

Julika Bake / Berthold Meyer

**The Image of the Democratic Soldier – Empirical Findings in the
German Case**
The German Case

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Contents

1. Preliminary remark	2
2. Overview of interviews and participant observation	3
3. Overview of the interviewees	4
4. Findings	5
4.1. The ideal soldier	5
4.2. Innere Führung. Or: Army and Democracy	12
4.3. Army and Civil Society	20
4.4. Army and Politics	22
4.5. The Bundeswehr and other armies	25
4.6. A Dent in the Positive Picture? “The Others”	26
5. Summary	27
6. Former and New Hypotheses on the Soldiers’ “Image of the Soldier”	29

1. Preliminary remark

Understanding the education of German soldiers is not possible without the knowledge of the term “Innere Führung”. But this term is not easily translated, as “Führung” in German means leadership and education as well as the result of both on the level of behavior. The concept behind¹ was supposed to define the internal relations of the members of the armed forces and the communication processes in the military hierarchy which were not or not primarily to be characterized by order and obedience, but instead by information and insight into the necessity of the requested action. On the Bundeswehr website the following description is found today: “The concept of “Innere Führung’ binds the army during the performance of its mandate to the values of the basic law. The concept has the task to adjust and to help tolerate tensions which exist between the individual rights of a free citizen on the one hand and the military duties of a soldier on the other hand.”

The realisation of the concept of “Innere Führung” requires learning and training on all levels of the Bundeswehr. Superiors are supposed to have internalised the concept to teach it not only to young recruits during the first phase of their education, but also later in other situations. For this, the Bundeswehr has established the “ Zentrum Innere Führung” (Center Innere Führung) in Koblenz. In addition to serving as the central steering unit of the Bundeswehr for “Innere Führung”, the Centre is a training centre where year after year about 14.000 soldiers and other persons take part in training courses.

The Centre consists of a staff group and four departments in Koblenz, with a fifth department being located in Strausberg². The first department is called “Basic Groundwork” and has the task to further develop the concept of “Innere Führung”. It organizes the education and training units for military superiors who prepare for a mission abroad und seminars for civil teachers or journalists. The second department concerns “Human Resource Management, Support and Care”. The courses organized by this division comprehend amongst others military coaching, moderator training, supervision for peers and moderators, personnel management and training of superiors for special missions abroad. The third department deals with “Political Education” and has the task both to communicate to soldiers the free democratic basic order and to facilitate acceptance of the necessity of the military service for peace, liberty and law. The fourth department concerns “Law” and presents courses and educational materials on the law of equal treatment of male and female soldiers, participation rights, and questions of military

¹ See Berthold Meyer, *Innere Führung und Auslandseinsätze: Was wird aus dem Markenzeichen der Bundeswehr?* HSFK-Report Nr. 2/2009, pp.5-15.

² For the following information, see the Centre’s website: <http://www.innerefuehrung.bundeswehr.de/portal/a/zinfue>

order. Seminars are held on legal aspects of security policy, the framework of international law for deployments abroad, and also as part of the preparation for concrete deployments. The fifth department, the outpost of the centre in Strausberg, was established in 1994, four years after German unification, in Eastern Germany to disseminate the philosophy of the “army of (German) unity” to people in the new “Länder” (federal states) and to seminar participants from memberstates of the NATO-“partnership for peace”.

2. Overview of interviews and participant observation

During two courses at the Zentrum Innere Führung in Koblenz in the summer of 2008, we had the opportunity to interview a total of 24 professional soldiers as well as to observe each course. The interviews were between one hour and three hours long with an average length of about 90 minutes. They all took place within a separate and quiet room within the Zentrum Innere Führung, either before/after the course (commissioned officers) or during the course (non-commissioned officers).

Both courses observed had “Innere Führung” as their general subject; besides “Leadership” and “Civic Education” as the two main subjects, also the following issues were part of the course:

- Women’s integration,
- Legal aspects of missions abroad,
- Law on soldiers’ participation,
- German security policy,
- Tradition,
- The Military Ombudsman of the German Bundestag,
- and Ethics.

The contents had been part of other CO and NCO courses and lectures before, so that there was not much that the soldiers had not heard of before. Still, they said in the interviews that it was refreshing and helpful to get in touch with the lecturers of the Zentrum Innere Führung and to be able to exchange and discuss experiences. While the courses observed were compulsory for the participants in order to qualify for their respective position of commander (COs) or company sergeant (NCOs), the Zentrum Innere Führung offers further courses on single issues such as “Peer Support” or “The Experience of Innere Führung as a Team” which are not obligatory.

Both of the observed courses lasted from Monday morning to Friday afternoon. During the course for commissioned officers, I participated in the whole course and conducted interviews before and after class every day. During the course for non-commissioned officers, it was suggested several times that I conduct the interviews during class time which is why I only observed one fourth of the course myself.

Both courses were facilitated with a great variety of methods, e.g. presentations, group work, simulation, discussions. The soldiers seemed attentive, although only very few took notes. They were encouraged to discuss and ask questions and did so quite frankly, objecting to the facilitators' statements and apparently not holding back critical comments about/towards "their employer". It was pointed out that none of the matters discussed or opinions stated would leave the room. The facilitators introduced themselves in a personal way describing their family and hobbies, which seemed to be a usual thing to do. They also emphasized that it was their task to help and serve the soldiers in regard to questions on *Innere Führung*, not only during the course, but at all times. All of this created a rather open atmosphere, with occasional laughter, but mostly quiet and friendly.

3. Overview of the interviewees

All of the interviewed soldiers had served in the German Armed Forces for about 20 years. Out of eleven commissioned officers, all were male and five were members of the General Staff (which is a rather high number considering that only about 12,5% of all Bundeswehr COs belong to it). All but one who was on the reserve list were professional soldiers. Three were members of the Air Force, while eight were members of the Army. Out of 13 non-commissioned officers, all were male, three were members of the Air Force, two were members of the Navy and again eight were members of the General Army.³ The only female participant at the courses was one NCO who did not volunteer to take part in an interview. All of the interviewed NCOs were professional soldiers.

The commissioned officers (11 interviews) are generally responsible for the soldiers' education and training and had all facilitated civic education during their time as company commander (about ten to fifteen years before). They either were already or were soon going to be commander of a battalion. The non-commissioned officers (13 interviews) already had been or were going to be first sergeants and as such bear responsibility for personnel matters and the soldiers' well-being. The nickname of this position, "the company's mother" already shows the emotional connotation and the extent to which caring for "one's soldiers" and helping them is part of this job. As there were no courses offered for lower ranks and because our time was limited, it was not possible to interview privates or recruits.

³ Due to the voluntary nature of the interview, it was not possible to aim for a representative distribution within the sample.

Having served in the German Armed Forces for at least 20 years and having been professional soldiers for at least ten, 23 of the 24 interviewed soldiers showed a great identification with their profession. It was an essential part of their personal identity.

4. Findings⁴

In the main part of this report we will present our findings on the image of “the democratic soldier” among German Bundeswehr soldiers. This chapter is divided up into the following parts: The ideal soldier and leader, Innere Führung or: Army and Democracy, Army and Civil Society, Army and Politics (including missions) and a comparison of the Bundeswehr and other armed forces.

4.1. The ideal soldier

In the eyes of the interviewed soldiers, the ideal soldier is characterized by five main qualities. First of all, almost all name *comradeship* as a major aspect of being a soldier. It defines the military ethos. Trust and dedication are crucial, because in the end lives may depend on it, as one Lieutenant Colonel said:

“For me, comradeship is absolutely crucial. Because, I think, that in the end, when it comes to an exchange of fire and you really have to rely on your men and women for good or for evil, only one thing counts. Then, only comradeship counts, in my eyes. (...) That is the cement that keeps us together in the end and that helps us master even the most adverse situations with the highest pressure together.” (H170-178)

But also in everyday business, the ideal soldier is a team player who does not only look out for himself, but understands himself as part of a community. This includes offering help to others in any given situation, but also accepting it, no matter whether you like each other as friends or not. One of the commissioned officers emphasized that this social bond called comradeship is even more effective than commanding. He said:

“I can achieve very, very much through comradeship. Definitely. Also through commands and obedience, but on that I cannot rely. When I know, that the man next to me accepts me and likes me, he is definitely going to help me more than when I command him to do so. And then, when the bullet really comes our way, he will rather bend his head down than when he thinks, yesterday we were standing around together, had a beer together than- if he thinks, this ass, now he is ordering me around again.” (X160-169)

⁴ Translating quotations is always a tricky issue. All interviews were conducted in German; every statement in this paper has been translated by the interviewer herself. Due to lack of space, we will not provide the original German statements in footnotes, as would be the usual procedure.

Comradeship is not limited to one's own army, but extends to other soldiers in general. As one Lieutenant Colonel of the General Staff point out:

“This is not a German or a national virtue, but something that basically exists in all armed forces. That exceeds the nation. When you are working together with allied armed forces, you rely – without knowing him, knowing his language, you count on him to ensure the camp's safety. (...) This trust, I almost believe, you cannot really define it, where you get it from, but this trust exists.” (F289-298)

Secondly, the ideal soldier also *serves* his employer and the state selflessly. He/She contains him- or herself and should always put the general interest before his or her own. “Work comes first, and when that is done, only then you yourself play a role.” (P259-260) The ideal soldier always does what is asked of him, he is flexible and able to adapt quickly to new situations and challenges: “He can put himself to use in many different situations, be it a flood or fighting a forest fire, instead of saying ‘There is no shooting or fighting here, I'm gonna go home, because that's not I trained for.’” (B309-311) This also implies a certain flexibility and creativity that one needs in order to handle the different situations.

Further, the ideal soldier always takes over responsibility and ungrudgingly takes action on things even if he does not want to. This willingness to serve is oriented at the state, the people and the form of government (=democracy) and should not be affected by changes in government, as one NCO put it: “to be self-confident as a soldier and to stand up for this system, this people and this state, even if one does not always agree with everything”⁵ (X215-217). I observed that in the soldier's view, this does not at all contradict the pretense of the critical and political soldier. Most of the interviewees differentiated between being critical and taking an active interest in political decisions on the one hand and wholeheartedly serving the state on the other hand, as if there were times for this and times for that mindset.

This already leads to another quality of the ideal soldier many of the interviewees agreed on, *loyalty*. The ideal soldier is loyal to the oath he/she took and to the state as his employer, but he should also show loyalty in his daily work, when it comes to superiors or subordinates. One might very well not agree with everything the next superior suggests or commands. But instead of objecting during the respective meeting or in front of other people, one should approach him or her afterwards and express one's concerns in private.

“If you are in a meeting and the boss says something and I don't agree, I will be so kind to shut up and then, afterwards, say: Boss, I didn't like that. (...) It's just like the relationship between mother, father and child. You do not argue in front of the child.” (S375-378)

Loyalty also plays a big role in the soldiers' expectations towards politics and civil society (see also parts 3.3 and 3.4). Regarding the latter, some soldiers remarked that if a

⁵ He alludes to 1998, when the Green Party, having developed from the rather left student and peace movement, became part of the government for the first time.

society decides to have an army, it should also stand by it and not rant about it all the time (see “Army and Civil Society”). Politicians should show loyalty in the regard that they should, for example, await the investigation of an incident, before dismissing a soldier. Quite a few of the NCOs brought this up during the interviews when talking about loyalty and the relation between the military and politics – shortly before the course for NCOs there had been a shooting in Afghanistan during which three civilians, a woman and two children, who were driving towards a checkpoint and did not stop despite several warnings, were killed by a German soldier. The German Minister of Defense apologized to the family of the dead on the next day which some soldiers perceived as a stab in the back of the soldier involved respectively the army in general:

“It’s just unbelievable, that a Minister of Defense flies to a mission country, apologizes to some people and is afraid of vendetta and a soldier, who just acted according to instructions, is being accused and legal proceedings are introduced. (...) Of course, not everybody can do whatever they want down there, but that is another subject.” (O1051-1056; 1087-1089)

„Even as Minister of Defense, I cannot go there, take out my check book and try to console people with money. No! I have to say: These soldiers were under a threat. You can find out through an investigation, and that’s why they acted like that. When I am in a war zone, bullets will be flying every now and then.” (S1159-1163)

The respective soldiers emphasized that, of course, there should be an investigation of the incident to clarify whether the soldier in question had acted correctly. But they also insisted that in a situation like that one had to take a decision and that this decision to shoot at someone was never easy – being criticized like this afterwards would just increase the insecurity of other soldiers in similar situations in the future. Moreover, the ideal soldier has *soft skills* and empathy. Many interviewees stressed that he/she should be open, able to adjust to and able to communicate with many different people – from rather poorly educated subordinates to superiors in the General Staff with a university education as well as with the Armed Forces administration. As success in the military often depends on many people cooperating and each contributing their part, especially those in a leading position should be able to respond to and integrate. Like the aspect of comradeship, this hints at the soldier’s profession as one where personal social skills play a major role.

Finally, very many of the interviewed soldiers point out that the ideal soldier should make up his own mind and be *critical*. He or she should be able to reflect upon things and think along, instead of merely following orders. Many of the interviewed soldiers also thought this freedom to ask questions and participate in the development of an action plan was a great advantage of the German Armed Forces, allowing them to be more flexible and independent. This is a prerequisite for the German tradition of mission-type tactics (see below), but also a question of motivation:

“I have to allow my people a certain freedom, and a certain maturity. (...) I think that is a tradition that we have, that is, that one takes his staff or subordinates seriously and works together reasonably.” (E 513-521)

- The ideal soldier – necessarily a fighter?

Some soldiers also addressed the question of what essentially distinguishes the profession of a soldier from that of others, that is, whether a soldier should be defined not only by his or her qualities, but also by the tasks he or she performs. One of the NCOs told me:

“A good soldier should first- or on one hand, know his job as a soldier, which I personally think the majority doesn’t know anymore. Many are specialists in their field, computers or technology or whatever, but in my opinion you are first of all a soldier and this is the job he should know, his gun, NBC weapons, and so on.” (P174-179)⁶

Many of the interviewed NCOs, but also of the COs criticized that the current advertisement campaigns for new cadets presented the Armed Forces as if it were just a simple company which created a false image among young recruits. The soldiers perceived this as highly dishonest and unhelpful, blaming their leadership to deliberately keep quiet about the true image (and risks) of a soldier in order to increase the number the applicants:

“The Bundeswehr is being promoted and praise like, like- like other companies it advertises. Like- just like this commercial “Study Aerospace science!”, wants to become a pilot and then somebody in the background asks “Yes, and why else do you want to join the Bundeswehr?” There, being a soldier comes at third place. That’s wrong, being a soldier should come at first place. And then comes everything else.” (Q135-140)

Of course, the NCOs quoted here has a different perspective on the essential tasks of a soldier than the five COs and members of the General Staff that I spoke to. But even if only a few of the interviewed soldiers emphasized this image of a soldier necessarily being a fighter, the question of what distinguishes the Armed Forces from other well-organized organizations active in crisis situations is one that many have in mind. Quite often I was told that the Bundeswehr could not just be “the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) in uniforms”. What exactly the borders of the Army’s tasks and engagements were, none of the interviewed soldiers said.

⁶ His colleague takes it even further and states that a good soldier should always aim for deployment in order to actually make use of the knowledge and training he or she has received (see M1399-1404).

- The ideal leader

There are several distinct characteristics which define a good leader in the eyes of the interviewed soldiers. The main ones are being a model for one's subordinates, caring for their personal well-being, showing honesty and integrity and last but not least applying mission-type tactics.

"As a superior, I only ask for something that I would be willing to do myself", M 1276

"They see, aah, he is not only standing there or driving beside us and mistreating us, but when you carry the same burden, the soldiers understand and follow along." P225-227

Being a model for one's subordinates is not only a way to demonstrate fairness and loyalty. Sharing hardships with one's subordinates also conveys a kind of support and motivation; it may show integrity and increase one's credibility among the subordinates.

"I was always outside (with them), we had to observe elections in the Balkans and I decided, we are out there for 24 hours, we divide the platoons into two, do 12-hour-shifts and I will drive out with them, especially during the tough periods, at night between two and five, and so on. And spoke to them via radio, too. (...) Even during the election period, we managed very well (like this)." (E1921-1929)

Being a model also is a possibility to teach things that are not easily expressed in words: *"If I did not exemplify comradeship in my own actions, a young soldier wouldn't be able to imitate it. Wouldn't be able to learn it. Comradeship is something you can learn, partly. (...) But I can only learn that, when older ones show me in their actions." (X307-210) The same applies to a concept such as Innere Führung which many say you cannot teach, but you kind of "pick it up along the way" or to values in general that one tries to pass on to younger subordinates (H276-283).*

Another important quality in a good leader is his *honest care* for the personal well-being of his subordinates. Many said that it was most important to simply be open and talk to someone, if he or she left the impression that something was wrong.

"I can read their files (...) But to really know how they will react in a special situation – my girlfriend is pregnant, I am having problems with the local court, I am plunged in debt, whatever, I will only get to know them through personal contact (...) I have to work with the people. Talk to the people". (NCO, M522-526)

"When he comes to you with a problem, and may it be personal, you will listen to him, of course. (...) If you have the chance, you- you can at least give advice and maybe you can even do something to help, that depends on the situation." (CO, F824-828)

"You have to be able to listen, otherwise you will never get to the real reasons for your subordinates' problems, and that's what I'm there for." (NCO, H226-228)

Every interviewed soldier stressed that this care for a subordinate's well-being is not limited to service-related issues, but very much also pertained to private matters.

"You have to approach them the right way. You must not always start off with work-related matters, but you have to know, okay, he has two kids, he spend his vacation there. And it's an art to know all the right birthdays." (B1224-1227) Whether it is an upcoming divorce or a dead pet, it seems that anything that could influence a soldier's job performance may be addressed upon request. But also generally, one *"should know the people and be able to assess someone's abilities" (B438-440)*, just in order to appoint them an adequate job. *"You do not stand in front of a machine and have to screw. You have to win these people, you have to win their hearts. That is something quite irrational." (B445-450)*

Further, the ideal leader has personal qualities such as honesty, integrity and credibility. In working relationships where trust is crucial, many interviewees emphasize that these traits play an important role. A superior should be: *"Acting with integrity. Being open. And honest. That means, not to lead people up the garden path, but to stay with the truth. And to vouch for the things you say." (H264-266)* This includes clearly expressing your expectations, not exaggerating the strain on your subordinates, but also controlling the fulfilment of orders, keeping your word, and generally keeping to the same standards applied to your subordinates. Only if subordinates trust that a leader will demand action, yet not abuse his power, will they follow him and even follow orders when there is no time to ask questions.

"Mission-type tactics" ("Führen mit Auftrag") was one the main concepts that appeared throughout all interviews, usually several times during one interview and in relation to many different aspects. Officially it is also considered part of the concept of "Innere Führung". It became quite clear that mission-type tactics is in fact an identity-building concept which many feel that they try to integrate into their own leadership style. The interviewees described "Führen mit Auftrag" as a *"cooperative style of leadership, which integrates subordinates" (F456)*. This is done through explaining the jobs instead of just ordering the soldiers to do them, counting on the fact that they will much rather follow when they understand the reason and sensibility of the task ahead. But "Führen mit Auftrag" also means that an order usually does not provide a detailed description of all the actions that need to be taken. Instead it should specify the background and reason of the order as well as the aim and allow the receiving soldier to develop his own plan of how to achieve it. Many assume that this way the soldiers have room for creativity and ideas of their own which adds to their motivation and satisfaction.

"That means, that when we do have enough time, I will explain to the people, why they are doing it. Not only politically, but also why it makes sense militarily and why it is necessary. Then, besides an explanation and generating trust, I can be sure that in a period of time, when I can only say, come on, to the right, and then, and so on, they know, he's explained this to us so many times and has given so many reasonable orders, this is rubbish, but we will do it." (E608-614)

“Führen mit Auftrag” implies a certain flexibility that the soldiers are convinced the Army would not have otherwise; when there is a problem, when a plan does not work or things do not go as planned, German soldiers are deemed more flexible and independent enough to react and still achieve the goal, because they do not rely on being ordered every step of the way. As one commander said: “(In the German Army), somebody dares to say, it won’t work in that way, I have to solve that. In order for the platoon to arrive, I have to go another way. And I make this decision. And I report this and that’s that.” (B680-684)

In addition to these four main characteristics, the interviewed soldiers said that a good leader would not only give orders, but also control that they are being carried out. This was an issue which was much discussed and commented on during both courses, as both times a handful of soldiers criticized that, firstly, there was not enough discipline among comrades regardless of the rank and, secondly, that superiors did not exercise control over the orders they had given, adding to this undisciplined attitude.

“Often, you also notice that – at least with us, the superior can do a lot through supervision and remedy of defects, but it is not done a lot of times. And then, everybody says to themselves, man, if he doesn’t do it, if the highest superior doesn’t do it, the next level says, why should I take a risk, and then the next level after that also says, if the two above me don’t say anything, why should I? And then, nobody does it.” (H864-872)

The interviewed soldiers also stressed that they were very much for a cooperative style of leadership and discussions, but that it was not acceptable that, upon an order, subordinates would first ask “Why?” and then “Why me?” instead of just saying “Yes, Sir.”

Further competencies include that a good leader inspired subordinates, *“served as a point of orientation” (F835-841)*, accepts criticism and turns to others for advice.

- Ethos

Most of the interviewed soldiers could not really relate to the term “military ethos” which I then often described as “particular values” or distinct features that the military might have. In general, the answers were quite similar to the ones regarding the ideal soldier or leadership style. Many stressed comradeship and service to the state as the most important aspects of a military ethos. Other values mentioned were integrity, loyalty, responsibility, honesty and initiative.

- Tradition

There were only few interviewees for whose identification tradition played an important role. This can probably be expected in a country with very distinct breaks in history and a public culture that encourages a rather rational and detached attitude towards the past. Some spoke of their position as company sergeant or their corps as a reference point for tradition and one or two mentioned something of a family history. But

most only recited the officially announced army traditions or explicitly said that tradition was not something they had in mind when thinking about their job. At the same time, many expressed an interest in learning more on tradition. Both courses included an afternoon on “tradition” which was very popular among the participants. The lively and anecdotal style of the facilitator, too, made this part rather interesting. It was very eagerly received, but only little discussed afterwards; as one soldier said: “(This is finally someone who not only tells us the same old, politically correct stories, but who actually looks into history in order to develop a German military tradition.”⁷

4.2. Innere Führung. Or: Army and Democracy

Especially the concrete answers on Innere Führung showed that the soldiers had been “children of their institution” for a long period of time. With up to twenty years as Bundeswehr soldiers, they not only identified with the official concept and had internalized it to a great extent, but many of them had also made it an essential part of their own actions. All of them described Innere Führung as a kind of “culture” – something that guided their actions that could hardly be numbered or substantiated, but that was always there. One of the soldiers said that *“This Innere Führung is not something, that I, let’s say, practice from seven to eight o’clock and then I go back to doing administrative work. It’s (an essential) part of the job. It’s always there.”* (K478-481)

Another soldier spoke of “our values” and “the glue that keeps us together”, another said it was “simple common sense”. This “comprehensive quality” in a soldier made it almost impossible to teach in class:

“That is very difficult, especially everything that regards social things or the human; each person has to have a certain basis in order to learn something that has to do with his personality. Innere Führung is not- he has to understand it or else, he will never understand.” (W941-945)

For Innere Führung especially, the soldiers agreed, it was important not only to cover certain aspects theoretically during a course, but to work on one’s own behaviour and to serve as models to the younger soldiers. But what is Innere Führung after all? As one sergeant put it, *“Innere Führung is the compromise, to demand something of a soldier military-wise, but in a way, that he understands. That he supports. To have him as an equal partner.”* (W951-953)

This aspect of the critical, independent soldier who should not only follow orders, but understand them is central to the concept of Innere Führung. The before-mentioned approach of mission-type tactics is also an important part of this. A different part of Innere Führung lies in the emphasis of the soldier as a human being which includes

⁷ In fact, I felt quite uncomfortable when this particular facilitator did not always address the German past in a politically correct manner.

aspects of care and communication. After describing these aspects, we will link our findings to the soldiers' motives and aims as well as to the question how the different aspects of Innere Führung are applied in and possibly influenced by missions abroad.

- The political soldier

All of the interviewed soldiers displayed a great interest in politics and political decisions. All of them said that every soldier regardless of rank or position should have civic education in order firstly to understand how the political decisions that effect him as a soldier are taken, secondly to understand for what kind of government, which values and norms he or she might risk her life and thirdly also to understand the background of missions abroad. This again shows the apparently strong attitude that a soldier should understand his job and the orders given to him. He or she is explicitly not an apolitical soldier, but very strongly bound to democratic norms and values. Quite a few of the interviewed soldiers emphasized that not only should all soldiers attend civic education classes, but that the rest of society should do the same, in order to raise the interest and the feeling of responsibility among citizens. The civic education classes themselves were perceived very differently. Some of the interviewed soldiers pointed out that it needed a committed and well-educated teacher in order to have civic education classes that actually served their purpose – to increase the soldiers' interest in politics and to teach them something⁸:

“If you have a committed company commander who reads the newspaper everyday, who is interested in things, who may be even is active in politics, the civic education classes will be of a different quality than when you have one, who say I don't really care. Once, we had a political scientist as platoon leader, there was a lot going on and it was a lot of fun. (...) so, it always has to do with people.” (V528-533)

Some soldiers also remarked that while other educational goals could be measured and had to be achieved by a certain time (the ability to use certain weaponry, for example), achievements in civic education were rather difficult to assess. And because the demands for other trainings (weapons, machinery, formal training) was so high, civic education classes were often the first thing to be crossed off the list of things to do. *“We all know that this is not how it's done“ (Y498)*, one soldier said, when asked whether his expectations of civic education were met. Then, he pointed out that the need for civic education was much higher today in the days of missions abroad than it had been during the old days of the East-West-Conflict:

“Today a lot more (civic education) than we can accomplish during the day is necessary. To really communicate to everyone, why the mission in Afghanistan for example makes sense. Because there are many soldiers who doubt it.” (Y563-567)

⁸ Civic education usually lies in the responsibility of the company commander, a young officer cadet.

One of the interviewed sergeants may serve as an example for a certain share of non-commissioned officers and lower ranks, who said that

“Civic education in general, but also at this course should be done more clearly or with more intensity. Yesterday, I spoke to a comrade about this, I said: ‘Did you know all this? All these complex interrelations, where Germany is involved? I have to admit: one or two things, that we have been told here, make me develop a different view (on missions abroad).” (S855-860)

This soldier, probably representative of a certain share of soldiers, expressed a very critical attitude towards missions in general, but also an urgent need for more information and education. He added that especially in the position as company sergeant, one should be able to *“communicate (the Army’s new tasks), or, develop a different attitude first of all” (S870-871)*. And for that, he (and the others) needed better civic education, so that when a discussion among his subordinates about a certain mission came up, he would have some arguments up his sleeve and could argue for the mission instead of not understanding himself what its purpose might be. Interestingly enough, though, many of the interviewed soldiers stressed that raising the soldiers’ political awareness was not merely a matter of classes, trips or presentations. There were several that held civic education was something to be done through *“a simple conversation”* during cigarette breaks or lunch time:

“Especially when chatting during a break, at the shooting gallery, when you stand there with the soldiers, that you talk to them. Just pick up on a subject that affects society at the moment and discuss it and also state one’s opinion as a subordinate. That is also really important that the soldiers realizes that one, that their superiors really deal with a certain subject critically. And has an opinion of his own.” (J422-428)

Quite a few soldiers also emphasized that civic education not only meant to teach certain contents or convey certain information, but to teach an attitude of political thinking. The aim of civic education in their eyes was to teach the young soldiers to discuss, to exchange views and form an opinion of their own. This does not contradict the demand for more discipline, as one soldier explicitly points out: *“There is a time for discussion and there is a time for saying ‘Yes, Sir’ and both are important.”*

This attitude, as a soldier to actively engage in debates and discussions on politics (as in, things that concern the state and society) showed in many details of the interviews and the course observations. Not all of the soldiers were interested in politics and engaged in discussions out of an intellectual interest, but they showed a very serious and active interest and had obviously learned to discuss things. There were lively discussions in both courses⁹. Still, it is difficult to assess whether the participants did bring forward all matters that they cared or had an opinion about. For one, they were rather efficiency-

⁹ The participants of the NCO course told me during the breaks, as I could only observe a small part of the program.

oriented, so that it is very likely that they did not say something, because they felt it was not the right time and place or the right person to address this issue with. Secondly, they made clear in the interviews that loyalty was an important virtue and openly criticizing a comrade was something they would rather not do, unless it served a clear purpose in the debate.

This self-image of a political, that is, independent and critical soldier is of course not without contradictions. As one of the non-commissioned officers pointed out, one had to find a balance between inquiring about the background of political decisions on the one hand and serving willingly as an instrument of the executive on the other hand:

“For me, the most important aspect of Innere Führung, in leading human being, is that a soldier must understand his mission, he must see a meaning in what he does, he has to know why he is doing that. And that is why- it’s a vicious circle. It’s a recurrent theme. That’s why we have civic education to make the boys realize what we are doing there, to talk openly with them, not to lie to them, of course. But, on the other hand, you clearly have to say, with the primacy of politics, it is not up to me to decide whether we’ll go there or not. That’s my own personal opinion. And if I am told, next week you are going onto that plane, that I will go onto that plane, it’s as easy as that, because that’s still my job.” (T1067-1078)

When asked about their civil rights and freedoms, each of the interviewed soldiers stated that he did not feel limited or discriminated against in any way. The restrictions on political engagement, for example, were all judged to be reasonable and well-founded. Everyone was convinced that working in a civil company would entail similar restrictions. At the same time, again it was stressed that trust played an important role – as long as the soldiers trusted that their freedoms were only limited when it was absolutely necessary, they would not feel restricted.

- The human soldier

The second major part of Innere Führung focuses on the “human”, that is, the social and psychological side of military service. Almost all of the interviewed soldiers said that Innere Führung meant to give room to the human aspects of the soldier profession in their everyday work.

„When the commander comes in and recognizes the other and doesn’t say, that’s only a private, I won’t talk to him. But, I know who that is. What he is like as a person. I can’t do that with 800 people, but at least I can be interested and gather some information, have an understanding like that. To treat them like humans.” (B1202-1204)

For the company sergeants especially, as it is an explicit part of their job description, but also for the commanders this meant to commit to comradeship and care for each other’s well-being as well as to really get to know one’s subordinates in order to be able

to judge them and handle them in the best way. This, as before-mentioned, includes being open for someone's personal problems, as these may very well influence his or her work. It also kind of implies that Innere Führung as a concept is relationship-oriented. As one commander to be pointed out, if he had to supervise a company just for a single task, he would of course treat them humanly, but wouldn't call it Innere Führung: "*Innere Führung, that would mean that I'd expect more, I would want to get to know them and do something with them.*" (E1968-1969)

Communication is a major part of this. When asked about the forms of conflict resolution, many of the interviewed soldiers simply said: "talking to each other". Very few mentioned official mechanisms like disciplinary measures and the Parliamentary Ombudsman, some simply referred to hierarchy and obedience. But most of them spoke of "common sense" and, in case of the sergeants who commonly are addressed in the case of conflicting interests, also the ability to be open to mediate was named as a possibility. At the same time, a few soldiers mentioned that "others" often tried to avoid conflicts in order not to have to intervene or take action or because they did not want to hurt their own career: "*So you think twice, before you say something. In order not step on someone's toes.*" (B1059-1060) This in mind, it is somewhat remarkable (and might confirm the soldiers' perceptions) that, in the course for commissioned officers, there was a presentation with the simple message that overlooking violations against the principles of Innere Führung, i.e. human dignity, was a sure way to stop one's career. The facilitator urgently warned the participants and (soon to be) commanders that they were not well-advised to look away in case of violations, but that they instead should intervene.

- Soldiers' motives and aims to join the army

Possibly related to the soldiers' expressed value of communication and empathy is one their main motives to join the army after serving as draftees. Many of them said that working with people was a major motivation to join the service:

[0]"I don't think there's any other job in which you have so many different people in one spot. My favourite example is that as a recruit I once had a homeless man, who suddenly had a home again and warm meals and clothers, but I also had those who had graduated university and finished writing their PhD thesis during their draft. This range of people is definitely there and every day I again find it exciting and interesting and fun again." (V91-97)

As a soldier, one meets and works with many different people with different personalities and different backgrounds which requires a certain empathy and "a feeling for people". This makes serving in the army almost some kind of a social adventure.

Another major motive for joining the army after the draft was the fact that many simply enjoyed what they were doing and they felt the army could offer them a great

variety of tasks and possibilities. Already as young group leaders they had the chance to work closely with a small group of recruits and takes over responsibility for them. A third, often-mentioned motive to become a voluntary and then a professional soldier after the draft was the will to serve the state. Quite a few of the interviewed soldiers felt a deeper meaning in their everyday job that contributed a great deal to their satisfaction.¹⁰ Further motives to join the army as voluntary soldiers were career possibilities and financial security (especially in the case of the company sergeants/NCOs), the prospect of an honorable profession and the somewhat “emotional safety” of an institution with a transparent set up and very clear rules.

- Innere Führung in Missions Abroad

The question to what extent the concept of Innere Führung, i.e. the political and the human soldier, could be applied during missions abroad, led to many interesting answers. All of the interviewed soldiers claimed that Innere Führung (as in, keeping the human part of the soldier in mind) could very well be applied when abroad; according to them, it was even more important to keep the human part in mind on deployments, as the soldiers do not have the possibility to get away and divert their thoughts by going home or hanging out with someone other than other soldiers. As one needs this kind of compensation, tensions may arise and create a strained atmosphere in the camp. In addition to that, the soldiers are confronted with uncertain and thus stressful situations which require a very stable personality. Therefore, it can be crucial to know about your subordinates’ personal situation – someone who is just going through a divorce, who is in great financial trouble or whose father just died, is not as stable as he or she should be and thus is more prone to a crisis or breakdown. Many of the interviewed soldiers also pointed out that Innere Führung was actually easier to “live” in missions than at home, because people would not run home to their families at five o’clock sharp, but they would socialize in the evening and grow together as a group.

When asked to compare the Bundeswehr to other armies, some of the interviewed soldiers explicitly pointed to fair and human treatment of all soldiers, regardless of their rank. There was no one who said that Innere Führung was something to feel less of a soldier for, when comparing oneself to other armies. On the contrary, many said that it was something to be proud of, although other armies might not always be able to relate to the concept:

„But as I said, we have a very good standing in the multinational area. Although many don’t understand Innere Führung and interpret it as “soft treatment” and say that cannot be, especially from the former Eastern Bloc countries- but when they see the results, what troops accomplish, that’s not a subject anymore.” (D1025-1029)

¹⁰ It was interesting to note that some said that this meaning, this commitment to serve the German state had increased after having been on missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Afghanistan and having experienced a weak state with little infrastructure and great poverty.

Also in cooperation with other armies, one soldier said that an empathy-oriented concept such as *Innere Führung* proved to be very helpful: Bundeswehr soldiers were “brought up that way” (H751-762), one commander said, to cooperate with others, and get to know them which was a good basis for intercultural communication and cooperation. Still, one of the interviewed soldiers pointed out, that a superior’s concentration on the well-being of his or her subordinates could lead to a rather reluctant and safety-oriented behavior in situations where activities might become dangerous. Then, instead of going out and risking lives, one would tend to stay inside the camp, until the situation was calmer again, instead of going out to get the situation under control. One of the company sergeants elaborated:

„One should review whether all of that really works during missions, or whether it might hinder or endanger the mandate sometimes. There are examples- Innere Führung also means that we care about the human, the person and we all want everyone to come home healthy. And that, for example in Kosovo, led to the situation that this monastery which was supposed to be guarded- that one was afraid to be hurt oneself and therefore dodged and did not exercise the mandate. Or in Afghanistan, where people tend to stay inside the camp when there is a shooting, to let nobody out of the camp. Normally, one should do the opposite, now more than ever. Even if it’s dangerous, more than ever, going out there.” (J820-830)

The other important aspect of *Innere Führung* in missions abroad, the emphasis on the critical and independent soldier, was one of the issues discussed during the course for commissioned officers. On the one hand, the interviewed soldiers claimed that the Germans were more flexible and often quicker than other armies to react to certain situations or develop an action plan, because they did not have to wait for someone in a higher position to give an order or approve of something they developed. Also, because they were “brought up” in an environment that allowed questions and critical thinking, mistakes could be set right earlier than in other armies:

“I don’t want to claim that we Germans are world champions in non-safety-oriented thinking, but it is definitely easier for us, I have to say. The Americans are taught to follow a plan one hundred percent – if something has been planned, it is going to be done. And you cannot change that plan so easily. In the German system, that can happen sooner. Because someone dares to speak up and say, that doesn’t work, I will have to find a solution. In order for the convoy to proceed, I will go another way. And I take this decision and I give notice about it and that’s that. And the Americans don’t dare to do that. (...) There is no other way. Because the order was to go here.” (B676-687)

In this regard, mission-type tactics are something that can very well be applied during missions. Regarding the cooperation with other armies, one of the interviewed commanders said this custom of being integrated into superior decision-making was a

very German one. He referred to a multinational meeting among cooperating armies in Afghanistan to which only the Germans were not invited and said: *“But that is their leadership principle. Not to include the lower units, but to take decisions by themselves. And the others settle for that, but we don’t. In that case, we were subordinate and dependent on that decision.”* (J903-906) He then decided to go to the meeting anyway: *“Asked questions, where it then became clear, that the French did not have any answers, because they hadn’t thought about it.”* (J884-886) And: *“It’s not enough not to answer then, but then we go on. Until we have reached our aim. (...) that is really a part of Innere Führung or how we are brought up.”* (J907-910)

On the other hand, there were quite a few soldiers who feared that mission-type tactics were decreasing or weakening, as orders were becoming more detailed and thus permitted less creativity and initiative on the part of the soldiers. They ascribed this to a globalized and media-oriented world, where one could never be sure of the consequences of even the smallest action:

“I think it (mission-type tactics) is getting less, because of the “strategic private” that we already talked about, because the task of a single patrol leader on the ground has immediate and unbelievable consequences for the Minister. That is definitely different today, also because of the media and the means of communication, no doubt.” (E507-511)

Thus, sometimes (again, rather safety-oriented) one would call to the Einsatzführungskommando (Mission Command) in Potsdam, Germany in order to get orders instead of taking a decision oneself; a scenarios that could prove rather impractical in more difficult situations. As one company sergeant explained:

“Unfortunately we get further and further away from this thing with mission-type tactics. Where I find, and by now we also know this through the evaluation questionnaires, that we get further and further away from mission-type tactics. Which we always held high and practiced in trainings many times and it’s great and fantastic und works very well, and then, during missions, every order is very detailed and safety-oriented. (...) when I was in Macedonia with my platoon in 2004, after the Kosovo-Albanians’ attacks of this camp in Tetovo, (...) the question whether I may shoot or not, would have been decided in Berlin. At the General Mission Command. I would have had to explain the situation and they would have said, now you may shoot or not, which is totally absurd. The one on the ground has to decide in the end, within the legal parameters, that’s not a question, you know? But a lieutenant colonel or a colonel would have stood there looking at a screen, on the phone and said, yes you may or no, you may not, probably also with a legal adviser standing next to them.” (U1069-1095)

4.3. Army and Civil Society

All of the interviewed soldiers said that there was no public debate about the ideal soldier or about the army in general, indicating that public interest in army matters is perceived to be generally low: *„Well, a debate would require that society is actually interested in the profession of a soldier. At the moment you cannot see that, not only at the moment, but for a long time already.”* (J299-301)

Having in mind the rather radical changes – in tasks, size and locations – that the Bundeswehr has undergone in the last twenty years, quite a few claimed that while there was more media attention today, there was less public interest than before. Whether this equalled less acceptance, the interviewed soldiers could not clearly say. Still, everyone agreed that there were huge regional differences regarding the acceptance and the recognition of oneself as a soldier and the army in general. Basically, they differentiated between the North and the South of Germany (which are traditionally also two different political “camps”, the North more socialdemocratic and the South more conservative), where in the North one was met with skeptical looks in public and should rather not go outside the camp wearing his or her uniform, while in the more Southern parts a battalion commander would be the second most important person in town, having a special parking spot and being greeted with hoorays and hellos when showing up in his or her uniform. One of the battalion commanders said: *„In this area, you can really feel the openness and identification with the soldiers, and that also adds to the soldiers’ motivation and self-image. When you realize, oh, we are not some outsider, but we are respected and liked here, just as we are.”* (G 220-224)

The generally low public interest in the army was attributed to several reasons: for one, society is not directly affected by any of the army’s actions and therefore is not interested in it. Compared to “the times of national defense”, before the fall of the Berlin wall, much fewer young men are drafted each year which, in the eyes of the interviewed soldiers, would be a way of increasing civil interest. In addition to that, they feel that the shutdown of many bases has decreased the army’s presence not only in the real landscape, but also in the minds of the people.

“Especially at the German-German border there were a lot of bases, also in small villages or small towns there were cases, the Bundeswehr was present, there were these partnership agreements, which were really well taken care of, where the swearing-in ceremony would be held on the community’s sports field. (...) Because of that, there was more interaction and also more talking to each other.” (A250-255)

Then again, one NCO speaks of a general loss of public interest in state institutions or the community – which corresponds to so many soldiers criticizing the weak sense of community and willingness to serve in most people. Further, the profession of a soldier and the “business of creating security” are rather abstract topics and not easy to communicate to outsiders. Many people cannot really imagine what one actually does as

a soldier which again leads to a feeling of distance. Then again, according to the interviewed soldiers, the images that many civilians have, remembering their own service as draftees, are “stereotypes” that do not have much to do with their reality as soldiers. One of the non-commissioned officers also pointed to the German past:

„I think they don't know (what an ideal soldier could be). You see that again and again. There is a lot of scolding of soldiers. (...) But when a levee doesn't hold or there's a lot of snow that has to be cleared, then we are great, then we also get mentioned in the press every now and then. But when it comes to unpleasant things, this story with the skulls¹¹, there is a lot of ranting: weird, stupid soldiers. We've had all that. Don't know what the deal is with that. Difficult. We have destroyed a lot ourselves and I think it is mostly because of our past.“ (S433-441)

And another sergeant added:

“(In the German society), everything that has to do with the military, has a negative touch to it. That we don't need militarism like before World War One, that's obvious, that's not the point. But I just think that we are very sceptical mostly because of World War Two. And it was the aim then, and that was from those days' perspective definitely right, to completely demilitarize Germany, also spiritually or intellectually. And that continues to have an effect. That's why we have such a hard time to speak of a “war” in Afghanistan.” (U342-350)

Many of the interviewed soldiers, if not all, expressed a deep wish for more public attention towards the Bundeswehr in general. Feeling like being at a turning point, they would welcome a discussion and many combine this with a felt need for a definition of German security interests and security strategy. From a cautious perspective, one may say that some of the soldiers showed particular democratic awareness, demanding not only the political sphere, but the public in general to discuss and decide the army's place, claiming that anything else would mean a decreased legitimacy. One sergeant pointed out: *“To be really honest, theoretically I would have to quit sometime. Because we are not acknowledged by society. Not like we should be according to my understanding of my profession.” (L191-193)* Two of his comrades add:

“When it came to disarmament, nuclear threat, there was more talking than today. Although, yes, one has to say, and that's the thing, that often disappoints soldiers a little, (...) the soldiers would really like more, let's say, feedback or response from society – although soldiers today actually participate in missions. And fight, which they never did back then.” (G335-340)

¹¹ In October 2006 five photographs were published in the tabloid BILD which showed German soldiers in Afghanistan holding up and/or playing with skulls (the photographs themselves were said to be from 2003). This sparked off a big discussion about the behaviour of German soldiers abroad.

“It’s worst for a soldier, I would say, when the people or one’s own government does not back up a soldier’s actions. Yes, there is nothing worse than when a soldier goes on a mission somewhere and the people or politicians do not back it up, (...) so, therefore I would really like to wish for a debate.” (O621-626)

In this scenario, politicians are given the role of the mediator – moderating the discussion and explaining to the public why the Bundeswehr is ordered to this or that mission or limited to this or that action. Almost all of the interviewed soldiers expressed this wish; one of the commanders said:

“I would actually like for the politicians to speak out on these subjects, in general regarding the Bundeswehr’s tasks, and, and, and, speaks out more frequently and is more open and honest to the people (...) so that they would get to talking with the public and not only when it comes to increasing a mandate or some incident in a mission.” (G299-304)

4.4. Army and Politics

- Security politics today

All of the interviewed soldiers agreed that today’s security politics were complex, globally influenced, not easy to understand and thus difficult to form an opinion about. Some said that it had been much easier back when the world order was simple and they were waiting and preparing for a great war on own territory. Especially many of the NCOs seemed to feel “far away” from the political sphere where decisions are taken, which in individual cases can lead to great frustration. It is usually the “not knowing” or the need but inability to make sense of political decisions that leave the soldiers in the lurch. The feeling of uncertainty, of not being able to judge why the parliament may decide this or send the Bundeswehr there, bears the danger of creating opposition just because of a lack of knowledge.

Many criticized that there was no concept or strategy for the use of the Bundeswehr, let alone a definition of Germany’s security interests. In an army in which the phrase “Handeln aus Einsicht” (Acting because of understanding) is held so high, it is not surprising that not understanding the German security strategy poses a great problem to the soldiers. As one sergeant said, *“this is what I always demand from myself, to understand the sense of a mission or tasks and to communicate it (to subordinates)” (R563-566)*. At both the commissioned officers’ and the sergeants’ course, this was a recurring subject of discussion and everyone agreed that it would be crucial and absolutely necessary to develop and note such a leading document.¹² One of the interviewed commanders elaborated:

¹² The Weißbuch that was published in 2006 obviously does not seem to fulfill this request in the eyes of the interviewed soldiers.

“It’s this question that also comes up here at the course again and again. One would actually have to, in order to do it right you would have to say, what are our interests. That is, the interest of the Federal Republic of Germany. And when you have defined those, you would have to say, what kind of Armed Forces do I need to guard those interests? Or to support those interests, depending on how you word it, that’s a political question. And then you’d ask, how do I get the money to pay for it. And right now, at the moment, and as long as I can remember, it’s like this, there is a budget X, these are the tasks and missions, and now, soldiers, please create an army? That can fulfil this. But that it is logically deduced from the interests of the Federal Republic of Germany, that’s not happening.” (D421-431)

Another remarked that one was taught the strategic interests of France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the USA in courses, but Germany’s interests were never addressed or spelled out. Nevertheless, soldiers ask themselves or are confronted by friends and family with the question what they were actually there for – a question that they do not find answered by the political leadership, as a sergeant and a commander spell out:

“If I was younger, I don’t think that I would become a professional soldier again. (...) The political parameters are missing! And in some areas, also the aims that the politicians pursue with the Bundeswehr.” (C97-104)

“I think what has become quite clear in our conversation is that we need to work at the fundamentals of the military. And that is the understanding: what am I there for? Because the times, the bogeyman in the East, that’s over with. And I can only achieve that through education. This understanding. In order to increase the motivate in the end.” (S1476-1480)

One of the commanders took it even further and, referring to the visits of parliamentarians in Afghanistan, said:

“Sometimes I rather have the impression that we soldiers explain to the politicians what we do where and why. Yes, also in Afghanistan I had this feeling. That we had to explain, what we did there.” (J342-349)

„And those are circumstances that cannot be. But the politician has to explain to us, what we do. We act for the purpose of politics. The politicians are our employer, our principal.” (J365-368)

This call for a general strategy does not necessarily include a critical attitude towards missions in general or in particular. *“Sometimes you just do wish you had a clearer mandate, so that you know where it’s going.” (D1269-1270)* Being asked whether they thought that the different missions the Bundeswehr had carried out in the last 15 years actually complied with its general tasks, most soldiers were actually content with the reasons given for each mission and did not question them. They found all missions in line with the general purpose of the Bundeswehr. Some just argued that missions served

German security, others drew simply on alliance duties. Some did question the purpose of single missions (Congo, Afghanistan) (COs), while believing that the decisions for them were not taken irresponsibly. Single ones became rather frustrated, because they did not understand or identify with single deployments or deployments in general (NCOs), imputing dishonesty to “those politicians”.

- Honesty and Responsibility

When asked, whether politicians take responsible decisions regarding the Bundeswehr, most of the interviewed soldiers answered “Yes”.

“Well, at least, the politicians in the Bundestag do not impart the impression, that they make it easy on themselves when taking the decision. (...) there is always, always a debate. Whether it is real interest or partly also a party-political exploitation of the subject, I don’t dare to say, but I do have the impression that they do not make it easy on themselves.” (D761-768)

Some of the interviewed soldiers pointed out that the political leadership often works together closely with the military leadership, so that it would be superficial to blame mistakes on “the politicians”. It was relatively obvious from the interviews, that the non-commissioned officers complained very little about the political decisions (→ which they are not well-traveled and educated enough to judge), but very much criticized the gap between missions and the available equipment – some things are not provided at all, others are only provided on the scene, which means that soldiers do not have an opportunity to train at home. (→ direct link between equipment and motivation).

One of the interviewed soldiers said: *“If I want to redo my house, I can’t just decide to do it, start and then realize what it’s going to cost. That’s something you have to plan beforehand.” In his view, it is irresponsible to send the army on new missions, but not raise the budget accordingly. Others found the complaint about “no equipment” a “very German one, we always concentrate on the negative side of things”.*

Besides the question whether politicians assumed responsibility in their decision-making, some of interviewed soldiers expressed a wish for a more empathetic contact and a “real interest” on the part of the politicians. One sergeant said: *“If you have the aim of Innere Führung, (...) then you have to invest some time. And that only happens through information and open and honest conversations.” (S1002-1004)* His comrade added on the same subject: *„In the last years, they have lost sight of the Bundeswehr. Lost the fatherly look, that they should actually have. Right now they really only use us as pawns and to achieve their goals.” (T831-836)* Again, this touches the question of how to keep the balance between being a critical and independent soldier on the one hand and assuming the role of the executive on the other hand. Most soldiers do not feel that this is an urgent problem, but there are some who are not really content with the situation.

Asked about the relationship between politics and the military, one of the interviewed sergeants responded: *“Relationship as in really standing by each other and responding to needs? I don’t see that. Politicians, and that is correct in some sense, are oriented at the needs of the world and the political circumstances. And we are just the executive. That’s it.” (L1011-1015)*

A particular issue that some soldiers felt politicians were not honest about was the “fighting” character of the ISAF mission and thus the possibility of soldiers dying or being injured. Both death and injury were much discussed issues at both courses. The soldiers felt that these topics were a public taboo and that politicians did not clearly say what soldiers could expect during a mission. I had the impression that this is an aspect that not only the political sphere, but also the army as a whole is only slowly realizing and thinking about. The interesting question is what the soldiers expect from and hope for in a public discussion on death and injury. It seemed to me that this again was a part of the rather emotional puzzle called “acknowledgement and appreciation”.

The interviewed soldiers were very well willing to serve and risk their lives doing so, but they wanted some kind of public acknowledgement or appreciation, may it be a public debate or just some media attention towards this topic. Also, there seems to be a thin, not always rational line between “healthy criticism” on one hand and fundamentally questioning one’s employer and “politics”. It is the feeling of honesty and the feeling of support from the government and the public which are crucial to a soldier’s satisfaction. Budget cuts and hardships like a badly-organized mission or the lack of support for one’s family are facts that of course influence the soldier’s motivation. But it is the impression that “politicians” are not honest or that they do not support the army and its members enough that makes the difference between satisfaction and frustration. Among the interviewed soldiers, there was one that was highly frustrated in this sense and several who had severe criticism about the “honest care” of politicians, but who in the end trusted in the political leadership. All of the interviewed soldiers pointed out that politics are very much influenced by elections and that, understandably or not, politicians always worried about getting (re-) elected and would always act accordingly. This is *“the price for democracy” (F924-925)*.

4.5. The Bundeswehr and other armies

When asked to compare the Bundeswehr with other armies, the interviewed soldiers mostly pointed towards mission-type tactics and the good atmosphere among soldiers of all ranks which were described earlier. Innere Führung also is something that soldiers are proud of - and that is perceived, all criticism against the lack of interest in civil society, as a sign of the army’s successful integration. As one sergeant pointed out:

“Therefore, it has been addressed constantly, the other nations envy us for it – really! I have thought about it several times. When I look at the British paratroopers, when we have an exchange or something, - the values and standards they have, that’s just chaotic. Simply chaotic.

I: What is the difference? How are they?

Q: The difference is, well, simply, let's say, that we go home over the weekend to our wife or parents. That we have a home, that we have values and norms. That we know how to behave, how- that one is human and such things. And they are really- I'd say, they neglect themselves. (Q1219-1230)

Many of the interviewed soldiers also spoke of the good reputation the Bundeswehr had in missions abroad or international cooperation in general. According to them, the German soldiers were known to do a good job and to be a good partner. As one sergeant said: *"I think that, internationally, we don't have such a bad reputation. That is, also the feedback that I get from other nations is actually good. Also on a small level we are considered to be a reliable partner, there come the Germans, you can work well with them."* (U1201-1204)

Then again, on a negative note, they said that other armies were prouder and that the Bundeswehr lacked self-confidence. One pointed to the "very German" attitude of concentrating on the negative and complaining about every single mistake instead of valuing one's achievements. He wished for a calmer and more relaxed attitude, where instead of fearing to make mistakes, one was more open to take risks and not be so careful.

4.6. A Dent in the Positive Picture? "The Others"

During both courses and both series of interviews it was often addressed and discussed that the atmosphere and the mood within the Armed Forces had changed and that "some things" did not work as well as they used to. Quite a few of the interviewed soldiers agreed that the problem concerned mostly comradeship and discipline, the former also being connected to a willingness to serve. As one sergeant said:

"I am on duty from 7.30 to 16.30h and this self-image, that you say, I am a soldier 24 hours a day and if there is something to be done, I have to stay a bit longer, or when help is needed somewhere- that is fading more and more. You also see that with your superiors; that you hardly meet anyone after 16.30 to whom you could say, I need some help with this or that." (O230-235)

Others said that there was not enough honesty and that comradeship was weaker than "in the old times", when soldiers did not necessarily go home on time, but (involuntarily) spent social time together in the evening or on the weekend. Similarly, there were quite a few who said that "everybody" only had their own personal career in mind, wanting to look good to his superiors, instead of putting in "for the team". During missions, on the other hand, some emphasized that the relationship among soldiers was much tighter, as they spent so much time together and obviously depended on each other.

Another issue much discussed was the (a lack of) discipline. As one sergeant put it, *“It’s part of our job to obey orders, not every single one, but generally. Not ifs and buts. And not to mistake an order as a basis for discussion. Which unfortunately happens more and more.”* (X315-317). Quite a few soldiers agreed that too often, orders were being discussed instead of being followed, from low to high ranking soldiers. One of the interviewed commanders said:

“The military leader takes advice and then he takes a decision at some point and then you’re getting started and then nobody should question that anymore. That is, personally, for himself he can question it and say, the old guy is nuts. That’s bullshit, this decision. But he took that decision. And this backing out, this questioning afterwards, this illoyal - that is increasing a bit. Slowly, subtly. And that’s not respectable. That is deeply undemocratic actually. And unlike the military. And illoyal.” (E578-586)

It was interesting to observe that the interviewees often spoke of “the others” when describing negative behavior. “Others” were not disciplined enough, “others” did not communicate, “others” only did a 9-to-5-job “for the money” instead of showing unlimited commitment, and “others” only had their own career in mind. Naturally, one tends to present a positive self-image in an interview. But it makes one wonder who these “others” might possibly be and to what extent the small and large conflicts described actually influenced the soldiers’ everyday work. May be it is also an expression or indication of the changes the Bundeswehr and each of the professional soldiers have gone through in the past fifteen years. Also, it could be a reflection of a society where individuals tend to keep to and care about themselves more.

5. Summary

Firstly, Innere Führung, that is „Citizen in Uniform“, mission-type tactics (“Führen mit Auftrag”) and the slogan “Mensch im Mittelpunkt” (Focusing on Man/Human/Person) are in fact identity-building concepts. “Citizen in Uniform” is a concept of importance also to the soldiers themselves; it is not only named in all of the interviews, but all of the interviewed soldiers – to a greater or smaller extent – emphasize their profession as one that serves the democratic state AND the people. They emphasize that they are living in the civil world like everybody else, going home every day and living like everyone else. Many emphasize the importance of civic education for doing their jobs – “it is the basis for our work”, thus every soldier should know how the political decisions that effect him are taken. This is not only a question of civic-education-classes, but younger recruits can be taught to develop an interest for politics e.g. through short talks during a cigarette break. This leads to assume that today’s Bundeswehr soldiers have internalized the ideal of a political or politically aware or politically educated soldier.

Also mission-type tactics is one of the key categories when soldiers describe the Bundeswehr culture and the ideal soldier. All emphasize that this means that the ideal soldier is one that thinks for himself, is independent, takes on responsibility and reflects this task and the orders he receives. In the soldiers' opinion, this does not contradict the image of the ideal soldier who is loyal, truthful, shows discipline and acts comradely.

Thirdly, the idea of the "Mensch im Mittelpunkt" seems to appeal to many of the interviewed soldiers. They say that they became professional soldiers, not only because they were looking forward to a job with a great variety of tasks, but also because they enjoyed working with and dealing with people. In addition to that, they also stressed the need for communication and trust between comrades. All of them said that the profession of the soldier requires special consideration for his/her human and social needs (family, friends, compensation, e.g. through free time). At the same time, some interviewees spoke of a lack of willingness to serve, lack of comradeship, lack of solidarity, as quite a few soldiers are said to consider their profession to be "nine-to-five job", not signing up for any extra tasks. Contrary to this, during deployments where soldiers are together all day, every day, the feeling of comradeship and achievement is much bigger.

Secondly, the relationship between civil society and the Bundeswehr is perceived as distant and therefore rather problematic. "We are the army of a democracy, of the people" is what many of the interviewed soldiers expressed. Most show understanding that civilians do not deal with Bundeswehr topics as they are not affected by them, but every single one expressed a need and a personal wish for greater public interest and especially public support/ acknowledgement. Quite a few linked public acknowledgement to the army's legitimate existence.

Thirdly, the "political soldier" has to find a balance between loyal service and critical political thinking. Some of the interviewed soldiers are very critical of politicians and the political sphere and/or particular missions (mostly Afghanistan). But soldiers do not question the government and political leadership or the fact that the army is led by a civilian. The only thing that gets to them is when they feel betrayed, that is when the values they hold up for themselves are not honored by the ministry or the minister. Loyalty, for example, is considered to be a very important value. Thus it is not acceptable for the Minister of Defense to apologize for a soldier's action directly after an incident such as the shooting of three civilians at a checkpoint in Afghanistan in August 2008 – "just" out of diplomatic or political caution and at a time when it is not clear what actually happened. The interviewed soldiers agreed that the incident, of course, had to be investigated, but that it was absolutely not acceptable to early on assume that there had been a mistake and thus to "stab the soldier in the back".

6. Former and New Hypotheses on the Soldiers' "Image of the Soldier"

Former Hypotheses (Report No. 2) Reviewed

- *Innere Führung is not a clear term and thus hard to teach.* This is definitely the case! Every one has their own definition, all consistencies in mind (one stresses the human aspect, another mission-type tactics, so the courses are definitely necessary! Most saw the course not only as a (welcome) break from their daily work, but also as a kind of support, because IF was defined and discussed at length.

- *Soldiers stress the importance of Innere Führung, but do not respect it in their daily work.* Hard to tell, how much of it is political correctness, but every interviewee said that IF was the foundation of his work; that one cannot say that it makes up 30% or 50% or 70% of his (daily) work, because it is always there. I would put it as the German Bundeswehr "culture" – values, norms, patterns of communication, ways "to do things" that the members, i.e. the soldiers have internalized.

- *Innere Führung is hard to keep up during deployments, as the German soldiers are seen as wimps.* Again, every single one said that Innere Führung was even more important during deployments, because the soldiers are under much pressure and stress and do not have the possibility to relax after work as civilians like they do in Germany, being with their families and in a civilian environment, so that as a superior, one has to watch every one closely and pay attention to their well-being; but also because the soldiers are together all day, every day and have to get along, they say it is necessary to be aware of the "human" part; in cooperation with other armies, cultural differences or likenesses are of course perceived ("get along best with the Norwegians or the Dutch, the Turkish are most different") and it is also mentioned that the others do notice the German mission-type tactics as different, but the interviewees generally emphasize that soldiers per se have a common ground (comradeship, efficiency, discipline, hierarchy).

Hypotheses Derived from the Empirical Material

- *The genuine tasks of a soldiers (fighting, hurting/killing others, risking one's own life) still are a public taboo. But they (or the possibility or threat they might occur) are a part of deployment reality and thus also a part of the soldier's self-image.* A soldier is someone who fights, hurts and kills others and risks his own life. This part of the soldier profession which in Germany is often described as "Protecting, Helping, Moderating, Fighting" is a taboo not only among politicians, but also in the public relations of the Bundeswehr. Here, being a soldier is depicted and described as a challenging experience and a safe job for twelve years. Many interviewees criticized this description heavily, as they felt that a future soldier should know what he or she is getting him/herself into AND what is expected of him or her. Quite a few had the feeling that this attitude already today

shows with some comrades who see themselves primarily as a “mechanic” or “electrician” and not primarily as a soldier (“But when it comes down to it, he is a soldier and he has to fight and hurt others and may be get hurt himself. Only when there is no danger, he can go back to fixing cars.”) The interviewees added that there was a lack of discipline and dedication among some fellow soldiers (independent of age or rank). “Sometimes it is just necessary to say “Jawoll” (Yes, Sir) and not argue or complain to the next superior.” Being a soldier is not a 9-to-5 job – “A good soldier does not only do what he has to do, but he volunteers to do more, he dedicates himself to the tasks he has/is given.”

- *All soldiers call for a “general strategy” for the use of the Bundeswehr instead of being sent on deployment here and there.* Often, it is not clear to the soldiers (mostly non-commissioned officers) why Germany and thus the German army participates in this and that. It is understood that the world and the security field are more complex than during the Cold War and that it is therefore more difficult to define this overall mission or even teach it. Nevertheless, the soldiers express a need for an overall policy on when, where and under what circumstances the army is to be deployed. There is a feeling that German politicians (government/ parliament) do not dare to say out loud what the country’s interests are or what simple a reason there might be for a deployment.

- *It is unsure which impact the missions will have on the German tradition of mission-type tactics.* Soldiers described that there were more and more moments of uncertainty during deployments, when they – because they could not estimate the consequences of a certain action – asked superiors for commands instead of deciding themselves what to do. Quite a few times, they say, the Einsatzführungskommando (General Mission Command) in Germany is contacted for instructions. The question is how this fits together with the German ideal of a soldier who is independent, self-reliant, creative and reflective and who decides himself how to carry out a certain command.