



Libby Busbee is pretty sure that her son William never sat through or read Shakespeare's Macbeth, even though he behaved as though he had. Soon after he got back from his final tour of Afghanistan, he began rubbing his hands over and over and constantly rinsing them under the tap.

"Mom, it won't wash off," he said. "What are you talking about?" she replied. "The blood. It won't come off."

On 20 March last year, the soldier's striving for self-cleanliness came to a sudden end. That night he locked himself in his car and, with his mother and two sisters screaming just a few feet away and with Swat officers encircling the vehicle, he shot himself in the head.

At the age of 23, William Busbee had joined a gruesome statistic. In 2012, for the first time in at least a generation, the number of active-duty soldiers who killed themselves, 177, exceeded the 176 who were killed while in the war zone. To put that another way, more of America's serving soldiers died at their own hands than in pursuit of the enemy.

Across all branches of the US military and the reserves, a similar disturbing trend was recorded. In all, 349 service members took their own lives in 2012, while a lesser number, 295, died in combat.

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