

# Vietnamese Emigres at Ft.

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FORT SMITH, Ark. — There was a moment of surprise here last week when 15 Vietnamese refugees, led by local funeral director Bill Satterfield, tumbled off a big, green Army bus and rushed into the local J.C. Penney store to buy arm loads of clothing.

The hasty buying spree by the Vietnamese—who persuaded Satterfield to stop on the way back to the refugee compound at Ft. Chaffee after a Buddhist funeral ceremony for a refugee in Fort Smith — was virtually the first glimpse anyone in this city of 56,000 has had of a refugee, despite the fact that 24,000 Vietnamese have been encamped here for more than a month.

"It was as though they were birds let out of a cage," Satterfield recalled. "The Vietnamese and the Americans both sort of circled each other with guarded curiosity."

While the initial fear here was that the unexpected ar-

rival of thousands of homeless Vietnamese might swamp this little city, there is now growing concern that the governments enforced and near-total isolation of the refugees may be causing a new set of problems.

There is already the existence of what some senior civilian officials at the camp call "the security blanket syndrome." Vietnamese, fearful of what lies outside the gates, have indicated in increasing numbers that they would rather linger a while inside the camp, where they can be fed and housed and, hopefully, can absorb a little more information on how to cope with the American way of life.

Almost every flight out of the Fort Smith airport scheduled to carry refugees away to meet sponsors has been marked by no-shows. Some of the missed flights, officials here said, are due to simple administrative foul-ups. Others, however, are believed to be connected with the refugees' fear.

"The Vietnamese are very

sensitive to what they hear," said David Lewis, the director of the U.S. Catholic Conference resettlement team at Fort Chaffee. Lewis heads the largest of seven private agencies looking for sponsors for the refugees.

"Some have heard reports that there are slave markets outside and a lot don't really understand how the sponsor system works," Lewis said. "Some are just afraid to face it. They don't know what they are facing."

Donald MacDonald, the senior civilian official here, said that a new effort will be made to prepare Vietnamese for what lies outside the camp gates. "We spent weeks getting the Americans ready for the Vietnamese," he said. "Now we're going to have to get the Vietnamese ready for the Americans."

MacDonald said officials hoped to expand children's

English classes this summer to include civics and history and to hold orientation lectures for adults.

The orientation job may become increasingly difficult under present conditions. Only about 4,200 of the 27,500 Vietnamese who have come here have been released and MacDonald said two-thirds of this group had relatives or former contacts in business or government in the United States.

The bulk of the remaining refugees—as well as most of about 50,000 others awaiting transportation to the United States from holding camps in the Pacific—is less affluent and sophisticated. Many have large families and little knowledge of English, officials said.

They are also more prone to believe rumors that abound in the refugee camp in an absence of firsthand contact with Americans outside the camp.

## Chaffee Fear Life on the Outside

An example is Truong du A, a 27-year-old former Vietnamese air force officer who is watching over 12 members of his family. Sitting on the front steps of the two-story barracks that houses 20 refugee families in addition to his, du A said one of his major worries was his wife, who is five months pregnant.

"I understand that to have a baby in the U.S. costs at least \$2,000," he said. The rumor, a common one circulated among the many pregnant Vietnamese in the camp, is hard to shake. "I think we will stay here until my wife has her baby. Then we will go and be ready to begin outside," he said.

Increasingly rigid procedures to keep refugees and Americans apart—including pass requirements to enter the camp and searches by military police and immigration officials of cars leaving the camp—have done little

to quash Vietnamese fears of life on the outside. And the isolation of the refugees has worked in part to keep alive an undercurrent of hostility among Americans here. There is grumbling about the more than a hundred Vietnamese—mostly interpreters and other camp-connected personnel—who shop in Fort Smith. When a minister from neighboring Van Buren sponsored several refugee families and moved them into an apartment complex last month, two families occupying nearby apartments promptly moved out.

There have been complaints from some U.S. volunteer workers at the base that they are being told not to mix with the Vietnamese except on official business. One group of college students teaching English at the camp for the summer said they were warned by

military police to stop "fraternizing" with Vietnamese.

"The cultural contact here has been nothing—zero," said Werner Daniels, a Fort Smith businessman who said he is planning to employ several Vietnamese in his metal forging plant. "You hear all kinds of rumors but the truth is almost nobody has even seen a refugee. People are going to have to get to know their culture before they can really comprehend their problems and lose some of the uneasiness that seems built up here."

In the beginning, city officials here talked about holding meetings between residents and the refugees. But there has not been much progress along these lines.

Despite these problems, the camp itself is a picture of tranquility. Groups of Vietnamese children—nearly 60 per cent of the camp's population—romp across

grassy areas kicking soccer balls and flipping Frisbees in contrast to couples strolling arm in arm along the sawhorse barriers or walking under delicately colored umbrellas that keep off the midday Arkansas sun.

Nearly everyone in the camp studies English. The Butterfield Trail News Stand in Fort Smith, which stocks pornography, Bibles, and the town's only supply of Vietnamese books, sold out its hastily ordered supply of Vietnamese-English dictionaries more than a week ago.

With years of unrest behind them and an uncertain future, there is a growing unwillingness among many of the refugees to part from this scene too quickly. Camp officials said three groups of refugees who left have returned, including one man who came back from North Dakota after he found it too cold.