

ALARMING RISE IN MILITARY SUICIDES: MORE THAN DOUBLE RATE IN 1999

AP's Robert Burns yesterday delivered sad news on a large rise in the rate of military suicides. Just over a month ago, Burns discovered that the military has been systematically under-reporting "green on blue" attacks in Afghanistan by only providing reports on deaths and not reporting attacks in which soldiers are wounded or unharmed.

Burns notes that suicides have held at almost exactly one each day for a period of almost half the year and that this is a large increase over what had been lower, steady rates the past two years. Sadly, deaths by suicide far outnumber combat deaths this year:

Suicides are surging among America's troops, averaging nearly one a day this year – the fastest pace in the nation's decade of war.

The 154 suicides for active-duty troops in the first 155 days of the year far outdistance the U.S. forces killed in action in Afghanistan– about 50 percent more – according to Pentagon statistics obtained by The Associated Press.

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Because suicides had leveled off in 2010 and 2011, this year's upswing has caught some officials by surprise.

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The 2012 active-duty suicide total of 154 through June 3 compares to 130 in the same period last year, an 18 percent increase. And it's more than the 136.2 suicides that the Pentagon had projected

for this period based on the trend from 2001-2011. This year's January-May total is up 25 percent from two years ago, and it is 16 percent ahead of the pace for 2009, which ended with the highest yearly total thus far.

Burns notes that although numerous mental health and counseling programs have been put in place suicides continue at a very high rate.

Contributing factors are discussed:

The reasons for the increase are not fully understood. Among explanations, studies have pointed to combat exposure, post-traumatic stress, misuse of prescription medications and personal financial problems. Army data suggest soldiers with multiple combat tours are at greater risk of committing suicide, although a substantial proportion of Army suicides are committed by soldiers who never deployed.

I thought it would be informative to find the rate of suicides before the ten years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq. An AP article on military suicides from June, 2000 can be found [here](#). It also was written by Robert Burns.

The suicides reported in that article for calendar year 1999 are broken down by branches of the armed services and in terms of deaths per 100,000 troops. The rates were 15.5 per 100,000 in the Army, 15 in the Marines, 11 in the Navy and 5.6 in the Air Force. Consulting this table of the number of active duty members of those branches, actual numbers come out to 65 suicides in the Army (although Burns noted there were 65 confirmed suicides and another 12 suspected suicides that are not included), 26 in the Marines, 41 in the Navy and 20 in the Air Force. That computes to a projected total of 152 suicides for calendar 1999. The total size of the force of active duty personnel for 1999

was 1,385,703.

Active duty forces now also total 1.4 million, so annual rates can be compared evenly. The rate for this year of 154 suicides in 155 days computes to a projected total of 363 suicides for this year. That suggests that after the decade of wars our armed forces have been asked to conduct, the suicide rate has more than doubled, going up by a factor of 2.4, from 152 per year to 363 while the force size has remained the same.