

30 servicemembers become citizens

by Master Sgt. Chris Miller
Air Force National Civic Outreach Office

5/27/2008 - **CHICAGO (AFPN)** -- Thirty military members from 14 countries took the oath of citizenship and officially became U.S. citizens in a ceremony at the Pritzker Military Library in Chicago May 23. Brig. Gen. Darren McDew, director of public affairs, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, was the keynote speaker at the event.

"I was honored to participate in an event like this," General McDew said. "I witnessed 30 true American heroes make a choice to become American citizens. Events like this and connecting with Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen of their caliber are reasons I continue to serve."

One of the 30 new citizens, and the only Air Force member, was Senior Airman Katherine Collantes, a Reservist assigned to the 434th Air Refueling Wing, Grissom Air Reserve Base, Ind. Airman Collantes, from the Philippines, joined the Air Force in 2004.

Since the beginning of the war on terror in September 2001, more than 39,000 members of the armed forces have become naturalized citizens through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The Honorable Matthew Kennelly, District Court Judge, administered the Oath of Allegiance and then spoke about how, as military members, they have already done their part as citizens by serving their country.

Another speaker was Ruth Dorochoff, district director of USCIS, who said citizenship is not a simple benefit.

"The Certificate of Naturalization is not a handout," she said. "American citizenship is an



Brig. Gen. Darren McDew, director of public affairs, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, was the keynote speaker for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Naturalization ceremony at the Pritzker Military Library in Chicago. The only Air Force member among the 30 new citizens was Senior Airman Katherine Collantes. She was assigned to the 434th Air Refueling Wing, Grissom Air Reserve Base, Ind. (U.S. Air Force photo)

invaluable distinction that involves more than stamped paperwork and a printed document. It is a lifelong journey that begins with the first step an immigrant takes on American soil."

The 14 countries represented were Haiti, Philippines, Mexico, Uzbekistan, Poland, Ethiopia, Guyana, Trinidad Tobago, Guatemala, Peoples Republic of China, Romania, Russia, Ecuador and South Korea.

"This was an awesome experience," said Airman Collantes. "I have a great sense of pride and accomplishment. It took the better part of a year to get all my paperwork complete, but this is such a great feeling."

[Comment on this story](#) (*comments may be published on Air Force Link*)

[View the comments/letters page](#)