

Bundeswehr Command and Staff College: 'Motivational Treats' Make People Smile

Sometimes it does not take much to make somebody's day. A smile, a kind word, a little snack, asking "How are you feeling today?" — little things like that can go a long way. The acting Welfare NCO of the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College in Hamburg, Chief Petty Officer Sitz, is well aware of this. The 32-year-old takes care of the about 40 soldiers who are not allowed to leave their accommodation at the Clausewitz Barracks due to the coronavirus. He makes sure they receive one hot meal per day at the All Ranks Club or 'GHG' in German, which is the short version of the registered club's name *Gemeinsame Heimgesellschaft*.



Chief Petty Officer Sitz (left) is handing over a bottle of Coke to an international student (photo: Bundeswehr Command and Staff College/Sophie Düsing).

When it became known that the first coronavirus case had been confirmed at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College, Chief Petty Officer Sitz was attending a meeting at the All Ranks Club. This was not a coincidence; in his free time the Chief Petty Officer acts as the Club's Deputy Chairman. He did not hesitate for a minute when he realised that his help would be needed at the All Ranks Club in the days to come. Where else would the about 40 soldiers receive additional food and drink supplies such as chocolate bars, soft drinks or savoury snacks if they were not allowed to leave the barracks? "I was expecting us to have a coronavirus case at some point," Chief Petty Officer Sitz says. Weeks ago, therefore, he had already explained to his 10-year-old son that he might need to stay at work for a longer period

of time. “I told him that in that case it would not be just for the heck of it, but in order to protect him and my parents who would then be taking care of him.” And so, he packed a few of his son's favourite things — “some sort of emergency package”, just in case. “I told him: if I can't come home one day, you have got this package. There is no need to share it with grandma or grandpa.”

Selling Goods is not the Main Focus

It all happened on 9 March: all members of the College, about 350 in total, were sent home. The — mainly international — students were asked to no longer leave the grounds of the Clausewitz Barracks. Chief Petty Officer Sitz, who is usually one of the staff members involved in the course organisation for the Faculty of Naval Forces, stayed as well and made himself comfortable in the All Ranks Club. “I sleep on the sofa. At the time, the comrades responsible for the accommodation management had already left. But I don't need a room. I like to be on site because sometimes people will come in at night when they have lost their face masks or when they need something else or would just like to have a chat. This way, there is always somebody there, 24/7,” the soldier says. Every day, he opens the doors of the All Ranks Club between 9am and 8pm. Selling goods is not the main focus, however. Not only does he provide the soldiers with personal protective equipment such as disinfectant, but he also supplies them with household cleaners so that they can clean their rooms. He has even thought of ways to encourage his comrades to really collect those things: for example, for every package they pick up they receive a token to exchange for a drink of their choice. “The soldiers really like this idea,” Chief Petty Officer Sitz says.



Safety first: only if you wear your gloves you are allowed to collect your groceries at the All Ranks Club (photo: Bundeswehr Command and Staff College/Sophie Düsing).

Supplies Will Last for Two Months

The hot meals in the evenings are freshly prepared and handed out to the soldiers at the barracks free of charge in addition to the packed lunches from the dining facility. The food is then consumed in the rooms. "It is not our aim to sell goods. If somebody needs something extra, they get it. We are trying to create a win-win situation to make sure that the All Ranks Club is not losing a lot of money in the end. And it is important to me that the comrades are well taken care of. They can't just go home or leave to see their families," Chief Petty Officer Sitz explains. Also, some of the goods will exceed their best before date around the end of March: "If I don't hand them out, I will have to chuck them away." In addition to that, some goods had already been defrosted to be used for events which were then cancelled due to the coronavirus situation. "If I use up every single item that we have in stock, including fresh and frozen produce, I can provide the soldiers with food for another two months."



These days, only few people are to be seen here: at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College, the dining facility and the All Ranks Club are located in building no. 16 (photo: Bundeswehr Command and Staff College/Sophie Düsing).

"We are not Abandoning Them"

Every day for a couple of hours, Chief Petty Officer Sitz is supported by one of his chefs — sometimes they will cook poultry, sometimes beef. They will prepare yeast dumplings with compote, spring rolls or chicken wings. "The soldiers enjoy the food very much. They thank us several times when collecting it." The students are well aware that the efforts of the team at the All Ranks Club in this special situation cannot be taken for granted. Chief Petty Officer Sitz also tries to have a little chat every day: "I ask them how they are feeling and whether there is

anything that bothers them. I would like them to know that we are not abandoning them.” Apart from the hot meal at night, every student also receives a drink and a dessert as a small ‘motivational treat’.

Going Home is not an Option

Chief Petty Officer Sitz is not afraid of catching the virus. After all he keeps a minimum distance and makes sure to wash his hands regularly. “If I were somewhere in Afghanistan right now, other things might happen: I could be stung by a scorpion when putting my boots on or I could step on an IED or something while on patrol. I am still safer here than on a mission somewhere abroad,” he says. As long as he is feeling well he does not want to leave the Clausewitz Barracks — despite the fact that he misses both his son and his daughter very much, as he keeps emphasising. “Going home is currently not an option for me, not until we are told that everyone is safe both here and at home. I am glad that my parents are taking care of my son. As long as the comrades who have no family here are stuck in the barracks, I will keep on cooking until all our resources are used up.”

We would like to thank Chief Petty Officer Sitz for his extraordinary commitment.

Written by: Sophie Düsing