



The Enlisted Club barber shop is open for walk-ins or appointments from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday and from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Saturday.

Mac Bitela puts the finishing touches on a haircut.

Sitting at HAFB's cutting edge

by **Laura Pellegrino**
Sunburst staff writer

Whether getting a haircut at the Officers' Club, Enlisted Club or Base Exchange barber shop, the men at Holloman can be sure their hair is in good hands. Combined, the four senior barbers from those locations have been cutting hair for 169 years!

"George" — 1957
Virgil George, a barber at the Enlisted Club, started cutting hair at age 13 in a small town in Louisiana.

"My father was an inspiration to me," he said. "He directed me to focus on a vocation that involved hair-styling for men."

George said he lived in a salt mining community that offered limited employment opportunities for young people.

His father encouraged him to practice barbering on his brother, cousins and neighbors. He soon became skilled enough to earn a scholarship to the Tyler Barber College in Tyler, Texas.

After graduation, he worked for almost two years in Las Vegas, Nev. "Because of my discomfort with my colleagues and the environment, I

chose to request relocation," George said. Four weeks later, he was in Hobbs, N.M.

In four years, George made a name for himself and was asked by the president of the New Mexico state barber board to take a position at Holloman.

He accepted the position, but after nine months was inducted into the Army, where he served from 1958 to 1961.

"Upon completion of military service, I returned to Holloman to resume barbering," George said. "I've been here ever since."

"Chris" — 1958
Chris Garcia, a barber at the BX, was living in La Luz and working for a construction company in the 1950s.

Construction work in the summer was hot, and Garcia decided to find a career that would bring him indoors. He attended barber college in Tucson, Ariz. and put an application in for a barbering job at Holloman's BX.

"That was in February 1958," he said, "And I've been here ever since."

"Chuy" — 1962
Chuy Holguin, the barber at the Officers' club, was washing dishes at the Base Exchange at Ft. Bliss as a teenager.

"One of the barbers there said to me, 'Why don't you go to barber college instead of washing dishes?'"

Holguin went to the barber college in El Paso, Texas. They told him he needed \$25 to start immediately.

"I gave them the last \$25 out of my pocket, and they gave me all of my equipment," he said.

He started working at the Holloman BX barber shop in 1962. After a few years, he moved to the Officers' Club.

"Back then, the Officers' Club had a bad reputation," Holguin said. "I said, 'I'll give them a year,' but that 'year' never came. I'm still here."

Holguin enjoys every minute of his job, he said. "There's never a boring moment," he said. "It's been good to me."

"Mac" — 1966
Macario Bitela, a barber at the Enlisted Club, was a detective in Denver, Colo. in the early 1960s. He was getting his haircut one Saturday and started having a conversation with the barber about the job.

"At that time I was working weekends, nights, holidays," Bitela said. "I didn't like it."

When the barber told him their schedule, with nights, holidays and Sundays off, Bitela decided to leave the detective agency and start Barber

College in Amarillo, Texas.

After college, he worked at Walker Air Force Base, N.M. A year later, rumors began to circulate that Walker would close.

"I left Walker before they closed and planted my roots here," Bitela said.

Bitela owned three barber shops at that time, one in the BX, the Officers' Club, and the NCO Club. In 1973, he gave up the three stores and opened a new one in the Enlisted Club. Today, he and George share ownership of the shop.

Hair today...

The barbers said they've seen many changes in men's hairstyles since first coming to Holloman, but old styles continue to come back.

The styles come and go in cycles, Huguin said. From flat tops to afros, these barbers have seen it all.

"When I first got here, flat tops were in style, but that faded out by 1975," Bitela said. "Now that's coming back very strong."

Today there are many different styles, George said. That wasn't the case in 1957.

To keep up with the latest styles, George said he looks through barber magazines, watches television and observes trends.

"It all depends on what they're doing in Hollywood," Holguin said.

A cut above the rest

It's a combination of talent and

people skills that make a successful barber, Holguin said.

"If somebody cuts you up you just smile," he said.

Bitela agrees that good barbers have a nice personality and can get along with customers. Sometimes a customer is not completely satisfied, he said.

"One of the biggest challenges in our profession is making people happy," Bitela said. "I do my best to please everybody."

When the customers come in the first few times, they're quick to grab the mirror to see how everything turned out, Holguin said.

Once people get to know the barber, they don't even want to look in the mirror, he said.

Garcia said the job comes easy to him after so many years of experience.

"It was probably hard when I first started," he said.

None of the barbers have plans for retirement.



Virgil George evens out a customer's neckline.

Above: Chuy Holguin concentrates on perfecting a customer's haircut. The Officers' Club barber shop is open from 7:30 a.m to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday.



Right: Mac Bitela cleans up the sides in the first stages of giving a flat-top haircut.



Chris Garcia uses the razor for a haircut. The BX barber shop is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday to Friday; 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday; and noon to 4 p.m., Sunday.

Photos by Laura Pellegrino