

Two American Soldiers Become U.S. Citizens at First USCIS Naturalization Ceremony Ever Held in Latin America

The U.S. Embassy here today hosted U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) first naturalization ceremony ever held in Latin America.

“I can think of no greater privilege than to be the first to welcome as the newest citizens of the United States two American soldiers, who currently serve our nation in Honduras and who have each already completed two tours of duty in Iraq,” said Michael Aytes, USCIS' acting deputy director.

Army Staff Sgt. Damien Milne, a native of the Marshall Islands, submitted his application for U.S. citizenship less than a month ago. On June 8, USCIS Honduras Field Office Director Emigdio Martinez traveled to Soto Cano Air Base and administered the naturalization test to Milne, which he aced. The new U.S. citizen now calls Killeen, Texas home.

Army Sgt. Carmen Villa, born in Mexico, who also had a perfect score on her test, opted to wait to become a citizen until today's ceremony so she could recite the *Oath of Allegiance* at the U.S. Embassy in front of fellow soldiers from Soto Cano Air Base, where she and Milne serve with a U.S. Army aviation regiment. Villa calls Columbia, S.C. home.

Honduras is the 15th nation since 2004 where USCIS has conducted naturalization ceremonies outside the United States. The *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004* authorized USCIS to conduct naturalization interviews and oath ceremonies to members of the U.S. armed forces serving abroad. Before Oct. 1, 2004, military service members could only naturalize in the United States.

Joining Aytes, who administered the *Oath* to the two soldiers, were U.S. Ambassador to Honduras Hugo Llorens and Army Col. Richard Juergens, commander of Task Force Bravo at Soto Cano Air Base.

USCIS' immigration officers and staff work in U.S. Embassy's around the world providing customer service to all who seek immigration services and benefits. Martinez made a special effort to reach out to the military stationed at Soto Cano to assist them in their quest for U.S. citizenship.

Since September 2001, USCIS officials have naturalized more than 49,000 members of the U.S. armed forces. For more information about USCIS' special services for the military and their families, please visit <http://www.uscis.gov/military>.