U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

USCIS Holds First Military Naturalization Ceremony on Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan - For the first time since U.S. military forces deployed to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom, 88 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines from 37 countries became citizens of the United States during a special naturalization ceremony on the Kandahar Airfield today. Before now, all naturalization ceremonies in Afghanistan have been held on the U.S. military airfield in Bagram.

Keeping with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) commitment to “bring immigration services to the troops wherever they serve,” a three-member team from the USCIS Bangkok District Office traveled to Kandahar to complete the naturalization process and hold the ceremony close to the battlefields where the American forces serve.

Steve Bucher, Deputy Director of USCIS’s Refugee, Asylum and International Operations Directorate, also traveled to Kandahar to preside during the ceremony. He explained that while the citizenship candidates interacted with the three USCIS officers in Afghanistan, completing the process involved a much larger effort and coordination with USCIS offices in the United States.

That coordination also involved working with the military’s Joint Sustainment Command in Afghanistan to ensure that all the servicemembers scheduled to naturalize could travel to Kandahar to complete the naturalization test and recite the Oath of Allegiance to the United States.

After administering the Oath, Bucher told the new citizens, "It is important for you to keep in mind that citizenship is not the end of your journey. It is the beginning, both for yourselves and for your families."

Since 2004, when the overseas naturalization program began, USCIS has naturalized 583 members of the U.S. military deployed in Afghanistan.

USCIS will continue to bring immigration services to members of America’s armed forces and their families stationed on military installations across the United States and abroad. Since September 2001, USCIS has naturalized more than 63,800 members of the military in ceremonies across the United States and in the following 21 countries: Afghanistan, Djibouti, China (Hong Kong), Cuba (Guantanamo), El Salvador, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kuwait, Oman, Philippines, South Korea, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

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