Blue Ridge Sailors become U.S. citizens during ceremony

By MC3 Melvin F. Orr III, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) held a naturalization ceremony for six Sailors March 8. Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class Raphael Zakar, Culinary Specialist 3rd Class Leonora J. Leybag, Culinary Specialist 3rd Class Melvin I. Sibal Machinist's Mate 3rd Class Tara C. Steiner, Logistics Specialist 3rd Class Jun C. Wu, and Machinery Repairman Fireman Veronica Y. Cerna were sworn in as U.S. citizens by members from the South Korean embassy.

These Sailors discovered that being a U.S. service member simplified their citizenship process.

Immigrants seeking U.S. citizenship under normal circumstances would have to wait five years to go through the process, but service members, such as the six Sailors on *Blue Ridge*, only have to wait one year.

Additionally, the process itself isn't difficult, most of the necessary forms are now available online, and Sailors don't have to pay for a lawyer.

"The first thing I'm going to do is to register to vote," said Steiner, who moved to California from Canada when she was 12.

Steiner studied astronomy at a local community college before deciding to join the Navy to earn more money to continue her education. Only recently did she decide to seek U.S. citizenship instead of renewing her green card.

"I've been waiting 20 years for this moment," said Cerna, who moved to California from Mexico when she was 2.

Cerna and Leybag joined the Navy because they needed to make more money, but quickly discovered that they needed to be U.S. citizens to get security clearances for certain jobs. "...if you are an American, then more benefits and options are possible," said Leybag.

Leybag, whose family now lives in Virginia, lived in the Philippines until she was 21, but after just three months working in the U.S. she realized she made little money from hard work. So, she decided to follow her brother, a retired U.S. Navy senior chief, and join the Navy.

Zakar, who is originally from Germany, also knew he couldn't do certain jobs without becoming a U.S. citizen.. He, saw the U.S. Navy as a good career opportunity, but later decided he wanted to pursue other career possibilities, which also included becoming a police officer or an FBI agent. "I enjoy the outdoors and I would like to work for the Fish and Game Department in Florida," said Zakar.

(Left) CS3 Leonora Leybag, CS3 Melvin Sibal, MRFN Veronica Cerna, LS3 Jun Wu, MM3 Tara Steiner and BM2 Raphael Zakar recite the pledge of allegiance as they become U.S. citizens during a naturalization ceremony held aboard the U.S. 7th Fleet command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) March 8.
U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Daniel Viramontes

"This ceremony signifies the end of your journey or possibly the beginning," said *Blue Ridge* Commanding Officer Capt. Rudy Lupton, during his introductory speech at the naturalization ceremony.

"In becoming a U.S. citizen, you've realized a dream that many other people will never have the chance to do," Lupton said. "Wherever you go from here, you represent the U.S. and attaining the dream."

Sexual Assault Prevention, Response program update released

By Navy Personnel Command Public Affairs

The Navy released its first quarterly Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program update to provide Sailors with the information necessary to positively impact their environment and lead the Navy toward its goal of eliminating sexual assault from its ranks.

"Sexual assault is an assault against unit cohesion, readiness and Navy's core values," said Rear Adm. Dan Holloway, director of personnel, plans and policy. "It is a Department of the Navy goal to eliminate sexual assault incidents that impact personnel and their family members."

The Chief asks:

"Did you know the first really large-scale employment of women in the Navy took place to meet the severe clerical shortages of the World War I era? The Naval Reserve Act of 1916 had conspicuously omitted mention of gender as a condition for service, leading to formal permission to begin enlisting women in mid-March 1917, shortly before the United States entered the war. Nearly 600 female Yeomen were on duty by the end of April 1917, a number that had grown to more than 11,000 in December 1918, shortly after the Armistice. If you didn't know, now you know." – MCC(SW/AW) Eric Hannah, CFAY Public Affairs

Navy leaders are making sexual assault prevention a top priority. Prevention efforts are focused on non-stranger and alcohol-facilitated sexual assaults. In the Navy's 2009 Annual Report of Sexual Assaults in the Military, more than half of the reports involved military subjects committing offenses against military victims.

Fleet organizers held the first waterfront SAPR workshop in February at Naval Station Norfolk. It was attended by more than 170 command leaders and 150 first responders. Future workshops in other fleet concentration areas are planned. The training focuses on increasing awareness, defining expectations and identifying resources available to commands.

In March, the fleet also began a peer-to-peer prevention training pilot program aimed at developing effective bystander intervention skills.

"This pilot training, tailored to Sailors and deckplate leaders who are critical to the success of sexual assault prevention, is designed to discover the best way to implement and sustain cultural change in our Navy," said Paul Finch, Commander Navy Installations Command SAPR program manager. "The overall goal is to create a culture of respect that requires that we all see ourselves as part of the solution, and to intervene to prevent sexual assault within our Navy environment."

The bystander intervention program teaches Sailors how to intervene in cases of sexual violence before, during and after incidents occur. This peer-to-peer program, using the Mentors in Violence Prevention model, will be tested within different training environments in Norfolk, Hawaii, Pensacola and Bahrain. "After the project is complete, we will know what works best for Sailors so we can implement effective bystander training Navywide," Finch said.

(Left) Fleet Master Chief Tom Howard, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Rick West and Force Master Chief Farris Forseman attend the SAPR Workshop in Norfolk, Va., Feb. 24.
U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Jennifer A. Villalovos

This year, the Navy again included SAPR training in annual general military training requirements for all Sailors and will add sexual assault awareness questions to Navywide advancement exams in 2011.