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MILITARY FAMILIES:

**MILITARY SUICIDES ARE UNACCEPTABLE CASUALTIES OF AN
UNJUSTIFIABLE WAR**

*Nationwide – Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) is criticizing a draft internal Army study, reported on yesterday in *The Washington Post*, that continues to blame rising rates of suicide and suicide attempts primarily on strained personal relationships. The study, authored by the Army's top psychiatrist Col. Elspeth Ritchie, concluded that as many as 121 soldiers committed suicide last year and at least 2,100 soldiers are reported to have attempted suicide or deliberately injured themselves in 2007.*

Col. Elspeth Ritchie, commenting about the study to Reuters news agency yesterday, said "Families are getting tired. Therefore, sometimes they're more irritable, sometimes they don't take care of each other the way they should, are not as nurturing as they should be."

"As the suicide rates have risen over the years of this war, Col. Ritchie has maintained her focus on failed personal relationships as the cause of these tragic deaths," said Nancy Lessin, co-founder of Military Families Speak Out. "How dare Col. Ritchie suggest that the families of soldiers who have committed suicide carry blame for their deaths? Military suicides are the unacceptable casualties of an unjustifiable war that is sending service men and women – including those with diagnosed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - on multiple and extended tours of duty into a combat zone where they are constantly on the front lines. What soldiers – and their families – need now more than ever, is the quick and safe return of all troops from Iraq, and for service members to be provided with the care they need to begin to recover from this nightmare."

MFSO member April Somdahl, whose brother Brian Rand served in the Army in Iraq, and took his own life on February 20, 2007, said *"The Army can not blame the families for the rise in suicides – we built and replenished our loved ones' strength; it was the war experience that broke them down. Our sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters wouldn't have killed themselves without the sadness and trauma stemming from this unjust war."*

Somdahl's brother Brian Rand underwent a psychological exam after returning home from his second deployment to the Middle East. The exam determined that he was unfit for deployment, but despite this determination, the Army deployed Rand again to Iraq. When he returned home from this third deployment, he desperately sought help before ending his life last year.

“My brother asked for help -- and he was denied the help the Army admitted he needed,” added Somdahl. *“Others have asked for help from the military too. The help was either non-existent or too little, too late. I don't think the military knows how to heal these wounds of the troops that they send out to Iraq, repeatedly. Stop the trauma. Prevent the scars, prevent the external mutilations, prevent the internal spiraling depressions by bringing them home, now!”*

Members of Military Families Speak Out including those whose loved ones committed suicide are available for interview.

Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) is a national organization of over 3,800 families who are opposed to the war in Iraq and have loved ones who serve or served in the military since the fall of 2002. For more information about Military Families Speak Out, please visit: <http://www.mfso.org>