



CIS NEWS RELEASE

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Tom Ridge and Eduardo Aguirre Visit Recent War Hero at Walter Reed

Administer Oath of Allegiance to Injured Soldier

Washington, DC – Wednesday, September 17, 2003, Tom Ridge, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Anthony J. Principi, the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and Eduardo Aguirre, the Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS), met with several injured soldiers from Operation Iraqi Freedom at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Mr. Aguirre administered the Oath of Allegiance to U.S. Army Specialist Hilario Bermanis before dozens of family, friends, and diplomats from his native home of Micronesia. Secretary Ridge stated, "It's an honor for us all to recognize your service and your citizenship."

Director Aguirre and Secretaries Ridge and Principi visited with several servicemen and their families, thanking them for their exemplary service and dedication to the United States. Specialist Brandon Erickson, Sergeant Michael Kane, and Sergeant Matt Dewitt are a part of the newest group of veterans to arrive home from the war in Iraq.

In the spirit of Citizenship Day, this naturalization ceremony was just one of many that occurred on September 17. The U.S. welcomed approximately 13,000 Americans in 50 naturalization ceremonies nationwide, where foreign-born individuals took the Oath of Allegiance. Spec. Bermanis was conferred with the status of a U.S. citizen, and complimented his military career by gaining the American rights and liberties that he defended abroad. Returning home a triple amputee, Bermanis lost both legs and his left arm during a rocket-propelled grenade attack in Baghdad. Bermanis was recently awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star.

In an Executive Order signed by President Bush in July 2002, legal permanent residents who have been actively serving in the United States military during times of hostilities became immediately eligible to apply for naturalization. Since the enactment of Executive Order 13269 more than 7,500 military personnel serving in the War on Terrorism have requested expedited citizenship.



Specialist Hilario Bermanis is originally from Micronesia, a U.S. protectorate in the Pacific Ocean. Pictured above, Bermanis receives his Certificate of Naturalization from Director Aguirre.

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On March 1, 2003, U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) became one of three legacy INS components to join the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. U.S. CIS is charged with fundamentally transforming and improving the delivery of immigration and citizenship services, while enhancing the integrity of our nation's security.