

OMNI NEWSLETTER #1 MILITARY SUICIDES, January 13, 2012. COMPILED BY DICK BENNETT FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE.

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AVERAGE NUMBER OF U.S. VETERANS WHO COMMIT SUICIDE EACH DAY:

18. "Harper's Index," *Harper's Magazine* (Feb. 2012) p. 11.

NY family: Army investigators said teen private who shot himself was abused almost daily Article by: DEEPTI HAJELA , Associated Press

Updated: January 5, 2012 - 6:39 PM

NEW YORK - A teenage Army private who committed suicide just weeks after getting to Afghanistan had been mistreated by comrades on an almost daily basis, his family and community representatives said investigators told them.

Daniel Chen's parents and other members of Manhattan's Chinese community held a news conference Thursday to disclose what they had learned from Army investigators at a meeting the day before.

"Almost immediately after he arrived, Danny was required to do exercises which quickly within a few days crossed into abuse," said Elizabeth OuYang, a community activist representing his parents.

The family was briefed on the results of Regional Command South's administrative investigation into Chen's death, Army spokesman George Wright said. A criminal investigation is ongoing.

The Army did not disclose details of what its investigators told the family.

OuYang said investigators had told the family that the 19-year-old Chen was subjected to excessive sit-ups, push-ups, runs and sprints carrying sandbags, among other things, and that rocks were thrown at him to simulate artillery. She said the investigators reported he also was called racial slurs and was forced to work additional details.

When the soldiers were putting up a tent, Chen was forced to wear a construction hat and give instructions in Chinese, even though none of the other soldiers spoke the language, she said investigators told his relatives.

On Oct. 3, Chen was found dead in a guardhouse in Afghanistan with what the Army said apparently was a self-inflicted gunshot wound. He had arrived in Afghanistan in August.

On the day of Chen's death, OuYang said investigators told the family, he had reported to the guard tower without his helmet or adequate water. She said he was forced to crawl 100 meters on gravel with his equipment on as his comrades threw rocks at him.

Eight soldiers are facing charges ranging from dereliction of duty to involuntary manslaughter in connection to Chen's death.

The eight soldiers are part of an infantry regiment based in Fort Wainwright, Alaska. They are from Maryland; Port Arthur, Texas; Aberdeen, S.D.; Youngstown, Ohio; Brooklyn, Iowa; Hendersonville, Tenn.; Greenville, Pa.; and Fowler, Ind.

The soldiers are still in Afghanistan but have been relieved of their duties and confined to a different base, the military said. The next step is a hearing to determine if there is enough evidence for a court martial. The proceedings are expected to be held in Afghanistan.

Chen's family and the community members are calling for the hearings to be held in the United States, saying that to do otherwise would be unfair.

<http://www.startribune.com/nation/136741908.html>

MENTAL SUFFERINGS AND SUICIDES OF US TROOPS 2009. A sharp increase of soldier suicides has occurred recently, to an all-time high. In one period more suicides than combat deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan combined. Growing evidence of neglect of PTSD soldiers showing suicidal signs. Mark Benjamin's study on salon.com examines ten cases. For example, Adam Lieberman's strong symptoms of mental illness following his return from Afghanistan were treated by the Army as non-combat. He turned to alcohol and prescription drugs and killed himself. Benjamin found many cases of depression, violence, self-medication prior to suicide. Interv. Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, 2-20-09.

PTSD, SUICIDES, MILITARY CHOICE OF DRUGS OVER THERAPY

(from *Citizen Soldier Reports 2011*)

Soldier suicides increasing. 2009 rate highest since Army began keeping records in 1980. "In April 2010, the VA reported that an average of 18 veterans kill themselves each day; that's 6,500 a year." Half of veterans who need treatment seek it, fearing damage to their careers. Only about half of these receive adequate care.

Drugs instead of therapy. The military over-prescribes drugs like Paxil and Zoloft to "treat" PTSD despite warning of the risk of suicide. Prescribing psychiatric medications for soldiers and dependents has increased 42%.

Drugs are preferred at many military clinics because "psychotherapy would make them ineligible for deployment and would be much more costly than drugs."

Citizen Soldier: www.citizen-soldier.org

“Army suicides set record in July”

By **Greg Jaffe**, *Washington Post*, August 12, 2011

The U.S. Army suffered a record 32 suicides in July, the most since it began releasing monthly figures in 2009.

The high number of deaths represents a setback for the Army, which has put a heavy focus on reducing suicides in recent years. The number includes 22 active-duty soldiers and 10 reservists. The previous record was 31, from June 2010.

Army officials cautioned that investigations are underway in most of the deaths to confirm the exact cause.

“Every suicide represents a tragic loss,” Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, the vice chief of staff of the Army, said in a written statement. “While the high number of potential suicides in July is discouraging, we are confident our efforts . . . are having a positive impact.”

Over the past several years, the Army has launched a major effort to institute new training to improve soldiers’ ability to bounce back from stress, and setbacks in combat and in their personal lives. It has hired hundreds of mental health and substance abuse counselors and has launched a push to convince soldiers that seeking help for mental health problems will not have a negative impact on their careers.

The service also has tapped the National Institute of Mental Health to conduct a five-year, \$50 million study and statistical analysis of suicide in the Army, an effort that includes surveys, data mining and medical testing.

Chiarelli, meanwhile, has devoted hundreds of hours to studying the suicide problem and its possible links to post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries caused by battlefield explosions.

So far, the efforts have not resulted in a significant change in the suicide rate in the Army. Over the first seven months of 2011, about 160 active-duty and reserve soldiers have committed suicide, which is about on par with the number of troops taking their own lives during the same months in 2009 and 2010.

The Marine Corps, which does not release monthly suicide statistics, has posted annual suicide rates similar to the Army’s.

Senior Army officials had hoped that the slowing pace of combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan might reduce the overall strain on the force and help drive down the rate of soldier suicides. The extra time at home, however, does not appear to have had a significant impact on the suicide rate.

In recent years, the Army’s suicide rate has surpassed the rate for the overall population. Comparing suicide rates among soldiers is difficult because the latest national suicide statistics, which are compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are about three years old.

If the suicide rate among troops is compared to a population that is similar to the military in terms of age, race and sex, the rate in the Army and Marine Corps appears to be about the same or slightly lower than the population at large, according to the Rand Corp., a government-funded think tank.

From Citizens Commission on Human Rights International

<http://www.cchrint.org/2011/06/24/u-s-troops-reportedly-taking-more-medication-than-ever/>

U.S. Troops Reportedly Taking More Medication Than Ever

“Every violation of truth is not only a sort of suicide in the liar, but is a stab at the health of human society.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Salem News by Marianne Skolek

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C.) – Fox News reports that U.S. military troops are taking more prescription medication than ever. *US troops Heavily Medicated on Prescription Drugs*, the report warns.

The bottom line is that the men and women of the US armed forces are taking more addictive medication than they ever have in the past.

The Daily reported Wednesday, that the US Department of Defense doesn't keep track of those medical prescriptions doled out to service members in combat. This, despite ongoing pleas from federal officials to record the data. The military's 2012 budget report from the House Appropriations Committee, cited how the prescription of pain management drugs is not handled consistently, particularly in battle. According to The Daily, the report includes an ultimatum. The committee expects concrete information within two months of the budget's approval, detailing “the required steps and potential obstacles toward electronic transmission of prescription drug data.”

In 2010 a US Army study revealed how 14 percent of soldiers have been prescribed an opiate painkiller. 95 percent of those prescriptions were for oxycodone, a notoriously-addictive pharmaceutical best known by the brand name OxyContin. And since 2001, military spending on prescription medication has skyrocketed. Orders for antipsychotics like Seroquel are up 200 percent, and demand for anti-anxiety drugs like Valium has increased by 170 percent, according to Defense Logistics Agency records. Many of the antidepressants, antipsychotic drugs and anti-anxiety drugs prescribed are highly addictive. Potential side effects include dulled reaction times, irritability and a heightened risk of suicide. “The medications they use shouldn't be so heavily prescribed in combat,” said Dr. Judith Broder, a psychiatrist and founder of the Soldiers Project, a nonprofit counseling service.

“But they can't afford to send anyone home. They need the bodies — health and welfare are secondary,” she said.

<http://www.salem-news.com/articles/june232011/drugged-soldiers-ms.php>

END MILITARY SUICIDES NEWSLETTER