



Office of Communications

U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Fact Sheet

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NATURALIZATION THROUGH MILITARY SERVICE

Service members and certain veterans of the U.S. armed forces are eligible to apply to become a citizen of the United States under special provisions of the *Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)*. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) streamlines the application and naturalization process for current members of the military and those who were recently discharged. Generally, qualifying military service is in 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.

Qualifications

A member of the U.S. armed forces must meet the requirements and qualifications to become a citizen of the United States. This includes demonstrating:

- 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 residency 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 or those already discharged from service. An individual may qualify for naturalization if he or she has:

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

Service in Wartime

All immigrants who have served honorably on active duty in the U.S. armed forces or as a member of the Selected Ready Reserve on or after September 11, 2001 are eligible to file for citizenship under the special wartime provisions in Section 329 of the INA. This section also covers veterans of designated past wars and conflicts.

How to Apply

Every military installation has a designated point-of-contact to assist with filing the military naturalization application packet. This is generally the Judge Advocate General (military lawyer) or the personnel division. Once complete, the package is sent to the USCIS Nebraska Service Center for expedited processing. That package will include:

- Application for Naturalization (USCIS Form N-400) (Members of the military are not charged a fee to file the Form N-400.)
- Request for Certification of Military or Naval Service (USCIS Form N-426)
- Biographic Information (USCIS Form G-325B)

Posthumous Benefits

- Section 329A of the INA provides for grants of posthumous citizenship to certain members of the U.S. armed forces. Other provisions of law extend benefits to surviving spouses, children, and parents. A member of the U.S. armed forces who served honorably during a designated period of hostilities and dies as a result of injury or disease incurred in, or aggravated by, that service (including death in combat) may receive posthumous citizenship.
- The service member's next of kin, the Secretary of Defense, or the Secretary's designee in USCIS must submit the application for posthumous citizenship within two years of the service member's death by filing USCIS Form N-644.
- Posthumous citizenship establishes that the deceased veteran is considered a citizen of the United States as of the date of his or her death. The deceased veteran's Certificate of Citizenship allows certain qualifying family members to apply for naturalization benefits under section 319(d) of the INA if the family member meets naturalization requirements other than residency and physical presence. The family member may also remain classified as an immediate relative for obtaining lawful permanent residence.
- For other immigration purposes, a surviving spouse (unless he or she remarries), child, or parent of a member of the U.S. armed forces who served honorably on active duty and died as a result of combat, and was a citizen at the time of death (including a posthumous grant of citizenship) is considered an immediate relative for two years after the service members dies and may file a petition for classification as an immediate relative during such period. A surviving parent may file a petition even if the deceased service member had not reached age 21.

Statistics

- USCIS has naturalized nearly 41,000 members of the U.S. armed forces since the beginning of the War on Terror. (September 2001)
- In October 2004, USCIS hosted the first overseas military naturalization ceremony since the Korean War. During this time and since, USCIS has naturalized more than 5,650 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines during ceremonies in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kuwait, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom and in the Pacific aboard the USS Kitty Hawk.
- In May 2008, USCIS hosted the first overseas naturalization ceremony for the spouse of a Soldier stationed in Germany.
- USCIS has granted posthumous citizenship to 117 members of the U.S. armed forces stemming from the War on Terror.
- Historically, the U.S. government has conducted overseas military naturalization ceremonies during times of war. During World War II, 20,011 service members were naturalized overseas. During the Korean War, 7,756 service members were naturalized overseas. Although authorized, no overseas military naturalization ceremonies were held during the Vietnam War.