



Ministry
of Defence

Defence Statistics Health

Ministry of Defence

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[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email dated 8 November 2018 requesting the following information:

"1. whether you have any numbers for year 2018, even incomplete, that you could share to give us an indication?

2. whether you could provide a breakdown of the deaths each year by deployment (e.g. deployed to Afghanistan/deployed to Iraq/never deployed/returned from deployment, or something similar if that is more suitable).

3. whether you could provide a breakdown by age or age groups.

Additionally, I would appreciate if you could explain the following:

4. Does the statistic include volunteers in the Territorial Army?

5. The methodology file says "Defence Statistics also receive cause of death information from military medical sources in the single Services. At the end of each calendar year, Defence Statistics cross-reference the medical information it holds against publicly available death certificate information available from the NHS." -- could you please advise me who exactly holds this information in the NHS and if it's publicly available how could I access it? I've spoken to NHS Digital and they don't hold this information.

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that all the information in scope of your request is held, some of which is already available in the public domain.

Q3: Section 21 of the Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where information is reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Information relating to suicides by age groups is available in Table 4 of the Excel file at the following:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-armed-forces-suicide-and-open-verdict-deaths-2017>

A breakdown by age group is not available by year to reduce the possible inadvertent disclosure of individual identities due to the small number of deaths in the age groups, in line with JSP200 Statistics Disclosure Guidelines.

Q1: Between 1 January 2018 and 7 November 2018 (the latest data available) there have been **two** coroner confirmed suicide and open verdict deaths among serving UK Armed Forces personnel and a further **14** who have died where the mechanism of death suggests suicide and which are currently awaiting the outcome of a coroner's investigation.

Q2: **Table 1** presents an annual breakdown of suicide and open verdict deaths among serving UK regular Armed Forces personnel who have been identified as having been deployed on combat operations to either Iraq and/or Afghanistan and those that have not been identified as having deployed to either theatre.

Table 1: UK regular Armed Forces suicide and open verdict deaths by deployment. Numbers.
1 August 2002 to 31 December 2017

Deployment	All	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
All	207	15	25	20	22	12	10	10	15	7	15	16	8	9	8	11	4
Deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan	94	2	5	9	6	6	4	5	11	2	7	12	7	4	5	5	4
Not deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan	113	13	20	11	16	6	6	5	4	5	8	4	1	5	3	6	0

Source: Defence Statistics (Health)

1. Deployment to the wider theatre of operation (see background notes).

Between 1st Aug 2002 and 31st December 2017, there were 94 UK regular Armed Forces coroner confirmed Suicide and Open verdict deaths among personnel deployed on combat operations to Iraq and/or Afghanistan. Of these:

- 11 coroner confirmed suicide or open verdict deaths were to personnel whilst deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan (of which one was a member of the Army reserves).
- 83 coroner confirmed suicide or open verdict deaths were to personnel whilst in service, since their return from Iraq and/or Afghanistan.

Over the sixteen year period 55% of all in-Service suicides were amongst personnel who had not been identified as having deployed to either Iraq and/or Afghanistan.

Q4: The UK regular Armed Forces Suicide and Open Verdict National Statistic does not include deaths of personnel in the Territorial Army as Defence Statistics do not receive routine notifications of all deaths among reservists and non-regulars unless they are on active service, and because reliable denominator data to produce interpretable statistics are not available.

Q5: The public can access death certificates through the General Register Office (GRO) if the name of the deceased is known. Defence Statistics use the NHS Digital protocol to access the certificates through the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Under Section 16 (Advice and Assistance) you may find it helpful to note the following in relation to your questions:

Although the MOD does not hold information on the causes of death of all UK Armed Forces veterans, studies have been carried out on two cohorts of ex-Service personnel. The MOD has published information on the causes of death, including suicides, among Veterans of the 1990/91 Gulf conflict and the 1982 Falklands campaign. The latest publications can be found on the Gov.uk website:

- Causes of mortality among veterans of the 1990/91 Gulf conflict:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/causes-of-deaths-that-occurred-among-the-uk-veterans-of-the-199091-gulf-conflict>
- Causes of mortality among veterans of the Falklands conflict:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/causes-of-deaths-among-the-uk-armed-forces-veterans-of-the-1982-falklands-campaign>

The Ministry of Defence has commissioned a new study to investigate causes of death, including suicide, amongst all those who served in the UK Armed Forces between 2001 and 2014, covering combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. This will include personnel who are still in service, and those who have now transitioned into civilian life.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-study-into-iraq-and-afghanistan-veterans-launched>

A MOD sponsored research paper on suicides since 1996 among those that had left the Armed Forces was published in March 2009 in the Public Library of Science (PLoS) Medicine at [https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/suicide-after-leaving-the-uk-armed-forces-a-cohort-study\(5837846f-8990-41b2-82a4-f448138274ae\).html](https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/suicide-after-leaving-the-uk-armed-forces-a-cohort-study(5837846f-8990-41b2-82a4-f448138274ae).html).

Defence Statistics Health compiles the Department's authoritative deaths database for all UK Armed Forces personnel who died whilst in Service going back to 1984. Information is compiled from several internal and external sources from which we release several internal analyses and external National Statistics Notices.

When providing statistics on suicides, Defence Statistics Health rely exclusively on the information provided by coroners in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland, and the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland. This ensures the Department's objectivity, as all accidental deaths and those resulting from violent action must be referred to these officials for investigation. For sake of brevity these sources of information have been labelled collectively as "coroner's verdicts".

The statistics provided include both coroner-confirmed suicides and open verdict deaths, in line with the definition used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), since research has shown that these deaths share many similarities with suicides except that in the case of open verdict deaths, the intention of the deceased to take their life has not been sufficiently proven to the satisfaction of the coroner.

To identify deaths that may result in a coroner returning a suicide or open verdict (awaiting verdicts), Defence Statistics Health use the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC) reporting category violent and unnatural causes (VUC) as an indicator for suspected suicides. Defence Statistics Health exclude from this number any death that has been identified as an assault on the Notification of Casualty form (NOTICAS).

Figures are for tri-Service regular personnel and only those reserve personnel who have died whilst on operational deployment.

The deployment data presented in this report represent deployments to the theatre of operation and not deployment to a specific country i.e. deployment to Op Telic includes deployment to Iraq and other countries in the Gulf region such as Kuwait and Oman. Therefore, this data cannot be compared to data on personnel deployed to a specific country, such as Iraq.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 1st Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.gov.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.gov.uk>.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Defence Statistics Health Head (B1)