



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

USCIS Naturalizes 53 Soldiers During Presidents Day Ceremony in Iraq

Feb. 23, 2011

CAMP VICTORY, Iraq – Presidents Day, which marks the birth of George Washington and honors all who have served as president of the United States, had added significance this year for 53 U.S. soldiers serving in Iraq. It was the day they became U.S. citizens.



Robert Daum, director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Field Office in Rome, led a special naturalization ceremony in Al Faw Palace in Baghdad on Feb. 21, administering the [Oath of Allegiance](#) to the new citizens.

“For over 200 years, our presidents’ words and deeds have inspired Americans to uphold the ideals of freedom and equality enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution,” Daum said. “Your presence here in Iraq is an inspiration and testimony to our nation’s history, and your contributions will help shape our country for future generations.”

U.S. Army Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, commander of United States forces in Iraq, congratulated the new citizens. “There is not a more deserving group of people than the men and women here,” he said. “Now they will become citizens of the country they have sworn to defend.”

Among the new citizens is a group of soldiers born in American Samoa. They include Sgt. Maj. Rimoni So’onata’a Mapu, now on his second Iraq deployment. Mapu comes from a military family and serves with the U.S. Army’s Hawaii-based 25th Infantry Division.

Another new citizen is Army Spc. Khoa Pham. He and his family came to the United States as refugees from Vietnam and settled in Charlotte, N.C. He enlisted as a medical specialist in honor of his father, whose own medical training was interrupted by service in the South Vietnamese army. Pham hopes that his citizenship will lead to his commissioning as an officer in the U.S. Army Medical Corps.

USCIS conducted the first naturalization ceremony in Iraq in October 2004, when the law was changed to allow members of the military to receive their citizenship while serving overseas. Since then, 3,426 members of the U.S. armed forces have become citizens of the United States while deployed in Iraq.

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