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U.S. ARMY EUROPE SOLDIER EARNS CITIZENSHIP IN VETERANS DAY CEREMONY IN IRAQ

By Sgt. Brandon Little

12th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs Office

LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Balad, Iraq -- Spc. Osborne Tate of Task Force XII was one of 178 service members here to be honored with two major events at once on Veterans Day -- earning his U.S. citizenship, and having the oath of citizenship administered by Michael Chertoff, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security.



SGT BRANDON LITTLE

Spc. Osborne Tate, a power generation equipment repairer with U.S. Army Europe's 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation (right), shakes hands with Command Sgt. Maj. Stacey Davis of the 316th Sustainment Command during a Multi-National Corps-Iraq naturalization ceremony at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Iraq Nov. 11. Tate, who was born in Liberia, was also personally congratulated on becoming a citizen by U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff.

Tate is the first member of the task force, led by U.S. Army Europe's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, to earn citizenship during the unit's current deployment. Chertoff personally congratulated the specialist and new citizen after the ceremony.

"I thought it was a pretty good ceremony," said Tate. "I'm proud to say I can honestly call myself an American now. For the first time in my life, I'm doing something that's not just benefiting me, but benefiting the country as a whole."

Born in Liberia, Tate and his family moved to the U.S. in February 1983. He joined the Army in March 2005, and began the process of becoming a U.S. citizen soon afterward.

“The whole process took about two years,” said Tate, a power generation equipment repairer in E Company, 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation. “I just got in contact with (the legal office) and they pretty much did the end product.”

To become a U.S. citizen, a Soldier must fill out several forms that are sent to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Nebraska, said Sgt. Aaron Simeraro, a Task Force XII paralegal specialist.

“Their (application) sits in at the USCIS for about three or four months while they do background checks, and perform all of the other checks they need in order to forward it to Rome,” said Simeraro. “Rome branch of the USCIS actually refers the individual seeking (U.S. citizenship) to an immigration officer.”

After Tate was referred to an immigration officer, and told when he would have his citizenship interview, the legal office prepared him for the interview.

After successfully completing their interviews, Tate and 177 others became citizens in the Nov. 11 ceremony that, just like the armistice that ended World War I and led to the creation of Veterans Day itself, began at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

“If a Soldier wants to become a citizen during this deployment, then they need to get to their legal office and begin this process as soon as possible,” said Simeraro. “The chance of them becoming a U.S. citizen while in Iraq significantly decreases the more they wait.”



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