

# Expedited Naturalization through Military Service

Naturalization is the process of becoming a U.S. citizen. Typically, under immigration law, an individual may apply to naturalize after five years in lawful permanent resident (**LPR**) status, or after three years if married to a U.S. citizen, in addition to meeting other requirements. However, Congress has created expedited pathways to naturalization through qualifying military service. Eligible servicemembers qualify for modified eligibility requirements and are exempt from filing fees.



## NONCITIZENS ELIGIBLE TO ENLIST

- ★ **LPRs**
- ★ **Noncitizen U.S. nationals**  
(e.g., persons born in American Samoa and Swains Island)
- ★ **Persons from Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau**

Enlistment of other noncitizens has been authorized under certain circumstances. For example, under the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (**MAVNI**) program (suspended in 2016), additional categories of noncitizens could enlist in the Armed Forces.

## NATURALIZATION REQUIREMENTS

Under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), requirements for military naturalization differ depending on whether the qualifying service took place during **peacetime** (INA Section 328) or periods of **military hostilities** (INA Section 329) as designated by Executive Order.

	Service During Peacetime:	Service During Periods of Hostilities:
<b>Honorable service requirement</b>	May apply to naturalize after at least one year of honorable service*	May apply immediately upon establishing honorable service*
<b>LPR status</b>	Must be an LPR	Not required to be an LPR if physically present in the United States**at the time of enlistment
<b>Good moral character</b>	Demonstrate good moral character for at least five years prior to filing the application	Demonstrate good moral character for at least one year prior to filing the application
<b>Age</b>	Must be at least 18 years old	May be any age
<b>Residence and physical presence requirements</b>	Residence and physical presence requirements are waived for those who apply while in service or within six months of discharge. Those who file six months or more after separation must have continuously resided (maintained a permanent dwelling) in the United States for at least five years and have been physically present in the United States for at least 30 months during that period. Service within five years of the date of filing counts toward U.S. residence and physical presence.	Exempt from residence and physical presence requirements

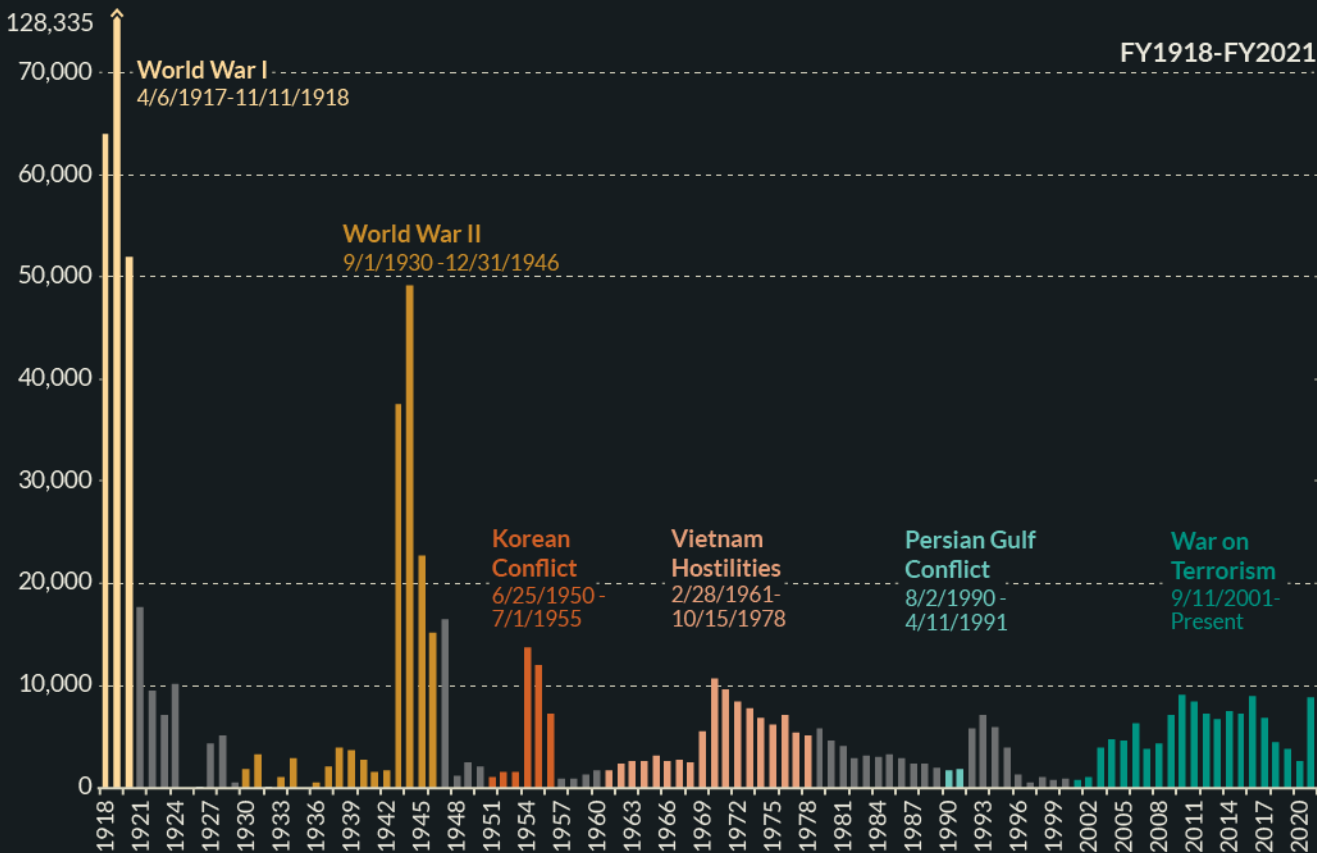
\* Those who have been separated from service must have been discharged under honorable conditions. The service branch determines whether the service and discharge were under honorable conditions. Service members may request certification of their service after one day of service.

\*\* Or, in the Canal Zone, American Samoa, or Swains Island, or on board a public vessel owned or operated by the United States for noncommercial service.

Under both provisions, servicemembers and veterans must demonstrate knowledge of the English language, U.S. government and history, and an attachment to the principles of the U.S. Constitution and take the Oath of Allegiance.

## MILITARY NATURALIZATIONS

and Designated Periods of Military Hostilities



Sources: Military Naturalizations - FY1918-FY2020: Department of Homeland Security (DHS), 2020 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Table 20; FY2021: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Office of Performance and Quality, N-400 Application for Naturalization Quarterly Data. Designated Periods of Military Hostilities - USCIS, Policy Manual, Volume 12, Part I, Chapter 3.

Notes: DHS military naturalization data are not available before FY1918; provisions for military naturalizations expired or were suspended in 1925 and 1935. FY1976 covers 7/1/1975 - 9/30/1976 because the end date of fiscal years was changed from June 30 to September 30.

Information prepared December 6, 2022 by Holly Straut-Eppsteiner, Analyst in Immigration Policy, and Brion Long, Visual Information Specialist. For more information, see CRS Reports IF12089, U.S. Citizenship Through Military Service and Options for Military Relatives and R43366, U.S. Naturalization Policy.



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