

U.S. Navy became path of dreams for Philippines native

By Marc F. Sibal

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"I am an American fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life." — Article 1, Code of Conduct.

I am proud to be an American serving in our armed forces; proud to lead other sailors in the United States Navy; proud to help defend freedom to ensure a better and more peaceful world.

Being an American means having the freedom to work hard, the strength to bear sacrifice and the courage to dream.

My journey to American citizenship started as a young boy growing up in the Philippines near Clark Air Force Base. My parents' values of hard work, tolerance and faith made me who I am today. I will always be grateful to my mother and father.

In 1982, exactly 30 years ago, I received a letter that would change my life. It was an invitation to apply to join the United States Navy. Out of thousands of applicants, I was lucky enough to make the grade and be selected.

When I arrived at San Diego Recruit Training Command, I saw a very diverse mix of people in my group — people from the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam, Puerto Rico; Mexican-Americans, African-Americans, Irish-Americans; people from across the United States.

One recruit from a farm in the South told me it was his first time in a big city like San Diego and that he felt uneasy.

I told him, "Don't worry, this is my first time in the United States at all!"

I thought all our differences would be a big barrier to our success as recruits. However, I was proved wrong.

Our differences made us stronger.

When people of diverse backgrounds share, cooperate and collaborate, they become a team with more in common than they might know.

That has been true throughout my naval career, during the Persian Gulf War, on deployments on the world's oceans, and in my most important job in the Navy — as a leader of sailors.

In 1993 I was naturalized on the island of Guam after citizenship rules were modified for U.S. immigrants who had invested in the American dream. It is one of the best things to happen in my life, and I feel grateful each and every day for the opportunity I have had to live the dream.

America has truly afforded my family and me opportunity, adventure and prosperity that otherwise would not be in my reach, and compels me to give back through service or help to those less fortunate.

We Americans are blessed to live in a country that prizes diversity, values creativity and rewards innovation.

When we come together to share our ideas, skills and talents to achieve a common goal, we are stronger and better, especially when we stand on a strong foundation of trust, respect, humility and courage to do the right thing — even when no one is looking.

These ideals are summed up in the Navy's Core Values of "honor, courage and commitment" — words to live by.

In the twilight of my own Navy career, I can look back with pride and gratitude for each opportunity I've had as an American. I am privileged to share my experiences with others and take part in the development of those Americans who carry on the dream and defend freedom. God Bless America.