



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

USCIS Naturalizes Largest Number of Service Members Since 1955

WASHINGTON – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) today announced that in fiscal year 2010 it granted citizenship to 11,146 members of the U.S. armed forces at ceremonies in the United States and 22 countries abroad. This figure represents the highest number of service members naturalized in any year since 1955. This number is a 6 percent increase from the 10,505 naturalizations in fiscal year 2009 and a significant increase from the 7,865 naturalizations in fiscal year 2008. Since September 2001, USCIS has naturalized nearly 65,000 service men and women, including those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“As our nation’s immigration agency, USCIS makes every effort to provide members of the military and their families with exceptional access to our services,” said USCIS Director Alejandro Mayorkas. “We are proud to partner with the Department of Defense in these efforts.”

USCIS has implemented outreach tailored to reach members of the military and their family. Military liaison officers at USCIS field offices in the United States and abroad conduct educational seminars on nearby military installations. Military lawyers, personnel officers and spouses are invited to learn about the naturalization process and other family-based immigration services. There is often an increase in applications for naturalization from the military community after these sessions.

The Naturalization at Basic Training Initiative has also contributed to an increase in the number of military personnel becoming naturalized citizens. Under this initiative, USCIS conducts all naturalization processing -- including the capture of biometrics, the naturalization interview, and administration of the Oath of Allegiance -- on the military base so that, in most cases, the recruit is able to be a U.S. citizen when he or she graduates from basic training.

“Many of our service members have risked their lives across the globe before becoming citizens here at home. Their brave acts, and those of more than 65,000 service members who have become citizens since 2001, demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to America,” said Director Mayorkas. “We are enriched by their decision to serve our nation and to join us as United States citizens.

USCIS has established several information services exclusively for members of the military and their families to find information about citizenship and other immigration benefits. They may go online to <http://www.uscis.gov/military>; call the USCIS toll-free help line, 1-877-CIS-4MIL, 1-877-247-4645; or send an e-mail to militaryinfo.nsc@dhs.gov.

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Fact Sheet

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Naturalization Through Military Service

Special provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) authorize U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to expedite the application and naturalization process for current members of the U.S. armed forces and recently discharged members. Generally, qualifying military service includes service with one of the following branches: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, certain components of the National Guard and the Selected Reserve of the Ready Reserve. In addition, spouses of members of the U.S. armed forces who are or will be deployed may be eligible for expedited naturalization. Other provisions of the law also allow certain spouses to complete the naturalization process abroad.

Qualifications

- A member of the U.S. armed forces must meet the requirements and qualifications to become a citizen of the United States. He or she must demonstrate:
 - Good moral character,
 - Knowledge of the English language,
 - Knowledge of U.S. government and history (civics), and
 - Attachment to the United States by taking an Oath of Allegiance to the U.S. Constitution.
- Qualified members of the U.S. armed forces are exempt from other naturalization requirements, including residence and physical presence in the United States. These exceptions are listed in Sections 328 and 329 of the INA.
- All aspects of the naturalization process, including applications, interviews and ceremonies are available overseas to members of the U.S. armed forces and certain “command-sponsored” spouses.
- A person who obtains U.S. citizenship through his or her military service and separates from the military under “other than honorable conditions” before completing five years of honorable service may have his or her citizenship revoked.

Service in Peacetime

Section 328 of the INA applies to all members of the U.S. armed forces and those already discharged from service. An individual may qualify for naturalization if he or she has:

- Served honorably in the U.S. armed forces for at least one year,
- Obtained lawful permanent resident status, and
- Filed an application while still in the service or within six months of separation.

Service During Periods of Hostilities

Under special provisions in Section 329 of the INA, the president signed an executive order on July 3, 2002, authorizing all noncitizens who have served honorably in the U.S. armed forces on or after Sept. 11, 2001, to immediately file for citizenship. This order also covers veterans of certain designated past wars and conflicts. The authorization will remain in effect until a date designated by a future presidential executive order.

Naturalization at Basic Training

USCIS and the Army established the *Naturalization at Basic Training Initiative* in August 2009 to give noncitizen enlistees the opportunity to naturalize when they graduate from basic training. (The Navy joined the initiative in 2010.) Under this initiative, USCIS conducts all naturalization processing including the capture of biometrics, the naturalization interview, and administration of the *Oath of Allegiance* on the military base so that, in most cases, the recruit is able to graduate from basic training as a U.S. citizen.

How to Apply

Every military installation has a designated point-of-contact, generally in the personnel division or the Judge Advocate General's Office, to assist members of the military prepare and file their naturalization application packet. That packet includes:

- *Application for Naturalization*, USCIS Form N-400 (Members of the military are not charged a fee to file Form N-400.)
- *Request for Certification of Military or Naval Service*, USCIS Form N-426 (The military must certify this form before sending it to USCIS. Individuals separated from the military may submit an uncertified Form N-426 with their DD Form 214.)

Once the packet is complete, send it to the specialized military naturalization unit at the USCIS Nebraska Service Center for expedited processing.

Customer Service to Assist the Military

USCIS created several customer service channels exclusively to assist members of the military and their families. They may contact USCIS:

- By visiting the specialized web page -- <http://www.uscis.gov/military>,
- By calling a toll-free telephone help line -- 1-877-CIS-4MIL (1-877-247-4645),
- By sending an e-mail to militaryinfo.nsc@dhs.gov.

USCIS customer service specialists are available to respond to inquires from members of the military and their families on weekdays (Monday through Friday) from 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., Central Standard Time, except federal holidays.

Posthumous Benefits

Section 329A of the INA provides for grants of posthumous citizenship to certain members of the U.S. armed forces. A member of the U.S. armed forces who served honorably during a designated period of hostility and died as a result of injury or disease incurred in or aggravated by that service (including death in combat) may be eligible to receive posthumous citizenship, as long as the next-of-kin applies for posthumous citizenship within two years of the service member's death. Other provisions of the law extend immigration benefits to the service member's surviving spouses, children and parents.

Statistics (through September 2010)

- Since September 2001, USCIS has naturalized 64,643 members of the military, with 8,854 of those service members naturalized during ceremonies in the following 22 countries: Afghanistan, Bahrain, China (Hong Kong), Cuba (Guantanamo), Djibouti, El Salvador, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Honduras,

Iceland, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kuwait, Philippines, South Korea, Spain, Thailand, and the United Kingdom.

- In fiscal year 2010 alone, USCIS naturalized 11,146 noncitizens serving in the military. According to statistics maintained by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics, this figure represents the largest number of military naturalized since 1955.
- Since 2008, USCIS has naturalized 883 military spouses during ceremonies in the following 16 countries: Bulgaria, China (Hong Kong), El Salvador, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Norway, Oman, Panama, Philippines, South Korea, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.
- Since 2009, USCIS has presented 30 military children with citizenship certificates during ceremonies in Germany, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom.
- Since August 2002, USCIS has granted posthumous citizenship to 131 members of the military.