

# Coronavirus Changes Everything: Soldier Speaks About Life in the Barracks

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*About 40 soldiers are not allowed to leave the premises of the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College due to the coronavirus situation. One of the soldiers tells us what life is like for him in the barracks.*

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It is rather quiet at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College in Hamburg these days. Very few people are to be seen at the Clausewitz Barracks. There are neither cars on the streets nor laughter or chatter to be heard. Only the birdsong echoes through the site. From time to time, a squirrel climbs up a tree. In the pond, the ducks enjoy their swim. Idyllic, one might think. But this impression is misleading. It is the impact of the coronavirus that is affecting not only the BwCSC, but the entire world. On the barrack grounds Lieutenant Colonel Miloje Zdravkovic from Serbia is going for his daily walks. It is the only opportunity for the student on the International General/Admiral Staff Officer Course (IGASOC) to get some fresh air and to leave his room for a couple of minutes.



*These days, when Lieutenant Colonel Miloje Zdravkovic from Serbia goes for a walk on the barrack grounds, there is hardly anyone to be seen (photo: Bundeswehr Command and Staff College/Sophie Düsing).*

He is one of about 40 soldiers who are currently in home isolation at the Clausewitz Barracks. When he goes for a walk, he always wears his face mask and gloves and has some disinfectant at hand. Whenever he sees somebody approaching him, he makes sure to keep at least three metres distance. The 47-year-old says: "In Serbia we say that if we protect ourselves, God will protect us." He does not mind following these rules. According to him, they are necessary to slow down the spread of the virus.



*Lieutenant Colonel Miloje Zdravkovic only leaves his room wearing a face mask and gloves (photo: Bundeswehr Command and Staff College/Sophie Düsing).*

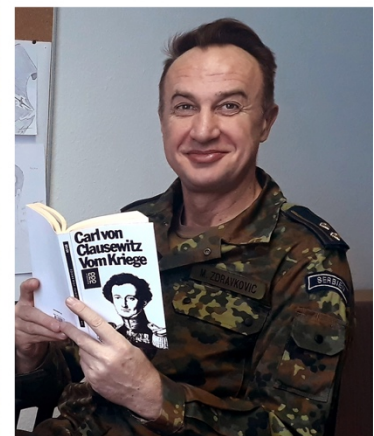
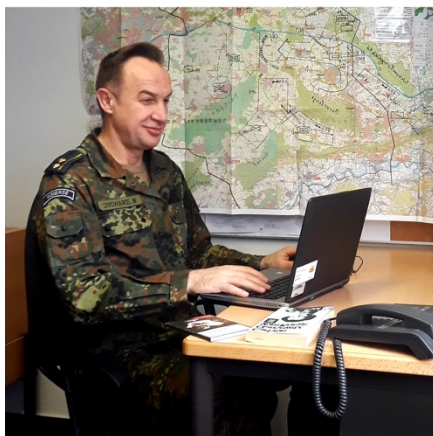
## A Memorable Event

The day when classes were suspended at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College as a precautionary measure, Lieutenant Colonel Zdravkovic and his fellow students from the IGASOC were visiting Wunstorf in Lower Saxony. "We went to the air base in order to take a look at the Airbus A400M. Our Course Director then told us that we had to cut the trip short and return to the College," Zdravkovic tells me. The reason was that a person at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College had tested positive for the coronavirus. Only a few days before, the 'Night of the Nations' had taken place — an event where international students were offering a variety of foods and drinks from their home countries and enjoyed chatting to attendees. The infected person, not knowing that they had contracted the virus, had also attended this event. The day the result was obtained, all members of the College, about 350 in total, were initially sent home since it could not be ruled out that other persons had also become infected with the virus. The international students were advised to go back to the barracks and to not leave the site for the following fortnight.

## A Lot of Time but no Hint of Boredom



“I then phoned my wife and my two adult children and told them what had happened,” says Lieutenant Colonel Zdravkovic and adds: “My wife told me almost the same thing.” In fact, shortly afterwards — on 15 March 2020 — a state of emergency was declared in his home country, Serbia. “The coronavirus is a threat to all of us, but it also represents a major opportunity for the world,” the student says and keeps emphasising the importance of being disciplined in these times. Only if everybody tries to minimise their contacts for a certain period of time will the virus stop spreading.



*Reading, enjoying the sun or surfing the web: Lieutenant Colonel Miloje Zdravkovic from Serbia knows how to keep himself busy in the barracks (photos: Bundeswehr Command and Staff College/Sophie Düsing (2) and privately (2), collage: Bundeswehr Command and Staff College /Marie Kellermann).*

When collecting his packed lunch from the dining facility in the mornings, he again keeps a distance to the others, and then later has his lunch in his room. “Afterwards, I read the newspaper or surf the web. I like to know what is happening both here and in the rest of the world.” In the mornings and afternoons, he would normally have classes at the College. Now he makes use of the time by making phone calls, reading or exercising. “There is no point in only sitting around and sleeping,” the soldier says. So far, he has not been bored, though. This is because he is the point of contact for tutors and comrades who are staying at the barracks. Since, again, any personal contact is to be avoided, the soldiers communicate using

a chat group instead. One time somebody asks where new sheets can be collected from, another time it is about new disinfectant, or people simply like to have a chat. In the evenings, the officers receive a free hot meal from the All Ranks Club, an association called GHG in German, which is short for Verein Gemeinsame Heimgesellschaft. “We are very well taken care of here,” he says.

## Equipment Cannot Defeat This Enemy

Over the past couple of days, one thing has become clear to the Air Force Officer: “Our airplanes, submarines, tanks or ships are useless, because we are fighting a different kind of enemy. Our opponent is invisible and fast, and we cannot defeat them with the sort of equipment we have.” Lieutenant Colonel Miloje Zdravkovic believes that in such a situation things like peoples’ beliefs, the colour of their skin or their nationality simply do not matter. “It is vital that we all show more empathy, unity, solidarity and selflessness.”

Written by: Sophie Düsing