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CNN

Army's largest base reeling from four apparent suicides in one weekend

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Four soldiers from Fort Hood, Texas died over the week. In all four cases, it appears the soldiers, all decorated veterans from the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan, took their own lives, according to Christopher Haug, a Fort Hood spokesman.

If confirmed as suicides, it would be on top of 14 other suicides on the base this year. Base officials called a news conference for Wednesday afternoon to discuss the problem of suicides at the huge base in central Texas.

"Every one of these is tragic," said Maj. Gen. William Grimsley, the post commander. "It's personally and professionally frustrating as a leader."

Grimsley did not announce any major action or response during the news conference. "I don't think there is a simple answer," he said.

The recent spate of incidents, began Friday Sept. 24 when the body of Pvt. Antonio E. Heath, 24, of Warren, New York, was found in Temple, Texas, the victim of a gunshot wound. Heath was deployed to Iraq for most of 2009 and earned a number of medals including the Army Commendation Medal.

The next day, Master Sgt. Baldemar Gonzales, 39, of Victoria, Texas was found dead in his residence on Fort Hood. During his service he had fought in Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. During that time he earned a Bronze Star, a Meritorious Service Medal with one oak leaf cluster, an Army Commendation Medal with four oak leaf clusters as well as numerous other decorations.

That same day the body of Sgt. Timothy Ryan Rinella, 29, of Chester, Virginia, was found in his home in Copperas Cove, just outside of Fort Hood. He had an "apparent gunshot wound," according to information released by Fort Hood.

Rinella served three tours of duty in Iraq and one tour in Afghanistan.

And then on Sunday, Sgt. Michael F. Franklin and his wife, Jessie, were found dead of apparent gunshot wounds in their home on the post. The case is being investigated as a murder-suicide. They were the parents of a 6-year-old daughter and 2-year-old son. Franklin served two tours of duty in Iraq in just the past four years, earning an Army Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters and several other decorations.

The entire U.S. military has been focused for years on trying to stop or reduce suicides among service members. At times some have speculated that troops wouldn't seek help for emotional or mental problems because it would stigmatize them in the eyes of their comrades in arms and their commanders.

But that didn't always appear to be the case at Fort Hood this past weekend.

"Early indications are, in at least two of the cases, and I can't speak definitively about the others, a couple had been in counseling for certain things," Grimsley said.

He said the pace of Army operations, caused in large part by fighting two wars simultaneously over many years, may be one "stresser" leading to more suicides.

"We are certainly a busier force as we've ever been in my career, you put those and the other stressors of life, with finances and relationships and everything else, it's a tough life. It is a tough life," he said.

It's yet more violence for Fort Hood, which was the site of the worst shooting on an American military base in decades. On November 5 of last year, a gunman opened fire in a building on the post, killing 12 people and injuring dozens of others. Maj. Nidal Hasan, an Army psychiatrist was shot and paralyzed by police who responded to the incident and is facing murder charges in the case.

Grimsley doesn't see a link between the the suicides and the shooting last year. "I don't draw a correlation, it's clearly in our respective psyches and will be for life. But so are all of the other things that have gone on here."

The first testimony in Hasan's pre-trial hearing is set to start in two weeks.