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Ford Visits Refugees in Ft. Chaffee

By Carroll Kilpatrick

Washington Post Staff Writer

FT. CHAFFEE, Ark., Aug. 10—President Ford won the cheers, smiles and handshakes of thousands of Vietnamese refugees here today as he began a two-week vacation.

Tonight he flew to Vail, Colo., his favorite summer and winter holiday resort, for a week of swimming, golfing and tennis to be followed by a week of speeches, travel, work and relaxation.

With the temperature in the upper 90s, the President visited a day care center, a hospital ward, a residence barracks and a conference building to see how 43,225 Vietnamese have lived here.

Asked for his thoughts after seeing the center, Mr. Ford replied:

"It makes all the efforts of so many people really worthwhile. It is really inspirational to see so many young people and old people getting an opportunity to be a part of America."

The President, perspiring under the broiling sun, shed his coat and gulped a can of iced tea as he moved rapidly from one hot building to another. He stopped to shake hundreds of hands as he moved about this old Army base.

Nearly all of the 20,491 Vietnamese still here turned out to give Mr. Ford an enthusiastic welcome. Vu Trong Ky, 67, a former army colonel, handed the President a letter proposing that something "like an existing Chinatown be established in the warmest south part of the United States" for Vietnamese not yet relocated.

"If the matter is not contrary to American law and to

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your policy, each refugee's family is to be allotted a plot of land enough for house construction and farming," Ky's letter said. Each family would be responsible for meeting costs of the project, he wrote.

After a briefing by Americans in charge of this relocation center, the President congratulated all who worked here and said:

"I want to thank you on behalf of the American people, who properly and enthusiastically opened their hearts to people who suffered adversity with us."

The hospital ward the President visited had about 20 beds, but only about half were occupied. One of the administrators told the President that, while there had been some serious illnesses, the health of the camp was generally better than that of the average American community.

"I've been told that the incidence of disease is lower here than in an average American city of this size," Donald MacDonald, the senior civil coordinator at the center, told the President. "And I must not forget to tell you that 150 new American citizens have been born here since early May."

While the President said in a brief television interview he had heard no complaints, reporters accompanying him heard a few, some from Vietnamese who have been here since May and have not yet found sponsors.

At the hospital ward, an elderly Vietnamese man in blue pajamas got out of bed to shake the President's hand and told him in broken English that "all of the people of Ft. Chaffee thank you for your help and we pray for you and your family and people."

En route to the airport at nearby Fort Smith, Mr. Ford stopped at a motel to meet 30 Arkansas Republican leaders for about 35 minutes.

"It was the most nonpolitical political meeting I've ever attended," White House press secretary Ron Nessen said after the closed-door meeting.

"Between now and the election I intend to spend my time primarily being President," Nessen quoted the President as telling the group. "I'm going to maximize my time on the job."

The President also told the Republican leaders, according to Nessen, that he was convinced "Arkansas can be a Republican state in 1976."

On arrival Arkansas earlier today, the President stopped in Fort Smith to participate in the dedication of the new St. Edward Mercy Medical Center.