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Opportunities and Challenges in Memory Activism: The Case of the Mittenwald Protest Campaign (2002–2009)

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Abstract: This article examines how memory activism can contribute to the democratizing of history through the example of a specific protest campaign in which activist historians among other groups and civil society actors attacked the dominant narrative of the “clean Wehrmacht” represented by a veteran association of Mountain Troops. It interrogates the Public History approaches of the activists and their impact on the local level of the Bavarian town of Mittenwald, where the protests took place between 2002 and 2009, in order to find out how participatory their construction of an alternative historical narrative actually was. Although memory activism has obvious benefits especially in dealing with painful pasts, the article also reveals its limits, as such benefits are contingent on the extent to which historian activists share their authority and the way they deal with public, as well as their own, emotions.

Keywords: memory activism, Public History, shared authority, emotions, Mittenwald campaign

1 Introduction

Mittenwald is a small community in Bavaria, in which veterans of Mountain Troops of the Wehrmacht (*Gebirgstruppe*) have gathered annually to commemorate fallen soldiers in World War I and II at their memorial since the early 1950s. In 2010, the Mittenwald community unveiled a new monument dedicated to deaths during World War II for

which the elite Mountain Troops of the Wehrmacht were responsible.¹ Originally, this monument was erected illegally by activist historians and civil society groups at the end of their eight-year protest campaign against the military tradition of the current Mountain Troops in 2009 (Figure 1). Besides the victims of war crimes, it also commemorated “Jews deported and murdered with the participation of the Mountain Troops.”² Finally, it remembered the liberation of the death march of the Dachau prisoners, which took place in Mittenwald at the end of the World War II.³ The official dedication of the monument, which followed a year of negotiations between the campaigners and the community, was attended not only by activists and some survivors of the Nazi terror, but also by representatives of the *Kameradenkreis der Gebirgstruppe* (from here onwards referred to as the *Kameradenkreis*), the veterans’ association of the Mountain Troops.

From a distance, this event might seem as a great success of memory activism in challenging the glorious legacy of the Mountain Troops, and thereby also the myth of a “clean Wehrmacht.” Until then, the Mittenwald community’s collective remembrance of World War II had been dominated by Mountain Troop perpetrators or bystanders who had either participated in war crimes or kept silent about them. The presence of liberated Dachau survivors of the death march in Mittenwald at the end of the war was not

¹ More than 50 war crimes especially in Greece and Italy are described in Stephan Stracke, Ralph Klein, and Regina Mentner, eds., *Mörder unterm Edelweiß: Dokumentation des Hearings zu den Kriegsverbrechen der Gebirgsjäger* (Köln: PapyRossa, 2004). See also Hermann Frank Meyer, *Blutiges Edelweiß. Die 1. Gebirgs-Division im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2008). With few exceptions (e.g., Kefalonia, Falzano di Cortona) these atrocities have not been objects of judicial proceedings in Germany and thus have not been legally defined as war crimes. However, the historically proved facts of the cases were evidently in violation of the laws in force at the time.

² For images of the illegal dedication and the monument as well as the exact wording of all inscriptions see “Denkmalsenthüllung in Mittenwald: Erinnerung an die Verbrechen der Gebirgstruppen,” *haGalil*, June 1, 2009, accessed January 6, 2022, <http://www.hagalil.com/2009/06/mittenwald-2/>.

³ For more see Eliezer Schwartz, “The Death Marches from the Dachau Camps to the Alps during the Final Days of World War II in Europe,” *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 25, no. 1 (2011): 129–160.

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Figure 1: The illegal unveiling of the monument to the victims by campaigners in 2009. Credit: Soňa Mikulová.

part of the local collective remembrance at all. Thus, from the perspective of Public History, the outcome of this protest campaign could be interpreted as creating space for previously marginalized voices of victims and survivors and constructing more participatory and pluralistic historical knowledge.

However, a closer look at the context of the dedication of the monument for the victims and the course of the entire campaign raises some doubts that these were examples of an unequivocally successful democratization of producing and disseminating historical knowledge. A discrepancy between the campaigners' motives and practices on the one hand and the apparently successful outcome was at the origin of my interest in a closer examination of the protest campaign, which took place annually in the Bavarian town of Mittenwald between 2002 and 2009. The aim of this article is to outline the main

arguments regarding the benefits and opportunities, as well as challenges and disadvantages of memory activism in this specific case and possibly more generally as well. Rather than being a contribution to the development of veteran culture in the West Germany and their oppositional movement, this article seeks to inform the general debate on how to democratize the process of coming to terms with painful pasts.

2 Theoretical Concepts, Aims, and Questions

When it comes to the participatory construction of history, the field of Public History offers several approaches within which the concept of shared and sharing authority seems to

be the most appropriate. It implies that public historians collaborate with communities during the entire process of constructing a historical narrative “from the collection and construction of sources, through the presentation and storytelling, to the various uses of the past.”⁴ Consequently, public historians are encouraged to consider different interpretations of various stakeholders within a specific community and to mediate a discussion rather than impose their own expertise.⁵ At the same time, however, public historians should be able to prevent the danger of replacing historical analysis by relativistic opinions from other public actors.⁶

Moreover, public historians as academic professionals and practitioners should be aware of the presence and the role of emotions both within history and in history-making processes.⁷ Emotions play a crucial role for participatory approaches of Public History not only because they serve as a way to connect among individuals and different groups, such as between historians, their partners, and audiences, but also because “the more the public feels connected with the history, the more they engage and participate.”⁸ However, as Thomas Cauvin put it, rather than denying emotions, “public practitioners must be ready to acknowledge – and

problematize the fact – that feelings affect the production of collaborative Public History.”⁹

In this article, I aim at understanding whether and how the practices used by the Mittenwald activists for the production and dissemination of historical knowledge corresponded with the abovementioned ideas and concepts. By focusing on the way activists shared their authority, worked with their own emotions and instrumentalized them in their communication with media, the veterans’ association and the Mittenwald community, one can better understand the contradictions between the motivations, goals, practices as well as the actual benefits and limits of the campaign.

Specifically, I ask: With whom and in what phases of the process did they share their authority? How did memory activists deal with the local community and ‘competitors’ in the public presenting different narratives of the past? To what public demand did they respond to and who constituted this public? How did the organizers of the campaign handle their own emotions and those of the public? Which specific emotions fueled their action? And finally, I ask what long-term repercussions did the protest campaign have in the Mittenwald community.

3 Memory Activism Regarding Military Traditions and the Origins of the Mittenwald Campaign

When looking at the process of producing historical knowledge about the Nazi past in postwar West Germany, the prominent role of historians outside universities, as well as journalists, lawyers, and other members of civil society becomes apparent.¹⁰ Memory activism has also been instrumental in breaking long-lasting taboos about crimes committed by the German Army during World War II.¹¹ The so-called myth of a clean Wehrmacht had

⁴ Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (London: Routledge, 2016), 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 225. However, it is not always possible to bring together parallel interpretations of different community members, be it the case of contrasting moral or ideological stances of former perpetrators and sufferers but also in the case of conflicting values of different racial and ethnic groups within a community. See William Logan and Keir Reeves, eds., *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with “Difficult Heritage”* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3, 11. Cf. for example a successful mediation of a discussion about a controversial past by Weyeneth, who, however, left an observant stance and decided to play a catalytic role in order to break the silence in the community. Robert R. Weyeneth, “History, He Wrote: Murder, Politics, and the Challenges of Public History in a Community with a Secret,” *The Public Historian* 16, no. 2 (1994): 51–73.

⁶ Cauvin, *Public History*, 16.

⁷ The twofold role of emotions in history – as the object of historicization as well as a motor of historical change – has been thoroughly conceptualized by historians of emotions in the past decade, see for example Ute Frevert, “The history of emotions,” in *Handbook of Emotions*, eds. Lisa Feldman Barrett, Michael Lewis and Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones (New York: The Guilford Press, 2018), 49–65. For the discussion on emotions as a constitutive part of the historical learning process, see Juliane Brauer and Martin Lücke, *Emotionen, Geschichte und historisches Lernen: Geschichtsdiaktische und geschichtskulturelle Perspektiven* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2013).

⁸ Cauvin, *Public History*, 217. The emotional participation of the public is prominent in reenactments of historical events, which aim at experiencing “authentic” feelings, although there is a risk of their abuse. See for example Alexander Cook, “The Use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment: Thoughts on Recent Trends in Public History,” *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (2004): 487–96.

⁹ Cauvin, *Public History*, 218.

¹⁰ See Frank Bösch and Constantin Goschler, “Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Public History,” in *Public History: Öffentliche Darstellungen des Nationalsozialismus jenseits der Geschichtswissenschaft*, ed. Frank Bösch (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2009), 7–23. For the historical context of German memory activism, see Jenny Wüstenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹¹ For more on the mythologization of an apolitical German Army conducting a fair and honorable war, see Wolfram Wette, *Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

been established since the late 1950s, along with the need to rearm West Germany during the Cold War.¹² Not only was the new army recruited from former soldiers, including perpetrators of various civilian massacres, but the military command of the Bundeswehr also never completely distanced itself from its predecessor despite the fact that, since the 1970s, German scholars have provided evidence of the Wehrmacht's participation in Nazi Germany's war of extermination.¹³ In fact, many military traditions of the "old army" were re-established and maintained in co-operation with veterans' associations existing mainly for these traditional purposes.¹⁴

Although individuals and left-oriented organizations have increasingly contested the commemoration of fallen Wehrmacht soldiers in the Bundeswehr and by veterans' associations since the 1980s,¹⁵ it was only the Hamburg Institute of Social Research's controversial *Wehrmacht* exhibition that brought awareness concerning crimes committed by regular armed forces into the public consciousness from the mid-1990s on.¹⁶ Particularly resilient, however, was the military tradition maintained by the ever-strong *Kameradenkreis*.¹⁷ This was to change with the Mittenwald campaign, which was the most intense, long-term, and physically close protest campaign against the

military traditions in the Mountain Troops and their veteran association to date.¹⁸

The campaign started as a single protest against traditional commemorative assemblies organized by the *Kameradenkreis* taking place annually during the Pentecost holiday. It was motivated by solidarity with members of Greek civil society demanding financial compensation for victims of war crimes committed by Germans.¹⁹ Due to positive responses from other German activist organizations, much larger protests accompanied each of the veterans' commemorative assemblies in Mittenwald from 2003 to 2008. The core of the campaign organizers was composed of historians, social scientists, lawyers, journalists, and other individuals from different parts of Germany, gathered in an informal group called the *Arbeitskreis (AK) Angreifbare Traditionspflege* that defined itself as a "temporary association of memory politics activists and historians."²⁰ With their activism, they claimed allegiance to the radical left and the autonomous movement in West Germany, which started to engage with the Nazi past only in the 1990s by activities supporting punishment of Nazi criminals and financial compensation for forced laborers.²¹

12 Alaric Searle, "Revising the 'Myth' of a 'Clean Wehrmacht': Generals' Trials, Public Opinion, and the Dynamics of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in West Germany, 1948–60," *German Historical Institute London Bulletin* 25, no. 2 (2003): 17–48.

13 Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002), 245–47.

14 *Ibid.*, 251–260.

15 Jakob Knab was, at that time, the most remarkable and successful individual activist in Germany. He fought against Wehrmacht traditions and symbols like military barracks named after Wehrmacht Generals who were Nazis or anti-Semites. For more see Jakob Knab, *Falsche Glorie: Das Traditionsverständnis der Bundeswehr* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1995).

16 In 1995, the first traveling exhibition received national attention and outrage in Germany and Austria. Subsequent discussions among scholars as well as the public led to its reconceptualization and reopening in 2001. For more see Tim Seidenschnur, *Streit um die Wehrmacht. Die Debatten um die Wehrmachtsausstellungen im Wandel der Generationen* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2010).

17 After 1990, when other Wehrmacht veterans' associations struggled with decreasing memberships, *Kameradenkreis* became one of the biggest such associations thanks to opening its membership to Bundeswehr veterans in the late 1980s. Soňa Mikulová, "Co zbylo z 'napadených' tradic? Spolek bývalých horských myslivců a jeho péče o tradiční vojenské hodnoty v SRN po zhroucení mýtu o 'čistém wehrmachtu'" [What Has Remained of the Traditions under Attack? The Association of Mountain Troops' Veterans and its Attitudes to Traditional Military Virtues in Germany after the Debunking of the Myth of the "Clean Wehrmacht"], *AUC – Studia Territorialia* 14, no. 3 (2015): 47–84, 68.

18 For an overview of the previous activities and the Mittenwald campaign see Nathan Stoltzfus, "The German Mountain Troops and Their Opponents, 1943 to the Present," *German Politics & Society* 38, no. 4 (2020): 72–90.

19 The organizers explained the circumstances and their motivation for creating the protest campaign in several texts as part of their manifesto. See for example: Ralph Klein, Regina Mentner, and Stephan Stracke, "Mörder unterm Edelweiß: 'Eine Selbsthilfegruppe für Kriegsverbrecher,'" in *Mörder unterm Edelweiß: Dokumentation des Hearings zu den Kriegsverbrechen der Gebirgsjäger*, eds. Ralph Klein, Regina Mentner, and Stephan Stracke (Köln: PapyRossa-Verl., 2004), 11; Ralph Klein, Regina Mentner, and Stephan Stracke, "'Dokumentation und Aktion' – Möglichkeiten geschichtspolitischer Intervention am Beispiel der Traditionspflege deutscher Gebirgsjäger," in *Kritische Geschichte: Perspektiven und Positionen*, eds. Richard Heigl, Petra Ziegler, and Philip Bauer (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2005), 193–209.

20 Klein, Mentner, and Stracke, *Mörder unterm Edelweiß*, 22. The name of the association can be translated as the working group to attack the cultivation of [military] traditions. It refers to a speech by Bavarian minister-president Edmund Stoiber from 2001 in which he praised the "unassailable cultivation of traditions" of the Mountain Troops. Jennifer Gronau, a member of the working group, described its character as a "networking of networks" in *Auf blinde Flecken zeigen: Eine Diskursanalyse soldatischer Gedenkpraktiken und Möglichkeiten des Widerspruchs am Beispiel der Gebirgsjäger in Mittenwald* (Oldenburg: BIS-Verl. der Carl-von-Ossietzky-Univ., 2009), 45. The term "cultivation of military traditions" means all social practices used to create and maintain a community of former and active soldiers, with its specific identity and values, in order to become a relevant agent in the public discourse. *Ibid.*, 79.

21 Klein, Mentner, and Stracke, "Dokumentation und Aktion," 194.



Figure 2: A cover page of the periodical of the veteran's association (no. 4/2006). Author's archive.

The campaigners themselves referred to their activities in the field of memory politics as “making history.”²² Thus, this specific protest campaign deliberately combined broader political activism and Public History.

Although there is an existing literature on the Mittenwald campaign, the scholarship to date has not dealt with its relation to Public History.²³ Since all of these publications were written by campaigners, I used these alongside other texts they have produced (both flyers and internet documents) to analyze the aims of their protests and the construction of the alternative historical narrative. The stances of the *Kameradenkreis* were taken mostly from its own periodical *Die Gebirgstruppe* (The Mountain Troops) (Figure 2).²⁴ Reactions to the campaign among the inhabitants of Mittenwald and its municipality were drawn

from local newspapers²⁵ and alternative internet media platforms which reported on the Mittenwald campaign.

4 Goals and Main Features of the Campaign

The campaign happened mostly in Mittenwald, because the protests were aimed against the activities, symbols, and the prestige of the *Kameradenkreis*. This veteran association was founded in 1951, uniting local organizations of former Mountain Troops living in West Germany, Austria, and Northern Italy.²⁶ Mittenwald held a special symbolic meaning among its members and sympathizers due to a central memorial dedicated to the fallen mountain soldiers in both world wars, erected on the hill Hohe Brendten close to the town in 1957 (Figure 3). The fallen

²² Ibid.

²³ Klein, Mentner, and Stracke, “Mörder unterm Edelweiß,” 7–23; Klein, Mentner, and Stracke. “Dokumentation und Aktion”; Gronau, *Auf blinde Flecken zeigen*.

²⁴ In this text, I draw on my already published analysis of reactions of the *Kameradenkreis* to the protest campaign. I explored the impact of the campaign on the veterans’ interpretation of two war crimes committed by Mountain Troops in Greece (Kefalonia and Komenno) and on their commemorative practices. Mikulová, “Co zbylo z ‘napadených’ tradic?”

²⁵ The analysis is based on articles from: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Münchener Merkur* and its local edition for Mittenwald and its surroundings *Garmisch-Partenkirchner Tagblatt*. The archive of the last two newspapers is available online through the news portal *Merkur.de*. A qualitative analysis of media reception of the campaign between 2002 and 2005 can be found in Gronau, *Auf blinde Flecken zeigen*, 95–137.

²⁶ Mikulová, “Co zbylo z ‘napadených’ tradic?,” 49.



Figure 3: The fallen soldiers memorial on Hohe Brendten near Mittenwald. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:20170807_xl_P1130838-ehrenmal-der-gebirgstruppe-am-hohe-brendten-bei-mittenwald.jpg.

soldiers memorial consists of a wooden cross and two masoned stelae with the wording: “1914–1918” and “1939–1945.” A new element of concrete was added in 2015 to remember fallen soldiers of the Bundeswehr.

As the *Kameradenkreis* declared consistently throughout decades of its existence, the goals of the commemorative ceremonies at their memorial were to remember all the fallen with “gratitude” and “appreciation,”²⁷ to experience belonging to the group of former and active soldiers, to identify with their values (such as “honor” and “bravery”), to be “helpful to comrades,” and to be “patriotic” and “willing to make sacrifices.”²⁸

Even before the installment of the memorial, Mittenwald had become the place of annual commemorative assemblies of former mountain soldiers from the Wehrmacht and later

also from the Bundeswehr, accompanied by their relatives, and visited by representatives of both the town of Mittenwald and the state of Bavaria. As a consequence, the *Kameradenkreis* established itself as a hegemonic actor in the local arena of collective remembrance regarding World War II, which suppressed most of German war crimes.²⁹ As such, it continued undisturbed in its commemorative practices and

²⁷ Gerhart Klamert, “Totengedenken,” *Die Gebirgstruppe* 46, no. 4 (1997): 3–4.

²⁸ Harald Rettelbach, “Ehrenmale – Gedenksteine – Gedenktafel der deutschen Gebirgstruppe,” *Die Gebirgstruppe* 50 (October 2001): 29.

²⁹ See the study of the activist historians on the *Kameradenkreis*: AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege, “Der ‘Kameradenkreis der Gebirgstruppe’,” in *Friede, Freude, deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, ed. Arbeitskreis gegen den Kärntner Konsens (Wien: mandelbaum kritik & utopie, 2011), 145–59. Cf. the general analysis of the culture of veterans’ associations in postwar Germany in: Thomas Kühne, “Zwischen Vernichtungskrieg und Freizeitgesellschaft: Die Veteranenkultur der Bundesrepublik (1945–1995),” in *Nachkrieg in Deutschland*, ed. Klaus Naumann (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), 90–113. For military veteran communities’ self-perceptions in the first decade after the war see also Jörg Echternkamp, *Postwar Soldiers. Historical Controversies and West German Democratization, 1945–1955* (New York-Oxford: Berghahn, 2020).

cultivation of military tradition of the Wehrmacht within the Bundeswehr throughout the 1990s. Only in 2002 did civil society actors confront its members personally with a contrasting interpretation of World War II right in the middle of their assembly for the first time.³⁰

Since its beginning, the *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege* collaborated with other left-oriented associations and individuals who had already been following some of their objectives, sometimes for decades.³¹ As a consequence, the Mittenwald protesters as a whole claimed a number of aims which differed slightly and were modified from year to year depending on the co-organizers. However, three main goals remained constant for the entire period: the legal punishment of the living ex-members of the Mountain Troops for more than 50 war crimes committed mostly in Greece and other Balkan states; the financial compensation of Greek victims of the massacres and their relatives provided by the German state; and the attack on military traditions as preserved and cultivated by Wehrmacht veterans' associations, symbolized by the annual commemorative ceremony of the *Kameradenkreis* in Mittenwald.³²

All these demands were justified with a reference to the many war crimes of the former Mountain Troops for which none had been punished by German courts by then. The historians of the *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege*, having examined existing scholarship and conducted their own research of the massacres both in archives and as part of witness testimonies, passed their findings to the police and

to the prosecuting attorney's office in Germany as well as distributed them to the public in a variety of forms: flyers handed around Mittenwald; articles in local, national, and foreign newspapers; reports on left-oriented internet platforms;³³ TV or radio features;³⁴ in addition to scholarly articles and publications.

The nonviolent attacks on the *Kameradenkreis'* assembly on Hohe Brendten were always accompanied by one or two day-long demonstrations in the streets of Mittenwald, including informal commemorations of civil victims of the war crimes as an alternative ritual to the veterans' ceremonies.³⁵ Leaflets and self-produced newspapers (Figures 4, 5, and 6) were distributed into private mailboxes and during the demonstrations to tourists and inhabitants in the streets of Mittenwald.³⁶ Moreover, since 2003, several lectures with historians and public 'hearings' with survivors and witnesses from abroad took place in the town (Figure 7).³⁷

The Mittenwald campaign differed significantly from previous protest actions against Wehrmacht traditions. Since none of their key demands were unique to the Mittenwald context, it was rather the fact that this campaign sought to achieve all of these at the same time, repeatedly and with great intensity for eight-years, that their demands received greater emphasis and raised more attention than any previous protests. The Mittenwald campaign was remarkable also due to several other features: a high degree of co-operation with foreign civil society actors and media, the creativity with which the organizers combined a

³⁰ The first protest has been described by the activists several times, but the first of these descriptions can be found in: "Deutsche PolizistInnen verhindern Schweigeminute," *de.indymedia.org*, May 20, 2002, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170902011412/http://de.indymedia.org/2002/05/22370.shtml>.

³¹ One of the most important partners has been the *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes – Bund der Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten* (Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime/Federation of Antifascists), founded in 1947. Its activities against the *Kameradenkreis* are documented in the internet archive of the association: *VVN-BdA, Landesvereinigung NRW*, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://nrw-archiv.vvn-bda.de/archiv.htm>. See also: Bundesausschuss der VVN-BdA, ed., *Eine Mordstruppe. Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen dem völkisch-militaristischen Kameradenkreis Gebirgstruppe und der VVN – Bund der Antifaschisten* (Renchen: druckwerkstatt renchen, 2009). Other groups were established in the 2000s, as for example *AK Distomo*, which supports the financial claims of survivors from the Greek village of Distomo. For more see "AK – Distomo," *Nadir*, accessed January 6, 2022, <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/ak-distomo/>.

³² Klein, Mentner, and Stracke, "Mörder unterm Edelweiß," 13.

³³ Besides texts on different internet platforms, the organizers launched their own website in 2008, which gave an overview of their historical research's results, programs, calls for their demonstrations, media perception, etc. It has since been archived: <https://web.archive.org/web/20100409073110/http://www.keine-ruhe.org/>. Some of the documents can also be accessed on the previous official sites for the Mittenwald campaign maintained by *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege*: <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/kampagnen/mittenwald> (for the period 2005–2007) and <http://mittenwald.blogspot.de/category/mittenwald/> (2007–2008), both accessed January 6, 2022.

³⁴ Among others the German investigative TV magazine "Monitor" featured a story on the war crimes of the *Gebirgsjäger* on December 5, 2002.

³⁵ For a brief chronicle of each year of the campaign see Gronau, *Auf blinde Flecken zeigen*, 75–94.

³⁶ A "newspaper" called the *Mittenwalder Landbote* was issued four times, in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007.

³⁷ The scale of protest forms is described in Gronau, *Auf blinde Flecken zeigen*, 92.



Figures 4, 5, and 6: The cover pages of activists' newspapers distributed during the protests in 2004, 2005, and 2006. Author's archive.

high variety of protest forms, and the flexibility with which they embedded impulses from current public discourse into their own arguments.³⁸ Additional meetings and demonstrations thus took place in front of the Bundeswehr barracks in Mittenwald, in front of a courthouse in Munich, and the homes of veterans whose investigation for committing war crimes was requested.³⁹ As a result, the Mittenwald campaign united several thematic issues, both historical and contemporary, which continuously provoked a wide set of opinions and raised the attention of journalists in Germany and abroad to their activities, goals and, not least, to the alternative historical narrative opposing the myth of a “clean Wehrmacht.”

³⁸ For example, within the campaign in 2006 and 2007, the negative influence of maintaining Wehrmacht traditions in the Bundeswehr was underscored by referring to a contemporaneous media event. The organizers created a link between the defamation of corpses committed 2007 in Afghanistan by Bundeswehr mountain soldiers based originally in Mittenwald and those perpetrated after the massacre of civilians in the Greek village Kommeno by former Mountain Troops in 1943. See the Call for 2007: “Berg frei! Nie wieder Faschismus, nie wieder Horrido!,” Nadir, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.nadir.org/nadir/kampagnen/mittenwald/aufruf2007.html>.

³⁹ Andrea Borowski, “Demo vor Haus des ‘NS-Täters,’” *Merkur.de*, May 23, 2007, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/muenchen-lk/demo-haus-8222ns-taeters8220-352338.html>.

5 Reactions of the Kameradenkreis, the Municipality, and Inhabitants of Mittenwald

Before 2002, the impact of previous singular protests on *Kameradenkreis'* interpretation of World War II and activities was rather small. If at all, isolated opinions within the association emerged, cautiously admitting the fact that the former Mountain Troops had committed massacres and war crimes, but the responsibility for them was always attributed to both sides of the conflict.⁴⁰ Outwardly, the veterans' association sustained a determination to support a “defensible democracy” in Germany and to develop “understanding among peoples” to maintain peace and freedom.⁴¹ Although the prestige of the association remained high from the perspective of local and Bavarian authorities, this strong position of the *Kameradenkreis* notably faded with the appearance of the *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege*.⁴²

The first protest of the Mittenwald campaign raised immediate indignation among many members of the

⁴⁰ Mikulová, “Co zbylo z ‘napadených’ tradic?,” 64–65.

⁴¹ Karl-R. Griessinger, “Liebe Kameradinnen und Kameraden,” *Die Gebirgstruppe* 50, no. 1 (2001): 3–4.

⁴² Hans Lindinger, “Ein Appell an die Medien. Gedanken eines besorgten Demokraten anlässlich der Brendtenfeier 2005,” *Die Gebirgstruppe* 54, no. 3 (2005): 11–12.



Figure 7: One of many ‘hearings’ with survivors and witnesses organized during the campaign, here from 2009. The large sign demands in German, Italian, and Greek to pay reparations to all Nazi victims. Credit: Soňa Mikulová.

Kameradenkreis. The prospect of even bigger protests and demonstrations taking place in the following year encouraged representatives of the veterans’ association to defend their reputation with preempted media exposure. Their aim was to publicly present their views on the value and meaning of military traditions, as well as the attitude of the *Kameradenkreis* to the crimes committed by the Mountain Troops during World War II.⁴³ However, they found a larger platform only in local newspapers and in their own periodical. On the one hand, the presidium of the *Kameradenkreis* manifested self-assurance in dealing with the past of the former Mountain Troops, explicitly claiming its respect for the constitution and the free democratic state order, while rejecting any dialog with “intolerant” protesters, labeled as “enemies of democracy” who “do not resist any violence.”⁴⁴ On the other hand, Ernst G. Coqui, who became the *Kameradenkreis* president in 2003, attempted to change the existing commemorative practices of the veterans’ association. While admitting some war crimes of the former Mountain Troops, he condemned atrocities on both sides of the war.⁴⁵ In 2003, he also organized and undertook a journey of “reconciliation” with a couple of *Kameradenkreis* representatives to Kommeno, one of the war massacre sites in Greece.⁴⁶

These new traits in the commemorative practices of the *Kameradenkreis* were, however, perceived by the protesters as a hypocritical and evasive maneuver.⁴⁷ Therefore, they failed to mitigate criticism of the *Kameradenkreis*. In response to the intransigence of protesters, the veterans’

association strengthened its original opposition to the campaign organizers, defending their memorial as “a symbol of reconciliation and co-operation between nations.”⁴⁸ The increased attention of local and national media on the veterans’ commemorative ceremonies seemed to have an influence on Manfred Benkel, who succeeded Coqui in 2005 and to some extent followed the trend started by the latter.⁴⁹ However, as documented by the veterans’ association periodical, voices defending traditional attitudes and interpretations prevailed among ordinary members of the *Kameradenkreis*.⁵⁰

The Mittenwald municipality reacted to the protest campaign in a pragmatic way. In the early years, it neglected the criticism of the protesters and supported the veterans’ association. Since 2005, however, the council started to consider how to prevent further damage on local tourism, which had suffered from loud protests and heavy police deployment.⁵¹ It negotiated with the *Kameradenkreis* and, in 2006, shifted the date of their commemorative assembly from the Pentecost weekend to another day.⁵² The protesters saw

⁴⁸ Mikulová, “Co zbylo z ‘napadených’ tradic?,” 74.

⁴⁹ In 2005, Benkel apologized to the war victims while emphasizing that only individuals are to be condemned. In 2006, the second delegation of *Kameradenkreis* representatives to Greece took place and, in 2007, a Greek delegation participated at the commemorative assembly in Mittenwald. Mikulová, “Co zbylo z ‘napadených’ tradic?,” 74–76.

⁵⁰ Mikulová, “Co zbylo z ‘napadených’ tradic?,” 78.

⁵¹ Werner Schima, “Brendtenfeier ‘nicht mehr tragbar,’” *Merkur.de*, March 14, 2005, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/regionen/brendtenfeier-nicht-mehr-tragbar-269785.html>.

⁵² Andreas Beez, “Brendten-Feier vorverlegt,” *Merkur.de*, February 2, 2006, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/regionen/brendtenfeier-vorverlegt-280721.html>. Since 2008, it has been shifted to a different date before Pentecost.

⁴³ Mikulová, “Co zbylo z ‘napadených’ tradic?,” 70–71.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Mikulová, “Co zbylo z ‘napadených’ tradic?,” 72.

⁴⁷ Klein, Mentner, and Stracke, “Mörder unterm Edelweiß,” 14–17.

this as a victory, while the *Kameradenkreis* maintained that the shift was of their own initiative.⁵³

Reactions from ordinary Mittenwald inhabitants can only be surmised. According to local newspaper articles outlining the course of demonstrations and comments left by protesters online, onlookers often expressed disagreement with activists while ostentatiously ignoring or mocking their actions, sometimes verbally offending the protesters or reporting them to police for defamation.⁵⁴ If they were not directly involved in the campaign,⁵⁵ local inhabitants rarely attended ‘hearings’ and other public events organized by the protesters. Nevertheless, some protesters’ reports also spoke about locals who, under the guise of anonymity, felt campaign ideas resonated with them and were interested in learning more about the historical events energizing the campaign.⁵⁶ Only some individuals, however, dared to openly sympathize and cooperate with the protesters.⁵⁷

⁵³ For the protesters’ position see “Pfungsten 2009: Auf nach Mittenwald!,” *Autonomes Zentrum Wuppertal*, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.az-wuppertal.de/2009/05/03/pfungsten-2009-auf-nach-mittenwald/>. In the following referred to as “the Call for 2009.” Cf. Manfred Benkel, “Terminänderung – Brendtenfeier,” *Die Gebirgstruppe* 57, no. 1 (2008): 3.

⁵⁴ Klein, Mentner, and Stracke, “Mörder unterm Edelweiß,” 13–14. Andreas Beez, “Parolen wie ‘Nie wieder Deutschland,’” *Merkur.de*, May 17, 2005, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/regionen/parolen-nie-wieder-deutschland-265156.html>. Nick Scheder, “Brendten-Gegner als Alleinunterhalter,” *Merkur.de*, May 29, 2007, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/regionen/brendtengegner-alleinunterhalter-291232.html>.

⁵⁵ In 2004, a group of high school students from a locality close to Mittenwald created a commemorative plaque for the victims of war crimes, installed during the demonstration. “Erfolgsversprechende Kampagne gegen die Gebirgsjäger in Mittenwald,” *forum solidarisches und friedliches augsburg*, accessed January 6, 2022, http://www.forumaugsburg.de/s_3themen/Antimil/040530_mittenwald/index.htm.

⁵⁶ Elli F. mentioned inhabitants reading the *Mittenwalder Landbote* in “Protest gegen Gebirgsjäbertreffen Mittenwald,” *de.indymedia.org*, June 1, 2004, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151109101130/http://de.indymedia.org/2004/06/84658.shtml>; Nick Scheder, “Brendten-Gegner als Alleinunterhalter,” *Merkur.de*, May 29, 2007, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/regionen/brendtengegner-alleinunterhalter-291232.html>.

⁵⁷ A nephew of the former Mountain Troops officer openly supported the campaign in 2007 and 2008. He regarded his uncle Joseph Scheungraber not being punished in Germany as “scandalous.” “Demonstranten stoppen Zug – Sturm auf Hohen Brendten gescheitert,” *Merkur.de*, May 5, 2008, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/mittenwald-ort29073/demonstranten-stoppen-sturm-hohen-brendten-gescheitert-329599.html>.

6 The Culmination of the Campaign and the Emotions at Play

After the number of active supporters started to sink significantly in 2008,⁵⁸ the organizers announced the official end of the Mittenwald campaign. While not giving up their main demands toward the German state regarding the legal punishment of the perpetrators and financial compensation of the victims, they highlighted the most significant achievements of the campaign.⁵⁹ Beyond raising both national and international awareness about the criminal past of the former Mountain Troops, they also credited themselves with applying the necessary political pressure to spur an investigation of a *Kameradenkreis* member involved in the shooting of male inhabitants of the Italian village of Falzano di Cortona.⁶⁰ The organizers also claimed success in the decreasing number of attendees of the *Kameradenkreis* campaign commemorative assemblies, as well as the municipal change of date for the veterans’ event.

The erection of the new monument for the victims, however, was considered the greatest symbolic triumph of the campaign. Unlike in previous years, in 2009 activists did not gather in Mittenwald at the same time as veterans in order to disrupt the course of their commemorative assembly. They arrived purposely at Pentecost, with the aim of giving a new meaning to the original day of the veterans’ event. While only temporary reminders of Mountain Troops’ victims had been installed previously, in 2009 they erected a solid monument made of steel carrying a glass vitrine, which was filled with stones from Falzano di Cortona. Next to the dedication to the victims was also a political statement from the donors – one of the slogans of the campaign and of

⁵⁸ The protests between 2003 and 2007 attracted between 200 and 600 supporters. In 2008 and 2009 only around 150 protesters came to Mittenwald. Gronau, *Auf blinde Flecken zeigen*, 94.

⁵⁹ See the Call for 2009.

⁶⁰ The protesters have long demanded the prosecution of Joseph Scheungraber even in smaller demonstrations at his place of residence. Already in 2006, Scheungraber had been condemned to life in Italy *in absentia*. In Germany, he was put on trial in October 2008 and found guilty in the case of Falzano di Cortona in August 2009, yet he was never imprisoned for health reasons. Nevertheless, his case was the first since the end of the war in which the German judiciary condemned a former Wehrmacht mountain soldier for taking part in a war crime. Christian Rost, “NS-Kriegsverbrecher zu krank fürs Gefängnis,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 11, 2011, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/josef-scheungraber-haftunfaehigns-kriegsverbrecher-zu-krank-fuers-gefaengnis-1.1130026>.

the German antifascist movement more broadly: “No more war – No more fascism” (Figure 8).⁶¹

By establishing the memorial, the campaign organizers aimed at ultimately redefining the terms ‘victim’ and ‘reconciliation’ in contrast to how they were used by the veterans’ association. Members of the *Kameradenkreis* did not speak about violent acts against civilians during World War II, let alone repentance and distance from the perpetrators. Instead, words of “reconciliation between nations,” related to the understanding between former war enemies, and the universalistic notion of all victims of wars including fallen soldiers could have been heard, especially at regular meetings of *Kameradenkreis* with other foreign veterans’ associations in Mittenwald or elsewhere.⁶²

The campaign organizers attacked the *Kameradenkreis* for producing, preserving, and conveying such selective memory among its members and active soldiers in Bundeswehr as well as in the Mittenwald community. By calling veterans “murderers,” the *Kameradenkreis* a “self-help group for war criminals,” and Mittenwald a “town of desecrators of corpses,” to name just a few examples, the organizers used rather confrontational, even insulting, and emotionally-loaded language.⁶³ Moreover, they criticized the *Kameradenkreis* for missing the opportunity to make a ‘real’ reconciliation face to face with survivors and witnesses who arrived to Mittenwald.⁶⁴ The inclusion of victims of Wehrmacht war crimes under the universalistic term “all victims of terror and war” used by *Kameradenkreis* was not accepted as repentance because, according to the protesters, it took place without specific acts based either on

feelings of guilt or of shame for ignoring the crimes and covering for the perpetrators.⁶⁵ Such acts would have to have resulted in excluding the offenders and collaboration with investigators, as well as in recognizing the criminal nature of the Wehrmacht’s engagement in the war and thus abandoning the cultivation of its traditions.

While shedding light on a past veterans suppressed and wished to forget, the activists blamed not only former Wehrmacht soldiers and the entire veterans’ association but also the German courts and governments they deemed complicit since the end of the war. The protest campaign, however, also partially targeted the Mittenwald community because of its alleged complicity with veterans. The criticized ignorance and resistance of the town to face the criminal past of the former Mountain Troops was explained by a collaboration of the municipality with local military and church representatives and the socio-economic relevance of the Bundeswehr barracks in Mittenwald for the community. Since the Bundeswehr was traditionally linked to the *Kameradenkreis*, according to the campaigners’ critique the town authorities were not interested in commemorating the victims of massacres whose existence was denied by the *Kameradenkreis* and therefore omitted by the Bundeswehr as well.⁶⁶

The history-making activities of the campaigners consisted not only of the production of the new historical knowledge but also of appropriate emotions. The acceptance of the alternative historical narrative thus went hand in hand with manifestations of solidarity with the ‘real’ victims. As expressed by the protesters, by “honoring” Mountain Troops’ “murderous past,” the memorial to fallen soldiers symbolized an “affront” to the victims of massacres.⁶⁷ The campaign’s rhetoric thus afforded the fallen soldiers memorial a new layer of meaning; to participants and supporters of the campaign – it became “a place of dishonor.”⁶⁸ Thus, the protesters also demanded the public disgrace and the physical removal of the veteran’s memorial. As a consequence, they repeatedly attempted to undermine the commemorative ceremony in a loud, aggressive, yet nonviolent way while blocking access to roads, and occasionally succeeding in infiltrating the veterans’ assembly at the memorial and unpacking banners with political slogans (2006). Nevertheless, beyond

⁶¹ Gronau, *Auf blinde Flecke zeigen*, 146.

⁶² In 1985, this “motivation” led *Kameradenkreis* to found the International Federation of Mountain Soldiers (IFMS), uniting veterans from Germany, Austria, France, Italy, and the USA. AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege, “Der ‘Kameradenkreis der Gebirgstruppe’,” in *Friede, Freude, deutscher Eintopf: Rechte Mythen, NS-Verharmlosung und antifaschistischer Protest*, ed. Arbeitskreis gegen den kärntner Konsens (Wien: mandelbaum kritik & utopie, 2011), 149. The association’s rhetoric thus foreshadowed and later referred to the development of the politics of remembrance under Chancellor Helmut Kohl in unified Germany, or rather a conservative discourse of reconciliation, which was highly controversial as it does not clearly differentiate between victims and perpetrators. The central symbol of this trend was the restored *Neue Wache* Memorial in Berlin with its dedication to the “victims of war and the rule of terror” in 1990. For more see Siobhan Kattago, “Representing German Victimhood and Guilt: The Neue Wache and Unified German Memory,” *German Politics & Society* 16, no. 3 (1998): 86–104.

⁶³ Klein, Mentner, and Stracke, “Mörder unterm Edelweiß,” 7; “Mittenwald – ‘Stadt der Totenschänder’ Endlich Weg damit,” *de.indymedia.org*, October 27, 2006, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061029092610/https://de.indymedia.org/2006/10/160260.shtml>.

⁶⁴ Klein, Mentner, and Stracke, “Mörder unterm Edelweiß,” 14–18.

⁶⁵ Klein, Mentner, and Stracke, “Dokumentation und Aktion,” 209.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 204. See also the Call for 2009.

⁶⁷ See the Call for 2009.

⁶⁸ Instead of the word *Ehrenmal* (“memorial of honor”) used by the veteran’s association, protesters used *Schandmal*, which stands for “a memorial of dishonor/shame.” See for example protester’s Call for 2007.



Figure 8: One of the dedications on the monument to the victims. Credit: Soňa Mikulová.

the time of the commemorative ceremonies, the memorial was repeatedly damaged by graffiti (2003), fire (2004), and pink paint (2009) by anonymous individuals who supported the campaign, as was evidenced by identical political slogans.

The *Kameradenkreis* objected to the verbal attacks on its historical narrative and the ‘material reinterpretation’ of the fallen soldiers memorial in its own periodical, as well as in the local press in an equally confrontational and emotionally-laden tone. Here the behavior of the protesters was described as “aggressive” and “villainizing.”⁶⁹ The veterans’ association also refuted the critique of its way of coming to terms with the past as allegations based on the lack of respect for their “reconciliation activities.”⁷⁰ The *Kameradenkreis* thus kept cleaning and restoring the fallen soldiers memorial as a symbol of positive values that, according to the veterans, needed to be maintained and followed by German soldiers as well as society as a whole. Meanwhile, protesters were called dangerous “hooligans” who were threatening not only the existence of the

association, but also the democratic establishment of the German state.⁷¹

The *Kameradenkreis* and the *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege* saw each other as direct opponents in the arena of collective remembrance. As a result, there was no effort on either side to engage in a dialog. The position of the protesters towards the community of Mittenwald was, however, slightly different. In contrast to the veterans, whose historical narrative was completely rejected and commemorative practices discredited, inhabitants of Mittenwald were explicitly invited to attend the campaign activities like public ‘hearings’ with survivors, protest marches, concerts, and alternative commemorative rituals. These appeals, however, consisted of serious information on historical events on the one hand as well as a mixture of ironic comments, provocative questions, and indirect insults on the other hand, which most likely would have moved the conscience of community members while also evoking feelings of shame about their own ignorance and passivity (Figure 9).⁷²

While it is impossible to fully capture the various aims, motives, and methods of the activists during the course of the campaign,⁷³ what does come through clearly is that humiliating the *Kameradenkreis* and shaming their real and alleged accomplices was a significant strategy in order to establish the new historical knowledge.⁷⁴ This becomes even more evident when focusing on the symbolic meaning

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷² See various contributions in the campaign booklet, especially “In der Gemeinde der Gebirgsjäger die richtigen Fragen stellen” in *Entering Mittenwald/In der Kleinstadt des Henkers nach dem Strick fragen*, ed. AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege (Landesverband Berlin-Brandenburg) (Wuppertal: AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege 2005), 3.

⁷³ See for example comments under the report on protests in 2006, which reveal that there was no consensus on how to act especially towards the inhabitants of Mittenwald. While some wished the campaign to offer more content than loud protests and provocations, others chose a confrontational approach and called for even harder approaches. “Gebirgsjägertreffen Mittenwald + Bilder,” *de.indymedia.org*, May 29, 2006, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170827174608/http://de.indymedia.org/2006/05/148357.shtml>.

⁷⁴ The power of shame as a political tool in its different historical and cultural contexts in modern history was elaborated in Ute Frevert, *The Politics of Humiliation: A Modern History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020). Frevert distinguishes between humiliation and shaming acts pointing at their exclusionary, respectively reintegrative function: “Even if shaming can be as painful and hurtful as humiliation, it offers the shamed person the chance of returning to the group whose rules they have infringed. With humiliation, the exclusion is bound to be permanent.” Ute Frevert, “Humiliation and Modernity: Ongoing Practices, Changing Sensibilities,” *Cultural History* 10, no. 2 (2021): 282–289, quote on 284.

⁶⁹ Mikulová, “Co zbylo z ‘napadených’ tradic?,” 74–75.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 75–76.

Entering Mittenwald



In der Kleinstadt des Henkers
nach dem Strick fragen



Bräunungscreme Mittenwald 2004



Eine bundesweit verschickte Postkarte 2004 aus dem Touristenidyll Mittenwald

Figure 9: The cover page and images taken from a brochure designed 2005 as an alternative “Tourist Guide through Mittenwald and Surroundings” with a provocative subtitle: “Asking for the Rope in the Hangman’s Small Town.” Besides information about the history of Mountain Soldiers and the campaign’s agenda on more than 60 pages, it also contains images of ‘propagation materials’ from the previous year’s protest. The advertised Karwendel sunscreen promises care, protection and “browning” – the common German term used for getting a tan, here playing on the brown Nazis. The postcard combining pictures of the idyllic alpine scenery and people in traditional costumes and military uniforms says “Murderers Among Us,” which also refers to the German film of the same name from 1946 dealing with the Nazi past. Author’s archive.

of the new monument. The campaign organizers “donated” this monument to the Mittenwald community in opposition to the memorial of fallen soldiers representing a “mockery” of their victims.⁷⁵ Made of stable materials, it was meant to manifest the new historical narrative in everyday life of the Mittenwald community beyond the protest campaign. Rather than a ‘realm of memory’ (Pierre Nora) providing meaningful interpretations of history that are able to bring a sense of identity for the community,⁷⁶ the protesters intended to construct an ‘offending object’ (Stein des Anstoßes). The declared purpose of the monument was to

create a place for the Mittenwald inhabitants to reflect and to be perpetually confronted with feelings of guilt.⁷⁷

While one of the members of the *Kameradenkreis* described the last demonstration as “a disgrace and a political provocation,”⁷⁸ the presidium of the association did not make any public comments. Local newspapers reported about negative reactions among some Mittenwald inhabitants, claiming that the community did not need such a monument.⁷⁹ In line with the restrained responses to the campaign, as from its beginning, the municipality facilitated the monument’s removal shortly after its

⁷⁵ See the Call for 2009.

⁷⁶ See the original concept of *lieux de mémoire* in Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24.

⁷⁷ See the Call for 2009.

⁷⁸ “Wie konsequent sind wir eigentlich? Ein Kamerad kündigte seine Mitgliedschaft bei VERDI,” *Die Gebirgstruppe* 58, no. 6 (2009): 58–59.

⁷⁹ Joachim Turnau, “Gabelstabler gegen Gedenken,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, June 12, 2009, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.fr.de/politik/gabelstabler-gegen-gedenken-11481318.html>.

erection with reference to safety regulations. This decision was subsequently denounced as an “affront to the victims” by the campaign organizers and their sympathizers.⁸⁰

Thanks to strong media pressure of the German and international public,⁸¹ the Mittenwald municipality entered into negotiations on a new location with representatives of the local church, school, and the *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege*. Under their agreement, the monument was placed in front of the local elementary school one year later.⁸² During the inauguration, representatives of the municipality, campaign organizers, and one of the victims made a speech.⁸³ *Kameradenkreis* and the Bundeswehr representatives in the audience left the hall when a member of the *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege* in his speech repeated the demands of the campaign and emphasized the “criminal traditions” passed on from the Wehrmacht to the Bundeswehr.⁸⁴ Thereby the representatives of active and former soldiers remained true to their tradition: they showed respect to the victims, but not to the protesters.⁸⁵

The mayor of Mittenwald criticized the speech by the *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege* representative for continuing a provocative rhetoric against veterans and the Bundeswehr.⁸⁶ Sympathizers with the campaign, however, appreciated

that the speech had shown no conciliation to the veterans’ association and the community and thus remained loyal to their original political ambitions.⁸⁷ This is understandable since neither during the Mittenwald campaign nor after its conclusion did the organizers aim primarily to produce and convey historical knowledge to the local public. Instead, they intended to use the newly established historical narrative to achieve other political goals.

7 Political Objectives Versus Participatory Approaches of Public History within the Campaign

As described above, the Mittenwald campaign can certainly be said to contain a number of elements that are common to Public History practices aiming at democratizing the production of historical knowledge and its presentation: It emerged as a bottom-up initiative of academics and others, who responded to the demand of a certain part of civil society in Germany and abroad, which acted on behalf of victims of specific war atrocities. The activists used a variety of nonacademic means to inform the public about historical events hitherto ignored not only in Mittenwald. Finally, and most importantly, the activist historians constructed a new historical narrative with the help of historical participants of the events using methods of oral history. These historical participants were exclusively survivors and children of the victims of several massacres, Holocaust survivors, and resistance fighters from outside the Mittenwald community.

Hence, the memory activists shared authority, but only with those with whom they felt solidarity. Contrasting interpretations of the other historical participants (veterans) were not considered truthful and relevant enough to be included into the public discussion. As a consequence, the campaign organizers behaved as missionaries who brought truth and knowledge to others and, as such, did not act in accordance with the ethics of Public History, according to which public historians should be able to show “awareness and consideration of the multiple uses of the past by different audiences.”⁸⁸

⁸⁰ For the press release reacting to the removal and an interview with a member of *AK Traditionspflege* see “Mittenwald: Denkmal für die Opfer der Gebirgsjäger von Gemeinde abgebaut und entfernt,” *freieradios*, June 4, 2009, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.freieradios.net/28410>.

⁸¹ “Ruhm oder Schande? Die umstrittene Gedenkstätte bei Mittenwald,” *3sat*, July 10, 2009, accessed March 27, 2019, <http://www.3sat.de/page/?source=/kulturzeit/themen/135718/index.html> (link no longer active).

⁸² “Gemeinde nimmt ‘Stein des Anstoßes’ an,” *Merkur.de*, November 15, 2009, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/landkreis/gemeinde-nimmt-stein-anstosses-529690.html>; Hermann Weiß, “Denkmal für Nazi-Opfer in Mittenwald,” *Welt*, March 21, 2010, https://www.welt.de/welt_print/vermischtes/article6865696/Denkmal-fuer-Nazi-Opfer-in-Mittenwald.html.

⁸³ The speech by Maurice Cling, a survivor of the Dachau death march liberated in Mittenwald, can be found in: “Ziehen Sie einen Trennstrich zur Traditionspflege der Täter!,” *Berg Frei Mittenwald!*, March 23, 2010, accessed January 6, 2022, <http://mittenwald.blogspot.eu/2010/03/29/ziehen-sie-einen-trennstrich-zur-traditionspflege-der-tater/>.

⁸⁴ “Feierstunde mit Störfeuern,” *Merkur.de*, March 21, 2010, accessed 6 January 2022, <http://www.merkur-online.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/landkreis/feierstunde-stoerfeuern-683371.html>.

⁸⁵ The presidium of the *Kameradenkreis* has never publicly formulated a position regarding the monument, nor has its president ever referred to it at the commemorative ceremony in the years since. It can also be assumed that many members of the *Kameradenkreis*, especially from the older generation, have never approved of its existence.

⁸⁶ “Mahnmal: Alte Konflikte brechen erneut auf,” *Merkur.de*, March 23, 2010, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/landkreis/mahnmal-alte-konflikte-brechen-erneut-685145.html>.

⁸⁷ “Keine Vereinnahmung der Opfer in Mittenwald,” *Antifaschistisches infoBlatt*, June 11, 2010, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.antifainfoblatt.de/artikel/keine-vereinnahmung-der-opfer-mittenwald>.

⁸⁸ Cauvin, *Public History*, 205.

However, it should also be kept in mind that different opinions certainly existed among organizers and their supporters, since they were not a homogeneous group.⁸⁹ Likely the largest consensus among the organizers and their supporters on the means of promoting historical versus political issues was in the attack on the *Kameradenkreis* and its interpretation of World War II. Nobody called for reconciliation between historical actors and their descendants or the creation of a common historical narrative in the common public space.⁹⁰ Instead, they demanded the suppression of the commemorative assemblies and replacement of its narrative with a new memory of victims which would not include any perpetrators, as was the case in the fallen soldiers memorial.

The attitude towards the Mittenwald community was more ambivalent. The fact that the erection of the new monument occurred without its collaboration makes obvious that the municipality was primarily considered to be a tool to place greater pressure on the veterans' association. Both protesters and the representatives of the community agreed on negotiations over the new monument in the end. The result, however, consisted of a mutual compromise rather than a fully-fledged victory for either side. The municipality did accept responsibility for remembering the victims but did not accept requested emotional practices (e.g., repentance conditioned by feelings of shame), nor did it feel obliged to follow the campaign's other political aims.

8 Maintaining the Alternative Historical Narrative After the End of the Campaign

Considering the long-term repercussions of the campaign on the different actors, it is clear that it was successful only in a partial and temporary way. The least effects regarding

raising awareness of the war crimes can be observed regarding the *Kameradenkreis*. Once the protests were over, the presidium of the veteran's association returned to the traditional pre-campaign rhetoric, even despite an exceptional attempt of a member to make a change. In 2015, Ulrich Manschke, a former Bundeswehr officer, had written an open letter to the president of the veterans' association Horst-Dieter Buhrmester.⁹¹ With the rhetoric of the Mittenwald campaign protesters, he demanded the dissolution of the "ceremony honoring war criminals at the Nazi memorial" and giving up the "name of dishonor" – that is the *Kameradenkreis der Gebirgstruppe*. It is worth noting that Manschke indirectly explained his radical rejection of the veterans' commemorative ceremonies by the gesture of Joachim Gauck in Greece a year earlier.⁹² The fact that the German President apologized to civilian victims of the violence committed by the Wehrmacht seemed to rehabilitate the activists of the Mittenwald campaign and to justify their criticism of the *Kameradenkreis*.⁹³ However, Manschke's efforts led to no visible changes of veterans' commemorative practices. Due to the reorganization of the Bundeswehr in 2001 and the elderly age of the World War II veterans, the number of *Kameradenkreis* members has continued to diminish and, arguably, so has its social relevance. Nevertheless, it continues to organize the commemorative assembly – with a few exceptions – in its traditional way until today, even if in a much smaller circle.⁹⁴

Over the course of its duration, the campaign seems to have been more successful in reaching the general public rather than the local community of Mittenwald. It was only thanks to the nation-wide media community and its pressure on the municipality after the removal of the monument that certain changes in the collective remembrance at the local level could be observed at all. However, given that

⁸⁹ The differences on how and with what aims the protest should be made provoked discussions among the organizers and participants already from the beginning: "Mein Opa ist Kriegsverbrecher und wohnt in Mittenwald," *Nadir*, April 3, 2003, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.nadir.org/nadir/kampagnen/mittenwald/texte/Mein-Opa-ist-Kriegsverbrecher-und-wohnt-in-Mittenwald.html>.

⁹⁰ See the position of *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege*: "Keine Vereinnahmung der Opfer in Mittenwald," *Antifaschistisches infoBlatt*, June 11, 2010, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.antifainfoblatt.de/artikel/keine-vereinnahmung-der-opfer-mittenwald>; a similar view was also held by Maurice Cling during the official dedication of the monument for victims. "Mahnmal-Enthüllung: 'Aussöhnung inakzeptabel'," *Merkur.de*, March 31, 2010, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/landkreis/mahnmal-enthuehlung-aussoehnung-inakzeptabel-698587.html>.

⁹¹ "Brendtenfeier: Kritik aus den eigenen Reihen," *Merkur.de*, August 25, 2015, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/mittenwald-ort29073/kritik-eigenen-reihen-5385141.html>.

⁹² A report about Gauck's visit in Greece: Florian Gathmann, "Verneigung im Dorf der Märtyrer," *Spiegel.de*, March 7, 2014, accessed January 6, 2022, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/griechenland-gauck-entschuldigt-sich-fuer-verbrehen-der-wehrmacht-a-957535.html>.

⁹³ "Brendtenfeier: Kritik aus den eigenen Reihen," *Merkur.de*, August 25, 2015, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/mittenwald-ort29073/kritik-eigenen-reihen-5385141.html>.

⁹⁴ After no commemorative assembly took place in 2020, the following year only a handful of representatives gathered at the fallen soldiers memorial due to the pandemic restrictions. "Gedenken am Hohen Brendten 2021," *Gebirgsjägerkameradschaft 232*, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://gebirgsjaegerkameradschaft232.de/gedenken-am-hohen-brendten-2021>.

after the official dedication of the monument no reports on active remembering of the victims of the war crimes or other uses of the monument by the Mittenwald municipality were found, it is evident that the decision to accept the monument was born out of pragmatic concerns aimed at avoiding further disturbances. No local newspaper reminded readers of painful historical events or questioned the legacy of the *Kameradenkreis* in the first years after the campaign ended.⁹⁵ In other words, the campaign did not even lead to the establishment of a small group of locals who would openly and publicly continue to convey the alternative historical narrative after 2010.

Besides Manschke's initiative, the only visible attempts to preserve the legacy of the campaign in Mittenwald came from outside – from the former activists and their sympathizers, however, no longer as organized and mediatized as in the past. Although the succession of the campaign in Mittenwald was announced a couple of times⁹⁶ and a “new generation” of *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege* was re-established in 2014, it did not lead to any massive protest activities against Mountain Troops legacy.⁹⁷ Despite including some of the key organizers of the original Mittenwald campaign, its new activities have changed focus, moving efforts toward other places in Germany. Concurrently, however, a few actions by individuals took place at the fallen soldiers memorial, as for example a display of a long poster with names of villages where the massacres happened during the veterans' assembly (2016), wrecking wreaths after the commemorative ceremony (2017), or spray-painting slogans of the campaign (2018).⁹⁸

⁹⁵ As for example Rudolf Tomaschek, “Friedliche Gedenkfeier am Hohen Brendten,” *Merkur.de*, May 29, 2011, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/mittenwald/friedliche-gedenkfeier-hohen-brendten-1263316.html>.

⁹⁶ See for example *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege*, “Aussöhnung inakzeptabel: Neue Mobilisierung am 8. Mai nach Mittenwald,” *ak – analyse & kritik – Zeitung für linke Debatte und Praxis*, no. 549 (April 4, 2010), accessed January 6, 2022, https://archiv.akweb.de/ak_s/ak549/32.htm.

⁹⁷ For more see “Angreifbare Traditionspflege – Neue Folge,” *Facebook*, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/Angreifbare-Traditionspflege-Neue-Folge-1037831096246595/>.

⁹⁸ “Protest gegen Kameradschaftsabend und Brendten-Feier,” *Reichenhall*, May 13, 2016, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://reichenhall.rosenheim.tk/2016/05/protest-gegen-kameradschaftsabend-und-brendten-feier/>; “Brendtenfeier des Kameradenkreises der GebTr e.V. 2017,” *Truppenkameradschaft Gebirgsjägerbataillon 234 Mittenwald*, accessed January 6, 2022, http://www.truppenkameradschaft-ehem-gebjgtl234.de/html/brendten_2017.html; “Ehrenmal am Hohen Brendten: Anschlag aus dem Nichts,” *Merkur.de*, January 11, 2018, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/mittenwald-ort29073/ehrenmal-am-hohen-brendten-in-mittenwald-anschlag-aus-nichts-9518021.html>.

Compared with the previous campaign, these actions were marginal because they only touched members of the *Kameradenkreis* and not Mittenwald citizens who only could learn about them from newspapers. Only in 2019, a serious attempt to continue the tradition of the Mittenwald campaign with a series of manifestations in Salzburg, München, and Mittenwald was carried out by the “new generation” of the *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege*.⁹⁹ It was also the first time that a few activists officially took part in the veterans' event, however, not as common guests but as “International commemorative inspection of the Brendten celebration to control the commemoration of the *Kameradenkreis*.”¹⁰⁰ The invitation had come from the *Kameradenkreis* president Hans Sahn, who probably wanted to prevent disturbances of the commemorative ceremony.¹⁰¹ Although the “inspection” abruptly left the assembly and their presence was hardly noticed by the visitors, President Sahn expressed his satisfaction with the course of the ceremony. However, he received support for his “conciliatory gesture” only from the former President Benkel, while ordinary members of the *Kameradenkreis* showed their incomprehension and dissatisfaction and previous President Buhrmester even publicly criticized it.¹⁰² The leader of the “inspection” and the spokesman of both

⁹⁹ The preparations and expectations on all involved sides were high. Even a new edition of the activists' periodical was published online: *Mittenwalder Landbote*, accessed January 6, 2022, <http://antifacafewuppertal.blogspot.eu/files/2019/06/mittenwalder-landbote-2019.pdf>. For the program see the call for the “Liberation-Tour 2019 von Mittenwald nach Distomo”, *az-wuppertal*, June 4, 2019, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://az-wuppertal.de/2019/06/04/von-mittenwald-nach-distomo-liberation-tour-2019/>. Cf. Christof Schnürer, “Störmanöver bei Gebirgsjäger-Treffen,” *Merkur.de*, April 9, 2019, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/mittenwald-ort29073/mittenwald-burgfriede-am-ehrenmal-vorbeistormanoever-bei-gebirgsjaeger-treffen-12150118.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Sabine Bade, “Angreifbare Traditionspflege: Gedenkfeier der Gebirgstruppe auf dem Hohen Brendten,” *seemoz*, May 31, 2019, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.seemoz.de/kultur/angreifbare-traditionspflege-gedenkfeier-der-gebirgstruppe-auf-dem-hohen-brendten/>. Cf. Matthias Köpf, “Kritiker nehmen erstmals an Gedenkfeier der Gebirgsjäger teil,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 5, 2019, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/bayern/bayern-mittenwald-gebirgsjaeger-gedenken-1.4474025>.

¹⁰¹ Christof Schnürer, “Brendten-Gegner kommen wieder – doch viel deutet auf Deeskalation hin,” *Merkur.de*, June 5, 2019, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/mittenwald-ort29073/mittenwald-brendten-gegner-kommen-wieder-doch-viel-deutet-auf-deeskalation-hin-12348871.html>.

¹⁰² Christof Schnürer, “Kameradenkreis: Hinter den Kulissen kracht's,” *Merkur.de*, June 7, 2019, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/mittenwald-ort29073/mittenwald-nach-pfingsttreffen-auf-hohen-brendten-kracht-s-beim-kameradenkreis-12361723.html>.

generations of the activists' group, Stephan Stracke, justified their departure on the grounds of disappointment that "nothing had changed in ten years."¹⁰³ They laid their wreath in memory of victims at their memorial instead. The irreconcilability of the views and attitudes of both actors in the local collective remembrance was thus once again clearly demonstrated.

In the future, the restoration of large protests in Mittenwald in the form and with the content as in the original campaign seems unlikely also because of the decline of the overall significance of the *Kameradenkreis* and its ceremonies and the lack of the mobilization potential on the activists' side. The Mittenwald campaign is thus slowly becoming a matter of the past and thus itself becoming an object of remembrance. Indeed, small signs of such transformation could be found in the local newspapers. These articles do not mention the historical knowledge that protesters used in their argumentation, but readers are superficially reminded of the essential traits of the controversy.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the aims of the campaign still resonate to some extent in the collective remembrance of the Mittenwald community, although with different meanings than intended by the campaign organizers and despite the fact that the monument for the victims has been a focus of interest for local journalists only in connection with its current condition requiring correction, not in relation with any commemorative events.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, stronger signs of belated benefits of the Mittenwald campaign like inspiring new actors and the sensitization of the local public can be observed in some Bavarian communities, where other activist groups

organized similar protests regarding war crimes of the Wehrmacht and the cultivation of its tradition.¹⁰⁶ In places like Grainau, they have even met a more responsive and co-operative audience. In 2015, the mayor facilitated the removal of the fallen soldiers memorial of a Wehrmacht unit on the grounds of historical evidence of their involvement in war crimes. The alternative historical narrative was presented by individual historians who belonged to the original group of *AK Angreifbare Traditionspflege*.¹⁰⁷ This occurrence may prefigure a future development in which the merits of the campaign for the erection of a monument to victims is acknowledged and appreciated also by the Mittenwald community.

There are no reports on how the history of World War II and the commitment of the former Mountain Troops are taught in the local school in front of which the new monument stands. We thus do not know if and how the monument is used to remember the painful past of the war crimes or if it rather stands as an example of Germany coping with a Nazi past at the local level. And yet, it cannot be ruled out that in the future the monument for the victims might become a new 'realm of memory' while creating positive emotions within the community (pride in dealing with the past, solidarity with the victims) or negative feelings (shame, contempt for activists, a sense of wrath) that would once again raise the debates about its existence.

9 Conclusion

Although the closer look at the Mittenwald campaign complicates the notion of its victory on the field of Public History, it nevertheless confirms the assumption that memory activism plays a major role in the democratization of history, especially with regard to painful pasts. The Mittenwald activists are to be credited for raising voices on behalf of absent victims. At the same time, it needs to be said that their work with emotions and political objectives were partially at odds with the participatory approaches of Public History, which made the mediation of the new historical narrative more difficult on the local level of the Mittenwald community. It is ironic that among local actors, who actually tried to take

¹⁰³ Christof Schnürer, "Tauber verspielt einmalige Chance," *Merkur.de*, June 6, 2019, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/mittenwald-ort29073/mittenwald-gedenkfeier-auf-hohen-brendten-staatssekretaer-tauber-enttaeuscht-12357532.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Christof Schnürer, "Ehrenmal der Gebirgsjäger: Magnet für Freund und Feind," *Merkur.de*, May 22, 2017, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/mittenwald-ort29073/gebirgsjaeger-treffen-auf-hohen-brendten-in-mittenwald-8340111.html>. Nevertheless, there has been a few exceptions in which the history of war crimes was briefly brought up in local newspapers. These reports were not directly connected to the Mittenwald campaign nor to the monument for the victims. See for example Christof Schnürer, "Edelweiß-Kaserne: Junge Griechen müssen draußen bleiben," *Merkur.de*, January 15, 2019, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/mittenwald-ort29073/junge-griechen-wollen-in-edelweiss-kaserne-mittenwald-ueber-kriegsverbrechen-diskutieren-und-bleiben-draussen-11210712.html>.

¹⁰⁵ "'Stein des Anstoßes': Oberes Drittel plötzlich verschwunden," *Merkur.de*, February 4, 2011, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/stein-anstosses-oberes-drittel-ploetzlich-verschwunden-1107312.html>.

¹⁰⁶ See for example protests of the *Rabat* group in Bad Reichenhall between 2010 and 2016. Individual reports can be found in the archive on the website of the group *Bad Reichenhall*, <https://reichenhall.rosenheim.tk/>, accessed January 6, 2022.

¹⁰⁷ "Grainau macht kurzen Prozess mit Denkmal," *Merkur.de*, June 12, 2015, accessed January 6, 2022, <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/garmisch-partenkirchen/grainau-ort28748/grainau-macht-kurzen-prozess-denkmal-5094774.html>.

part in creating a new common narrative, the most active and at the same time most disregarded ones were the abovementioned *Kameradenkreis* presidents who introduced new practices and vocabulary in the ceremonies. Although the possibilities of creating of a widely accepted

and shared narrative were not completely fulfilled, the Mittenwald campaign gave impetus to other unexpected developments and opened up new possibilities for public historians to collaborate with the community in any future representations of its recent history.