

Local

Cuban refugee 'appalled' by treatment

By MARGARITA JAIME
Battalion Staff

When Dr. Ben Aguirre first heard of the treatment the Cuban refugees were receiving in this country, he was appalled.

Aguirre was a Cuban refugee himself and did not receive that type of treatment on his arrival.

A sociology professor at Texas A&M University, Aguirre came to this country in 1961 after the demise of the Bay of Pigs invasion, three years after the Fidel Castro take-over.

He was 14 years old when he arrived in Miami. At the time, a rumor circulated through Cuba that a law was going to be passed that would take away the power and responsibility parents had over their children.

The rumored law would have allowed the government to recruit young boys into the army without permission from the parents, Aguirre said.

"My mother decided that I should leave the country temporarily; so, I flew to Miami to reside with my uncle," he said.

When Aguirre arrived in the country, he was not forced into any relocation camp or contained for any processing period.

"Federal agencies were set up in the Miami area," he said, "and they aided the Cubans in asking for political asylum."

Once the refugees were granted asylum, these programs and agencies helped them find a job and a place to stay. Contrary to the way Cubans were treated in the early 1960s, some Cubans in Fort Chaffee have been waiting relocation for as long as three months.

Nowadays, Aguirre said there is more red tape involved in relocating the refugees.

"In a number of cases it appeared to me that procedures were not as efficient as they (the U.S. government) had hoped.

"People's records were lost. Some people were outside the camp; however, their records showed them to be inside the camp."

In August, Aguirre was invited to conduct a study for

the Federal Emergency Management Agency on the situation inside the camp.

At the Fort Smith, Ark., airport, he talked to a Cuban who had been released from the fort and given an airline ticket and was awaiting a flight to his sponsors. The man didn't know their names or what city he was going to, Aguirre said.

He called the Catholic Conference at the fort to find out the information and "They said he was still supposed to be at the fort," he said.

"That 50-year-old man was almost in tears. I told him I wouldn't send him back to the fort," Aguirre said.

After a frustrating 30-minute call to the officials who issued the ticket, he finally determined the name and telephone number of the sponsors. It was a wrong number, but a call to Corpus Christi information produced the correct number and he called the sponsors.

As it turned out, the sponsors weren't expecting him that day and were trying to cope with damages from Hurricane Allen, he said. With that basic information, Aguirre was able to help the refugee make his transfer flight and he was met at the Corpus Christi Airport by his sponsors.

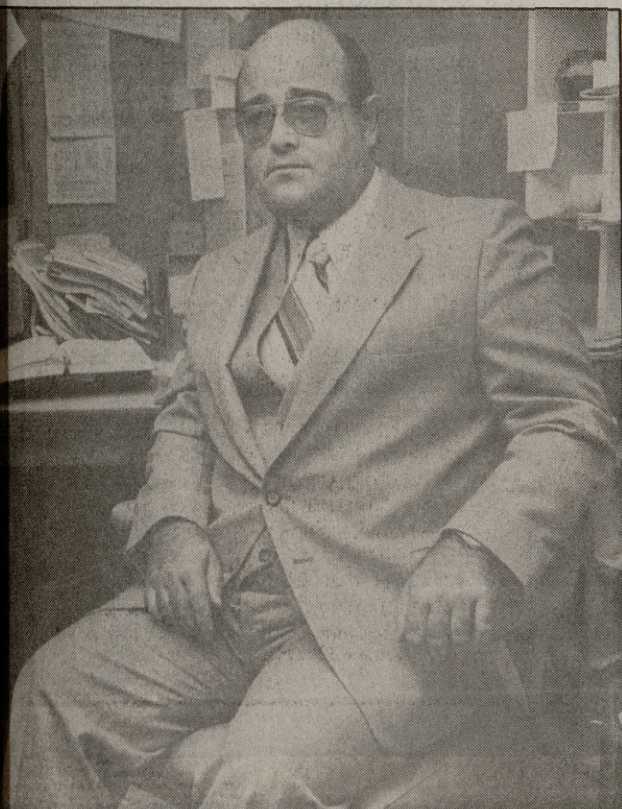
Since then, Aguirre said the man had called to report he had found a job and was starting a new life.

The migration process was also different in 1961, Aguirre said.

"It was a gradual migration with very orderly and established means," he said. "During this period the U.S. government was prepared for the migration of Cubans; they knew who, and how many were coming even before the Cubans left the island."

However, the migration this summer was unexpected.

"The press had reported that there was a CIA report warning that Castro would rid the country of malcontents through immigration," Aguirre said. "As it turned out, he shipped them to the United States against the authority of our government."



Staff photo by Pat O'Malley

Ben Aguirre, a sociologist professor at Texas A&M University, first came to America from Cuba in 1961. He says the new wave of Cuban refugees is receiving much different treatment.

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Vernon Dulling, division manager of Texaco's West United States

Producing Department, and staff geophysicist S.B. Conger Jr. awarded the grant.

Dr. Neville Carter, head of geophysics at Texas A&M, accepted the check.

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