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## News: Guardsman receives citizenship

**123rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment**

Story by [Sgt. Brian Barbour](#)

PHOENIX — On Feb. 22, a National Guardsman dressed in his Army service uniform took the oath of allegiance with more than 100 other area residents during a ceremony in Avondale, Ariz. The guardsman is fulfilling a childhood dream, a dream he and many other immigrants in this country have shared, to become a U.S. citizen.

Arizona Army National Guardsman, Sgt. Juan Arbelaez, a truck commander and team leader for 2nd Platoon, 222nd Transportation Company out of Florence, Ariz., completed his pathway to citizenship during the naturalization ceremony.

Born in the country of Columbia, Arbelaez was 4 years old when he came to the U.S. arriving with his mother, 2 ½-year-old sister, and 6-month-old brother. Now, at the age of 51, receiving his citizenship is a significant life achievement for Arbelaez.

"It's a very important moment," said Arbelaez. "It gives me a sense that I've completed a life-long dream I have had since I was 6 years old."

Getting his citizenship hasn't been an easy process. He applied for citizenship on three different occasions prior to this last one.

"The applications all got lost somewhere so I just gave up on trying," said Arbelaez.

Arbelaez's brother, Raul Arbelaez of Salisbury, S.C., had already received his citizenship and was able to give his sibling guidance during the arduous naturalization process.

"The process of getting our citizenship was hell for both of us," said Raul. "But, it's a great honor to hold the title of U.S. citizen. Too many people take it for granted."

Arbelaez eventually tried again, and after getting past several roadblocks along the way, finally found success.

"It's a sense of closure and relief," said Arbelaez.

Raul expressed pride about of his brother's accomplishment.

"He's a U.S. citizen now and that makes me very happy," Raul said. "I've always looked up to my brother."

Now that he's an official a citizen, Arbelaez says it's not much of a different feeling than before.

"It doesn't feel like I've changed now that I have my citizenship," said Arbelaez. "I think when I'm going to feel it is when I go to vote and get summoned for jury duty. That's when it's finally going to hit me."



Sgt. Brian Barbour  
Sgt. Juan Arbelaez, an Arizona Army National Guardsman takes the Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America with other area residents Feb. 22 during the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services naturalization ceremony at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale, Ariz. Arbelaez, a truck commander and team leader with 222nd Transportation Company out of Florence, Ariz., immigrated from Columbia when he was 4 years old. (Submitted photo courtesy of Deborah Taylor)

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