

DEOMI News Highlights

DEOMI News Highlights is a weekly compilation of published items and commentary with a focus on equal opportunity, equal employment opportunity, diversity, culture, and human relations issues. DEOMI News Highlights is also a management tool intended to serve the informational needs of equity professionals and senior DOD officials in the continuing assessment of defense policies, programs, and actions. Further reproduction or redistribution for private use or gain is subject to original copyright restrictions.

Alarming VA Report Totals Decade of Veteran Suicides [Richard Sisk, *Military.com*, 2019-09-23]

- The Department of Veterans Affairs released an [alarming report](#) Friday showing that at least 60,000 veterans died by suicide between 2008 and 2017, with little sign that the crisis is abating despite suicide prevention being the VA's top priority.
- In 2017, more than 6,100 veterans died by suicide, an increase of 2% over 2016 and a total increase of 6% since 2008, the report found.
- Of particular concern was the suicide rate among former National Guard and Reserve members who were never federally activated and therefore, did not receive VA services. Within that population, there were 919 suicides in 2017, an average of 2.5 per day, the report said. Some 12.4% of all military suicides in 2017 were among this population, the report found.

[Alarming VA Report Totals Decade of Veteran Suicides](#)

Former Top Enlisted Marine Warns Leaders to Watch Social Media Misbehavior [Gina Harkins, *Military.com*, 2019-09-23]

- When the Marine Corps' top leaders were summoned to Capitol Hill two years ago to explain how they were addressing a [major social media scandal](#), Sgt. Maj. Ronald Green called it one of the lowest points of their careers.
- Green was serving as sergeant major of the Marine Corps when an explosive report detailed how hundreds of male Marines and veterans were using a Facebook group called Marines United to share nude photos of their female colleagues online without permission. It was a major scandal for the service, which has struggled to address high numbers of reports of sexual assault and other gender issues in the ranks.
- Now, with members of Congress concerned about a potential rise of racism and other extremist ideologies in the ranks, Green said leaders must stay plugged into what's happening on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other online spaces.

[Former Top Enlisted Marine Warns Leaders to Watch Social Media Misbehavior](#)

Military sees frustrating trend as suicides spike [Lolita C. Baldor, *The Associated Press*, 2019-09-27]

- Military [suicides](#) have surged to a record high among active duty troops, continuing a deadly trend that Pentagon officials say is frustrating and they are struggling to counter.
- The Army, Navy and Marine Corps all saw the rate of suicides go up as well as the overall numbers, with only the Air Force showing a decrease, according to [data](#) released by the Pentagon Thursday. Suicides among members of the Reserves and the National Guard also grew.
- The number of suicides across the military increased from 511 in 2017 to 541 in 2018. According to the Pentagon, the most at-risk population is young enlisted men, and at least 60 percent of the time they chose a gun as their suicide method. Army suicides went from 114 to 139, while the Marines went from 43 to 58 and the Navy went from 65 to 68. The Air Force dipped from 63 to 60.

[Military sees frustrating trend as suicides spike](#)

CULTURE

[Why an apolitical military is so important in an era of an “All-Volunteer” force](#)

[Charlie Dunlap, *Lawfire*, 2019-09-21] [OPINION]

Earlier this month *Military Times* reporter [Kyle Rempfer](#) asked me for comment about a recent [case](#) where an Army National Guard officer, in uniform and at a campaign rally, gave a “[visibly emotional](#)” but full-throated endorsement of a candidate for the Democratic Party’s nomination for President. Kyle ultimately used quite a bit of what I gave him in his excellent [article](#), but I wanted to share with you my full input to him and add a couple of comments.

Kyle also asked if I had “any thoughts on some of the more nuanced situations involving MAGA hats being signed by [POTUS](#) (see [here](#)) during visits to troops and patches on uniforms (see [here](#)) that appear to use renditions of campaign slogans.” In addition, he asked if I had any “practical advice and wisdom on how troops can avoid violating policy during the upcoming campaign.”

Damaging the military’s apolitical reputation can adversely impact an already challenging recruiting environment for the armed forces, and obviously undermines its efforts to [broaden the potential pool of recruits](#).

DIVERSITY

[Women Veterans Have Unique Transition Problems, But We Don’t See Them](#)

[Jennifer Anthony, *Military.com*, 2019-09-27] [OPINION]

My transition from the Air Force looked successful. Yet in the privacy of my commute, in the evenings at home or during my lunch break, it looked anything but. No one saw my uncontrollable sobbing, how unsure and alone I felt, or how scared I was of what was to come.

I’ve since learned from other female veterans that I am far from alone in my struggles. Instead, the transition journey for female vets is uniquely difficult. But for all its challenges, it’s rarely talked about or recognized outside our own circles.

As the number of female service members, and thus the number of women veterans, moves toward a significant increase, we must find a way to make the transition space more comfortable to navigate.

If we are going to be successful in changing the narrative for female veterans, we -- women veterans -- have to do the work of engaging key stakeholders in higher education, employment, and nonprofit and transition services so they understand our unique experiences. They must become a voice in solving this with us, not for us. And, frankly, we need people other than just female veterans talking about it.

DISCRIMINATION

[Felix, other top stars, fight track’s pregnancy penalty](#) [Eddie Pells and Pat Graham,

The Associated Press, 2019-09-26]

Two months after the U.S. women’s soccer players stated their case for equal pay, women in track and field come to their major event, the world championships in Doha, having found their footing on another important crusade—retaining full pay from their sponsorship deals after they get pregnant.

The six-time Olympic and 11-time world champion [[Allyson Felix](#)] had a baby girl in November and will compete on the women’s relay team next week at the worlds in Doha, where she will have a new apparel sponsor, Athleta, after spending years with Nike.

Nike responded to the outcry, as well, announcing in May that it would not apply performance-related pay reductions for pregnant athletes for a consecutive period of 12 months. Then, last month, the company expanded that to 18 months — starting eight months before the due date — and pledged to include specific language about pregnancy in its contracts to reinforce the policy.

HUMAN RELATIONS

Do veterans lack social-emotional skills? A major study finds that many civilian employers believe they do. [Diana Stancy Correll, *Military Times*, 2019-09-26]

Just based off their resumes and cover letters, veterans' military service is working against them when they apply for jobs in certain fields, a new study says.

The study — conducted by Duke University's Fuqua School of Business and released Sept. 24 — found employers believe veterans are less suited for jobs that involve social-emotional skills and interacting with people than their non-veteran counterparts.

Veteran service organizations like American Legion, however, take issue with the study, saying it promotes the stereotype of veterans as brooding malcontents.

The study, which was comprised of a total of 10 smaller surveys evaluating perceptions of [veterans](#) in the workforce, also consistently found employers and others rated [veterans](#) as a better fit for jobs working with things rather than people. Employers, managers, and laypeople participated in the surveys.

MISCELLANEOUS

Air Force Looks to “Alpha Warrior” to Change PT Culture [Brian Everstine, *Air Force Magazine*, 2019-09-26]

The Air Force wants more airmen to take advantage of the “American Ninja Warrior”-esque fitness rigs it has deployed to dozens of bases, one of multiple steps it is eyeing to change its physical training culture.

The service has deployed “Alpha Warrior” training contraptions, which combine an obstacle course with CrossFit-like training, to bases around the world since 2017. The rigs build skills like agility alongside “functional fitness” exercises that combine muscle groups and are thought to be better for airmen than other forms of PT.

The military launched competitions to encourage Alpha Warrior training and brought in celebrity judges from the “American Ninja Warrior” TV show to help with recruitment. [Chief of Staff Gen. David] Goldfein took Capt. Noah Palicia, the current overall Alpha Warrior champion, to the 2019 Air Force Marathon earlier this month to highlight the initiative.

Army Unveils Major Changes to New Combat Fitness Test [Matthew Cox, *Military.com*, 2019-09-27]

The U.S. [Army](#) on Friday announced major changes to its new Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT), including lowering standards in some cases. It also added a plan to have new soldiers in initial military training pass the more challenging assessment as a graduation requirement after Oct. 1 of this year.

The service is moving into the next phase of an effort to replace the current, three-event Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) with the new six-event fitness assessment after completing a yearlong field test of the ACFT involving 63 battalions of active-duty, [National Guard](#) and Reserve soldiers.

Current soldiers across all three components of the Army will begin taking the ACFT for practice until October 2020, when it will become the service's official test of record.

Census: Inequality grew, including in heartland states [Mike Schneider, *The Associated Press*, 2019-09-26]

The gap between the haves and have-nots in the United States grew last year to its highest level in more than 50 years of tracking income inequality, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures released Thursday.

The nation's Gini Index, which measures income inequality, has been rising steadily over the past five decades.

The Gini Index grew from 0.482 in 2017 to 0.485 last year, according to the bureau's one-year American Community Survey data. The Gini Index is on a scale of 0 to 1; a score of "0" indicates perfect equality, while a score of 1 indicates perfect inequality, where one household has all the income.

Deported Army veteran returns to US in bid to become citizen [Sophia Tareen, *The Associated Press*, 2019-09-24]

An Army veteran who was [deported](#) to Mexico in 2018 arrived back in Chicago Tuesday for a final chance at becoming a U.S. citizen and living in the city he has called home since boyhood.

Federal immigration authorities granted Miguel Perez Jr. a two-week parole into the U.S. for an immigration hearing, according to his attorney. The 41-year-old Perez has a green card as a permanent U.S. resident, but after serving time for a 2008 non-violent drug conviction was deported last year. Then last month, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker [issued a pardon](#), erasing the conviction and reviving Perez's chances to become a citizen.

He joined the Army in 2002 and served in Afghanistan where he suffered a brain injury and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Goldfein Brings Commanders' Fitness Push to Air Force Marathon [Brian Everstine, *Air Force Magazine*, 2019-09-23]

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein toed the starting line of the 2019 Air Force Marathon here Sept. 21, hoping to spur a greater focus on physical fitness in the service from the top down.

"If you are a command team in the United States Air Force, you need to be fit," Goldfein told Air Force Magazine. "You need to be on a fitness program, you need to take fitness and wellness and health seriously."

The Air Force's top uniformed officer wants commanders to drive a [fitness-minded culture change](#) within their organizations and "emphasize fitness as a responsibility of being an airman."

In leaked documents, Army family reports waiting weeks to have gas line and roof leaks fixed in on-base housing [Haley Britzky, *Task & Purpose*, 2019-09-20]

In a document put together by an Army Transition Team (ATT) for the new Chief of Staff, Gen. James McConville, soldiers and their families gave an honest assessment of the problems they face—from housing, to health care, and the inability to advocate for themselves.

In one section under the title, “Theme: People Matter, but Families Do Not,” a comment says there are “unacceptable wait times” to get housing issues resolved, pointing specifically to one instance where there was a wait time of over three weeks to fix a gas line leak, and over four weeks for a roof leak “that resulted in gallons of water falling on a dependent’s bed.”

The Army has already put in place a number of processes to help stymie the housing crisis, and said that many of the recommendations the IG made in its report are already underway, but it’s not a problem that will be solved overnight—and families are clearly still suffering.

SEE ALSO:

[Pentagon official in charge of F-35 operating costs and privatized military housing resigns](#) [Task & Purpose, 2019-09-26]

[Pregnant airmen can now fly without medical waiver, new rule says](#) [Brian Ferguson, Stars and Stripes, 2019-09-24]

Pregnant aircrew and missileers can now perform their assigned duties [during pregnancy](#) without a medical waiver, the Air Force said in a statement Monday.

The policy, which takes effect immediately, gives certain fully qualified pilots, remotely piloted aircrew and missile operations duty crews the option to continue doing their jobs while pregnant.

It expands the time qualified airmen can fly during pregnancy, and means airmen with uncomplicated pregnancies will no longer need a waiver to be able to return to flight, the statement said.

[Soldiers say the Army’s relentless push for readiness is ‘breaking the force’ in leaked documents](#) [Haley Britzky, Task & Purpose, 2019-09-20]

According to an internal Army document, soldiers feel that the service’s overwhelming focus on readiness is wearing down the force, and leading some unit leaders to fudge the truth on their unit’s readiness.

“Soldiers in all three Army Components assess themselves and their unit as less ready to perform their wartime mission, despite an increased focus on readiness,” reads the document, which was put together by the Army Transition Team for new Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville and obtained by Task & Purpose. “The drive to attain the highest levels of readiness has led some unit leaders to inaccurately report readiness.”

Lt. Gen. Eric J. Wesley, who served as the director of the transition team, said in the document’s opening that though the surveys conducted are not scientific, the feedback “is honest and emblematic of the force as a whole taken from seven installations and over 400 respondents.”

[These military stores are pulling vaping products from the shelves in the wake of health scare](#) [Karen Jowers, Military Times, 2019-09-24]

Exchanges on Army, Air Force and Navy installations are in the process of removing [e-cigarettes and vaping](#) products from their shelves and from concessionaires by Oct. 1, in light of recent deaths and illnesses associated with vaping.

The decisions were made in the wake of news about the outbreak of mysterious vaping-related lung injuries. At least 530 cases from 38 states have been reported, and seven deaths have been confirmed in six states, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Vaping now appears to be more common in the military than smoking regular cigarettes, according to results of the most recent Defense Department Health-Related Behaviors Survey of Active-Duty Service Members. The results of that survey, conducted in 2015, showed 11.1 percent of troops said they were daily e-cigarette users, compared to 7.4 percent who said they smoked cigarettes daily.

MISCONDUCT

Former Top Enlisted Marine Warns Leaders to Watch Social Media Misbehavior **[Gina Harkins, *Military.com*, 2019-09-23]**

When the Marine Corps' top leaders were summoned to Capitol Hill two years ago to explain how they were addressing a [major social media scandal](#), Sgt. Maj. Ronald Green called it one of the lowest points of their careers.

Green was serving as sergeant major of the Marine Corps when an explosive report detailed how hundreds of male Marines and veterans were using a Facebook group called Marines United to share nude photos of their female colleagues online without permission. It was a major scandal for the service, which has struggled to address high numbers of reports of sexual assault and other gender issues in the ranks.

Now, with members of Congress concerned about a potential rise of racism and other extremist ideologies in the ranks, Green said leaders must stay plugged into what's happening on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other online spaces.

Infantryman arrested for allegedly offering bomb-making instructions to target politicians, wanted to fight in Ukraine with far-right unit **[Kyle Rempfer, *Army Times*, 2019-09-23]**

A soldier with the 1st Infantry Division has been charged with sending instructions for making a bomb over social media, some of which would have resulted in viable explosives, and were sent with the knowledge that they could be used to target politicians, according to the Department of Justice.

Spc. Jarrett William Smith, 24, was arrested Saturday and charged with one count of distributing information related to explosives and weapons of mass destruction. He was serving at the time of his arrest as an infantryman with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, at [Fort Riley, Kansas](#).

Smith admitted during the arrest that he knows how to make [improvised explosive devices](#), and that in online chat rooms he routinely provides instructions on building explosive devices, according to Department of Justice documents.

SEE ALSO:

[Prosecutor: 'Satanist' soldier sought government's overthrow](#) [2019-09-26]

Man admits to shooting transgender woman in hate crime, police say **[Karma Allen, *ABC News*, 2019-09-25]**

Police have arrested a Dallas man who they say admitted to [shouting anti-LGBTQ slurs at a transgender woman](#) before shooting her several times.

Domingo Ramirez-Cavente, 29, allegedly shot Rony Calderon, who is transgender, last week in northwest Dallas, hitting her multiple times in the chest and arm, and leaving her in serious condition, police said Tuesday.

At least 18 transgender people have been killed this year in the U.S., according to the Human Rights Campaign. The group tracked 29 killings in 2018, the most it had ever recorded in a year.

Recruit diagnosed with autism returns home, recruiter removed from duty [Kyle Rempfer, *Army Times*, 2019-09-23]

An [Army recruit](#) who had an [autism diagnosis](#) and anxiety medication prescription but was still sent to basic training, possibly against Army policy, has been returned home, while his recruiter has been removed from duty pending the final outcome of an investigation.

[U.S. Army Recruiting Command](#) confirmed that officials are conducting an investigation into whether the recruiter encouraged the recruit to conceal his autism diagnosis, which is considered high functioning, prior to arriving at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, on Aug. 20.

Army applicants with autism spectrum disorders are automatically disqualified, per [Defense Department accession](#) policy, though sometimes medical enlistment waivers are granted after a visit to a DOD behavioral health consultant, according to Lisa Ferguson, the chief spokeswoman for the service's recruiting command.

Theft of smoke grenades, LSD distribution included in charges for 13 California Marines arrested in human smuggling probe [Philip Athey, *Marine Corps Times*, 2019-09-26]

Thirteen Camp Pendleton, California, Marines arrested in July for alleged involvement with human smuggling at the U.S. and Mexico border have been charged, the Marine Corps has confirmed.

Charge sheets obtained on Thursday upon request by Marine Corps Times show allegations ranging from the theft of smoke grenades, obstruction of justice, distribution of drugs and the tampering with cellphones to protect Marines under investigation.

Only nine of the 13 Marines charged have been accused of conspiring or aiding in the smuggling of undocumented or illegal immigrants, and it is unknown how the charges for the other four Marines relate to the human smuggling investigation.

RACISM

Man accused of making racist threats to remain in custody [Mike Schneider and Michael Kunzleman, *The Associated Press*, 2019-09-23]

A White man charged with cyberstalking and making racist threats against a Black activist in Virginia was ordered Monday to remain in custody, in a case that could test the boundaries of when online trolling becomes a criminal threat.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Thomas Wilson ordered Daniel McMahon to continue to be jailed, saying his mental instability, ability to obtain firearms and praise of mass shootings in Pittsburgh and Charleston, South Carolina, through his online communications raise concerns he poses a threat to the community.

An indictment unsealed last week in Virginia said McMahon expressed White supremacist views on his social media accounts. It said McMahon used his social media accounts to intimidate the activist, Don Gathers, and interfere with his campaign to run for a seat on the Charlottesville, Virginia, city council.

White Girls, 10 and 11, Accused in Hate Crime After Assault on Black Classmate

[Sharon Otterman and Azi Paybarah, *The New York Times*, 2019-09-25]

Two girls, 10 and 11, face criminal charges of harassment and assault of a 10-year-old girl on a school bus in a small upstate New York town, in an episode that the local police are treating as a racial hate crime.

The two girls charged in the alleged attack, which occurred on Sept. 10, are White, and the girl who was assaulted is Black, the police in the Village of Gouverneur, in St. Lawrence County, said.

The arrests coincide with a national push to treat acts of bullying among juveniles as crimes, sometimes at the request of victims' parents. It also coincides with a rise in hate-crime incidents in schools across the United States; 753 such cases were reported in 2017, [according to F.B.I. data](#).

RELIGION

Poignant New Year for Jewish community scarred by massacre [David Crary, *The Associated Press*, 2019-09-27]

There will be some differences—and some constants—over the coming days as the New Light congregation observes Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, for the first time since three of its members were among 11 Jews killed by a gunman nearly a year ago at a Pittsburgh synagogue.

The man who last year blew New Light's shofar, the ram's horn trumpet traditionally sounded to welcome the High Holy Days, was among those killed. Richard Gottfried, 65, a dentist nearing retirement, was one of the congregation's mainstays in reading the haftara, a biblical passage that follows the Torah reading.

In Gottfried's place, the shofar will be blown this year by the congregation's rabbi, Jonathan Perlman. And the venue for the services will not be the Tree of Life synagogue, the site of the massacre. All three congregations that shared space there have been worshipping at neighboring synagogues since the attack on Oct. 27, 2018.

Rosh Hashanah 2019: When it starts and what this Jewish celebration really means [Dwight Adams, *USA TODAY*, 2019-09-27]

This year, Rosh Hashanah begins at sunset on Sunday, Sept. 29, and ends two days later at sunset on Tuesday, Oct. 1. It's the start of the Jewish month of Tishrei, or Tishri, which falls in September or October, according to the Gregorian calendar. It's the first month of the civil year for Jews or the seventh month of the ecclesiastical year. Some years, Rosh Hashanah can start in early September or as late as early October.

While some ancient cultures, such as the Celts, celebrated the start of a new year during the spring equinox because it was the time of planting, Semitic cultures in the Near East celebrated the new year in the fall, after the harvest was gathered. The name of Rosh Hashanah can be translated as "first" or "head of the year." It is also sometimes called "The Feast of Trumpets."

It's actually called yoma arichta – translated as "a long day" – because the 48-hour period when Rosh Hashanah is observed is actually considered to be one extended day. It's the only Jewish holiday that is two days long both outside and inside Israel.

Veterans group pushes to dismiss suit over Bible on display [Michael Casey, *The Associated Press*, 2019-09-25]

A battle over a Bible on display at New Hampshire's veterans hospital was the focus of a federal court hearing Wednesday, with lawyers for the government arguing that [a lawsuit demanding its removal](#) should be dismissed because the Air Force veteran who filed it hasn't shown he was harmed in any way.

Justice Department attorney Cristen Handley told a judge Wednesday that James Chamberlain has acknowledged he was a devout Christian who wasn't offended by the display at a table honoring missing veterans and POWs. But Chamberlain's lawyer Lawrence Vogelstein said his client's religion should not matter and that he was filing the lawsuit on behalf of his fellow veterans who might feel the VA is choosing Christianity over other religions.

The Bible became part of the missing man table honoring missing veterans and POWs at the entranceway of the Manchester VA Medical Center. The Department of Veterans Affairs said the table was sponsored by the Northeast POW/MIA Network and has been up since last September. The POW organization said the Bible was owned by a prisoner of war in World War II from New Hampshire.

SEXUAL ASSAULT/HARASSMENT

[Doctor pleads guilty to sexually exploiting VA patients](#) [The Associated Press, 2019-09-26]

A California doctor has pleaded guilty to sexually exploiting five women—several of them veterans—while doing work for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Edgar Manzanera pleaded guilty Wednesday as trial was to begin on more serious charges of sexual assault. Instead of potentially facing more than a dozen years in prison, Manzanera will be sentenced to three years of probation. He also must surrender his medical license and register as a sex offender.

Authorities had charged the Oceanside physician with sexually violating patients on the pretense of giving them unnecessary gynecological exams while he was doing contract work for the VA. Authorities said four of the five women were military veterans.

[Lawmaker demands overhaul of VA anti-harassment policies after staffer reports assault at veterans hospital](#) [Leo Shane III, Military Times, 2019-09-26]

The [chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee](#) is demanding a nationwide review of department sexual harassment policies after one of his committee staffers was [assaulted at a VA hospital](#) last week by a fellow veteran.

Andrea Goldstein, a reserve Navy intelligence officer and the lead staffer on the committee's Women Veterans Task Force, said she was groped and body checked by an unknown man while waiting in the front atrium of the [Washington DC VA Medical Center](#) last Friday. The man also propositioned her as he made the unwanted advances.

Goldstein, who in recent months has helped organize several congressional roundtables on harassment and misogyny at VA facilities, said she uses VA almost exclusively for her medical care, and has visited the Washington, D.C. facility—just a few miles north of Capitol Hill—multiple times in the past. She said she was satisfied with staff response to the incident after she filed her complaint, but remains upset that there was no immediate reaction to the assault, which happened in an open area in view of multiple patients and staff.

SEE ALSO:

[Congressional Staffer Recounts Assault at VA Hospital](#) [Military.com, 2019-09-26]

North Carolina Detective Fired After Allegedly Sending Inappropriate Messages to Women Whose Rape Cases He Handled [Mahita Gajanan, *TIME*, 2019-09-27]

A detective in North Carolina was fired earlier this year after he was accused of making inappropriate advances toward women whose sexual assault cases he investigated.

Paul G. Matrafailo III was fired in May from the Fayetteville Police Department, according to his dismissal letter, a copy of which was obtained by TIME.

The letter notes that the police department received a complaint in March accusing Matrafailo of reaching out to a sexual assault victim on Instagram and starting a conversation that she later said felt inappropriate. He is alleged to have made a second attempt to contact the woman a few days later.

SUICIDE

Active duty suicides are on the rise, as the Pentagon works on new messaging and strategy [Meghann Myers, *Military Times*, 2019-09-26]

The rate of active duty [service members who take their own lives](#) has been rising an average of 6 percent year-over-year the past five years, the Pentagon announced Thursday.

The number of suicides jumped from 285 to 325 between 2017 and 2018, according to the [2018 Annual Suicide Report](#), for a rate of about 22 suicides per 100,000 service members to about 25. Officials did not draw any conclusions about why the numbers continue to rise despite efforts to train commands and troops on preventing suicide and seeking behavioral health care.

“Although the [suicide rate](#) among most of our military populations is comparable to broader civilian rates, this is hardly comforting, and our numbers are not moving in the right direction,” Elizabeth Van Winkle, the Defense Department’s executive director of force resiliency, told reporters in an off-camera briefing.

Alarming VA Report Totals Decade of Veteran Suicides [Richard Sisk, *Military.com*, 2019-09-23]

The Department of Veterans Affairs released an [alarming report](#) Friday showing that at least 60,000 veterans died by suicide between 2008 and 2017, with little sign that the crisis is abating despite suicide prevention being the VA’s top priority.

In 2017, more than 6,100 veterans died by suicide, an increase of 2% over 2016 and a total increase of 6% since 2008, the report found.

Of particular concern was the suicide rate among former National Guard and Reserve members who were never federally activated and therefore, did not receive VA services. Within that population, there were 919 suicides in 2017, an average of 2.5 per day, the report said. Some 12.4% of all military suicides in 2017 were among this population, the report found.

SEE ALSO:

[Veteran suicides increase despite host of prevention, mental health efforts](#) [*Military Times*, 2019-09-20]

‘Everybody’s Overworked:’ String of Suicides Raises Questions About Sailors’ Stress Levels [Gina Harkins and Patricia Kime, *Military.com*, 2019-09-25]

Three sailors assigned to the same ship died in apparent suicides in the last week, leaving some asking what more leaders can do to support troops as the military grapples with rising rates of self-inflicted deaths.

The Bush crew is not the only military command dealing with high suicide rates. The [Air Force](#) recently [declared war on hopelessness in the ranks](#) after a sharp spike in suicides. Service leaders found toxic and uncaring leadership was having a major effect on the well-being of airmen.

Last year, 325 active-duty troops from across the services died by suicide -- the highest number since the Defense Department began tracking the problem in 2001.

SEE ALSO:

[Investigators probing four suicides involving carrier crew](#) [Navy Times, 2019-09-24]

[Here's what first-ever data shows about military family suicides](#) [Karen Jowers, *Military Times*, 2019-09-27]

The prevalence of [suicide](#) among military family members is about the same or less than in the civilian population, according to a report from the Defense Department.

It's the first time data on military family member suicides has ever been released by the Defense Department. This report includes one year of data: 2017, so there's no basis of comparison for trends within the community.

The overall suicide rate among family members was 6.8 per 100,000 population in 2017, which is less than half the rate in the U.S. general population of 14.5 per 100,000. This measurement is the standard comparison used by the government for suicide rates in populations.

SEE ALSO:

[In a First, Pentagon Releases Data on Military Spouse and Child Suicides](#) [2019-09-27]

[Meet the Navy chief helping suicidal sailors on Reddit](#) [Geoff Ziezulewicz, *Navy Times*, 2019-09-24]

Connecting with suicidal sailors and veterans on [Reddit](#) and helping them [get help](#) has become [Chief Navy Counselor Grant] Khanbalinov's collateral duty in 2019.

The chief said he hopes more conversation can lessen the stigma that lingers around mental health.

Last year, 68 active-duty sailors took their own lives, a grim increase from a decade ago, when 38 sailors killed themselves in 2008, [according to Navy data](#).

[Military sees frustrating trend as suicides spike](#) [Lolita C. Baldor, *The Associated Press*, 2019-09-27]

Military [suicides](#) have surged to a record high among active duty troops, continuing a deadly trend that Pentagon officials say is frustrating and they are struggling to counter.

The Army, Navy and Marine Corps all saw the rate of suicides go up as well as the overall numbers, with only the Air Force showing a decrease, according to [data](#) released by the Pentagon Thursday. Suicides among members of the Reserves and the National Guard also grew.

The number of suicides across the military increased from 511 in 2017 to 541 in 2018. According to the Pentagon, the most at-risk population is young enlisted men, and at least 60 percent of the time they chose

a gun as their suicide method. Army suicides went from 114 to 139, while the Marines went from 43 to 58 and the Navy went from 65 to 68. The Air Force dipped from 63 to 60.

Military Suicide Rates Hit Record High in 2018 [Patricia Kime, *Military.com*, 2019-09-26]

The suicide rate for active-duty U.S. military members in 2018 was the highest on record since the Defense Department began tracking self-inflicted deaths in 2001.

Officials said Thursday that 2018's rate of 24.8 deaths per 100,000 service members is comparable to age and gender-adjusted civilian rates, but added that fact is "hardly comforting," given that "the numbers aren't moving in the right direction."

A new DOD publication, the [2018 Annual Suicide Report](#), released Thursday confirms that 325 active-duty personnel took their own lives last year, up from 285 in 2017 and 280 the previous year.

According to the report, the [National Guard](#), which experienced 135 suicides in 2018, had the highest suicide rate among the three components, including the Reserves. Its rate of 30.6 per 100,000 was higher than the civilian rate when adjusted for age and gender.

The National Guard's suicide rate has surpassed the other military components [Meghann Myers, *Military Times*, 2019-09-26]

The National Guard's [suicide rate has](#) climbed higher than the active duty and Reserve's, according to an annual Pentagon study released Thursday. In response, officials are looking for new ways to help troops [feel comfortable coming forward](#) about their issues and getting help they need.

The most recent figure is about 30.6 deaths per 100,000 service members, according to the Defense Department Annual Suicide Report for calendar year 2018, well above the Reserve's 22.9 per 100,000 and the active component's 24.8.

While all three components are staring down growing [suicide rates](#), the National Guard faces a unique problem, officials told *Military Times*, because they don't have the day-to-day interaction that active troops have with their leadership, and members are often in-between military and civilian health care, so it's not always clear which providers they should seek out if they're having trouble.

VETERANS

After Ant-Bite Scandal, Federal Watchdog to Review VA's Nursing Home Ratings System [Patricia Kime, *Military.com*, 2019-09-23]

Days after news broke of a veteran who [suffered hundreds of ant bites](#) as he lay dying in a [Department of Veterans Affairs](#)-run nursing home, the Government Accountability Office announced it will review the ratings system the department uses to assess its community living centers.

The VA released the ratings of its community living centers, or CLCs, [following an investigation by USA Today and the Boston Globe](#) that found its rating system, initially developed for internal use only, showed 60 VA nursing homes, or nearly half the 133 homes in 2017, received a one-star rating, the lowest on a five-star scale.

By the time the VA released its updated star ratings in 2018, 8% of its nursing homes had a one-star rating and 26% had a five-star rating.

The senators said they want the GAO to review the system based on reports of poor quality ratings and “disturbing anecdotal stories of substandard treatment and conditions at some CLCs across the country.”

[New eligibility rules for Arlington cemetery would exclude most non-combat veterans](#)
[Leo Shane III, *Military Times*, 2019-09-25]

Officials are moving to limit the number of individuals eligible for burial at [Arlington National Cemetery](#) in Virginia, restricting below-ground sites to combat heroes, battle casualties and a small pool of notable dignitaries.

Under the proposal, which still needs to be finalized through a public rulemaking process, some other veterans will still be eligible for storage of cremated remains [at the famed site](#) in above-ground structures, which will allow planners additional flexibility and space in coming decades.

The move by the Army, which administers the cemetery, is part of an ongoing effort to extend how long the cemetery can be used as [a final resting place](#) for America’s service members. Army officials have for the last two years considered a series of site expansions and facility changes in an effort to deal with dwindling space at the site.