



Victory Times

Telling the United States Forces - Iraq story

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Deployed Servicemembers become U. S. citizens at Camp Victory

Story by Senior Airman Luis Loza Gutierrez
United States Forces-Iraq Public Affairs

More than 100 servicemen and women walked into the headquarters of the United States Forces-Iraq Monday morning and gazed upon the large American flag that hangs down the three floors of the marble covered rotunda of Al Faw Palace. Their hands and feet were still. Their backs were straight as rods and their chins were raised a little higher than the day before; for today was indeed a day to raise their heads with a greater sense of pride.

One hundred-six deployed Soldiers and one Airman became U.S. citizens by taking part in a naturalization ceremony that gave them the right to officially say that the flag that hung before them is the flag of their country.

Lt. Gen. Charles Jacoby Jr., deputy commanding general for operations United States Forces-Iraq, played the role of host for the ceremony and delivered an enthusiastic and supportive message on today's event.

"I'm truly honored to be part of the 16th naturalization ceremony held in Iraq as we add 107 Servicemembers from 44 countries to the melting pot of America, and in so doing we will have welcomed 1,428 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines into citizenship in the United States of America," Gen. Jacoby said.

"Through their military service they have all made significant contributions to our nation's strength long before they were granted citizenship. They have embraced the call to serve our country while still looking forward to the day when they could claim America as their very own."

U.S. Ambassador Robert Ford, deputy chief of mission U.S. Embassy, Baghdad, also attended the event along with hundreds

of other people who provided plenty of congratulatory handshakes and hugs for their new fellow American citizens.

Robert Daum, field office director U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in Rome presided over the ceremony and certified that each of the Servicemembers had fulfilled all the requirements for the naturalization process, a process in which a participant is referred to as a candidate once USCIS declares him or her eligible for citizenship.

Becoming a citizenship candidate alone can be a challenge.

According Maj. Robert Baker, USF-I human resources officer in charge of plans and policies, most traditional citizenship applicants must possess a green card for five years before becoming candidates. However, if a person joins the U.S. armed forces, that time may be reduced to one year. In addition, a deployed military member may be declared eligible for citizenship after serving one day in country, if serving in combat.

Once eligible, the process takes about 90 days to complete. During this time, the candidate will be required to pass two important exams. One exam is used to evaluate a candidate's basic reading, writing and speaking proficiency of the English language. The other exam tests the candidate on basic knowledge of U.S. history and government. This is commonly known as a "civics" test.

If a candidate passes the two exams, he or she will then be interviewed by a USCIS agent. The oath of allegiance to the United States may then be administered during a naturalization ceremony usually held at a later date, but for 107 deployed Servicemembers that date was Feb 13. (*Sgt. Lindsey Bradford contributed to this story.*)

(Cover photo by Sgt. 1st Class Roger Dey) Spc. Erwin Villacis, a Soldier with United States Forces-Iraq, gazes at the large American flag hanging in Al Faw Palace as an Army band plays Woody Guthrie's, "This Land is Your Land" during the U.S. naturalization ceremony Feb. 13.



Photo by Spc. Britney Bodner

One hundred-seven deployed service men and women raise their right hand to take the oath of allegiance to the United States during the U.S. naturalization ceremony.



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Vendor fair brings contractors, Iraqi companies together

Story and Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Roger Dey
United States Forces-Iraq Public Affairs

The small, wooden model of a gazebo housed a pair of plastic action figures. Flanked by painted wooden replicas of T-walls and Jersey barriers on one side, a miniature office desk and bunk bed on the other, it dominated a display of products provided by the Barakat al-Taqqadum company, an Iraqi construction and supply firm that took part in Victory Regional Contracting Center's Vendor Fair, Feb. 13.

The toy soldiers hanging out in a scaled down smoke shack stood out among the exhibits by 156 local Iraqi vendors who came to Camp Liberty Field House hoping to do business with United States Forces-Iraq. Vendors, among them 27 female business owners, had goods and services ranging from gravel samples to leather holsters and multimedia presentations on display for the swarm of contracting officers looking to help supply their Soldiers and Airmen.

According to Maj. Humberto Jones, the chief contracting officer with the VRCC, a major goal of the fair was to allow Iraqi businesses a face-to-face chance to prove to United States military contracting officers that they can provide goods and services at a level of quality on par with companies from the U.S. or around the world.

"You're used to getting certain quality of goods back in the States. When you come to Iraq, sometimes you don't get that same quality," Jones said. "What we've done is gone out there and chased after some of the local vendors that can produce that same type of quality."

Convincing American Servicemembers that Iraqis can produce quality goods and services is only part of the equation. Increasing contracts with Iraqi companies is a long-standing mandate for contracting centers that was recently reinforced in a memo from Gen. Ray Odierno, the commanding general of USF-I. In a Jan. 31 memo, he stated that "employment of Iraqis

not only saves money, but it also strengthens the Iraqi economy and helps eliminate the root causes of the insurgency - poverty and lack of economic opportunity."

Mohammed Al Shara, a U.S. citizen from Detroit who was born and educated in Iraq, now works as a business development consultant with the VRCC. He noted that the focus on awarding contracts to the Iraqi vendors injects money into the Iraqi market because the vendors will hire Iraqi labor and build the value of the Iraqi dinar.



Staff Sgt. Angel Morales, a supply sergeant with the incoming III Corps, goes over some of the products and services offered by the Dar Al Hana Company with Sgt. 1st Class Glenville Angel, a supply sergeant with I Corps, at the Victory Region Contracting Center's Vendor Fair.

Al Shara added that such companies provide an additional asset to the new Iraq business community, bringing with them experience in dealing with companies from foreign countries.

Maythem Al-Asdi is an example of the success a contractor can have. He has been doing business for five years as a construction contractor with the U.S. military and the United States Agency for International Development. He said he has learned management processes for his company through training provided by the VRCC.

The opportunity to talk directly to potential clients at the Vendor Fair was appreciated by Al Asdi. "Interaction teaches you so many things," he said. "Before this, vendors didn't have many events where they could interact with Americans."

Al Asdi sees events like this as a way to improve the future of his country. "My hope is if we can duplicate the American dream, we can have the Iraqi dream."

El Salvador refugee becomes United States citizen

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Dan Yarnall
United States Forces-Iraq Public Affairs

In 1991 a civil war forced a little boy accustomed to an upper-class lifestyle in El Salvador to flee the country with his family to seek refuge elsewhere. Now a grown man, that child stands in Camp Victory’s Al Faw palace among 106 fellow Servicemembers who are all about to fulfill their dream of receiving U.S. citizenship.

That boy’s name is Spc. Hector Fernando Tobar-Castaneda, a combat medic with the 82nd Airborne Division. Born 1985 in El Salvador, Tobar remembers what it was like growing up there and having to leave at the age of 6.

“There was a lot of fighting going on, it wasn’t safe. In our neighborhood there were a lot of people coming up missing, people getting killed, and my dad’s car actually got blown up,” said Tobar.

Life for the family was safer in the U.S. However, things were not exactly easier, according to Tobar. “In El Salvador we actually had it made. My dad had a good job; he was an agricultural engineer for 5 or 6 farms. We lived in a nice home and it was a good living. We went from the upper class to pretty much poverty level in the United States,” he said.

With their new life in the U.S. the

family started out sharing a one bedroom apartment with Tobar’s grandfather in Los Angeles. Tobar’s parents continued to strive toward a more comfortable life like the family was accustomed to in El Salvador. The family moved around a lot, and ended up settling in Nevada in search of that better life.

“Every time we moved, our situation got a little better until we finally moved to Mesquite, Nev. There we bought our first home in the U.S.”

Tobar stayed there with his family for the next nine years. His father had to work two full-time jobs in order to provide for the family. However, it was his father’s work ethic that taught him the value of hard work.

Tobar eventually moved out on his own and left Mesquite to go to college and study electrical engineering at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. After completing 22 and a half credit hours he realized he couldn’t afford to stay in school without aid.



Spc. Hector Fernando Tobar-Castaneda sits among 106 fellow Servicemembers becoming U.S. citizens during a naturalization ceremony.

“I wasn’t able to get any scholarships or grants because I wasn’t a citizen. It was a big obstacle. I had to find another way and I didn’t want to get any loans so I joined the military.”

It was 2007 when Tobar enlisted in the U.S. Army. Now this war-torn and poverty-stricken kid from El Salvador is on his second deployment as an Airborne Medic with the 82nd Airborne Division. But more than anything, Tobar now can now call himself a U.S. citizen.

With his new found citizenship Tobar’s goal is to finish his service and go back to school.

“I have about nine months before my ETS, I will be going back to study physical therapy,” he said .

Tobar is truly grateful to have earned the right to call himself a United States citizen.

“It’s great that I don’t have to wait any longer to call myself what I already am, an American,” he said.

Dream of citizenship finally achieved after long wait

Story by Spc. Britney Bodner
United States Forces-Iraq Public Affairs

Spc. Ronald St. Louis, a-22-year old Soldier from Mount Vernon, N.Y., serving with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 7th Engineer Battalion, became a citizen Feb. 15 at Al Faw Palace, Camp Victory, Baghdad.

St. Louis was born in the Port of Spain, Trinidad, where he lived until he was nine. His mother, Erlise, then moved him and his two brothers, Ricardo and Richardson, to Westchester County, N.Y., where he attended school and realized the advantages of having United States citizenship.

St. Louis said that he had been trying to become a citizen for 10 years and that he joined the military because it was difficult for him to find a civilian job.

“Not having citizenship didn’t really allow me to do certain jobs I was actually interested in,” St. Louis said, “The jobs I wanted usually needed some sort of clearance but because I didn’t have citizenship I wasn’t eligible for the employment.”

“I joined the military three years ago and have been in country for eight months,” he said. “To gain my citizenship this fast, after years of applying, is surprising.”

“It feels great to know that I’ve done something that I’ve been trying to accomplish since I’ve stepped foot on this land,” St. Louis said.

St. Louis said that receiving his certificate of naturalization, United States flag, and the United States Forces-Iraq

coin from Deputy Commanding for Operations USF-I General Lt. Gen. Charles H. Jacoby Jr. has been the best thing that has ever happened during his military career, he said.

St. Louis said he spoke every word of the oath of allegiance to the United States at the top of his lungs because now

he was truly an American citizen.

St. Louis mentioned he is the only member of his family to gain citizenship. He said he plans to marry his fiancé when he goes home on leave.

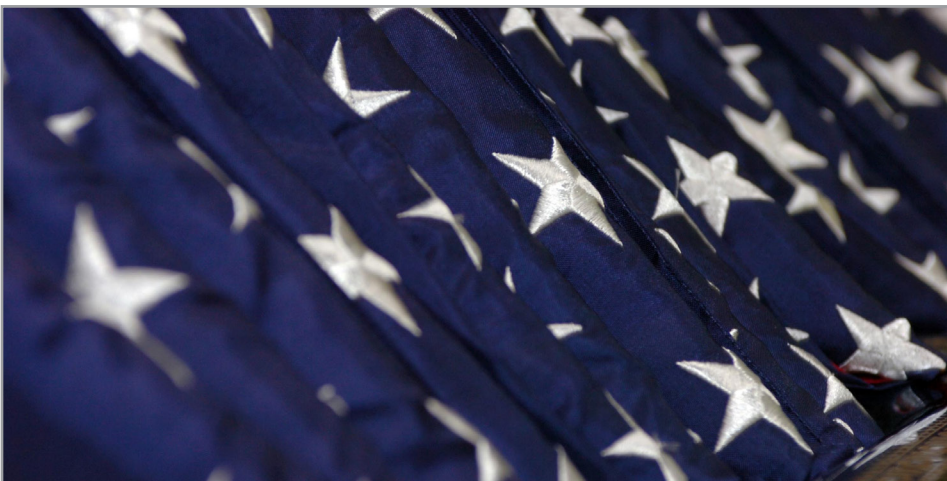
“It is a privilege to become an American citizen,” St. Louis said, “For anyone looking to gain their citizenship, just stay on the path and do the right thing, because in the end it is worth the wait.”

“IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO
BECOME AN AMERICAN”



Photo by Spc. Britney Bodner

St. Louis (fourth from the bottom) holds his flag and certificate of naturalization after becoming a United States citizen during a ceremony attended by 107 Servicemembers.



U.S. flags are lined up and ready to be handed out to Servicemembers that received their U.S. citizenship.



Photo by Senior Airman Luis Loza Gutierrez

(At left) Army Lt. Gen. Charles Jacoby Jr., deputy commanding general for operations United States Forces-Iraq, congratulates Louis upon becoming a U.S. citizen during a naturalization ceremony.

Black history month observance illustrates pride

Story and Photos by Staff Sgt. Dan Yarnall
United States Forces-Iraq Public Affairs

A brass quintet performed jazz music from the 1930's and 40's that echoed through Baghdad's Al Faw Palace as U.S. Soldiers filed into the palace rotunda for a night of history, education, and entertainment.

The I Corps Equal Opportunity Program held an African-American/Black History Month Observance Feb. 5. The evening was complete with demonstrations of ceremonial tribal dances from members of the Ugandan Special Operations Command, a performance by the Victory Gospel Experience choir, and a speech by former West Point professor Col. Barrye Price, who holds a doctorate in history.

Sgt. 1st Class Kimberly Stokes with the U.S. Forces-Iraq Equal Opportunity Office was responsible for the majority of the thought and attention to detail needed to set up this event. After a deployment with Task Force Lion's 35th Signal Brigade, she volunteered to come back to Iraq to work for the EO office.

According to Stokes, the planning for this observance started in October, but the four months of coordinating was well worth it.

"The goal I had set for myself in my planning and coordinating was to entertain the people, draw them in, and give them some education," Stokes said. "I believe that our strength is in our diversity, so it's important that as a military service we highlight a lot of that diversity, and that's what we did tonight."

One member of the audience saw this event as an opportunity to enlighten some of his junior Soldiers.

"My goal in coming out and bringing my Soldiers was to give them a sense of history and a sense of pride in everybody, no matter their race. I think anybody can come out and get

something educational and beneficial to them," said Warrant Officer Shannon Titus, with the 28th Combat Support Hospital.

The main event of the evening was a presentation given by guest speaker Col Barrye Price, USF-I director of personnel.



U.S. troops gather in the rotunda of Al Faw Palace, Baghdad for an observance in honor of Black History Month.



A dance group comprised of members from the Ugandan Special Operations Command Group puts on a performance as part of the Black History Month Observation Feb. 5.

"It's kind of a trek," Price said of his speech. "I wanted to come up with a presentation that was not just a spoken voice but something people could see, could hear and could go on a journey with me... I wanted it to be entertaining, academic, and educational."

Price kept the audience engaged by showing photographs and speaking about black people who are often left out of the history text books. In doing so, Price touched on such issues as why we need to celebrate Black History Month observances like this.

Reflecting on what it is like to be asked to be the guest speaker, Price said he found it humbling. However, he also said he felt certain obligations; not only share his knowledge with others, but to deliver a well put together presentation.

"I recall going to these programs and seeing speakers that were not prepared. I thought to myself, when it's my turn I would be prepared. I see it as an honor and as part of my responsibilities to educate."

Community



Servicemembers participate in SAPR walk

As part of the first theater-wide Sexual Assault Awareness Day, Servicemembers and civilians participate in a Sexual Assault Prevention and Response walk Feb. 12 on Camp Victory. The walk started in the evening and had four stations that taught participants what sexual assault was, how to prevent it and how to help victims. (photos by Spc. Britney Bodner)

AIKIDO CLASS

MON, FRI: 0700-0800

TUES, THURS: 2300-0045

(16 FEB TO 30 FEB, TUES & THURS CLASSES WILL START AT 2345)

MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM LOCATED ON THE BACK SIDE OF HOPE CHAPEL

GREAT FOR FLEXIBILITY AND GREAT FOR SELF DEFENSE; IMPROVES RELAXATION, BALANCE CONTROL, JOINT MANIPULATION, PRESSURE POINTS TO CONTROL AND IMMOBILIZE MULTIPLE ATTACKERS SIMULTANEOUSLY

Operating Hours

Coalition Cafe DFAC

Breakfast 5:30 - 8:30 a.m.
Lunch 11:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Dinner 5 - 9 p.m.
Midnight Dining 11 p.m. - 1 a.m.

Sports Oasis DFAC

Breakfast 5:30 - 8:30 a.m.
Lunch 11:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Dinner 5 - 9 p.m.

Education Center

8 a.m.-8 p.m.

Camp Liberty Post Exchange

8 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Fitness Center

Open 24 Hours

Victory Main Post Office

Monday-Sunday 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.
Saturday 8 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sunday 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

MNF/C-I Unit Mail Room

Customer Services/Mail Call:
3-6 p.m.

Al Faw Palace Post Office

Wednesday and Sunday
12:30-5:30 p.m.

Golby TMC Sick Call

Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
Saturday & Sunday 9 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Dental Sick Call

Monday - Friday 7:30 - 10:30 a.m.
Saturday 9 - 10:30 a.m.

Mental Health Clinic

Monday - Friday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Saturday 9 a.m. - noon

Pharmacy

Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m. - noon;
1 - 4:30 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday 9 a.m. - noon

NOTICE

Container management and IBS-CMM system training is available every Monday at 1430 on Camp Victory, Building 18 conference room.

Contact SSG Castaneda at Francisco.castaneda@iraq.centcom.mil or DSN 318 485-2867 to schedule training for a representative from your unit.



It is committed in many situations — on a date, by a friend or an acquaintance, or when you think you are alone. Educate yourself on “date rape” drugs. They can be slipped into a drink when a victim is not looking or put in a drink given to you. Never leave your drink unattended — no matter where you are. Try to always be aware of your surroundings. Date rape drugs make a person unable to resist assault and can cause memory loss so the victim doesn’t know what happened. Call the USF-I Deployed Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (DSARC) at 485-5085 or 435-2235 for help. Army members should seek assistance with their Unit Victim Advocate (UVA) or DSARC; you may also call 485-5085 or 435-2235 for assistance.

Establishment of Iraqi NCOES shares challenges, successes

Story by Spc. Sgt. Lyn Bradford
United States Forces-Iraq Public Affairs

Editor's note: This is the first of a two-part series.

Although it seems unrealistic for an Army to be comprised of Soldiers who were unable to read, it was one problem facing the Iraq Ground Forces Command and the Iraq Training and Advisory Mission-Army as they attempted to develop and implement a structured noncommissioned officer education system for Iraq's soldiers.

In October of 2007, Carlos Legoas was asked by the coalition and Iraqi Army to come up with a strategy to develop the Iraqi NCO corps. Legoas, a retired U.S. Army command sergeant major, said he was selected for the position because of his wealth of experience shaping the NCO corps throughout the world, to include holding the position of U.S. Southern Command senior enlisted advisor.

Once in Iraq, Legoas quickly realized the challenges ahead of him and the ITAM-Army team. In a little more than

two years, the IGFC and ITAM-Army, with support from other directorates, turned those challenges into successes.

Not only did reports from the field indicate that a large number of the NCOs were illiterate, but they were being used to accomplish menial tasks such as gardening and caring for the upkeep of headquarters buildings, Legoas said. In addition, there was a shortage of 32,000 NCOs in the IA.

"Officers did not empower their NCOs. NCOs were perceived by soldiers as 'spies' for officers," Legoas said.

Roughly one year ago, in an effort to combat the high illiteracy rate, recruits were administered and required to pass a literacy test before joining the IA, said Master Sgt. Ramon Valadez, ITAM-Army Iraqi NCOES advisor.

While a shortage of NCOs remains, the NCOs are being used more efficiently, Valadez said.



Courtesy Photo

Carlos Legoas, left, poses with Lt. Gen. Hussein-Dohe, commander of the Iraqi Training Directorate command, in Dec. 2009, before Legoas returned to the United States.

"Iraqi officers are beginning to understand the positive impact an NCO will have to a unit if used effectively. Iraqi NCOs are the primary instructors at all the training centers and schools," Valadez said.

A breakdown in communication two years ago posed other problem while trying to develop an education system.

"The Basic Tactical Training Directorate, equivalent to the schoolhouse, and the Iraqi Ground Forces Command, where the majority of the students come from, were not talking. There were coalition-run NCO academies throughout Iraq, sponsored by some Iraqi divisions. Some of these were very efficient. However, there was no (program of instruction) standardization among the academies, meaning that Iraqi divisions were not synchronized with the BTDD," Legoas said.

Since the "ad-hoc" academies did not have authorization documents to support personnel resources, training equipment, classrooms and other infrastructure, Legoas said the instruction wasn't standardized and did not last.

With literacy testing standards and a new outlook on how to best use NCOs, the focus was now on how to develop enduring schools for Iraqi forces.



Courtesy Photo

Iraqi leaders are briefed in October 2007 about a noncommissioned officer education system for the Iraqi Ground Forces Command. Carlos Legoas, an advisor with Iraq Training and Advisory Mission-Army, said this meeting was "the catalyst that obtained the 'buy in' and subsequent support for the creation of the Iraqi NCOES."