



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

# USCIS MONTHLY

## NOVEMBER 2007

“Special All-Military Edition”



A MESSAGE FROM  
USCIS DIRECTOR  
EMILIO T. GONZÁLEZ



[A Message from USCIS Director Emilio Gonzalez](#)

[Veterans Day 2007](#)

[News You Can Use](#)

[From the Leadership Journal](#)

[Outstanding American by Choice](#)

[Adopted Valor: Immigrant Heroes](#)

[USCIS Military Resources](#)

[How Do I...? Frequently Asked Questions at USCIS](#)

[Faces of America](#)

Today, some 45,000 immigrant troops continue to make extraordinary sacrifices serving in our Armed Forces. Because of USCIS efforts to expedite their citizenship applications, these patriots no longer have to wait until they return stateside to naturalize and become citizens of the Nation they have courageously stepped up to defend.

Over Veterans Day weekend, Secretary Chertoff, Deputy Director Scharfen and I flew to Balad Air Force Base in Iraq to administer the Oath of Allegiance to new U.S. citizens during a special Veterans Day naturalization ceremony. USCIS also hosted two additional naturalization ceremonies for immigrant service members serving in Kuwait and Afghanistan.

These patriots came to this country, like millions of others from all around the world, simply seeking the chance for a better life. They didn't come here to fight, they came here to be free. But through their service, these immigrants not only proved their courage, but also displayed great respect and love for their adopted Nation. By giving back to the country that has given us so much, we strengthen our bonds as Americans and earn our place in a Nation of immigrants.

As an Army veteran, I am proud to note that record numbers of lawful permanent residents continue to join our military, spurred on by a desire to earn their place in their new communities and the prospect of a secure and stable career. And just as quickly as new immigrants sign up for military service, USCIS is there to assist them with processing their paperwork and handling immigration questions for their families.

We just dedicated a toll-free help line, 1-877-CIS-4MIL (1-877-247-4645), where immigrant service members and their families can call to get answers from immigration officers about their cases. In addition to the help line, USCIS has developed a [military web page](#) that contains information and links to services specifically for military members. We're working daily with the Department of Defense to ensure the military community has accurate and up-to-date information about immigration services and benefits.

USCIS employees assigned to our military naturalizations office consider this responsibility a privilege and an honor, and do all that they can to ensure that applications are processed and completed, in as many cases as possible, before these brave men and women are deployed to combat zones overseas. In all of our military naturalization efforts, we work very closely with our Department of Defense counterparts to expedite the transfer of necessary information.

At this agency, we give special thanks to the many veterans who are continuing their service to our Nation by working for USCIS. We know these men and women as our friends, neighbors, relatives and colleagues, and we owe them a debt of gratitude. This edition of USCIS Monthly is dedicated to all men and women who serve or have served in our Armed Forces.

**USCIS: AMERICA'S IMMIGRATION SERVICE**

# VETERANS DAY 2007

## USCIS Hosts Military Naturalization Ceremonies in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait



Secretary Chertoff (Center) poses with new citizens



Army Sergeant Major Stacey Davis, Brigadier General Couch, Secretary Chertoff and Director Gonzalez



Service Members take the Oath in Afghanistan

USCIS welcomed 253 new U.S. citizens during three special Veterans Day naturalization ceremonies on November 11 and 12 in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan. DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff personally delivered the Oath of Allegiance to the new Americans and USCIS Director Emilio Gonzalez presented each of the immigrant service members with their Certificates of Naturalization at an event at Balad Air Base.

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 took the Oath of Allegiance at military installations across the world.

In 2004, USCIS conducted the first overseas military naturalization ceremony since the Korean War, after an Executive Order signed by President Bush allowed non-citizens on active duty to become eligible for expedited citizenship. Since then, USCIS has naturalized more than 4,400 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard personnel in all-military ceremonies overseas.

In fiscal year 2007, more than 1,300 took the Oath of Allegiance during USCIS ceremonies in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kosovo, Kuwait, South Korea, Spain and the United Kingdom. USCIS has naturalized more than 35,125 members of the Armed Forces since September 11, 2001. Posthumous citizenship has been granted to 105 immigrants who lost their lives before they could become citizens.



New citizens ready to cut the cake in Afghanistan

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# NEWS YOU CAN USE...

## FROM USCIS COMMUNICATIONS



[USCIS Naturalizes 253 Service Members in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan to Honor Veterans Past and Present](#) - 11/14/2007

[USCIS Centralizes Filing for H-2A Petitions](#) - 11/09/2007

[Fact Sheet: USCIS Revises Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9](#) - 11/07/2007

[USCIS Revises Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9](#) - 11/07/2007

[USCIS Reopens Comment Period on Proposed Rule for Religious Worker Visa Classifications](#) - 11/01/2007

[USCIS Streamlines Readmissions for Certain H and L Nonimmigrants with Pending Permanent Residence Applications](#) - 11/01/2007

[DHS Terminates Temporary Protected Status \(TPS\) for Nationals of Burundi as of May 2, 2009](#) - 10/29/2007

[Questions and Answers: Termination of Temporary Protected Status \(TPS\) for Nationals of Burundi](#) - 10/29/2007

[Advisory: USCIS and Nellis Air Force Base to Welcome Newest Citizens](#) - 10/26/2007

[USCIS Announces Changes to Vietnam Adoptions](#) - 10/25/2007

[Fact Sheet: Naturalization Through Military Service](#) - 10/24/2007

[USCIS Announces Centralized Filing Location for the H-2A Temporary Agricultural Worker Program](#) - 10/17/2007

[New Rule for Nonimmigrant Victims of Criminal Activity Goes into Effect Tomorrow](#) - 10/16/2007

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## THE DHS LEADERSHIP JOURNAL

The Leadership Journal is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to provide a forum to talk about our work protecting the American people, building an effective emergency preparedness and response capability, enforcing immigration laws, and promoting economic prosperity.

[Secretary Chertoff discusses the State of Immigration](#) – 11/07/07

“I think you’ll remember that this past August, after Congress failed to pass the proposed immigration reform bill, we announced that we were going to use the tools that we have, such as they are, sharpen them up and go about the business of getting control of the border. And to that end, this past August the administration announced a series of reforms to strengthen immigration enforcement and to meet our nation’s workforce needs to the extent the law permits so that we could try to fill the gap left open by Congress’s failure to act to address the challenges comprehensively.”

“Among the 26 items that we put forward in our proposal, one was a commitment to provide periodic “State of Immigration” reports to the American people. Today, about a month after the close of the fiscal year, is the first of what I anticipate will be a number of briefings over the next year.”

[Remarks by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff on the State of Immigration](#) – 11/06/07

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**USCIS: ENHANCING NATIONAL SECURITY**

# OUTSTANDING AMERICANS BY CHOICE

The [Outstanding American by Choice](#) initiative recognizes the achievements of naturalized U.S. citizens. Through civic participation, professional achievement, and responsible citizenship, recipients of this honor have demonstrated their commitment to the country and to the common civic values that unite us as Americans. Selected by USCIS Director González, Outstanding Americans by Choice are naturalized citizens who have made significant contributions to their communities and adopted country.

## CAPTAIN RASUL ALSALIH

Born in 1956 in Samawah, Captain Rasul Alsalih is a native of Southern Iraq. He was 35 years old when the United States and coalition partners ejected Saddam Hussein's army from Kuwait in 1991. Taking advantage of a defeated Iraqi army, the Shi'ites of Samawah and other cities took up arms and attempted a rebellion against Saddam throughout southern Iraq. The response from the Iraqi Army was brutal and swift, and massive numbers of Shi'ite civilians were killed in heavy artillery and helicopter attacks. Alsalih and his family fled to the southern border and were taken to a refugee camp in Saudi Arabia, where they were provided food, water and medical treatment by American soldiers.

The Alsalih family lived in the camp from March 1991 until September 1992. During this time, Alsalih volunteered as a translator for U.S. soldiers attending to the camp. He noted their kindness to the children and elderly. "I had a lot of admiration and respect for the military because my experience in the refugee camp gave me a good impression of them -- they took good care of us in the camp," Captain Alsalih said. "I formed my opinion about the military and I wished to become one of them because they did a good job for us. I still remember the names and the faces of the soldiers who helped us in the refugee camp."

The Alsalih family was granted entry into the United States on September 24, 1992. Alsalih and his wife became naturalized citizens of the United States in 1997. Rasul earned a master's degree in Systems Engineering in 2000. After completing school, he decided to serve his adopted country and was commissioned in the Air Force as a First Lieutenant. Alsalih served at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, CA, where he developed a field manual "Iraqi Language Kit" used by troops deploying to the region as the pocket-guide to surviving and speaking basic Iraqi.

His current deployment to Iraq is his second assignment to his former home, and his third supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom. In 2004, Captain Alsalih returned to Iraq to serve as the liaison officer for the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Iraqi Government, working closely with Ambassadors Bremer, Browning and Jeffrey. Getting back to his engineering expertise, today Captain Alsalih supports the U.S. Army's 20th Engineer Brigade where he oversees construction projects not far from his hometown and is a liaison between the unit and the Iraqi contractors. "I feel I have a lot of specialties and they are taking advantage of that. I speak the language here and have an expert knowledge of this country and culture. For me, it's an honor to come back here and serve and be a part of the history that is happening here," Alsalih said.

Captain Alsalih proudly serves each day for his new country to provide hope and promise for the people of Iraq. He says, "I always feel that I am indebted to America; my wife's life, my daughter's life, my own life, were saved from a certain death. I will do my best to pay back as much as I can by serving. I am certain that I will not be able to pay back all the debt but I will keep on trying."



Captain Alsalih receives his Outstanding American by Choice Certificate



Captain Alsalih oversees a construction project in Iraq

# ADOPTED VALOR: IMMIGRANT HEROES

## CORPORAL OGNIAN “OGI” IVANOV

As his wife Cheryl looked on, U.S. Army Corporal Ognian “Ogi” Ivanov raised his new prosthetic right hand to take the oath of citizenship on November 6, 2007 in the USCIS San Antonio District office.

A native of Bulgaria, Ogi came to America where he met and married Cheryl. In 2000, they moved to Oregon after spending several years in Las Vegas. He got a job as a technician at a Casino, while she worked as a phlebotomist at a Hospital. With prior experience serving in the Bulgarian Army, Ogi joined his wife and enlisted with the Oregon National Guard

“Ogi felt that if the United States opens its arms and accepts someone as a citizen with all of the rights, freedoms and benefits of a natural born American, then you lay your life down to help protect those said rights, freedoms and benefits,” Cheryl wrote.

In June 2006, Ogi and Cheryl left for Afghanistan. They were stationed in a small forward operating base, Camp Lightning, near the city of Gardez in the southern part of the country.

While Ogi trained Afghani Army recruits, Cheryl provided medical assistance and humanitarian support in rural areas of the country. One of only two women in her unit, Cheryl's provided care to those in need and were able to administer basic health care to the women of the area.

As a veteran of the Bulgarian army, Ogi had received training in the use of Soviet-era weapons. Some segments of the Afghan army rely on such equipment and Ogi's expertise proved valuable. February 6, Ogi was providing instruction in the proper handling of Soviet mortar rounds. An Afghan soldier mistakenly activated one and then froze in terror. Ogi grabbed the live round to throw it away when it detonated and took his right arm. His actions saved the lives of the men he was training.

After immediate medical treatment in Afghanistan, Ogi was in serious condition when he was brought to the Brooke Army Medical Center and the Center for the Intrepid in San Antonio for treatment. "The doctors can't believe he survived it," Cheryl said. Ognian's armor protected his upper body and head from shrapnel, but his extremities bore the brunt of the blast.

Cheryl, a medic who was able to accompany her husband to San Antonio for his rehabilitation, made an InfoPass appointment to notify USCIS of her husband's case. While in San Antonio recovering from his injuries, Ogi was able to take the Naturalization Exam. The Ivanovs recently bought property near Poteet, Texas, and plan to stay there with their four children. He will finish his electrical engineering degree, and she plans to start nursing school.



Corporal Ognian Ivanov takes the Oath of Allegiance to become a U.S. Citizen



Husband and Wife in Afghanistan



USCIS San Antonio District Director Mario Ortiz, Cheryl and Ognian Ivanov

**MORE THAN 45,000 IMMIGRANT SERVICE MEMBERS ARE CURRENTLY DEPLOYED ACROSS THE WORLD.**

**USCIS: IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE**

# USCIS: SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE OUR NATION

## INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY AND THEIR FAMILIES

This section of USCIS Monthly contains immigration-related information and links to resources geared specifically for members of the military and their families.

USCIS is working with the Department of Defense to ensure the military community has accurate and up-to-date information about immigration services and benefits.

### USCIS MILITARY HELP LINE

USCIS has established a toll-free military help line, 1-877-CIS-4MIL (1-877-247-4645), exclusively for members of the military and their families. USCIS customer service specialists are available to answer calls Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. (CST), excluding federal holidays. After-hours callers will receive an email address that they can use to contact USCIS for assistance.

Callers will receive assistance with immigration-related information, such as:

- Tracking their application for naturalization (Form N-400);
- Notifying USCIS of a new mailing address or duty station;
- Checking the status of an application or petition;
- Bringing a spouse, fiancé(e) or adopted child to the United States;
- Obtaining posthumous citizenship for a deceased member of the Armed Services;
- Submitting an application for expedited processing.

Service members and their families stationed in the United States or overseas may access the help line using the toll-free number, through their base telephone operator or using the Defense Switched Network (DSN). Operators will ask members of the general public to call our main customer service line: 1-800-375-5283.



USCIS Director Emilio Gonzalez with Outstanding Americans by Choice

“Under the direction of President Bush, USCIS is taking steps to ensure that the application process for immigrant service members is convenient, quick and secure. In order to expedite processing, we established a specialized unit at our Nebraska Service Center where all up-front processing on military naturalization takes place.

“The most recent improvement, in collaboration with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Defense, instituted a change in our fingerprint process to better serve U.S. military personnel applying for naturalization. Under this improved process, military members applying for naturalization may sign a Privacy Act Statement and Release Authorization Form, explicitly consenting to the use of the fingerprints provided at time of enlistment for immigration benefits purposes, rather than having to appear at one of our Application Support Centers post-deployment to provide a new set of fingerprints. Furthermore, if we are aware of an impending deployment, we expedite FBI name checks for soldiers.

“This new procedure applies to all non-citizen members of the U.S. Armed Forces seeking naturalization and eliminates a significant obstacle that previously delayed some military naturalization cases.”

[Remarks by Director Gonzalez to Congress on the Contribution of Immigrants to the Armed Forces](#) – 7/10/2006

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
[WWW.USCIS.GOV/MILITARY](http://WWW.USCIS.GOV/MILITARY)**



# “HOW DO I...APPLY FOR CITIZENSHIP, AS A SERVICE MEMBER?”

## ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Members and certain veterans of the U.S. armed forces are eligible to apply for United States citizenship under special provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). In addition, USCIS has streamlined the application and naturalization process for military personnel serving on active-duty or recently discharged. Generally, qualifying service is in one of the following branches: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, certain reserve components of the National Guard and the Selected Reserve of the Ready Reserve.

### Qualifications

A member of the U.S. Armed Forces must meet certain 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.

An individual 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 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 immediate citizenship under the special wartime provisions in Section 329 of the INA. This section also covers veterans of designated past wars and conflicts.

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

### 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 make this request for posthumous citizenship within two years of the service member's death.
- Under section 319(d) of the INA, a spouse, child, or parent of a U.S. citizen who dies while serving honorably in active-duty status in the U.S. Armed Forces, can file for naturalization if the family member meets naturalization requirements other than residency and physical presence.
- 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 death 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.

### How to Apply

All aspects of the naturalization process, including applications, interviews and ceremonies are available overseas to members of the U.S. Armed Forces. Members of the U.S. Armed Forces are not charged a fee to file USCIS Form N-400, Application for Naturalization. Every military installation has a designated point-of-contact to assist with filing the military naturalization application packet.

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)
- Request for Certification of Military or Naval Service (USCIS Form N-426)
- Biographic Information (USCIS Form G-325B)



# FACES OF AMERICA

## COAST GUARD PETTY OFFICER 1ST CLASS PRESCILLA HARRIS – PHILIPPINES

For one woman in a historical Boston building crowded with 381 other people and their family members, repeating the oath of allegiance Sept. 27, 2007, flooded her mind with memories of reciting the oath of enlistment 17 years prior.

Prescilla Harris, a first class petty officer in the U.S. Coast Guard, stood proudly in Faneuil Hall as she raised her right hand and swore for the second time in her life to support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States.

Harris moved to America from the Philippines in 1987 when she was just 18 years old. "Here you get everything you want," Harris said. "We were poor in the Philippines, so when I got the opportunity to come here, I took it."

She had been living in Savannah, Ga., for a few years when she said she felt pressure from her friends who were joining the Army to do the same. But when she went to see an Army recruiter, she learned that she may have to wait up to eight months before leaving for boot camp.

Anxious and determined to serve a country she wasn't even a citizen of, Harris eventually ended up in a Coast Guard recruiting office. Since she was already living in America and she had never lived in a country that was considered hostile to the interests of the United States, she was eligible to join the military. Only two weeks later, after a whirlwind of activity, she was shipped off to boot camp in Cape May, N.J.

Harris applied for citizenship on Feb. 23, 2007, when she learned that President Bush, had waived the application fee for members of the U.S. military. When Harris told her story to an immigration information officer at the USCIS field office in Boston, the woman told Harris she shouldn't have to wait any longer, and she hand delivered her application to expedite the process.

Only one month later, on March 23, Harris was given instructions to appear at Faneuil Hall at 12 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 27, 2007, for a naturalization ceremony. "It's a huge relief that the whole process is finally over," Harris said. She also said the fact that she wasn't a U.S. citizen had always been in the back of her mind. But it's not anymore, and now, for the first time in her career, her opinion will count during presidential elections.

"I'm really excited about voting in the next elections," Harris said. She added that voting is a right and responsibility she takes very seriously and that she and her husband, who have different political views, often debate political issues.

"I always teased her and said that no matter how strong her opinions were, they ultimately didn't matter since she couldn't vote," joked her husband, Chief Warrant Officer Colin Harris. "I can't tell her that her opinion doesn't count anymore, because now she'll be able to vote." Joking aside, Harris plans to serve at least 20 years in the Coast Guard.

"I love being in the Coast Guard," she said. Harris added that she is happy to finally be one of the approximately 7,000 service members naturalized each year. On Thursday afternoon, standing in her military uniform decorated with ribbons highlighting her achievements and with her right hand raised, she couldn't stop the huge grin from spreading across her face as she repeated the phrase "I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law," something she's proudly done for the past 17 years.

(Story and photo courtesy of PA2 Lauren L. Downs, USCG)