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Press Release

FORT BENNING HOSTS ALL-MILITARY NATURALIZATION CEREMONY



FORT BENNING, GA. – Nearly 100 active-duty Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines became U.S. citizens this afternoon during an all-military naturalization ceremony held at Fort Benning, Georgia. Born in 36 countries, the majority of the service members naturalized today expect to deploy to Iraq and other overseas posts in the coming weeks or have just returned from overseas rotations.

Joining the service members and their families to celebrate the swearing in were U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Director Eduardo Aguirre and Fort Benning's Commander Brigadier General Benjamin Freakley.

“Thousands of immigrant troops are making extraordinary sacrifices for America, and there is no more fitting way for a grateful nation to demonstrate its appreciation than through expedited citizenship. Today, you join the family that you have pledged to die defending; welcome” said USCIS Director Eduardo Aguirre.

Under an Executive Order signed by President Bush in July 2002, legal permanent residents actively serving in the U.S. military, and legal permanent residents who were on active duty on September 11, 2001 or after, and honorably discharged, are immediately eligible to apply for naturalization. The President is authorized to waive the normal residency requirements for naturalization during specified periods of military hostilities. The July 2002 Executive Order designates the War on Terrorism, including the current conflict in Iraq, is such a period. More than 13,000 military personnel have applied for expedited citizenship since the Executive Order was enacted. In San Diego, 820 service members took the U.S. Oath of Allegiance in 2003.

Today's naturalization ceremony was the kick-off event of USCIS's first anniversary celebration. On March 1, 2003, USCIS became one of three legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service components to join the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. USCIS is charged with fundamentally transforming and improving the delivery of immigration and citizenship services, while enhancing the integrity of our nation's security. During the past year, nearly 8,000 military service members have become U.S. citizens.

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