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News Release

USCIS WELCOMES AMERICA'S NEWEST CITIZENS AT SEA

Ceremony Held Aboard USS Kitty Hawk

WASHINGTON, DC — Twenty-nine active-duty Sailors took the Oath of Allegiance and became America's newest U.S. Citizens during a special ceremony aboard the USS Kitty Hawk on Friday, August 19, 2005. Robert Looney, the Director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Bangkok District and Captain Edward McNamee, Commanding Officer, USS Kitty Hawk, presided during the ceremony, which was the first time since World War II that U.S. service members were naturalized at sea.

"Thousands of immigrants serving in the United States Armed Forces are making extraordinary sacrifices for their adopted nation," said Looney. "These brave men and women have pledged their lives to defend liberties they have yet to secure for themselves. There is no more fitting way for a grateful nation to show its appreciation for their service, than through granting qualified military service members U.S. citizenship as quickly as possible."

Early last week, Joe Olivares and Judy Ung, from the USCIS Offices in Seoul, and Guangzhou, flew to the Kitty Hawk. Once on board, the two USCIS officers began a weeklong process of interviewing citizenship candidates and approving those eligible to naturalize during Friday's citizenship ceremony.

The 29 new citizens are originally from the following countries: Belize, Cambodia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ghana, Haiti, Jamaica, Laos, Mexico, Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan.

Because of changes to the law governing U.S. citizenship, USCIS can now hold naturalizations ceremonies overseas for U.S. military service members. Since October 1, 2004, USCIS has naturalized more than 700 Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines during ceremonies in Afghanistan, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, and the United Kingdom.

Each year, USCIS welcomes more than 450,000 citizens during naturalization ceremonies across the United States. That number includes nearly 10,000 members of the armed forces who have naturalized through an expedited process stemming from their military service.

(more)

For more information regarding immigration services, please call 1-800-375-5283 or visit <http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/index.htm>.

Commissioned at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard on April 29, 1961, the Kitty Hawk is the oldest active ship in the U.S. Navy. It is the second U.S. Navy ship named after the small North Carolina town near which Orville and Wilbur Wright flew the first-ever successful, controlled, powered aircraft on Dec. 17, 1903.

– USCIS –

In 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 our nation's security.