Interestingly enough, a considerable body of recent research has indicated that within the armed forces, there is no clear or direct correlation between completed suicides and deployment. However, the 2016 Department of Defense Quarterly Suicide Report maintains that deployment overseas to the wartime theater is an extremely stressful and life-altering experience that disrupts the fabric of the family and the existing “social and interpersonal structure” of the Service Member’s life. The DOD correlates suicide with the “interplay of feelings of belongingness,” which can be affected by deployment.

According to the DOD, suicide risk factors are those associated with the increased potential for suicide attempts and successful suicides in the civilian, include major life transitions, and
deployment is one. Alan Zarembo of LA Times writes that, while the trauma of deployment is obvious, we know that the problem exceeds and extends past the trauma of war—thus the Epidemic of Veteran Suicides.

The wartime theater demands some, if not an enormous degree of interpersonal support for psychological survival. Recent research suggests that the support and kinship of Service Members and their convergence during overseas wartime deployments constitute a protective factor, something that mitigates suicide risk. However, environmental differences between the various branches of the Armed Forces may dictate the provision of varying degrees of interpersonal support, often dependent upon factors such as geography, location, mission, and remoteness of assignments in the wartime theater. Furthermore, this may be dependent on the types and intensity of combat exposure, which is also likely to impact the acquired capability.

In order to decrease the likelihood of suicide, the 2016 DOD Quarterly Suicide Report recommends “unit level and community support and training interventions that increase protective factors within the culture of the military.” Unfortunately, as the data reveals, the DOD has fallen far short of this goal. Suicide prevention training is frequently perceived as a compulsory check-the-box class that generates just enough interest to put attendees to sleep. Beating the problem to death with power point presentations offers no cure for a problem of such immense proportions. Asking Soldiers to care about other Soldiers when leadership failures demonstrate otherwise, serves only to aggravate the existing problem of falling down the rabbit hole of isolation and desolation for those who believe themselves to be a terrible burden to everyone and every aspect of the world that surrounds them.