



IMMIGRATION POLICY CENTER

...providing factual information about immigration and immigrants in America

POLICY BRIEF

U.S. Soldiers from Around the World: *Immigrants Fight for an Adopted Homeland*

As American troops, including many immigrants, are now engaged in military action in Iraq, the Immigration Policy Center has updated its fact sheet about the role and participation of immigrants in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Consistent with our history as a nation of immigrants, the burden of defending America has always been shared by the many among us who are not yet citizens. While policymakers on both sides of the immigration debate battle over the proper role of immigration policy in homeland security, thousands of immigrants from around the world have answered the call to duty and stepped forward to put their lives on the line in the war against terrorism.

According to the U.S. Department of Defense:

- More than 60,000 immigrants serve on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces.
- Immigrants make up nearly 5 percent of all enlisted personnel on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces.
- Nearly 7 percent of U.S. Navy enlisted personnel are immigrants.

On July 3, 2002, President Bush recognized the contributions of immigrants in the U.S. Armed Forces by signing an executive order that provided for “expedited naturalization” of non-citizen men and women serving on active-duty status since September 11, 2001. The order granted some 15,000 members of the U.S. military who served fewer than three years the right to apply for expedited citizenship in recognition of their service.¹

For four dozen troops involved in the post 9/11 operations in Afghanistan, the executive order meant they could briefly put down their weapons and pick up pens to focus on another common objective: to become U.S. citizens.

Service in the military can also be required of non-citizens in this country. All lawful permanent residents and naturalized citizens are required to register with the Selective Service and would be required to serve in the military if drafted. Under the law, failure to register for the Selective Service can result in fines up to \$250,000 and/or a sentence of up to five years. The failure of a legal permanent resident to register may also prevent them from becoming naturalized.

Historically, immigrants have made significant contributions to defense of America:

- More than 20 percent of the recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor in U.S. wars have been immigrants, a total of 716 of the 3,406 Medal of Honor recipients have been immigrants.
- 500,000 immigrants fought in the Union Army during the Civil War.

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- A special regimental combat team made up of the sons of Japanese immigrants was the most decorated of its size during World War II.
- Major U.S. weapons, such as a more advanced ironclad ship, the submarine, the helicopter, and the atomic and hydrogen bombs were developed by immigrants.
- After the passage of Section 329 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 143,000 non-citizen military participants in World Wars I and II, and 31,000 members of the U.S. military who fought during the Korean War, became naturalized American citizens, according to White House statistics.

A Soldier's Story

Jamal Baadani is a Sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corp. Born in Egypt, he came to America as a child and joined the military after graduating from high school. He explained what motivated his decision: "...I felt I had an obligation to serve the country that helped give my family a new life. It was my way of thanking America for giving me a country to call home."²

Among the many contributions of his career, Baadani has fought in combat in Beirut, defended U.S. oil rigs against attacks by Iran, and trained fellow Marines. After September 11, he founded the "Association of Patriotic Arab Americans in the Military," to highlight the service and sacrifice of Arab Americans defending the US. For Baadani, the attacks of September 11 only re-affirmed his loyalty to America. "Even though I share a common ethnicity with those [perpetrators], I am a proud American", said Baadani in a recent interview.

*"We owe a debt to all of those people
wherever they or their parents were born."*

*Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham
(former Sen. MI-R)*

For Amos Dobrowski, a Polish immigrant who signed up at the recruit station in Flushing, images of injustice he saw in the media during the war in Yugoslavia stirred up a desire in him to join the United States military. Fresh out of high school at the age of 17, Dobrowski signed up to a four-year assignment working as a tank gunner in Texas. He plans to attend college in the future with the hopes of studying the military from the perspective of academia.

Erick Mogollon, born in Guatemala City, testified before the Senate about his experience as flight deck chief and aviation warfare specialist aboard the aircraft carrier, the USS John Kennedy. He recalls, "I think one of my best experiences was on the USS John Kennedy because I was in charge of one division where I had people from Korea, I had people from China, I had people from Mexico."³ During Desert Storm, the USS John Kennedy participated in over 120 combat strike missions and flew nearly 4,000 strike sorties.

Not only did Mogollon graduate top in his class during his training, he went on to receive the Commander in Chief United States Naval Forces Europe Leadership Award while serving in Spain. Mogollon is not the only one in his family who has committed his life to service: all three of his brothers are also serve in the armed forces.

Uncommon Valor

The stories of Mogollon, Dobrowski, and Bandaani represent just a few of the thousands of immigrants sacrificing for the United States. Their achievements exemplify the truth in Senator Spencer Abraham's words when he said, "We owe a debt to all those people, wherever they or their parents were born, who have kept our Nation free and safe in a dangerous world."

The fact that immigrants account for 20 percent of the recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor illustrates the remarkable historical legacy of immigrant heroism in the armed forces. "That is more than 700 immigrants who served this country in a time of war and displayed heroism beyond the call of duty," said Senator Patrick Leahy.

Conclusion

At a time when Americans value patriotism more than ever, immigrants demonstrate that they are a part of this spirit through their service in the military. Paul Bucha, President of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, made the following assertion: "I put to you that there is a standard by which to judge whether America is correct to maintain a generous legal immigration policy: Have immigrants and their children and grandchildren been willing to fight and die for the United States of America? The answer right up to the present day remains a resounding 'yes.'"

Prepared, August 2002

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Endnotes

¹ White House Office of the Press Secretary, July 4, 2002 *White House Daily Briefing*.

² www.apaam.org

³ *Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Examining Immigrant American's Contribution to the Armed Forces and National Defense*, 106th Cong., 26 May 1999.