Naturalization ceremony makes U.S. citizens of Sailors, Marines, spouses

Story and photo by Jeffrey C. Doepp, CFAY Public Affairs

A naturalization ceremony on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka was held at the Chapel of Hope Jan. 20, where 46 Sailors, Marines and spouses, from 15 different countries, became naturalized U.S. citizens.

The newly naturalized Americans, who are currently stationed in Yokosuka, Atsugi, Sasebo, Misawa, Yokota and Camp Fuji, were formally citizens of China, Philippines, Nigeria, Haiti, Trinidad, Ghana, Mexico, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, Peru, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras and Guatemala.

"This naturalization ceremony not only celebrates the birth of your new homeland but also symbolizes the fight for freedom that members of our armed forces are still waging today," said keynote speaker Paul M. Fitzgerald, minister-counselor for Consular Affairs Consul General, U.S. Embassy Tokyo, as he directly addressed the new citizens.

"As the head of Consular Affairs here in Japan I have many duties, but none of them give me greater pleasure than being a part of welcoming new U.S. citizens, and I'm honored to be part of this process," added Fitzgerald. "It is humbling because, quite frankly, it is an inspiring experience to swear in new citizens and add to the roles of the great men and women who have preceded you for some 400 years since the first migrants arrived on America's shores and began to carve a new way of life out of the wilderness, joining the Native-American people of the continent."

Department of Homeland Security-U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Seoul Korea Field Office Director Walter Haith briefs Sailors, Marines and spouses who are about to become naturalized citizens prior to the start of a naturalization ceremony held on board CFAY at the Chapel of Hope Jan. 20.

According to Personnel Support Detachment Yokosuka Travel Section Leading Petty Officer Personnel Specialist 1st Class Oliver Santy, the lead coordinator for the event, the ceremony is usually held twice a year and can open up a world of opportunity for those being naturalized.

"For service members, becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen opens up better opportunities in the military. It allows Sailors a better possibility for rate changes and the possibility for obtaining a security clearance," Santy said. "For family members, it gives them the right to vote. It also makes international travel easier. It may also open up greater opportunities for employment."

Because of their service in the armed forces, the attendees were able to apply for naturalization under special guidelines. Outlined in section 328 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, those who are not U.S. citizens but are serving in the U.S. armed forces are authorized to become naturalized under special provisions. One of those provisions includes serving one year of honorable service.

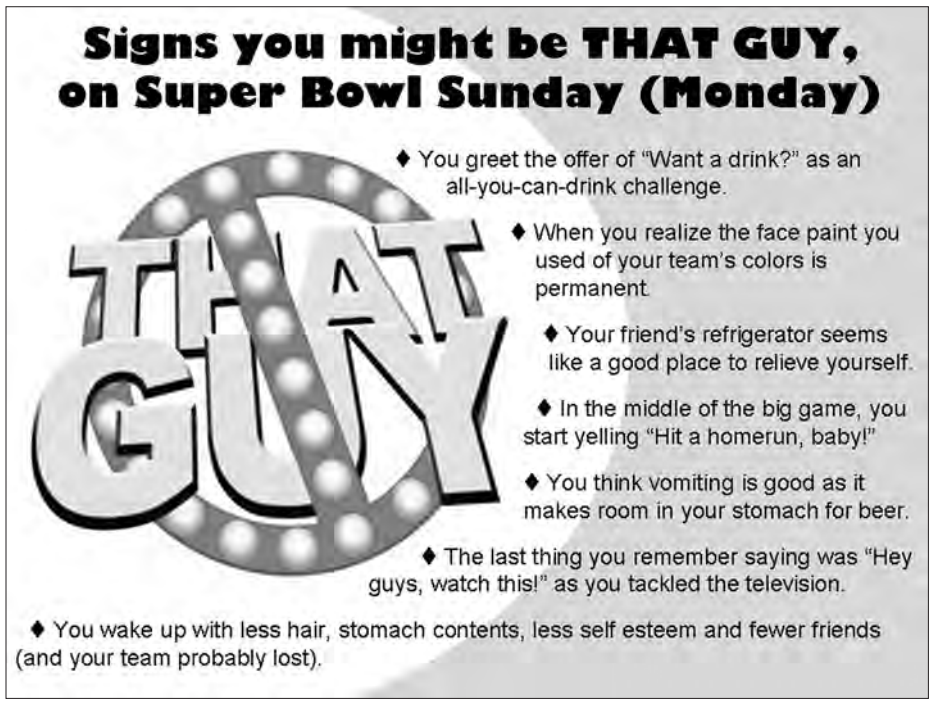
"It wasn't really a difficult process because there are several people standing by to assist you," said Logistics Specialist 2nd Class Sorviel Sinsin, who is assigned to the Force, Manpower, Personnel Office at Commander U.S. Naval Forces Japan. "The hardest part was trying to schedule interviews, but in the end, I knocked them all out. I feel very fortunate that my service has given me an opportunity to become a U.S. citizen."

Most installations provide resources to aid military service members and their eligible family members through the process but, according to Santy, are under utilized.

"Active duty military and their family members should rely on their respective command representative to start the process," Santy said. "Applying is quite easy and it's free for active duty military. The best resource is the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website at www.uscis.gov."

Following a special video message from President Barack Obama, who congratulated the attendees on their achievement of becoming American citizens and thanking them for their service, CFAY Commanding Officer Capt. David Owen was on hand to assist Fitzgerald and Department of Homeland Security-U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Seoul, Korea Field Office Director Walter Haith with the presentation of certificates.

"Congratulations to all of you," said Owen during his brief remarks prior to certificate presentations. It's no mystery that not only the United States but the military, just look around the base, look at our military today, the diversity we have, it's a melting pot. And with all the different culture you bring to it, it is what makes us so strong. I applaud you all on your efforts and I welcome you as being naturalized citizens."

USS Blue Ridge Sailors become U.S. citizens in ceremony

(Left) MMFN Joangela Tanilon, EM3 Brady Nagy, MM3 Abeose Cyrus, and BM3 Kenneth Acosta of U.S. 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) pose for a picture following a naturalization ceremony in which the Sailors became U.S. citizens. The Sailor's dedication to serving the U.S. armed forces enabled them to apply for naturalization under special provisions outlined in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Steven Khor