
ARTICLE – GERMAN STUDIES

The Return of the Military Memoir: The Bundeswehr Deployment to Afghanistan and the Re-Emergence of a Literary Form

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This article examines the re-emergence of the military memoir in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) since the deployment of the Bundeswehr, the armed forces of the FRG, to Afghanistan as part of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2001. The resurgence of a literary form associated in the 1950s with the apologetics of officers of the Wehrmacht, Hitler's army, and the construction of a usable Second World War past is striking. The article locates this phenomenon in a gap that has been growing since the mid-2000s between official claims about the deployment and soldiers' perceptions of the reality on the ground. It also reads memoirs by Achim Wohlgethan, Heike Groos, Andreas Timmermann-Levanas and Robert Sedlatzek-Müller as examples of the soldiers' dominant narratives – of the exercise of military skills and of trauma – to emerge from ISAF. These recent memoirs resemble more closely the texts by soldiers from other NATO forces and they offer a partial normalisation of a form with a problematic history in the FRG. In the face of ongoing suspicion on the part of German scholars, the article draws on a tradition of English-language scholarship to argue also for a normalisation of critical approach. What is needed is a method able to relate the texts to international scholarship about the form while remaining sensitive to the distinctive way in which, against the background of the form's problematic history in Germany, they embody key values of the founding ideal of Bundeswehr of the soldier as a 'Citizen in Uniform'.

Tweetable Abstract: The return of the military memoir in German suggests the normalisation of a difficult form; critical approaches are urgently required to explore this.

Introduction

Beginning with Achim Wohlgethan's *Endstation Kabul: Als deutscher Soldat in Afghanistan* (*Destination Kabul: A German Soldier in Afghanistan*, 2008), the late 2000s witnessed a proliferation of memoirs by soldiers of the Bundeswehr, the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), about their participation in the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan after 2001. This article reads four memoirs principally – and briefly a fifth – as examples of the dominant soldiers' narratives to emerge from this deployment:

Wohlgethan's *Endstation Kabul* and his follow-up *Operation Kunduz: Mein zweiter Einsatz in Afghanistan* (*Operation Kunduz: My Second Deployment to Afghanistan*, 2009) offer accounts of the exercise of specialised military skills in operations around Kabul and in Kunduz in 2002 and 2003 respectively. A second cluster of texts features narratives of trauma, therapy and political action on behalf of veterans affected by their experiences of the deployment: Heike Groos's *Ein schöner Tag zum Sterben: Als Bundeswehrärztin in Afghanistan* (*A Good Day to Die: A Bundeswehr Doctor in Afghanistan*, 2009) deals with four tours of duty in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2007 and their aftermath and Andreas Timmermann-Levanas's *Die reden – Wir sterben: Wie deutsche Soldaten zu Opfern der deutschen Politik werden* (*They Talk – We Die: How German Soldiers Become Victims of German Politics*, 2010) covers service in Sarajevo in 1999 as well as Kunduz in 2006. The discussion of Timmermann-Levanas's text also touches on Robert Sedlatzek-Müller's *Soldatenglück: Mein Leben nach dem Überleben* (*The Luck of Soldiers: Living after Surviving*, 2012), which draws on elements of all the earlier narratives in its story of the author's service near Sarajevo in the 1990s and in Kabul in 2002, and his battle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The publication of the texts by mainstream rather than specialist military publishers points to a considerable public appetite for soldiers' experiences of the deployment: Wohlgethan's appeared with ECON, an imprint of the Ullstein group, Groos's with the S. Fischer Verlag, Timmermann-Levanas's with Campus – a publisher specialising in politics, society and economics – and Sedlatzek-Müller's with the non-fiction publisher Edel. The appearance of the authors in interviews in print and broadcast media around the time of their memoirs' publication and the texts' subsequent presence on prestigious bestseller lists such as that of *Der Spiegel* provides further evidence of this widespread public interest.

The memoirs by Wohlgethan, Groos, Timmermann-Levanas and Sedlatzek-Müller represent the leading edge of a resurgence of the military memoir in the FRG that has yet to be set in its political and literary-historical context at home or addressed by the otherwise vibrant international scholarship on the military memoir as a literary form. These texts are significant because they are the first accounts by German soldiers of their experiences in conflict situations outside Germany since the Second World War. Established in 1955 as a defensive army, the Bundeswehr arose in the shadow of 1945 and against the backdrop of the Cold War division of Germany; only after German unification in 1990 did it participate in 'out-of-area' deployments in a NATO and/or UN context, with its involvement and responsibilities gradually increasing through deployments to (among others) the Persian Gulf during the first Gulf War (1990–91), Somalia (1993–94), the former Yugoslavia (United Nations Protection Force/UNPROFOR, 1992–95, Stabilisation Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina/SFOR, 1996–2004, Kosovo Force/KFOR, 1999–present) and to Afghanistan (see below). The memoirs of Bundeswehr soldiers are important documents not only of specific controversies in the FRG around the deployment of troops to Afghanistan, but also of debates on the post-unification 'normalisation' of the FRG in respect of domestic and foreign policy, the strategic culture of restraint defining its security policy since the Second World War, its place among democratic Western nations, and the traumatic history of Germany in the twentieth century. Moreover, as soldiers' tales, they also pose questions about the resurgence and 'normalisation' of the military memoir and of critical approaches to the form both in the German-language context and in scholarship beyond Germany. The military memoir has barely been seen as a genre in the FRG since the 1950s and today it is regarded with suspicion there on account of its role, at that time, in the memory politics of the Second World War. While certain scholars writing in English, such as Samuel Hynes (9) and Yuval Noah Harari (4 and 55), ascribe to the military memoir as a form a unique and more positive quality arising from the revelatory and transformative nature of the battlefield experience it records, English-language scholars

considering texts in German since 1945 have approached them with a focus on German exceptionalism, from dictatorship to division, in the twentieth century – as does Tom Smith in his work on military-themed writing from the German Democratic Republic in *Comrades in Arms: Military Masculinities in East German Culture* (2020). The current resurgence of soldiers' texts in German and the questions about the 'normalisation' of the form that this raises, by contrast, have not yet been registered – not even, for example, in the comprehensive sweep and assertively transnational focus of recent edited collections such as Philip Dwyer's *War Stories: The War Memoir in History and Literature* (2016). In this collection, Dwyer and his contributors make a case for the study of the military memoir in all its variety as a form of life writing in which individual life histories intersect with historical events in often dramatic ways and which for scholars throws up poignant questions about the value of individual experience and memory, and the relation of these to the historical record (Dwyer 1–2). It is important here too that the recent memoirs of German soldiers are subjected to the analysis they merit.

This article places the recent resurgence of the military memoir in Germany in the context of the controversy surrounding deployment of the Bundeswehr to Afghanistan. It makes the case for a critical approach drawing on recent English-language scholarship to understand the relative 'normalisation' of the form with respect to texts from other NATO forces. It considers too the tradition of the military memoir as transformative and revelatory, while at the same time remaining sensitive to the fraught history and distinctiveness of the form in Germany. In so doing, the article seeks to situate the recent Bundeswehr memoirs of Afghanistan within broader theoretical approaches to the military memoir internationally and to provide scholars interested in the form in a transnational context with an interpretative framework within which to read the texts of German soldiers.

The individual texts are chosen here for the vigour with which they seek to intervene in public debates in the FRG about the deployment and role of soldiers. They are also selected for the unique claim to attention that each of them makes, which is combined, in the tradition of the construction of the subject of classical autobiography as both individual and universal (Pascal 185), with the affirmation of a representative quality. Wohlgethan was among the first German soldiers sent to Kabul in 2002 and to Kunduz in 2003. His tales, in *Endstation Kabul*, of duty split between his German battalion and Dutch special forces and, in *Operation Kundus*, of preparations for the establishment of a German Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the north of Afghanistan, offer a singular perspective on the Bundeswehr's role and a direct point of comparison with other ISAF forces. Groos's memories of attending the scene of a suicide attack on a bus taking soldiers to an airfield near Kabul in 2003 shape her account of her deployment as a medic, as do her experiences as a woman soldier. Women were able to volunteer from 1976 but eligible for a full range of roles only after a legal challenge in 2001; Groos's text is the first published account by a female Bundeswehr soldier (Plowman, 'Afghanistan, Soldiers' Experiences and Literary Invention' 524). Timmermann-Levanas saw action in the Bundeswehr's first battle in an ambush near Kunduz, and his inability to square his experiences as a soldier on the ground with his official statements as a press officer adds poignancy to his story of struggle for recognition of PTSD arising from this incident among others.

The claim to a story that is unique or the first of its kind is typical of the memoirs that would follow, as with Sedlatzek-Müller's tale of serving first as a Paratrooper in Kosovo and then in Kabul as the handler of an explosives sniffer dog. Also typical are the underlying narrative patterns, with Wohlgethan's texts focusing on personal transformation through the exercise of military skills at a high level, admittedly with a note of mounting disillusion; and the texts by Groos, Timmermann-Levanas and Sedlatzek-Müller on the experience of trauma and the

process of recovery. Both the specific texts considered here and the wider resurgence of the military memoir can be located, as the subsequent section of this discussion shows, in the context of a growing gap from the mid-2000s between official claims about the deployment and the deterioration of the situation on the ground. If this variance revealed the limits of the FRG's postwar strategic culture of restraint and how far from 'normal' the FRG remained in its security policy as measured against its allies in NATO, the return of the military memoir nonetheless suggests a partial 'normalisation' of a form associated in the FRG in the 1950s with the self-exculpation of former officers of the Wehrmacht after the Second World War.

The cultural context is important here in order to understand just what makes the resurgence of the form so striking and the individual texts so distinctive. Against the background of post-Second World War reconstruction and the Cold War division of Germany, Wehrmacht officers' memoirs played an important role, alongside a slew of war films, in the construction of a clean and 'usable' wartime past (Moeller 6–8). The current texts testify, by contrast, to the legacy of the FRG's ongoing confrontation with history and they bear the imprint of the founding ideals of the Bundeswehr. 'Innere Führung' ('Inner Leadership') was the Bundeswehr's leadership philosophy, standing for integration of the military into society and acceptance of the political process and of the rule of law; the 'Staatsbürger in Uniform' ('Citizen in Uniform') was a soldier committed to these values, his (or her) responsibilities and rights legally circumscribed (Clay Large 177–83). These concepts were contested when they were introduced: while military traditionalists rejected them, critics on the left dismissed them as window-dressing (Plowman, 'Defending the Border' 134–36). The recent memoirs confirm the acceptance of these ideals in the intervening years. In contrast to the self-justificatory tone of the Wehrmacht memoirs, the authors of the recent texts engage in debates about Afghanistan, the Bundeswehr and military identity with a perspective 'from below' and very much in the critical spirit of the 'Citizen in Uniform'. They voice a call for recognition in the face of the perceived failure of military leaders and politicians to speak frankly about a deployment seen as sliding into 'war': recognition of professionalism and skills, of the risks soldiers face and of the physical and mental costs to them – in short, of the job soldiers do. In their valorisation of soldiers' professionalism and skills, the recent memoirs of the Bundeswehr deployment to Afghanistan demonstrate parallels to the memoirs of soldiers in other NATO forces, yet it is the imprint of postwar debates about the soldier as 'Citizen in Uniform' that makes these texts distinctive.

The Deployment of the Bundeswehr to Afghanistan and the Return of the Military Memoir in the FRG

After the USA and UK, the FRG was the third-largest contributor of troops to operations in Afghanistan (Schroer 78). After 11 September 2001, the Bundestag authorised deployment of a limited number of troops – special forces, specialists against chemical and biological attack – to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the US-led 'war on terror' until 2010 ('Kampf gegen den internationalen Terrorismus'). Larger numbers were deployed until 2014 in the NATO operation ISAF: in Kabul from 2001 to support the restoration of government after the overthrow of the Taliban and in Kunduz, Feyzabad and Mazar-i-Sharif from 2003 to 2004 to work with civilian teams to run PRTs. Around 4,000 soldiers participated in OEF and 100,000 in ISAF, with a handful staying from 2015 to support the training of Afghan security forces ('Einsatzzahlen'). By 2014, fifty-five German soldiers had died in Afghanistan, thirty-five of them in attacks or in combat ('Todesfälle im Einsatz').

Controversies around the deployment reverberated through politics and culture in the FRG. After 11 September 2001, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) declared 'unrestricted solidarity' with the USA, but the way he tied support for OEF to a confidence vote and restrictions

on involvement shows how contentious participation in Afghanistan was compared to that in the former Yugoslavia in the late 1990s, when his Red-Green coalition had argued for joining NATO operations by using moral arguments about Germany's responsibility to defend human rights and its commitment to multilateralism (Harnisch and Longhurst 55). Subsequently, Schröder's government and, after 2005, Angela Merkel's CDU-SPD coalition played down involvement in OEF and reframed ISAF as a humanitarian relief mission (Schroer 86). An approach centred on 'networked security' was designed to integrate the Bundeswehr alongside the Foreign Ministry, the Finance Ministry and the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development into a network both of state and non-governmental agencies tasked with working together to achieve post-conflict stabilisation by tackling underlying political and economic causes of conflict (Schroer 86). Initially, and in contrast to the south of Afghanistan, where UK and US forces battled insurgents, relative calm after 2003 in the German-controlled areas around Kunduz in the north seemingly confirmed the approach (Noetzel 402).

However, a series of incidents visibly exposed the disjunction between official claims about the deployment and the deteriorating situation on the ground. As early as 2003, the suicide attack on the bus near Kabul recounted by Groos in her memoir tarnished claims of a low-risk deployment when four German soldiers died. On 19 May 2007, another attack, which killed three soldiers in a Kunduz marketplace, marked the spread of insurgency to the north. On 4 September 2009, the conduct of German troops came under scrutiny when an officer called an air strike on two tanker lorries hijacked by insurgents, killing 142 people, largely civilians. As the journalist and writer Dirk Kurbjuweit (19), whose novel *Kriegsbraut (Bride of War)* (2011) offered a fictional reflection on the strike, noted in an appraisal of ISAF in *Der Spiegel* as it ended in 2014, this incident marked a loss of innocence for German soldiers and further eroded public support for the deployment.

Following the perceived success of participation in NATO/UN operations in former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan offered the FRG the chance to further demonstrate reliability as an international partner and take greater strides towards normalisation (Schroer 78 and 86). For commentators in political science and strategic studies, however, the deteriorating situation exposed the limits of a well-established culture of restraint and the idiosyncrasies of security policy in a Germany. The latter was shown to lack realistic aims and strategies for the deployment and was still far from normal, while political leaders clung to the rhetoric of post-conflict stabilisation even as pressure from NATO mounted to join a more robust Counterinsurgency Strategy (COIN) (Noetzel 400–2). Admittedly, for the Bundeswehr, the situation in Afghanistan precipitated a process of transformation already underway since the 1990s. Designed to adapt it to new tasks, under Defence Minister Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg (2009–11) this would lead to the abolition of conscription in 2011. It also intensified a parallel debate about the role and identity of soldiers when zu Guttenberg's predecessor, Thomas Jung (2005–9), who stepped down in the wake of the strike in Kunduz, sought to align founding concepts of the Bundeswehr to these tasks. For some, Jung's 2009 revision of the *Zentrale Dienstvorschrift 10/1 (Central Regulation 10/1)* on 'Innere Führung' was out of date before it appeared, since it was too timid in tackling soldiers' perceptions of conflict in Afghanistan (Dörfler-Dierken 148–49). Here, paradoxically, the disastrous air strike in Kunduz showed signs of shifting the strategic narrative (Noetzel 406–7). This incident caused consternation at home and abroad, and in addition to Jung, suggestions of a cover-up of the facts cost other senior soldiers and politicians their jobs. However, it did effect a shift towards a language of warfare that had previously been avoided in view of public sensitivity and the echoes of Germany's wartime past, as Merkel paid tribute to 'fallen' soldiers and zu Guttenberg acknowledged soldiers' experience of 'war-like conditions' ('kriegsähnliche Zustände') (Noetzel 407). Given that it also revealed misunderstanding on the ground about the willingness of political and military

leaders to tolerate a more assertive force posture against the background of NATO's COIN strategy, the Bundeswehr's strict Rules of Engagement were relaxed, and simultaneously, the limits of this relaxation clarified, while light artillery was deployed to strengthen combat capabilities (Sangar 421–22). Nonetheless, the stabilisation narrative soon reasserted itself, with the government downplaying measures in tune with COIN (e.g. renewed deployment of special forces) and stressing others such as the training of Afghan security forces, a floundering project taken over by the USA (Noetzel 412–17; Schroer 93).

The narratives by Wohlgethan, Groos, Timmermann-Levanas and Sedlatzek-Müller are set in the earlier 2000s, near the start of the deployment, but they are rooted in the gap between official claims about the deployment and the worsening situation on the ground prior to the strike in Kunduz. In *Endstation Kabul*, for example, Wohlgethan's perspective is shaped by later events, such as the attack in 2007 on soldiers in a Kunduz marketplace, which colours his own account of arriving at the scene of a double suicide attack on a Kabul marketplace in September 2002 (Wohlgethan *Endstation Kabul* 208–12). In all the texts, criticism of the failure of leaders to speak truthfully about the deployment to a public seen as unknowing or to provide adequate equipment to troops reflects the perception after the mid-2000s of slip-page into a war that no-one wanted to recognise.

Around the mid- to late 2000s, the gap between official claims and the deterioration described above generated a range of cultural production that reflected what was in fact a significant public appetite for insight into the deployment at this time. Journalistic exposés painted a vivid picture of conflict in Afghanistan and of deficits in German strategy (e.g. Hörstel, in 2007). The Vietnam homecoming film (e.g. *Coming Home*, directed by Hal Ashby, 1978) provided a template for therapeutic narratives in films and TV movies in which returning soldiers bring their traumatic memories and the reality of war in Afghanistan back home to the FRG.¹ Among the cultural forms to emerge, the memoirs of Wohlgethan, Groos, Timmermann-Levanas, Sedlatzek-Müller and others claim a particular authority, and they paved the way for a wide range of other soldiers' utterances. These include letters home from the front collected with the aim of prompting debate about ISAF (Baumann et al.) or diaries chronicling military operations and everyday life in the German bases (e.g. Eckhold). They also include collections of soldiers' experiences, forming part of a postwar tradition of 'Protokollliteratur': experience-based accounts gathered to give voice to groups seldom heard in public and published with a strong editorial agenda. In the case of the deployment to Afghanistan, this agenda was to record for other soldiers practical experience not contained in official reports (Brinkmann and Hoppe) or to shed light on the debilitating effects of PTSD (Wizelmann).

Scholars contend that the claim to authority of military memoirs among a range of cultural forms about war and conflict derives from the way their narratives construct soldiers' experiences as a source of insight. For Samuel Hynes, in his classic study of 1997, for instance, the power of soldiers' texts resides in their rendering of the 'close texture' (9) of battlefield experience and the 'inner change' (26) resulting from the encounter with this, which links them to the representation of the process of spiritual transformation at the heart of conversion narrative even if they are 'not quite autobiography' (26). And for Yuval Noah Harari in 2008, 'being there in the field' (4) is a source of revelation (whether a positive revelation of heroism or a negative one of disillusion or trauma) arising from a visceral process of 'flesh-witnessing' in which extreme bodily experiences overwhelm the mind (55). Where Hynes and Harari link the authority of the form to battlefield experience, K. Neil Jenkins and Rachael

¹ E.g. respectively *Nacht vor Augen (A Hero's Welcome)*, Bettina Bertele, 2008) and *Willkommen zuhause (A Long Way Home)*, Andreas Senn, 2008). See Plowman, 'Defending Germany in the Hindukush'.

Woodward – sociologists rather than literary critics or historians – link it to the sum of military practices turning the civilian recruit into the soldier's 'trained operational body' ('Bodies and the Contemporary British Memoir' 154–55). This is a helpful view that informs this discussion too, since it helps both to align recent memoirs by German soldiers with texts by NATO counterparts and to understand the way in which these memoirs have become more 'normal' with respect to those of soldiers in other armies. It is also adaptable to the experiences of German soldiers who – and this is an important distinction – saw less combat experience than Anglo-American counterparts.

In English-language criticism, the claim of the military memoir to authority and insight is widely recognised, but in German criticism any such claim is treated with scepticism for reasons relating to the particular history of the genre in Germany. English-speaking scholars display a lively interest in soldiers' memoirs as historical texts and ego-documents that illuminate their involvement in historical and contemporary conflicts; texts emerging from recent deployments to Afghanistan or Iraq are still central to discussions of the evolving form (on British soldiers' texts, see Bourke), even if the output of German soldiers posted to Afghanistan remains a blind spot. In the German-speaking world, commentators (e.g. Epkenhans et al.) readily mine memoirs as historical sources, but in the rare instances where they approach recent memoirs about Afghanistan they do so with suspicion. In one of the few discussions to touch upon memoirs and other texts by soldiers, for instance, Bernhard Chiari's introduction to a 2012 collection on political, strategic and cultural aspects of 'out-of-area' deployments of the Bundeswehr pays lip service to 'diaries and letters' as sources that offer a rounded picture of German participation in ISAF (Chiari 35). Yet he professes mistrust of soldiers' utterances because of their inevitably partial perspective and their misrecognition of strategic contexts, reserving particular scepticism for memoirs. In analogy to the memoir literature of the Second World War, he claims, these risk succumbing to the need for self-justification (Chiari 36). Chiari's mistrust of soldiers' perspectives notably plays down the significance of the 'close texture' of experience valued by scholars like Hynes. In this respect, the context of the deployment of German soldiers alongside the armed forces of allies in a NATO operation demands that the experience of German soldiers is taken more seriously. Scholars such as Hynes, Harari and Woodward and Jenkins can provide helpful impulses here. What is also striking is how Chiari alludes, without completely spelling out the point, to the role Wehrmacht soldiers' memoirs played in the construction of clean wartime memories and in processes of self-exculpation from National Socialist crimes after 1945 (Moeller 6–8). Yet if we are to come to a better understanding of the ways in which the recent memoirs have – and have not – become more normal, a more nuanced grasp is needed of the texts' relation to the Wehrmacht memoirs and indeed to subsequent traditions of writing by soldiers about the Bundeswehr.

Certain scholars offer convincing analyses of former Wehrmacht soldiers' memoirs and their role in the early FRG. Friedrich Gerstenberger, in a piece published alongside the controversial 1995 'Crimes of the Wehrmacht' exhibition, and Rolf Düsterberg, in a quantitative study completed the same year, have shown how a wave of texts peaking in the mid-1950s – by senior officers rather than NCOs or rank-and-file soldiers – used strategies of omission and elision to assert the clean conduct of the Wehrmacht in the Second World War. Where the texts recounted the experiences of German soldiers as Soviet Prisoners of War, sometimes for several years after the end of the conflict, they mobilised anti-communism and claims of victimhood to support calls for rearmament and the further erasure of German crimes, as the FRG prepared to establish the Bundeswehr in the context of the Cold War and the integration of the Federal Republic into the West (Moeller 4–6). The relation of current texts to less well-documented traditions of writing by Bundeswehr soldiers is also intriguing. Apart from some

senior officers' texts, such as Ulrich de Maizière's *In der Pflicht: Lebensbericht eines deutschen Soldaten* (*To Have a Duty: The Life of a German Soldier*, 1989), which reflect on military careers spanning the caesura of 1945, the Bundeswehr has produced few free-standing memoirs. With respect to his pre-1945 career, de Maizière shares with Wehrmacht memoirs a tendency towards apologia (Gerstenberger 621–24). With respect to the Bundeswehr, where he became, as General Inspector, its senior soldier between 1966 and 1972, he affirmed the democratic spirit of the military reforms of the 1950s and of the founding concept of 'Inner Leadership' and the ideal of the soldier as 'Citizen in Uniform'. If the scarcity of Bundeswehr memoirs before 1990 may partly reflect an awareness of the problematic legacy of the Wehrmacht memoirs and an unwillingness to approach the military memoir, it is also not surprising in view of the Bundeswehr only being deployed in 'out-of-area' actions after 1990. However, during the political radicalisation of the 1960s, there was a trend among conscripts towards the publication of short experience-based accounts in left-wing magazines, as conscription and conscientious objection became ideological battlegrounds for the student movement generation. Following the example of Günter Wallraff's conscription diaries of 1964 and in the tradition of postwar Protokollliteratur designed to give voice to groups seldom heard in the public sphere, these accounts contested official claims about the realisation of the reform ideal of the 'Citizen in Uniform' and pointed to continuities of personnel and ideology with the Wehrmacht (see Plowman, 'Günter Wallraff's Bundeswehr Diaries').

In key respects, recent Bundeswehr memoirs resemble texts originating in other NATO forces more than they do memoirs of former Wehrmacht officers or previous writing about the Bundeswehr; and here the English-language approaches can aid in aligning them where appropriate. Wohlgethan's recollections illustrate the importance that Woodward and Jenkins accord to military skills and professionalism in the self-construction of soldiers' identities. They share with, say, Jake Scott's account of operations with British forces in Helmand province in *Blood Clot: In Combat with Patrols Platoon, 3 Para* (2008) an instructional dimension in communicating to readers what these skills are (Woodward and Jenkins, *Bringing War to Book* 9), even if – and here is the difference again – they do not place the same premium on combat experience. For their part, Groos's and Timmermann-Levanas's accounts of trauma and the struggle for recognition and compensation in the face of official hurdles are not so dissimilar to texts like US veteran Jake Wood's *Among You: The Extraordinary True Story of a Soldier Broken by War* (2013), though undoubtedly the Vietnam-era narrative too is an important influence here (see also Woodward and Jenkins, *Bringing War to Book* 15–16). It thus seems appropriate to posit that the texts show at least a partial normalisation of a form tainted by association with the self-justifications of Wehrmacht soldiers, one that can profit from the theoretical approaches of English-language scholars while remaining sensitive to the way the texts are distinctive in their German context of production – a normalisation of critical approach, so to speak. Written largely from the perspective of NCOs rather than by the senior figures responsible for most Wehrmacht memoirs, the recent memoirs offer memorable and thoughtful perspectives on a UN-sanctioned deployment. Furthermore, it is wrong to dismiss as self-justification soldiers' reflections on an involvement in contemporary geopolitics that hardly compares to the National Socialist war of aggression. On the face of it, recent memoirs have little in common with the accounts of the conscripts who in the 1960s criticised the Bundeswehr's failure to distance itself from the legacy of the Wehrmacht. However, in questioning official narratives about the deployment and the Bundeswehr's role, they share some of this critical spirit. Here the texts embody an awareness of lessons from the past and we glimpse their authors as lively participants in a robust debate about what it means to be a soldier and a 'Citizen in Uniform' in the FRG in the twenty-first century. They demonstrate an acute consciousness of being the first generation of Bundeswehr soldiers

deployed in fraught situations outside Germany since 1990 and of the personal and political responsibilities this entails. In articulating their experiences for a wide readership they contribute assertively, and as 'citizens in uniform', to debates about the deployment and about soldiers' identities, the responsibilities of the government to the public and towards them as soldiers, and indeed the relation of the military and society itself.

Narratives of the Exercise of Military Skills in Achim Wohlgethan's *Endstation Kabul* (2008) and *Operation Kundus* (2009)

Endstation Kabul focuses on what Wohlgethan, a sergeant in the 313 Paratrooper Battalion, describes as the 'special role' (58) he was given upon being seconded to Dutch special forces, the Korps Comandotroepen (KCT), during his deployment to Kabul from April to October 2002.² The interest of the text resides both in the claim that it makes for the recognition of Wohlgethan's military skills and the critical perspective it offers on the deployment and the role of the Bundeswehr around 2002 and from the vantage of the mid- to late 2000s, when it was written against the background of worsening conditions in Afghanistan. The memoir describes how Wohlgethan was deployed first alongside his friend Alex on information-gathering missions around Kabul and then with the KCT, with whom he undertook further intelligence gathering and a mission into the mountainous Paghman district west of Kabul to establish contact with a local power player. The memoir was released amidst a controversy manufactured to boost sales, with the publisher issuing claims that the text provided evidence that German soldiers had transgressed the limits of the geographical 'Area of Responsibility' set by the Bundestag when it approved the deployment. These claims point to the public force with which the military memoir self-consciously announced its re-emergence as a form; they dominated reviews and even prompted denials in the Bundestag in a rare official response to a soldier's memoir of ISAF ('Afghanistan: Bundeswehr soll Mandat des Bundestags verletzt haben'). Wohlgethan's narrative of military adventure and personal transformation through the development of his skills stands out among all the texts that followed. His stated desire 'to participate actively' (*Endstation Kabul* 12) in geopolitical developments and to test those skills in the challenging conditions in and around Kabul are positive elements of revelation in Harari's reading of the military memoir as a form. They form part of the call for recognition in Wohlgethan's memoir and serve the normalisation of the self-representation of soldiering. However, experiences with the KCT also highlight the Bundeswehr's shortcomings and give rise to disillusion and critique, which are for Harari negative elements. Here too, the text seeks to illuminate and stimulate wider debate about the deployment from the perspective of the soldiers involved in it, very much in the spirit of the 'Citizen in Uniform'.

Indeed, in the face of, for example, Chiari's suspicion of the partial perspective of military memoirs, it is important to note that *Endstation Kabul* resolutely seeks to place Wohlgethan's engagement as a soldier of the Bundeswehr in a wider political, social and cultural context. Wohlgethan invokes 11 September 2001 and the international Petersberg Conference in the FRG (which subsequently established an interim Afghan government) as markers of a global political framework, while reference to Bundestag approval for the deployment in December 2001 recognises the importance of parliamentary oversight and democratic process. Wohlgethan also outlines the situation in Afghanistan and if his sketch perhaps fails fully to grasp the forces at work, it nonetheless illustrates an NCO's attempt to understand the environment in which he operates (*Endstation Kabul* 31; cf. Chiari 22). This also holds true for the depiction of the terrain, places and people, which demonstrates the kinship of military memoirs to travel writing (Hynes 5–8). Littered with mines dating from the Soviet

² All translations from the texts by Wohlgethan, Groos, Timmermann-Levanas and Sedlatzek-Müller are mine.

invasion of Afghanistan (1979–89), the mountain and desert landscape is sublime and dangerous, embodying the quality Harari (152–53) describes as revelatory. An exoticising gaze informs Wohlgethan's description of Kabul, an ethnographic one his impressions of Afghans, from fighters to interpreters who learned German in the GDR during the years of Soviet occupation.

With its emphasis on the exercise of military skills, Wohlgethan's text is well suited to an approach grounded in the work of English-language scholars who stress the transformative aspect of military experience, especially Woodward and Jenkins. Their 'Military Identities in the Situated Accounts of British Military Personnel' (2011) offers a model for understanding both the role of professional skills in the text and the parallels to the self-representations of soldiers from other NATO forces. In a case study of British troops in Afghanistan, they show how soldiers, in contradistinction to the traditional class- and gender-based categories of military sociology, construct identities around the performance of skills, which is understood as a transformative and collective act binding soldiers together in structures of 'fictive kinship' (Woodward and Jenkins, 'Military Identities' 253–59 and 263). Woodward and Jenkins's analysis of the performance of skills in soldiers' photographs fits both the images contained in Wohlgethan's book and his whole narrative. *Endstation Kabul* offers an inventory of his professional skills and asserts his transformation into a soldier of special-forces calibre. Working with his friend Alex after his arrival in Kabul, he hones existing skills. The account of their mission to observe the surroundings of the Loya Jirga council that chose Hamid Karzai as the new Afghan president in April 2002 illustrates this emphasis on skills: from scouting out an observation point or preparing equipment and supplies, to gathering information and passing this up the chain (Wohlgethan, *Endstation Kabul* 93–94). Joining the KCT after Alex leaves opens new horizons. Following a test of competence that is recounted at length, Wohlgethan receives new equipment and, starting with Dutch army operating procedures, acquires new skills. In Wohlgethan's account, the KCT offers him better opportunities to develop skills than are afforded to Bundeswehr soldiers in German special forces. Where the KCT fully participates in ISAF, the Bundeswehr's Kommando Spezialkräfte (KSK) appears to Wohlgethan as sidelined in OEF, the US-led operation against terrorism. When on one assignment he meets the soldiers of the KSK, he judges their troop's morale to be at 'rock bottom' in contrast to his own experience with the KCT (Wohlgethan, *Endstation Kabul* 118–28).

Where the KCT provides a positive experience of transformation through the development of military skills, *Endstation Kabul* pits this, in line with the critical aspect of 'negative revelation', against disillusionment arising from experiences in the Bundeswehr. Since these typically point to the failure of political and military leaders to understand the demands on soldiers, they may be read as part of a critique rooted in the growing awareness of the gap between claims and reality in the run up to the publication of the text in 2008. When Wohlgethan profiles his skills against German officers – superior in rank but lacking his experience – who visit for the thirty days required to receive one of the prized Bundeswehr deployment medals, there is criticism of an army that undervalues practical military competence. In one incident, a visiting officer whom Wohlgethan accompanies around Kabul orders him to apprehend suspected insurgents in an unplanned operation; Wohlgethan cites the Bundeswehr's Rules of Engagement and its regulations on lines of command to return everyone safely to camp (*Endstation Kabul* 240–42). While such incidents offer criticism of the Bundeswehr, they also show how the author seeks to frame his actions as a 'Citizen in Uniform' within the rules governing the deployment. At the close, the rejection, because of insufficient security clearance, of his application to stay on with the KCT again underscores German superiors' bureaucratic mindset and their indifference to his hard-won experience. While Wohlgethan blames military leaders for failings, particular criticism is reserved for politicians who shun responsibility

for the deployment they authorised and – the perspective of the mid- to late 2000s is clear – avoid mention of war. Their stage-managed trips to Kabul are ‘monkey shows’ in which the media are also complicit in painting a picture of a risk-free reconstructive mission (*Endstation Kabul* 51). Disillusion is accentuated by Wohlgethan’s homecoming and the perceived lack of understanding which greets him back in the FRG. His experiences fail to resonate either with family and friends, which reveals the lack of recognition as endemic in society, and with fellow soldiers who have not served in Afghanistan, who joke about his ‘vacation’ in the sun. Only with distance and in retelling his tale does he reaffirm, as he expresses hope for peace in Afghanistan, his geopolitical engagement and his experience of positive personal transformation when he notes that ‘the deployment changed me’ (*Endstation Kabul* 297).

Written against the background of public discussion of the problems of German strategy that was becoming more open in the lead up to the air strike in Kunduz in September 2009 and published alongside Heike Groos’s memoir of trauma *Ein schöner Tag zum Sterben* in the aftermath of this event, Wohlgethan’s *Operation Kundus* unfolds a stronger narrative of disillusion and critique in the face of increasingly challenging circumstances. Wohlgethan’s narrative projects initial euphoria at the prospect of returning to Afghanistan with his battalion, this time to Kunduz where he was posted from November 2003 to January 2004 to prepare for the establishment of a German PRT. However, criticism of the Bundeswehr’s preparation for the demands of the mission is already visible in the account of pre-departure briefings when more senior soldiers take credit for suggestions that Wohlgethan makes as he draws on his prior experiences from Kabul. In Kunduz, Wohlgethan’s role in scouting out and establishing contacts offers challenges in respect of deep reconnaissance (e.g. establishing a safehouse in Taloqan), but compared to the spell with the KCT previously, it lacks the same chance to acquire new skills. The deployment evinces a declining clarity of purpose as Wohlgethan’s reconnaissance team becomes embroiled in squabbles with troops assigned to guard the airfield. Growing doubts about the ‘networked approach’ and a timid German strategy – civilian aid organisations are increasingly wary of being seen by the local population to work with Bundeswehr, the Bundeswehr is helpless against warlords and reluctant to tackle drug lords as the UK and USA do – make for an even harder homecoming. Once more, Wohlgethan invokes the KCT in a blunt final stock-taking to throw into relief various shortcomings of the German approach: ‘I wish [...] that the professionalism and experience of the Dutch troops would rub off on the Bundeswehr [...]. The same mistakes are being made [...]. The soldiers who are deployed in Afghanistan pay the price’ (*Operation Kundus* 53). Where in *Endstation Kabul* disillusion is balanced against a powerful narrative of transformation, *Operation Kundus* offers a more uncertain outlook. Taken together the two texts provide a compelling illustration of the way in which soldiers’ accounts contributed to a public discourse about ISAF that was becoming increasingly fraught.

Narratives of Trauma and Recovery in Heike Groos, *Ein schöner Tag zum Sterben* (2009), Andreas Timmermann-Levanas, *Die reden – Wir sterben* (2010) and Robert Sedlatzek-Müller, *Soldatenglück* (2012)

In Groos’s *Ein schöner Tag zum Sterben*, published on the eve of the strike in Kunduz, and Timmermann-Levanas’s *Die reden – Wir sterben*, which appeared after, psychological trauma and the battle to have it officially recognised serve as a figure for the reality on the ground denied by military and political leaders and for shortcomings in strategy arising therefrom. The battle for recognition of trauma, and for support and compensation also shows the authors as engaged in the interest of public understanding and on behalf of comrades in therapeutic narratives in which recovery ultimately appears contingent on political acknowledgement of the situation. Groos, whose memoir is also the first by a female soldier of the

Bundeswehr, served four tours as a military doctor: in Kabul in 2002 and in 2003, when on 7 June she attended the scene of the suicide attack on a bus that killed four German soldiers, in Feyzabad in 2004 and Kunduz in 2007. The attack on the bus highlighted the risk of German fatalities in Afghanistan and for Groos memories of it trigger a breakdown when, echoing the Middle Eastern tale about the inescapability of death that provides her title (a man flees death in Baghdad only to meet it in Samarra), they irrupt into her new life in New Zealand. While her understanding is informed by the concept, Groos eschews the designation of PTSD due to the perceived stigma of mental illness and rather favours an individualistic self-therapy, though telling her tale of trauma and recovery does engender the impulse to raise awareness and campaign on behalf of other affected soldiers. A first lieutenant in the Luftwaffe, Timmermann-Levanas was a liaison officer for civilian-military reconstruction projects in SFOR in 1998–99 and a press officer in Kunduz in 2006, where he participated in what he claims was the first firefight that the Bundeswehr was involved in since its inception. *Die reden – Wir sterben* relates his struggle with PTSD and with military and civilian bureaucracy for acknowledgement of his symptoms and the support to which he should be entitled following his discharge. It also touches on his work to help other soldiers and campaigning for a change in the laws around compensation and financial support for veterans. Following on from Groos's memoir, Timmermann-Levanas's text marks a further step towards the normalisation of discourses about military action and the risk of PTSD in the accounts of Bundeswehr soldiers; yet in his engagement around the rights of his comrades, the distinctive quality of the text as a reflection on the role of the soldier as a 'Citizen in Uniform' is also apparent.

Compared with Wohlgethan's memoirs, the focus on trauma and its latency infuses these texts with a stronger aspect of disillusion or 'negative' revelation, to speak with Harari, and a greater shift towards the problems of ex-soldiers whose experiences place them at odds with official discourses about ISAF. In both, the definition of PTSD fixed by the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1980 partly as a result of campaigning by Vietnam veterans' associations shapes the account of the causes of trauma as being in overwhelming experiences, the inability of memory to process these and the resulting mental and bodily symptoms (Biesold 103–7). Both posit a link between trauma and the exercise of military skills. The way in which trauma follows as a consequence of the exercise of military skills in extreme conditions serves to underline how the official claims about the deployment have become untenable for the texts' authors. While Groos's and Timmermann-Levanas's roles as doctor and press officer respectively point to the diverse skill sets of modern soldiers, both of their texts stress how pressure foregrounds their military training: Timmermann-Levanas explains how, when ambushed, his training kicks in 'like a drill' (*Die reden – Wir sterben* 35); Groos, for whom feelings of kinship with her fellow soldiers as patients mark the difference from work as an emergency doctor at home, describes in similar terms how 'tunnel vision' comes in as she gets on with her job (*Ein schöner Tag* 27). If trauma involves the irregular processing of memories, then in both texts for a soldier to function as trained entails the suppression of affect, which becomes toxic as political and military authorities seek to underplay the seriousness of conflict in Afghanistan. A marker for trauma that each text constructs differently, however, is the motif of a resulting split in the self. Reflecting on her experiences as a mother, Groos's therapeutic narrative mediates memories of Afghanistan and of her 'normal' life and concludes with a plea for understanding on behalf of soldiers affected by trauma. Timmermann-Levanas describes a contradiction between his personal experiences and professional role. Asseverating that PTSD is a political problem, he demands that his rights – and the rights of other soldiers – as 'Citizen in Uniform' be honoured.

Groos's account of her trauma and of the revelations offered by working it through is also intertwined with her experiences of gender difference in the Bundeswehr and her

therapeutic narrative affirms her self-identity as a woman soldier. Groos explains how, when she joined the Bundeswehr without having planned to by taking a post in a military hospital, she became simply 'a soldier' ('ein Soldat', masculine noun, *Ein schöner Tag* 9–11) with identical skills to male counterparts. Progressively, as she reviews her time in Afghanistan after memories of the suicide attack on the bus irrupt into her new life in New Zealand, she asserts her experiences as gendered. She explains how, while out on patrol, as a woman soldier she was able to establish contact with Afghan women who were shielded from male counterparts. She exposes misogynist attitudes among individuals in the Bundeswehr, such as the military psychiatrist who sought sexual favours in return for having her sent back to Germany early and the institutional sexism of an army incapable of offering a woman a leadership role. She invokes her role as mother when she confronts visiting politicians who lack awareness of the situation in Afghanistan: 'How dare you send me, a mother of five children, here for the second time in a year?' (*Ein schöner Tag* 108). Finally, she valorises the difference her gender makes: 'I am a soldier. [...] I am also a woman. [...] It is time to confront [the Bundeswehr] with the fact that women are different' (*Ein schöner Tag* 297).

Groos uses the metaphor of pictures with different frames to portray how trauma causes a split between memories of her normal life and of Afghanistan. Alongside memories of her life as a mother and doctor in Germany and New Zealand, which she describes as a 'colourful oil painting in an ornate frame', Groos notes 'a second picture' containing 'Afghan stories' (*Ein schöner Tag* 14). Her self-conscious use of metaphor to locate this split and of narrative to close it up again, which stands out among other recent texts by German soldiers, links the text firmly to a post-Vietnam tradition of soldiers' writing as chronicles of psychological suffering and therapy (Hynes 217–19).

Opening a frame in the narrative present, the cancellation of her children's school bus in New Zealand at the start triggers traumatic memories and the act of narration. As Groos reconstructs her arrival at the scene of the attack in 2003 (*Ein schöner Tag* 18–19), the road to Kabul's airfield becomes a scene of blood and wreckage redolent of what Hynes (26) describes as the trope of the 'Battlefield Gothic' in soldiers' memoirs. Critique of equipment inadequate to the demands of the deteriorating conditions in Afghanistan is a common motif in soldiers' texts; in Groos's account this tips into the grotesque when the standard-issue Bundeswehr coffins prove too small for the bodies of some of the soldiers killed in the attack. Dutch forces in Camp Warehouse offer the German troops larger coffins but, under pressure from Bundeswehr generals who are concerned about how the disparity in the size of the caskets will appear when the bodies are returned home, Groos and her comrades have to weld the Dutch coffins shut in order to prevent the bodies' legs being broken so that they can be transferred into the smaller German ones (*Ein schöner Tag* 63–64). The commemoration ceremonies that follow offer a scene of loss, highlighting the gap between official claims about the deployment and Groos's ambivalent feelings. She is torn between the pathos of the reading of the poet Ludwig Uhland's lament, 'Der gute Kamerad' ('The Good Comrade' 1809) and anger at the certainty of the soldiers' sacrifice for the FRG invoked by the commander's address – a certainty that she and the other mourning soldiers have long begun to question (*Ein schöner Tag* 112).

Groos's narrative, which draws on diaries and other documents including a testimonial for a colleague and a report written for Dutch soldiers to reconstruct and make sense of her experiences, leads to recovery and to recognition of the wider importance of her story. In Groos's text, recovery proceeds without psychiatric intervention and in an individualised fashion, and it even takes a psych(ot)ic turn when she consults a Maori acquaintance about the visions she experiences. Finally, it evolves into engagement on behalf of other soldiers affected by PTSD and confrontation with authorities back in Germany that deny its debilitating effects and the scale of the problem. In New Zealand, near the close, Groos appears to

be cured when going out hunting once again imparts a positive meaning to the handling of guns learned as a soldier; in the process, this closes up the split in her memory: 'The separate picture frames for my life have disappeared. Through the familiar sound of a shot they have merged' (*Ein schöner Tag* 257). Groos's text concludes with an open letter to the psychiatric profession, calling for better treatment while asserting that trauma is a normal reaction to extreme events. There is also the prospect of renewed agency when she states that she made contact with other soldiers to begin collecting the material that would form the basis of her subsequent collection, in the tradition of Protokollliteratur, of soldiers' accounts of their experiences of the deployment in *'Das ist auch euer Krieg': Deutsche Soldaten berichten von ihren Einsätzen* (*'It's your war too': German Soldiers Tell of Their Deployments*, 2010).

By contrast, Timmermann-Levanas's *Die reden – Wir sterben* grasps PTSD more insistently as a political issue in need of a political solution, and the consciousness-raising and campaigning dimension of this memoir was the main aspect picked up in reviews and interviews with the author (e.g. Bredow). In 2011 Timmermann-Levanas explained that he wrote about his experiences to show 'where the problems in the system are and can be improved' (*'Soldaten im Auslandseinsatz'* 8–9). In his memoir he elaborates, noting that he tells his story not for himself but 'for those [...] who cannot speak' (Timmermann-Levanas, *Die reden – Wir sterben* 9–10). For Timmermann-Levanas, who had lodged a complaint about poor equipment when he was serving in SFOR in 1999, speaking out appears as a responsibility to other soldiers and towards the public, while embracing the concept of PTSD aids the case for recognition of the work that soldiers do and the situations they face.

In SFOR in 1998, a failed grenade attack had already made Timmermann-Levanas aware of a gap between official claims and his personal experience of the situations in which soldiers were operating. In his role as press officer in Kunduz, this disjunction is felt viscerally as a split that becomes ever harder to contain: 'As a soldier with experience of attacks and combat, I cannot erase my memories, but these cannot feature in public statements since I speak not for myself but for the Bundeswehr' (*Die reden – Wir sterben* 39). A further and direct role in the genesis of his PTSD is ascribed to the experience of being ambushed and drawn into a firefight in June 2006. The account of how Timmermann-Levanas's vehicle is attacked as he accompanies American journalists on a tour through Kunduz and of how the German soldiers defend themselves invokes the tropes of 'battlefield revelation' described by Harari (2–4). Heightened sensory awareness distinguishes the patter of insurgents' Kalashnikov rifles from heavy weapons, time blurs and a rocket flash allows a glimpse of the sublime, appearing 'almost beautiful' (*Die reden – Wir sterben* 35). But in the account, positive revelation turns negative in Harari's sense: the overwhelming intensity of this experience of 'flesh-witnessing' (Harari 9) finally breaks open the split in Timmermann-Levanas's self between personal experience and professional role – a division that becomes toxic and manifests as trauma.

Timmermann-Levanas describes the symptoms of PTSD before contextualising them historically in a narrative that moves towards political action on behalf of affected soldiers. In the present of the narration at home in the FRG, nightmares and flashbacks that transport him back to Kunduz convey how the traumatic memories of the firefight and other incidents are experienced as indistinguishable from reality. Frequently accompanied by sweating and shaking, flashbacks point to involuntary remembering, the blurring of past and present and the total-body nature of the experience as the symptoms of trauma. With an increasing assurance that reflects (in contrast to the ignorance he perceives in the Bundeswehr and in society at large) his own efforts to research and understand his symptoms, Timmermann-Levanas's narrative frames these within a broad history of conceptions of trauma from First World War 'shell shock' to the present. He pays particular attention to the definition of PTSD developed by the APA in 1980 and its refinement in the World Health Organisation's tenth

International Classification of Diseases in 2000 (*Die reden – Wir sterben* 101–8). Where Groos mistrusts the designation of PTSD, Timmermann-Levanas embraces it for its political potential. Nonetheless, on the basis of his own story he weighs universal claims about PTSD against individual experience, stating that it ‘is different for everyone’ (*Die reden – Wir sterben* 97).

In contrast to Groos’s text, with its more individualistic story of recovery, Timmermann-Levanas offers a more resolutely political critique of the shortcomings of military and civilian bureaucracy. His memoir demonstrates at its heart something of the distinctive outlook and engagement of the soldier as a democratically minded ‘Citizen in Uniform’. Timmermann-Levanas remarks that the hardest battle he faced as a soldier and ex-soldier was for recognition and support at home. Following his discharge from the Bundeswehr, the application process for the support and compensation to which he feels entitled proves fraught: it places the burden of proof on him, and a diagnosis of PTSD by military doctors when his symptoms first appeared is worthless. When his claim is rejected by a civilian doctor who never examines him in person, the notification, which states that in his role as press officer he experienced the ambush and ensuing firefight ‘indirectly’ and not ‘personally’, ascribes his symptoms to longstanding depression arising from the loss of his father when he was young (*Die reden – Wir sterben* 160–61). With legal redress his only option, yet unable to afford representation, Timmermann-Levanas is forced to navigate compensation law alone. His memoir leaves him pursuing his claim, fighting not insurgents, but ‘German authorities [...] that deny my rights’ (*Die reden – Wir sterben* 187).

Where Groos’s memoir offers resolution, through a personal process of recovery and the telling of her story, this is incomplete for Timmermann-Levanas while the political problem of PTSD remains. Narrating his tale has little therapeutic value: ‘it neither distracts nor liberates me’ (*Die reden – Wir sterben* 91). Rather, it calls to action as he abstracts from personal experience to attack a state that for him is in denial of the reality of the deployment and reluctant to meet the obligations to soldiers and veterans. The values and commitment of the democratically minded ‘Citizen in Uniform’ at the heart of the memoir come into view when Timmermann-Levanas asserts the reciprocal responsibilities of soldiers and state enshrined in laws enacted by the Bundestag and cites relevant legislation: ‘The state needs to rely on its soldiers, but this also applies the other way, thus the state has a duty of care. This too is legally codified. Paragraph 31 of the “Soldatengesetz” [the law defining the status of soldiers] states: “The state has a contractual obligation [...] to ensure the wellbeing of professional soldiers and their families, also for the period after termination of the contract of employment”’ (*Die reden – Wir sterben* 188–89). His logical conclusion is not an individual ‘cure’ but his founding of a support organisation (the Deutsche Kriegsofferfürsorge) in 2009 to campaign on behalf of traumatised soldiers.

It is fitting, then, that the prospect of a change in the law governing support and compensation for soldiers, so as to bring these into line with the real demands and risks both of deployment to Afghanistan and indeed the ‘out-of-area’ deployments of the Bundeswehr more widely, is reported not in Timmermann-Levanas’s memoir but rather in Robert Sedlatzek-Müller’s 2012 *Soldatenglück: Mein Leben nach dem Überleben*. This tells the story of Sedlatzek-Müller’s service as a paratrooper in Kosovo in the 1990s and as a dog-handler in Kabul from 2002, and of how he developed PTSD after a blast at an explosives disposal site in March 2002. Timmermann-Levanas makes an appearance in Sedlatzek-Müller’s text when he gives his backing to Sedlatzek-Müller in the latter’s own battle with the authorities. This support flourishes into a campaign for a change in the law for compensation of soldiers that is finally agreed by the Bundestag when it accepts a lowering of the disability threshold and back-dates this to 1992, the start of ‘out-of-area’ deployments (Sedlatzek-Müller 285). Sedlatzek-Müller’s *Soldatenglück* offers a striking example of the influence and legacy of the texts by

Wohlgethan, Groos and Timmermann-Levanas. Its narrative of Sedlatzek-Müller's roles as paratrooper and dog-handler combines the emphasis on high-level military skills familiar from Wohlgethan's texts with a tale of trauma more reminiscent of Groos and Timmermann-Levanas. This text in turn makes a further case for the normalisation of the figure of the soldier and of soldiers' memoirs in the context of NATO and/or UN deployment. Here too, important features are the geopolitical engagement – for instance when Sedlatzek-Müller contrasts the 'robust mandate' (125) and the achievements of the Bundeswehr in Kosovo with its more uncertain involvement in Afghanistan, for which trauma stands as a figure – and engagement on behalf of other soldiers as well as the impetus to inform the public of the situation as it is experienced on the ground. The agreed change to the law around support and compensation, finally, points to the prospect of hard-won acknowledgement for the soldiers of the Bundeswehr and their commitment.

Conclusion

A proliferation since the mid-2000s of texts written by soldiers who have participated in the deployment of the Bundeswehr to Afghanistan after 2001 has marked the visible return of the military memoir as a literary form in the FRG for the first time since the 1950s. This article has considered some of the first published memoirs of the deployment as examples of key narratives to emerge from the participation of German soldiers in ISAF: the exercise of military skills and their transformative impact in the case of the texts by Achim Wohlgethan, and of trauma and, to a point, therapy in those by Heike Groos, Andreas Timmermann-Levanas and Robert Sedlatzek-Müller. The resurgence of the military memoir in the German-language context is striking and merits further exploration, yet to date there has been little analysis either in or beyond Germany. In the Federal Republic, scholars have been cautious about approaching the utterances of soldiers on account of the role played by the military memoir in the self-exculpation of officers of the Wehrmacht after the Second World War. This article has demonstrated that the recent memoirs are fascinating documents of the deployment of German soldiers to Afghanistan and of the surrounding controversies, since they spring from and point to a gap between official discourses about the deployment and soldiers' own perceptions of the deteriorating situation. Significantly, the texts suggest at least a partial 'normalisation' of the figure of the soldier and of the military memoir as a literary form. In contrast to the self-exculpation of Wehrmacht soldiers, the books by Wohlgethan, Groos and Timmermann-Levanas show the authors as thoughtful participants, in the spirit of the soldier as 'Citizen in Uniform', one of the Bundeswehr's founding concepts, in debates about the deployment and the role of the Bundeswehr, military identity and the relation between the military and wider society. What is needed in considering these Bundeswehr memoirs may also be described as a 'normalisation of critical approach'. The article has made a case for a method that draws on the work of English-language scholars such as Hynes, Harari and Woodward and Jenkins – who respectively emphasise the role of transformation, of positive and negative battlefield revelation, and of the construction of skills-based identities in soldiers' texts – to yield insights into the chosen memoirs and the transformative impacts of military engagement that they relate. Beyond Germany, recent scholarship on military writing in German since 1945 has focused on the exceptionalism of German history in the twentieth century through National Socialism and German division, while the recent resurgence of the memoir has remained a blind spot. By contrast, the approach taken here provides a critical framework within which it is possible to understand how the recent Bundeswehr memoirs both construct their authors as skilled professionals in line with soldiers from other NATO forces and are distinctive in the imprint they bear of postwar discourses about the soldier as 'Citizen in Uniform'. This framework can also offer scholars interested in the military memoir in a wider transnational context with

a firm grasp of what matters and what is distinctive about the re-emergence of the form in Germany today. Whether this form will continue to develop after the end of ISAF in 2014 and the return to greater restraint in the deployment of the Bundeswehr remains to be seen. However, in any future development that may arise, gauging any further normalisation and the ongoing distinctiveness of the form will remain a pressing task.

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How to cite this article: Plowman, A 2020 The Return of the Military Memoir: The Bundeswehr Deployment to Afghanistan and the Re-Emergence of a Literary Form. *Modern Languages Open*, 2020(1): 53 pp. 1–19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3828/mlow.v0i0.283>

Published: 07 December 2020

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