



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on July 19, 2010

U.S. Army Reports Record Suicides

On July 15 the U.S. Army reported 32 confirmed or suspected suicides among its troops in June, the highest number in a single month since the Vietnam conflict. Of the deaths, 21 were active duty soldiers, while 11 were reserve soldiers on inactive status. Seven of the soldiers killed themselves during combat in Iraq or Afghanistan, and the Army reported that among the 32 killed, ten had been deployed multiple times.

Including the June statistics, the Army said that 145 soldiers have taken their own lives in 2010, more than half the record-breaking 245 suicides by Army soldiers in 2009.



The problem is not unique to the Army. The American Forces Press Service reported that in 2009 a total of 52 Marines and 48 Navy personnel committed suicide, and the Air Force reported 41 suicides among active-duty personnel during the same period.

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Col. Chris Philbrick, who heads up the Army's suicide prevention effort, said that Army officials could discern no trend to explain the record numbers. "I have no silver bullet to answer the question why," he said, adding, "Continued stress on the force and the opportunities we have been facing in terms of the challenges in the Army continue to cause these events to take place."

In a continuing effort to stem the tide of suicides among its ranks, the Army recently produced a new video entitled *Shoulder to Shoulder: I Will Never Quit on Life* (watch below) that officials hope will help soldiers understand the need to get help when they are under stress.

The video includes a compelling true story from a soldier, Specialist Joseph Sanders, who attempted suicide after his wife informed him she wanted a divorce. Sanders recalled that after getting the news, his world fell apart, and one day he took his rifle, "put it under my chin and pulled the trigger." But the weapon didn't fire because one of his buddies had removed a key part of the rifle after he became concerned that Sanders might harm himself.

Philbrick said such direct intervention is essential to address the problem. "There will never be a substitute for a non-commissioned officer, first-line supervisor, or friend who knows when a person is suffering and has the moral courage to act and get that individual the help they need," he said. "That ability to make a positive difference is the best method to render effective suicide prevention in the Army."

But testifying July 14 before the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Tim Embree of the group Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America said that regardless of the Army's efforts, many soldiers will continue to shy away from seeking help because of how mental and emotional duress is viewed in the military. "The heavy stigma associated with mental health care stops many service members and veterans from



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seeking treatment,” he testified. “More than half of soldiers and Marines in Iraq who tested positive for a psychological injury reported concerns that they will be seen as weak by their fellow service members.”

Embree also noted that the Army’s statistics on suicide don’t take into account the many veterans who take their own lives every year. According to the Veterans Affairs Department, that number increased 26 percent from 2005 to 2007.

While the Army’s own efforts to deal with suicide among its soldiers should not be discounted, Major General Robert Dees (U.S. Army, Ret.) of the group [Military Ministry](#), an outreach of Campus Crusade for Christ, told the Christian Broadcasting Network that more effort needs to be made to instill faith into the lives of America’s soldiers. “God’s Word is relevant ... to encourage hope and optimism during these difficult time of nine years of persistent warfare,” he said. “Faith makes a difference in depression, post traumatic stress disorder, and suicide prevention.”

Photo: Dr. Tangeneare Singh, a psychiatrist at Fort Campbell Army base, speaks to counselors at a seminar on suicide prevention, in Fort Campbell, Ky. on Jan. 21, 2010: AP Images



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