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Official Assures Arkansas
Over Impact of Refugees

By B. DRUMMOND AYRES Jr.

FORT CHAFFEE, Ark., May 1—Though some local residents oppose housing even a small number of Vietnamese refugees on this Army post, a State Department official said today that the exiles with the toughest resettlement problems might be sent here.

But the official, Donald McDonald, insisted "there is not going to be any adverse impact on the economy of Arkansas because of the presence of these people."

"They are also remarked healthy," he added.

The first refugees are scheduled to arrive tomorrow. Eventually, as many as 20,000 may be sent here.

Fort Chaffee, one of three military bases selected as a temporary home for the exiles, can house and feed up to 25,000 people. Except for periodic use by Reservists and National Guardsmen, the 72,000-acre post has been in the hands of a small caretaker force for the past 15 years.

The other bases chosen as refugee centers—Camp Pendleton, Calif., and Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.—have seen greater use by active military units than Fort Chaffee has.

Post Called Ideal

Mr. McDonald, the top civilian official in the resettlement operation under way here indicated that those bases would handle refugees who had the greatest expectation of quickly finding permanent homes and jobs, mainly through friends and relatives. He told newsmen this afternoon that "Chaffee would seem ideal "for long-term use by refugees with major problems in finding support.

When asked whether any of the refugees might be on the post for as much as a year or more, he replied, "I have no basis for thinking anyone will be here for that long."

Some of the people in Barling, a farm town adjacent to Fort Chaffee, were not reas-

sured by his remarks. They plan to protest at a Town Council meeting and passed around petitions calling for an end to the resettlement effort.

Last night, several Barling residents picketed briefly in front of Fort Chaffee's main gate. They carried signs that read, "Let's start helping Americans" and "How long is temporary?"

Other residents made special efforts to welcome the refugees. Schools collected toys for Vietnamese children, and civic groups collected clothing for the adults.

City officials from nearby Fort Smith plan to greet the first planeload of exiles with a banner reading "Welcome" in Vietnamese. Gov. David Pryor was also scheduled to be on hand.

Official Is Confident

Mr. McDonald said that he was confident most of the Vietnamese refugees coming to the United States could be resettled within a year, because four out of five could speak "reasonable" English and most had enough education and skills "to match up to the needs of this country."

Many workers for American agencies and companies in Vietnam during the war.

"These people are not going to settle in the communities around the camps," Mr. McDonald added, apparently to reassure local protesters. "They're going to settle in all the country."

He said that the main problem most refugees would face would be finding a "sponsor." A sponsor must agree to take financial responsibility for a refugee's debts until the refugee can become a United States citizen, a process that takes several years.

Mr. McDonald said that some state and local governments were already pooling the names of individuals, companies and groups willing to serve as sponsors.