



News Release

Nov. 12, 2009

137 Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Become U.S. Citizens in Afghanistan

USCIS Officer Reunites with Former Refugee during Ceremony to Honor Veterans

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officers traveled here to naturalize 137 Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines during a special Veterans week commemoration ceremony on Nov. 12.

Leading the team was USCIS Bangkok District Director Robert Looney, who recognized his own name on a document in a Soldier's immigration records (A-file). It was a pleasant surprise to reunite with Spec. Veba Vaene, who came to the United States when she was two years old after Looney interviewed her family in a refugee camp in Thailand in 1987.

Among the applicants were five Soldiers, who choose to make the United States their home, arriving on special immigrant visas after working for the U.S. government as civilian Afghan translators and interpreters. All five joined the U.S. Army and returned to Afghanistan as translators

During the naturalization ceremony, Looney commented that the service members reflect the same values of our nation's founding fathers, choosing to volunteer as patriots before becoming citizens of their adopted country.

Guest speakers were Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and Army Maj. Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, commander of Combined Joint Task Force-82 in Afghanistan

In October 2004, USCIS hosted the first naturalization ceremony overseas since the Korean War. During this time and since, USCIS has naturalized more than 7,740 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines during ceremonies in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Iceland, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kuwait, Philippines, South Korea, Spain, United Kingdom, and aboard Navy flagships in the Pacific Ocean.