Lauprecht 2014, 25). On the inside, the parliament of chancellor Konrad Adenauer was particularly interested in preventing a recurrence of the Weimar Republic and therefore focused on the inner structure and composition of the military management and army constitution (Kutz 2012, 122). The armed forces should be closely bound to the national constitution following the principle of primacy of politics: the Bundeswehr was by definition a purely defensive army with the command of the overall forces vested in the Federal Minister of Defense, combined with a strengthened Parliament’s right of control (Article 65a Basic Law). The integration of the armed forces into a society with a “deep-rooted aversion to everything military” (Krause 2013, 80) should be solved by a new guiding principle: The core model of *Innere Führung*, in the following *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education*, became the new self-image and from now on the identification mark of the Bundeswehr.

3.1.1 The Concept of Leadership and Civic Education

When, after several years of demilitarization, the decision was made to rearm the Federal Republic of Germany, it fell to the *Amt Blank*, the predecessor institution of the

Federal Ministry of Defence, to develop the defining parameters. Therefore, a German planning committee on rearmament was built. The basic document for the planning and establishment of the new Bundeswehr was the *Himmeroder Denkschrift*³ of October 9, 1950. The starting point for all considerations on the establishment of West German armed forces was that they were to become an element of multinational forces and not an independent force operating on its own. The document already contained the essential elements of what later became the *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education*. The distinction from the Wehrmacht was emphasized, as was the democratic understanding and the value-based nature of future soldiers (Bredow 2015, 168). Wolf Graf von Baudessin, a general staff officer, was one of the committees members and ranks as the inventor of the *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education*. Baudessins aim was to implement moral, ethical and political convictions within the new established military forces that would clearly oppose to everything the Nazi regime stood for. He therefore based his system on the following fundamental understandings: First, soldiers should not be considered as instruments of warfare but instead as peacekeepers. This understanding rooted in the concept of military deterrence which was of great importance at the time of the rise of nuclear weapons in the 1950s. Further, within the *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education* a cooperative style of leadership should widely replace the strict concept of order and obedience (Kutz 2012, 122). The soldiers should be intrinsically motivated to be able to act independently on the battlefield. This intrinsic motivation should be closely bond to an ethic understanding of the profession as well as to the German Basic Law. Within the *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education* the democratic patterns of behavior should be deeply rooted into military routine. Also, the overall goal of preserving peace should become the ultimate mission of every soldier.

³ Full title: Denkschrift des militärischen Expertenausschusses über die Aufstellung eines Deutschen Kontingents im Rahmen einer übernationalen Streitmach zur Verteidigung Westeuropas vom 09. Oktober 1950 (Rautenberg and Wiggershaus 1977)

3.1.2 The Citizen in Uniform

Building on the ideas of the Prussian army reform, the ideal of military resistance in the Third Reich and on the basis of the norms and values of the Basic Law, not only the *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education* was inherited by the German armed forces. Within, also the *Citizen in Uniform* was created. The term *Citizen in Uniform* was marked in 1952 by the SPD politician Friedrich Beermann, who played a central role in creating the legal basis for the Bundeswehr. The term should stress that the soldiers of the Bundeswehr are more than soldiers in a sense of mercenary but have very complex identities (Ohm 2010, 42). The *Citizen in Uniform* emphasizes that the profession of a soldier is a political profession – this constitutes the fundamental difference between a soldier and a mercenary. A soldier has the right to be politically active, since every soldier enjoys the same civil rights as every other citizen. Premise therefore was a concept of education that includes not only the traditional education but also a civic education that should convert soldiers and transcripts into convinced democrats (Kutz 2003, 113-115). This was further manifested in the 1956 Soldiers Act. All the special rights that soldiers in the Wehrmacht had were abolished, and also the linguistic diction changed: although there was still reference to classic military values such as obedience and comradeship, terms such as honor and fighting spirit or sacrifice were no longer used. The concept of the fatherland was also abandoned and replaced by the oath that soldiers should defend the right and freedom of the German people (Neitzel 2022, 251). In particular, the commitment of soldiers to the values and standards of the free democratic constitutional order was intended to strengthen the *Citizen in Uniform*.

Like the *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education*, the *Citizen in Uniform* came to represent what was new about the German armed forces. Both concepts embody the fundamental understanding and acceptance of democracy within the military and the representation of it to the outside by its soldiers (Bredow 2015, 165) and characterize German military culture.

3.1.3 Germany as a Civilian Power

From Antimilitarism and Multilateralism

The very first sentence of the preamble to the Basic Law points to the most important guidelines of German foreign policy. As an equal member of a united Europe, the Federal Republic has undertaken to serve world peace. It reads: "Conscious of its responsibility before God and man, inspired by the will to serve world peace as an equal member of a united Europe, the German people, by virtue of their constitutional authority, have given themselves this Basic Law." This postulate of peace is concretized in Article 26 (1) of the Basic Law, which declares unconstitutional and thus punishable all acts that disturb the peaceful coexistence of peoples and prepare the waging of a war of aggression. In addition, Article 24 (2) of the Basic Law declares Germany's willingness to submit to a system of mutual collective security in order to preserve peace and thus to agree to a limitation of its sovereign rights. These enshrinements of the peace postulate are intended to make clear Germany's renunciation of its National Socialist past. Jeffrey Lantis and Darryl Howlett describe Germany's strategic culture as follows:

"German strategic culture is a product of both geopolitical circumstances and historical memory. A deeply-seated historical narrative in West Germany combined strands of pacifistic, antimilitaristic attitudes with a sense of war guilt. These values came embedded in political institutions as well as elite discourse throughout the cold war. It was only with the fall of the Berlin Wall, German unification, and the collapse of the Soviet Union that leaders began to question their reluctance to consider the use of military force"(Lantis and Howlett 2010, 94).

Henceforth, the term civilian power, coined by Hanns Werner Maull, became characteristic of German foreign policy (Maull 2007, 73). The significance of Germany as a civilian power must thus be seen in the context of antimilitarism and multilateralism. After 1945, a policy of restraint developed based on three norms that guided German foreign-, defense- and security policy: antimilitarism, multilateralism, integration and western binding. Behind the concept of antimilitarism was the basic pacifist idea of permanently preventing the outbreak of another war. Accordingly, from then on there was a fundamental skepticism towards the military as a political instrument. Thus, military operations were categorically rejected until the 1990s, which led to a rather defensive character of the German armed forces. For the Bundeswehr, this meant in concrete terms that foreign deployments should only be permissible if the

Federal Republic of Germany itself was under attack and was therefore in a state of exercising its individual right of self-defense, either alone or together with other states under attack at the same time.

As emerged, Germany's domestic, foreign and security policies were shaped by its defeat in the Second World War and the resulting division of Europe by the Iron Curtain. Both German politics and society were equally shaped in the direction of a civilian power and the resulting consequences with the construction of the armed forces as a purely defensive army under a civilian primacy of politics.

While the bipolar threat situation assigned the Bundeswehr primarily the role of safeguarding national existence, social debates were often characterized by pacifism and neutralism, and the debates in the 1950s about rearming Germany experienced a kind of renaissance in the 1960s. Although the Bundeswehr promised to be close to the population as an "army in democracy" and was supposed to be anchored in society through general conscription, attitudes toward the Bundeswehr in public opinion tended to be restrained to skeptical. Franke sums up: "The military was not popular, but as a necessary evil for the guarantee of peace and prosperity, it was nevertheless tolerated to a certain extent as a national insurance policy" (Franke 2012, 314).

3.1.4 From Cold War Era to Out of Area

From 1947-1989 the Cold War Era globally dictated military politics. The bipolar world order with its principles of territorial defence and deterrence played a central role in the territorially divided Germany. Not only the political climate but also the military tactics and perception were influenced by this division. The west German Bundeswehr developed a doctrine of „*being able to fight but not forced to fight*“⁴ (Kümmel/Lauprecht 2014, 24) and national defense became a defining characteristic. Thus, in the Cold War era, joining the military to promote homeland security was a common and well accepted legitimization of soldiering by the public (Leonhard/Biehl 2012, 413).

⁴ „Kämpfen können um nicht kämpfen zu müssen“

After the Cold War era, world politics changed. The very clear division of the two fronts lead to more complicated international relations. The “End of the World” (Fukuyama 1992) meant a turbulent world order in which old conflicts re-arose and new conflicts with new kinds of warfare occurred (Kaldor 1999/ Münkler 2010). A so called “something-has-to-be-done-factor” (Dandeker 1998,in Leuprecht/Kümmel 2014: 22) evolved within the international state community, to be able to face the extraordinarily violent conflicts in the 1990’s in for instance Rwanda, Congo, Sierra Leone and Ex-Yugoslavia.

Especially in Europe, the standing armies had to face a new range of tasks such as conflict prevention and humanitarian aid. Germany's integration into international alliances, a changed global security situation, and threats such as international terrorism became constitutive for the German armed forces: With the end of the East-West conflict, the participation of German soldiers in multinational missions abroad became the structure-determining task of the Bundeswehr and shaped a new foreign policy self-image of Germany (Gareis 2011, 149).

The changes that German foreign policy has undergone since the end of the Cold War and German reunification are particularly evident in the Bundeswehr's out-of-area missions. Until reunification in 1990, the Bundeswehr's mission were limited to national and alliance defence. The Bundeswehr was only deployed outside NATO territory in the event of natural disasters such as drought and earthquakes, where the Bundeswehr primarily transported relief supplies to disaster areas (Rauch 2004). German foreign policy before 1990 was thus characterized not only by integration into the Western alliance but also by a general renunciation of violence. For the Bundeswehr, this meant limiting military force to self-defence. Foreign deployments were only constitutionally permissible if the Federal Republic itself was under attack.

With reunification, however, it became clear that Germany had to more actively fulfil its obligations under international treaties. Due to the changes in the global political situation, German security policy had to undergo far-reaching changes if Germany did not want to remain a mere recipient of alliance security (Krause 2013, 163). The then German government under Chancellor Helmut Kohl also saw the need for political action regarding German missions abroad at the beginning of the 1990s. At that time, however, there was no clarity about the constitutional conditions of such Bundeswehr

missions (Gareis and Klein 2006, 278). In the light of this development, Chancellor Helmut Kohl announced during his government declaration in the first unified German Bundestag on October 4, 1990, that a unified Germany would live up to its international responsibilities and that the constitutional prerequisites for this would also be created (Deutscher Bundestag 1990, S. 18028). Kohl made this statement in October 1990 in reference to Iraq's parallel annexation of Kuwait, which led to the Second Gulf War beginning in January of the following year. Due in part to the lack of a constitutional basis for German participation in out-of-area missions, however, the German government could not bring itself to participate militarily in the U.S.-led intervention. Instead of making a military contribution to the coalition force, Germany provided the U.S. and Israel with financial and material aid amounting to more than 17 billion DM (Krause 2013, 168). Thus, despite Kohl's declarations, the first military engagements of the Bundeswehr of reunified Germany continued the tradition of humanitarian aid, and the Bundeswehr continued to provide primarily technical, medical, and logistical assistance in international missions. Germany's involvement in 1991 in the mine-clearing operation at the end of the Gulf War, German support for weapons inspectors in Iraq within the framework of UNSCOM, and participation in the blue-helmet mission in Cambodia were also officially declared to be humanitarian aid, although the Bundeswehr did in fact participate more and more militarily in out-of-area missions. In this context, von Krause points out that the factually and legally questionable declaration of the missions as humanitarian aid primarily served to circumvent the domestic political discussion about the constitutionality of the missions (Krause 2013, 171). The final threshold for German soldiers to take part in combat operations outside national and alliance defence was then crossed in 1993 with the UNOSOM II mission in Somalia, in which the Bundeswehr took part in the armed mission of the United Nations with a supply battalion (Gareis and Klein 2006, 278).

In the process, the Bundeswehr changed from a purely training army to an operational army. In the course of this change, the question of constitutionality and the control function of the German Bundestag in missions beyond national defense were sharply debated in domestic politics. After several lawsuits filed by the opposition parliamentary group in the Bundestag, the Constitutional Court finally ruled on July 12, 1994, that the military deployment of the Bundeswehr within collective security systems is also permitted outside national and alliance borders. Since then, the federal

government has been obliged to obtain the constitutive approval of the Bundestag for every deployment of armed forces. Responsibility for foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr is thus shared by the federal government and parliament as a constitutive act (Meiers 2011, 88). In this context, the Federal Constitutional Court coined the term *parliamentary army*, which was later adopted in this form by the German Bundestag.

The Bundeswehr as an Operational Army

Out-of-area missions became a new element of German military culture. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Bundeswehr increasingly took part in armed operations within the framework of UN and NATO missions. The missions UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia, NATO SFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina and KFOR in Kosovo are particularly worthy of mention. The Bundeswehr's deployments during the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia are particularly significant: at the same time that the constitutional court was formally resolving the permissibility of out-of-area deployments, another restriction, this time political, had to be broken down. The historically evolved restriction, also known as the Kohl Doctrine, prohibited German troops from being present in countries occupied by the Wehrmacht during the Third Reich (Hilz 2009, 41). The historical restriction also corresponded to the widespread skepticism about German military missions in society at the time. As the intensity of the war in Yugoslavia increased and the German out-of-area question was resolved, the Kohl Doctrine was suspended over time (Krause 2013, 200). The Bundeswehr's operational spectrum changed considerably in the course of the conflicts of the 1990s. The Bundeswehr became an instrument of German foreign policy with a changed range of tasks. With its participation in Operation Enduring Freedom, the Bundeswehr also entered the militarily led fight against international terrorism for the first time after the terrorist attacks in 2001, on the basis of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty and Article 51 of the UN Charter (Gareis and Klein 2006, 278).

This new range of tasks is of great importance, especially for the soldiers themselves, and at the same time presents them with new challenges. The operational army goes along with "new armed forces" (von Bredow 2006) or a "hybridization of armed forces" (Haltiner and Kümmel 2009). In this context, von Bredow points out that a shift in the spectrum of operations also requires a recalibration of the relationship between the

Bundeswehr and German civil society if a process of alienation is to be prevented. According to von Bredow, however, this process has already begun in recent years (Bredow 2015, 178).

3.1.5 Military Service in Germany

The compulsory military service characterized the Bundeswehr for decades. From 1956 onwards, male citizens were obliged to serve in the military for a certain amount of time. The main task of the Bundeswehr alongside its NATO allies until the end of Cold War was to counter any possible attacks from the Warsaw Pact members. The structure of the German armed forces corresponded directly to that task in means of equipment and personal strength: from its formation until the end of the East-West conflict the personnel of the Bundeswehr amounted about 500 000 soldiers of which about half of them were conscripts (Wiesner 2011, 91).

Although compulsory military service was highly controversial when it was introduced in the context of German rearmament, it was accepted by the majority of the population in view of the threat situation of the Cold War, since the creation of a new Bundeswehr could only be realized through compulsory military service (Weber 2017, 73). As Weber notes, conscription required special legitimation from the very beginning due to German history and was given a strong normative component through the anchoring of the guiding principles of the *Citizen in Uniform* and the *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education*.

Theodor Heuss called compulsory military service the "legitimate child of democracy" (Bald 1991, 3) and it was seen to serve as the basis for anchoring armed force in society in the new Federal Republic. In post-war Germany, conscription was considered to be the best option to ensure the democratic integration of the military into the civil society (Mannitz 2014) and was seen as a parenthesis between the military and society. Compulsory military service thus became an essential element of the political-military culture in Germany (Werkner 2011, 45).

With the end of the Cold War, the strategic significance of the Bundeswehr also changed. Since 1989, Germany was no longer threatened at its borders and in the

course of the German reunification, the Bundeswehr had to be restructured. In the following years, the focus was on reducing the size of the armed forces. From the original half a million soldiers, the troop strength was reduced to 252.500 soldiers, accompanied by base closures and the shortening of the duration of compulsory military service. Successively, the duration of compulsory military service was shortened from 15 months to six months (Wiesner 2011, 91).

Although conscription became less relevant to security policy after the end of the Cold War and critics questioned the justice of military service, it was still maintained for the time being (Weber 2017, 73). The main argument for retaining conscription was once again normative and aimed at the social significance of the Bundeswehr. It was feared that a suspension of conscription would lead to an alienation between society and the military, with a simultaneous devaluation of the soldier's profession (Biehl 2012a, 54).

Despite these concerns, a shift took place in the late 2000s. High costs and declining social acceptance of compulsory military service ultimately paved the way for the decision of the government coalition of the governing coalition of the CDU, CSU and FDP in 2011 to suspend compulsory military service. Henceforth, the Bundeswehr, with a significantly reduced staff of 185,000 soldiers, was to consist primarily of professional soldiers and only voluntary conscripts (Wiesner 2011).

Formally, conscription has not been abolished, but suspended. However, the end of compulsory military service continues to apply exclusively in peacetime; it can be reactivated in the event of tension or defence. Therefore, Article 12a of the Basic Law, according to which every male German citizen "from the age of eighteen may be required to serve in the armed forces, in the Federal Border Guard or in a civil defence unit," remains untouched (*Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* 1949).

After the suspension of compulsory military service, personnel reductions and base closures the question arose as to the future integration of the Bundeswehr and soldiers in society (Weber 2017, 75). Due to the lack of direct contact with soldiers of the German Armed Forces, the perception in society has also changed. In this context, Detlef Buch states that the disappearance of conscripts from everyday life increased a gap between the military and society (Buch 2014, 131). Everyday encounters between Bundeswehr soldiers and civilians are on the decline and the Bundeswehr is

perceived primarily by the media, especially television and newspapers (Wanner 2019, 66). This circumstance will be addressed in the further course of the study.

In 2021, the Ministry of defence launched the pilot project “Your Year for Germany”. The project represents a voluntary service and is intended, on the one hand, to strengthen social cohesion and confidence in the armed forces. In addition, the volunteers thus recruited are to supplement the forces of the Bundeswehr in homeland security and the territorial reserve. In this way, the service is intended to contribute to societal resilience and nationwide crisis prevention (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2021).

3.2 Joining In

The Joining in section looks at the reasons why the participants decided to join the military professionally. It examines the extent to which the study participants identify with their profession and the values and norms associated with it, along with the challenges they are confronted with in this context.

3.2.1 Professional Motivation

Between Institution and Occupation

The aspects of soldier motivation form a central field of research within sociological and political science military research. “Soldiers’ motivation must be understood as an amalgam of possible actions, behaviors and attitudes, which has a decisive bearing on soldiers’ actions. The long-term motivation of soldiers and their fundamental bond in an army can even be understood as the general commitment of the soldier to a military organization.”(Tomforde 2005, 579). The motives of a person for joining the armed forces of their country are diverse. Researchers interested in examining the reasons people choose to serve in the military, have often categorized the various motivating factors for military service using the analytical framework of Moskos’ Institutional and Occupational (I/O) model (Taylor et al. 2015, 2).

At the end of the 1980s, Charles Moskos developed the Institution/Occupation model. With this model, Moskos wanted to depict the social transformation of the U.S. military after the abolition of conscription in 1973 and the ensuing change in civil-military relations. Moskos argues that after the abolition of conscription, the U.S. military became closer to the profile of a civilian employer. Moskos contrasts two different conceptions of the military, which represent different contents of military socialization (Weber 2017, 85). In Moskos' sense, the military as an institution is characterized by values and norms that put the common good before self-interest, by soldiers with a high degree of role identification and a willingness to sacrifice themselves, and by a professional attitude that can be described as a vocation:

“An institution is legitimated in terms of values and norms, i.e., a purpose transcending individual self-interest in favor of a presumed higher good. Members of an institution are often viewed as following a calling; they generally regard themselves as being different or apart from the broader society and are so regarded by others. To the degree one's institutional membership is congruent with notions of self-sacrifice and dedication, it will usually enjoy esteem from the larger community” (Moskos 1977, 42).

Military occupation, on the other hand, follows the rules of the market economy. Individual economic interests dominate over organizational interests, which is the same as the type of employment:

“An occupation is legitimated in terms of the marketplace, i.e., prevailing monetary rewards for equivalent competencies. In a modern industrial society employees usually enjoy some voice in the determination of appropriate salary and work conditions. Such rights are counterbalanced by responsibilities to meet contractual obligations. The occupational model implies priority of self-interest rather than that of the employing organization” (Moskos 1977, 43).

In the I/O model, the soldier's profession is understood normatively in an institutional understanding of the military whereas in an occupational understanding, this normative element is absent (Weber 2017, 23). Corresponding to the two contrasting forms of military character, the motivation of soldiers to join the military can also correspond to either the institutional or the occupational character. According to the two models, a person's motivation to join the military can be reflected by intrinsic (Institution) and extrinsic (Occupation) factors. Intrinsic motives are motives such as education, social status, beliefs and prestige contrary to extrinsic motives like for instance salary and occupational security (Bulmahn 2007, 76).

3.2.2 Motivation of German Soldiers to Join the Bundeswehr

A person's decision to join the military is complex and is usually motivated by several intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The most frequent responses to the question of why the interview participant became a soldier were outlined below and reflected in overarching categories.

Adventure

Among the German interviewees, adventurousness was the most frequently mentioned answer to the question why they chose the profession of a soldier.

“The main thing was adventure. I wanted to get out, experience something different, and that's when the Bundeswehr came in handy. Initially, I was drafted through compulsory military service and then I extended my service to four years. [...] I was more or less allowed to experience my adventure and enjoy various training courses, which simply allowed me to get a taste of different areas and it was simply versatile and not mindless. And that was exactly what I wanted at the time” [GER5, 30, Specialist].

“To experience something” was very often mentioned in the interviews held: “I am sure that the spirit of adventure has always been with me. Just to experience something. I was incredibly happy to go on exercises, because this life in the field was always something that I enjoyed immensely” [GER7, 55, Captain]. Especially among soldiers who joined the armed forces at a very young age, the desire to experience extraordinary situations has been present.

“And it was just a bit of a sense of adventure. On the one hand the technology, on the other hand I was young, I was only 18 years old and shortly after I turned 19. Of course I had a sense of adventure, and I would have liked to see a bit of the world. I didn't really had the danger on my radar.” [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant]

The desire to experience extremes also went hand in hand with a detachment from the parental home. For many of the German soldiers interviewed, joining the Bundeswehr also marked a turning point between adolescence and adulthood.

“I think when you're 18, you don't really have an idea of what it's really like or what to expect. But it was also this kind of rebel in me. Breaking out of home, getting to know something new. The Bundeswehr was actually secondary at that moment, it was actually a bit of discipline, to

experience something new, to just get away from home. A little bit of an adventurous spirit, that kind of thing" [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

Some were looking for an occupation that offered the maximum deviation of what they knew from home and from school:

„Yes, I graduated from high school and just didn't want to sit in the classroom anymore, I wanted to get out into the field and forest. To sit in the tank and simply hear less about theory and academia. I wanted to do something practical for a change. I've always been attracted to foreign missions, to get around the world, to see something of the world“ [GER4, 38, Major].

Altruistic Motives

The desire to help people in need and to be part of an organization that promotes peace seems to also be one of the strong motives for the soldier to join the armed forces:

"So it wasn't so much the Bundeswehr, but rather the idea that being a soldier is in itself a profession in which you contribute something to world peace, in which you slap bad people on the wrist, protect people in need, and so on. Those were the main criteria. Also because of the conviction that one cannot counter what is happening in the world only with diplomatic efforts, but that it is necessary in certain cases to use armed force. [...] So when human rights violations happen somewhere, you have to take action directly and not months later, when more innocent people have lost their lives there" [GER4,38,Major].

Social status, prestige and heroism played a major role in the decision-making process of many young men:

"I always wanted to join the Bundeswehr, I always wanted to be a soldier. My entire childhood was shaped by the fact that I knew nothing other than the image in my head: I want to become a soldier. I want to help others, I want to perform heroic deeds, perhaps. To be the knight in shining armor. [...] I always thought soldiers helped and were heroes and brave. If I was asked the question, why don't you go to an aid organization, I still thought, I'd rather be someone who can fight back. I also had a strong sense of justice in my school days and always tried to stand up for the weaker ones. That was also a bit of the pathos, so to speak, under which I wanted to become a soldier" [GER6, 31, Specialist, Paratrooper].

“The knight in shiny armor” [GER6] describes the soldier as a hero – a picture as old as warfare. Legends of warrior heroes have been produced throughout history and can still be found in today’s narratives (see section 2.1.4)

Political beliefs

Political attitudes can also be a decisive criterion for taking up a certain profession, this also applies to the profession of a soldier.

“I was already very interested in security policy at that time [...] and I felt that something would move positively in this solidification of the East-West conflict, and so it should come. Not today, not tomorrow. It took some time until the fall of the Berlin Wall, but there were clear relaxations for the people, also for the citizens who could visit each other, more than it was really possible before. I myself had relatives in the GDR at that time, and there was a clear easing of tensions at that level, but also on the larger security policy level, and that appealed to me. So I said to myself, yes, you want to be part of that, you want to promote that, without an armed force that was ready for action, it was not possible at that time, quite clearly. The East-West conflict was based on mutual deterrence, and that had to work in order to keep the other side, regardless of which side, from doing something stupid. This balance of power was necessary from my point of view, but in terms of security policy there was a clear easing of tensions toward the good side, and that also inspired me.” [GER10, 66, Lieutenant Colonel]

In Germany in particular, the Cold War had a direct impact on people's lives. The Iron Curtain, in the form of the Berlin Wall, divided not only Berlin, but also friends and families, as in the example of the study participant cited above. Contributing to the improvement of a political situation was also a reason for this interview participant's choice of profession when he decided to join the armed forces in light of the terrorist attacks in New York.

“In 2001, the World Trade Center towers collapsed, and yes, I think 9/11 was a deciding point for me to go into the service, for example, to Afghanistan. I really wanted to be in a special forces unit. And accordingly, I had a positive understanding of [the Bundeswehr]. In addition, the foreign deployments also increased, and at that time I was involved with Somalia and also with Kosovo, and I actually wanted to go on a foreign deployment from the very beginning, because I simply wanted to give aid and support to other peoples in general.” [GER2, 35, Corporal].

For some of the soldiers interviewed, classic military life was also a motivating factor in their decision. Some found the setting of boundaries and the hierarchical structures in the military appealing.

“Since I had always wanted to go there, it was the obvious thing to do. I simply liked the fact that I was given a structure. I also liked the work. Especially being out in the field as an infantryman. That was just my thing.” [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper]

Masculinity

The military has been associated with masculinity for a long time. this participant saw his career choice as a proof of manhood.

“I was drafted via compulsory military service. And then I joined the Bundeswehr. That was a proof of manhood for myself at the time, because I thought a real man had to join the Bundeswehr. For me, it was like saying that a man has to know how to defend himself. Camaraderie, loyalty, and yes, something honorable. An honorable task. And that was genuinely masculine for me, yes” [GER2, 35, Corporal]

The use of weapons and the associated possibilities to decide over life and death and to exercise power and violence are central to the definition of military masculinity and have also always been used as a clearly defined demarcation criterion between the sexes into a weapon-bearing male and a non-weapon-bearing female gender. Women were formally excluded from combat positions in almost all European countries until recently. As medics, they were allowed to carry weapons for self-defense purposes and were trained accordingly. However, this did not apply to combat operations. "Armament (is) the most permanent and stable boundary that women had to cross to become fully recognized soldiers." (Evert 2010, 70). For many years, the profession of soldiering was also reserved exclusively for men in the Bundeswehr. It was not until the mid-1970s that women were allowed to serve in the Bundeswehr's medical service, and finally in the music corps in the 1990s. Military combat training was unthinkable for a long time until women finally had access to all military careers following a ruling by the European Court of Justice in 2000. Today, the proportion of women in the Bundeswehr is around 13 percent.⁵

Financial Benefits

The occupational security and the secure income also influenced the support by the soldier's social background. Some families openly approved their child's career choices based on these extrinsic motives.

⁵<https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/ueber-die-bundeswehr/selbstverstaendnis-bundeswehr/chancengerechtigkeit-bundeswehr/frauen-bundeswehr>, 18.10.21.

„So in the family it was received rather positively, because all of us served. [...] There was also a good, fixed salary and actually the Bundeswehr was also well regarded as an employer“ [GER5, 30, Specialist].

A fixed salary and job security was one of the important criteria for some to become a soldier: “Then there was a financial aspect, a security in financial and professional terms” [GER4, 38, Major].

How much a soldier in the Bundeswehr earns is governed by the German Federal Salary Act (Bundesbesoldungsgesetz). Each soldier receives a certain basic salary, depending on their rank and grade. The classification within the various grades is based on the soldier's training, experience and seniority. For example, a non-commissioned officer receives 2328,82€ during his training in grade A3, experience level 1, whereas a lieutenant after completion of officer training receives 3472,38 € in grade A 10, experience level 3. As a rule, soldiers are placed in grade one from the time of their appointment. After a certain period of time - every two to four years - they are promoted to a higher grade. The salary is paid free of social security and pension contributions. Soldiers also receive free healthcare during their period of service provided by the free troop medical service. The basic salary is supplemented by the family allowance and certain service allowances or performance bonuses. Service allowances can be, for example, supplements for field service, Sundays or holidays - but also mine divers or paratroopers receive allowances for their work. When deployed abroad, tax-free foreign pay is also granted in addition to domestic service pay. This includes, for example, the foreign assignment allowance, which is paid when the German Armed Forces participate in foreign assignments.⁶

Assessing the motivation

The motives of the interviewed German participants for joining the military have been manifold.

⁶ <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/betreuung-fuersorge/besoldung-versorgung-soldaten/besoldungstabelle-grundgehaelter-soldaten-beamte>

Intrinsic motives were most frequently cited by the German study participants surveyed when choosing a career as a soldier. For the majority of soldiers, it was crucial to take up a meaningful profession in which they could do something for the common good. The altruistic motive of contributing to world peace was mentioned just as frequently as the desire to experience adventure and to learn about and overcome personal limits. For half of the respondents, experiencing the military lifestyle was appealing. Financial reasons such as a fixed salary and paid studies were the only extrinsic factor and least frequently cited

3.2.3 Identification and Commitment

Commitment is generally understood to mean the fundamental attachment of the individual to its organization. In the military context, commitment thus indicates the extent to which a soldier identifies with his military (Biehl 2012, 449). Commitment is to be distinguished from combat motivation, which will be discussed in the *Being there* section.

Soldiers generally have a different relationship with the military as their employer than is the case in other professions. As soon as they enter the service, they have to take the oath of allegiance, which emphasizes their loyalty to the state they serve. The oath of the Bundeswehr is: I swear to serve the Federal Republic of Germany faithfully and to defend the law and the freedom of the German people bravely⁷. The commitment that the soldier enters into with this oath could hardly be more profound; ultimately, it can even lead to the soldier having to sacrifice their lives in the performance of their duty (Leonhard and Biehl 2012, 393).

And indeed, a majority of the interviewed German soldiers referred to the *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education* and to the *Citizen in Uniform* when they were asked about their picture of the German military culture:

⁷ § 9 Soldatengesetz, Eidesformel für Berufssoldaten und Soldaten auf Zeit

"It has always been natural, despite everything, to be a sincere, honest soldier on the basis of the inner leadership of the Bundeswehr. The democratic soldier, citizen in uniform. That's what shaped me, that's what educated me and that's what really attracted me. As a self-convinced democrat and also politically active person, that was the perfect picture. Not the state within the state, as it was after the Second World War, but how the Bundeswehr was actually anchored in society, through its internal leadership" [GER9, 34, Lieutenant].

Each of the interviewed German soldiers could highly identify themselves with the *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education*. This became particularly clear when asked about the soldiers' self-image: "Clearly Innere Führung, the model of the Citizen in Uniform. Yes, that's exactly how I saw myself as a soldier." [GER10, 66, Lieutenant Colonel] Although the concept is somehow omnipresent within the Bundeswehr, its exact meaning is not easy to grasp and can be individually interpreted and supplemented by each soldier. Many of the soldiers associate the concept with a high level of civil courage and a commitment to the democratic values of society:

"I am much more willing to go where it might hurt to help someone. This courage is no question for me. I would rather take the risk of suffering myself than just watch. I could not reconcile that with myself. That's just the soldier in me. I'm responsible for the society. Wherever I act, my duty time comes back. I swear to serve the Federal Republic of Germany faithfully, to defend the right and the freedom of the German people and that is not only in the foreign defence, but I am also ready to defend other people and to stand in between, to let myself be injured in case of doubt." [GER9, 34, Lieutenant].

As already mentioned, the formation of a soldier's identity depends on their self-image, external perception, professional image and public image. In many respects, the soldier's profession stands out from other professions.

"It simply differs in its self-image from all other professions that we have in Germany. The policeman, for example, vows to uphold the law, to act against the citizen in order to uphold the law, and the soldier is the only profession I know that swears to protect people from physical violence by force of arms and to uphold the principles of this country by force of arms, that is, "I swear to serve the Federal Republic of Germany faithfully and to defend it bravely. So to serve faithfully means for me also if I have doubts about a certain component of this profession or this task, then only loyalty comes into play. [...] Brave means for me also in view of the possible damage to life and health. That is something that characterizes this profession. Of course, firefighters also do this, in which case they also accept their own damage, but the soldier is the only one who does it with armed force, i.e. also with the possible use of deadly force against third parties. That alone distinguishes this entire profession from everything else that exists in Germany in my opinion" [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

Jürgen Kuhlmann describes the discussion about the supposed special status of the soldier or the designation of the soldier's profession as an occupation *sui generis* as

“finished in Germany some 15 years ago“ – notably in an academic publication from 1990 (Kuhlmann 1990, 3). As obvious as the question of a special status may be for Kuhlmann, this is not reflected in the interviews with the German soldiers.

Almost all of the respondents stated that their profession as a soldier had shaped their own personality to a particular extent. This impact on personality can be explained on the one hand by the formative training that soldiers usually undergo at a young age. On the other hand, the soldiering profession is also very time-intensive. Soldiers spend a lot of time away from family or friends in an exclusively military environment.

“I think that when you identify yourself with your job, it has a big impact on everything. On your whole life, how you organize your day, what you sacrifice for time around it, whether it's the training grounds or something else. It is so, actually your whole everyday life is influenced by it and of course also the being finally” [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

When asked to what extent the profession of soldiering has had an influence on personality, this participant responded:

“Quite strongly. The habitus has been strongly influenced, you always notice that when you meet people who were not socialized in the Bundeswehr. I think that's where something special is formed. For me personally, it's different for everyone, of course, but for me it has led to a relative rationalization of thinking. That is, a world view that is very rational and less emotional. Which includes positive and negative aspects. That can turn into such a work mode where I then really block out the whole environment, even my own identity and just kind of fulfill my job. I don't know if that might not have been different in other professions. [...] But discipline, punctuality, a certain toughness toward oneself, deferring rewards, that's what you're given, and that's also what characterizes my character” [GER4,38, Major]

In the interviews conducted, the influence that military training has on the soldier subjects became apparent. From the previous example, it can be seen that the emotional level is also shaped to a considerable extent by military socialization. This soldier reports a rationalization of thinking. He reports the ability to switch from a personal mode to a working mode in which emotions play a subordinate role. This ability can be vital for soldiers, especially in extreme situations such as combat operations.

The typical military virtues of discipline, punctuality and structure that the recruits have learned in their training are often seen as positive for other non-military spheres of life as well.

“Absolutely. It starts with my work behavior. For example, when I was working in that particular circle, it was very important to be precise in your work. That you are reliable, punctual, prepared. These are things that I acquired there and that will also be useful to me in the rest of my life. Organized, above all. Responsible. Those were the things that I definitely took with me there” [GER5, 30, Specialist].

However, it is also pointed out that despite the strict hierarchical structures and the general principle of command and obedience, the Bundeswehr also promotes the individual's own critical thinking and ability to make decisions. In addition, the Bundeswehr has also helped to strengthen the individual's self-confidence, in which challenging situations can be overcome.

“Well, the military hierarchy is very formative at first. It also means a certain subordination to authority, even if I don't like the guy or even question his orders, I still have to obey him. That can lead to frustration, because there are just assholes. This element of hierarchy is very formative. It taught me, for example, that sometimes it's necessary to say yes and do it, but that it's still important to keep your own head. [...] I learned through the Bundeswehr that the most important quality of a leader, that is, a superior, is not only to lead, that is, to have a claim to obedience but also to exercise care and I learned that through the Bundeswehr. [...] I'm really aware of the fact that despite the command and obedience and the hierarchy, independent thinking has developed to such an extent that I also question things. [...] Then the introduction to extreme situations, and by that I don't mean the deployment, such as parachuting training, so getting to know my own limits, 30 km performance march and things like that, things that really challenged me and that I then had to overcome, develop coping strategies and things like that, that's what the Bundeswehr did. It boosted my self-confidence” [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

The level of identification with the institution of the military has many shades. For some participants being in the military not only had impact on their personality but it influenced even their private relationships and family lives.

“For me, I can say that I lived being a soldier. When the boys were little, we had everything here. We had a field kit, we put up tents here and did camping and so on and that was always it. So that totally shaped me in the Bundeswehr. The Bundeswehr was pretty much the first or second priority for me. I didn't take the family into consideration either. I knew that my wife had everything pretty well under control and when I went on exercises or had to go on a mission somewhere or something and I was able to do that, then I drove. So that's the thing, I guess, where I say that shaped me” [GER7, 55, Captain].

Of course, not only the military socialization and the military work in the home base is formative for the soldiers, especially the foreign deployments as part of the profession can have a great influence on the personalities of the soldiers.

“[The impact is v]ery, very strong. 90-95% of my current character, I have put away a lot from childhood and youth. My main socialization has to do with the Bundeswehr, certainly also through September 11. [...] Each of my missions has definitely changed me. My ex-wife said that, I came home differently after each mission, completely different. Sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, also in character and self-confidence. Without the Bundeswehr, I wouldn't be sitting here now. Or not the way I'm sitting here. That would have been a completely different path” [GER9, 34, Lieutenant].

For some of the participants, soldiering has been so formative that they identify with it to such an extent that it has not been a profession for them, but rather a vocation.

“[I]n fact, it was not a profession per se for me afterwards, but actually a vocation. It was a lot of fun for me. All the time really these new experiences, the discipline, the hierarchy, it was all just so mine” [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

For a profession to become a vocation there must be the greatest possible match between the skills and interests of the employee and the requirements of his or her job. A certain importance or a higher meaning must be attached to work; for example, work for the benefit of the community. This also leads to a high level of identification with the employer. The social psychologists Abele-Brehm and Hagmaier-Göttle from the University of Erlangen studied the connection between vocation and life satisfaction. The participants were asked about the degree of their commitment to work and their job satisfaction on the one hand, and the extent of their general life satisfaction on the other. The result: the greater the correspondence between ideal and real conditions at work, the greater the general life satisfaction. The greater the gap between ideal and reality, the more dissatisfied the participants were with their life situation (Hagmaier-Göttle and Abele-Brehm 2015, 12).

3.2.4 Advantages and Disadvantages of Soldiering

The occupation of soldier is a very special profession, as already explained. This is also reflected in the advantages and disadvantages of the profession. When asked about the benefits of their work, 70% of the German soldiers interviewed cited camaraderie.

“And what was also very important, of course, was this experience of camaraderie. That's something you simply don't experience in the civilian world, outside the barracks. That's

something that still lives in you, that you want to continue to carry out. That you don't leave anyone alone, and I think that's actually a very important point." [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant]

The camaraderie within the military is perceived by many soldiers as something unique that, it appears, has no equivalent in the civilian world. Consequently, it is precisely this cohesion that is missed by many after they leave active service.

"Definitely the camaraderie. You know exactly that you can rely 100% on the others around you. I miss that a lot out here, I have to say. It's a pure elbow society out here. Everyone only looks out for themselves and I really liked that. That's what you miss in retrospect, I have to say" [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant].

Many consider the variety of work assignments to be another advantage of the soldier's profession. "The variety in the end. That for an officer it is also not only called office, but that it is both. Both inside and outside." [GER4,38, Major i.G] In this context, it is above all the training courses and exercises that are mentioned as having made the military profession so attractive for many of the respondents.

"Actually everything that took place there. The first two years we did a lot. I went to a lot of training courses. I went to exercises and everything was a lot of fun. Especially the exercises, you went through a lot together and when you got through that and were back home again, it was a nice feeling" [GER1, 27, Specialist].

Going through a lot together with fellow comrades can not only strengthen the comradeship, but also the personality of the individual. Many of the interviewees said they enjoyed pushing their own boundaries in the course of their work, testing their limits and growing beyond them.

"During my time in the service, there were various challenges that I had to overcome. Like the skydiving course, because I have an insane fear of heights. That was terrifying for me at first, but it was also a twofold benefit, because creating and overcoming those challenges was just great and very helpful for my personal development. So different points were the best. The best was just really doing something I was convinced of and also enjoying doing it" [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

The study participants also cited the compatibility of sports during working hours as an advantage of being a soldier. In addition, the salary, job security and protection in the event of illness, occupational disability and retirement were highlighted as positive.

"Definitely sports during working hours. I like to do sports, I'm very ambitious. Of course, that's a big advantage if you can do it during working hours. Now that I'm in training, I realize that I

have to redistribute that in my free time. Then, of course, there's the earnings. It's just that you earn well as a soldier compared to the free market economy. But, as I said, you have privations. Another advantage is that you are very well promoted. If you use and accept the support well and are aware that it's a temporary contract that will end at some point, you have the best chance of taking something with you for life. I think those are the main criteria soldiers have in mind when they sign the contract. It's also the medical care. You're also in excellent care in terms of health and nursing" [GER5, 30, Specialist].

In addition to the advantages that the profession of soldier brings, there are also job-related disadvantages. The most frequently mentioned disadvantage is the absence from home: "But the soldier also has something to spare. He is constantly on the road. He is committed, he is hardly ever at home, and these are the disadvantages that are often not seen" [GER5, 30, Specialist]. Frequent transfers, the absence of family and friends, and a certain form of social disconnection are inherent in the soldier's job description: "Then the frequency of transfer. The relative isolation from society, the absence of family and friends. That's already relatively serious" [GER4,38, Major i.G]. The special mobility and flexibility requirements are particularly evident in the form of duty periods that are difficult to plan, additional duties, absences due to training courses or exercises, and changing duty locations. In 1986, Mady Segal described the military and the family as "greedy institutions" that both act on the soldier and demand his time and attention (Segal 1986, 10). For many soldiers, therefore, it is not always easy to reconcile the two institutions. Especially during longer missions abroad, it is difficult to do justice to the family that remains at home.

As already described, the specific characteristic of the military and, as a result, the special task assigned to soldiers lies in the management of violence. Of course, death and injury also play a major role when it comes to the negative aspects of soldiering: "That one is confronted with death and wounding and with risks. And on the opposite side as well as on one's own" [GER4,38, Major]. Although the focus on "the outmost" shapes the professional image of the soldier even in times of peace or nondeployment (Leonhard and Biehl 2012, 397), many soldiers are not aware of this until they are actually confronted with it.

"The negative aspects are actually, if you can become aware of it at some point, that you actually become a bit dehumanized. You become a number that is trained to simply carry out certain orders. One is, as I said, an instrument of power to ultimately kill when necessary. And you're not really aware of that all the time, and that's the negative side of it. That you're made into a machine. You become numb, feelings and emotions aren't that important anymore in a lot of things" [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

Although the general combat mission is inherent in the soldier's profession, it often recedes into the background in the soldier's normal everyday life. The reasons for this are to be found primarily in the bureaucratic structures of the military organization. The everyday activities of soldiers are often characterized by "hierarchies, specialization, rational decision making, (strategic) planning, paperwork as well as quality and cost control" (Soeters, Winslow, and Weibull 2003, 246). These bureaucratic structures are also often seen by soldiers as a disadvantage of their job, as it is very slow and complicated to implement changes or requests.

“And what I'm noticing more and more is that the Bundeswehr is a travel bureaucracy machine and you're simply rocking back and forth in an insane system, and society, which doesn't hold the Bundeswehr in high esteem, also has a say in it, and you're in the justification loop all the time. So this whole issue. It's just a huge structure that takes years to change. We can feel that in the current debates and scandals. It is a bureaucratic monster. With 179,000 soldiers and 60,000 civilian employees, it takes years for processes to get underway and develop” [GER4,38, Major].

In addition to over-bureaucratization, this quote addresses another disadvantage, namely the assumption that the Bundeswehr does not have a high status in German society. The participant refers to a "justification loop" in which he feels he has to justify his profession. In the following, we will examine how the German participants in the study perceive society's appreciation of their profession and whether the Bundeswehr is insufficiently recognized in society.

3.2.5 Recognition: Wearing the Uniform

As already explained in section 2, the self-perception and development of a soldier's identity also depends to a large extent on his external perception and public image. “A positive or at least accepting attitude of the population towards the army is an essential and indispensable criterion for the soldier's self-confidence, if he does not want to be considered a mercenary” (Seifert 1996, 42). The decisive factors here are not only scientific studies on the social recognition of the soldier's profession, but also the experiences that individuals gain in the social context. In the following, therefore, the focus will be on the impressions that the participants in the study have gained in the public eye when they are in uniform.

The closest soldiers come to experiencing the state of the civil-military relationship is when they are out in uniform in the civilian world. Here, recognition and rejection become immediate. 70% of the German soldiers surveyed have already had a negative experience in uniform. The negative experiences range from supposedly derogatory looks, insults and disparagement to physical attacks or being spat at.

“Yes, I was attacked in uniform. At Berlin's main train station by punkers. We were spat at in our uniform. [But] I really don't care. It was my decision to choose this profession. And I knew that there would be hostility” [GER2, 35, Corporal].

This participant's statement reveals that it was already known in advance that situations like the one described could happen. This study participant also reports that people in the civilian environment behave differently toward him when he is in uniform. The reactions are often interested, but he still reports recurring hostility. He counters this with his conviction that he is doing something good for society through his profession.

“When I was in uniform, the interaction with strangers was completely different. From people who were really interested and asked: “who are you, what do you do?” to people who are typical opponents of the Bundeswehr, who then also shout at the train station: “you're a murderer,” etc. [...] Going home in uniform, that was always quite normal for me. Showing up in uniform, even though I was sometimes bullied on the train, that was part of it for me, that was just the way it was. I was a soldier in the Bundeswehr with the deepest conviction that I was there for society. [...] Yes, my God, that's just the way it is. I see it as in the Bundeswehr campaign: “We also fight for you to be against us” - that has become a mantra for me. Inwardly, I have often thought that it would be so easy to use my fist. But I replied, “And I would die so that you could still tell me that tomorrow” [GER9, 34, Lieutenant].

Both of the above quotes indicate that it was “normal” for many of the soldiers to experience hostility while in uniform. The next statement shows just how mentally stressful the sometimes very harsh criticism of the soldier's profession can be.

“I have actually had several negative experiences in all that time. It was 2006/2007 when we came back [...], we landed in Leipzig. Not on the military part, but on the civilian part. For the very first time, we were received with demonstrations. Tomatoes were thrown at us, we were spat at. There were lots of banners: You won't get our children. And: Soldiers are murderers. And that was of course very difficult. Then it continued with 50 Years of the Bundeswehr Big Band, Frankfurt Oder, where there was also a counter-demonstration by left-wing extremists, which was also, yes, a very bad experience. That people were rushing towards us and were actually out for a beating and so on. And where you think, ok, you're doing a job that is there, that is done like any other job, and then you're attacked for it. [...] You actually feel quite humiliated at that moment. And insulted, hurt. I think that there are so many emotions that come crashing down on you, that you can't sort out, where it took a very long time to perhaps

also assess this other perspective and to see what moves these people to commit these acts in the first place. At that moment, you're just angry and pissed off and want to rail against them and defend yourself, but you're still a citizen in uniform and discipline is the be-all and end-all, and it's very, very important not to lose your temper"[GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

As is evident from this soldier's account, soldiers are particularly affected when they are attacked in public for carrying out their profession. According to Sørensen, in particular the stigmatization as a "murderer" can become a problem for soldiers. Following her argumentation, being labelled a murderer, or a person who engages in aggressive behavior toward other people for seemingly no reason, stands in stark contrast to civilian moral norms. The professional identity of soldiers is thus perceived as contrary to the moral values of society. Affected soldiers are therefore often forced to justify or excuse or defend their work. A common consequence of this moral dilemma, according to Sørensen, is that some soldiers "consequently [...] choose to conceal their military background in civilian settings by talking in codes about their profession, adopting a civilian-like casual bodily behavior, and not wearing a uniform or showing visible soldier tattoos or other disclosing signs"(Sørensen 2015, 234).

"And of course, when you're walking around alone on the street it's a difference anyway. So I also think twice about whether I want to go somewhere in uniform, because I might behave a little differently myself, because I'm then in the focus, or represent something. On the other hand, people also behave differently toward me and appear differently. [...] I'm rather stared at when I ride the subway, for example. Younger people, especially boys, are often interested, if I'm not in an alternative neighbourhood, which I don't do when I'm in uniform" [GER4,38, Major].

Another soldier concludes: "I would also say that it is already brave to be a soldier in public in Berlin, maybe in special neighborhoods, but probably everywhere, or just Hamburg at the main station" [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

Many of the incidents described were related to train travel or at train stations. In order to take this into account and to increase the visibility of soldiers in German civil society, the project "Train Riding in Uniform" was launched on January 1, 2020. The project was developed in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Defense, the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure, Deutsche Bahn and the tariff association of the federal and non-federal railroads in Germany. The project offers soldiers in the German Armed Forces the opportunity to travel privately by rail free of charge in uniform throughout Germany. Former Defense Minister Kramp-Karrenbauer

said of the project: "Rail travel in uniform is a success right down the line! I am pleased that the Bundeswehr is becoming more visible as a part of our society as a result. The soldiers are receiving a sign of the recognition and appreciation they deserve for their service to our country" (Kramp-Karrenbauer 2020).

Although not all of the participants interviewed had experienced negative experiences in uniform in public, each of them knew at least one of their comrades who had experienced such a situation. Some of the respondents therefor got into the habit of not talking openly with civilians about all areas of work, such as foreign missions. In addition, he criticizes the population's lack of knowledge about the work of the military itself and sees one cause for this in the historically anti-militaristic attitude of the German population.

"I never had any negative experiences myself, so that I was spat on or gawked at, which is also what you hear. But it does happen, in certain situations with certain people, that there are rash opinions and you are quickly pigeonholed and then just rather badly regarded. For example, it is not always advisable to talk about operations. You don't have to get your foot in the door right away, because it's always viewed negatively, because it's more of an act of war. And essentially, the population doesn't even know what exactly is happening and what is being done on the ground, but it is still always perceived rather negatively. So that's the response I'm getting from the population. I think this is due to the past somewhere. The population can't deal with the guilt of the past and hasn't gotten over it yet, and that puts a lot of pressure on the military branch. And also in terms of patriotism, not nationalism, but patriotism. Outside of the World Cup, it is so that it is immediately pushed into the right-wing corner. And it's the same with the military, simply because of bad experiences. It's also badly publicized and badly explained by the media" [GER5, 30, Specialist].

The "right wing corner" mentioned above is encountered more frequently by the soldiers interviewed. This soldier attributes this circumstance primarily to German history: "I think times that it still carries from the 2nd World War. That still stuck and many Bundeswehr soldiers are called Nazis." [GER1, 27, Specialist]

Regional Differences in Recognition

There also seem to be regional differences in terms of perceived recognition. In the interviews, it emerged that the soldiers noted differences between urban and more rural areas. While most negative experiences occurred in urban areas, the general attitude toward soldiers is considered more positive in rural areas.

“Where I experienced it firsthand, very positively, is here in the more rural the area. The Bundeswehr is still rooted. So it's not a problem at all when you're out and about in uniform. Sometimes people even say, "Gee, poor guy, should I give you a lift if your backpack is too heavy?" [...] Or they offer you food and drink or all kinds of things. The more rural the whole thing is, the more they deal with us in a friendly way, I would say” [GER7, 55, Captain].

This soldier attributes the reasons for the supposedly greater social recognition of soldiers in rural areas to a greater sense of commitment among people in the countryside, as well as to a greater sense of tradition.

"I have to say that I would differentiate regionally. I know that, as far as the Bundeswehr is concerned, in most parts of Bavaria the world is still fine. There, the parades still take place outside the barracks, in the middle of the villages or in some partner communities. And that's where the Bundeswehr is gladly seen. [...] I'm sure that will also be the case in the north in the rural areas. [...] People are still really trying to maintain the traditions. The Bundeswehr is actually a part of it, in our country it was said that the Bundeswehr belongs in the middle of society, and everyone sees it that way. [...] In rural areas, people are also more likely to socialize. People are more open-minded. It's not the elbow society like in the big city. I think that makes a big difference. In the big city, everyone has their anonymity somewhere. [...] Of course, there are other regions in Germany where you experience hostility just by being in uniform. [...] Then I also hear from other soldiers who live in Berlin, Hamburg, Dresden, i.e. the larger cities, about some hostility. That soldiers are spat at on the street when they walk around in uniform. They no longer dare to go from A to B in uniform” [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant].

Occasional and Temporal Recognition

At a national level, the Bundeswehr is particularly perceived in the context of disaster relief and crisis management. Especially the assistance provided by the Bundeswehr during past flood disasters or the corona pandemic, has moved into the public eye.

In crisis management situations, there is increased interaction between soldiers and the civilian population and the soldiers often experience a high level of approval and gratitude during these missions. For this study participant, the engagement in the 2013 flood disaster was a particularly positive experience in terms of the feelings of support for the soldiers, in comparison to his rather negative perception of the German armed forces by the general public: “[The recognition is] negative for the most part. I have to say, when we were on flood duty in 2013, it was different again. There was support and they were also grateful. I have the feeling that as soon as the tasks of the Bundeswehr in the civilian population fall away, a wall is built up” [GER1, 27, Specialist].

The next example refers to the positive feedback received during the march for more recognition of German veterans. The march was first held in 2017 at the initiative of Afghanistan veteran Alexander Sedlak, who suffered post-traumatic stress disorder after serving as a sniper and first responder in Afghanistan. The march was intended to increase the visibility of veterans in German society and was repeated again in 2020⁸.

“Of course, there were also relatively many positive experiences, when you went shopping in uniform, that you were thanked for your commitment, especially in Bruchsal [...] I think the very first time I really experienced recognition was during the Donation March project. Where you can see what the population is actually responding to, also in terms of positive feedback. That was a very interesting and great experience.” [GER 8, 31, Staff Sergeant]

Also, it seems, there is a difference in public recognition between generations. The older soldiers interviewed had fewer negative experiences in uniform in public during their active time as soldiers in the 1970s and 1980s.

“No. I always traveled in uniform in the early days when I had to go somewhere, even by train and so on, and it was actually just the opposite. Even at Hamburg Central Station, where you might assume that a little bit, not at all. Even, I say, even people from the lower classes, such a deposit bottle collector, for example, addressed me in a friendly manner and in some cases they even knew my rank. So they addressed me as Herr Hauptmann or whatever I was then, Herr Oberleutnant or whatever. So I didn't really experience anything negative” [GER7, 55, Captain].

There was also hostility towards soldiers at that time, but in a different way than the soldiers report about it today.

“When I walked through the streets in uniform, for whatever reason, I too saw the famous flipping finger, no question about it, but hostility that I couldn't cope with and would have had a hard time dealing with, there was none of that. An example, I once had to come from Berlin, at midnight, in Hamburg central station, because I had missed the train to Kiel, to spend there one and a half hours, until the next train to Kiel. Of course, people don't look at you in a very friendly way, but I didn't notice that I was being attacked there. I felt more like an exotic, as a Bundeswehr soldier in uniform at midnight at Hamburg's main train station you are an exotic, but I didn't feel hostile” [GER10,66, Lieutenant Colonel].

⁸ <https://sternmarsch-zum-gedenken.jimdosite.com>

Some of the German study participants interviewed see reasons for the change in the public perception of soldiers in the abolition of compulsory military service. This will be discussed below.

Suspension of Compulsory Service

The suspension of conscription continues to be cited by some soldiers as a decisive factor in the perceived alienation of soldiers from civil society. The absence of constant exchanges between soldiers and civilians, as practiced during conscription, has created a cleavage between soldiers and civilians, according to some participants.

"During the time of compulsory military service, [...] it was quite normal. There were many, many more people in the Bundeswehr, simply because in almost every family there was at least one conscript in the Bundeswehr. And with the abolition of conscription, I think that the distance to the civilian population has actually become much, much greater. Because not every family has someone who is in the Bund. That's completely over now" [GER7, 55, Captain].

The end of compulsory military service has, according to some participants, alienated the civilian population from soldiers, resulting in a loss of perception and meaning for the military itself, as well as for the profession of soldiering.

"The abolition of compulsory military service [...] has already brought about a change. [...] This direct experience of the Bundeswehr through stories told by conscripts at home, at the weekend over breakfast or dinner, among friends or family, that is of course no longer there, no longer as present. Things have already changed a bit. The Bundeswehr is further away from public perception. It no longer features so prominently in the public image" [GER10,66, Lieutenant Colonel].

Detlef Buch, a military sociologist and Bundeswehr officer, also confirms that the primary experiences of conscripts "who talk about their experiences in the armed forces at the dinner table at home on weekends" have been eliminated by the end of compulsory military service (Buch 2014, 133).

"The Bundeswehr no longer has the presence it once had. Time has just moved on. The missions of the Bundeswehr, which are far away in the world, in Afghanistan, Mali and the Mediterranean are no longer in the public eye, Kosovo, although there are still 500 or 600 German soldiers there, is no longer printed in the media, it no longer exists, although there are still relatively many deployed there. In terms of perception, I would like to see more in the media, but everything else is just over. You have to take note of that, and I see no reason to want to turn it back. I have to go back to the fact that there is no longer any presence and no

longer any corresponding interest in personal individual perception, but appreciation? I feel that the Bundeswehr's reputation is quite good" [GER10,66, Lieutenant Colonel].

The lack of interest in the military on the part of the general public, which was mentioned in the previous statement, is described by Buch as a form of egalitarianism: although the armed forces are accepted by society, they tend to be rather perceived as professional service providers instead of an Executive, acting on behalf of the German people (Buch 2014, 131). Similar to the soldier quoted, Buch does not equate the form of alienation of soldiers from the civilian population described above with a generally negative perception of the Bundeswehr among the population. He rather sees the alienation as the consequence of a normalization of the military, which would often be misinterpreted as a lack of support (Buch 2014, 133).

According to this participant, the fact that the Bundeswehr no longer features so prominently in the public image is also reflected in the decline in public protests against military involvement. He cites the Easter marches, for example, in which peace activists have been protesting since the 1960s. The peace marches peaked in 1968 against the backdrop of the Vietnam War, with up to 300,000 participants. At the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, the Easter marches were also very popular due to the NATO double decision and the rearmament. Since the end of the Cold War they are now rather a marginal phenomenon.

"And with the peace movement, I think it was actually much more in the past. These May Day rallies, or also the Easter marches, I think that was more in the days of the Cold War than it is today. If one observes that now times, these Easter marches there is still, but there are then only a few hundred people who run with it and in former times that were thousands. And that, too, is actually a sign that this is all much further away. That is this friendly disinterest. If it doesn't directly affect me that one of my family is going to Afghanistan or Mali or wherever, then I have no contact with it" [GER7, 55, Captain].

This quote also addresses the narrative of friendly disinterest, which will be discussed below.

The Narrative of Friendly Disinterest

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Bundeswehr, the then Federal President Horst Köhler gave a prominent speech in which he used the term "friendly disinterest".

This term was intended to express how the German population feels about its armed forces: according to Köhler, there is a generally positive attitude among Germans toward their Bundeswehr, but at the same time it is characterized by indifference and unawareness, with a lack of concrete support for the soldiers (Köhler 2005). Several of the interviewees can still relate to this statement.

“I actually still like to keep it very much with Horst Köhler, with the friendly disinterest, actually. You know, there is the Bundeswehr, there is actually also an affection in a certain way. Basically, I would say it's positive, but people don't notice it, they're not interested, they don't ask about it [...] People are not interested, the Bundeswehr just exists [...] so you sometimes feel as if society isolates you as an outsider. And that is sometimes a bit difficult“ [GER9, 34, Lieutenant].

Also former military commissioner Reinhold Robbe drew attention to the insufficient support soldiers receive from the civilian population. In 2009, he reported to the German Bundestag about many soldiers that complained about a lack of civilian support. According to Robbe, it is incomprehensible to the members of the Bundeswehr why they receive so limited moral support from their fellow citizens, despite the fact that as soldiers they dedicate their health and their lives to German interests and on behalf of the German Bundestag: “What our soldiers expect is more empathy, more human caring” (Robbe 2010, 4).

Inherent in the narrative of friendly disinterest is the assumed lack of interest in and knowledge about the activities of the Bundeswehr on the part of the population. To some of the soldiers interviewed, it seems as if the Bundeswehr is simply not perceived in society.

“Broken down to one sentence, I would say that people in Germany don't really perceive the Bundeswehr because, for example, unlike the police, they are in barracks. So they are first of all away from society, the barracks are not in the inner cities or not on the edges, but mostly away somewhere in the sticks. What they do, the training and everything, that takes place out of the public eye. You don't see any of it. You don't hear about the preparations, not to mention the missions. That's why people don't even notice their soldiers, unless they see one in uniform at the train station. As a result, they simply don't concern themselves with it. I do believe that the profession of soldier is a very respected profession in Germany, at least the surveys regularly confirm that. But people simply don't perceive it. They only notice it when there are scandals, as there are right now, for example, or when something doesn't work as politically envisioned in the foreign missions, such as Afghanistan. This is the best example of how those in positions of political responsibility fail to tell the truth for years and end up having to explain why everything is still so shitty, when they have been saying for years that we are only building wells here and that there is only progress. To put it in a nutshell: people either don't notice the

Bundeswehr at all or only when there are scandals or when operational scenarios develop differently from what they thought they would" [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

The public's ignorance of the actual activities of a soldier in everyday life also leads to some of the soldiers being confronted with prejudices or myths.

"Otherwise, the state is societally at least uneasy, partially indifferent, pacifist in character, skeptical, ignorant. There are also a lot of legends and bizarre ideas about what the Bundeswehr actually does all day, and some of the things you have to listen to are really outrageous. For example, I often hear that we're pumped full of drugs to put up with it all, or that we shoot people all the time but aren't allowed to tell anyone. So really completely crazy. Or that we would pick and choose which foreign missions we participate in. We are a parliamentary army, which means that the German parliament decides where it sends us and where not. That means we are an executive body, we have a bit of a say in the planning phase, but in the end, of course, we are just an instrument of politics that politics uses. I hear that relatively often" [GER4,38, Major].

Recognition and Mass-Media

Some soldiers have pointed out that a distinction is seldom made between the Bundeswehr as such and the soldier as a person.

"Well, on the one hand, soldiers are often seen personally as a figurehead for the entire Bundeswehr, which means they are then held responsible, they are asked, they are expected to justify what the Bundeswehr does as a whole. And they are then the whipping boys when it comes to scandals. Then people are relatively quick to make sweeping generalizations and apply them to individuals, regardless of the direction they take. On the one hand, we may have a sex scandal in the Bundeswehr and then hostility toward individuals or the accusation that one is part of the action. On the other hand, when it comes to equipment failures or the like, one is quickly in a kind of victim role, where one is pitied. That is also part of the whole." [GER4,38, Major]

The preceding quote draws attention to the condition that the Bundeswehr is perceived by the German public mainly through the mass media. Due to the abolition of compulsory military service and base closures, the Bundeswehr is perceived by most people through the medium of television, followed by newspapers and magazines. Only rarely is the Bundeswehr perceived in everyday encounters or public events. The published figures of a ZMSBw population study prove this. Thus, in 2017, the Bundeswehr was perceived by over 77% of the population via television broadcasts, 62% perceived the Bundeswehr via reporting in newspapers, and only 14% experienced the Bundeswehr at public events (Graf 2021, 22). The year 2017 is

interesting because it was a scandalous year for the Bundeswehr. Accusations of right-wing extremism, triggered by the Franco A. case, and cases of abuse and sexual assaults were the focus of media attention. In this context, Wanner draws attention to the fact that negative events, which are highly newsworthy, constitute the primary occasion for federal military-related reporting (Wanner 2019, 171). In other words, the credo that good news is bad news is detrimental to the German public's perception of the Bundeswehr in this case and leads to an overemphasis on a perspective that is critical of the Bundeswehr.

3.2.6 Need for more Recognition?

Personal Perception vs. Social Reputation

The civil-military relationship is a decisive factor for the soldiers' self-image. The soldiers interviewed repeatedly refer to the population and democratic principles in their self-description and define themselves largely in terms of their role as guardians of these principles.

“After all, we take an oath to defend our democratic values. And we are the people who ultimately stand up for what makes our life here so bearable and so good. The values we stand for should be protected by the soldiers. And that's why, in my opinion, soldiers should have a higher standing among the population. What is perhaps now being steered in the wrong direction by foreign policy is a different issue, but the soldier's profession cannot be imagined without it” [GER5, 30, Specialist].

It is precisely this function that makes the soldier's profession a special one for many of the interviewees, one that has no equivalent in the civilian world. This also gives rise to a special need for recognition.

“There is no other profession in Germany where the job description states that, in case of doubt, you kill or die on duty. I can't order a policeman to shoot, but I can order a soldier to do so. And I can also tell the soldier, you go there now even if there is the enemy. Of course, the policeman can also die, also the ambulance driver, everyone, but that someone consciously tells me, and that again out of the oath, I swear to serve Germany faithfully and to defend the law and the freedom of the German people bravely. To defend bravely means, in case of doubt, to give my life for it. I don't have that in any other job. And that's why I don't understand why Ms. von der Leyen keeps saying we have to fight for every employee. Yes, we have to fight for soldiers if we want to recruit them, and I'm completely on board with that. But then I also have to tell them that your job will include killing and dying in case of doubt. And you don't do that. Then I also have to say to that, yes it is part of your job, but we will take care of you if

you did it. And we will take care of your loved ones if that happened. It is a service and in my eyes it is also in a way an inner conviction to become a soldier. To say, I have a salary there now and that's why I'm going there, that doesn't work." [GER9, 34, Lieutenant]

The soldiers interviewed often emphasize that they do not want anyone to thank them personally for doing their duty. Rather, they are interested in a broad social appreciation of the Bundeswehr and all soldiers.

"You didn't get the feeling that you were being thanked or something. Personally, it's not that important to me, but seen from a general perspective, it would be good if the entire image of the Bundeswehr were elevated rather than being addressed to individual soldiers. But I think that will be difficult. I don't know if that will ever happen again." [GER1, 27, Specialist]

The Center for Military History and Social Sciences of the German Armed Forces, or ZMSBw for short, has been researching the German population's attitudes toward security policy issues for many years on behalf of the Ministry of Defense. For years, it has also been conducting population surveys that capture citizens' attitudes toward their armed forces. For many years, the findings have attested that the Bundeswehr enjoys a high social reputation. Indeed, the surveys reveal a consistently positive opinion picture. Since 2010, more than three-quarters of respondents have said they have a positive opinion of the Bundeswehr. In the past year 2020, the approval rating was 82% and thus at the top of the aforementioned time comparison.

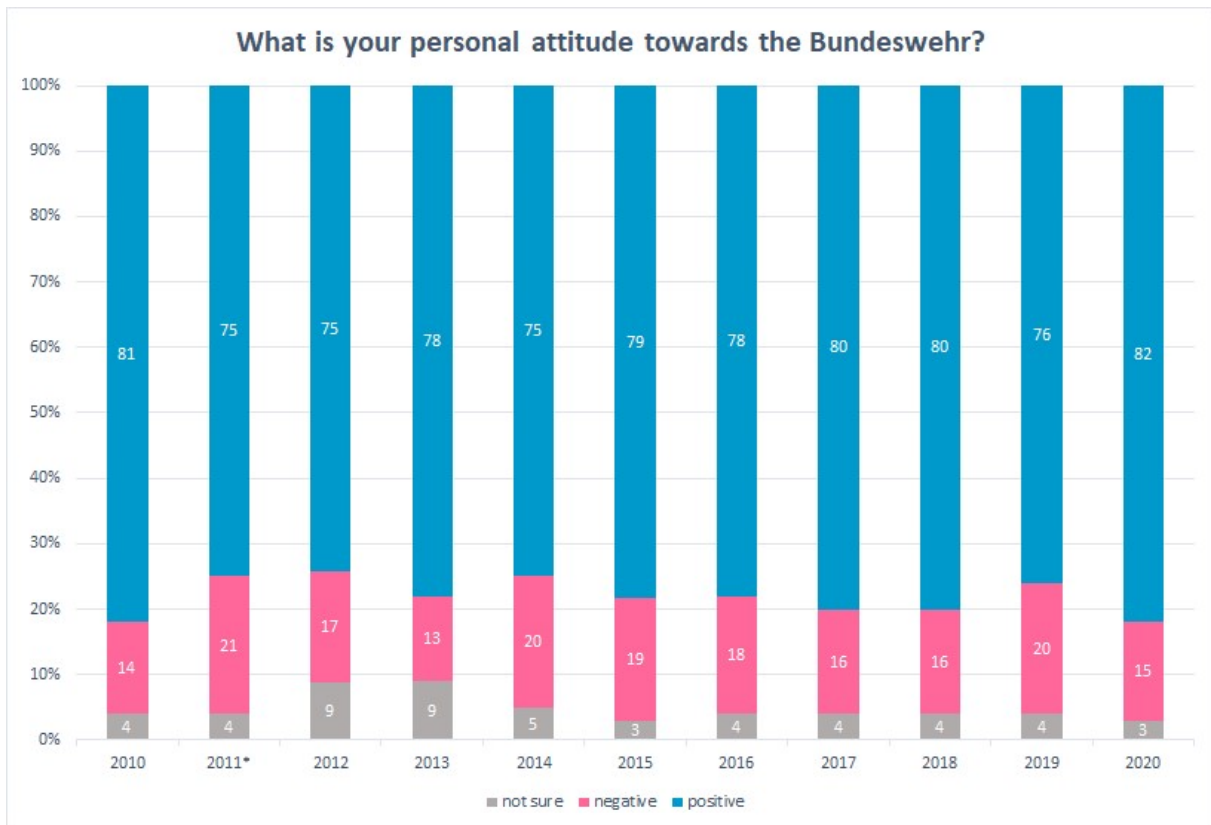


Figure 2: Personal Attitude Towards the Bundeswehr (Graf 2021, 14)

Nevertheless, the members of the Bundeswehr do not seem to feel the support of the population that has been proven in the studies. There is a discrepancy between the soldiers' personal perception of how the Bundeswehr is viewed and actual social recognition.

“But the image itself, even if the soldier's profession is one of the more highly regarded professions according to the statistics, has never seemed that way to me among the population. So in fact I encountered much more resistance.” [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant]

This discrepancy and its causes have been the subject of increasing research in recent years (Wanner 2019; Biehl and Fiebig 2011). The observation of the alienation of the Bundeswehr and its members from the German civilian population is partly contradicted in the scientific debate. Biehl, for example, notes that although there are a number of voices, both from the military and from politics, that criticize alienation and a lack of recognition, these assumptions cannot be supported scientifically. Instead, according to Biehl, the cultivation of the discourse about a possible lack of recognition

would cover up the discrepancy between diagnosis and findings. Although an overwhelming majority of the population is supporting its armed forces, the impression is still to be created that they receive an insufficient measure of recognition. (Biehl 2012, 62). Asked about this discrepancy phenomenon, this soldier replies:

“Yes, it may be that soldiers always perceive it as somewhat worse. But the way some research is conducted, I wouldn't rely on it, especially with regard to ZMSBw studies, which is all departmental research. If there is this contradiction, then it is certainly partly because we do not express this publicly. But if the perception of the Bundeswehr is positive - it may be, in private - as I said, I doubt it. But then there is a lack of it being shown publicly. That one then also stands up for it, even if one is not in an anonymous survey, but also sometimes on the street. Or to take a stand in a discussion. I'm pretty sure that people in Germany are often reluctant to express a positive opinion about the Bundeswehr. Because it is stigmatized. Because we live in a pacifist-oriented society, because the Bundeswehr generally doesn't have a particularly positive image. So why should we go out on a limb and speak positively about the Bundeswehr?” [GER4,38, Major].

Assessing the Recognition

The answers to the question of how soldiers feel about the public recognition of their profession in Germany can be divided into three categories. On the one hand, there are the soldiers who feel that their profession is treated pejoratively. Then there are those who have the impression that they do not feature at all in the public perception or are confronted with "friendly disinterest". The last category is made up of those who feel that their profession is sufficiently or well recognized.

7 out of 10 respondents have experienced direct hostility when out in public in uniform and feel that their profession is not sufficiently or rather negatively perceived by the German public, whereas only 3 of the participants have a positive perception of the public's attitude towards their profession. Around half of the respondents also found fault with the fact that the public perception of their profession is generally too low or that it only comes into focus on special occasions. The studies conducted by the ZMSBw show that the profession of soldier enjoys a high level of recognition in Germany. Nevertheless, xy of the soldiers surveyed would like to see more recognition for their profession. The discrepancy between certified approval and perceived positive perception can be attributed above all to the fact that approval is not lived out publicly and thus appears more on paper than in the everyday lives of soldiers in Germany.

The end of compulsory military service has caused soldiers to disappear from the public image. Whereas at the time of compulsory military service, many families or acquaintances were military service members, the abolition also triggered an alienation of the military from civilian life. However, there seems to be a city-country divide. In smaller and more rural communities, soldiers seem to receive more positive feedback about their job than is the case in large cities. Campaigns such as the "Train Riding in Uniform" campaign play an important role in raising the profile of soldiers in civilian life.

3.3 Being There

The Joining In section investigated the commitment and identification of the German soldiers with their military institution.

Being There examines the foreign deployment of the German soldiers interviewed in Afghanistan. After first outlining their motives for the deployment, the following section describes how the soldiers interviewed experienced their deployment abroad. They recount the preparations for the mission and the challenges they were confronted during the mission, as well as their feelings when they left Afghanistan.

3.3.1 Operational Motivation

What motivates soldiers for their service, which can involve considerable danger to body and soul, especially during foreign deployments? Combat motivation not only refers to the soldier's general attitude toward his military, but is supplemented by a level of action. Specifically, the soldier on deployment abroad must have a motivation for deployment that is derived from his commitment, but he must also have a motivation on deployment from which his actions are derived. For example, combat motivation includes a willingness to engage in direct combat operations. In this case, soldiers not only expose themselves to a military threat, but are also willing to act within that danger (Biehl 2012, 450). In the wake of World War II, scientific studies were conducted in the United States to explore soldier motivation in and for combat operations. By gaining

knowledge in this area, it was hoped that practical implementations could be made to strengthen the readiness of troops (Biehl 2012, 452). As a result, two important strands of knowledge on mission motivation developed: social cohesion and task cohesion.

Social Cohesion and Task Cohesion of German Soldiers

The concept of social cohesion was developed by the *Research Branch*, a team of researchers led by social scientist Samuel Stouffer. In one of the most extensive social-empirical research projects in recent scientific history, more than half a million soldiers were questioned in individual studies about their motivation for deployment (Biehl 2012, 452). In the multi-volume work "The American Soldier", researchers concluded that a soldier's motivation for and in deployments depends primarily on their social military environment. In this way, a soldier feels a special obligation to his comrades, but also to his superiors, and draws from this obligation the motivation to risk his life under special circumstances (Stouffer 1949). Stouffer describes that soldiers thus draw their combat motivation primarily from a sense of community (Stouffer 1949) and not from ideological convictions or self-interest. Social cohesion thus describes a motivation to act that results from the cohesion of comrades. The close bonds that develop between soldiers in a group and the protection that soldiers afford each other act as a motivation to go to war.

The thesis of social cohesion is also supported by Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz (Shils and Janowitz 1948). They interviewed German war prisoners after the Second World War and investigated the question of why the soldiers continued to fight and resist instead of surrendering despite the hopeless situation towards the end (Biehl 2012, 453). While national socialist ideology was often considered responsible for this, the researchers concluded that comradesly cohesion played a predominant role instead:

"The fighting effectiveness of the vast majority of soldiers in combat depends only to a small extent on their preoccupation with the major political values. [...] Where conditions were such as to allow primary group life to function smoothly, and where the primary group developed a high degree of cohesion, moral was high and resistance effective or at least very determined, regardless in the main of the political attitudes of the soldiers" (Shils and Janowitz 1948, 284).

In this context, Sönke Neitzel notes that the Wehrmacht had an extremely tight cohesive network. The historian attributes this to the close connection between the Nazi state, society and the armed forces, noting that “there was, in a sense, no civil-military gap“ (Neitzel 2022, 247). The central importance of social cohesion has since been argued in a number of studies (Biehl 2012, 453). Also, in the interviews conducted, it became clear that social cohesion and a group affiliation are still a decisive factor for going on an international assignment today.

“I don't think it was a decision at all ultimately. I think we were so tightly knit beforehand that we knew we were a team and nothing would really break that. And because of the experience that I had, it was already clear who was going to be part of Afghanistan” [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

A study published in 2003 that examined the motivation of American soldiers to engage in combat during the Iraq war also highlights group cohesion as a significant motivating factor (Shils and Janowitz 1948). Belonging to a particular military unit and the obligation to it seem to be more important to soldiers than their own sense of security.

“I wasn't the one who said we'll go for it, no matter what, but either I wasn't the one who said I'll let the others go alone, I will stay here. But I go with them and we do it together. I wasn't keen on shooting anyone, I really didn't want to do that” [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant].

Loyalty to one's comrades and the feeling of not letting the group down act as a strong emotional bond. The rank of the soldiers among themselves or their position in the structure is not relevant for a sense of community. Nevertheless, the superiors of a troop are particularly committed to their solidarity. When asked about the voluntariness of going on the Afghanistan mission, this company commander replied:

“I couldn't choose. Yes, of course, I chose to join the Bundeswehr at some point, but I certainly wouldn't have volunteered for this assignment. I was the company commander of 200 soldiers, so I personally couldn't say no either. A few of my soldiers said no, but of course I didn't send them into combat alone; of course, I couldn't do that. [...] What keeps you together is, of course, the camaraderie. So that's it. Otherwise, I certainly wouldn't have done it voluntarily in 2010 when the order came, not by any means” [GER4,38, Major]

Task cohesion stands in contrast to social cohesion as a motivation for action. This explains the cohesion of a unit in a deployment through a jointly pursued goal. In social cohesion, the focus is on whether the group members like each other, whether they are sympathetic or even friends, whether they feel “emotionally close to one another”,

whereas in task cohesion, the focus is on whether the members of the group share the same values and pursue the same goals: “A group with high task cohesion is composed of members who share a common goal and who are motivated to coordinate their efforts as a team to achieve that goal” (MacCoun, Kier, and Belkin 2006, 647).

Charles Moskos concluded in a 1968 study of soldiers in the Vietnam mission that soldiers' combat motivation is made up of several components: Social cohesion is as important as individual self-interest and a shared belief among soldiers. In this context, Biehl notes that while Moskos cites the primary group as central to social cohesion, it is not the exclusive determinant. Rather, it is collective values and beliefs from which soldiers draw their combat morale. The soldier must be convinced of the rightness of his mission. He must be fundamentally convinced that he is serving a good cause.

The individual self-interest refers to the phenomenon, that the soldier cannot overcome the stresses to which he is exposed during deployment alone, but is dependent on his comrades and superiors. If the individual soldier wants to increase his chances of survival, he must necessarily develop and participate in primary group relationships. The comradeship thus also always corresponds to a kind of special purpose association, which results from the particular burdens faced by the soldiers (Moskos 1968, cited in Biehl 2012, 455). Military cohesion is thus described as a functional necessity given the conditions of war and deployment.

The German interviews also revealed that task cohesion and military cohesion played a decisive role in many soldiers' decision to deploy to Afghanistan. Although comradeship always plays a prominent role in the military context, it was not the main motivation for the German soldiers interviewed to deploy to Afghanistan. Rather, commonalities in goal orientation became apparent. The altruistic motive of being able to make a difference for the good was a motivating factor for one-fourth of the respondents to go on the Afghanistan mission.

“The Good Friday battle of 2010 made it clear to me once again what's actually going on, what they're doing there [...] So that was an incentive for me to get involved and maybe do something better. Yes, I also wanted to change something” [GER1, 27, Specialist].

Giving meaning to their actions is an important motivational aspect for soldiers who are exposed to increased dangers, especially when deployed abroad.

“Because I believed in politics back then. In Peter Struck, too, when he said that Germany would be defended in the Hindu Kush. And then it was just a running mission for me. In addition, the foreign missions have also accumulated and I had dealt at that time with Somalia and also with Kosovo and wanted to go actually from the outset in the foreign mission, because I wanted to give simply these aids and this assistance generally to the other peoples” [GER2, 35, Corporal].

Fulfillment of Profession

The vast majority of the German soldiers interviewed volunteered for the Afghanistan mission. Only two of the interviewees stated that they had not volunteered but had been selected. The interviewees' high readiness for deployment is in line with the results of the study on deployment motivation of the 22nd ISAF contingent of the German Armed Forces by Carsten Pietsch, in which it became clear that a foreign deployment was part of the soldier's self-image and that it was therefore not necessary to volunteer. Pietsch nevertheless points out that peer pressure can arise within a unit, which then results in a "voluntary" report (Pietsch 2012, 105).

Indeed, 7 out of 10 of the German soldiers interviewed even stated that the deployment had been a fulfillment of the soldiering profession for them.

“I know many comrades who were more than envious that this has hit me, because this is of course the absolute fulfillment of the soldier's profession if one is company commander of a combat unit in Kunduz. So there's nothing more to it than that in purely soldierly terms. That's why it was unbelievable for me” [GER4,38, Major].

This fulfillment includes, among other things, applying what soldiers have trained for in years. Many of the soldiers also saw the deployment as an opportunity to put their skills to the test.

“Yes I wanted to go. I was actually already at the end of my service time and if I had wanted to, I would have gotten around it, let's put it that way. Wouldn't have been a problem, even without consequences [...]. But I just wanted to get into the situation that I have to use what I have been trained for in years. Ten years trained for fighting and until then I didn't have to fight, thank God, but somehow you want to get into the situation that you have to. But I didn't want to have to shoot at a person, that was where I got a little bit torn, I have to say.” [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant]

Some of the soldiers have deliberately tried to be sent abroad for a longer period of time. This specialist paratrooper even deliberately changed units in order to be sure

that he would be able to apply the skills he had acquired at home when deployed abroad.

“Yes, I actually transferred in a unit that was going into the field. I tried to do it before. I kept submitting requests to my commander, quarterly, so quarterly, over two years, every time he said let's look again next quarter. It was always rejected. [...] Then I got myself transferred and then went into action with the unit. I wanted to be deployed as a soldier from the beginning, because I always thought like this, why am I doing the training. I also really want to understand what happens in the field. What it means when being a soldier is really called upon.” [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

In essence, being a soldier has always meant preparing for the seriousness of a combat mission. In 2005, former Bundeswehr Inspector Budde explained that the ability to fight is the clasp that holds the army together (Budde 2005, 113). For many soldiers of the Bundeswehr, the opportunity to demonstrate the skills they have acquired over the years in a foreign deployment is indispensably intertwined with their identity as a soldier.

Other Sources of Motivation

Some soldiers applied not only specifically for the mission but also for out of camp missions, probably knowing that they were putting themselves in a higher danger by doing so.

“Then I thought, now I want to go to Kunduz myself. [...] The mission was then really driven by the fact that I want to go there, I want to experience something, I want the action, I want to perhaps also have the risk there that something can happen to me. I also made a conscious decision for the unit. For the use of the IEDs and [...] that it would also be in the potential combat area, I was aware of that and I consciously applied for it. I could have applied for a staff position as well. I didn't feel like it, I'm not made for the office” [GER9, 34, Lieutenant].

However, in some cases it is precisely these dangers that can be a motivation for an operation. This soldier describes the ambivalence of his feelings on the plane to Afghanistan.

“The feelings were ambivalent at that moment. On the one hand, I wanted to go, simply for myself, to experience the feeling of being constantly under adrenaline and fear. And on the other hand, I didn't want to go because I was afraid that something could happen to me. But I think the addiction for the kick was bigger than the fear. And in addition, you also want to apply what you've learned” [GER2, 35, Corporal].

The thrill, the urge to experience a border, to get to know one's own limits, even the feeling of direct fire can thus be a source of motivation.

“I was asked, I think in August or September 2012, whether I could operate it and whether I would like to. Then I said that I have desire and I would like to go. Just to have that experience. What's down there and what it looks like down there. You've heard a lot from your comrades who have been in combat and everything, but you'd like to get your own picture of it. So the stories were appealing, like the Good Friday battle, which went on for ten or twelve hours. Lots of firefights and stuff. That's its own appeal. The appeal of just going down there. I know that sounds strange now. Especially if you've heard this story before. But I just wanted to get to know it myself. That was just to collect this experience“ [GER1, 27, Specialist].

As already mentioned, one of the advantages of being a soldier and the motivation to take up the profession was job security and a good salary. Soldiers deployed abroad are paid an additional daily rate. Most German soldiers have been deployed abroad in Afghanistan for up to six months. For this reason, the daily allowance was a decisive motivator for some to go on deployment. “And because of the money I have to say. That was simply so, that is the only incentive that was there.” [GER1, 27, Specialist]

For this interviewee, a key motivator for his first deployment to Afghanistan was to do something good and help the people on the ground. As can be seen here, the main motivation changed during his second deployment.

“But in general, the second time was really more out of the motivation to take a little money with me before I quit. 110 Euros a day, which is actually a joke, but compared to the rest of the world, we're pretty high up there” [GER 5, 30, Specialist].

Why his motivation changed during the two missions will be explained in the section on mission evaluation.

Assessing the Operational Motivation of the German Soldiers

The motivation of the soldiers interviewed for the mission in Afghanistan was diverse. While some of the interview participants wanted to change things for the better in Afghanistan, others saw the mission as a chance to apply what they had learned to achieve professional fulfillment. To help illustrate the diversity of mission motivations, the following section draws on Fabrizio Battistelli's model.

Battistelli, a professor of sociology at the University of Rome, studied the various reasons for mission motivation in an Italian contingent deployed to Bosnia in the 1990s. In doing so, he divided mission motivations into three different categories, distinguishing between paleomodern, modern, and postmodern types of motivation (Battistelli, Ammendola, and Galantino 1999, 147).

The paleomodern soldier type largely corresponds to Charles Moskos' institutional model and is dominated by other-orientation. It is primarily imbued with altruistic motives. The second type of operational soldier is the modern type, which corresponds to Moskos' occupational model and is primarily self-oriented. Here, economic motives are primarily represented, such as earning an additional salary or career advancement. The last type describes the postmodern soldier, who is primarily concerned with self-realization. For him, adventure, personal challenge and self-development are in the foreground (Battistelli, Ammendola, and Galantino 1999, 149).

In the following, a simplified representation of Battistelli's typology is used, which was made by the Swedish researcher Erik Hedlund (Hedlund 2011).

Battistelli's Typology of Soldier's Motivation to Join Missions

Paleomodern (Institutional)	To be useful to others To strengthen the country's images at the international level
Modern (Occupational)	To earn some extra money To learn things could be useful to one's career and return to civilian life
Postmodern	To satisfy a desire for adventure To have a meaningful personal experience

Figure 3: Battistelli's Typology of Soldier's Motivation to Join Missions (Hedlund 2011, 183).

Battistelli's Refined Motivation Typology

Motivation	Materiality	Immateriality	Self-Oriented	Other-Oriented
Paleomodern		x		x
Modern	x		x	
Postmodern		x	x	

Figure 4: Battistelli's Refined motivation Typology (Hedlund 2011, 183).

After evaluating the German interviews regarding the motivation for the foreign mission in Afghanistan, the following classification can be made according to Hedlund's scheme of Battistelli's typology:

Motivations of German Soldiers to go on Deployment to Afghanistan

Paleomodern Immateriality/ Other-Oriented	Modern Materiality/ Self-Oriented	Postmodern Immateriality/ Self-Oriented
(3) Comradeship (2) Altruism	(2) Financial Benefits	(4) Adventure (7) Fulfillment of Profession

Figure 5: Deployment Motivation of German Soldiers, own data, based on Hedlund 2011, 186. Multiple answers were included.

The classification of the German soldiers' motivation for deployment shows that the most frequently cited reasons for foreign deployment are of a postmodern nature. Professional self-fulfillment and the application of what the soldiers have learned were the most frequently cited motives, followed by adventurousness.

Altruistic motives were also cited. Several of the soldiers interviewed stated that they wanted to make a difference for the better in Afghanistan. In addition, some of the soldiers felt an obligation to their comrades. Consequently, paleomodern motivations are the second most frequently mentioned. Modern materialistic motives played a subordinate role in the survey of German soldiers.

3.3.2 Preparations and Run-Up

Weeks and months of intensive training precede a foreign deployment to ensure that the soldiers are prepared for the challenges they will be facing.

The vast majority of the German soldiers surveyed stated that they felt well prepared by the Bundeswehr for their deployment abroad.

"Militarily wise, definitely [well prepared]. So what training we had there, with all the trimmings, whether it was driver training for the vehicle that I theoretically would have had to drive if my driver had dropped out. As far as the military stuff, like mastery of the weapon, it was all there. The knowledge of how do I handle my equipment, how do I best assemble it. The teamwork that I had was top notch. We practiced with the company I was traveling with, which meant as a "stranger" I knew their procedures and how they thought. We had already become attuned to each other. When you arrived on site, it was really just, "The exercise is over, now it's reality." From day one. We're not just going out and practicing to see if it works. Every patrol is hardcore, every patrol is serious, and it could go bang at any second. No bickering, no playing around, just go for it and get out there. And then you knew: We're here together, we've practiced and rehearsed, and now we have to build on that. We kept improving as we went along, we improved a lot. At some point we had a positive routine. I knew exactly what one of them was trying to tell me, I could see it in his eyes. We didn't need to talk to each other anymore. It had become a routine" [GER9, 34, Lieutenant].

Many soldiers describe the preparation time as very time-consuming and sometimes exhausting. For some, the time of preparation was so intense that they were looking forward to the mission itself, as they hoped to be able to recover from the training at the camp.

"Well prepared indeed. The 8 months in which we were prepared, we went absolutely full throttle. There was nothing that could have been done more. I prepared as well as I could. The half year was an extremely exhausting phase, at the end we said, thank God we are finally in Kunduz now, we can relax a bit. It sounds stupid, but also in my private life, the things you have to sort out with family members before a mission like that, it's just a tremendous strain that you're exposed to" [GER4,38, Major].

As the previous statement indicates, the intensive training period prior to a deployment also has an impact on the soldiers' private lives. In addition to the time away from home during training, mental preparation and dealing with death can put a strain on relationships. Some soldiers have written their last will and testament and letters for their loved ones.

"I have written my will. But I don't think you should think too much about whether you die or don't die. Because whether you die in traffic or on a mission abroad, the danger is there, but

you should also be aware that you could die. It's just the occupational risk" [GER2,35, Corporal].

For some of the soldiers, repressing the potential danger is a way of dealing with the extreme situation of deployment. However, the opinions of the soldiers diverge, in some cases significantly, particularly with regard to the risk assessment of the deployment.

"Well, there is this argument that you can also be run over by a bus here, and I can only shake my head at that. Because that's really nonsense. There is an offensively operating opponent, who wants to run you over with the bus, so to speak. Well, in the half year before that I hardly had a chance to think about it because it was so exhausting and time-consuming. So I didn't have a chance to think about it much. It was all about being as well trained and prepared as possible. I read a lot, was trained, trained, that was sort of the way out to deal with this pressure situation" [GER4,38, Major].

With regard to training and education, Biehl mentions as a stressor that soldiers often have to be prepared for increasingly complex requirements within a very short time. For example, soldiers should be available for deployment abroad after just one year of service (Biehl 2011, 73). In retrospect, this soldier felt that he was not sufficiently militarily prepared for the demands placed on him during deployment.

"No, definitely not. I had suggested several times that maybe you could practice with paintball guns in that area. I found myself not well prepared in local and house combat. I also didn't feel well prepared for those guided engagements, so I felt that the overall mission preparation at the time in 2005 was relatively poor. So one day of mine reconnaissance, on the second day a bit of battlefield training and a bit of rumbling around on the training area and that was it - it's not the same as being directly on the ground. But you also have to remember that at that time the Bundeswehr had no experience in this area. I don't know now how far the training has changed. But I didn't feel well prepared" [GER2, 35, Corporal].

As some participants felt that the training within the Bundeswehr was not sufficient, they met after the mandatory military training with their unit in their free time to further deepen the training, to teach each other special skills and thus to be best prepared for the mission.

"Yes, I did as well as I could with my guys. We went through the training together, the mandatory training. They each did the training themselves in the unit, played through all the scenarios and we did training beyond the regulations with us. For example, we had soldiers who had better medical training, who were allowed to lay needles and so on, and so that they would stay in practice, we locked ourselves in the bathroom and said let's go lay needles. And then we put needles in our arms and legs so that they had practice. So that it really works

when it has to be. We did a lot of training in writing, practical training, in the group and we also secured ourselves in this way” [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant]

However, differences can be observed between the training of special units and the general troops of the Bundeswehr. This becomes particularly clear when a soldier has been deployed abroad several times and has undergone preparation in different units.

“From the point of view of the Bundeswehr, definitely. It's not as if you're told, Mr. xy, pack your bags, you're going to Afghanistan tomorrow. Rather, it really is a process in which you first have to complete various training courses, if only so that you speak the same language as the international forces on the ground. You first have to reach a certain level, then you are informed about the insurance policies you can take out, what happens to the surviving dependents and how you can make provisions. What to expect there, what is the purpose of being there. And you don't die stupidly there, I say. But it's also somehow everyone's responsibility to educate themselves, so I'm only talking about the group of people I was there with. [...] [When I was with the EBG Unit I was prepared] 100%, definitely. I mean, you have to. You are simply exposed to the greatest dangers there. It's not like you're doing the same craft as soldier x, but you're at the highest level of danger. [...] That's something completely different when you go there with the general troops of the Bundeswehr” [GER5, 30, Specialist].

Regardless how well the preparation and how intensive the training at home base has been, how well the soldiers felt prepared militarily and psychologically for their deployment, in actual warfare soldiers are confronted with situations for which they cannot be adequately prepared.

“Dealing with death and the wounded is something you learn in class, how to deal with it, where you know exactly when it happens it will be different anyway, even if he is a comrade, one is more sympathetic to me than the other, and accordingly I will grieve differently with the other than with the other. You can't be extremely prepared psychologically either. I can't sit down and watch a movie for two hours where I see all the dead bodies and say that I have it easier. The reality, there are the smells and the sounds and so on. I cannot support this statement that shelling is part of the everyday life of a soldier, therefore it is not particularly stressful. No, I don't have an automatic shield against such things, no one can do that either” [GER9, 34, Lieutenant].

In summary, the majority of the German soldiers surveyed rated the preparations in the run-up to the Afghanistan mission as good. It should be noted that military preparation was rated better than psychological preparation. In this context, however, it must be pointed out that only limited preparation can be made for the special, psychologically stressful situations that can arise during a mission.

3.3.3 Realities of War: Experiences of German Soldiers

Stress Factors during Deployment

The soldier is confronted with special challenges and exposed to various pressures during deployment. Biehl divides the burdens of soldiers on deployment into four categories: separation from home and absence from family, threats to life and limb, conflicts between soldiers and organizational failures (Biehl 2011). These challenges and stressors are explained below and compared with the responses from the interviews. Based on the participants' responses, the list of stresses will be further expanded.

Separation from Home

The separation from home and the absence of the family is one of the most central burden for the German soldiers deployed. The Bundeswehr's standard for the duration of a deployment is four months. In practice, soldiers, especially in special units, are often deployed longer or voluntarily extend their deployment time. It is also common for two soldiers to share a six-month deployment abroad (Hickmann 2013). The reactions of family and friends of the participants when the assignment became official already indicates the pressure the soldiers are under.

“ [There was] absolutely no understanding. My mother was naturally afraid for her child and so was my father. And they also tried to pull me away from it until the last moment. But everyone has to make their own decisions. They would have told me not to do it, but I believe that everyone is responsible for their own personal development. And accordingly it was my life and my decision. Accordingly, my decision, my consequences” [GER2, 35, Corporal].

In addition to their own feelings and, if applicable, their own fears that a soldier experiences in the run-up to a deployment abroad, a way must also be found to deal with the feelings and fears of their relatives before a deployment. The strategies for coping with these stressors varied.

“It was actually very difficult for the family from the beginning. But we also talked about it a lot, I also said I would be honest, so that they always knew where I was. Because it was clear from the beginning that I would not only be in the safe camp, but also outside the camp, so I always had a map of Afghanistan with me and marked the points where I knew I would be in the near future, and I sent it home, so that my mother was always on the safe side. If something comes on the news, she knows where I am right now. In fact, we didn't talk about it that much

in the circle of friends. It was more like, it goes into action, but what's all there, that was more of a taboo subject" [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

While the previous example focused on communication and transparency, the next participant chose a strategy in which as little information as possible was communicated to family members. Even their own wedding was deliberately planned after their return from deployment abroad to see if the relationship could withstand the strain.

"The details were not known to them. They said I was going on a mission and then I left it like that. I didn't marry my wife until after my first deployment. I also deliberately set the date after my first deployment, because I only submitted the application then. When the deployment was over, because I just wanted to know, will it work with her? Can she handle it? And that actually worked out well in the first deployment and she knew okay, I'm a soldier. She would also have joined if I had wanted to be a professional soldier. But I didn't want to do that by myself. And she also knew that there could be another deployment and I also told her that we were going on deployment and there was never any question about whether I had to go along or not. She was never asked because she actually knew that the soldier had to go into action and that was it. And I would not have let my boys go alone. It only became really present in the news on Good Friday, I would say. One week before our departure. And it was already known to us almost half a year before that we were leaving. And there was rather little in the media. My mother then said, "Boy, this has to be, can't it be done any other way? And I said, "Mom, this is a mission. You know that and she said I should come back safely." [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant]

The soldiers who were in a committed relationship at the time of their deployment abroad increasingly stated that the separation was a particular burden for them as well as for the partners who stayed behind.

"They didn't took it that well. [...] But yes, it was just my decision. My partner at the time was definitely the one who was hit the hardest. My parents weren't even that upset, they were already expecting it when I started my training." [GER5, 30, Specialist]

The soldiers often leave their personal environment for months at a time due to their deployment abroad. Even though modern technology makes a certain degree of contact possible, the soldiers are unable to participate in many of the developments taking place at home. This is also seen as the flip side of modern communication during deployment: the soldiers are regularly made aware that life in their home country continues as normal and the feeling of separation is thus kept present (Biehl 2011, 69).

"Managing the relationship during that time was an incredible challenge. She met new people during that time, I thought that was strange. I was then jealous or distraught or whatever. Having an argument on the phone over 500 kilometers sucks. Yes. On Christmas Eve, we

were all billeted outside in an Afghan compound, we had to stay there for ten days or so and secure a certain area. Then on Christmas Eve we were allowed to use the satellite phone, everybody was allowed two minutes on the phone or something. I called her house and she was completely overwhelmed with me calling because it wasn't announced either. That was a really negative phone call, that was really gross. Where I just thought, how nice that you are happy. She was just completely overwhelmed and I had no understanding for it" [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper]

Separation from home can also be a great challenge the reverse way - it is often a great burden for the family at home to know that a family member is in supposed danger, which, again, in turn can put a great strain on the soldier himself.

"A big aspect was that [...] at 1 p.m. local time or German time it came in the news that in Baghlan a German soldier was killed, several wounded. For us it was about 5 p.m. local time, so my mother tried to call me, because it was already on the news, she knew where I was. And during the phone call a mortar shell hit directly in the camp and accordingly there was radio silence. We had "minimize", so no telephone contact with the outside for two days and accordingly my mother was at home for two and a half days in helplessness and did not know what had happened. I could not reach her in any form and after two and a half days it was then of course a very, very big relief for her. Of course, this is still a point that plays a very important role in therapy" [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

During a foreign deployment, the soldiers said they had grown particularly close to their comrades. In each of the interviews conducted, the camaraderie during deployment was highlighted as particularly positive. Nevertheless, living with comrades in close quarters for a long time can also be a stressor.

Conflicts between Soldiers and Responsibility

Another stress factor listed by Biehl is conflict at the horizontal and vertical levels within the military structure. Tensions can arise between soldiers in the same grade group or between soldiers and their superiors (Biehl 2011, 71). In the interviews conducted with German soldiers, neither of these stress factors played a significant role. Nevertheless, tendencies of the stressors addressed by Biehl could be discovered in some interviews. For example, some participants developed a kind of camp fever after months of spending time together.

"I tried a lot to exchange with Afghans. At the same time, when I'm with others a lot, like with the American soldiers, then not losing sight of the team. Sometimes they complained: You're always hanging around with them. Me: Yes, when we're on duty, we're with each other 24 hours a day, when we're on patrol or who knows, I also need to see other faces. Of course,

that also distanced me from the team somewhere. That was also a coping strategy” [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

According to Biehl, one conflict descriptor at the vertical level can be the high level of responsibility, especially of superiors (Biehl 2011, 71). In military operations, even young people in superior positions, already bear a great deal of responsibility, both for the material and for the conduct of operations, but especially for their personnel. The constant stress of dealing with this responsibility can be a great burden, as any failure on the part of superiors can have massive consequences.

“I was squad leader first vehicle. I was actually always the one in front in the patrol. I was responsible for looking for the right route and navigating accordingly. Observing the situation in front of me. In how far the civilian population is there or is not there. To look for conspicuousness in protected places, to really decide for ourselves, we stop and see if everything is okay. Then we got out and looked for an explosive charge or something that could be there. I actually had permanent responsibility for what would happen if we got into a booby trap. You are simply exposed to the greatest dangers there. It's not like you're doing the same craft as soldier x, but you're at the highest level of danger. What challenges did you experience? So fortunately, everyone came back. It was just an experience, yes, and I took my experiences with me. For example, to approach things more carefully, to be more patient. And working responsibly. It was down there that I first understood what it means to be responsible for others. If you're not prepared, it can be a real disaster, and I'm not the only one affected, maybe the whole troop is. And those were experiences that I could never have had here in civilian life” [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant].

It is not only the constant danger to which soldiers are exposed while deployed abroad that can become a burden. In order to be able to perform their work adequately on the ground, soldiers are dependent on good equipment and the functionality of their gear. Inadequate equipment can become a major stressor when deployed abroad.

Organizational Failures

Organizational failure can be a great burden (Biehl 2011, 72). Here, equipment and training play a decisive role. Particularly with regard to inadequate military equipment and lengthy, bureaucratic and expensive acquisition procedures, the Bundeswehr frequently made negative press. In the 2020 Defense Report, for example, Högl, the Federal Commissioner for the Armed Forces, recently criticized the Bundeswehr's continuing problems with materials, personnel and bureaucracy. She considers it unacceptable that soldiers still do not have the best possible equipment available to

them in many cases during their training and deployments. There is not only a lack of large items such as operational vehicles, helicopters or ships, but also of equipment such as helmets or backpacks. These circumstances are unfortunately an everyday occurrence in the force and a frequent cause of justified dissatisfaction (Deutscher Bundestag 2021). Inadequate equipment can lead to major hazards and high individual stress, especially in combat situations.

“There were a total of nine incidents in this complete period, which one has actually not yet perceived in the mission. A very big point is the 07.10.2010, where the sergeant Pauli fell. I was in the immediate vicinity in the Kilagai outpost and we were attacked in the evening, six kilometers away from where he fell, we heard the fighting all day and, yes, in the evening the Taliban withdrew and attacked our camp. We were not able to fight at night because of the lack of equipment and then we had to rely on the Americans. We were six Germans, we were responsible for the camp supply. I was responsible for the water, i.e. for the water treatment and that we had drinking and service water available, and apart from that there were 500 Americans, who were of course more trained for this, or more trained to go into combat. As I said, we were not able to see where the shots were coming from because of the lack of equipment. I think that was the first time I had the feeling of helplessness and fear of death. Simply because one did not know from where it comes. So I think you would have been able to act if you had seen from which side we were being attacked. But because of the lack of equipment, we were actually trapped in our outpost and had to wait and see. That is actually still a very difficult point, even now in therapy.” [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant]

The feeling of helplessness and the feeling of being exposed to a situation without being able to actively change anything about it can be a trigger for triggering post-traumatic stress disorder, as in the case of the interview participant. In the event that soldiers in the German Armed Forces suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, there are special support services that are described in more detail in the *Trauma* section.

Threats to Life and Limb

Soldiers are exposed to constant hazards during their deployment abroad. Even if these dangers may vary somewhat depending on the task on the ground, there is still a constant sense of insecurity due to the risk of attacks or accidents. The possibility of having to resort to violence in a combat scenario can also be psychologically stressful. In the long term, this form of stress can have both physical and psychological consequences and may manifest itself in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder (Biehl 2011, 70).

“Then there were the battles, of course, and then the confrontation with the death and wounding of comrades. After five months, we had 25 wounded by explosives, one shot and one killed by a suicide bomber. These were, of course, unbelievably crass challenges, but then at some point from a certain point on fear, I didn't feel any fear at the beginning during the first battles. That came later and it got very, very, very bad with me. So I don't know. I know one of us pissed himself, during a skirmish. But still, they all kind of still functioned, at least from my observation. With me it was then at some point, I was so inhibited, I couldn't act properly while we were being shot at, because I was so afraid. But I also couldn't deal with this fear. I could have said, I need a break or I'm going back. That would have worked. But I couldn't let my team down either. I was torn. That was the biggest challenge” [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

In extreme situations, every individual and every soldier behave differently, regardless of the training they have completed. While some were blocked in their fear, others just functioned without thinking.

“You don't think about it at all. So at that moment you're so under adrenaline that you don't even think about what's happening here. Not even the days afterwards, it was really like that, that we, yes, said, this is the way it is now. You've probably already suppressed it and you've continued to do it, because you have to function” [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant]

In fear and stress situations, the human body releases adrenaline. The stress hormone supplies the body with the increased energy demand and ensures that functionality is maintained over a longer period of time. In particular, the battles with the local Taliban often went over long distances and it was particularly necessary to keep a sharp mind in order not to be caught in a pitfall due to exhaustion.

"I was in battle. The first was on May 15, 2010, when explosive devices were suspected on the street below. There were repeated patrols on that section of the road, and then the entire company moved out with two platoons and a special rifle platoon and secured the area so that the explosives experts could search the area. When we went there we noticed that there were no people there, and if the civilian population was not there as usual, then something was wrong. There were no vehicles on the road, there were no people on the roads, it was to be assumed that something was wrong here. That was around noon. And then all of a sudden there was a violent detonation. And then the first moment you think, oh here we go. You look where it is, where you see something. In the western part, there was a warning fire and detonations. Then we saw three Taliban that had changed position to the north. We really took fire at them, but we didn't get them, they were 300 meters away and at that distance they are way too fast for us. The whole thing went on for a total of 6 hours. There were always bigger breaks, so for half an hour there was nothing at all and then it was relatively heavy rattling again. [...] We didn't follow behind, we stayed in the area. Which was the better solution, really. The locals know the terrain, they would have been prepared accordingly and we would probably have been locked in there like the other comrades on Good Friday. [...] I then saw the panicked looks of my boys from time to time, but we were probably so wide awake due to the adrenaline that we actually just reacted. We thought, okay, they're shooting at us, head down and then okay, it hit somewhere behind us and then we immediately opened fire in their direction. There were two trees that were completely bare after that. I suppose, but I don't

know if we killed them, but at least we probably wounded them. There was no more fire coming from that direction either" [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant].

In addition to the direct battles, the hidden boobytraps posed special challenges for many operational platoons.

"The last German soldier was killed at the beginning of June 2011, that was weeks before we went into action. In May and June 2011 there were two more serious attacks in which German soldiers were killed. When we went there at the end of June 2011, the fighting had subsided. Parts of my company came into an open firefight and otherwise the main threats were the hidden boobytraps. We were constantly and permanently pulling booby traps out of the ground. Three times in our task force, people were also blown up by us and wounded. Except for PTSD, which developed in many soldiers, we did not suffer any serious injuries. At least physically, everyone was able to get back into shape. So in the end, it was mainly the booby traps that got to us, that were buried everywhere. Where we had to use search methods, where we sometimes searched for days, where we found nothing, and sometimes where we took three out of the ground a day from places that we had actually classified as safe" [GER4,38, Major].

Soldiers in war are not only exposed to psychologically stressful situations during direct combat operations. Witnessing human rights violations and mistreatment can also have lasting consequences for the mental health of soldiers.

"A very big issue that continues, or what I continue to struggle with because it is simply not in any diary, what happened in the mission. We had to observe, or watch, how a boy was abused and raped several times. Or even sold to the Taliban as a boy toy. By the family. We had a house in the observation area, there was a man, I think he had three wives, several children and yes. Besides that he abused the sheep and the donkey, where you might have laughed about it at first, because it's just something you can't deal with, which you just don't know. Then it was just yes, other countries, other customs, so it was always told to us. [...] And that always happened in the evening and always when we were on guard duty. So at some point, of course, you couldn't take it anymore. The cries of the donkey, the sheep, and we thought, okay, we have to put them out of their misery. Just shoot it. But you don't do it, because of course we are there according to German law and we are not allowed to do it. That would definitely have had legal consequences for us here in Germany. And that means that I actually still live today with these feelings of guilt for not having helped this boy. Morally, it's totally hard to deal with it, because of course here in Germany you wouldn't watch it. If it happened to anyone, be it children, women, anyone else. But there we were just forced to watch, we were permanently sold or even abused there on the spot. [...] Then at some point the language mediator explained to us that in Afghanistan it is very often the case that very poor families sell boys in particular, as so-called lust boys, who are sold to high-ranking officers or the Taliban for a little money in order to dance there or to be sexually abused. That took a long time and that yes, as I said, that was actually a bit of a statement, look away. [...] I think it was actually the problem afterwards that if we had sent troops there to the house to do reconnaissance or whatever, the family would have been in danger. Because the Taliban would have seen that. We often had that with the cleaners, who often came to us and cleaned, especially in Kielagai, one man never came back. The language mediator told us that the Taliban had shot him. As a traitor. Yes, and the other man was badly beaten up. And of course

these were also things that are difficult to deal with. You think, why are these people suffering so much?" [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant]

For soldiers who are exposed to particular stresses, the Bundeswehr offers the possibility of a short time leave during the foreign deployment. Soldiers are released from the deployment to a neighboring country for a period of three to five days to recuperate and then return to duty. During the measure, a psychologist and a social worker provide regeneration and psychological stabilization services. The recreation measure serves to maintain serviceability in the country of deployment (Zentrum Innere Führung 2015, 101). None of the German soldiers interviewed had taken advantage of this recuperation measure.

Confronting Wounding and Death

The experience of death and wounding is one of the most extreme border experiences in military operations. Although the subject of death is dealt with theoretically in the training of deployed forces, it can be assumed that the directly experienced loss of comrades is extremely burdensome for the deployed forces.

"We stood guard a total of four times in these four months. It started in January with a Norwegian. In February with two Swedes and then in April with seven Germans, once the three on Good Friday and a week later the four in the Bengan. That's when you realize what it's actually like out there. What can happen there. How dangerous it is out there" [GER9, 34, Lieutenant].

Some of the soldiers interviewed only realized the danger they were in when their comrades died. Although the majority of the Germans interviewed rated the military preparation for the mission as good, the direct confrontation with injury and death affected them strongly.

"We had the Good Friday battle with our predecessors, who were shot up there, three dead, many seriously wounded. We stood in line at the funeral service. We just knew from that moment on that it was getting serious. I thought, the situation is real, something can definitely happen" [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

A soldier describes the mourning ceremony at the camp in Mazar-e Sharif:

“Several soldiers were killed during the time I was there, foreign soldiers and German soldiers, and that was very, very impressive for me. There is a large memorial city in Mazar-e-Sharif and when this funeral service was then carried out by the soldiers who fell there, then all nations, every soldier who was not assigned to guard duty somewhere, gathered there at this memorial city and then the coffins, which were laid out in the medical ration, were standing there, and during the time in which the soldiers were laid out there, a guard was constantly standing there, two soldiers were standing guard. They took turns, of course, but there were always soldiers in front of the door. And when the fallen soldiers were then driven to the airport, then all the free soldiers there stood in guard at the road where the soldiers were then driven along. And that was done in such a way that basically flatbed trucks were covered, the back of the flatbed was uncovered and the individual coffin stood on the back of the flatbed and a soldier, that went at a walking pace, drove these cars past us, a soldier walked away in front and carried the picture of the soldier and that was sometimes not only one vehicle, but then there were several that drove past us. The soldiers who stood guard on the road then saluted us when the car drove past us and then the coffins were loaded onto a plane and arrived back in Cologne” [GER7, 55, Captain].

The direct experience of death and wounding is, as already described, a borderline experience for which a person can only prepare to a certain extent. Under certain conditions, these experiences can result in trauma, which can occur immediately, but in some cases also only after months and back in the home country.

Trauma

Working in extreme contexts exposes people's physical and mental health to high risks. Members of military organizations are particularly affected by these circumstances. In recent years, the mental condition of military personnel has become the focus of preparations for deployment, in addition to their physical fitness. Soldiers are tested for a certain level of mental health in advance of a deployment or before being accepted into a special team (Hofmann 2014). Factors influencing the long-term psychological consequences of deployment are partly analogous to the stress factors already described. For example, separation from partners and family can lead to a feeling of loss of control and helplessness, and interpersonal conflicts with comrades in a confined space are also a predictor for the development of a depressive illness. Lack of sleep due to interruptions of the day-night rhythm and constant fatigue are also part of foreign deployments and have a favorable effect on depression or stress disorder. Especially the experience of death and wounding during combat situations or the loss of comrades is an extreme experience. The traumatic situation often occurs suddenly and unexpectedly and requires instinctive action, with the event often leaving

the person helpless and overwhelmed. Combat situations, accidents with tidal consequences, witnessing violence and the use of firearms are relevant in the military context (Hofmann 2014). In particular, however, the accumulation of the individual stress factors over a long period of deployment can lead to mental disorders or psychiatric illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), depression or anxiety (Kottlow 2020, 167).

“Yes, then of course there were many small incidents in between, but in retrospect they have had quite a big impact. Simply on the whole. Whether it was a multiple bombardment during the night, not a dangerous bombardment, but still, in retrospect, you have to keep in mind, hey, what could have actually happened if the missile had hit 50 meters further” [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

The signs by which post-traumatic stress disorder can manifest itself are manifold. Since their deployment, some of the soldiers have had problems with loud and unexpected noises like a slamming door.

“It's funny. You're at home and you know that you're actually safe, that nothing can happen to you here, but you look at every manhole cover, every guardrail somewhere with suspicion because you're just so used to it. In the beginning, I couldn't keep up with that. After that, I had my problems. Once someone slammed a door in a building I was in, and that door was like a grenade impact, not in terms of volume, but in terms of sound and frequency. I sat there in a cold sweat and was unresponsive for 2-3 minutes, then they touched me on the shoulder and said, "Hey, what's wrong with you?". This went on for half a year, and after half a year the whole thing was over. That vigilance is not as present anymore” [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant].

Fireworks can also be a challenge for affected soldiers, as they remind them of the combat experience.

“Well, I would say that it depends on the one hand on the pure training and on the other hand on a possible consequence of damage like in my case now. So what do I know, with fireworks, for example, is quite difficult for me, because of course I behave differently than other people because of my experiences and my training. But mainly because of my experiences. I find it very, very difficult to tolerate. The firecrackers remind me a lot of the battles we've been through. There are paramedics who can't smell grilled meat anymore because they've treated burn victims. There are many forms of trauma that can hit you in your everyday life” [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

The smell of burnt meat mentioned above is indeed described by some soldiers suffering from PTSD as a catalyst that also extremely restricts them in their home life, especially during the summer barbecue season. The smells evoke inner images of extremely traumatic experiences, as in the following example.

"When Corporal [name] was killed in the shooting accident, we were responsible for cleaning the tent in the camp with the human remains, and you're just not prepared for that in advance training. There were injuries presented, like open wounds, guts sticking out, or other things. But not that you would encounter such a picture. The comrades came from a patrol at night and were deployed directly to the guard post. [...] it is still incomprehensible to everyone that after two weeks on patrol they came in directly from outside and were immediately deployed. They posed in the tent with the weapons, for photos. They were being playful with the weapons. And in the process, the shot went off and he shot his comrade in the head from a meter and a half away, and yes, he was killed instantly. And the next day we were responsible for cleaning the tent of these human remains. I think that's actually the worst part. The smells, I have a hard time with that, even the smell of grilled meat. We took care of two badly injured Americans who were badly burned and almost dead. That means I still can't grill or even be near a grill today. At home, since I've been back, there's been no roasting of meat. [...] I always have my scent spray with me. Always my little bag, where I then try to counteract with orange-citrus scents. Sometimes it works, sometimes not. Sometimes I throw up because the memory comes back. Yes, so there have been incidents that have not passed me by without a trace, not at all" [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

Soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder have a legal right to support from the Bundeswehr. The legal situation of physically or emotionally injured soldiers on deployment has improved significantly in recent years as a result of various laws. The Deployment Support Act and the Deployment Reassignment Act play a central role in this regard. The basis for the application of both laws is an application for military service injury, which can be submitted by the soldier himself, his troop doctors or superiors. This forms the basis for further assessment, which does, however, take some time. The Deployment Benefits Act regulates the financial compensation of soldiers in the event of chronic illnesses and disabilities. This includes one-time payments and/or pension benefits. The Troop Service Continuation Act also provides for the possibility of extending the period of service or re-entering the armed forces after discharge from military service in order to serve again in the armed forces (Zimmermann, Jensen, and Alliger-Horn 2016, 31).

3.4 Coming Home

"Coming home is the hardest part of deployment" (Wächter, Karsten in: Würich, Scheffer, and Baumann 2014, 26)

The following section examines the homecoming experience of the German soldiers. It considers how they experienced the homeland reception and the difficulties they were confronted with after their return.

3.4.1 Leaving Afghanistan Behind?

The soldiers' feelings on leaving Afghanistan were ambivalent. It was a relief for many to come home unharmed. Some are grateful for the experiences they were able to have and have also taken something with them for their future lives.

“So fortunately, everyone came back. It was just an experience, yes, and I took my experiences with me. For example, to approach things more carefully, to be more patient. And working responsibly. It was down there that I first understood what it means to be responsible for others. If you're not prepared, it can be a real disaster, and I'm not the only one affected, maybe the whole troop is. And those were experiences that I could never have had here in civilian life” [GER5, 30, Specialist] .

Likewise, some of the soldiers were burned out after their deployment time and ask themselves what will remain of their commitment. In this context, it is positive for the soldiers if they can look back on the completion of their personal mission.

“I was just totally burnt out. Then we flew back home, that was just totally strange. The feeling that we were done, and at least everyone in our company survived. And now? What remains now? We already had the advantage, in contrast to our predecessors, who finished with the Good Friday battle relatively at the end, that we had very great military success, especially at the end. And that was very, very important and good to be able to leave this mission with a positive feeling” [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

Not all of the soldiers felt that they had achieved a military success. Some would have preferred to stay and continue their mission despite the strain. They therefore had the feeling of having left behind an unfinished task.

“Unfinished, for one thing. The question as to who would stay down, 80 percent of the company answered yes. We had settled in, we had situational awareness, we knew what was going on, we could assess the threat situation to some extent. Somehow it was also exciting and adventurous, and my basic feeling was, "Man, you're going to stay here for a while. Knowing full well, however, the rational half of my brain said, "That can't be healthy. And so I went home anyway. And we also forbade our soldiers to prolong the mission. I think there was only one soldier who stayed, he was already an officer, and he acted as a link between new and old for two more months. So the unfinished is one thing. One got along quite well with new living conditions in a new living environment. You earned well, the rhythm was very clear, and you

had to break with that. And yes, at home it was just really weird. I actually felt quite out of touch there. And out of place. It was just surreal, as if you suddenly come into an area with a different understanding of values, where life is somehow going on without even noticing what was going on in Afghanistan. It was just really weird. I also had a decent sleep disorder at first, and then I just went about my day" [GER4,38, Major].

3.4.2 Lonely in the Crowd

After their deployment, the soldiers return home to a society that cannot share their experiences. After their return, many soldiers feel an emptiness that is difficult to fill in everyday life.

"Strange. There was a void all of a sudden. You are trained, you fly there, you do your job, you do a pretty good job. It's fun too, you feel challenged, you feel supported, you feel important at that moment. And then you come back and wait again. And accordingly, you were happy to be back home, but you were also not happy to be home" [GER2, 35, Corporal].

Even friends and family members cannot share the experiences made. Many of the soldiers have difficulty settling into everyday life because time has not stood still at home either.

"I think I was actually there for seven and a half months, which was obviously an enormously long time. You arrive home, everything is different. It's also difficult, it's difficult to actually get back into everyday life, because life has already come to a standstill, while with friends everything has continued or in the family. Our life stopped, my life stopped. And then you come back and actually wish, as with the other foreign assignments before, that it should continue. Just as you left the country, you want to start again. But you can't" [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

As already shown in *Separation from Home*, the personal relations of the soldiers are affected by their foreign deployment. Some of the interviewees describe that it took them a certain amount of time after the mission until they were mentally back at home and in everyday life again. Würich, Scheffer and Baumann state in this regard: "When soldiers are deployed, they go into battle mode mentally, and they go through it together. But it is not easy for the soul to return to peace mode. I am expected to get involved again with my feelings. If I then just sit quietly in the corner, that's a problem. Women report that their husbands take longer to come back after each new deployment."(Würich, Scheffer, and Baumann 2014, 26).

3.4.3 Reception and Landing

The soldiers experienced their homecoming very differently. Depending on the destination airport and the time of arrival, there were varying degrees of welcoming reception. The different arrival times and the redistribution of troop members throughout Germany resulted in some of the soldiers having to handle their arrival after the deployment on their own and independently of the troop they were deployed with.

“No, we landed in the middle of the night in Berlin, Hanover and Cologne. The plane flew to different airports so that people had a short way home. And that was at eleven or twelve, a comrade picked me up and even drove me home. Then I stood in front of my door, that was it. So we were discharged directly from the airport. After that, there was a week's vacation” [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper]

What all study participants had in common, however, was that there was no official reception by the military. All soldiers landed at an extra terminal away from the German public.

“When we arrived, only the family members were at the airport. There was nothing from the official military side. Everything is handled quietly, I would say. You don't land at a civilian airport like in other countries, but you really land at the Bundeswehr terminal, where only your own relatives are allowed to wait for you. The second time, there was even a small protest in front of the terminal, but it was quickly dispersed. But apart from perhaps drinking a glass of champagne afterwards in your own troop, there is no official welcome” [GER5, 30, Specialist].

As the next example shows, respondents from the German study group do not necessarily request a special reception. However, they partly interpret the public remoteness of their landing as a lack of public appreciation of their foreign deployment.

"It doesn't matter where you land. Both my Kunduz missions ended in Cologne at the military terminal. That's a long way from the public terminal. You arrive and wait for your luggage, and if you're unlucky, customs wants to look in your backpack. [...] You come out into the reception hall and there are your relatives waiting. That is something special when you see the tears in their eyes. Most of the time you come out the door alone, which I didn't realize until afterwards. And then the relatives sort of come up to you, it's unbelievable. The others applaud and are happy and you yourself are happy for them. That was something special. But otherwise there was nothing special. There is also no announcement of when soldiers will land again.[...] There is no official representative of the Bundeswehr who stands there and says, when the plane has landed, on behalf of the Ministry of Defense, welcome back. Somebody who says, good to have you back. Thank you for the mission or something. You get cut off from society. During the Super Bowl, there was a commercial in America where you walk into an airport check-in hall, and suddenly people start applauding, and then you see the soldiers come in. In America, of course, it's celebrated quite differently. That doesn't necessarily have to be the case in Germany. It's just a matter of landing in such a way that people notice. It would be enough if

just one person said thank you. If this was a national soccer team, everyone would be there. I definitely think it's a shame" [GER9, 34, Lieutenant].

The comparison with the national soccer team was drawn relatively frequently in the interviews. Some of the soldiers interviewed found it difficult to comprehend that the national team is received at the airport after an international match with great public interest, whereas the soldiers arrive in seclusion after a foreign deployment.

"The national soccer team would have been applauded and the rest of us would not. That's sad. In Nuremberg, where we landed, we didn't go out via a normal terminal, but came in the back via the baggage department into the large baggage hall. our families received us there, nicely shielded from the public" [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant].

Some of the soldiers were invited to restaurants or hotels by their relatives after landing at the airport. Two soldiers report on their experiences in the camouflage uniform:

"I arrived in uniform from Afghanistan and was then taken to a steakhouse by those who came to pick me up. There were actually stupid comments from people who had just left the restaurant, along the lines of: why is he in uniform here now? Of course, that was exactly what I needed after 200 days in Afghanistan. To have someone make stupid comments to me from the side" [GER4, 38, Major].

Similar experiences were made by a soldier who was picked after landing and drove to a hotel in uniform:

"When I came back from Afghanistan, I went to a rather expensive Cologne hotel in full montur, that is, in the sand-colored uniform. I wanted to spend two nice days there with my boyfriend. On the short walk from the car to the room, I felt such rejection that I thought, "This can't be happening." The doorman looked me up and down, and the receptionist was arrogant. This simply should not happen. I didn't feel like a hero, but I would have appreciated a "welcome back" or at least an interested question about where I was coming from." (Schulze, Andrea in: Würich, Scheffer, and Baumann 2014, 166)

None of the German soldiers interviewed received any special welcome within their barracks either.

"And in terms of my work, there are only 20 of us in my office, so there was nothing major, but simply, yes, Mr. S. it's nice that you're back, now tell me, did you experience anything special? No, nothing special? Good, then the service just goes on again." [GER7, 55, Captain]

Also, the reintegration measures of the soldiers turned out to be rather modest for the German soldiers surveyed.

“No, no, there was nothing like that. There was a three-day reintegration seminar, but then everybody just sat in a circle and drank and told each other funny stories about the mission, so I don't think that was really successful in terms of really getting to the bottom of a problem” [GER4,38, Major].

The partly extreme experiences gained during the deployment must first be processed after arriving home. In order to determine whether a soldier has suffered psychological damage as a result of deployment, all soldiers must present themselves to a troop doctor.

“Yes, well, you have to go to the troop doctor in any case. You have to present yourself there. Then you have to fill out a questionnaire, also from the psychological service, which is sent to you. This all happens, let's say, six weeks after the deployment. So you wait a certain amount of time to see if anything opens up. What I did twice was this preventative cure. Not so much because I thought I needed it somehow, psychologically or something, but I just thought I'd be stupid not to take advantage of it. I went to the North Sea for three weeks [...] That's a gift vacation, everything is paid for by the Bundeswehr, which is great, of course” [GER7, 55, Captain].

In some of the interviews, a certain bitterness about the seclusion of the landing and the lack of an official reception became apparent. Some soldiers experienced hostility in uniform in public immediately after their landing. These experiences lead to the assumption of a lack of public interest in the Bundeswehr's foreign missions.

In the next section, it will be addressed to what extent the perception of the soldiers corresponds to the public's appreciation of the missions.

3.4.4 Public Recognition of Mission

“You just don't expect much. You know how the population reacts towards soldiers. As long as you don't get insulted or thrown at at the airport, it's okay. You don't know what some people are like.” [GER1, 27, Specialist]

As described in the Being There section, soldiers deployed abroad are exposed to various stressors. They are separated from their private environment over a long period of time and have only limited privacy within the camp. They are exposed to dangers, in some cases they have fought and been confronted with death or injury.

In the Identification and Commitment section, the soldiers pointed out that they understand themselves as citizens in uniform and are sent on foreign missions as part of the parliamentary army at the behest of German politicians and thus the electorate. For some of the German soldiers interviewed, this also results in a desire for public recognition of the service they have rendered. However, the desire for public recognition often contrasts with the soldiers' experiences after their return. According to their own experiences, 8 out of 10 of the German soldiers surveyed would like to see more public recognition for their service abroad.

In several interviews, the resignation of German soldiers with regard to the public appreciation of their work, especially their missions abroad, became apparent. Similar to the narrative of friendly disinterest, some of the soldiers also attributed the perceived deficiency in recognition of their foreign deployments to a missing understanding on the part of the general public.

"I think it's understandable to encounter rejection. I see that in family and friends. They just can't understand it. They also can't understand what we're experiencing there. They have a certain opinion that is more or less directed against politics. Of course, that's unfair, but I think it's also just their attitude and that they don't necessarily know what they're voting for. Because they either don't care or they just don't have the intellect to realize what they are actually voting for[...] They don't understand that we are a parliamentary army that they are voting for [...] At the end of the day, we are doing our job, we are sworn to defend our homeland at home and abroad. It is indeed unfair from time to time, but I also have partial understanding simply because they are uninformed" [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

Some of the interviewees, as in the previous example and also in the following one, attribute the perceived disinterest in foreign missions to a deficiency of information. According to the next interviewee, many of the events in Afghanistan are not covered by the media and are therefore not made available to the German public.

"I am of the opinion that more recognition is not possible, because most of what happens they do not even notice. From our battle on May 15, nothing reached Germany, because there were no wounded by enemy action, there were no dead, there was no material damage. Of course, we had some holes in the vehicles, but that's not worth mentioning, that's normal. On the Bundeswehr website, it is usually published a few days later that there was a fire and so on, but that is not interesting enough for the media. But in general, is it really appreciated? No, not at all, I think there are a few in the circle of friends, acquaintances or in the family who might notice it [...] but the majority of the population not at all" [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant].

The population survey conducted by the ZMSBw that has already been referred to also examined how well informed the respondents feel about the Bundeswehr's missions

abroad. In fact, the number of those who feel well informed has declined sharply since 2015. In 2019 and 2020, a mere 16 percent of respondents feel well informed about the Bundeswehr's foreign deployments.

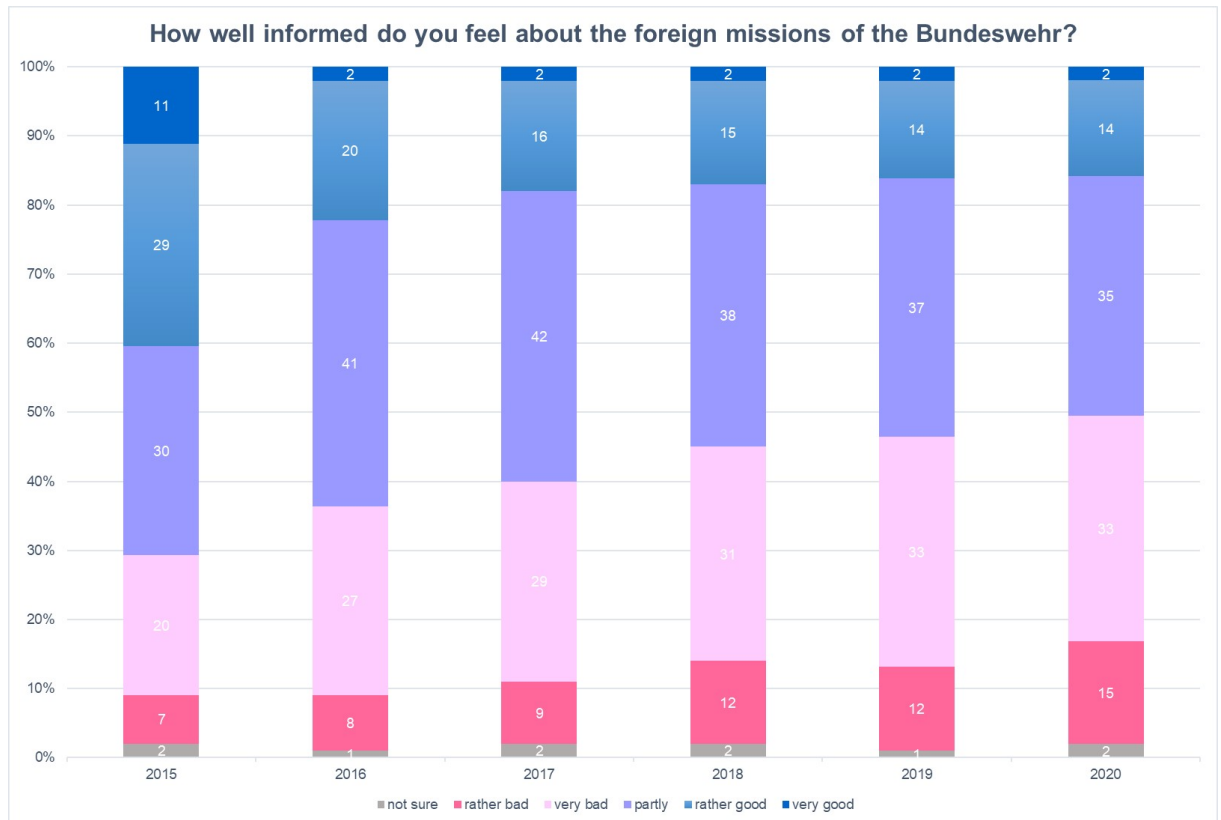


Figure 6: Information on the Foreign Missions of the Bundeswehr, (Graf 2021, 27).

The experience that people outside the Bundeswehr cosmos have little knowledge about the missions and the work of the soldiers themselves was shared by many of the interviewees. In order to prevent an increase, the next interviewee believes that the focus should remain on transparency and public relations work.

"When you talk about it with other people who are sometimes completely horrified because they can't really understand it and just don't have an understanding of this profession, it's very important to do more educational work in this area. What's actually involved in it. And I think we are already doing that very well with this open day. Giving insights every now and then. Whether you think it's good or not, the youtube series "the recruits" also just helps people get a bit of an insight. [...] I think that's very important. Also in social media to give more insight into this profession, to show how it actually looks like" [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

According to this soldier, the general lack of knowledge about the Bundeswehr's missions can again be attributed to the abolition of compulsory military service. The loss of personal relationships with soldiers in the circle of friends or family also eliminates the points of reference to foreign deployments. The general absence of soldiers from the streets also contributes to the fact that the Bundeswehr itself is not perceived in the same way as in earlier times. However, he does not attest to a general lack of appreciation for the work of soldiers on deployment. Still, according to the respondent, the desire for more recognition on the part of individual soldiers is understandable.

"I mentioned the keyword conscription. Also the absence of the Bundeswehr in the public image. Not everyone can go to Afghanistan and see the soldiers on the ground [...]. We don't want that either, and we can't do it at all. Of course, some would like a little more praise. I can well imagine that for individuals. Who doesn't like to have praise in the sense of "you did that well"? Yes, but the appreciation is there for the armed forces system as a whole. [...] After all, it is a parliamentary army. It does not set itself the tasks, but is given them by the government, the parliament. So it has a very clear legitimacy. I think as well as the Bundeswehr, according to all that I know, also performs, not without risk and not without danger, there is already a certain reputation in the public" [GER10.66, Lieutenant Colonel].

In the interviews, many of those surveyed referred to the parliamentary mandate of the army. It became evident in the interviews that it is important to the soldiers that a clear distinction is made between the Bundeswehr and the German parliament as the commissioning party. Thus, it is not the Bundeswehr's decision to go on a mission, but the mission is mandated by parliament, which is elected by the people. Some of the soldiers complain about a lack of understanding on the part of the population in this regard.

"Of course, it's disappointing. On the one hand, I have come to terms with it somewhere, but on the other hand, I am now active in Combat Veteran because I don't want to come to terms with it. I say we are a parliamentary army, we are sent there by the Bundestag [...] and if the Bundestag decides that we go there and the Bundestag is elected by the people, then in my opinion the people have given the order. And then you have to pay respect to the free democratic basic order if you defend it, as Peter Struck says, in the Hindu Kush. In my opinion, that happens very rarely" [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant].

The feeling that soldiers receive little public recognition after a deployment abroad is widely shared within the group surveyed.

"On the one hand, you want to have your peace somewhere. You don't want to be looked at stupidly or attacked in the sense of "what are you doing here now" or even worse. On the other

hand, you would be happy if when you come back - and if you wear desert camouflage, then you just got out of a mission, even the dumbest would have to understand that - of course I would be happy if one or the other says "Hey guys, great that you're back, thanks for your job", but that just doesn't happen" [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant].

In the interviews, it became apparent that the majority of the soldiers surveyed felt a lack of recognition for their work, especially when deployed abroad. While some, as stated above "came to terms with it", others would like to see a clear change in this respect.

"More recognition would give a completely different picture. I think with some soldiers then it would also be that they go down [to the mission] with pride. So, if you have the old-established soldiers, I think they're still proud, but the younger ones, they know what's going on here at home and that you're not really welcome when you come back. The way you see it with the Americans, for example. There's just a spontaneous landing military plane at the airport and everybody claps when the soldiers get out of there. They are allowed to go to schools in uniforms, which is not allowed here. They are allowed to enter public buildings like that, and here everything is so restricted and tepid" [GER1, 27, Specialist].

However, many of the soldiers emphasize that not only their profession deserves more public recognition, but also many other professional groups along with the soldiers.

"I would actually like to expand that a little bit. Because I think that also what the police officer, the nurse, the nursing staff and then also the soldier, that what they do is not valued at all. I think the only profession that is really valued, at least that's always at the top of the surveys, is the firefighter. With the firefighter, everybody sees that something happens. If I have an emergency here and there's a fire, the fire department comes. This profession is much more recognized than the other professions I just listed. I actually also think that we are struggling with such a decline in values. When I imagine that in some cases there is no longer any respect for a policeman or something like that. When I look at the G20 summit in Hamburg, I think to myself, my God, what do they have to put up with?" [GER7, 55, Captain]

This soldier emphasizes that neither thanks nor recognition were important to him, because he went abroad out of pure conviction and belief in the mission. In doing so, he also draws a comparison with Doctors Without Borders, who also act out of conviction to do something good.

"I wouldn't like a higher level of recognition. [...] I would find it out of place. After all, I'm not helping the Germans at the moment, I'm helping the Afghans. And all the soldiers have actively chosen this profession. The most I would wish for is that all these professions receive more appreciation, the policeman just as much as the fireman, just as much as the nursing staff, doctors, emergency doctors, paramedics, all of them deserve more appreciation in my eyes, not just the soldiers. [W]hat about all the NGOs like Doctors Without Borders? They go into crisis areas without military protection. And the doctors work there for I think 1300 euros gross

and do that because they believe in it. And I also believed in it at that time. And that's why I didn't care, because I believed in the mission" [GER2, 35, Corporal].

Personal need for public recognition varies across the surveyed cohort. The soldier interviewed below is very active in the veterans' association and is committed to educating the public about the work of the Bundeswehr. For him it is not about the arrangement of parades, but about the overall perception of soldiers returning from missions abroad:

"I myself don't wish for any confetti parades, because I also have the comfortable situation of getting a lot of positive feedback from my work, which also implicitly has to do with the mission. Others will certainly wish for that, but I don't think any soldier really wishes for a kind of ticker-tape parade, lots of applause and whatnot. Rather, they wish above all not to be viewed negatively in the first place." [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper]

Whereas in the previous comments, no desire for extraordinary honors was expressed, the next statement summarizes why it would be desirable at various levels for many soldiers to receive more public recognition. Asked whether the recognition of the Bundeswehr's foreign missions is noticeable among the German public, this soldier begins:

"No, not at all. Sorry, not at all, not a bit, zero. In the end, it's something between resignation and isolation or something like that. So by now I'm in a mode where I say to myself, well, okay, let's not do it. Then we'll just do our thing here and you do yours, but then I don't want this constant interference and these smug judgments from someone's living room chair at home" [GER4,38, Major].

In response to his implied separation of the Bundeswehr and civil society, he continues to state:

"For me, there are also huge differences, not only the theoretical ones, that you can be wounded or killed, that you have a duty of bravery and so on, but a serious difference is also the privations that you take upon yourself. Not every evening at home, but somewhere in Germany on a training ground or half a year in a foreign mission. And that's just a hardship that you have to put up with, but which society doesn't recognize or appreciate very much. Because society also doesn't understand that it has something to do with their standard of living and prosperity. If we see ourselves as "citizens in uniform", and we are supposedly all so intertwined with each other and like each other so much, and this is also supposedly scientifically confirmed again and again by the ZMSBw, then why are there no corresponding honors and words of appreciation and symbolic confessions? I am simply tired of the discussion. De Maiziere with "greed for recognition", that was 2013 that was the tip of what you were exposed to. For me, the consequence is to say, then we should forget about civil society involvement and do something officially separate, and then we won't need this recognition, which we should actually be entitled to automatically, so to speak, with our

leadership philosophy of citizens in uniform. And then there's the fact that I look abroad and see that military parades, veterans' days, public honors, etc., are the norm. Then there's always the argument about our history, but then you don't need to go all international and send the Bundeswehr on combat missions. Then we should concentrate on our UN observer missions. [But] we do the same as other nations in foreign missions" [GER4,38, Major].

Various points of criticism are listed in this statement. On the one hand, reference is made to a supposed separation between the German public and the Bundeswehr. It points out the dichotomy between the fact that soldiers, as citizens in uniform, are part of German society and the fact that the Bundeswehr, as a parliamentary army, is only sent on missions by decision of the German people. Furthermore, attention is drawn to the fact that the scientifically certified recognition is not lived out publicly enough. All these points have already been addressed. In addition, however, this statement highlights another point: the soldier refers to the fact that the German armed forces have long played a special role in the international community, but are now involved in combat operations to the same extent as other countries, with the difference that public appreciation is more pronounced in other countries. Referring to homecoming parades and Veterans Days as they exist in other countries, including Denmark, the soldier elaborates on the importance of such honors:

"I think something like that helps tremendously. I really believe that. You can think what you want about symbolic parades and honors, and I can't explain exactly what that does to people, but this form of appreciation and recognition and the official, ritualized gesture of acceptance works. And it also works against PTSD. At least for some people. The Germans may not need it, because they don't get it. But they also don't know what they are missing. It definitely has a psychological effect. And it is also a form of prevention against PTSD, which is often caused by a lack of appreciation and attention. And then you can also come to a better conclusion with the mission. You come from Afghanistan, you've just run over a booby trap, and suddenly I'm in Germany and nobody cares about me. With something like that, you find a conclusion together and then everyone can go their own way again. In Germany it's also so torn, everyone comes back at different times, gets off the plane and goes their way and then you don't see them for weeks. Then you come back and a third has already been transferred [...] it's just not cohesive" [GER4,38, Major].

As addressed in the previous statement, public tribute can be particularly meaningful for soldiers who have been wounded mentally or physically. The next quote stresses how important public recognition, also on the part of the politicians who send the soldiers on missions, would be for the soldiers after their return.

"I think right now with the soldiers who are injured in action, who of course come back and this number is very high, even the number of unreported cases, which is not known, I think there is definitely a need for more education and more recognition. Simply this creation of a veterans'

day. Just now in Berlin, it was the first time that I took part in it and to see that there are also people grumbling about the fact that we were standing in front of the Federal Chancellery. Or the older generation who say that they were in the Second World War - that is simply no longer comparable with today. I think it would be nice if there would be a day where politicians don't stand aside from the soldiers, but commemorated with them. Because after all, it is also their task to continue to look after us and not to let us down and also to show a presence. "You are not alone with this." I think that is very, very important, but I think it should not be so heroic. Not like in America, where it's constantly said "thank you for your service" [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant]

The debate on the introduction of a veterans' day in Germany is still ongoing and no agreement could be reached by the time this paper was completed. The German approach towards a veterans' policy is addressed in the following.

German Veteran Culture

In the section public recognition of mission, the lack of a veterans' day was pointed out frequently by study participants. The discussion about the possible introduction of a veterans day in Germany is preceded by two long-running debates, which should be briefly explained in order to understand the problem of introducing a veterans' day.

The first debate was the discussion about whether or not German soldiers were at war in Afghanistan⁹. In 2008, when German soldiers who had already died in Afghanistan were being transported back to Germany in coffins and repatriation was conducted quietly without any press coverage (Dahl Martinsen 2016, 39), German politicians were still debating whether the mission in Afghanistan was a "veritable war" or just a "skirmish"(Deutsche Presse Agentur 2008). The terminology was subsequently changed through a "robust deployment" two years later to "war-like circumstances" and finally "war" – first used by the then defense minister Guttenberg 2010 (Schroeder and Zapfe 2015). In this context, Neitzel notes that many German soldiers reacted with incomprehension to the wording of the term "war" and were in disbelief as to why the term "killed soldiers" was used instead of "fallen soldiers", since there was no doubt that they were at war in Kunduz (Neitzel 2022, 516). The recognition that German

⁹ for a more comprehensive look at the changing narrative in the course of the Afghanistan mission, see, among others (Schroeder and Zapfe 2015).

soldiers fought in a war was particularly important in relation to returning soldiers, especially given that the number of wounded and traumatized soldiers was increasing. The question arose as to how both German politics and the German public should respond to war returnees, how to deal with death in action, and whether a new culture of remembrance needed to be created. The difficulties of establishing a veteran culture or concept were already evident in the agreement on a definition of the word veteran.

For a long time, many people in Germany associated the word veteran – according to the Latin origin of the word - with an old and long-serving soldier (Weber 2017, 29). However, only few people associate the term with young soldiers from current missions (Bulmahn 2012, 34). In the course of the 2010s, various veterans' associations, such as "Reservistenverband"¹⁰, "Bund Deutscher Einsatzveteranen"¹¹ or "Combat Veterans Germany"¹², were founded to promote not only about the terminology, but above all about political implications of a German veterans policy. After years of discussion between the Ministry of Defense, the Bundeswehr Association and the Reservists Association, a common definition of the term veteran was finally agreed in 2018. Henceforth applied: A veteran of the German Armed Forces is a person who is on active duty as a soldier of the German Armed Forces or who has retired honorably from this service, i.e. who has not lost his or her rank (Von der Leyen 2018). The definition veteran was defined as openly as possible: it is not tied to length of service, function within the Bundeswehr or the participation in a foreign mission. All at once, more than 11 million people in Germany became veterans by definition (Weber 2018, 1). Parallel to the debate about a standardized definition of the term veteran, the debate about the implementation of a veteran policy in Germany proceeded. In 2012, the then defense minister De Maizère presented a thesis paper to the defense committee on the development of a veterans' policy in Germany. The discussion paper addresses the development of the German armed forces into an "army in action" and the resulting fact that the issues of death and wounding have also come to the public's attention as a result of the German armed forces' missions abroad. The introduction of a veterans' policy was intended on the one hand to express the appreciation of the

¹⁰ <https://www.reservistenverband.de/veteranen/>

¹¹ <https://www.veteranenverband.de>

¹² <https://www.combat-veteran.com>

state and the Bundeswehr to veterans, and on the other hand to provide an incentive for the recognition of veterans in German civil society: "This is new, but only for Germany" (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2012, 1). The brief paper focused on considerations for the intangible recognition of veterans, such as the introduction of a veterans' day, the establishment of veterans' homes and the introduction of a veterans' badge (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2012, 4).

Implementation of German Veterans Policy

A veterans' policy can be implemented on several levels. Christian Weber (Weber 2017) distinguishes between a material and an immaterial level of veterans policy: On a practical level, material measures are pursued to ensure or improve the care of veterans. These include medical services and social and therapeutic care, for example, to provide support after deployment-related stresses and strains. Also compensation payments, pension entitlements or allowances for risks during the period of deployment abroad are also included in the material measures. The second level of veterans' policy addresses the ideological level. This includes measures aimed at increasing the social recognition of veterans and strengthening their integration into civil society. These efforts focus on measures with a symbolic character, such as veterans' days, public appeals and parades, but also the awarding of medals or the establishment of memorials (Weber 2017, 36).

The material level of a German veterans policy has already been well implemented through laws such as "The Deployment Support Act", the "Deployment Reassignment Act", the "Deployment Benefits Act" and the "Troop Service Continuation Act" (see 3.3.3 *Trauma*). In regard to the immaterial level of a German veterans policy, it can be noted that a veteran concept announced for the end of 2012 failed to materialize and remains non-existent to this day. Nor was it possible to implement a veterans' day by the time the thesis was completed. Instead, in 2015, the "Day of the Bundeswehr" was introduced. It is intended to increase the visibility of the Bundeswehr in civil society and present the Bundeswehr as an employer. The subject of veterans was only dealt with marginally on the Day of the Bundeswehr (Weber 2017, 226) until four years later, when in 2019, for the first time, the veterans badge was awarded during the Day of the Bundeswehr. The veterans badge can be applied for by any veteran of the armed

forces. However, it may not be worn on the uniform, but should represent the veterans in public (Bundeswehr 2021).

Another element of the immaterial veterans policy is the “Forest of Remembrance”, which was established in 2014 as a central memorial site for fallen soldiers located on a Bundeswehr site in Potsdam. The Forest of Remembrance is an area of around 4,500 square meters on which commemorative memorials from the soldiers' areas of deployment were reconstructed. The memorials were designed by the soldiers themselves and serve to commemorate their comrades who died in action (Weber 2017). The Forest of Remembrance complements the memorial of the German Armed Forces in the Bendlerblock in Berlin, which is the official place of remembrance for the fallen of the German Armed Forces. The Forest of Remembrance is dedicated to the personal grief of those affected and their relatives, and the idea for the memorial itself stemmed from the relatives of fallen soldiers. Unlike the Bundeswehr memorial, the Forest of Remembrance is not generally open to the public. Visits must be announced and personal identification must be deposited (Bundeswehr 2022).

Assessing the Public Recognition of the Mission

A large majority of the German soldiers surveyed said that they received little or no appreciation from the German population for their deployment abroad. Only twenty percent of the respondents said that they received enough appreciation. Almost half of the respondents attributed a lack of appreciation to a lack of knowledge about the missions and about the work of the German armed forces in general. In the interviews with German soldiers, it emerged clearly that many would like to see more recognition of their work and, in particular, of their deployment abroad. It has also been shown that the scientifically proven support of the Bundeswehr on the part of the population is often not received by the soldiers. It can be assumed that there is a discrepancy between the actual and perceived recognition of the soldiers and their work abroad in Germany. Public events such as honorary days or "Zapfenstreich" events are possible ways of bringing this recognition closer to the soldiers. For the soldiers interviewed, it is particularly important that the relevant political players are involved.

3.4.5 Evaluation of mission

The German soldiers surveyed had a very mixed opinion of the success or failure of the Afghanistan mission. For many, the phased withdrawal of troops came too soon and, in the eyes of some soldiers, the Afghan population was left alone and ultimately abandoned.

“Now this is my personal opinion. I just think that the people down there are being left in the lurch. That's a slap in the face, I'd say. Because they were just not ready. I mean one sees that also now in the media that that has brought nothing at all in the final effect, that it is again the same conditions. It was just somehow handed over and then they said yes, we have created something here. But everyone who was there saw that the Afghans were not yet ready to take on all the responsibility there. Especially this affective, the attitude to do it now. I mean, the generals there were already dividing up the barracks when we hadn't even left yet. They've already shipped the satellite dishes home and so on. Well. It was actually clear in advance that it was pointless. I mean, things happened that just hit you. You don't always know the background, but for example, so much defense material was simply destroyed, burned, instead of being given to those who could have used it. Such senseless things” [GER5, 30, Specialist].

Many of the respondents share the fear that the Afghan local forces that have been working with NATO troops are in danger after the withdrawal.

“Yes, I have already said that we have not achieved anything with our efforts. I can't give you an example where I would say, yes, from my point of view this has been really successful. There are only very, very, very few things where you say yes, now the girls can go to school there. Well, if that was the goal, that should certainly be a goal. But the country is not pacified. My claim is that we should not have gone out until we could really be sure that the Afghan army really had the country under control and said, well, now we can ensure peace and order here ourselves. And that has still not happened. the fact is that we have given a lot of Afghan forces a job. They worked as interpreters or in the camp, and there were also many construction companies that worked there. So yes, that's right, but I always thought what kind of reprisals they might have to endure later, when we are no longer there and the Taliban knows exactly, watch out here, you worked for the Germans, or for the Americans and so on. And now, as punishment, we'll take your daughter with us or whatever. And that's where I think we left a lot of problems behind when we went out there. So. And when you hear now that the Americans are already thinking about increasing their military strength there, yes, we are still tied up in this training mission there, so in this respect I lack this political far-sightedness, what happens after the military deployment there. What happens then when the soldier is no longer there, or we are so reduced that we can no longer do anything militarily there, that's just the story, I think something is missing in our politics” [GER7, 55, Captain].

Some of the soldiers interviewed fear that the positive developments the country made during the deployment will be reversed or were not sustainable enough.

“Just the kids there when you were outside. They were so happy to see us, they laughed and everything. It wasn't as if we were considered hostile by the citizens. The masses there, of course, welcomed Western life, it's clear, I mean you can only see that if you were there. It's a life like in the Middle Ages. And when you see that there is something better, it is of course unsatisfactory, then you also want to go there. Of course, a lot has been done and a lot has been changed, but if that doesn't remain, then it's frustrating. It's like a fisherman, if I don't show him how to catch a fish, then it won't work, he'll starve to death. Then I can leave as much fish as I want, it will rot and then it's good. This will only bring something for a short moment. I feel sorry for those who helped me. They already knew, I talked to some of them and they said that one of them, for example, could speak perfect German at the end, and he really wanted to come because he knew that when they came back it would be his turn. He just worked together with the Germans, with the enemy or whatever, and then it's over for him” [GER5, 30, Specialist].

Several of the soldiers, however, no longer saw any prospects for positive change through their deployment and questioned the general meaningfulness of their presence.

“There was nothing more to change. If you can't change anything for twelve years, then you won't be able to pull anything out of the last two years. To be honest, we have already achieved something, but in the end, when we are gone again, the Taliban all invade again, which was not a meaningful mission. For me personally, no. And for the Bundeswehr, I don't know. From my point of view it was not necessary” [GER1, 27, Specialist].

Many soldiers rate the overall mission as being unsuccessful, yet they do regard “making life better for the Afghan people for a period of time” as an achievement.

“Definitely for some Afghans, but not for others. I think when we did patrols in remote village areas, where doctors were present, it was a successful mission for me, even if only one child benefited from it. Then you also experienced and saw gratitude in the eyes of the children, in the eyes of the people. Yes, it was successful” [GER2, 35, Corporal].

This soldier sees a clear separation of responsibilities in this regard. The main responsibility for a deterioration in the security situation therefore lies at the political level and cannot be compensated for by the soldiers.

“I always say, I am a soldier, I am an executive body, what happens to this country in the next decades is ultimately not in my decision-making power, but I had a mission. It lasted half a year, and in this half year I fulfilled my mission with my company to the best of my ability, and we were successful in our limited section, in terms of location and time. Anything else is out of our control, it's as simple as that. And other than that, I say, well, we provided a window of opportunity for these people that we were responsible for in our six months where they could live a little bit more quietly and a little bit more peacefully. If that's no longer the case now, then that's sad, but that's no longer my responsibility, that's the responsibility of the politicians or higher military” [GER4, 38, Major].

In the next statement, it is also clear that the political and military strategy is considered separately from the humanitarian gains that were achieved, at least for a short time. Doing good with good intentions was the soldier's primary concern; the interviewee again refers to the altruistic motives of the soldier's profession. For him, it remains questionable whether the sacrifices made during the mission are in proportion to the success.

"If I were to evaluate it as a mission in itself, I would say it was started under misconceptions. At the beginning, we thought we could do something down there, but after a short time it turned out to be total nonsense, it didn't do justice to the situation. At some point, the strategy was changed, in 2009 approximately, and was able to work relatively successfully. Then, in 2011/2012, they suddenly had so many successes that they withdrew the troops because they simply couldn't sell it to the voters in Germany any other way. The troops had to be withdrawn and the moment was seized. Unfortunately, at that moment it was still too early for the Afghan security forces, which then led to the situation, which was not sustainable, being completely overturned again. So if you measure the mission by that, you can say you did good things with good intentions and you also screwed up a lot of things. At least for a while, there was real progress. Whether that was worth the sacrifices, the money and the deaths in retrospect is the question. But on my personal level, I just say that I stood up for something I was and am convinced of, namely doing something for other people. The political implications I have, at the moment when I did it, a little bit excluded. So I was aware of them, but thought I'd try anyway. Accordingly, I would not consider my mission a failure. But I know that a lot of soldiers think differently, they say that it was all pointless, the sacrifices were pointless. We were burned out and whatnot" [GER6, 31, Specialist Paratrooper].

As mentioned in the preceding statement, the next soldier also refers to the change in strategy and the imponderables that repeatedly created new challenges during the deployment. In each of these instances, it is described that the soldiers assumed different framework conditions for their deployment and were therefore not always able to react adequately to the sometimes rapidly developing situation on the ground.

"I think it's ambivalent. Of course, this mission was simply about, well, it was never really about a humanitarian aid mission. But it was still the case that, especially after September 11, security had to be established and that there was, of course, a very high threat situation abroad and especially here at home. That we had to react. So I think this operation can be justified, but it was more of a sudden action, we go in there and we don't know what we're in for. And that over the years. The fact that no one has given it a thought at all, are we making any progress at all here? Is this whole concept working. You conquer occupied territories, you help people to build schools, to do agriculture, you show them that this is how it works and, yes, as soon as it somehow works, it is destroyed again, because you did not stick to it consistently. Because it's also too late to start simply involving the local forces. To train the Afghan National Army better without then still being recruited by the Taliban, as you saw on 18.02 that the ANA soldier attacked and shot at the German soldiers there in OP North. For nothing actually. Out of fear and for some money. And there are of course quite a lot of questions in retrospect,

what justifies it at that moment that so many German soldiers died there. Also from the other nations" [GER8, 31, Staff Sergeant].

As has emerged, some of the soldiers doubt the sustainability of their mission on the ground. They wonder whether their efforts will have a lasting impact. The following example illustrates a different perspective. The soldier interviewed considers his deployment to have been a great success, both personally and militarily. This is primarily related to the timing of his stay and the task he was assigned.

"Overall successful, the highlight of our stay was this very election and it was held without major incidents with a large voter turnout. The voters were also not intimidated by the insurgents. The mood did not change until two to three years later in Afghanistan in 2006 and 2007, but this year 2004 and the following year also saw the first parliamentary elections, which, as far as I know, took place in 2005 and were held cleanly and without any major incidents. No, in so far also successfully because there what one must say of the following presidential elections unfortunately the first election without election fraud was held, with the following elections was nevertheless quite substantially, quite substantially bungled, also with the re-election of Karzai four years later. I don't know how the people who were there later after me felt. I was there with my staff at a point in time where I was able to determine has one, a safe election, has two, a high voter turnout, has three, no election fraud and that of course contributed to the fact that I went back very satisfied and said yes, it was worth it, it was worth it" [GER10.66, Lieutenant Colonel].

It is evident from the above that the individual assessment of the success and meaningfulness of the mission depends on a number of factors, including the time at which the soldiers were in Afghanistan and the task they performed during the mission.

In all the German interviews conducted, it became clear that hardly any of the soldiers questioned the initial mission of the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan. 9 out of 10 soldiers stated that they felt it was right to want to contribute to stability and peace in Afghanistan. However, the majority of respondents criticized the fact that long before the end of the official mission, it became apparent that the measures that had been implemented well at the beginning were not sustainable enough and that the security situation on the ground was visibly deteriorating with every reduction in troop numbers. The greatest concern among the respondents at the time of their respective withdrawals was for the local Afghan forces that supported the Bundeswehr. Many said they felt they had let down the aid workers and the people on the ground. In retrospect, more than half of the respondents said they considered their mission itself a failure. Only the improvements achieved during their presence on the ground were considered

a success by the soldiers surveyed. For all of them, it remains questionable whether the mission was worth the sacrifices made.

The reality of the Afghanistan mission stood in sharp contrast to the usual Bundeswehr missions up to that point. The Bundeswehr faced enormous challenges when, for the first time in its history, it had to not only simulate a war, but actively fight one. The credo "to be able to fight but not forced to fight" became obsolete on Afghan ground. Many Bundeswehr soldiers went into the mission with the idea of a stabilization and training mission and then found themselves exposed to combat operations. Even though 90% of the German soldiers interviewed all stated that they had prepared well militarily for the mission, the soldiers deployed in the early years of the Afghanistan mission in particular experienced a disruption in the image they had of the Bundeswehr and its tasks. When asked if the soldier's image of the armed forces had changed after the deployment, this interviewee replied:

"Yes, yes, quite massive. Quite fundamentally, in fact. So for me, the Bundeswehr was just the peacekeeping army and the nice, friendly diplomat in uniform, an armed force that mainly builds wells and schools, and that has changed fundamentally through the combat experience. I was down there in 2010 and saw paratroopers who were fighting there, who also had numerous wounded and really lived there in the dirt every day, and that's when the first crack appeared in this image of armed reconstruction workers. And that had a lasting effect on me, so that I finally gave up this illusion and naiveté and never tire of pointing out to people who think this is all just a big fun event that it can happen very quickly that you are back in a mission. The combat mission in Afghanistan ended de facto at the end of 2011, from 2006-11, those were the very intensive years for the Bundeswehr, and since then we have not had a mission of this intensity, but that is only a question of time. Sooner or later, our allies will certainly expect us not only to burdenshare, but also to riskshare, and just because the last German soldier was killed in combat in 2013 doesn't mean that it can't happen to us again when we look around the world. In Afghanistan, we were also very naive at the beginning and thought that it couldn't happen to us" [GER4,38, Major].

In the context of the challenges posed by the war in Afghanistan, Neitzel notes that "the Bundeswehr has come of age in the Hindu Kush" (Neitzel 2022, 559). However, this coming of age not only affects the Bundeswehr organization, but also German civil society. The public debate and discourse about the Afghanistan mission in the home country has a particular impact on the soldiers after their return. After their return, soldiers act as multipliers, so to speak, in their own environment when they are questioned about certain incidents or have to explain and possibly even justify them. In particular, doubts about the meaning and success of the deployment can weigh on the soldiers in a special way.

In spite of all the adversities that can be associated with a foreign deployment, 80% of the German soldiers surveyed said that they would go on a foreign deployment again. For many, it was especially the camaraderie they experienced during the deployment that would make them want to deploy again: "Yes. Yes, because of the camaraderie, the working together with the comrades [GER3, 34, Master Sergeant]", for others, it is a matter of inner attitude to complete the mission they consider unfinished:

"Yes, as much as I would say now, I don't do reserve service with the Bundeswehr, as much as I say now, I don't go into any barracks, I would go into action at any time. So Kunduz in particular, and even if it were the last time, Kunduz in particular, to get back what we have laboriously fought for there and which we have now just given up again. There is actually also such a sense of honor, where I also know many comrades who say, will you come with me, be it to the last? Yes" [GER9, 34, Lieutenant].

As the statement indicates, the interviewee makes a distinction between the Bundeswehr as such and the mission itself. This is congruent with some of the interviews. For example, some of the soldiers interviewed would not necessarily rejoin the Bundeswehr, but would still go on a mission.

"Yes, I would. [...] If there had been the possibility that I could always just go on foreign missions, without the Bundeswehr otherwise, I would do that immediately. I'm actually desperately trying to get back into a deployment. An intensive one, if possible. [...] It just has an adventure aspect, a bit of sensation seeking, which is involved. The feeling that you're doing something valuable. [...] The high point for many of us was our participation in the war, when some of us were in their twenties. And they have never again experienced anything that moved them so emotionally and where they had the feeling that they were doing something valuable and exciting. [...] We all need a sense of community, and that is very strong in foreign missions. You look out for each other, get through hardships together, have solidarity, esprit de corps, you just don't feel all that in Germany" [GER4,38, Major].

Aftermath: The Grand Tattoo

After more than 20 years of Bundeswehr deployment, the NATO mission Resolute Support was officially declared over and the last German soldiers were flown out of Afghanistan on June 29, 2021. More than 160,000 German soldiers have served in various military missions in Afghanistan, many of them several times. 59 lost their lives (Manner 2022). Defense Minister Kramp-Karrenbauer explained that the withdrawal marked the end of a historic chapter and an intensive mission in which the troops had proven themselves in battle: "A mission in which members of our armed forces were

injured in body and soul, in which people lost their lives, in which we had to mourn the fallen. My thoughts are with them and they remain unforgotten."(Kramp-Karrenbauer 2021) The defense minister made this statement during a United States state visit. When the soldiers landed in Wunstorf, Lower Saxony, no German politician or dignitary was present. There were no official honors or expressions of gratitude. When this circumstance was publicly criticized afterwards, the Ministry of Defense points to the fact that it had wanted to forego a large-scale tribute because of the Corona pandemic and had complied with the troops' wish for a silent return (Küstner 2021).

When the Bundeswehr withdrew, the situation in Afghanistan was already deteriorating on the ground. Even before the final withdrawal of the last international troops, the Taliban marched into Kabul in August 2021 and proclaimed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and quickly collapsed the established state structures and the political system, which had been built up with Western support until then (Kaim 2021). Pictures of people desperately trying to flee from Kabul airport made news around the world.

In the following, the Bundeswehr was preparing the largest evacuation mission in its history to fly out both German citizens and endangered Afghans. By the end of August, more than 5000 people had been evacuated from Afghanistan by the Bundeswehr (Manner 2022) under highly dangerous circumstances and with great media attention.

Finally, in October 2021, the Bundeswehr honored its soldiers deployed in Afghanistan with a grand tattoo (Großer Zapfenstreich) in front of Berlin's Reichstag building. The Grand Tattoo is the highest protocol military ceremony of the German Armed Forces and is hosted, among other things, at the farewell ceremonies for federal presidents, chancellors and defense ministers. The event was broadcast by the media, but took place in the absence of the public. The area was widely cordoned off to prevent possible protests on site (Decker and Dunz 2021). After there had already been discussions in the run-up to the event about whether, how and where the grand tattoo should be held, critical voices were raised in the aftermath of the event, insinuating a connection to national socialist times (Deutsche Presse Agentur 2021).

3.5 Interim Conclusion

In the interviews with the German study participants, it became apparent that the interviewees can identify to a high degree with the ethos of the Bundeswehr. In particular, the guiding principle of the *Citizen in Uniform* and the *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education* are important identification features for the study participants. Increasingly, reference was made to the oath of service and the associated protection of the free democratic basic order, to which the soldiers feel equally committed.

The motivation for the choice of profession was varied in the study group. In most cases, intrinsic factors played a role, especially altruistic motives, political convictions and a sense of adventure; in some cases, extrinsic factors such as job security and good pay were also mentioned.

It was evident that military socialization had a great influence on the personality of the soldiers themselves. The classic military values such as comradeship, discipline and punctuality were frequently mentioned in this context. Comradeship, in particular, had a prominent value among the interviewed participants. It was repeatedly referred to in various interview situations. At the same time, comradeship is also considered to be the greatest advantage of the soldier's profession, along with the opportunity to participate in sports while on duty. Some of the soldiers emphasized positively that they could test and overcome their own limits in the Bundeswehr and learned to develop independent thinking and decision-making skills.

The biggest disadvantage of the job mentioned was the large amount of time required and being away from home. Due to exercises, training camps and foreign deployments, soldiers are often away from home for long periods of time, which is particularly disadvantageous for soldiers with families and children. Frequent transfers to other locations were also mentioned as negative aspects of the job. In addition, some of the soldiers perceive the bureaucratic structures in the Bundeswehr as an obstacle. Individual study participants also described feeling pressured by the public to justify their choice of profession.

This coincided in part with the experiences described by soldiers in uniform in public. More than two-thirds of the German soldiers surveyed said they had had negative experiences in uniform in public. These ranged from insults to physical assaults.

Soldiers who had not had any negative experiences themselves knew soldiers in their immediate environment who had. Experiences in which soldiers were called murderers were described as particularly burdensome. As a result of these experiences, the majority of the German soldiers interviewed felt uncomfortable going out in public in uniform.

In the interviews with the German soldiers, positive experiences in uniform were also reported. From the descriptions of the positive events, various differences in public recognition could be derived. First, regional differences in recognition were reported, revealing that soldiers in more rural areas had experienced higher levels of positive encounters than those in large cities. In addition, positive experiences were also reported during specific missions, such as flood disasters or fundraising marches. In addition to regional differences, temporary differences can also be derived from the above. Another aspect that emerged clearly was that the older soldiers interviewed had had fewer bad experiences than their younger comrades. The soldiers interviewed attributed this primarily to the former compulsory military service. Compulsory military service had made the profession more present and had led to greater understanding and acceptance among the German public.

Even today, the younger soldiers interviewed in particular assume that the German public has an anti-militaristic attitude or at least a friendly disinterest. This perception, which was also widespread in the study group, contrasts with recent studies that show that the German public has maintained a positive attitude toward the Bundeswehr for years. The discrepancy between perceived appreciation and actual recognition of the soldier's profession, as shown in surveys, can be attributed in part to the fact that public honors and appeals are largely uncommon in Germany. This makes some soldiers feel that public recognition is not practiced and therefore does not resonate with the troops. Political efforts that promote the presence of soldiers in public, such as the campaign to ride trains in uniform, were viewed positively by the soldiers interviewed.

The motives of the German soldiers surveyed for deployment to Afghanistan were complex. A slight majority of the soldiers surveyed cited immaterial, self-related reasons for their deployment, which can be assigned to the postmodern soldier type. In addition to a sense of adventure, professional self-fulfillment played a major role.

Modern deployment motivation reasons, such as financial incentives, also played a role. The most frequently expressed paleomodern motives were comradeship and altruistic motives, specifically to improve the lives of people in Afghanistan.

The German soldiers interviewed were trained over a period of several months in preparation for deployment, depending on their unit and the area of operations involved. Seven out of ten of the German soldiers interviewed reported feeling well prepared. In some cases, a distinction was made between military and mental training, and a qualitative distinction was also made between the deployment preparation of the special forces and the general troops. In this regard, training in special forces, such as paratroopers or the explosive ordnance disposal service, was rated better than training in the general forces.

During the deployment itself, various stressors determined the daily routines of the soldiers surveyed. The absence of home, family and friends was named as the main perceived stressor. In particular, soldiers' relationships with their partners were subjected to special stresses due to the often limited communication options. Accordingly, soldiers in relationships and with children perceived the foreign deployment as more stressful than soldiers living alone. For the most part, everyday life in the camp was described by soldiers as monotonous. Depending on their duties, some soldiers rarely or never left their camp in Afghanistan. This sometimes led to frustration among the soldiers. Looking at the soldiers' self-image and motivation for the deployment, this is not surprising since the majority of participants in both groups stated that they hoped to find professional fulfillment through the Afghanistan deployment.

Depending on the time of their deployment to Afghanistan, the operation was either quiet or the soldiers were confronted with different shades of war. Some of the soldiers witnessed or were directly involved in battles with the Taliban. Some have seen IEDs explode and witnessed or suffered severe injuries and burns. There have been descriptions of rape and other forms of violence that soldiers have witnessed. Some soldiers have lost their comrades.

The foreign deployment left its mark on all of the German soldiers interviewed. Three of the German study participants were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder after the deployment.

Returning home was described as the greatest challenge for the soldiers after deployment. Each of the soldiers interviewed described returning home and settling into everyday life as a personal challenge, with some soldiers finding their rhythm more quickly than others.

The German soldiers mostly landed in separate military terminals scattered throughout Germany. In the terminals, they were welcomed by their families. This moment was described as very emotional by many of the Germans interviewed.

Three of the German soldiers interviewed had negative experiences upon arrival. They reported anti-war protests in front of the terminal and hostility on the train and in the restaurant. In this context, some of the soldiers criticized the way returning soldiers are treated in Germany. The main criticism was the seclusion in which the soldiers landed. The receptions for the soldiers were all privately organized. There was no official military reception after the deployment.

In several interviews with the German soldiers, the desire for greater public recognition of their service abroad was expressed: eight out of ten of the German soldiers interviewed would like to see more public recognition for their deployment abroad. The perceived lack of recognition was often attributed to the German public's lack of knowledge about the realities of deployment. In fact, a population survey conducted by the ZMSBw confirms that the number of citizens who feel well informed about the Bundeswehr's missions abroad is declining. Other factors cited for the lack of knowledge among the population include the abolition of compulsory military service and low media interest in deployments aside from scandals. With regard to the Bundeswehr's foreign deployments, some of the German soldiers interviewed pointed out that, as part of the parliamentary army, they are sent on foreign missions at the behest of German politicians and thus the electorate. However, some of the study participants felt that not all citizens were aware of this, which they interpreted as a kind of ignorance on the part of the German population.

From a military point of view, the majority of the German soldiers interviewed assessed the deployment as unsuccessful. Nevertheless, a distinction was made between personal and strategic success. Many of the German soldiers stated that their deployment had improved the lives of the Afghan people for a time, although sustainable stability could not be achieved.

4 Case Study: Denmark

4.1 Danish Military Culture

Denmark has undergone an astonishing transformation in foreign and defence policy over the past thirty years. In the existing literature, the considerable change during recent decades is attempted to be understood through terminology such as “from adaption to activism” (Daugbjerg and Refslund Sørensen 2017) or “between Venus and Mars” (Branner 2013). These terminologies have in common that they attempt to explain the transition from a reserved, neutral small states’ role in foreign policy to an active and committed form of international participation. To explain this change to a “warring nation” (Daugbjerg and Refslund Sørensen 2017) and in order to get closer to the self-image of the Danish soldier today, the following section describes the origins and guiding principles of the Forsvaret from its founding to the present day.

4.1.1 From Adaption to Activism

From the thirteenth century onwards, Denmark was a Baltic Sea imperial power with a leading influence in Scandinavia. This status remained until the fifteenth century, from which on Denmark became gradually smaller and less powerful as a result of unsuccessful foreign policy, until the nineteenth century, in which the year 1864 marked a significant turning point for Denmark: Within the Second Schleswig War, Denmark lost control over the duchies Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg to Prussia and Austria. In total, Denmark lost one third of its territory and population and officially became a small state (Wivel 2014, 116).

“In the period from 1864 until the end of the Cold War, Denmark had a fundamental problem of survival“ (Branner 2013, 141). With this sentence, Branner summarizes the foreign policy doctrine, that Denmark was to follow over 100 years and also Wivel notes the defeat resulted in a “complete overhaul of Danish policy” from which resulted that “Denmark was now a small state and needed to act accordingly” (Wivel 2014, 116).

This traumatic experience “haunted both foreign policy makers and the Danish public” (Branner 2013, 140) and largely led Denmark to exercise restraint in its foreign policy

and to adapt to the policy of the great powers it was surrounded by. The period from the 1864 defeat to the Second World War was largely characterized by a geopolitical balance of power in Europe, which was divided into great powers and small states. Denmark as a small state was at most dependent on relations with the great powers, especially Germany and Great Britain. If Denmark wanted to assert its own interests, such as trade interests on the Baltic Sea, it had to be able to deal with the great power states and therefore pursued a policy of restraint and non-provocation in order to survive as a small state in the powder keg of Europe at the turn of the century (Jakobsen and Rynning 2019, 1). This “small state reactive pragmatism” (Wivel 2014, 109) had Denmark avoiding involvements into any kind of power struggles of other nations. Denmark was largely uninvolved in World War I and declared itself neutral at the beginning of the Second World war in 1939. But the guiding principle of neutrality of the small state, which had been upheld since 1864, could not prevent the German invasion. The German occupation on 09 April 1940 “was established as a lesson in its own right, one that stood in stark contrast to the traditional neutrality lesson” (Olesen 2018, 76). In consideration of Germany's geographic proximity, its overwhelming military superiority, and little prospect of allied assistance (Olesen 2018, 75), it was hardly surprising that Denmark surrendered to the Nazi dictatorship after the blitzkrieg in 1940: “[Denmark] did not put up much of a fight against German occupation in 1940-1945, instead opting for a policy of adaptation and appeasement towards the Nazi rule” (Daugbjerg and Refslund Sørensen 2017, 3). Also after the end of the Second World War, Denmark first continued the policy tradition of non-involvement in the belief, that a small state could not benefit from any forms of military conflict and therefore “should aim for diplomatic solutions to international conflict” (Wivel 2014, 116). But the systemic upheaval brought about by the end of the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War was also fundamental for the small state of Denmark. With the collapse of Germany as a great power, Denmark was able to step out of their shadow and redefine their domestic and foreign policy (Olesen 2018, 63): “For Denmark the end of World War II meant liberation from the German wartime occupation, and it also meant that the almost constant threat of German aggression, which Denmark had had to live with for eighty years, had been at least temporarily eliminated” (Olesen 2018, 76). Denmark was one of the founding members of the United Nations in 1945. The first two post-war years were peaceful, though the decision by the Soviet Union to retain control for the time being of the island of Bornholm, which is strategically well situated

in the Baltic Sea, was unsettling for Denmark (Jensen 1999). In the face of rising tensions between the allied powers, Denmark, following the old pattern of neutrality, initially declared itself a “no-bloc” state and attempted to mediate (Olesen 2018, 76). When it emerged that the confrontation between the Soviet Union on the one hand and the West on the other was intensifying, Denmark again saw itself as a frontline state under threat and forced alliance negotiations. Therefore, in 1948-1949, Denmark was actively involved in negotiations for a Scandinavian Defense Unit with Norway and Sweden. Only when these negotiations failed did Denmark join NATO in 1949 (Olesen 2018, 63).

4.1.2 Denmark during Cold War

During the Cold War, Denmark, as a front line state, was constantly exposed to the direct threat of an invasion by states of the Warsaw Pact. Until the end of the east-west confrontation, Denmark’s foreign policy therefore was rather defensive and primarily oriented towards national defence (Jakobsen and Rynning 2019, 1).

Danish foreign military involvement during the Cold War was rather defensive as part of the NATO alliance and to UN-mandated peacekeeping missions, which envisaged the use of military force at best in self-defence. The first exception to the doctrine existing until then was the deployment in the Congo, which began as a peacekeeping mission and ended as peace enforcement under Chapter VII of the UN Charter following an escalation of the conflict (Braun 2012, 65).

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War marked a turning point for Denmark. Jakobsen and Rynning describe the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1991, together with the realignment of Poland, as a blessing for the small state, which was now surrounded by like-minded states and emphasize: “The entry of the three Baltic States into NATO in 2004 as full allies crowned a decade’s worth of Danish diplomatic investment” (Jakobsen and Rynning 2019, 1).

Danish foreign and security policy in the post-Cold War era followed two main doctrines. The first was to defend Denmark's borders and provide security and prosperity at home. The other doctrine was to protect and develop the norms and

values on which Denmark is founded, including the rule of law, the welfare state¹³, free market economy and peace, freedom, respect for human rights. In addition, Denmark's contribution to a stable international state order has been emphasized (Jakobsen and Møller 2012, 18). In particular, the formulation of foreign policy objectives to contribute to a peaceful, democratic community of states should become one of the foundations of the new Danish foreign policy which was supposed to form the basis for future missions abroad.

4.1.3 A Small State out of Area

The changed security environment in the post-Cold War period meant that the small Scandinavian state of Denmark had to realign its foreign, security, and defence policies if it did not want to become increasingly marginalized in foreign affairs now that it was no longer a frontline state (Jakobsen and Rynning 2019; Bollmann 2021, 62). To counteract, Denmark's engagement in international operations increased severely. Mariager and Wivel note that "Over the past decades Denmark has proven to be one of the most eager and consistent suppliers of troops" (Mariager and Wivel 2019, 49) thus describing what has also become established in research as "a new wave of activist foreign policy" (Daugbjerg and Refslund Sørensen 2017, 1). This refers to the participation of Danish soldiers in 76 military operations over a period of less than two decades, ranging from small observer missions to the war in Afghanistan (Mariager and Wivel 2019, 49). The number of Danish military operations from 1990 to 2018 has thus increased sixfold compared with the period 1945-1989 (Mariager and Wivel 2019, 54).

The Balkan crises in Europe marked the beginning of the changing Danish foreign policy. In 1992, Danish troops were stationed in Bosnia for the first time, where they were repeatedly involved in fighting. In the years that followed, Denmark participated

¹³ With the introduction of the Scandinavian welfare state the country obtained a reputation as "a society characterized by tolerant, humanitarian, and pacifist stances" (Daugbjerg and Refslund Sørensen 2017, 2), promoting social democratic values and equality with a foreign policy that was focused on peacekeeping and mediation.

in the Implementation Force (IFor), the Stabilization Force (SFor) and the Kosovo Force (KFor), among others. In the 1999 Kosovo War, Denmark eventually provided a 900-man infantry battalion, the largest NATO contingent by population size (Braun 2012, 65). The number of deployed Danish troops increased in the 1990s, reaching a peak with the simultaneous deployment to Bosnia and Kosovo in 2000 (Jakobsen and Rynning 2019, 3).

The consistent involvement of the Danish military in Bosnia, the former Yugoslavia, and later in the Middle East laid the foundation for a new understanding of the military (Wivel 2014, 126). In the wake of an activist foreign policy “Danish troop contingents on the ground have – from the Balkan conflicts (1992-), over Iraq (2003-2011), to Afghanistan (2002-2014) – tended to become deployed to ever ‘sharper’ missions” (Daugbjerg and Refslund Sørensen 2017, 1). Today, Danish Soldiers are deployed in various theatres of the world and the Forsvaret is viewed as a legitimate and effective foreign policy institution (Wivel 2014, 126).

Denmark’s Expeditionary Army

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, marked a turning point in Danish foreign policy. Although an army reform has already been initiated in the light of increased deployments since the 1990s, “it only really transformed itself when the next strategic change occurred with the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001” (P. V. Jakobsen and Rynning 2019, 6).

Shortly after the terrorist attacks, then Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, announced that Denmark would stand by the United States “all the way” and the successor government under Anders Fogh Rasmussen as prime minister also emphasized Denmark’s moral responsibility to the international community to fight for values such as democracy and freedom and to protect Danish fundamental values. (Sørensen and Linnet 2016, 13)

In the course of the war on terror, Denmark sent soldiers to Afghanistan and Iraq. The operations were seen as essential to maintaining global security and stability (Wivel and Crandall 2019, 400). Denmark’s participation was also intended to demonstrate to the U.S. that Denmark was a reliable and relevant partner in military security matters.

To meet the requirements of deployable expeditionary forces to the combat areas where NATO needed to operate, the largest restructuring of Danish defence policy since World War II followed in 2004 (Bollmann 2021, 62). The reform reflected “ a strong political desire to cement a special relationship with the United States, and a military interest in creating combat-capable units in all three services that were relevant for the 9/11 era” (Jakobsen and Rynning 2019, 3). In the course of the transformation, the expeditionary capacity of the Danish Armed Forces was doubled and the Danish Armed Forces entered the “expeditionary era” , adopting a “comprehensive approach” to crisis management, deploying more than 800 troops to Afghanistan (Jakobsen and Rynning 2019, 7,8).

4.1.4 The Danish Normalization of War

Wars have historically been an important part of the national identity of almost every state (Gillis 1994). Denmark is no exception to this rule; on the contrary, its frequent border shifts are an example of a particularly extensive martial past. When Denmark began to send soldiers on international missions again in the 1990s, however, this aspect of national history seemed to have been largely suppressed in Denmark's society and posed challenges for politics and the civil-military relationship (Sørensen and Linnet 2016, 8). Thus, breaking down this narrative and reuniting war with Danish identity posed a challenge to the political elite in the 1990s.

As outlined above, Denmark's foreign policy changed decisively with its deployments in the 1990s to the Balkans and later to Iraq and Afghanistan. In less than a decade, Jakobsen and Møller note, Denmark has travelled “from Venus to Mars” (Jakobsen and Møller 2012, 106). With the new activist foreign policy, it seems, the Danish nation shifted from being rather “peaceful” to “belligerent” (Sørensen 2015, 233). The change from national defense towards an expeditionary force caused little discussion in Danish society: “Somewhat surprisingly, the Danish population supported the new approach with hardly any objections [...]” (Sørensen and Linnet 2016, 4). In this context, also Jakobsen stated that “nobody consequently raised an eyebrow in October 2004 when the Defence Minister stated that the defence of Denmark now took place in caves in Afghanistan and in the Iraqi desert” (Jakobsen 2005, 37).

How Denmark, despite its basic pacifist understanding, managed in a comparatively short time to normalize war and to gain broad public support¹⁴ for soldiers deployed on international missions is examined by Brigitte Sørensen and Jeppe Linnet.

Given that Danish national self-image has long repressed wars and military values, the research duo asks how “this peaceful Scandinavian welfare state has turned [...] to ‘reinventing’ itself as a warring nation” (Sørensen and Linnet 2016, 2) and argue that a redefinition of the Danish self-image became necessary, both nationally and internationally: “The challenge was not only how to lend political legitimacy to military intervention, but to present the political shift in manner that could be seen as consistent with or even as reinforcing the nation’s identity” (Sørensen and Linnet 2016, 9).

In this context, the strategic narrative that legitimizes foreign deployments and the use of force in Denmark is particularly important. Jakobsen and Møller describe the narrative used as equating national defense with the promotion of the basic humanistic values that Denmark stands for: “The strategic narrative that Denmark employs to legitimate its use of force combines the need to protect Denmark and its citizens from external attacks with the need to promote democracy, human rights, the rule of law and development in order to prevent such threats from arising in the first place” (Jakobsen and Møller 2012, 18). Thus it seems, that in Danish society and throughout the political spectrum it has become largely accepted that “Danish security policy is no longer tied to conventional homeland defence, or [...] that the defence of the homeland today often takes place far from the national borders” (Daugbjerg and Sørensen 2017, 3). The connection of the narrative of defending Danish values outside the national borders is also emphasized in the speech of the former Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, when she said on the 150th anniversary of the battle at Dybbøl 1864:

“Also at this day, Danish soldiers are struggling for our country. They are not fighting on Denmark’s borders. No, today our deployed men and women are fighting far from home; when

¹⁴ Daugbjerg and Sørensen note that “regularly conducted opinion polls continue to indicate that the Danish population supports the overseas deployment of its military significantly more than that of any other coalition nation” (Daugbjerg and Sørensen 2017, 1).

land-, sea- or airborne, they help to resolve international conflicts. Yet the basic task remains the same: soldiers fight so that we can live safely. They solve their tasks under difficult conditions and they deserve our deep respect and gratitude. Then, and today” (Brigitte Refslund Sørensen and Linnet 2016).

In this speech, reference is made not only to the described normalization of wars outside Danish territory, but also to the importance of the key figures in these operations – namely, the Danish soldiers. Accordingly, it is above all the figure of the soldier that was particularly affected by the transformations of the Danish armed forces.

While in 1993 Ulf Hedetoft described the Danish soldier as “an honest but blundering, upright but harmless fellow, an anti-hero donning his uniform for as brief time as possible, subsequently to boast about the combination between ridiculous hardships and his personal ability to pervade them” (Hedetoft 1993), the narrative of the new ‘warring nation’ inherited a reinterpretation of the role of soldiers. To this end, Sørensen and Linnet note, soldiers had been portrayed as “courageous protectors and moral rejuvenators of this rediscovered Danish identity” (Sørensen and Linnet 2016, 5).

4.1.5 Compulsory Military Service in Denmark

Compulsory military service has applied in Denmark since 1849 and is anchored in the Danish constitution. The constitution declares that formally, every male Danish citizen is liable to military service in order to contribute to the defence of the fatherland, while women can do their military service voluntarily (*Danmarks Riges Grundlov* 1953, §81).

All Danish men living in Denmark are invited to Forsvarets Dag, Defence Day, the year they turn 18. At Forsvarets Dag, the invited candidates receive information and insight into the work of the Danish Armed Forces and its branches. Medical examinations are carried out and a fitness test is made to check whether the candidates are suitable for military service. A written test must also be taken (Forsvaret 2022) Since more candidates are regularly classified as eligible for military service than there is a need for personnel, the decision is made by lottery. Based on an annual availability of around 30,000 persons classified as fit for military service, around 7,000 conscripts are selected via the lottery procedure. Furthermore, the lot system also circumvents

problems relating to military justice (Hippler 2010, 393). Nevertheless, without regard to the lottery procedure, candidates who have been declared fit may volunteer for military service (Hippler 2010, 389) On the website of the Forsvaret it states in this regard: “Although it is called conscription, the vast majority of young people actively choose to take up conscription training. In fact, more than 99% of conscripts have voluntarily chosen to do so” (Forsvaret 2022).

As a result of sufficient personnel requirements being covered by volunteers, the period of military service was also reduced as part of the realignment of the armed forces in 2004 and is currently four months. After completing the four-month basic training in the army, navy or air force, conscripts must be available for a period of up to three months during the next three years after discharge for tasks related to the overall defence of Danish society (Hippler 2010, 389). According to Søren Gade, then Minister of Defence, it was no longer appropriate that the duration of compulsory military service is rigidly fixed. Rather, the need for armed forces should be the deciding factor (Deutsche Presse Agentur 2004). This can be seen as a reflection of the flexibility of the transformed Danish military service. The content of the military service and the concept of total defense, developed during the Cold War, was adapted to the changing security situation after the reform. Although the guarantee of internal security was to remain in place, a restructuring of training took place and, in relation to a changed security situation that now also included the threat of terrorist attacks, some parts of the training that were considered obsolete were cancelled or replaced by modern practices. Externally, the military's ability to rapidly deploy capable forces to international missions was advanced. Hippler concludes from the reforms that conscription in Denmark is a flexible and adaptable policy tool that will continue to be optimized and assessed for its effectiveness (Hippler 2010, 391-393).

4.2 Joining In

The Joining in section looks at the reasons why the participants decided to join the military professionally. It examines the extent to which the study participants identify with their profession and the values and norms associated with it, along with the challenges they are confronted with in this context.

4.2.1 Motivation of Danish Soldiers to Join the Forsvaret

A person's decision to join the military is complex and is usually motivated by several intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The classification of career choice motivation into intrinsic and extrinsic factors is based on Charles Moskos' I/O model and has already been presented in section 3.2.1. The most common responses to the question of why the Danish interview participants chose a military career are outlined below and are reflected in overarching categories.

Family Background

In the interviews conducted with the Danish soldiers, it emerged that for many of the soldiers, their family and social background was a decisive criterion in their career choice to join the military.

The course to professional life is set early, in youth, and in some cases already in childhood. Family factors influence child development more than any other factor. Family factors also include the occupational socialization of parents (Rottermann 2017, 27). Several of the Danish soldiers interviewed stated that they had already learned about the profession of soldiering from their fathers and that they wanted to follow in their footsteps.

“From a more realistic base I would say that my father was a soldier before he retired and became a national guard. So we talked about a lot of soldier experiences when I was a child. And when I was 17 and in Highschool you could join the Homeguards as well, so I did that, so even before I came into the army, when I was 17 and made my graduation and I became a corporal and national guard when I was 19 before I joined the army. And at that stage I had already decided to go into that direction” [DK 2, 59, Major].

For this soldier, too, paternal imprinting played an important role. Together with his friends, whose fathers were also in the military, the young men decided to volunteer for the Forsvaret.

“I became a soldier in 1992 when I was 18 years old. I wanted to join the army, my father was an officer in the army. [...] I didn't pick the number. You had to pick from 0-18000 and I picked 93862. But I wanted to join the army. Some of my friends, we were the same age and we were following each other from childhood and we all talked about how our fathers had been to Cyprus as peacekeeping soldiers. And we had a dream of all going together” [DK5, 44, Corporal].

Pre-professional socialization takes place mainly in the family and at school. The family exerts an influence on career choice through its socioeconomic status, level of stimulation and imprinting of values (Rottermann 2017, 27). For this interviewee, it was natural and consistent to join the military, just like his father did.

“I think because my father was at the army it has been natural that at some point I would go and be a transcript. And that would be it. I had no idea, my plan wasn't to stick forever, not at all. I was gonna be there for a couple of years, save some money, take some classes and then go back to the U.S. That was basically my plan but that never happened” [DK7, 43, Major].

Beyond family, the career choices of interviewees' acquaintances also influenced their decisions to join the military. Positive reports about life and work in the military have therefore also had an influence on the choice of career.

“I wasn't forced into the army, I volunteered because I had a lot of friends in the army and it sounded like a nice place to be. Possible to do a lot of sports and going out and having fun in the nature. So that was it back then, now its ok. It's still ok” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

From the interview statements, it appears that the narratives about Forvaret and military life as a whole from those around the study participants interviewed were so promising that they persuaded some of them to join the military themselves.

Sports

The job requirements of soldiers also include physical fitness and athletic performance. Particularly in operational situations, physical fitness is indispensable and, for most soldiers, just as much a part of their job as their uniform or weapon. According to Pedersen, “a fit body indicates a strong-minded soldier, competent in combat” and may point, “at least in the Case of the Danish Defence” to a certain kind of firm will (Pedersen 2017, 18) with which most of the Danish soldiers can identify well. To this end, soldiers are offered the opportunity to participate in sports during their service. Many of the Danish soldiers interviewed stated that the opportunity to exercise during regular working hours was very attractive to them and a factor in career decision-making. This participant reports that he began studying after his basic military service, but dropped out and went back to the Forsvaret because he lacked the physical activities in civilian occupations:

“I was a conscript, just after high school. I was at the small island Bornholm where we had a very good time with a high level of physic activities, which I liked very much. After my period at Bornholm, I went out studying economic and law but after half a year I missed the physic activities and by taking officers education I could combine the sports with my interest of leading other people and also all my personal skills would be developed during the education of an officer.” [DK4, 44, Major].

For the majority of the Danish study participants surveyed, the opportunity to exercise during working hours was a decisive factor in their career choice.

Camaraderie

Just as important as the sporting aspect of being a soldier is the social structure within the military. comradship has an outstanding value for the soldiers interviewed and was for many of the Danish soldiers interviewed both a factor for joining and staying in the military.

“I thought it was interesting, it was competitive, difficult, I was tired every day. And there was this great feeling of a group working together. I got some really good friends within a very short time because you experience so many things together. I think that this is a normal soldier thing. [...] Looking back, the comradship was probably what kept me going in the start” [DK7, 43, Major].

For many, camaraderie, cohesion and physical activity are at the core of being a soldier. Recruits learn about these things during their basic military service and remember them well even after they leave the military. The positive stories of others led this soldier to apply to the military when he was in a career search phase.

“I joined the army in 2004 and at that time I haven´t taken part in the national service, so I was working at a low paid job and I was looking for something else to do with my life. I didn´t really had any big plans for my career or s.th. like that. But there were some colleagues at the place where I was working who told me about the time they had in the army during their national services and that sounded interesting. They described a lot of physical activities and a lot of challenging situations and to some extent the social aspect, the camaraderie. So based on that I contacted the army and asked if it was possible to become a soldier” [DK10, 46, Captain].

The interview participant describes a period of discovery in his life when he did not know what to do with his life. This phase is not uncommon, especially for young people just before they start their careers. Some young people then choose basic military service as a test phase to assess whether a military career might be of interest to them.

The following statement shows that a military career can also be interesting as a career change.

“I was in med school and it took me almost three years to figure out that I didn’ t want to be a doctor. And I looked around and thought what else can I do with my life? That was non-university but still should put a demand on my intellect. And then I found the army’s military linguist program, which is well renowned for being intellectually challenging. So I applied for that. So it was less about army life than finding some meaningful direction personally. There is more personal agenda, rather than Afghanistan or the Army or army way of life” [DK3, 32, Captain].

As will be shown later in this paper, the Danish soldiers perceive their military to be very professional. The reputation of good education of the Danish military was therefore a motivating factor for many to pursue a professional career in the Forsvaret. A good education was also a decisive point for the major in his career choice: “There was some kind of considerations about what’s in it for me as a person, so if I did fine I could achieve a good education as well” [DK1, 50, Major].

Adventure

Some of the candidates interviewed came to Forsvaret through basic military service. As described above, in Denmark it is the procedure for drawing lots that determines whether a candidate is required to perform basic military service or not. Regardless of the number drawn, it is still possible both to refuse military service and to perform military service voluntarily. In the following interview, a participant describes how he came to commit himself permanently as a soldier via basic military service. Although the number he drew would not have obligated him to perform military service, he decided to do so. For him, it was a step toward becoming an adult and leaving his parental home. It also describes how a sense of adventure, overcoming his own limitations, and social cohesion led him to make a lasting decision to pursue a military career.

“I was recruited back in 1990 with 18 years old. It’s pretty normal for Danish boys to become a conscript. At that time you needed to pick a number and if you have a little number you needed to go to the Forsvaret. Actually I had the opportunity to say no because my number was high, but I decided to go. I think it was a combination of leaving my mother back home and trying something new. [...] All in all it has just been me wanting to go. [...] It definitely was [an adventure]. Because you are going through so much and you are trying things you would

have never done otherwise so it's a questions of breaking your barriers all the time. Breaking your limits. Becoming a part of the unit. It is very important for young people" DK9, 46, Captain].

Get to know your personal limits, overcome boundaries, become part of a unity. These are all ingredients that make up the fascination of soldiering. The desire to become a soldier was also so pronounced in the case of this study participant.

"Yes, actually I did [pick a number]. It was kind of strange, because I went there telling them that I would apply no matter what, thinking that there was no reason for me to pick a free number, as its called, from someone who didn't want to do service. And I was told that I had to take a number no matter what and I picked number 1111. I can remember that, for always. And that's a low number. I think it was between 0-10.000 you would be sure to be enlisted. So the major there said: well [Name], welcome, you are going to the army. And I said, I told you so, because I would go no matter what. And that was it, I was enlisted" [DK7, 43, Major].

All of the Danish soldiers interviewed volunteered for the Forsvaret. Even with the lottery, there is the option of refusing to serve. As in the case of the soldier quoted above, a sense of adventure and pushing one's limits played an important role for many of the participants.

Political Beliefs

The decision to join the military is often also a political decision. Accordingly, the global political situation can also be a decisive factor when joining the military. The following interview section describes how the Kosovo War at the end of the 1990s led this participant to join the Danish military, despite the fact that his political affiliation was more to the left of the spectrum.

„I decided to go to Forsvaret in 1998, when Denmark was very active in Serbia. There was this famous attack on Serbia, because Serbia was in the process of exterminating many people in Kosovo. These attacks were decided by a Danish foreign minister, who was a social liberal and belonged to a party that is called de radikale venstre in Danish, and these are usually, let's say, pacifists or at least people who are actually critical of the military. And I actually like this party very much. And then I realized that the military is not a solution, but it is a tool. And I wanted to work for the military, if that means that we do missions like this, where it's about protecting people from other people“ [DK8, 52, Lieutenant].

“Protecting people from other people” and appeasing acts of conflict is a central altruistic motive that is often cited by soldiers and plays a major role in mission motivation, especially in foreign missions. The decisive factor here is often the canon

of values of the soldiers themselves. This soldier's career decision was also driven by the desire to do something meaningful and to contribute to world peace.

“I thought Denmark's activist foreign policy was very, very good. I thought it was very good that we were so focused on the UN at that time and I kind of wanted to support that. And I'm also a very political person, so I thought, okay, I'm young, I'm fit, and I just joined the Navy, and at the same time I could hopefully do something good for the world peace at some point later on. Doing something good was definitely a motive” [DK8, 52, Lieutenant].

But it was not only the desire to globally promote a certain set of values that motivated the Danish study participants to become soldiers. The preservation of democratic values within Denmark was also a motivation for some to join the military.

“Because I would like to protect the national values, like the welfare state, the democracy. And it's not free, someone have to defend it. I fact that was the purpose from my attendance from the beginning.” [DK1, 50, Major].

Egalitarianism, the Scandinavian welfare state, and a home-oriented middle-class society are, according to Linnet and Sørensen (2016), central narratives of the Danish national understanding. The preceding statement reflects a high degree of identification with the home country and the identity associated with it. Both are also constituent elements of patriotism. Patriotism and national heroism indeed played a role in the career choices of Danish soldiers.

“It was a very seduced perspective from my very young stage. Basically I think it was more interesting, it had some kind of action in it, I think it was the fascination of the whole soldiering as a profession and maybe a little bit - and that is of course a statement from a much older person - some kind of romantic approach. So what it meant to be a soldier. The glamour, the flying flags, the heroism, all that. That sounds banal, but never the less, it might have been a part of why I chose it while I was young” [DK2, 59, Major].

The fascination of soldiering, as this interview participant summarizes, is a mixture of many factors that make up the profession of soldiering, but above all the traditional image of the soldiering profession in Danish society.

Assessing the Motivation

The motives of the interviewed Danish participants for joining the military have been manifold.

The most frequently mentioned source of motivation for the Danish soldiers interviewed is to be found in the family environment. Most of the soldiers joined the Forsvaret because their fathers or friends were also in the military and spoke positively about it. Access to a good education was the second most common response. Danish soldiers perceive their military as very professional and the training within it is highly regarded and was for many a decisive factor in their career choice. Altruistic motives, such as learning a meaningful profession in which they are contributing to a good cause, and political attitudes and patriotic motives were the third most frequently cited. The opportunity to play sports while working was another motivating factor, ahead of companionship and leaving the parental home. Salary as an extrinsic factor was not mentioned by any of the respondents as a motivating factor.

4.2.2 Identification and Commitment

The tasks of the Danish armed forces are defined and regulated by Act No 122 of 27 February 2001 on the Purpose, Tasks and Organization of the Danish Armed Forces and the relevant amending Act of 9 June 2006. It states the overall objectives of the armed forces are “To prevent conflicts and war, to assert Denmark's sovereignty and ensure its continued existence and integrity and to promote a peaceful development in the world, with respect for human rights”. The Armed Forces Act also describes the tasks of the armed forces:

“The tasks of the Armed Forces range from: Participation in international operations all over the world, to survey and protect Danish territory and territorial Waters, and to support the society with a number of vital tasks. These include surveillance of Denmark's air space and territorial waters, environmental surveillance, Pollution Prevention, fisheries inspection, Search & Rescue operations, Support to the Police Authorities and to the Emergency Management Agency” (Ministry of Defence 2020).

Our Core Values are: Credibility, Transparency, Trust, Independence and Responsibility. Every of the interviewed Danish Soldiers could identify themselves with the Forsvaret and its tasks in some ways. The officially defined core values of “credibility, transparency, trust, independence and responsibility” (Ministry of Defence 2020) have a high correspondence with the ideas with which the soldiers identify themselves and which they want to represent. When asked whether this participant

could identify with the ethos of the Danish army, he replied: “Yes, because also the values the military consisted of in that time was I think identical values as I would like to be a part of and to protect” [DK1,50,Major]. These values often correlate with the idea of doing something good with one's work and contributing to a more peaceful world. Furthermore some participants found a purpose in their work. This soldier answered to the question what the Danish Army stands for in his opinion:

“Order, discipline, regularity, scheduling, responsibility. Sort of long term that there is a purpose. But also the whole organization is kind of focused around that purpose rather than profit or something else. I think there was an idea of something more values-based than just an economic drive” [DK3,32,Captain].

Many soldiers have to accept considerable restrictions for their profession, especially in foreign missions, which will be discussed in more detail later. The meaningfulness of the soldier's profession, as mentioned here, often makes it easier for the interviewees to accept these restrictions and identify with the profession.

“I think I could see things that I would want to be but not was at that time. I think I was young and I lacked a bit of direction and life had been easy until that point. Getting up in the morning could be a big deal and suddenly skipping ahead once you are deployed suddenly its not that big of a deal anymore. You change your perception of army life and deployment. The whole process changes your worldview quite a lot I find. So I think more I was looking towards the army for who I wanted to be rather than who I was. And its a challenge because its so rigid and strict, particularly when you are a recruit, that was definitely the biggest challenge [DK3,32,Captain]”

Although the Danish Army, like the other armies considered, is here characterized by the classic attributes “order, discipline, regularity, scheduling, responsibility”, the institution of the Danish military is generally perceived as very professional and modern with a good working atmosphere:

“I don't think that the army is strict. I think we have a very modern way of leadership. Of course there is a hierarchy based system but if you have the knowledge of some special area, the leaders will always listen to the specialists even if they are lower rank. So I think we have a very modern way of doing our leadership. Also we listen to the needs of our men. Because we need their support to do all our missions. So if they are afraid or they think that they don't have the right education than we need to provide them with the right education so that they can solve the tasks” [DK4,44,Major].

The professionalism of the work in the Danish military was one of the most frequently mentioned keywords when asked what the soldiers associate with the army. All the Danish interviewees stated that they felt well prepared and trained for their main duties:

“I think that we have in many way a very professional defence. I as an army officer had interaction preliminary with the armed branch and not so much with the air force or navy. In the training that I have done and in the deployments I have taken part in I have this overall understanding that we have a large degree of professionalism and confidence in the tasks that we carry out. I think there is obviously situations where you will find people who don't try their best or do their utmost to do the best that they can in all professions and work supplies and obviously that exists in the army as well but for the most part very professional and conscious of their professionalism. [DK10,46,Captain]”

Especially the fact that nobody has to be involuntarily drafted into military service any more, but the army is getting enough of volunteers, the level of professionalism has increased:

“I think it is a very professional environment, where we take care of our soldiers and that we have moved away from the conscript army where we only had conscripts and where we put all our efforts in the conscripts. So the last 20 years we have changed our focus onto a more professional army with also a very expensive equipment. So in that way we became more professional in the army. I also think that we have some traditions that we try to take care of. Especially in the army where I am from” [DK4,44,Major].

The level of professionalism of the Danish Armed Forces is also reflected in international comparisons. This soldier reports how Danish soldiers often hold higher ranks when deployed abroad than at home in Denmark because their training is higher by international standards.

“[We] have a good reputation and we have really good education. Especially the officers academies, meaning, when we are going in missions, often we are having a rank higher as we used to have at home. So for example I just returned from Afghanistan, there I was a lieutenant coronal, but on the way home I was degraded to major again. This is because our skills and knowledge is responding to the rank comparing to other nations ranks. So our education is quite good” [DK1, 50, Major].

Members of the military are often under special public scrutiny. Soldiers are encouraged to behave appropriately in uniform and to act as role models. According to this interviewee, it is precisely this circumstance that leads to what he considers to be a high public image of the Danish military. Since the values of the interviewee correspond to the military values, the soldier identifies strongly with the institution of the Forsvaret.

“In my opinion the military was having a good reputation among the civilians, among the population because there was order, there was a good structure, all personnel in the military was a kind of role model for the normative. In my opinion. [...] Yes, because also the values the military consisted of in that time was I think identical values as I liked to be a part of and to protect. [...] Maybe I put it in too high position but in fact it was my opinion at that time” [DK1, 50, Major].

The soldier's profession and military socialization has an influence on the person behind the uniform (see 2.1.3) This soldier describes how his time in the military made him more self-confident and how it strengthened his self-esteem.

“I think that it has given me a lot of self-esteem. I am more confident. And it has probably told me a lot about how to communicate with other people. Even though the way we communicate within the military is not always a good way to communicate with people in the civilian world because we talk a lot in short sentences and use short terms for describing longer sentences and its difficult not to use that in front of a civilian. So sometimes they don't really know what I mean and I have to explain it afterwards. But in general it has given me a lot of positive things in my life” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

In this example, it is apparent how military socialization differs from civilian socialization. The soldier distinguishes between different communication patterns and adapts his language and speech habits to the respective environment. The classic military values that make up the military culture as such (see 2.1.) are also mentioned by the soldiers as formative and lead to a high degree of identification of the interviewees with their employer, the Forsvaret. When asked if this study participant can identify with classic military values such as punctuality, discipline, or camaraderie, the respondent explained:

“I don't know, it's difficult to talk about values when it comes to things like that because they become in many ways installed in many things that you do in the army very early on in your time. So they become something like second nature and something that for me become quite natural to follow the examples that you gave” [DK10, 46, Captain].

The classical military values are described here as a second nature, as something so deeply rooted and installed in the soldier's personality that they have become part of the person. The longer soldiers are exposed to certain patterns of military culture, the more influence it has on their personalities.

“Through the years it shaped and formed the person that I have become. Some of it has of course been within me and I would not have changed either or but I think that it's a job that is very disciplined. Not in a strict way but you have to be disciplined to survive in the start [...]” [DK7, 43, Major].

Identification and commitment can therefore also be reflected in shared values. This soldier talks about how he and his comrades wanted to make a difference together and how they lived and experienced the military culture, and how the soldiering profession was a call for him personally.

“I think that everybody wants to change something. Like going to Africa and change something. And we wanted to do that in the forces. We had our own language, our own uniforms and you are all working in the same direction all the time. It's not only from 8am to 4pm but it is almost 24hours seven days a week, And if you are going on a mission or a rehearsal or something like that you work for that goal every time and all the time. You have a very intense time with people for half of a year or something and then you can see that it is a very special culture. So at that time it was kind of a call to become a soldier, more than today. Today it is more of a job I think, but at that time it was a call” [DK9, 46, Captain].

The following quote clearly shows how far the identification with the military extends. This soldier does not see himself as an employee of a company, but he considers himself and his colleagues as the heart of the company: "We are the military" shows how connected he has become to the Forsvaret.

“Well if you start in an organization, any organization, you will always talk about the company as something outside yourself. But in the army now, me and my colleagues, we are the army. Because we have taken over all the traditions and we are the establishment, which is natural at our age. So the culture, what is wrong and what is right and how you behave towards each other and all that things will rest with the older individuals. Of course I can understand the mechanisms” [DK2, 59, Major].

Here, the difference between a civilian employer and the military becomes evident and the role played by the military culture in the identification process is emphasized. As explained in chapter 2.2, the military corporate culture plays a central role in the identification of the individual soldier with the respective military organization. Wearing the same uniforms, espousing the same values, standing up for the same goal - all this connects the soldiers with each other in a special way and strengthens both the cohesion among them and the relationship between the individual soldier and his superordinate military institution.

“There is a very strong corporate culture I think. [...] The way we speak, the way we communicate, evaluate information, make decisions. How you tend to see your work life balance. I think you are less focused with your rights and more purposely objective of your job and why you are there and if you need to stay x hours longer to get it done, you stay. If you need to stay out in the rain, in the mud, in the forest, in the middle of nowhere, you do that. Because of a common understanding bond, just the fact that we wear the same clothes. I think there is a very, very strong corporate culture that is separate and probably you can see that in

the numbers of people flexing in and out of the army for civilian life. I think people tend to stay for a long time even though it might not be their rational-economic interest, they tend to hang around in the armed forces for quite a while” [DK3, 32, Captain].

As already mentioned, traditions play a major role within military culture. In Denmark, there is the Gardehusarregimentet, The Guard Hussar Regiment, a cavalry unit of the Royal Danish Army, which to this day places particular emphasis on maintaining its very own traditions.

“I also think that we have some traditions that we try to take care of. Especially in the army where I am from. I am for instance from the royal hussars and it’s a tradition that when you become an officer that you have to learn how to ride a horse. And that when you are in the officers’ club in the royal hussars there is a tradition that you give some money to buy some silver plates, forks, knives, so that you can put up a table with silver plates and all stuff like that. Then there is a tradition that every last Friday in every month all the young officers are meeting to a common lunch and if you have time than you go there and say hello to the others. Also when you are promoted, there is a parade and stuff like that. So in that way we have some traditions and ceremonies that you don’t have in the civilian life. You use some of your working times to the care of those traditions” [DK4, 44, Major].

As described in the previous part, the military profession differs in many ways from other civilian professions. This is also reflected in the advantages and disadvantages of the profession. How the Danish study participants perceive these advantages and disadvantages is outlined below.

4.2.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Soldiering

As already described in section 2.2, comradeship is one of the most important reference points of military culture. Wearing the same clothing, living and training together in military facilities, speaking the same military language, and maintaining and passing on common values and traditions all foster camaraderie within a military unit. Especially in dangerous situations, soldiers must be able to rely on each other and each individual is in a situation of dependency on the others. Many soldiers describe the camaraderie in the military as something unique that they lack in the civilian world. According to the survey, camaraderie is the most frequently mentioned advantage of the Danish soldiers interviewed.

“The comradeship. You are part of something big. In that time we did not have terrorism in Denmark and we did not had that kind of wars. I remember one day at a bar there was a fight. There were some of the local guys who wanted to beat up a soldier. And the other soldiers couldn't see why they wanted to beat him up, so just one soldier standing up, calling the regimental lane, all the other soldiers stood up. So now we were more soldiers than them. We didn't want to fight. The local guys left. We all sat down, had a soda or beer, no problem. So camaraderie” [DK5, 44, Corporal].

For many Danish participants, a decisive factor in their choice of profession was the opportunity to take part in sports during working hours. Accordingly, next to comradeship, the opportunity of physical exercise is listed by many as a major advantage of the profession.

“Sports, comradeship. Even though this is a system where you are always told what to do, depending on the level you are working on, you have a huge amount of freedom to decide in which way you are doing that. So some think it is very important for people that they can manage their own work life. If you look at how they are gratified. Being able to have influence on how you work is very important. So you can do that. And of course also there is a certainty in that because you belong to a group of people that understands you and appreciates you to some extent. That creates a kind of a brotherhood regardless of what rank you might have. If you are talking to a soldier, you will always talk in the same framework. That creates a sense of brotherhood, that's a good thing” [DK 2, 59, Major].

Although the profession of soldier is often associated with strict rules and procedures, many of the Danish soldiers interviewed cited flexibility and freedom as other advantages of their profession.

“Our daytime work is not very strict. We can plan our days as we like and if I want to take some time off to do some sports or go on holidays it's no problem. I can manage a lot of my schedule myself and inside our own team. So in here it's really great for that point. So that's one if the things. And then there is the fact that you can do a lot of sports within the service time and that's also a great thing” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

Despite some freedom and flexibility in shaping the soldiers' daily lives, the core military elements of command and obedience are still present. In particular, the possibility of being seconded to other regions of the country and possibly having to relocate as a result are cited by many soldiers as a disadvantage.

“You are in a system where you are told what you have to do your whole life and that is of course a burden on you. Whether you realize it or not. It can bear you down over time, because you are in a system where you can be told that tomorrow you should work in another part of the country. And then you need to uproot your family and move. Even though what I would call the army we have now where you have a lot of influence on your own life and where you want to work and what carrier you want to pursuit, even though you are always in situations

where you are always told what to do and how to do it. So that's of course a limitation of personal initiative" [DK 2, 59, Major].

Some of the interviewees also perceive the foreign assignments, including the preparation and follow-up time, and the associated absence from home as a disadvantage of the soldier's profession.

"Time away from family and friends. [...] I understand that when I continue in the army there will at some point be another mission that I will probably have to take part in. And that's difficult to accept, because I know it will be very difficult for my wife and my daughter. On top of that there is a lot of preparation, a lot of exercises and courses, so typically when you prepare for a mission you end up on top of the mission being six months than you typically have maybe three or four months spread out over a long period of time where you are also away from your family. So the time away is the hardest thing and the biggest disadvantage. [...] To a certain extent there is a small degree of geographical uncertainty depending on if you are forced to go to certain areas in Denmark but it's not such a big worry for me, but that could also become an issue" [DK10, 46, Captain]

With regard to a possible transfer or absence from home, it often makes a difference whether soldiers are single or have a family. Particularly when children are involved, some of the soldiers would like to have a more regulated work schedule, as is common in other professions.

"Disadvantages - as a system it can be really closed off, the most obvious disadvantage is that the pay would be better in a civilian job, there is no risk of deployment, regular working hours, I mean a whole lot of practical stuff that - I recently became a parent - suddenly become very relevant in a way that it wasn't before" [DK3, 32, Captain].

This soldier also sees positive aspects in the supposed disadvantage of being away from home. For example, his expertise as a soldier would increase with the experience he gained, and he and his family would benefit from the relocations and foreign deployments.

"All jobs have [disadvantages], but in my situation, the disadvantages could be going abroad, going into missions where you are ordered. It is hard in the situation, but afterwards there will be advantages because my experiences will raise and I will identify my family life with my wife and my children is not destroyed in my absence, so in fact this is also a kind of advantage when I am away from my family because that also gives them some tools because they have to find own solutions in my absence. And again when I compare me and my friends, they are all living in the same village all their lives. We have lived many places in Denmark and also abroad and I have been provided courses also in the U.S. where I could invite my family in the end as some kind of vacation. So I think being an officer is a long life education. You will always have to pick up education, you have to make your own reflections in all situations, search for the best solution. So you have to be open minded" [DK1, 50, Major].

In addition, a professional disadvantage can be when soldiers have to justify their choice of career or the work of the military. This soldier describes how it feels when soldiers have to justify political decisions or explain the *raison d'être* of the military in general.

“Of course it can be frustrating as well when there is the inability to explain operations and as operations are from my point of view, together with defending national sovereignty the main *raison d'être* of the armed forces. If you can't quite explain what it's like to be in an international cooperation, then explaining the point of what we do at home when we do training for, when it becomes so difficult, that scission can create a disadvantage. Also socially when you work for an organization that has at least at times a lot of political and media attention when we are in theaters around the world, your relation to the organization or how you identify yourself with it can be a source of at least annoyance. That you always have to defend your position or the army's position, or Denmark's position” [DK3, 32, Captain].

As described in this example, identification with the military and the soldier's profession can also become a burden, at least if the public's perception of the military or its missions is critical. When soldiers move in public space in uniform, they are directly recognized as soldiers by the civilian population and can consequently be exposed to a direct image of opinion. How it feels for the study participants to wear military uniforms in the Danish public sphere is considered in the following.

4.2.4 Recognition: Wearing the Uniform

Most of the Danish study participants interviewed stated that it is normal for them to wear their service uniform in public. Soldiers are as much a part of the cityscape as other professions and are rarely confronted with their profession by the passers-by.

“I find the general opinion is whether you work for Lego or the army, you have chosen your way of life and get on with it. It's no big deal in Denmark. I find the view is not that different from other occupations. You don't have any reverence for veterans the way you would see in Britain or the U.S. where there is something special surrounding having served. I mean the one time I have ever been approached by anyone when I have been in uniform making my way to something work related somewhere in Denmark, the one time someone came up to me and started a conversation and ultimately thanked me for my service, it was an American” [DK3, 32, Captain]

“Whether you work for Lego or the army” – this statement by the soldier interviewed illustrates that, in his opinion, working for the military in Denmark does not have any

special status in society - neither positive nor negative - but is a profession like any other. This perception is also consistent with the overall assessment of the majority of the Danish soldiers surveyed. They perceive their profession as being well respected in society, but without attaching any particular importance to it in everyday life: “You are just a man in uniform” [DK5, 44, Corporal], or as this study participant states: “In Denmark soldiers are just a part of the normal life. There is no big difference of being in the military compared to another job for the public” [DK6, 34, Sergeant]

This impression also seems to be due to the time in which the interviews were conducted. This major talks about how social acceptance in Denmark has changed since he joined the military.

“Denmark was in the Cold War scenario, and at least in my family it was not an issue to become a soldier. In those days, of course when I became a little bit older we had a society influenced by what happened in 68. And after that came a period where the civilian establishment had quite a negative approach to soldiers and to the army, mostly soldiers were not very well perceived. I am not saying that you had any kind of harassment or things like that. Maybe some places in the bigger cities, but in general in smaller cities and the country side, there was not much of it. But if you look at the academia, the teachers, the mainstream media after 68 there was a more defined climate towards soldiers in whole. And probably also as a result of what happened in the Vietnam War. And that of course became the picture during the 70s and early 80s. Soldiers doing their job, going on exercises, on a march or whatever, actually you would meet people who would shout at them [...] Back in the 80’s in the Danish Defense Command, north of Copenhagen, the officers going up there normally not wear their uniform when they go to work, because they get all kinds of comments if they were taking the subway, or if they go to Copenhagen after work to pick up their children from Kindergarden, so they would actually change into civilian clothes after work in order not to have all the small kinds of battles and bad experiences. Today it is a completely different picture. Today we have a situation where there is a lot of respect towards soldiers, where we have many arrangements with the civilian society and you can hardly find a politician in Denmark saying anything negative about Danish soldiers. So this is a completely different picture now. Which is a good thing” [DK2, 59, Major].

The shift toward a militarized Danish society over the past few decades has been outlined (see section 4.1). Sørensen and Linnet consider this as the reason for the non-special status of soldiers in Denmark today: “Over the past ten years, Danish society has undergone a significant transformation, which [...] entails a gradual but steady militarization of society and a normalization of war, including the normalization or mainstreaming of the figure of the soldier” (Sørensen and Linnet 2016, 16).

This soldier also reports on a changed image of soldiers in the Danish public in recent decades, but in a different direction. In his description, the profession of soldier used

to be more appreciated by the Danish public and is now, in contrast, perceived by the public as a profession like any other and does not command any more respect than other professions.

“Yes and they were traveling in uniform and it was something to be proud of so to speak. I mean if you are going from one barracks home - I was in northern Jutland and my parents lived just north of Copenhagen - and if I was traveling home I would always do that in uniform, people would look at you fondly and kindly and would say: good job or whatever. I think that changed through the years and we had a period about ten years ago where it really started to change. The people wouldn't wear their uniform home because there were of course some kind of threats towards soldiers in uniform like terrorist goals or whatever, but it was also not looked at in the same way. I remember that my father told me once when he started back in the late 60s, early 70s it was either or. People either hated the military or they loved the military. But being an officer was something to look at respectfully. No matter if you really liked it or not. And I think that has changed. Today, being a soldier or being an officer is just a normal job” [DK7, 43, Major].

Nevertheless, this perception fits in with Sørensen and Linnet's thesis that the profession of soldier has undergone a normalization that is neither positive nor negative on the part of the population, but has to be understood like a normal profession as has already been described by other participants in the study. The threats mentioned in the preceding quote and the recommendation to refrain from using uniforms in public stem from the threats against Denmark following the publication of the Muhammad cartoons on September 30, 2005. On that day, twelve cartoons appeared in the Danish newspaper "Jyllands-Posten" under the title "The Face of Mohammed. This was followed by numerous, in part violent demonstrations in Muslim countries in which, among other things, Danish flags were burned and Danish embassies were attacked. Denmark, the editorial staff of "Jyllands-Posten" and the individual cartoonists were targeted by international terrorist networks such as al-Qaeda (Reimann 2017). In this context, soldiers were also advised not to wear uniforms in public unless absolutely necessary. Nevertheless, many of the Danish soldiers interviewed are comfortable wearing their uniforms in public.

“In fact we had a situation a couple of years ago where our intelligence service informed all uniform personnel not to wear uniform from home to work and vice versa but I just did it because when I picked up my children some years ago in kindergarten all kids said, oh, what kind of uniform is that? They have not seen it. So in order to get some knowledge about the military's existence in the Danish population I always wore my uniform on my way to work. I think we are accepted and recognized as good and professional soldiers among the Danish population. Still we have a good reputation and we have really good education” [DK1, 50, Major].

This Danish soldier also reports that it is normal for him, but also in general, to move in public in uniform. In his opinion, the Danish public is generally friendly towards soldiers, and he himself has not had any bad experiences as a soldier in public.

“It’s quite normal to have the uniform on in Denmark [...] People are more friendly towards soldiers. Its more that the military security devices us not to be wearing a uniform if not necessary in open places with huge groups gathering together. Like in the middle of Copenhagen or sth. But still if you go through Copenhagen you will see people in uniform I am sure about that. It doesn’t really matter. I have never experienced something bad like spitting on me or giving me the finger or whatever. [...] I may have heard of once or twice, but it really is pretty rare here in Denmark” [DK9, 46, Captain].

Although none of the Danish study participants interviewed had negative experiences in uniform in the Danish public sphere, some of the soldiers nevertheless prefer to go out in public in civilian clothes rather than in uniform. This is particularly due to the expectations that are placed on soldiers, as this participant explains:

“I think they expect that I will behave in a certain manner. I would always need to stop at a red light in a uniform and in general go in for my job. So if I am sitting in the train and an elderly woman would enter than I will get up. Probably I also would do that in civilian clothes but I have to do it in uniform. I saw once some guys on the train making trouble and I was in my uniform, so I had to solve that. I am kind of a public person in my uniform. Sometimes because of that I would rather go out without my uniform, because than I can speed up in traffic and things like that” [DK4, 44, Major].

In addition to the role model function mentioned above, which results from certain expectations of soldiers, there is also the additional aspect that soldiers in uniform are seldom seen as individual subjects, but always as representatives of their institution.

“When I go out in uniform I am never off-duty. I am representing the Forsvaret. But when I am out in civilian clothes no one look at me and say that guy is probably from the army. So I think we have a duty that if we are in uniform we have to behave better than normal. You can’t do stupid things in uniform because people would immediately look at you and they would think that’s’ the army. They wouldn’t see the person but the institution. So I think you have to protect that once you are in uniform” [DK7, 43, Major].

In general, Danish soldiers largely see themselves as anchored and integrated in the middle of Danish society. When they are not on a foreign deployment or on a military exercise, their daily work is often similar to that of other professions, and by mostly living outside the barracks, soldiers feel well embedded in Danish civil society, as this soldier points out:

“If you look at the soldiers in Denmark, we are not a cast within the society. Most or all soldiers are living outside the barracks. With their families. If we are not on a mission, most of the job would be from 8 to 4. And then you have exercise. But it means that in whole, the major group of soldiers in Denmark are just ordinary families with all the issues a normal family has as well. I would say that Danish soldiers and families are very much embedded in the rest of the society. It’s not like a professional army living inside the barracks having a separate life from the rest of society” [DK2, 59, Major].

This interviewee also emphasizes the good civil-military relationship that he believes exists between the Danish population and the military. According to him, the garrison towns would also be proud to be a military location.

“Here in Denmark we have a good relationship with the civilian part of society. The cities are proud to have a military garrison in their city. So in Denmark its well accepted and well taken. Of course there is always someone who doesn’t like the military or what the military stands for but in general we have a good stand in society.[...] I never had a problem going out in uniform. Small kids shout “ooh look, there is a soldier”, so no bad looks, only appreciating nods from people. We, the soldiers, are just a part of the daily picture” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

In the interviews conducted, the majority of Danish soldiers expressed satisfaction with the status of the military and the soldiering profession in Danish society. Only one interview participant expressed criticism:

“The soldiers are not earning enough respect. We are lacking behind. America is very far in front of us. We have some respect from various persons but we are far behind. We have a society that is heaving enough in themselves. We have a veterans´ card. There was a joke for many years ago when they issued us those veterans cards. What are we supposed to use them for? Nothing! We just now have a card that says that you are a veteran. And now some companies say, ok, on veterans day, on the 5th of September, we give some discounts. But when you go to the states and you show your veterans card - 50% off in the shops” [DK5, 44, Corporal].

When asked if he favors a veteran culture like it exists in the U.S., he explains

“No, not exactly like that, but some more appreciation. We have politicians in Denmark that believe in we should be a non-fighting country, we should demilitarize the army, the police, then we won’t have any wars or criminals. And they are on the outer left flank and they believe in peace, love and harmony, accept when they want to meet their goals, then they put on their hoods and throw stones on the police. That’s some of the reasons we don’t get the recognition we should get” [DK5, 44, Corporal]

The soldier interviewed has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder since his deployment in Afghanistan and is campaigning for more recognition to be given to soldiers and veterans who have been wounded mentally or physically. He reports on

the educational work he carries out in Danish schools, among other places, and describes how the pupils' perception of what a soldier does can differ greatly from reality.

“I believe there is a gap, for misunderstanding of what we are doing out there. When I go out to school classes and tell them about my story, some of the first questions they ask me: did you kill many men? And that's what they believe you are doing in wars. No, I didn't kill anybody, I patched them all up. From infant to grown men. But they can't comprehend it. They believe war is war, you are just shooting, just like in Hollywood. Hollywood inspire movies, like, yeah, you go out, all gods and glory, shoot the enemy, the war is over, go home and enjoy. But they don't see the other side” [DK5, 44, Corporal].

Although none of the Danish soldiers interviewed had a correspondingly critical perception of the civil-military relationship, the assumption that there are certain prejudices in the population against soldiers that are determined by films was also shared by other participants in the study.

“I think Danish society recognizes soldiers. But I think it's mainly based on popular cultural references that they get from TV's and movies and stuff like that. So there is a certain degree of cliché. I mean where we work here we see that a little bit, we work with veterans and we know that to certain extent people in society they think that people who have been deployed - veterans - are in some way either physically or mentally challenged when they come home. That they have some kind of diagnosis or disorder and that's not even the case at all. It's a very small amount of people who come back with challenges. So we meet these kind of preconceptions in Danish society relatively often. But I think that in general Danish society recognizes the contribution that soldiers do, especially when they take part in international missions. But there is not in society a very large degree of recognition more than other duties. They sort of understand that this is what soldiers do but they know very little about what actually takes place when you are in Denmark working as a soldier. And typically they know only what's portrait in the media. So if someone is killed or injured then they have this as a reference point, they don't know about the five and a half other months where nothing really happens than your average work somewhere in a foreign country. So they recognize the contribution but they don't really know what it means to be a soldier” [DK10, 46, Captain].

Sørensen and Linnet confirm this perception in part, given the number of films and books about somehow wounded soldiers within popular culture that have been published in Denmark in recent years. However, in addition to perceived prejudices that the films, books, and even plays may have incited, they also note “through these, ordinary Danes gradually became familiar with modern soldiers, and in particular with the challenges they face after their homecoming” and that a recent development figures soldiers as “secondary characters whose presence is not in itself remarkable, but rather adds to the gallery of everydayness [...] [and] today often include soldiers

and veterans as particular representatives of the common Danish population” (Sørensen and Linnet 2016, 16-17).

Assessing Identification and Commitment

The identification and commitment section examined the extent to which the Danish study participants can identify with the military as an institution and employer. The reasons why the participants decided to join the Forsvaret and how they evaluate the civil-military relationship in Denmark were examined.

It became clear that all of the participants interviewed identified with the military profession to a high degree. All participants stated that their time in the military had been formative for them. The military culture of the Forsvaret as such and its military values are widely shared and represented by the participants. The keywords education and professionalism were mentioned particularly frequently.

When asked about the advantages and disadvantages of being a soldier, the benefits mentioned were sport during working hours, flexibility and comradeship. The greatest disadvantage of the profession is the time-intensive nature of exercises and foreign deployments. Soldiers who had children mentioned this disadvantage more frequently than those without children.

Despite a high degree of identification with the soldier's profession, many of the participants describe their profession, apart from exercises or foreign deployments, as a profession like any other, which would be appreciated by the general public, but would not occupy a special position.

The civil-military relationship in Denmark is rated as good by the majority of the soldiers surveyed. None of the participants had ever had a bad experience in uniform in public, although some reported hearing about it in stories. The Danish public is described as tolerant of uniformed soldiers, although some of the respondents attest to a certain degree of unknowingness among civilians regarding the profession of soldiering itself. According to some of the interviewees, certain stereotypes prevail, which are partly reinforced by films and media portrayals. Only one of the participants surveyed stated

that he did not feel valued enough and wished for more recognition, especially for veterans.

4.3 Being There

The Joining In section investigated the commitment and identification of the Danish soldiers with their military institution.

Being There examines the foreign deployment of the Danish soldiers interviewed in Afghanistan. After first outlining their motives for the deployment, the following section describes how the soldiers interviewed experienced their deployment abroad. They recount the preparations for the mission and the challenges they were confronted during the mission, as well as their feelings when they left Afghanistan.

4.3.1 Operational Motivation

Social Cohesion and Task Cohesion of Danish Soldiers

The reasons for soldiers to go abroad are diverse. One approach that attempts to explain the motivation of soldiers to deploy has been provided by the concept of social cohesion and task cohesion. The concept was developed by Samuel Stouffer and his research team and has already been presented in detail in chapter 3.1.1. The researchers came to the conclusion that a soldier's motivation for and in missions depends above all on his social military environment. Thus, a soldier feels a special obligation to his comrades and draws from this obligation the motivation to risk his life under special circumstances (Stouffer 1949) In social cohesion, camaraderie and a sense of belonging with one's troops and superiors are the most important driving forces.

In the interviews with the Danish soldiers, it also became apparent that comradeship and the loyalty and commitment associated with it were important factors in motivating the soldiers to go on deployment. A sense of responsibility and loyalty play a significant

role, especially in the case of troop superiors, as is also evident in the following example:

“The second time I was actually the commander of a company that was gonna be deployed and would get a new boss otherwise and so I felt I had to go of course if I wanted to or not. I mean these were my guys, my men and so I went down with them” [DK7, 43, Major].

The high level of responsibility can have an inspiring effect, but it can also put immense pressure on the individual soldier. This study participant reports on this ambivalence

“Yes, it was kind of like, I am in the army, I have volunteered to have an army career, so I needed to take up the responsibility to be deployed sometimes. And it was also that they trusted me that I could lift this task. Because they think that I am a good officer, that I have the skills to become a commander in Afghanistan so in that way I was also proud to have this task. But also worried about that I would be able to lift it. But it was kind of an exam of all that I have been doing up to this time. I have been on officers academy, I have been trained in many years in leadership and tactics and now I needed to put all of my experiences together in order to lift this task in Afghanistan and to bring all my men back home” [DK4, 44, Major].

It would have been possible for the Danish soldiers as well to refuse to go on the foreign mission to Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the soldiers are united by a certain obligation that can be a great motivator for deployment, which is significant for social cohesion.

“Well, if you say definitively no for some reason, I can hardly think of anyone who would have been pressed to a mission like that. But on the other hand, you can say there is a timeframe, for instance five years, in those five years all your colleagues have been deployed and you are expected to also go. Because otherwise you would be one of the few people and you don't want to. So it's a kind of burden sharing. With the group of colleagues, you feel a certain obligation to also being deployed” [DK 2, 59, Major].

A motivator for deployment abroad can also be the sense of belonging to the subculture of deployment veterans. As described in section 2.2.2.7, a subculture of veterans forms within the troops who have been on a foreign mission together. “Because otherwise you would be one of the few people and you don't want to” – as the previous quote makes clear, the desire to belong to the veterans' subculture can also exert a certain social pressure on soldiers. The desire to belong is also reinforced by military customs and informal rites, among other things. For example, this Danish soldier describes how a person's perceived competence in the military is linked to the number of foreign deployment experiences.

"[...] I still think that there is a certain degree of culture that in the armed forces promotes that people who have been on missions are worth more, so to speak than people who haven't. A specific example of that is when you introduce yourself in a presentation situation you would always say how many missions you have been on and which missions you have been on. No one would ask you, but you would present it anyway. You would never walk on to someone and say hey, who are you, what missions have you been on. But still, if I would have to give a briefing to people I never met before I would say it" [DK10, 46, Captain].

For this reason, among others, participation in a foreign assignment can also be seen as a career development opportunity. For some of the Danish soldiers interviewed, participation in the Afghanistan mission was therefore also an attractive career push.

"The first was not really voluntary because of personal reasons but I still could have said no. The second was more voluntary, I was asked if I wanted to take part and I chose it based on the career benefits that would come from taking this mission" [DK10, 46, Captain].

Advancing a career can thus outweigh personal objections to the mission itself. This is also evident in the next quote, in which the soldier interviewed had clear doubts about the Afghanistan mission itself, but decided to participate for extrinsic, career-oriented reasons.

"I had a good feeling. I was not particularly enthusiastic about the ISAF mission from the beginning, because I thought then and now that the whole invasion of Afghanistan was just wrong. But I went because I knew I could make something for my career and learn a lot, and I had always wanted to work for NATO. So I had a good feeling when I flew there" [DK8, 52, Lieutenant].

For some soldiers, a foreign deployment is also the supposed highlight of their career. They see the foreign assignment as a fulfillment of their profession. A number of the Danish soldiers interviewed justified their willingness to deploy with what historian George Mosse defined as the characteristic elements of the 'Myth of War Experience': Adventurousness, comradeship, and virtuousness (Mosse 1990). This Danish soldier describes a form of excitement that he has experienced in his job only during foreign deployments. He also rates his job satisfaction congruent with the frequency of foreign assignments:

"Well it's not good anymore. It's going downwards. A big part of it is that we don't have foreign deployments anymore. They are almost gone. So there is not the same happiness about being here because you train and you train and you train but you don't use what you trained for. You don't go abroad to use what you trained for. In the end that's just frustrating for people to do the same training again and again and again and don't use it actively. When I came to the Forsvaret they corresponded pretty well. You had a good collection of people and we enjoyed

being together. We had a great time together and we got a lot of new friends and great colleagues, too. To chat with and do nice things. That was ok. And when you were going to a foreign deployment, there was also the feeling of adventure. Of course it was also the fact that you could use what you trained for but also the excitement of going out to places where you wouldn't normally go" [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

Many of the soldiers interviewed described that there is no equivalent for a foreign deployment in civilian life. For many soldiers, doing what they were trained to do is an important part of their self-image as a soldier. Therefore, the motivation to go on foreign assignments is not necessarily of a political or altruistic nature, but rather one of personal development: "I also wanted to go [to Afghanistan]. When I came home from Kosovo from my foreign deployment I said that I wanted to go again. And for me it didn't matter where" [DK6, 34, Sergeant] Immediately after his deployment in Kosovo, the soldier decided that he wanted to go on another mission abroad. Here it becomes evident that the soldier was not concerned about the mission in Afghanistan; ideological motives did not play a role in his decision. It was primarily about the fact of being deployed itself.

The Danish researcher Thomas Randrup Pedersen accompanied a Danish platoon during deployment preparation, the deployment itself in Helmand Province, and in the aftermath. He describes that a large part of the soldiers he accompanied deliberately wanted to go to war zones and especially to battlefields in order to experience a kind of authenticity. "[...] There are Danish soldiers who volunteer for military service and war-zone deployment in an attempt to make their warrior dreams come true by virtue of undergoing an 'authentic cultural experience'"(Pedersen 2017, 8). He portrays soldiers who are well aware of the sometimes brutal reality of war, but who see the experience of this reality as a fulfillment of their profession and an opportunity for self-realization. The desire for "fulfillment of profession" and "doing what you are trained for" was also reflected in the Danish interviews conducted as part of this research.

"You have done so much training and what's the point if you learn something but don't go to do the job? We all really wanted to go. Even before we were deployed, me and one other colleague asked to extend our stay. Normally it's six months but we asked to stay for eight months. Then I even stayed longer than that. So I definitely consider myself a volunteer. During my second leave with my home unit I planned my tour numbers two and three, so even before I got home, I knew I would leave again. I was quite an enthusiast about it. I wanted to do what I have trained for, I wanted experience, personal growth, definitely a bit of adventure" [DK3, 32, Captain].

If the expectations of the foreign assignment are thus not met, this can lead to frustration on the part of the soldiers. In the following example, it is described that the interview participant hardly left the camp during his second assignment in Afghanistan and mainly had to do office work what contradicted his self-image as a soldier.

“So first time I was part of the staff but my job was out of the office so I was out in the community everyday driving around talking to people, having chats and everything in Kabul. But in Faizabad it was the complete opposite. [...] I was in the operational cell. So my job was total desk work. I left the camp maybe three times throughout the mission and that really bothered me. I am not a soldier to sit behind the desk. It felt way too long to be stuck there and not being in the field” [DK7, 43, Major]

If the expectations of the mission do not match the reality of the mission, this can be a stress factor and lead to soldier dissatisfaction.

Assessing the Operational Motivation of Danish Soldiers

The motivation of the Danish soldiers interviewed for the mission in Afghanistan was diverse. While some of the interview participants went on deployment primarily out of solidarity with their comrades, others saw it as an opportunity to advance their own military careers or to realize their dreams of soldier hood. To help illustrate the diversity of mission motivations, the following section draws on Fabrizio Battistelli's model (see Chapter 3.3.2).

After evaluating the Danish interviews on the motivation for the foreign assignment, the following classification can be made, based on Hedlunds outline of Battistelli's typology:

Motivations of Danish Soldiers to go on Deployment to Afghanistan

Paleomodern Immateriality/ Other-Oriented	Modern Materiality/ Self-Oriented	Postmodern Immateriality/ Self-Oriented
(3) Comradeship	(3) Carrier push	(1) Adventure (4) Fulfillment of Profession

Figure 7: Deployment Motivation of Danish Soldiers, own data, based on Hedlund 2011, 186. Multiple answers were included.

A slight majority of the Danish soldiers surveyed are postmodern soldiers in terms of their reasons for going abroad. Hereby, professional self-fulfillment and doing what they are trained for were the most frequently cited motivation. Motifs that can be attributed to the paleo-modern soldier type were mentioned just as frequently as motivations of the modern soldier.

Based on the stated motives for going on deployment, no clear type of soldier can be identified within the Danish interview group. Rather, it can be seen that comradeship, career orientation and fulfillment all played an equally important role in the Danish soldiers' motivation for deployment.

4.3.2 Preparations and Run-Up

With regard to preparations in the run-up to the Afghanistan mission, all of the Danish soldiers interviewed stated that they felt well prepared by the Forsvaret.

“Yes, in both cases. Physically and mentally. In the first mission I did not exactly know what my task would be and how life would be there. But I adapted very quick and in the second mission I was head of a logistics unit I had been in earlier before, so I knew exactly what my task would be and all those concerns and uncertainties weren't there, and I could set my focus on how to train and deploy my unit. But I felt both times as prepared as I could be at least before both missions. And I didn't feel like there was anything missing” [DK10, 46, Captain].

In order to prepare the soldiers as well as possible for their missions abroad, special training sessions are scheduled in the months and weeks before the mission itself. The

training period is a very intensive time for the soldiers and their families, as described here.

“Yes, we had a pretty long training up to that. I think every soldier in Denmark and probably everywhere else they hate the training period up to a mission, because you have a lot of trainings during that time and you are almost tired when you are going on the mission itself. So everyone is almost looking forward to the mission, because then you would get into a normal pattern. So I think everybody hates that period. You are traveling around a lot. It's almost as tough as being abroad, also for the family. You need to go to the trainings from Monday to Friday and you come home for the weekends but on Sunday afternoon you need to leave again. And especially us, we had a very long period of training. We were supposed to leave in February 2006, but because of the drawings [refers to Mohammed caricatures] all our equipment had to be sailed down to Pakistan and everything was postponed. So I think finally we left in May, so it was an even longer training period because we needed to wait three months and so we had additional trainings. But even without that I think we all have been very well prepared” [DK9, 46, Captain].

In addition to the physical preparations for the mission, the soldiers must also prepare themselves mentally in advance. This also includes dealing with the possibility of dying. Soldiers are encouraged to take precautions and, for example, plan their funeral in advance. By that, the soldiers and their families are supported by the Forsvaret:

“The system is doing a lot. The army is having a lot of connections, there is a program with the families, there is interaction with the families of the soldiers before they go, when they are gone, when they come back. There is a briefing for the families, there is a trying to support how you can maintain relationships, there is also some very factual things done. People are good advised how to arrange themselves and the practical issues, like how to run the household, what kind of insurance you have, should you make a testament, should you get married before you leave, if you are just living together, because then you are having a better legal position if you are officially married. There are also some psychologists running programs, telling people about what kind of experiences they might have as individuals, as corporals. So there is a whole lot of programs running in order to mitigate the fact that people are away. So there is a lot of support in that aspect” [DK 2, 59, Major].

Since 2009, the Danish Defence Forces, in cooperation with the Association for Life and Death, have published a booklet that is handed out to soldiers in advance of a deployment: *Min sidste Vilje*.

“In Denmark there is a red booklet, Min Sidste Vilje, my last will. There are lectures only for soldiers and there are lectures where the relatives also come and psychologists and social workers and so on discuss various topics and finally you as a soldier have to fill out this red booklet and in it you have to decide in detail about your own funeral. So do you want to have a cremation funeral or a straw burial, should it be a military funeral and so on. And we also made a will, of course, and then I talked to my mother about some of these issues. For example, I told my mother, I have to write something here and I would like to have a military funeral and I told my mother that. Because that means my comrades would carry me then.

And my mother should know that and then we talked about in which cemetery it should take place and which pastor should do it. And I entered all that accordingly. And there were several other questions. So it was all very structured” [DK8, 52, Lieutenant].

In addition to a last will, the booklet also contains a donor card and three envelopes for farewell letters. *Min Sidste Vilje* is intended to provide support for both the soldier on deployment and his or her relatives, and to encourage the persons concerned to reflect on the riskiness of the deployment and possible consequences.

“In Denmark at least, also from a practical point of view, every soldier, before they go, they are making a letter of last wish where they write down how they want to be buried, what kind of ceremony they would want, whether they want it to be private, if they want a priest, so everything. And you can say this is very morbid, you can say that, but it is actually a help for the families if the soldier is being killed. Because then they don’t have that problem on top of all the other problems. Like what kind of hymn did he like to be played. If they know that, if this is written somewhere, they can be more concentrated on recovering from grief if there is a last will. So this is the practical part of it. If you ask about my personal feelings, I can not say that. I have been doing this for so many years, it is just business as usual. I have no specific feelings about that” [DK 2, 59, Major].

Even if the military offers assistance in preparing the soldiers, each person concerned deals with the situation differently. Particularly, the process can be mentally stressful, especially for the family members of the soldiers.

“From a personal, emotional perspective, by far the most challenging experience was when my wife and I set down for the mission to prepare my last will and testament. That is mandatory. It’s an official form that you hand in. So we sat down and planned my funeral. That hammered the point down, especially to my wife, that this is more serious than everything we have done before. But looking back on it, really, its handed out to you like any other form. But when you sit at home at a cold and dark winters eve, filling in that form, that’s a very lonely process and not something I have ever discussed with my colleagues or friends. Maybe that was the most profound moment of pre deployment time and that was done in complete isolation with certainly no support with my wife. She was then very alone with it afterwards” [DK3, 32, Captain].

Since not all soldiers are exposed to the same level of risk when deployed abroad, it is important that soldiers include their personal risk in the process and provide realistic risk assessments to their families so as not to create unnecessary fear. However, it is also up to the soldiers themselves how and whether they fill out the form completely or submit it blank. This interview participant, for example, decided not to write a last will in order not to change his own mindset.

“They came up later with the red book, we didn’t have that back then. But I decided that I didn’t want to write any letters because I thought that would change myself if I did it. So I decided, hey, I told everyone what I thought about it, like people that were close to me before leaving and that was it. So there was no letter for me. That was just my decision. And when I went there the next times I decided, hey, it worked for the first time, so no need to do it this time either” [DK7, 43, Major].

The physical and mental preparation for a foreign deployment is of outstanding importance and plays an important role in the Forsvaret. Nevertheless, the *Red Book* can only be understood as a possible tool or a assistance for the mental preparation for the extreme case and it is up to each soldier himself whether and how he wants to use this kind of support.

4.3.3 Realities of War: Experiences of Danish Soldiers

Stress Factors during deployment

Separation from Home

The most frequently cited stress factor for the Danish soldiers surveyed on deployment abroad is absence from family and friends. In particular, soldiers who left children behind at home described the time of deployment abroad as most stressful.

“It was the first Danish team in Helmand, it was the beginning, so nobody know what would come. We had people in Kabul since 2002 so we knew about Taliban and that stuff. I had a daughter in June 2005 so she wasn’t even a year when I left for Afghanistan. So it was the first time going on a foreign mission that I had a family. On the previous missions it was only myself, so that was a lot easier. This time there were a lot of feelings about the family and what was going on back home and on what my wife had to take care of and so on” [DK9, 46, Captain].

For the soldiers deployed, the knowledge that their relatives are concerned about them can also be stressful. This is particularly important if the mission takes a turn for the worse because the situation on the ground has changed.

“They were worried about the time in Afghanistan because in that time we also lost a lot of soldiers. I was team 7 and on team 4 I think we lost four or five Danish soldiers, on team 5 we lost three or four, on team 6 we lost six soldiers, so my family knew that there was a risk that my life was at risk but also my soldiers’ lives were at risk. And in the same time I had two very young girls, so in that way it was also hard for my wife to be left home with the responsibility for the house and the two children” [DK4, 44, Major].

This interview participant describes the absence as emotionally very stressful because he had to leave behind not only a small child but also his wife with a newborn baby. The quotation illustrates that it was emotionally difficult for the soldier to return to the foreign mission when he had to leave behind his second child in infancy.

“In 2004 I had one child and in 2007 when I was back home on leave we had number two and then I took off again when he was five years old. That was a very difficult time. Leaving him as a baby. It was emotionally very hard” [DK7, 43, Major].

The pause mentioned refers to a special feature of the Danish military during foreign deployments. The soldiers are obliged to fly home for a short break during their foreign assignment. With a deployment duration of six months, the break normally corresponds to three weeks. Generally, the mandatory break from overseas deployment is meant to provide relief to soldiers. They should be able to recharge their batteries at home and return to their mission with new motivation. The interviewed Danish soldiers are ambivalent about the break:

“Well, it is good but it also has a backfire. You are on the edge. And then you come home and you have to cool off and that’s probably a good thing. But then when you have to go down again it takes some time to get up in gear and to readjust yourself to the way of life there. And you don’t have this really big enjoyment of going back. So I think you lose a lot of energy in the first days and weeks after that. You just don’t do your job as good as before the break. So that’s the problem with it. But of course it is healthy for the body and the mind to get home. Talk to your family and be with friends, go out and party or do some sports if that’s what you like” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

The time at which the soldiers fly home can also be decisive. As this study participant explains, it makes a difference whether the soldiers take their break early or late during deployment.

“It can get sometimes a bit complex to plan because you want to make sure that you always have a minimum crew left over to carry on the mission and it means that some people either leave very, very early in the mission after maybe one month, some people get it very, very late. And it does affect the way that they sort of mentally approach being in the mission if they know that they are not going home for another four months that can be quite difficult. But at the same time if they have a very early leave then they have a long time afterwards. I think I was quite lucky both times I had a nice leave somewhere in the middle and it was a good way breaking up the six months to manageable sizes” [DK10, 46, Captain].

An additional challenge is the change from deployment to civilian mode. One leader reports challenges that soldiers he knows have faced.

"[...] I think it's the harder challenge for the combat soldiers at least. This switching the mindset. I have heard a number of people giving presentations about this specific challenge. Maybe not so much during leave but definitely when they are finished with their mission. So when they had a very hard combat mission and maybe lost soldiers or had injuries then they become or they toughen up in a way. As one guy explained he had so much authority and power when he was on his mission with his guys during patrol, he was in a way able to determine life and death of other people and then he came back and had no authority what so ever. He explained a situation where they were celebrating that they came back and some of them got drunk and other people from outside came and made trouble and he still felt as if he had the same authority and still was in charge here in Denmark and so he said, go away I am in charge here. And even when the local police came he still carried on and said go away, I am in charge here and he had to realize that it's the police that was in charge in this country and not him. It's just an example but I think it illustrates the point that if you have a high work load or a lot of authority or an important position and it is so removed from the structures of society that you are used to in the country that you come from, then that transition mentally can be very difficult. I didn't find it difficult, I thought it was a nice break from each period" [DK10, 46, Captain].

In the interviews with the Danish soldiers, it appeared that the break during the stay abroad is generally assessed as positive, but that the timing of the break is important. Ideally, the break should be taken in the middle of the deployment, thus dividing it up.

Other potential challenges for mission returnees are further discussed in more detail in the *coming home* section.

Camp Life

The lives and daily routines of soldiers during deployment are extremely different from those in their home countries. The camps in which the international soldiers are stationed inside Afghanistan are designed differently and adapted to the respective conditions. Both the basic facilities and the recreational opportunities at the camps have varied.

"We started in Kandahar where the facilities were very much establish and were in many ways it was very moved from combat operations. There was a lot of different places you can eat, work out, relax, it was in many ways very well established. Then we moved to Camp Bastion what was far more combat oriented, so the facilities were more primitive. We moved from sleeping in buildings to sleeping in tents. From proper beds to hammocks. So for myself and for my unit that was quite a challenge to make that transition especially during the mission. But you quickly adapt. You just make the most of it. So it was relatively primitive in Camp Bastion" [DK10, 46, Captain].

Camp Bastion was one of the largest military camps in southern Afghanistan near the city of Lashkar Gah in Helmand Province and was built by the British Army in 2005. Various nationalities were stationed within Camp Bastion, including the Danish encampment Camp Viking (Global Defence Technology 2015). Although this interview participant described the camp as relatively primitive by comparison, at Camp Bastion had, in addition to an airfield and field hospital, amenities such as gyms, fast food restaurants, stores and cafes. Even though the time frame that soldiers spend within the camp varies depending on the soldier's area of responsibility, life within the camp is the same for all soldiers, regardless of their rank.

“Life itself when you are deployed is really, really easy. Because you wake up in the morning and just go into the canteen. You don't have to speculate about making food or if the fridge is full. You just wake up, take your clothes on, go to the cookhouse and eat. Then you do your work. Some are mechanics, some are at the office, some are driving out logistics and some are going out on patrols but you just have your daily work. And it's been planned forehand what you have to do. So that's really easy. Of course it can be tough and mentally distracting but it's still just work. When you have dirty clothes you just deliver it to the cleaner and the next day you pick it up and its clean. When you have spare time you can watch TV, play computer” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

The soldiers sometimes spend, depending on their function, a large part of their time during the mission within the camp in which they are stationed. Accordingly, it is important that the soldiers have various opportunities for relaxation and distraction within their camps. The amenities in the camps should thus provide temporary breaks from war.

“Of course sometimes you think, well, I could do so many other things. But somehow you like being a soldier and its part of what you are trained for and part of what you love doing. And this danger, I think you just shove it behind your head and don't really think about it and just do your job. Because that is what you need to do when you go out. You don't have time when you are out doing your job to think those kind of thoughts because your focus is on the job. Sometimes in the evening you can think what the fuck am I doing here, but then again there is so much positive distraction around you. You can call home and talk to them, you can go to the café and often there is free coffee and cake and you can relax. Also there is a lot of physical training. There is weight lifting and running and you can do a lot of team sport as well. [...] It is a lot like summer camp just for six months and in Afghanistan. But also you do it with your best friends” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

The soldiers should, as far as possible, feel a piece of home for the duration of their stay. In the previous quote, the soldier describes a place to relax with free coffee and cake, the café *Kuffen*. The researcher team Sørensen and Linnet have studied how

Danish soldiers on overseas deployment in Afghanistan maintain military-social relations through cultural images and idioms. Through interviews with deployed Danish soldiers they found out that *Kuffen* had a special significance within the military camps. They found that “the desire for a homelike and informal ambience at the soldier’s preferred hangout in Danish army camps, *Kuffen*, as well as the pronounced disregard of rank differences and the involvement of soldiers in domestic activities [...] are all particular to the Danish military” (Sørensen and Linnet 2016, 18). They describe the cafe as a “piece of Denmark in Afghanistan” and a central place where *hygge* is practiced. The concept of *hygge*, in particular, serves as a cultural resource through which Danish soldiers feel connected to their home country, even while deployed abroad. The researchers describe *hygge* as an art of being together, feeling good and relaxed, and being cozy, and associate *hygge* as part of Denmark's national character (Sørensen and Linnet 2016, 18).

The military tries to make the time of the deployment as good as possible for the soldiers by providing a break during the deployment, cultural ties to the homeland and other amenities within the military camps. Nevertheless, the soldiers are in a war zone and are exposed to dangers for body and soul, depending on the task area. The Danish soldier’s experiences with threats to life and limb are reported below.

Threats to Life and Limb

A large part of the Danish combat forces were stationed in Helmand Province. In one of the most hotly contested areas of Afghanistan, but also elsewhere in Afghanistan, the Danish soldiers were confronted with the most diverse manifestations of war. One soldier describes:

“We had many incidents. Both, with IEDs and guns, we had rocket attacks against the camp several times, three German comrades were killed in Kunduz by suicide bombers. We had those also a couple of times in Faizabad” [DK7, 43, Major].

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) posed a major challenge. The fact that the bombs are improvised makes them difficult to recognize, because their shape can vary extremely as this soldier points out:

“The biggest danger was when we drove on some landmines and IEDs and of course we didn’t know where they were. It’s like a hidden enemy. Sometimes there are some hints that in this area there might be something. But you can’t be sure. Sometimes they also put indicators out without dropping any IEDs there just to confuse us, so you never know. So that was the biggest problem” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

For the soldiers whose responsibility it was to detect and clear IEDs, this meant a large number of missions, sometimes continuously over a long period of time.

“We met a lot’s of challenges for the improvised road bombs, the IED’s and also small arms fire. Where Taliban fighters tried to hit us. So that was one of the challenges and then there was a very high pressure in order to make a lot of operations. So my men they had a really short time to recover from one mission to another mission. They were out on a patrol Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday I think we counted how many days in a row they were out and sometimes it was up to three weeks in a row that they were out on missions. So trying to keep them going was also a challenge. [DK4, 44, Major].

In addition, the soldiers frequently came under fire during their patrols:

“Yeah, it was small armed fire from long off. So we didn’t really see the enemy, we just heard the snaps over our heads. That happened often. So the security trains just drove to the side and answered the fire [...]”[DK6, 34, Sergeant].

As has already been pointed out, all of the Danish soldiers interviewed stated that they felt well prepared for the mission. Nevertheless, a patrol, especially over a longer period of time, can be mentally very stressful.

“Yes. I was good prepared, both, physically and mentally. [...] But it was tough. Mentally especially. Sometimes when we went out at four in the morning and I just had a bad feeling in the stomach like: something is going wrong today. And then when you got home to the camp like 20 hours later you have just been relieved” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

With regard to the soldiers' handling of the hazardous situations described, this major again referred to the degree of professionalism which, in his opinion, distinguishes the Danish military and its members.

“You don’t feel anything in the situation. You react according to what you have learned. It sounds strange, but it is not that strange. Because you are a professional. Your training will take over. Danish soldiers are generally very well trained and so the patterns of the training will take over. Its more when you come back and consider what happened and what could have happened. Its more your feeling whether it’s a good idea to be in that kind of situation , but when you are in it you react more like a machine. This is what we are trying to achieve when we train people. That they are so professional that they will do the job and later there will be time for considerations” [DK 2, 59, Major]

This participant confirms this and describes that he switches to a professional mode in hazardous situations and also tries not to think too much about how great the danger really is. “I don’t know exactly how you cope with that, I think I looked at it in a professional way and said hey, this is my job. I know the risks and I never really thought so deeply about the risks because I have always just lived with them” [DK7, 43, Major].

The following statement also shows that the soldiers are well aware that they are in life-threatening situations. Although the soldier does feel fear in these situations, he describes it as an occupational risk that he and all the other soldiers have consciously taken.

“[W]hen I was actually in Afghanistan and I was in a traffic jam, I thought, man, if the car next door, if the driver just detonates a bomb, then you're screwed, man. But if that's the way it is, that's the way it is, and luckily I had already talked to my mother about these different issues. And on top of that, I've been dealing with the military for 17 years, it's actually clear to me that it's an occupational hazard and if I fly somewhere, it's just the way it is. I know about it, I know that something can happen here, unfortunately that's the way it is. And whoever says somehow that I can't handle it, then he shouldn't fly at all. I have the advantage that I don't have a girlfriend, I don't have a wife, I don't have children. So if I die, it's a little bit easier this way” [DK8, 52, Lieutenant].

Accordingly, the mindset of the soldiers can also be decisive. This platoon commander describes how he tried to prevent his soldiers from thinking about what could happen whenever they left the camp.

“And I told my guys when we went to Kabul, well, there is a big risk of suicide IEDs, but if we think about that every day when we drive outside, we are going to go crazy within 30 days. So we got to take our precautions, we will take different routes and do whatever, but we are not going to worry about it. Because when it happens, it happens. We can’t protect everything all the time. And I think that’s just a mindset you have to have to get through it. [DK7, 43, Major]”

One particular form of stress during deployment abroad is the experience of being confronted with wounding and death. This will be addressed in the following.

Confronting Wounding and Death

Even if the soldiers interviewed were all aware of the general risk they were exposed to, the situation still changes when something actually happens and comrades are injured or killed.

“Yes, I have not lost any soldiers but one of my soldiers in one of the platoons, he stepped on an IED and lost his right arm and right leg. Then we had one man who was hit by a shot in his hip and we had one with some blast damages in his face. But we got all our man back from my corral. In the battalion we lost three soldiers” [DK4, 44, Major].

Upon request, the major explained how he and his platoon proceed in these situations, how recovery works and why it is important to get back on patrol quickly after such an experience:

“One of my platoon commanders he was very good and already while we had the training in Denmark we rehearsed a scheme of after action review, where we had a certain way of working our patrol, the troop. So after every mission, we gathered all the persons who had been involved in the patrol and then we started to say ok, what was the plan before we went out, what happened, why did it happen and what can we learn from that. So those four bullets we went through every time we had done a task. In the situations with the wounded soldiers, they had been out of the camp. So first I flew out with the helicopter to the field hospital to look after them and after that I took out to the platoon that was out with them and talked with them to see how they felt and then they had one day off after that and then I went with them on a patrol the day after in order to force them to go out again. Of course they were afraid and very aware of the threat but we forced them to go out again because we still had four more moth left and needed to go on with our mission. Then, when they came into the camp we had a psychologist flew into the camp, so all of the soldiers from that platoon had a psychologist” [DK4, 44, Major].

The experience also leaves its mark on some of the soldiers. Some of the interviewees were struggling to cope with the aftermath of their sometimes traumatic experiences. Two Danish superiors, who were responsible for selecting soldiers for deployment to Afghanistan, described the criteria they use to select their soldiers and why post-traumatic stress disorder can nevertheless affect anyone.

“There are not many suffering from PTSD. I think people are obviously different. Whatever foundation they have is different. What we can do in our training is to put on that foundation. Somebody might be very resilient to any kind of experience like that and someone might not be. I think its accumulative as well. I think there can be a certain amount of pressure put on you and then you cannot take anymore. I don't believe that you can learn how to deal with being in paralyzing or catastrophic situations. I think it's like a jar, you can fill it up and then there is not more space to work with. But I think that jar has a different size from person to person. So I don't think you can train people to be in crazy situations without it having some kind of effect. But of course we try to give people as much of learning by dealing professional with stuff in order to carry them to the situation [...]. And another thing is, no situation is the same. People might have been in minor engagement and people have maybe experienced something very traumatizing, so it's very hard to assess what the effect is of seeing someone being killed, seeing someone being burned or being shot at or being close to an explosion. That's very difficult to say” [DK 2, 59, Major].

Even if post-traumatic stress disorder cannot be predicted, the superiors' gut feeling also plays a role in the selection of soldiers for overseas deployment.

“I have always taking my precautions and I have trained my men or my team as good as possible. I have a saying which I always use: If you are in doubt you are not in doubt. I mean if you are doubting if this is good or bad, then you are not in doubt because then it's not good, than its bad. And by that I mean, if I had to pick a person to come with me to Afghanistan and I was in doubt if he was good enough, if he can handle that, then I wouldn't take him. So if I was in doubt I said no, if I was not in doubt, no problem. If I was in doubt I would say no because then there is no doubt” [DK7, 43, Major].

Despite a high level of training and professionalism, careful pre-selection of soldiers, and assessments by superiors, this major concludes, PTSD can affect any soldier.

“I think it can happen just to everybody. And I think it can happen to everybody because everybody has a breaking point. And it's a matter of hitting that breaking point. [...] And you can't say: because it didn't happen this time it won't happen the next ten times. It can happen the next time, or the time after that or it may never happen” [DK7, 43, Major].

According to the assessment of the major, who is also responsible for selecting soldiers for deployment, any soldier can be affected by post-traumatic stress disorder. Extreme experiences such as those described above can, but do not have to, trigger trauma. In the following, the Danish veteran care system and trauma in connection with foreign deployments will be discussed in more detail.

Trauma

If a Danish soldier suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder after a deployment, the ministry of defense has established the Veteran Centre as part of its veteran policy, which provides assistance to soldiers in the context of veteran efforts. The Danish Veteran Centre is part of the Danish Ministry of Defense and advocates for the needs of all Danish veterans and their families and is the corporate body that implements Denmark's veteran policy. The center was established in 2011 and is responsible for the coordination and development of the veteran effort in the public sector in Denmark. It aligns its efforts in four core areas: the recognition effort, the prevention effort, the support and treatment effort and the employment effort (The Danish Ministry of Defence 2016, 5).

Danish policy defines a veteran as “a person, who – as an individual or as part of a unit has been deployed in at least one international operation. The person may still be employed in the military but may also have left the military for a civilian life, job, and/or education” (Danish Government 2010, 5). With this broad definition of veterans, many people are entitled to assistance, both when they remain in the military and when they leave the military. The Danish Ministry of Defense underlines this responsibility with its credo “Once a veteran, always a veteran” and states further:

“Veterans have been deployed to hot spots in the world to protect the lives and values we believe in. We must treasure the courage of those deployed and their will to react. Their efforts and their special competences must be recognized and respected. As an employer, the authorities of the Ministry of Defence bear a particular responsibility for the recognition of veterans and their relatives. This responsibility exceeds current employment” (The Danish Ministry of Defence 2016, 6).

The veterans' care system in Denmark has been steadily expanded and developed in recent years, as this soldier reports:

“It is doing a very, very good job. But that took a long time. Because we have not been actually engaged in real combats since before the Second World War. So when we went to the Balkans, Danish units and missions were actually working in a framework of the United Nations and many of these units could not even be armed. And what happened in ex-Yugoslavia, we had some soldiers there with units where of course they could work as a unit but they were not prepared for all the psychological side effects and all the effects with the families. So at that time we started to build up a system that supported families and soldiers. So some of the very bad cases we had, where soldiers had been shelled without being able to withdraw, soldiers being witnesses in killings without being able to react, some of these soldiers were in a very bad state after they came back. This was the first time after the Second World War that we came in that situation and most of the soldiers were not prepared for that, neither was the army. So since ex-Yugoslavia, then we participated in Iraq, it became better, because we build constructions that could support the soldiers. Then came Afghanistan and now we have a whole system in place and the Veteran Centre has all the capacities. [...] A lot of experience that has been earned in a very hard way. From situations where it didn't work at all to now where we have the whole mechanism in place and we don't have that much casualties. [...] So even we have been fighting very hard in Afghanistan and lost a lot of soldiers, some of them having amputated limbs and all that, we hardly have anyone in that category living off the grid. That shows that the staff we have been putting together works” [DK 2, 59, Major].

The next statement also addresses the learning process in the Danish veterans approach that has taken place in recent years. The efforts for public recognition are seen as important and correct especially with regard to wounded soldiers.

“Yes, I would say in the context of this Afghanistan mission we have also had the first real casualties. And pretty quickly, I would say, they thought about it in Denmark and agreed on

this veterans policy. And probably over the years, after the Yugoslavia mission, they realized that we didn't do it right back then and that they wanted to draw the consequences. And then the veterans' policy was developed and it was of course very positive that when you come back from the war and you are no longer healthy, people still assessed it positively and showed respect for it" [DK8, 52, Lieutenant].

Asked if this soldier considered Danish veterans' care to be adequate he states:

"I would say so, yes. Compared to other armies, I would say we are in place. Even compared to the U.S. - I met a lot of American veterans having very miserable lives. They might get more public attention, but the care system is not necessarily better. We are a small army and have a lot of resources, so I think we are doing well" [DK 2, 59, Major].

Without suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, the process of homecoming can still be challenging for deployed soldiers. The following section will shed light on this.

4.4 Coming Home

The following section examines the homecoming experience of the Danish soldiers. It considers how they experienced the homeland reception and the difficulties they were confronted with after their return.

4.4.1 Leaving Afghanistan Behind?

The feelings of the Danish soldiers on their return from Afghanistan were manifold. This interview participant describes thinking about the people and things he left behind in Afghanistan and that a part of himself is left behind as well.

"I think about the things that I have left in Afghanistan. I have worked very filthy with Afghans that I come to know on a fairly profound level. And I had a role there and I generated a certain kind of value. Of course you become a slightly different person and in a way that person is also left out there, but just the fact that I have left a lot of colleagues and friends in a country still at war and I have got no idea and I will never know what will happen to them. I worked together with a coronel and the thing almost dearest to his heart apart from his children was his apparently quite lovely little garden, that he described to me in great detail. And I would have loved to see that garden. I don't know how his garden is doing and I will never know. So that's left in Afghanistan" [DK3, 32, Captain].

In contrast to the previous statement, this soldier succeeded very well in completing the mission.

“I was relieved. I could see on my pre-assessors that it was hard for them to get rid of the mission after coming back to Denmark. They contacted me many times and in fact that scared me a lot. Because I didn't know, will I be a kind of lunatic when I am coming back? So I made some thoughts about that. But the last day in my camp when I left it, we were supposed to go into the Headquarter for two days and then fly directly to Denmark. I could feel when I was sitting in my helicopter leaving camp that now I am closing the book. My mission is now over. Now I cannot influence anything. And in fact I had that feeling since” [DK1, 50, Major].

This soldier describes his relief at having brought all the soldiers under his command home safely. However, he also describes his doubts about whether he, as company commander, could adequately provide aftercare for his troops.

“It felt very good. Because none of my men died, that was a relieve. Sometimes I am thinking about how I was taking care of the soldiers afterwards, because two months after we went home I got a new function where I should educate at the officers academy. So I left the company and in that way I maybe thought that it was a bit fast that I left the company. Afterwards I followed some of the soldiers on Facebook and I have seen when they were having a hard time or they got PTSD so in that way I sometimes think that I as a company commander could I have done something more for those soldier who were having a hard time afterwards” [DK4, 44, Major].

For some of the soldiers, as the previous quote indicated, completing their mission and returning to their daily lives in Denmark was a challenge, and not all experienced their return as a simple trip home. Several of the Danish soldiers interviewed described a form of mental exhaustion after their return home.

“Especially the second time I was very exhausted. Not physically but mentally. You have long working days and you work seven days a week but I think it was more the pressure you are on. Because there was a very high risks being in Helmand at that time. I think everybody coming home was tired for a long time. I cannot remember how long but my wife told me that it took me a very long time to recover from that. I was just mentally so exhausted. I am pretty sure that the guys who have been out there in the green zone, that it was even worse for them. So for the first mission I cannot recall that being an issue. Maybe a little, but nothing compared to that. Even though I was out, but it was not as bad at that time in Helmand” [DK9, 46, Captain]

This soldier also describes how exhausted he was and although the mission was morally meaningful for him, he longed for his home:

“I was tired. Really, really tired, especially in the mind. So the body was a little exhausted but the mind was like oh my god. I just wanted to go home. Of course you know that these things matter. It is important for us to go down there. Here in Denmark we have a nice community.

We have a nice life. We don't have all this threat. They have to live with that threat 24/7 down there. And women are getting undermined and there are a lot of issues. And if we can help changing that then it's worth it. Of course it's tough. But when I am back in Denmark for a long time I want to go there again because in the camp it's such an easy life and good extra money. So it really depends on the mood" [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

At the same time, the previous quote describes a supposed dichotomy shared by many of the interview participants. Although soldiers deployed live under extreme conditions, the majority of the soldiers interviewed would go on a foreign mission again:

"Of course some don't understand what you were doing down there or they can't understand that you say you would go abroad again. But me personally, if I could go again tomorrow- give me 24 hours to take care of all those things at home and then I am off. I think most of us would be ready to within 24-48 hours. [...] I would go anytime if I had the chance. It's a little thing in the back of your neck, it's like "oh you want to go". But there are no missions for a long time, so. That's just part of it" [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

Junger sees one of the reasons for this in the experience of living in such a close-knit community on a foreign mission, which has no equivalent in civilian life at home. According to him, any soldier returning from deployment would find himself "back into a society where most people work outside the home, children are educated by strangers, families are isolated from wider communities, and personal gain almost completely eclipses collective good" (Junger 2016). Sørensen also notes that the intensive period of deployment with its preparation and follow-up, as well as the experiences during the foreign deployment, constitute a special bond between the soldiers themselves and the soldiers and the military institution: "Month of intensive training followed by deployment, life in a camp environment saturated with military culture, and an everyday constituted by the realities of war generate an embodied sense of being at home in the military that does not easily dissolve" (Sørensen 2015, 231). For some of the soldiers interviewed, this made their return and reintegration into Danish society and everyday life difficult.

4.4.2 Lonely in the Crowd

For a number of Danish study participants, not only the foreign assignment in itself was a challenge. The process of coming home likewise appeared to be more difficult than expected for some of the soldiers.

“And coming back home was something I was not prepared for. I often thing back to one of the military psychologists who told me, you must be aware that there can be a disconnect between you and your loved ones. And when you are exited and when you are down. Because when you are deployed, its exiting for you, but all your loved ones are down about it. And when you come home, your loved ones are excited about it but you might experience it as somewhat of a down. And I certainly did. And just having lived and breathed army for a while, when I came home I signed up for everything that was possible to sign up for. I just couldn't imagine taking off the uniform and settling down, so I worked double the time as before. It was a hard transition for me” [DK3, 32, Captain].

The transition from deployment to everyday life at home is a challenge for many soldiers. They often try to compensate for the transition period by working. The next interview participant also describes that he was holding on to work after returning home.

“For the first mission I remember having sort of like a period where I thought that my need to be very active work wise, being up, that sort of level going on lasted for quite a few month because I have just getting used to it. It took a while for that to go away” [DK10, 46, Captain].

Difficulties often become apparent when the soldiers talk about their experiences abroad in a civilian setting. Many returnees report that they do not feel understood by people in their civilian environment because they cannot share their experiences. This can lead to a lack of understanding among family and friends.

“You get home with scars on your soul. And people in the civilian life can't comprehend the stories from what you have seen. You have some friends, you can tell them the story maybe twice. Then they would say, ok, get over it, get on to life. You maybe have the family, you can tell them the story five to ten times, then they say, ok, get on. But you have your comrades and you can speak to them and tell them the story as many times as you want because they have been there. Or in some similar experiences” [DK5, 44, Corporal].

In their civilian environment, soldiers must contend with “considerations about what and how much to tell, what to conceal and what to reveal, whom to tell, when and how” (Sørensen 2015, 232). This may result in some of the soldiers feeling a gap between the civilian and the military after the deployment.

“When you then go back home having been deployed, if not before, certainly than there is a scission between army personnel, most of whom will have deployed at some point, and the civilian population. So I am not sure that is the origin, but it is certainly an extreme example of where it could originate from. Then we could surround that with layers of maybe it comes with the willingness of being deployed, maybe that's enough to create that separation, that people choose to be part of the army where you support an organization meant to extent violence against someone. Maybe that's enough to create that scission. But I find certainly on operations it becomes the most evident” [DK3, 32, Captain].

Soldiers describe that they can share their thoughts about their missions best with other soldiers, because they can relate to what they have experienced. Even if family members cannot usually share the experience, it can be helpful if relatives familiarize themselves as far as possible with the substance of the foreign assignment.

“We talked a lot about it and my mom, she read a lot of books from former soldiers who had been in Afghanistan. So she was into the whole picture of what was going on down there and what was the assignments and so on. So it was also a lot easier to talk to her about things, both, during the mission but also when we came home. When I said camp xy she knew where it was and what I meant when I said we are going on logtrain or IED, she knew that it was improvised explosive device and a logistic train to take out supplies and so it was a lot easier to talk to her about these things, not having to explain the expressions and the daily talk” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

Making oneself understood by others in the respective environment preoccupies many of the soldiers interviewed after their return home. The main concern is the desire to reintegrate into civilian society, as Sørensen explains: “While some veterans live in social isolation with little need for storytelling, the majority attempt to reintegrate themselves into civilian society, making themselves visible and in some ways recognizable if not understandable to others” (Sørensen 2015, 232). According to her, soldiers returning from overseas deployment must therefore address how they understand their new veteran identity and seek points of self-identification.

Thus, soldiers' homecoming is not complete when the plane lands. Rather, coming home after a war deployment must be understood as a process that is highly individual, depending on the soldier's personality and experiences. Sørensen elaborates: “Rather than being a rite de passage, homecoming events mark the beginning of an extended homecoming process with ongoing struggles for veterans to find themselves and their place in the civilian social world” (Sørensen 2015, 245). A particular difficulty in this process is coming to terms with one's own identity. Many of the soldiers describe how the deployment changed their personalities.

“I think I have been treated differently because I was different. It had an impact on my personality, I would say that. I was not treated differently because I was now a person who has been deployed, they just treated me differently because I changed a bit. Suddenly it's not important what you are going to eat or what you are going to wear. At least for a while your perspective changes a lot for what is important and what's worth thinking about. Of course also tiny things like how you react to loud sounds, your behavior just changed and only slowly go back to not normal, but a middle ground. People change all the time, it's just a more extreme exposure” [DK3, 32, Captain].

Some of the interview participants described how their focus has changed both in terms of valuing their home and in measuring the importance and unimportance of everyday matters. Many have described that they appreciated the prosperity and life at home in Denmark more after their deployment.

“Somehow you will change. In some ways. I was under a high pressure so sometimes I was not thinking rational but I got very emotional. For instance I suddenly started to believe or hoped for my dead grandmother to take care of me. Those kind of things. And afterwards when I came back it was different. You have seen some very poor people so things came more into perspective and big problems are not that big any more. When my wife asked what we should have for dinner, I really don't care. Because two weeks ago I was worried to bring all my men back alive. I also try to teach my kids to be thankful for what we have here in Denmark” [DK4, 44, Major].

Not only in private life, but also in professional life, this change of focus can cause irritation in the first period after the deployment.

“I think quite fast I became a normal father and husband. Sometimes it was difficult in the perspective of the job. Because before it was a matter of life and death and now I was a teacher at the officers academy. And I had some talks with the students about how it's not ok to come too late to the class. Or I had some paperwork to do and an old major had some corrections and remarks and I thought that was just ridiculous. Now somebody corrected my writing and before I had responsibility for 130 men in Afghanistan. So that was a bit of a challenge” [DK4, 44, Major].

Most of the Danish soldiers interviewed reported that their appreciation of their lives in Denmark has increased, especially in light of the humanitarian grievances that the soldiers experienced in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, it is important that the soldiers return to a certain normality during their homecoming and reintegrate into civilian life in their home country.

“[W]hen you come home from a hard mission like ISAF you change. We talk a lot about that a lot because we have the veterans with PTSD. So when you come home you need to be Danish again. So you need to be able to complain again about traffic and being in the line in the supermarket even if there are only three people ahead of you or the weather and so on. Then you are Danish again. We like to complain about everything. But if you have been down there, then you don't complain about anything anymore because you have seen people who really suffer. That takes some time. They say, you are ok, when you start to become Danish again” [DK9, 46, Captain].

The next section examines the experience of Danish soldiers at reception and landing.

4.4.3 Reception and Landing

As has been shown, the transition from deployment abroad to everyday life at home can be challenging for the soldiers.

Upon arrival in Denmark, there are reintegration programs set up by the military for the soldiers to participate in. These include psychological aftercare and group activities with the troops with whom the soldiers were deployed. In addition to the formalities to be fulfilled, the reintegration phase is intended to give the soldiers as smooth an introduction as possible to their everyday life at home in Denmark.

“I can’t remember the exact program but there is a fixed program [...] where you have different activities you take part in. Practical things like handing back your equipment, then there is some briefings from social workers and psychologists and organizations who support veterans, as well as from defense depending of which unit you are from. And then there is also a certain degree of or quite a lot of social activities with your unit sort of slowly keep hold to each other now that you are not in your mission any more that you still talk to each other and talk about your experiences. And then it’s also quite loosely structured, you only have half days and that goes over into days off” [DK10, 46, Captain].

The duration and intensity of the program also depends on how long the soldiers had been in the military before their deployment, as this soldier describes.

“Just after we came home we got as far as I remember we had some duty off, some holiday and then we met again for a four weeks reintegration program. Because we were professional soldiers we didn’t have such a long reintegration program as our neighboring company, they were young soldiers who only had 12 month of soldiering before going to Afghanistan. They had a three month reintegration program. [...] I think at that time it was sufficient. We had some talks with the psychologists, also in group and alone and we had a final small reintegration tour where we had some adventure like a mountain bike tour and swimming and climbing and also drinking some beers” [DK4, 44, Major].

In addition to reintegration measures, Denmark introduced a special day in 2009 to publicly welcome Danish soldiers who have been deployed abroad.

Flagdag

One cornerstone of the Danish veteran effort is *Flagdag*, the official soldiers’ memorial day (The Danish Ministry of Defence 2016, 7). *Flagdag* was introduced in Denmark in 2009 and since then has always been celebrated on the 5th of September. The purpose

of the day is to commemorate soldiers who have died in operations abroad and to celebrate soldiers who have returned from deployment.

The initiative for the soldiers' memorial day was given by the veteran Kim Thygesen, who served in Afghanistan himself. Thygesen, inspired by British and American memorial services, had repeatedly referred to Denmark's obligation to pay tribute to soldiers sent on foreign missions. The initiative met with great approval, both within Danish politics and by the public. As Kaare Dahl Martinsen, professor at the Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies, notes "having an official celebration of the troops was very much consistent with official policy. Moreover, [...] many Danes had wanted some way to express their support for the troops" (Dahl Martinsen 2016, 93). General Flemming Lentfer, the Chief of Forsvaret, emphasizes the importance of the day:

"Flag Day is an important recognition of those who were deployed for Denmark. We fly the flag for those who came home safely, for those whose lives were changed by their deployments and for those who never came home. Flag Day is also a recognition of the relatives who always stand behind those deployed. I am proud of all those who always stand up for Denmark, even when it is not without risk" (Forsvaret 2022).

Flagdag consists of a central event in Copenhagen and a number of local events throughout the Kingdom. The festive program consists of a wreath-laying ceremony at the monument in Kastellet, a memorial service for Denmark's fallen in Holmen's Church and a parade for the annual deployed soldiers at Christiansborg Square who are also awarded medals. For the former soldiers, Flag Day is also a day to meet those with whom they were deployed. The program is officially attended by members of the royal family, high-ranking military officers and politicians such as the Prime Minister, the minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence (Christensen 2015, 354).

Linné and Sørensen described a memorial service for fallen Afghan soldiers that took place at Holmen's Church in Copenhagen in 2010. In addition to the official representatives, the relatives of the victims also attended the ceremony, which was also broadcasted live on television. After the names of the fallen soldiers of the past year were read aloud, the anthem *Altid frejdig når du går* (Always cheerful when you go) from 1867 was sung. The hymn is today regarded as being a part of Danish cultural heritage and has a special value for Danish soldiers. It is often sung at ramp ceremonies before sending off a fallen soldier back to Denmark (Sørensen and Linné 2016, 13). The last verse reads:

Kaemp for alt hvad du har kaert, (Fight for everything you hold dear)
Dø, om så det gaelder! (die, if necessary!)
Da er livet ej så svaert, (Then life is not as difficult)
Døden ikke heller. (death is not either.)

Although the hymn was written in the spirit of the Danish defeat of 1864, it became relevant anew due to the fallen Danish soldiers in the Afghanistan mission. According to Linnet and Sørensen, the special significance of the lyrics are that “In this moment, the soldier’s death were honored as sacrifices, and sorrow and grief were transformed into a sense of national unity, purpose and determination, transgressing both time and space” (Sørensen and Linnet 2016, 13).

The heart of Flagdag are the public parades, where soldiers in uniform parade through the towns, accompanied by spectators with flags. This Danish soldier describes how he experienced Flag Day for the first time and how surprised he was by the scale and magnitude of the event.

“Yes, it was really great. Ok, I saw my team there, but it was only on the parade. But it was a good day. In fact I was so surprised for my family how huge the day was. They heard in the radio in the morning and they saw it in the television and then my wife contacted me during the flag day in Copenhagen and she said if I knew it was so big I would have gotten a day of and participate along with you. It was really good” [DK1, 50, Major].

One soldier describes the event and explains why he believes the initiation of the day was an important step in Denmark’s veteran policy:

“[W]e have on the 5th of September Flag Day in Denmark. That is for veterans. It started pretty much in Copenhagen, you walk through the streets of Copenhagen. Now you will see that everywhere in Denmark, they have similar things. So when you have a garrison in Denmark, they walk from the main house inside the city. So that’s the day where you celebrate that. [...] That’s also where you will meet the guys again who have been in a mission with you. So it’s a very nice day as well. There are lots of speeches and I think in Copenhagen there is the royal family as well and you get a medal for being abroad. [...] Its really important because it’s with Denmark’s officials and that’s their way of valuing and honoring what we were doing. I think also the British they are even better in those stuff but we in Denmark are getting to that slowly” [DK9, 46, Captain].

Even before the soldiers’ memorial day was established, there were parades and public honors of soldiers in cities, as this soldier reports.

“Well of course we have a special welcome every year, we have, I think in 2011 they started it, we have this annual soldiers day on the 5th of September. But also before that there was always a parade in Copenhagen for the soldiers coming home where the governors thank us for our commitment. It was outside Christiansborg. And now they have the Flagdag where in every city the garrisons have speeches and stuff” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

This participant also rates the day as important in terms of recognition for veterans, but still sees room for improvement in direct comparison to the handling of veterans in other countries.

“Yes on 5th of September we have the national flag day and this was a political initiative designed to increase recognition of the contribution of soldiers. And it helped to a certain extent. All the municipalities in Denmark now, or at least the vast majority now marked the day by having some sort of an event by inviting the veterans from their actual area to take part so there is an understanding that this is important and it is an official holiday or a day which is remembered. But I still find that I don’t really experience other than that anyone recognizing my contribution. That’s also based on my knowledge of what happens for example in America or the United Kingdom that you to a higher degree may experience people coming up to you when you are wearing your uniform saying that you for your service” [DK10, 46, Captain].

This interviewee confirms that he finds it important to publicly recognize the work of soldiers deployed abroad. However, he criticizes the design of the day, which he finds rather artificial. For him, the day is more a political decision than a genuine recognition of the Danish population towards its soldiers.

“For me personally it does not play a big role, to the point where I have not actually attended a Flag Day yet. Because I think celebrations like that, memorial days or anything of that sort is great if it is organic. If it comes from at least a significant sub set of the population. But I think this was a political move more than any public wish to recognize soldiers. I just think it comes a bit close around itself, it’s all soldiers and soldiers families, it’s an own micro verse. So I don’t think it’s a living thing. It’s probably world-something day today and I just don’t know. Of course I would like more recognition. Just the fact that you have ultimately chosen a carrier part where you are willing to risk your life in the service of your country and your countrymen, yes I think this is worth recognition. Probably not to the U.S. reverence level but it is worth a recognition. I am just not sure if this is the right way of creating values. I am an expert on cultures, I respect them a lot whether its ethnical culture, national culture, corporate culture. But it takes ages to grow, it can’t be done with one set day. I mean it means more for me that the queen mentions serving personnel in each and every speech on new year’s eve, because she has done that forever. Its consistent and not driven by political objectives” [DK3, 32, Captain].

Some of the interview participants emphasized that the day is not that important to them personally. Nevertheless, they knew of many soldiers for whom public recognition was important.

“It was not really that important to me, but I think it is quite important to many others. Maybe the sergeants. [...] It could be [bond to the rank]. It’s only my opinion. I could see on Facebook all my colleagues had the flag in their profile. I think the thing is that we should not make too big fuzz about it. I think the armed forces in Denmark should consider that this is the top level. Do not expand too much” [DK1, 50, Major].

This captain also emphasizes that public recognition is generally important, but that the top level has been reached on the political side with the initiation of the day. At the same time, he also suspects a connection between the desire for recognition and the rank of a soldier.

“Yes, because I know that for many soldiers it is important. It do need that. I do think that it is something that should be recognized, something that should be made more of an effort of. Typically some of the veterans that we meet [in the Veteran Centre], who are extremely incensed of the government is because they are not recognized enough. It’s a broad complaint. They don’t really point at anyone, level of institution or person or organization but they just say, we are not recognized enough. And then if you ask but who do you want to recognize you? The political level has done what they think they can with the flag flying day but I think that there are a lot of soldiers who would like to be recognized more certainly. [...] I can’t be certain, but I find to a certain extent the lower ranks to have this idea. Officers and especially higher ranked officers, I don’t think they need that recognition in the same way. Maybe because they get this from their position anyway. Because you are in a position of power and then you are automatically given a certain degree of recognition either from your organization or from people around you. You have a different network. Your average private or low ranked sergeant may feel to certain extent overlooked. And may want the recognition to a higher degree. I don’t know for certain but I feel that this is the case” [DK10, 46, Captain].

Others of the soldiers interviewed emphasize that they have chosen the profession of soldiering for themselves and do not need any special recognition to perform it.

“I have never gone because I don’t feel the need for someone to celebrate that I have done my job basically. I mean if you ask a bus driver to drive a bus that’s his job. He has chosen this job and that’s what he does. So I don’t need special recognition. [...] Personally I think it’s a great idea, its perfect that people join and do the march and feel the pride and are enthusiastic about it, that’s great. More power to them. But personally I just don’t need the attention. And I think that’s just a personal thing, that’s just how I am. I would rather just stand on the side and be happy that everyone is happy. I don’t need special recognition” [DK7, 43, Major].

This soldier finds the recognition with the *Flagdag* sufficient taking into account that he has consciously chosen this profession. In this context he also recalls the sacrifices that the soldier families bear who must share the professional decision.

“Yes, I think in order to say good job it is important that we have those days. To honor and value our work. [That’s enough for the public valuation] because you should not forget that I

chose my job myself. So I don't need more honor than we are having. Because if I don't like to be here, I could quit. It's good that we are having this, especially after a deployment, but it's enough. I don't need that every day. And you should not forget about the families and their sacrifices. We should thank them as well. I knew when I was safe in the camp but my wife she was always worried" [DK4, 44, Major].

The hardships faced by the families of deployed soldiers have already been discussed in the being there section. The greatest fear in this context is that the soldier will be harmed or killed while deployed abroad. If this worst-case scenario occurs, the families of the victims will be honored separately during the soldiers' memorial day. Medals that are normally awarded to soldiers who have returned from a foreign deployment that year, are presented to the families of the fallen in a special ceremony. Soldiers wounded in action are also honored separately. This form of recognition is an important part of Danish society, according to this participant:

"The soldiers either get their medal in the mission or at the ceremony. There are medals for the ones who fell in the war, then the parents are receiving those in the big ceremonies. Or the wounded ones, they also get a medal presented in a special ceremony. And that's fine and that is how it should be. I think that it is an important part of our society that the military is recognized. I mean the society doesn't have a bad opinion of us either way but it's good that we have these ceremonies in honor of our service" [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

Although the mission in Afghanistan was very far removed from the reality of most Danes, the soldiers' memorial day made the returning soldiers visible to the masses and thus no longer anonymous. The following quote illustrates how important the development in Danish veteran policy is perceived by the soldier interviewed.

"I think the 5th of September is one of the things which have done a lot for the soldiers in the sense of pride. I think it's about time that there is recognition also towards veterans. I mean that has been a long way. There has been a lot of people suffering for many years and not being able to find help anywhere and I think that this is a good thing that we are doing it" [DK7, 43, Major].

The introduction of Flagdag is not only a pillar of the Danish veteran care system, but also contributes to the general visibility of soldiers and veterans in Danish society. The day was introduced, as described above, in the wake of soldiers returning home from overseas deployment in Afghanistan. The following section examines how Danish soldiers experienced the public evaluation of the Afghanistan mission.

4.4.4 Public Recognition of Mission

The Afghanistan mission was widely recognized from the outset. In the political arena, the decision to deploy Danish soldiers was made by consensus, which led to only minimal public debate and was rather supported and endorsed by the Danish population (Dahl Martinsen 2016, 3). A Danish lieutenant describes how he perceived the early days of the Afghanistan mission in Denmark. He describes a wave of patriotism that swept through Denmark in the wake of the events of 9/11 and created a great deal of support among the Danish population for the Afghanistan mission.

“I have to say, in the context of this Afghanistan mission, the Danes became very, very patriotic. In my opinion, the Afghanistan mission was a mistake, a huge mistake. But a lot of people thought, something happened in New York, so we'll march into Afghanistan, and then it'll all be okay again. At that time, I was in my mid-30s or so, and I saw that young people of 22 or something went to Afghanistan and argued: yes, we don't want to experience something like that in Denmark. [...] And all of a sudden the general opinion was, okay, we're going to Afghanistan, and we're thus rid of the terrorists. And as a result, the Danes became very patriotic and also viewed the military very positively and were of the opinion that we would thus simply eradicate all terrorism. But somehow that was not possible“ [DK8, 52, Lieutenant].

This soldier describes how it was difficult for many people in Denmark to make a connection between what was happening in Afghanistan, international terrorism and the Danish deployment. Especially in view of the fierce fighting, the sense and purpose of the mission was difficult to convey.

“I think the mission and the purpose for the Danish military at this moment is not visible for the civilians because armed forces are supposed to defend own borders. How come they are now going abroad to long distance countries and make some missions there? It is hard for the normal population to understand the need for a force to be there. They understand if we defend our territory, it is much easier. [...] The politicians have a task as well to identify the purpose for each mission we are supposed to be a part of. We had this 9/11 thing in the U.S. and afterwards we participated in the war in Afghanistan. In a very hard war. It was quite difficult for the Danish population to understand the link between terror in the U.S. and the Danish contribution to the war in Afghanistan” [DK1, 50, Major].

Still, public recognition of the work of soldiers on missions is often tied to the course of the deployment itself, and distinguishing between the two is difficult for the general public. Sørensen notes that “the social status of the veteran is rarely immune to public opinions about the legitimacy, meaningfulness, achievements, and human costs of particular wars” (Sørensen 2015, 233). The following statement describes how, in the soldier's opinion, the mission was publicly judged at the end by how many fallen

soldiers Denmark had to mourn and not by what was achieved during the mission. According to him, media portrayal also has an influence on public opinion.

“It got worse at the end because it all mounded up in: ooh we lost 40 men, and ooh we lost 45 men now. It was like, the success of the mission was taken out in “how many lives did we lose?” and not in “what did we accomplish, what did we do, what did we change” or “what did we do for the public down there” but it was measured in how many deaths we had down there. I think for a lot of people it just went too far in the number of losses. And a problem is also the way that the media had used it. One thing is, we lost a soldier. He died in a cause of changing the world and helping a lot of people. But our tabloids they use it in all kinds of way. So the media is not always a good thing in this aspect. So I think in the end it was just too much and maybe this was also why the politicians brought the mission to an end” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

This aspect is differentiated by the following interview participant by describing that, in his opinion, the Danish population might have questioned the mission itself, but not the work of the military. He feels that the political legitimization of the mission supported the use of the military itself and confirmed the soldiers in their work.

“Some people would draw a question mark on what we are doing. Like: Why do you go to Afghanistan, why do you go to Iraq. But it’s not for us to decide, it’s the politicians. But they would ask: Why are you doing it, as a person? But I am a tool for the Danish government to do that. Of course I could have said no. But if I wouldn’t do it, then they would put somebody else in my place to do it. They ask things like that but I think in general its recognized that somebody needs to do it. [...] I think the people of Denmark are pretty much, even though they might disagree with the government and so on, I think when it comes to military matters, when they decide us to go to Afghanistan, almost all parties within the Folketinget, they said yes to that. Maybe one of the left wings and one of the right wings said no, but the rest of them would say yes. [...] I think that’s a part of the Danish way to think. When all the parties said yes, its ok. I am not sure if this will be the same in the future, because after Iraq and Afghanistan, people would question. Why are we doing that? And I don’t think it’s only because of the losses – of course they were high in Afghanistan and it also costs a lot of money. But I think it’s more that we didn’t succeed, did we? The Taliban are still there, now they call ISIS, so it would change all the time. But I think in Denmark people have the trust when it comes to military matters in the government and in the broad majority” [DK9, 46, Captain]

The "Danish way to think" and the "trust when it comes to military matters" seem to have been decisive for the Danish population's approval of the mission, at least in the first decade of the Afghanistan mission. Jakobsen and Ringsmose refer to the "secret Danish recipe" when they state that the Danes had the highest population support for the ISAF mission of all troop-contributing countries, despite the highest per capita losses and at the same time the highest losses since the Second World War (P. Jakobsen and Ringsmose 2015, 138). Especially in the initial phase of the Danish participation in the mission in Afghanistan, politicians and the military invested

considerable energy in building an image of “good war” (Rasmussen 2011), and have focused their reporting primarily on positive achievements, such as the establishment of girls' schools in Afghanistan (Sørensen 2015, 233). This can also be seen as a strategy to generate a high level of support for the mission from the Danish population. At least since the Vietnam War, “winning the hearts and minds” has become a credo of modern psychological warfare. The term originally aimed at achieving a military victory through the support of the civilian population of the country in which the war was fought, rather than through the use of armed force. However, today it is at least as important to win the hearts and minds of the home audience whose nation is sending soldiers into international conflicts (Sluka 2010). The former Danish Minister of Defense Søren Gade even stated that “it is easier to win a war than popular support” (Ostrynski 2008). This soldier also refers to this when he describes that the Danish population’s benevolent interest in the military actually increased with the Afghanistan deployment:

„So I think in Denmark it was always something positive. It was positive if you were in the military. It was completely okay, it was not like in Germany in the 70s or 80s and partly still, that some people are just of the opinion that soldiers are murderers. [...] So it was always positive in Denmark. But then it got a bit more attention since the Afghanistan mission. So all of a sudden the attention towards the Danish military had increased drastically. And it was seen even better that you were in the military“ [DK8, 52, Lieutenant].

Nevertheless, the assessment of the mission may differ between those who receive their information from television in Danish living rooms and those who have actively fought on the ground. The next section therefore considers the evaluation of the soldiers themselves.

4.4.5 Evaluation of Mission

The Danish interview participants were asked to give a personal assessment of the Afghanistan mission. The answers were very mixed. This soldier distinguished between a strategic and a Christian approach in his answer

“It’s not on me to evaluate the NATO’s engagement or the Danish role in it. But personally, it depends on your level of analyses and perspective. And also on your own beliefs. If you say , I have been there, I have helped some individuals and I have done something good in the

world and this will spread - like Christian approach, that's rooted in your values. If you ask the strategic approach, which is my world, that's a political statement which I am not supposed to give. Personally, of course we helped people, showed them how to run a society without corruption, building institutions, how they can support them, so we have shown how to build a society in kind of a western perspective. Whether they want to do that or whether they are able to do that, that's another question. Main object was to build up Afghan security forces. There has been certain success" [DK 2, 59, Major].

In the interviews, it was frequently noted that it was difficult for the soldiers to assess whether any improvement had actually been achieved in the country during their 6-month deployment. This soldier was in Afghanistan several times and reports how he was able to notice positive changes over a longer period of time.

"I think when you are there for six month, especially in Afghanistan where everything went really slow it is very difficult to see if you made an impact or not. And I don't think that you as a person or a group or a company or whatever you can say that you made a difference. It's really hard to say what you made in only six month. But I have been lucky because I have been back to Afghanistan several times afterwards because I have been training people for missions down there and I can see over the years what has been happening in the country. That has been a tremendous change. One of the biggest things that I have noticed and that was actually just two years after I left the first time, I say that, when we came down there all women wore burkas and when we came back maybe 50% were wearing burkas and that's a huge change. It was a prove that democracy was happening and that people were changing their ways. So I think it's hard to see in a short amount of time, you have to see it more longer basically. I think it made a lot of sense going there from different perspectives" [DK7, 43, Major].

Some of the interviewees also measure success in terms of what they changed for a small amount of time. As in the previous statement, this soldier also refers specifically to the situation of women in Afghanistan: "I think we made a big difference to a lot of people and I believe a lot of people, especially women and children have a better life now than they would have had if we have not been there" [DK7, 43, Major].

Especially for soldiers who had been in Afghanistan several times, a change was evident.

"I think it would be wrong to say that it was not a success. Especially the guys who have been down there in several teams, like in team 4 and then team 8 again and so on, they told me that they could see a big difference in the society down there. So suddenly there would come up small shops and there was more color everywhere and the people were maybe a little happier. But our government, they went out too soon, they stopped the mission too soon. Well I think it was NATO who stopped too soon. So to say it was not a success would be wrong. Also it would be frustrating regarding those who lost their lives there. For the families who lost dear ones there. It would be very, very wrong to say that it was a lost case or a failure because that would be saying that their son or their daughter died for nothing. So I would never say

that it was for nothing because it was for something and it was a success. Some people had, even though it might have been only a small part of their lives, a better time in those 10-15 years that we were there” [DK6, 34, Sergeant].

In the previous statement it is pointed out that the evaluation of the mission as pointless or as a failure is critical especially for the bereaved of fallen soldiers.

Another veteran emphasizes that the assignment was meaningful for him, regardless of the evaluation of the political mission, and that this kind of fulfillment can only be experienced during the assignment.

“I also found that the work is challenging, and that there is a purpose behind it. Both, whether or not you agree with the political objectives of the mission, when you stand out there you meet real people. And if nothing else, that gives it a very real sense of purpose. I don’t think I would find that sense of purpose in any other job” [DK3, 32, Captain].

Nevertheless, in the interviews it has become apparent that, at least from a military-strategic point of view, several of the Danish soldiers consider the mission itself a failure.

“It was not a success, no, not at all. You must have read the newspapers, right? Of course, it was a big mistake. You can see it from a distance. In the meantime, the Taliban have regained control of about 75 percent of the country. Is that enough of an answer?” [DK8, 52, Lieutenant].

One soldier also attributes the partial failure of the mission to the constantly changing situation in Afghanistan and the difficulty of not having a clearly identifiable enemy:

“I think back in 2006 when I was there it was not quite a success. But really quickly we realized that. That we are only there to open some doors and get things ready for the next guys to come in. But that takes some time and I know that we all agreed that we would need to be there for quite a long time. So I think it was not a success as such but I think we did an ok job. And in 2010 it was pretty much chaos I think. It was fighting all over. And it was very difficult to see how things will end. At that point a military person would really quickly see that we will never win this war. It’s very difficult because you are not fighting a traditional opponent but one day you fight the farmer, the next day someone else you wouldn’t expect. So it’s very difficult to see a chance there” [DK9, 46, Captain].

Some of the soldiers interviewed also considered the end of the Danish commitment in Afghanistan as too early and questioned the premature end of the Danish mission.

“I also firmly believe that we left way too early. I remember all the Danish politicians and all other politicians for that matter saying that Afghanistan would be a long haul and we have to be there for many years and we talk 20, 25,30 years on our horizon before we would have

been able to decrease troop support. And then ten years later from day one we decided to leave because now politically it popular anymore or whatever. I thought that was the wrong decision. [DK7, 43, Major].

The testimony of this Danish soldier is also negative, and although it was not known at the time of the interview how dramatically the situation in Afghanistan would deteriorate after the withdrawal of international troops, his account of the mission is deficient.

“I think it’s almost impossible for anyone now to say that the ISAF mission was a success. And especially from what I have learned afterwards personally and from what I have seen when I studied strategy and from what I have seen on the media and stuff like that, it’s very clear that the overall military campaign in the south of Afghanistan was not a success. It had only very temporary effects. Very locally. And as soon as that military presence left than things would go back to either what they were before, or worse. But I don’t think anywhere you were able to establish a sustainable difference” [DK10, 46, Captain].

This assessment should prove to be correct.

4.5 Interim Conclusion

From the interviews with the Danish soldiers, it became apparent that each of the study participants could identify to a high degree with the institution and the values of the Forsvaret. The professionalism of the Danish military was emphasized as a particular identification feature and was named by almost all of the soldiers interviewed as an identity-forming element. In particular, the training of the soldiers and the modernity of the Forsvaret as an employer were positively emphasized. Through its activist foreign policy, the Forsvaret has shaped the image of a professional operational army over the years, which the soldiers have adopted as part of their professional identity.

Intrinsic factors were predominantly decisive for the study participants' career choices. Education, sports, and comradeship were among the most important factors in career choice for the Danish respondents. Family background was also a decisive factor for some of the soldiers. The classic military values that are passed on to recruits in the course of military socialization were also considered important among the Danish interview participants, and military values such as comradeship, discipline, punctuality or structure are passed on within the Forsvaret. Military traditions play a role especially in certain military subcultures, such as the Royal Hussars.

Danish soldiers rated camaraderie as the greatest benefit of their profession. The second most frequently mentioned advantage was the opportunity to play sports during working hours. The opportunity to test and overcome one's own limits was also mentioned positively. A certain flexibility in the exercise of the profession was also mentioned as an advantage, which resulted from the modernity of Forsvaret as an employer.

The biggest disadvantage of the profession was mentioned as the high time requirement and the absence from home. Due to exercises, training camps and foreign deployments, soldiers are often away from home for long periods of time, which is particularly disadvantageous for soldiers with families and children. Frequent transfers to other locations were also cited as detrimental.

With regard to the status of soldiers in Danish society, the majority of interview participants stated that they perceive themselves as being in the middle of Danish society and fully integrated. They described their profession as neither negatively nor positively viewed by society, but rather as a profession without special status. None of the respondents had ever had negative experiences in public in uniform. Nevertheless, most of the soldiers surveyed would refrain from appearing in uniform in private, primarily because they would then, in their opinion, be acting as role models, representing the military as an institution. The Danish soldiers interviewed generally rate the civil-military relationship in Denmark as good and feel that their work is appreciated. Nevertheless, they feel that the Danish public is not well informed about the profession and activities of soldiers and is partially biased by the portrayal in feature films.

The motivation of the Danes interviewed to go abroad was complex. In the Danish interviews, a slight majority of the interviewed soldiers gave intangible, self-related reasons for their deployment, which can be assigned to the postmodern soldier type. In addition to the desire for adventure, professional self-fulfillment played a particularly important role. With regard to the typology of modern deployment motivation reasons, it is noticeable that career optimization and advancing one's own career were in the primary focus in the Danish interviews. Comradeship played the most important role as a paleomodern motivation for the Afghanistan mission.

Deployment preparation extended over a period of several months, depending on the unit and the associated deployment area, and was described as physically and mentally very strenuous. Nine out of ten of the Danish soldiers surveyed rated their pre-deployment training as very good.

In terms of mental preparation, Danish soldiers are required to submit a folder, *Min Sidste Vilje*, to the Forsvaret prior to deployment. This contains detailed questions that soldiers must address, including detailed arrangements for their burial. In this context, some of the Danish soldiers reported that filling out the folder was a psychological strain, especially when they did so together with their families.

One of the main stressors in the deployment itself was being away from home, family, and friends. Soldiers in relationships and soldiers with children found this situation more stressful than soldiers living alone. Daily life in the camp was described by soldiers as monotonous at times. Depending on their duties, some soldiers rarely or never left their camp in Afghanistan. This sometimes led to frustration among those soldiers who saw the mission as the fulfillment of their profession as a soldier and wanted to apply what they had been trained for. Others described their time inside the camp as a kind of summer camp, where life was very easy for them because the daily routine was very structured and they did not have to worry about things like laundry or cooking and instead had more time for sports or other leisure activities. Café Kuffen was a popular meeting place and offered the Danish soldiers a piece of home, serving many of the typical Danish sentiments such as celebrating *hygge*. Creating a sense of home during the deployment abroad has proven to be particularly important for the soldiers' identification with their military.

Danish soldiers are typically deployed abroad for six months, with a mandatory break of two weeks. The timing of the break is not necessarily in the middle, but must be agreed upon with the unit and can also be at the beginning or end of a deployment. The opinions of the Danish soldiers about the break differed. For some, it was difficult to relax during the break, and the motivation to return to the mission afterwards was low for some of the respondents. Others used the time to vacation with their families and rated the break as a positive opportunity to relax. All agreed that the ideal time to take a break would be in the middle of the deployment.

Depending on the timing of the overseas deployment to Afghanistan, some of the soldiers have witnessed or been directly involved in battles with the Taliban. Some soldiers have witnessed or suffered severe injuries and burns or have lost their comrades.

The reality of war has left its mark on each of the soldiers involved. One of the Danish study participants was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder after deployment. Soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder can find help at the Veterans Center, a facility run by the Danish Ministry of Defense. The Veterans Center is one of the institutions responsible for implementing the Danish Veterans Policy and focuses its efforts on four core areas: Recognition, Prevention, Support and Treatment, and Employment. The current Danish veterans policy was rated as good by the majority of study respondents. Some respondents pointed out that veterans policy has evolved significantly in recent years, and that Danish policy is responding to shortcomings in previous deployments.

Returning home was described as the biggest challenge for soldiers after deployment. Each of the soldiers interviewed described returning home and settling into everyday life as a personal challenge, with some soldiers finding their rhythm more quickly than others.

In the Danish interviews, soldiers described that it took them a while to settle back into their daily routines upon their return. Many had a high level of activity after their return and problems finding relaxation. It was also described that soldiers' values had shifted and that many everyday problems at home seemed insignificant compared to the suffering in Afghanistan. A certain speechlessness in relation to what they had experienced on deployment was described. This caused difficulties for some of the soldiers, especially in relationships and in the family environment. It was described that soldiers are best able to talk about their experiences with other soldiers, as only they can share their experiences. For the majority of soldiers, appreciation of life at home increased after deployment.

In Denmark, soldiers have time to spend with their families after landing before then participating in military reintegration activities. The duration and intensity of the reintegration measures depends, among other things, on how long the soldiers have

been on deployment and ranges from four weeks to three months. During the reintegration measures, the soldiers are assisted by psychologists who help them come to terms with the experiences they have had in the deployed unit. As part of Denmark's veterans policy, Flag Day was introduced in 2009. The purpose of this day is to commemorate Danish soldiers who have died in foreign deployments and to celebrate veterans who have returned home. On this day, public parades are held in Denmark's major cities. In Copenhagen, the royal family and high-ranking politicians such as the prime minister and the ministers of defense and foreign affairs also lay wreaths and hold a memorial service. Medals are also awarded to all soldiers returning from a foreign deployment in the year of the parade. In the interviews with Danish soldiers, it is noteworthy that all of the soldiers interviewed emphasized that they thought it was very important and good that the day was established to honor Danish veterans, but that they personally did not need this kind of recognition. In general, nine out of ten of the surveyed soldiers rated the existing Danish veterans policy as good and sufficient. Only one soldier rated Danish efforts as too low in direct comparison with U.S. veterans policy.

Public recognition of the deployment was considered high by the majority of interview participants. This is also consistent with studies showing that the Danes were the most supportive of all troop-contributing nations in Afghanistan. However, it also became clear in the interviews that the Danish population distinguishes between the political mission and the work of the deployed soldiers. Thus, a portion of the public was critical of the deployment, which increased as the number of Danish soldiers killed in action increased. By the end of the mission, the public evaluation of the mission itself had declined, but not the evaluation of the soldiers' work.

From a military perspective, the Danish soldiers judged the mission as unsuccessful. Although the interviews were conducted before the Taliban took power in 2021, it was clear to all soldiers interviewed that the decades-long effort would not last. Nevertheless, they had succeeded in improving the lives of the Afghan civilian population for a certain time, which some soldiers felt was a personal success.

5 Comparison of Case Studies

5.1 Joining in

In the joining in section, the motivation of the interview participants for choosing the profession of soldier was examined. The extent to which the soldiers identify with the respective values and guidelines of their military, which advantages and disadvantages they see in their profession and how the soldiers perceive the standing of their profession in the respective civilian population was assessed.

Professional motivation

In both Denmark and Germany, intrinsic factors were decisive for the study participants' career choice. A desire for adventure, altruistic motives, and political beliefs were all mentioned in equal measure. While patriotism and masculinity were also cited as motivating factors by the German participants, education, physical activities, companionship and family background were among the most important factors in career choice for the Danish respondents. While financial benefits also played a role as an extrinsic factor for the German respondents, this was not significant for the Danish participants.

Identification and Commitment

The soldiers interviewed in both countries were able to identify to a high degree with the ethos of their military institution.

The guiding principle of the *Citizen in Uniform* and the *Concept of Leadership and Civic Education* were seen as important points of identification by all German soldiers surveyed. In addition, some of the German soldiers referred to their oath of service as well as the civil courage and democratic values of society, which the soldiers would defend according to their own understanding.

In the group of the Danish respondents, the professionalism of the Danish military was particularly emphasized as an identifying characteristic. The Danish soldiers surveyed

rated their training in the Danish armed forces as very good and highly professional and described the Forsvaret as a modern military institution and employer.

Among the study participants in both countries, it became clear that military socialization had a major influence on the personalities of the soldiers themselves. This was particularly evident in the manifestation of classic military values such as comradeship, the inherited virtues of discipline, punctuality or structure, and the exemplification and passing on of military traditions, especially within certain subcultures.

While the classic military values and the basic understanding of democracy were equally pronounced in both groups of respondents, the differences in the answers arose primarily in the emphasis of identification. Whereas the German soldiers increasingly referred to the image of the citizen in uniform and the associated understanding of democracy, the Danish soldiers predominantly mentioned professionalism as an identity-forming element. It should be noted that both elements - an understanding of democracy and professionalism - are present in both militaries. The focus of the soldiers interviewed can rather be traced back to their national understanding and the role of the military in their respective societies. Whereas in Germany, due to the history of the Bundeswehr, which had to consciously distinguish itself from the former Wehrmacht, an understanding of democracy was given a special place in military training from then on, the Danish military, with its new role of activist foreign policy, has given itself a new image of a professional operational army. The ethos that dominated the military in each case was reflected in the responses of the respective study groups.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The interview participants from both countries were also asked about the personally perceived advantages and disadvantages of being a soldier. The responses of the groups surveyed were very similar. In both Germany and Denmark, the soldiers rated the comradeship as the greatest advantage of their profession. The second most frequently cited benefit was the opportunity to do sports during working hours. The opportunity to test and overcome one's own limits was also cited positively by both

groups. Freedom and flexibility in the exercise of the profession was additionally named as an advantage on the Danish side.

The answers were also consistent with regard to the disadvantages. In both study groups, the greatest disadvantage of the profession was the large amount of time required and the absence from home. Due to exercises, training camps and foreign deployments, soldiers are often away from home for long periods of time, which is particularly disadvantageous for soldiers with families and children. Frequent transfers to other locations were also named as disadvantageous. In addition, the German group surveyed also mentioned the perceived over-bureaucratization of the Bundeswehr as a disadvantage, as well as the confrontation with death and injury. Furthermore, the German interviews stated that some soldiers had to justify their choice of career outside the military environment. This disadvantage was also mentioned on the Danish side, but not in relation to the soldier's profession itself, but in relation to the purpose of foreign missions.

In respect to the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the soldier's profession, it can be concluded that the responses in both study groups were largely similar and that no significant differences could be identified.

Recognition: Wearing the uniform

With regard to the perceived public recognition of their profession in their countries, the study participants were also asked about their personal experiences in uniform in public. The two study groups revealed significant differences in their experiences.

Seven out of ten of the German soldiers surveyed reported having had negative experiences in uniform in public. These ranged from verbal abuse and the showing of the middle finger to physical assaults and being spat upon. All of the German soldiers interviewed also knew soldiers who had already had negative experiences in public. Experiences in which soldiers were called murderers were described as particularly stressful. As a result of their experiences, the majority of the German soldiers surveyed are uncomfortable going out in public in uniform. Political efforts that promote the presence of soldiers in public, such as the campaign to ride the train in uniform, are assessed positively by the soldiers.

In the interviews with the German soldiers, positive experiences in uniform were also reported. Based on the descriptions of the positive events, various differences in public recognition could be derived. First, regional differences in recognition were reported, and it became clear that soldiers in more rural areas had more positive experiences than those in large cities. Furthermore, positive experiences were also reported during certain missions, such as flood disasters or donation marches. In addition to regional differences, occasional differences can also be derived from this. It also became clear that the older soldiers interviewed had had fewer bad experiences than their younger comrades. The soldiers interviewed attributed this on the one hand to the zeitgeist under which they served, and on the other to compulsory military service and its abolition. They described how the profession of soldier used to be part of almost every family or circle of friends. As a result of compulsory military service, the profession was more present and there was greater understanding and acceptance within the German public. Although protests against rearmament, the military and war were omnipresent, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, they were aimed more at politics and the military institution than against the individual soldier.

Still today, especially the younger soldiers interviewed assume that the German public has an anti-militaristic attitude, or at least a friendly disinterest. This perception, which is also widespread in the study group, contrasts with current studies, which show that the German population has maintained a positive attitude towards the Bundeswehr for years. The discrepancy between the perceived esteem and the actual recognition of the soldier's profession as evidenced by surveys can be attributed, among other things, to the fact that public honors and appeals are largely uncommon in Germany. This gives some soldiers the feeling that public recognition is not practiced and therefore does not reach the troops.

The Danish participants in the study paint a completely different picture with regard to public recognition. In general, the Danish soldiers surveyed see themselves as being in the middle of Danish society and fully integrated. They describe their profession as neither negatively nor particularly positively regarded by society, more like a job like any other. None of the respondents had ever had negative experiences in public in uniform. Nevertheless, most of the soldiers interviewed would refrain from going out privately in uniform, mainly because they would then feel they were acting as a role model or would be under special observation because they would be representing the

military as an institution. The local and temporal differences in public recognition of soldiers were also mentioned in the Danish interviews. Here, too, the older soldiers interviewed described that, especially in the 1960s to 1980s, an anti-militaristic sentiment was widespread, which was felt by soldiers, especially in larger cities. Nevertheless, soldiers would have been treated with respect even back then. The Danish soldiers surveyed generally rate the civil-military relationship in Denmark as good and feel that their work is appreciated. Nevertheless, they think that the Danish public is not well informed about the profession and activities of soldiers and is partly prejudiced by media portrayals in feature films.

Therefore, with regard to the wearing of uniforms in public, it can be stated that the greatest difference between the Danish and German soldiers is that almost all of the German soldiers have had negative experiences in uniform in public. While the Danish soldiers reported largely indifferent to positive public reactions in this context, the wearing of military uniforms still seems to be seen as not entirely natural in parts of the German public.

5.2 Being there

The section looked at the foreign deployment of the German and Danish soldiers interviewed in Afghanistan. The soldiers were asked about their motivation for deployment and described their training and preparation for the mission. They gave an insight into their everyday life in the military camps and talked about the personal challenges they faced in Afghanistan.

Operational motivation

In the Being There section, the operational motivation of the study participants was investigated. The motivation of the Danish and German soldiers interviewed to go on deployment abroad was multifaceted. In order to compare deployment motivation, the typology of Fabrizio Battistelli was used, who categorized deployment motivation according to paleomodern, modern, and postmodern characteristics. The categorization of the deployment motivation of the interviewed soldiers was based on

a simplified table of Batistelli's typology, which was developed by the Swedish researcher Hedlund (see 3.3.2).

The paleomodern soldier type largely corresponds to the institutional model of Charles Moskos and is determined by other-orientation. His motivation is determined primarily by altruistic motives. The second type of operational soldier is the modern type, which corresponds to Moskos' occupational model and is primarily self-oriented. The decisive factors for this type are primarily economic motives, such as financial benefits or personal career advancement. The last type describes the postmodern soldier, who is primarily concerned with self-fulfillment, such as experiencing adventure, overcoming personal limits or fulfilling the soldiers' calling.

In both study groups, multiple answers were given and in both study groups all three motivation categories were represented. A direct comparison shows that in both the German and the Danish interviews, the slight majority of the soldiers interviewed gave immaterial, self-oriented reasons for their deployment which can be assigned to the postmodern soldier type. In addition to the desire for adventure, professional self-fulfillment played a particularly important role in both study groups.

With regard to the typology of modern deployment motivation reasons, it is striking that financial incentives played a role in the German interviews, whereas the focus in the Danish interviews was on career optimization.

In both study groups, comradeship played the most important role as a paleomodern motivation for the Afghanistan mission. In the German interviews, altruistic motives for deployment were also mentioned, whereas this was not the case in the Danish interviews. Nevertheless, it should be noted that no absolute classification of the study groups into one of the three categories can be made, because the soldiers partly had several, equally important reasons for participating in the deployment.

Preparations and Run-Up

Soldiers going on deployment must generally be well trained, both militarily and mentally.

In addition to training for the actual task in the field, preparations in the run-up to a mission include the effective handling of weapons, knowledge of the culture, the political situation and the conflicts in the crisis country, the assessment of dangers and risks, initial medical care and strategies for psychologically managing exceptional situations.

The deployment preparations of the soldiers interviewed were basically structured in a similar way in both countries. The soldiers were prepared for deployment over a period of several months, depending of the unit and the associated task area. A direct comparison showed that 9 out of 10 of the Danish soldiers surveyed rated their pre-deployment training as good. In the German study group, 7 out of 10 soldiers felt well prepared, although in some cases a distinction was made between military and mental training. Within the German study group, a qualitative distinction was also made between preparation for deployment by special unit and the general force. Training within the special forces, such as the paratroopers or the explosive ordnance disposal service, was rated much better than training within the general forces. With regard to the mental preparation for the deployment, the interviews gave the impression that the Danish soldiers had dealt more intensively with the possible consequences of the deployment. Whereas in Germany the Bundeswehr provides a checklist with recommendations for the preparation of soldiers and their families, which is not binding, the Danish soldiers are required to submit a folder to the Forsvaret in advance of the deployment. The red folder, *Min Sidste Vilje*, contains detailed questions that the soldiers must deal with, including a detailed arrangement of their funeral. In this context, some of the Danish soldiers reported that filling out the folder was a mental strain, especially together with their families.

Realities of War

The study participants were asked to report on their experiences during their deployment in Afghanistan. They described their everyday life in camp and recounted positive experiences, as well as combat situations, wounding, death and mourning.

Even if the individual experiences of the soldiers interviewed cannot be directly compared with one another, there were parallels in their deployment experiences.

These include certain stressors that were reported by both German and Danish soldiers. One of the main stressors mentioned by both interview groups was the absence of the soldiers' homes, families and friends. Managing relationships and the frequency and manner of communicating with loved ones was the most frequently described burden. Soldiers in relationships and soldiers with children found this situation more straining than soldiers living alone. For the most part, the soldiers described everyday life in the camp as monotonous. Depending on their duties, some soldiers rarely or never left their camp in Afghanistan. This has sometimes led to frustration among soldiers of both nationalities. In view of the soldier's self-image and motivation for deployment, this is hardly surprising, since the majority of participants in both groups stated that they hoped to fulfill their profession through the Afghanistan mission. Depending on the equipment of the camps, the soldiers could spend their free time playing sports or meeting in cafes. The cafe Kuffen was a popular meeting place and offered the Danish soldiers in particular a piece of home. Creating a sense of home while on deployment abroad is particularly important in terms of soldier identification.

This likewise emerged in the description of the Christmas celebration in the German camp.

The duration of the foreign assignment varies in the two countries under consideration. The German target for the duration of the assignment is four months. In practice, soldiers, especially in special units, have often been deployed for longer or have voluntarily extended their deployment time. It is also common practice for two soldiers to share a six-month deployment abroad. For soldiers who have been exposed to particular stress, the Bundeswehr offers the possibility of a short time-out during their deployment abroad. Soldiers are taken off deployment to a neighboring country for a period of three to five days in order to recuperate and then return to duty. None of the German soldiers surveyed had taken advantage of the recreation measure.

Danish soldiers are generally deployed abroad for six months, with a mandatory break of two weeks. The time of the break is not necessarily in the middle, but must be agreed with the unit and can also be at the beginning or end of a deployment. The opinions of the Danish soldiers on the break differ. For some, it was difficult to relax during the break, and the motivation to return to the mission afterwards was low for some of the

interviewees. Others used the time to go on vacation with their families and assessed the break as a positive opportunity to ease their minds.

Depending on the time at which the soldiers were deployed abroad in Afghanistan, the deployment may have been quiet, or the soldiers may have been confronted with different shades of war. Some of the soldiers witnessed combat with the Taliban or were directly involved in it. Some have seen booby traps explode and witnessed or suffered serious injuries and burnings. There were descriptions of rape and other forms of violence that the soldiers were forced to observe. Some soldiers lost their comrades.

The realities of war have left their mark on every of the soldiers involved, regardless of their nationality. Three of the German and one of the Danish study participants were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder after the mission.

Danish soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder find help at the Veteran Centre, a facility of the Danish Ministry of Defense. The Veteran Centre is one of the institutions responsible for implementing the Danish veterans' policy and aligns its efforts in four core areas: the recognition effort, the prevention effort, the support and treatment effort and the employment effort. The current Danish veterans' policy was rated as good by the majority of the study participants surveyed. Some respondents pointed out that veterans' policy has developed considerably in recent years and that Danish policy is thus responding to shortcomings in previous missions.

5.3 Coming Home

Coming home was described as the greatest challenge for the soldiers after the deployment. Each of the soldiers interviewed described homecoming and settling into everyday life as a personal challenge, with some soldiers finding their rhythm more quickly than others. In this regard, no particular differences between the nationalities could be identified.

Leaving Afghanistan behind?

In both the German and the Danish interviews, soldiers described how it took them a while to settle back into their everyday lives after their return. The most frequently mentioned factor was a high level of activity and problems finding relaxation. It was also described that the soldiers' values had shifted and that many everyday problems at home seemed insignificant compared to the suffering in Afghanistan. A certain speechlessness with regard to what was experienced in the field was described equally in both study groups. This caused difficulties for some of the soldiers, particularly in relationships and in the family environment. It was described that the soldiers can best talk about their experiences with other soldiers, as only they can share their experiences. For a majority of the soldiers surveyed in both study groups, the appreciation of their life at home increased after the deployment.

Reception and Landing

Although the soldiers interviewed all indicated that returning home was a personal adjustment for them, there were significant differences among nations in how they handled receiving and landing soldiers.

The German soldiers mostly landed in separate military terminals distributed throughout Germany. Within the terminals, they were received by their families. This moment was described as very emotional by many of the Germans interviewed.

Three of the German soldiers interviewed had negative experiences upon arrival. They reported anti-war protests in front of the terminal and hostility on the train and in the restaurant. In this context, some of the soldiers criticized the way returning soldiers are treated in Germany. The main criticism here was the seclusion in which the soldiers land. The receptions given to the soldiers were all privately organized. There was no official military reception or call after the mission. After the soldiers have been back in Germany for a few weeks, an obligatory follow-up seminar takes place. The seminar, which lasts two to three days, is intended to help the soldiers reflect on their experiences and is accompanied by psychologists.

In Denmark, too, soldiers have time to spend with their families after landing, before they then take part in military reintegration measures. The duration and intensity of the reintegration measures depends, among other things, on the length of time the soldiers have already been in the military and is set at between four weeks and three months. During the reintegration measures, psychologists are on hand to help the soldiers work through the experiences they have had in the deployed unit. As part of the Danish veteran policy, the *Flagdag* was introduced in 2009. The purpose of the day is to commemorate Danish soldiers who have died in foreign missions and to celebrate veterans who have returned home. On this day, public parades are held in Denmark's major cities. In Copenhagen, the royal family and high-ranking politicians such as the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence and Foreign Affairs also lay wreaths and hold a memorial service. In addition, medals are awarded to all soldiers returning from overseas deployment in the year of the parade. In the interviews with the Danish soldiers it is remarkable that all of the interviewed soldiers emphasized that they think it is very important and good that the day was established to honor Danish veterans, but that they personally do not need this kind of appreciation. In general, nine out of ten of the soldiers surveyed rated the existing Danish veterans' policy as good and sufficient. Only one soldier rated the Danish effort as too low in a direct comparison with U.S. veterans' policy.

Public Recognition of Mission

As shown in the Realities of War section, the soldiers interviewed from both countries were exposed to various stressors during their foreign deployment. They were separated from their private environment, home and families for a long period of time. They had limited privacy within the camp, where often boredom and heat also posed challenges. Soldiers in both interview groups were exposed to danger, in some cases fighting and facing death or injury. These hardships were common to both study groups. However, there was variance in terms of perceived public recognition of their service in Afghanistan.

In several interviews with German soldiers, the desire for greater public recognition of their service abroad was expressed: 8 out of 10 of the German soldiers surveyed would like to see more public recognition for their service abroad. A perceived lack of

recognition was often attributed to a lack of knowledge among the German public about the realities of deployment. And indeed, a population survey conducted by the ZMSBw confirms that the number of citizens who feel well informed about the Bundeswehr's missions abroad is in declining. Among other factors, the abolition of compulsory military service and a low level of media interest in the missions outside of scandals were additionally cited as further factors for the lack of knowledge among the general population. With regard to the Bundeswehr's foreign missions, some of the German soldiers interviewed pointed out that, as part of the parliamentary army, they are sent on foreign missions at the behest of German politicians and thus the electorate. However, some of the participants in the study felt that not all citizens were aware of this, which they interpreted as a kind of ignorance on the part of the German people.

Possible solutions included more transparency and public relations work, as well as the wish for a veterans' day that has increasingly been expressed. According to some of the German study participants, a veterans' day or a public tribute would also help mentally or physically wounded returnees in particular to find a way out of the mission. The demand for a veterans' day was already publicly discussed in Germany since 2012. A veterans' day was intended to be a component of Germany's intangible veterans' policy, but has not been implemented to date. Instead, the Bundeswehr Day was initiated in 2015 to make the work of the Bundeswehr more transparent and accessible to the public.

In the Danish interviews, public approval of the soldiers' deployment was perceived quite differently. A large proportion of the interview participants reported that they considered themselves and their deployment in Afghanistan to be highly regarded by the Danish population. This is also consistent with studies showing that Danes are the most supportive population group of all troop-contributing states in Afghanistan. However, the interviews also pointed out that the Danish population makes a distinction between the political mission and the work of the deployed soldiers. Thus, part of the public was critical of the deployment, which increased as the number of Danish soldiers killed in action increased. Nevertheless, some interview participants felt that the soldiers went into action at the behest of parliament. Thus, by the end of the mission, the public evaluation of the mission itself had declined, but not the evaluation of the soldiers' work. One soldier described a benevolent interest in the

military on the part of the Danish population, which even increased with the Afghanistan mission.

Evaluation of Mission

The evaluation of the mission was similar in both countries and no country-specific differences were found.

Both German and Danish soldiers assessed the mission from a military point of view as unsuccessful. Although the interviews were conducted before the Taliban took over in 2021, it was clear to all the soldiers interviewed that the efforts made over decades would not be sustainable. In both study groups, however, soldiers also considered their mission a partial success. The argumentation was the same in both groups: they had succeeded in making life better for the Afghan civilian population for a time. This emphasis on partial successes was particularly important with regard to the wounded and fallen soldiers and their surviving dependents. In both groups, the soldiers were concerned about the local Afghan forces after the withdrawal of the troops. The Danes in particular felt that the end of the ISAF mission was rushed and premature.

6 Conclusion

As has been shown in the course of the study, the identity of a soldier depends on various variables such as self-perception, external perception, professional image and public image.

The initial hypothesis that there are significant differences between Danish and German soldiers in terms of the manifestations of their soldier identities, particularly as a result of differing civil-military relations, has been verified in parts.

It was shown that certain points of identification are independent of the respective military cultures and that the interviewed soldiers of both study groups showed similarities in these points. Soldiers in both study groups were found to identify equally with military core values that are inherent in any military, regardless of nation. Thus,

soldiers in both Denmark and Germany have a similar basic understanding of their profession and the values they stand for. The soldiers' professional motivation, perceived occupational advantages and disadvantages, and deployment motivation were also largely in alignment.

Significant differences emerge in the perception of the soldier's profession in Germany and Denmark. Whereas the Danish soldiers interviewed perceived their profession as largely well-regarded and firmly anchored in the middle of Danish society, the German participants assumed a negative public image of the soldiering profession. Self-experienced or inherited negative experiences in uniform in the public sphere lead to the anticipation of a civil-military gap, which the majority of the soldiers interviewed inferred from an anti-militaristic civilian population, the abolition of compulsory military service and a lack of public knowledge about the work and tasks of the military.

The deployment experiences in Afghanistan varied subjectively both between and within the study groups. In both study groups, some soldiers experienced quiet deployments, while others were confronted with open combat and traumatic experiences. The different experiences can be attributed to the respective activities and the timing of the respective deployment. Yet all soldiers in Afghanistan were equally exposed to certain stressors. Apart from threats to life and limb, separation from family and friends was perceived as equally stressful by soldiers in both countries.

It became apparent that coming home and settling into everyday life after the Afghanistan mission was described as challenging by both the Danish and the German soldiers. What fundamentally differs between the two countries is the way in which the returning soldiers are handled. While Denmark has been able to create new traditions such as the *Flagdag* and to establish a comprehensive veterans policy for returning Afghanistan veterans, Germany has so far failed to implement a satisfactory intangible veteran effort.

When distinguishing between material and non-material veterans' policies, it should be noted that in both countries, material provisions are guaranteed. On the intangible level, however, Germany, unlike its Scandinavian neighbor, has not succeeded in seeing twenty years of deployment in Afghanistan as an opportunity to use intangible implications for a veterans' policy. While the German public and politicians were

discussing war terminology and receiving fallen soldiers in seclusion, a comprehensive veterans structure was established in Denmark. Although German soldiers have been coming home since the beginning of the Afghanistan mission, first as state builders, then as war returnees, it was not until seventeen years later and through the initiative of various veterans' associations that a universally valid definition of the word "veteran" could be agreed on. The definition is broad and includes all active and former soldiers of the German armed forces. The broad definition of veterans was intended to prevent division within the armed forces and to pursue an integrative approach, which is positive. However, this type of definition is problematic for the soldiers, who are not granted special status despite their deployment.

The Danish experience with the *Flagdag* shows how important public appreciation can be for returning soldiers. Although a number of the Danish soldiers stated that they did not necessarily need a parade, their appreciation of their deployment and reintegration at home was rated significantly more positively than that of the German study group.

The majority of the German soldiers interviewed are not concerned with parades, medals or special days in their honor. Rather, they want to be seen. They desire recognition for the national service they perform. Studies have shown that the public's image of the Bundeswehr and its soldiers is at a stable high level. The problem is that the soldiers do not perceive this valuation. The implication of a more comprehensive veterans policy could have helped transport existing support into the troops.

In this regard, the political handling of the official end of the Afghanistan mission in Germany can be seen as emblematic. After no political representative received the soldiers at the actual end of the mission, the shortcoming was only corrected after the dramatic fall of Kunduz with the grand tattoo. The tattoo took place in seclusion from the public for fear of protests critical of the military, although the majority of the German population has a positive attitude toward the Bundeswehr and its soldiers. By showing consideration for a minority critical of the military, the soldiers are reinforced in their misperception that their profession is generally not valued.

It should be noted that Denmark's foreign and security policy grew out of different historical backgrounds and, as described, could go from adaptation to activism. The National Socialist past and the post-heroic society have prohibited similar robust

approaches in German politics, not only in terms of constitutional law, but also in terms of social conduct. The transformation that the Bundeswehr has undertaken in Afghanistan is therefore all the more immense to understand. While Denmark had already gained sharp foreign deployment experience before Afghanistan, Germany had yet to do so. From these perspectives, Denmark certainly had an easier time implementing new military traditions and establishing a comprehensive veterans policy. Under these aspects, it was facilitated for Denmark to introduce new military traditions and to implement a comprehensive veterans' policy.

Still, the transformation of the Bundeswehr should not be regarded as complete, especially in view of the current geopolitical conflicts, and a continuous advancement of the intangible veterans policy should continue to be considered and pushed forward. For the further development of German veterans' policy, the Danish veterans' effort can be taken as a reference model.

The comparison between Germany and Denmark has shown that the social treatment of returning soldiers has a more relevant impact on the soldiers' identity than the war itself. The public's attitude to returning soldiers relates both to the political esteem in which they are held and to their status within the civil-military relations in a society. It is the task of politics to promote public recognition of soldiers and their work. In this context, any success or failure must be evaluated separately from the work performed by the soldiers. In both countries, greater efforts are needed in educating the public about the service of soldiers, both at home and abroad, in order to gain widespread public support. Therefore, within the framework of bilateral relations between neighboring countries, it would be conceivable to establish a commission of inquiry to discuss experiences and approaches in the handling of soldiers and returning veterans.

The very Model of a Modern Soldier

If one had to draw a picture of the German soldier on the basis of the interviews conducted, it would be that of a convinced democrat who can identify to a high degree with the guiding principles and ethos of the Bundeswehr. The German soldier identifies with classic military values and places particular value on comradeship. He sees himself as a representative of the basic democratic order who is committed to society. Although studies show that soldiers are held in comparatively high esteem by the German civilian population, the German soldier does not feel sufficiently valued in his profession and his position in society. This becomes particularly apparent when returning home after missions abroad. The German soldier has either experienced hostility in his own life or knows a soldier who has had negative experiences in uniform in public. Therefore, the German soldier does not go out in public in uniform unless he has to. However, he would like to do so because he wears the uniform with a certain pride.

If one had to draw a picture of a Danish soldier on the basis of the interviews conducted, it would be that of a highly professional, modern soldier who attaches great importance to sport and good training. What he likes most about his job is the camaraderie, the freedom and the flexibility. The biggest disadvantage for him is the amount of time he has to spend away from his family. Foreign assignments are a constitutive element of his self-image. After intensive training, he feels well prepared for the foreign assignment and wants to apply what he has trained for. The Danish soldier feels that his profession is well respected in Danish society, but that it is not special or outstanding. He understands his profession as a job like any other and does not need any parades to honor him, but knows many other soldiers for whom this form of recognition is very important. Therefore, he evaluates the soldiers' memorial day as an important milestone within the Danish veteran's effort, which has improved over the years and is generally considered to be sufficient.

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9 Appendix

9.1 Questionnaire

Section 1: Soldier Identity

1. What was the motivation of the subjects to become soldiers?

- Can you please describe for me, as detailed as possible, why you decided to become a soldier? (Probe: Can you describe the way you were recruited and under what circumstances?)

2. What was the reaction of the soldiers' personal environment to becoming a soldier?

- How did your environment (e.g. your family/friends) react when you became a soldier?

3. What is the subjects' image of their military?

- How would you describe the ethos of the Military in your Country? (The defining characteristics, the soul, the identity)

4. How do subjects feel about the public's perception of their profession?

- How would you describe the reputation of the military in your country?
- How would you describe the standing of a soldier in your country?
- How would you describe the public recognition of your profession in society?

5. What are the advantages of being a soldier in the eyes of the subjects?

- What do you enjoy most about being a soldier?

6. What are the disadvantages of being a soldier in the eyes of the subjects?

- Are there disadvantages of being a soldier? If so, what are those disadvantages and in what way?

7. How do the subjects identify with their profession?

- How do you identify yourself with that military ethos (and why)?

In what way does the profession of soldiering influences the subjects personality?

- In what way do you, as a soldier, differ from a civilian? (Probe: Can you give an example of a situation in which you act differently comparing to the way a civilian would do?)
- In what way does being in the military had an impact on your personality? (Probe: Do you interact differently with people, do you respond differently to situations, do you think about things differently than a civilian would do?)

How do the subjects feel wearing their uniform in public?

- How do you feel the way people act towards you is influenced by the fact that you are a soldier, compared to being a civilian? (Probe: For instance: your family, the people you meet in your community, etc., Can you give an example of a situation where people have responded differently to you because you are a soldier/because you were wearing your uniform? positive and/or negative)

Section 2: Mission specific

8. What were the reasons for the subjects' decision to go on military deployment to Afghanistan?

- Why did you decide to go on deployment to Afghanistan?

9. How did the subjects feel prepared both militarily and personally for the deployment?

- When going on a foreign mission as a soldier, certain risks might occur. How did you prepare yourself for that?
- How did you feel prepared when going to Afghanistan? (mentally/psychologically)

10. What was the reaction of the soldiers' personal environment to the foreign mission?

- How did the people in your environment react? (e.g. family/friends/other soldiers at your homebase/partner)

11. What challenges did the subjects experience in Afghanistan?

- What was your main purpose during the mission? What challenges did you experience?
- What was your most positive/negative experience?
- How was your everyday life in the camp like? How did it differ from your life at home?

12. How do the subjects evaluate the mission?

- How did you feel when you left Afghanistan?
- How would you evaluate the success of the mission? (personally/ task specific /overall mission)

13. How did the soldiers experience their homecoming?

- How did you experience your homecoming? (landing/reception)

14. How do the subjects feel about the public's perception of the mission?

- How do you evaluate the public recognition of your deployment/the mission in general?
- In your opinion, have you been treated differently after returning from Afghanistan?

15. How does the foreign deployment affect the subjects' own attitudes toward the profession of soldiering?

- In what way has your experience of being in the military changed after your foreign assignment?
- What kind of impact did the mission have on you as a soldier?
- What kind of impact did the mission have on you in your everyday life?

16. How do the subjects assess the handling of veterans in their country?

- How would you assess the handling of veterans in your country?

9.2 Deutschsprachige Zusammenfassung der Dissertation

Die Bedeutung von Militärkulturen in ausgewählten europäischen Staaten unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von soldatischen Identitäten

Nach fast zwei Jahrzehnten endete der Einsatz der alliierten Militärkoalition in Afghanistan offiziell im Jahr 2021. Die Bemühungen der internationalen Staatengemeinschaft, Frieden und Stabilität nach Afghanistan zu bringen und demokratische Strukturen nachhaltig aufzubauen, sind offensichtlich gescheitert. Nach dem angekündigten Abzug der truppenstellenden Staaten eroberten die Taliban das Land schneller zurück, als viele internationale Beobachter und selbst einschlägige Experten vermuteten. Das Scheitern wurde spätestens am 15. August 2021 deutlich, als die Bilder von verzweifelten afghanischen Zivilisten, die den Kabuler Flughafen stürmten, weltweit Schlagzeilen machten. Fast genau zwanzig Jahre nach den Terroranschlägen vom 11. September 2001 und rund 19 Jahre nachdem die ersten Soldatinnen und Soldaten nach Afghanistan entsandt wurden, steht die Frage nach der Sinnhaftigkeit des Einsatzes und der dafür erbrachten Opfer mehr denn je im Raum. Diese Frage betrifft insbesondere jene Soldaten, die in Afghanistan gekämpft haben – denn die Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik hat schon längst neue Hot Spots in den Blick gerückt.

Jede Debatte über den Sinn und Erfolg des Einsatzes oder über etwaige politische und strategische Fehler betrifft Einsatzrückkehrer in dezidiert anderer Weise als sie es die übrige Gesellschaft berührt. Die eingesetzten Soldaten haben im Rahmen ihres Dienstes große Einschränkungen und Belastungen hinnehmen müssen, waren verschiedenen, teil ungekannten Stressoren und Gefahren ausgesetzt. Auch wenn die absolute Zahl der Gefallenen eher gering erscheint, so haben doch einige Kameraden verloren. Viele sind körperlich oder seelisch verwundet in die Heimat zurückgekehrt.

Die Frage danach, ob und was die Politik und Gesellschaft ihren Soldaten schuldig ist, wird in jedem Land unterschiedlich beantwortet. Die Streitkräfte eines Landes sind ein Produkt des politischen und gesellschaftlichen Systems, in das sie eingebunden sind. Die Identität eines jeden Soldaten entsteht daher nicht im luftleeren Raum, sondern wird durch ein politisch und gesellschaftlich vorgegebenes Rollenverständnis sowie durch eine persönliche Selbstpositionierung innerhalb dieses Systems geprägt. Die

militärische Kultur und das zivil-militärische Verhältnis des Landes, auf dessen Schutz ein Soldat einen Eid ablegt, ist daher entscheidend für die Identität eines Soldaten. Militärische Kultur und zivil-militärisches Verhältnis sind hierbei keine statischen Konstrukte, sondern unterliegen einem permanenten Wandel.

Nach dem Ende des Kalten Krieges in Europa 1989-1991 sahen sich viele europäische Militärs mit der Aufgabe konfrontiert, durch eine Umstrukturierung ihrer Streitkräfte auf die sich verändernden globalen Sicherheitsanforderungen zu reagieren und damit ihre verteidigungspolitischen Prioritäten und Aufgabenbereiche neu zu definieren. So muss ein moderner Soldat im 21. Jahrhundert nicht mehr ausschließlich in der Lage sein, die weithin als klassisch bekannten militärischen Aufgaben im Zuge der Landesverteidigung zu beherrschen. Vielmehr wurde das Verständnis des militärischen Handelns neu definiert und umfasst angesichts von Stabilisierungs-, Aufklärungs- und Aufbaumissionen auch das Anwenden von humanitären, kulturellen und sozialen Fähigkeiten.

Die sich verändernde Einsatzrealität von der Landes- und Bündnisverteidigung zu internationalem Krisen- und Konfliktmanagement sowie die Ausweitung militärischer Aufgaben auf zum Teil polizeiliche und diplomatische Aufträge haben dabei nicht nur Auswirkungen auf die soziale Struktur innerhalb des Militärs und auf die Identität der Soldaten, vielmehr wirken sich veränderte sicherheitspolitische Rahmenbedingungen durch mediale Berichterstattung auch auf die Meinung der Bevölkerung in den Heimatländern der Soldaten aus. Dieser Umstand greift in den persönlichen Raum der Soldaten ein und kann so zu einem identitätsstiftenden Element der Soldaten werden. Schließlich ist kaum ein anderer Beruf so stark von politischen und gesellschaftlichen Interdependenzen geprägt wie jener des Soldaten. Doch was bedeutet dies auf der Mikroebene für den einzelnen Soldaten?

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht den Einfluss der nationalen Militärkultur und der zivil-militärischen Beziehungen auf die Identitätsbildung von Soldaten. In einem Vergleich zwischen Deutschland und Dänemark wird anhand von Interviews mit Afghanistan-Veteranen untersucht, wie sich die zum Teil sehr unterschiedlichen Militärkulturen der beiden Nachbarländer auf die jeweiligen soldatischen Identitäten auswirken. Der ISAF-Einsatz in Afghanistan diente dabei als eng definierter und, wie sich im Laufe der Studie zeigte, mittlerweile abgeschlossener Referenzrahmen.

Mit dem Afghanistaneinsatz endet für die truppenstellenden Staaten Deutschland und Dänemark der intensivste und verlustreichste Einsatz ihrer Armeen seit dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs. Während zu Beginn des Einsatzes die öffentliche Solidarität und die allgemeine Einsatzbereitschaft in beiden Ländern vergleichsweise hoch waren, zeigten sich im Verlauf des Einsatzes und insbesondere mit zunehmender Kampfintensität deutliche Unterschiede im nationalen Umgang mit dem Einsatz und vor allem mit den eingesetzten Soldaten. Während in Deutschland die öffentliche Auseinandersetzung mit heimkehrenden Soldaten und insbesondere mit den Gefallenen weitgehend vermieden wurde, wurden in Dänemark die Veteranen und auch die Gefallenen öffentlich geehrt. Während deutsche Politiker zeitweise Neologismen der Kriegsterminologie schufen, entwickelte Dänemark das Selbstverständnis einer kriegführenden Nation, welches zu einem Element der dänischen Militärkultur des 21. Jahrhunderts wurde.

Die unterschiedlichen Ansätze im Umgang mit Soldaten und Veteranen in den betrachteten Ländern lassen sich durch die unterschiedlichen Ausprägungen der jeweiligen nationalen Militärkultur und des damit verbundenen zivil-militärischen Verhältnisses erklären. In dieser Arbeit werden die Ursachen für die verschiedenen Ausprägungen der Militärkulturen und ihrer zivil-militärischen Beziehungen eingehender untersucht. Die zentrale Frage ist, wie sich die unterschiedlichen Militärkulturen mit ihren zivil-militärischen Beziehungen auf die Soldaten selbst auswirken. Damit verbunden ist die These, dass die unterschiedlich wahrgenommene nationale Unterstützung eine zentrale Rolle bei der Entwicklung von Soldatenidentitäten spielt.

In der Politikwissenschaft und in der Soziologie hat sich das Militär als Forschungsfeld weitgehend etabliert. Während das Militär als Ganzes in seiner Funktion als Instrument der Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik des Staates gut erforscht im Mittelpunkt vieler Studien steht, wurde dem Soldaten auf der Mikro- oder Individualebene bislang vergleichsweise wenig wissenschaftliche Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Dies mag zum Teil daran liegen, dass der Zugang zum Soldaten als Forschungsobjekt durch die militärische Organisation teilweise eingeschränkt ist. Dabei ist die Erforschung soldatischer Identität vor dem Hintergrund der Herausforderungen, mit denen Soldaten heute konfrontiert sind, von großer Bedeutung.

Die militärische Kultur, in der Soldaten sozialisiert werden, wirkt sich ebenso auf ihre Identität aus wie das zivil-militärische Verhältnis, in dem sie als soldatisches Subjekt interagieren. Insbesondere die Herausforderungen, denen sich Militärs in Auslandseinsätzen stellen müssen und die mit Kampfhandlungen verbunden sein können, prägen ihre Identität nicht nur in beruflicher Hinsicht, sondern haben auch Auswirkungen auf ihr Privatleben. In diesem Zusammenhang ist die Heimkehrerfahrung aus dem Auslandseinsatz von besonderer Bedeutung, weil sie mögliche Diskrepanzen zwischen der öffentlich und politisch proklamierten Wertschätzung des Soldatenberufes und der tatsächlich wahrgenommenen und erlebten Wertschätzung der Soldaten selbst aufzeigt.

Die Dissertation verdeutlicht, dass der Beruf des Soldaten in seinem Aufgabenprofil zwar universelle und damit vergleichbare Elemente beinhaltet, aber dennoch im nationalen Vergleich zu unterschiedlich definierten Soldatenidentitäten führt. Es wird gezeigt, dass entsprechende Identitäten im nationalen Kontext verstanden werden müssen und durch unterschiedliche Faktoren geprägt werden. Es wird die Hypothese aufgestellt, dass Soldaten, die den Wert ihrer Arbeit als hoch einschätzen, andere Soldatenidentitäten entwickeln als solche, die ihn als niedrig einschätzen.

Ziel dieser Studie ist es, das normative Verständnis des Militärs und des Soldaten selbst in Dänemark und Deutschland zu untersuchen, indem die Geschichte des Staates, äußere Einflüsse, allgemeine Prinzipien und politische Richtlinien untersucht sowie öffentliche Umfragen und bestehende empirische Studien mit einbezogen wurden. Vor dem Hintergrund des Afghanistaneinsatzes wurden öffentliche Debatten und Meinungsumfragen betrachtet, um einen kontextualisierenden Überblick über die mediale, politische und gesellschaftliche Stellung des Militärs und der Soldaten in den betrachteten Ländern zu erhalten. Ein besonderes Merkmal liegt hierbei auf der Wiedereingliederung von heimkehrenden Afghanistanveteranen. Zur Beantwortung der Forschungsfrage wurden Leitfaden-Interviews mit Afghanistanveteranen in Deutschland und Dänemark geführt. Die Fallauswahl des Vergleichs zwischen Deutschland und Dänemark wurde getroffen, weil die Nachbarländer trotz sehr ähnlicher äußerer Einflüsse – so sind etwa beide Staaten NATO-Alliierte und haben entsprechend große Übereinstimmungen in Bezug auf ihre strategische Kultur – deutlich unterschiedliche Militärkulturen entwickelt haben, was sich insbesondere in

der Ausprägung unterschiedlicher Soldatenidentitäten zeigt, wie im Verlauf der Arbeit gezeigt wird.

Für die Untersuchung wird zunächst der theoretische Bezugsrahmen skizziert, auf den sich die Untersuchungen stützen. Es werden die wichtigsten Theorien und Forschungsstränge zu den Themen Soldatenidentität, Militärkultur und zivil-militärischen Beziehungen in Form einer Literaturdiskussion vorgestellt und darauf aufbauend die prägenden Faktoren soldatischer Identitätsbildung beleuchtet. Es wird dargestellt, dass sowohl die militärische Kultur als auch die zivil-militärischen Beziehungen, in denen sich das soldatische Subjekt befindet, einen zentralen Bezugsrahmen für die Ausbildung der soldatischen Identität darstellen.

Auf den theoretischen Grundlagen basierend werden daraufhin in den Fallstudien die historischen Entwicklungen und die politischen Hintergründe beschrieben, welche die Militärkulturen der beiden Staaten prägen. Zentrale Konzepte und identitätsstiftende Elemente der Militärkulturen und der zivil-militärischen Beziehungen werden herausgearbeitet. Nach der Darstellung der jeweiligen Militärkulturen erfolgte dann die Auswertung der Interviews. Es wurden insgesamt 20 Interviews mit Männern und Frauen in verschiedenen Altersgruppen und Dienstgraden geführt. Bei der Auswahl der Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer wurde darauf geachtet, dass eine möglichst große Vielfalt abgebildet wurde. So wurden Soldatinnen und Soldaten im Alter von 27 bis 66 Jahren in verschiedenen Dienstgraden befragt, die überdies im Auslandseinsatz unterschiedlichen Funktionen wahrnahmen. Die Dienstgrade reichten dabei vom Stabsgefreiten bis zum Oberstleutnant. Soldaten, die in Kasernen in Großstädten stationiert waren, wurden ebenso befragt wie deren Kameradinnen und Kameraden aus ländlichen Gebieten. Die breite Auswahl an Dienstgraden, Alter und Geschlecht sowie die Unterschiede zwischen Stadt und Land stellten sicher, dass die Erfahrungen der Soldaten mit dem zivil-militärischen Verhältnis in ihrem Heimatland und die Ausprägung ihrer soldatischen Identität möglichst ganzheitlich dargestellt werden konnten. Die Auswertung der transkribierten Interviews erfolgte auf Basis der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse nach Mayring. Die Ergebnisse wurden in drei Teilkapitel aufgeteilt: *Joining In*, *Being There* und *Coming Home*.

In dem ersten Teil, *Joining In*, liegt der Untersuchungsschwerpunkt auf der Identifikation der Soldaten mit ihrer Institution. Es wird die Motivation der

Interviewteilnehmer für die Wahl des Soldatenberufs untersucht und beleuchtet, inwieweit sich die Soldaten mit den jeweiligen Werten und Leitlinien ihres Militärs identifizieren, welche Vor- und Nachteile sie in ihrem Beruf sehen und wie die Soldaten das Ansehen ihres Standes in der Zivilbevölkerung wahrnehmen.

Der Abschnitt *Being There* thematisiert im Anschluss die Einsatzerfahrungen der Soldaten in Afghanistan. Nachdem zunächst die Motive für den Einsatz skizziert werden, folgen Erlebnisberichte der Soldaten. Sie berichten von den Vorbereitungen auf den Einsatz und den Herausforderungen, mit denen sie während des Einsatzes, sowohl innerhalb als auch außerhalb der Lager konfrontiert waren, sowie von ihren Gefühlen beim Verlassen Afghanistans.

In dem Abschnitt *Coming Home* werden die Heimkehrerfahrungen der Soldaten beleuchtet. Es wird untersucht, wie sie den Empfang in ihren Heimatländern erlebten und mit welchen Schwierigkeiten sie nach ihrer Rückkehr konfrontiert waren.

Wie sich im Verlauf der Studie zeigt, ist die Identität eines Soldaten von verschiedenen Variablen wie Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung, Berufsbild und öffentlichem Ansehen abhängig. Die Ausgangshypothese, dass es signifikante Unterschiede zwischen dänischen und deutschen Soldaten hinsichtlich der Ausprägung ihrer Soldatenidentität gibt, die insbesondere auf die unterschiedlichen zivil-militärischen Beziehungen zurückzuführen sind, kann in Teilen verifiziert werden. Es wird gezeigt, dass bestimmte Identifikationsmerkmale unabhängig von den jeweiligen Militärkulturen sind und dass die befragten Soldaten beider Studiengruppen in diesen Merkmalen Gemeinsamkeiten aufweisen. Es wird ferner festgestellt, dass sich die Soldaten beider Studiengruppen gleichermaßen mit militärischen Grundwerten identifizieren, die jedem Militär, unabhängig von der Nation, innewohnen. So haben Soldaten in Dänemark und Deutschland ein ähnliches Grundverständnis von ihrem Beruf und den Werten, für die sie stehen. Auch die berufliche Motivation der Soldaten, die wahrgenommenen beruflichen Vor- und Nachteile und die Einsatzmotivation stimmen weitgehend überein.

Signifikante Unterschiede zeigen sich in der Wahrnehmung der gesellschaftlichen Stellung des Soldatenberufs in Deutschland und Dänemark. Während die befragten dänischen Soldaten ihren Beruf als hoch angesehen und fest in der Mitte der

dänischen Gesellschaft verankert wahrnehmen, gehen die deutschen Teilnehmer von einem negativen öffentlichen Bild des Soldatenberufs aus. Selbsterlebte oder tradierte negative Erfahrungen in Uniform in der Öffentlichkeit führten zur Antizipation einer zivil-militärischen Kluft, die die Mehrheit der befragten Soldaten aus einer antimilitaristischen Zivilbevölkerung, der Abschaffung der Wehrpflicht und einem mangelnden öffentlichen Wissen über die Arbeit und Aufgaben des Militärs ableitete.

Die Einsatzerfahrungen in Afghanistan variieren subjektiv sowohl zwischen als auch innerhalb der Studiengruppen. In beiden Studiengruppen erlebten einige Soldaten relativ ruhige und ereignisarme Einsätze, während andere mit offenen Kampfhandlungen und traumatisierenden Erfahrungen konfrontiert wurden. Die unterschiedlichen Erlebnisse lassen sich auf die jeweiligen operativen Tätigkeiten und den Zeitpunkt des jeweiligen Einsatzes zurückführen. Dennoch waren alle Soldaten in Afghanistan gleichermaßen bestimmten Stressoren ausgesetzt. Neben der Bedrohung von Leib und Leben wurde beispielsweise die Trennung von Familie und Freunden von den Soldaten in beiden Ländern gleichermaßen als belastend empfunden.

Es zeigt sich, dass die Heimkehr und die Eingewöhnung in den Alltag nach dem Afghanistan-Einsatz sowohl von den dänischen als auch von den deutschen Soldaten als herausfordernd beschrieben werden kann. Ein grundlegender Unterschied zwischen den beiden Ländern ist die Art und Weise, wie mit den zurückkehrenden Soldaten umgegangen wird. Während Dänemark in der Lage war, neue Traditionen wie den jährlich am 5. September stattfindenden Flaggentag zu schaffen und eine umfassende Veteranenpolitik für zurückkehrende Afghanistan-Veteranen zu etablieren, ist es Deutschland bisher nicht gelungen, eine vergleichbar zufriedenstellende immaterielle Veteranenarbeit zu leisten.

Bei der Unterscheidung zwischen materieller und immaterieller Veteranenpolitik ist zu beachten, dass in beiden Ländern die materielle Versorgung nicht zuletzt durch soziale Sicherheitssysteme gewährleistet ist. Auf der immateriellen Ebene ist es Deutschland jedoch im Gegensatz zu seinem skandinavischen Nachbarn nicht gelungen, zwanzig Jahre Einsatz in Afghanistan als Chance zu begreifen, immaterielle Implikationen für eine Veteranenpolitik zu nutzen. Während die deutsche Öffentlichkeit und Politik etwa über Kriegsbegriffe diskutierte und gefallene Soldaten in der Abgeschiedenheit von abgesperrten Fliegerhorsten empfing, wurde in Dänemark eine umfassende

Veteranenstruktur aufgebaut. Obwohl seit Beginn des Afghanistan-Einsatzes Soldaten heimkehren, zunächst als Staatsaufbauhelfer, dann als Kriegsheimkehrer, konnte man sich in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland erst nach siebzehn Jahren und durch die Initiative verschiedener Veteranenverbände auf eine allgemeingültige Definition des Wortes „Veteran“ einigen. Die Definition ist weit gefasst und schließt alle aktiven und ehemaligen Soldaten der deutschen Streitkräfte – auch jenseits des Afghanistaneinsatzes – ein. Mit der weiten Definition des Veteranenbegriffs sollte eine Spaltung innerhalb der Streitkräfte verhindert und ein integrativer Ansatz verfolgt werden, was positiv zu bewerten ist. Problematisch ist diese Art der Definition jedoch für die Soldaten, denen trotz ihres Einsatzes kein Sonderstatus zugestanden wird.

Die dänische Erfahrung mit dem Flaggentag zeigt, wie wichtig die öffentliche Wertschätzung für heimkehrende Soldaten sein kann. Obwohl die meisten dänischen Soldaten angaben, nicht zwingend eine Parade zu benötigen, wurde die Wertschätzung ihres Einsatzes und der Wiedereingliederung in Dänemark deutlich positiver bewertet als die Erfahrungen innerhalb der deutschen Vergleichsgruppe. Die Mehrheit der befragten deutschen Soldaten legt dieser Untersuchung zufolge auf Paraden oder Medaillen keinen besonderen Wert. Vielmehr wurde der Wunsch danach geäußert, öffentlich mehr und besser wahrgenommen zu werden und damit Anerkennung für den nationalen Dienst, den sie leisteten, zu erfahren. Studien haben gezeigt, dass das Bild der Bundeswehr und ihrer Soldaten in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit auf einem stabil hohen Niveau ist. Es scheint vielmehr, dass die Soldaten diese Wertschätzung nicht wahrnehmen können. Eine umfassendere Veteranenpolitik könnte dabei helfen, die vorhandene Unterstützung in die Truppen zu tragen.

Der politische Umgang mit dem offiziellen Ende des Afghanistan-Einsatzes in Deutschland kann in dieser Hinsicht als sinnbildlich angesehen werden. Nachdem die letzten deutschen Heimkehrer in Abwesenheit eines hohen politischen Vertreters in Deutschland landeten und auch öffentlich dem Ende der Mission nicht gesondert gedacht wurde, wurde dieses Manko erst nach weiter medialer Kritik und dem dramatischen Fall von Kabul mit dem Großen Zapfenstreich behoben. Dieser traditionelle Appell fand jedoch unter Ausschluss der Öffentlichkeit statt, offenbar aus Angst vor militärkritischen Protesten und damit in Negierung der Ergebnisse einschlägiger Studien, nach denen die Mehrheit der deutschen Bevölkerung der Bundeswehr und ihren Soldaten positiv gegenübersteht. Durch konsequente

Rücksichtnahme auf eine militärkritische Minderheit werden die Soldaten jedoch in ihrer Fehlwahrnehmung bestärkt, ihr Beruf würde generell nicht geschätzt. Der Umgang mit den Rückkehrern und dem Großen Zapfenstreich steht damit sinnbildlich für das militärsoziologische Unwohlsein in weiten Teilen der politisch Verantwortlichen.

In dem direkten Vergleich der Militärkulturen Deutschlands und Dänemarks muss angemerkt werden, dass die dänische Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik vor vollkommen anderen historischen Hintergründen entstanden ist und sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten deutlich aktivistischer entwickeln konnte als der überaus vorsichtige deutsche Kontrapart. Die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit, die Erfahrungen aus Befreiung, völliger Demilitarisierung und Kaltem Krieg und die Antizipation einer militär-aversiven Zivilgesellschaft wirken bis ins 21. Jahrhundert fort. Sie lassen in der deutschen Politik ähnlich, dänisch-robuste Ansätze nicht zu, weder verfassungsrechtlich, noch in Bezug auf soziale Konventionen. Vor diesem Hintergrund ist der Wandel, den die Bundeswehr in Afghanistan vollzogen hat, bemerkenswert. Während Dänemark bereits vor Afghanistan über robuste Auslandseinsatzenerfahrungen verfügte, war dies in Deutschland noch nicht der Fall. Unter diesen Gesichtspunkten hatte es Dänemark sicherlich leichter, neue militärische Traditionen umzusetzen und eine umfassende Veteranenpolitik zu etablieren.

Dennoch kann die Transformation der Bundeswehr insbesondere angesichts der aktuellen geopolitischen Konflikte nicht als abgeschlossen betrachtet werden. Vielmehr müsste eine kontinuierliche Weiterentwicklung der immateriellen Veteranenpolitik erwogen und vorangetrieben werden, die die Erfahrungen aus dem Afghanistaneinsatz mit den neuen Notwendigkeiten der wiedererstarkten Landes- und Bündnisverteidigung verbindet. Für die weitere Entwicklung der deutschen Veteranenpolitik kann die dänische Veteranenarbeit als Referenzmodell herangezogen werden.

Der Vergleich zwischen Deutschland und Dänemark hat gezeigt, dass der gesellschaftliche Umgang mit heimkehrenden Soldaten eine größere Bedeutung für die Identitätsbildung der Soldaten hat, als der Einsatz selbst. Die Einstellung der Öffentlichkeit gegenüber heimkehrenden Soldaten hängt sowohl mit der politischen Wertschätzung als auch mit ihrem Status innerhalb der zivil-militärischen Beziehungen in einer Gesellschaft zusammen. Es ist nunmehr Aufgabe der Politik, die öffentliche

Anerkennung der Soldaten und ihrer Arbeit besser und nachhaltiger zu fördern. Dabei ist jeder Erfolg oder Misserfolg einer militärischen Mission unabhängig von der Arbeit der Soldaten zu bewerten. In den beiden Ländern sind verstärkte Anstrengungen bei der Aufklärung der Öffentlichkeit über den Dienst der Soldaten im In- und Ausland erforderlich, um eine breitere öffentliche Unterstützung zu gewinnen. Im Rahmen der bilateralen Beziehungen zwischen den Nachbarländern wäre es daher unter anderem denkbar, eine gemeinsame Enquete-Untersuchungskommission einzusetzen, um Erfahrungen und Ansätze im Umgang mit Soldaten und heimkehrenden Veteranen zu diskutieren und gemeinsam weiter zu entwickeln.

