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Four Suicides in a Week Take a Toll on Fort Hood

By **JAMES C. MCKINLEY Jr.**

HOUSTON — Four veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan died this week from what appeared to be self-inflicted gunshot wounds at **Fort Hood** in central Texas, raising the toll of soldiers who died here at their own hands to a record level and alarming Army commanders.

So far this year, Army officials have confirmed that 14 soldiers at Fort Hood have committed suicide. Six others are believed to have taken their own lives but a final determination has yet to be made. The highest number of suicides at Fort Hood occurred in 2008, when 14 soldiers killed themselves, said Christopher Haug, a military spokesman.

About 46,000 to 50,000 active officers and soldiers work at the base at any given time, making this year's suicide rate about four times the national average, which the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** estimates at 11.5 deaths per 100,000 people.

The largest base in the United States, Fort Hood and the surrounding communities have suffered high rates of crime, domestic violence, suicide and various mental illnesses as wave after wave of soldiers have been deployed abroad over nine years of continual warfare, often serving more than one tour.

Last November, an Army psychiatrist, Maj. Nidal M. Hasan, was charged with killing 13 people with a pistol in a rampage at a building on the post.

On Sunday, Sgt. Michael Timothy Franklin and his wife, Jesse Ann Franklin, were found fatally shot in their house on the base.

Army investigators said they believed that Sergeant Franklin, who was 31 and had served two tours in Iraq, killed his wife and then turned the gun on himself. The couple had two small children.

Maj. Gen. William F. Grimsley, the Fort Hood senior commander, said in a statement released at a news conference on Wednesday that “leaders at all levels remain deeply concerned about this trend.”

Mr. Haug said that the general did not believe that additional measures were necessary to stop the trend and that the base already had an extensive suicide-prevention program.

But advocates for soldiers who have suffered mental breakdowns said the programs were not effective.

Cynthia Thomas runs the [Under the Hood Café](#), an organization of antiwar activists and veterans who provide referrals for soldiers to mental health professionals. She said a stigma remained among soldiers about seeking help from Army counselors for suicidal thoughts or other mental problems. And those soldiers who do seek counseling are often given medication and put back on duty, she said.

“You don’t get counseling, you get medication,” Ms. Thomas said. “These soldiers are breaking.”