

Tripler Army Medical Center

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Tripler nurse's quest for U.S. citizenship takes a detour in Iraq

by Les Ozawa

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HONOLULU— May 4, 2005, a day to remember for Ines Sanchez. Not because she is a student in the Obstetrics-Gynecological Nursing Specialty Course at Tripler Army Medical Center. Not because she is a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. Not because her duty assignment is in Hawaii. 1st Lt. Sanchez is all that, but on that Wednesday afternoon, she became a U.S. citizen, along with more than a 100 other applicants in a crowded, federal courtroom in downtown Honolulu.

Sanchez' quest for citizenship began in August 2003, when she filed an application for citizenship in San Antonio, Texas, a month after she was sworn in as a U.S. Army officer. Her application had to wait, however, until she returned from a year-long deployment to Iraq. This January, she resumed her quest in Texas, submitting new fingerprints and new documents to show she was an U.S. Army officer.

After being assigned to Hawaii to enroll in the Tripler nursing course, Sanchez reported to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) office in Honolulu in February. April 5, she was interviewed by an USCIS officer about the documents in her file and about details of her personal life. She then had to pass a three-part test to determine her fluency in English and her knowledge of U.S.

history and government.

Then May 4, in a solemn ceremony witnessed by her friends, peers and instructors of the nursing course, Sanchez became a naturalized U.S. citizen.

“The citizenship ceremony was very meaningful to me,” said Sanchez. “It became much more so, when the judge presiding over the ceremony expressed his gratitude to those of us who served in the military in Iraq during wartime.”

“Except for my sister who witnessed this event,” Sanchez said, “My parents and siblings were not there physically, but deep in heart I know they were with me to celebrate my joy. However, I was blessed to have my Army family with me, my OB-GYN instructors, classmates, and my battle buddy and best friend whom I met in Iraq attend the ceremony and to share my happiness. It could not have been better than that.”