

SFChronicle AUG 11 1975  
**President**  
**Welcomed**  
**At Camp**

Ft. Smith, Ark.

Thousands of Vietnamese refugees greeted President Ford warmly yesterday as he paid his first visit to a staging camp for Indochina refugees.

An estimated 18,000 Vietnamese lined the road for three miles outside Ft. Chaffee refugee camp in western Arkansas to watch the vacationing President arrive in his black Cadillac limousine.

The President and Mrs. Ford stopped here to dedicate a local hospital, to visit the Ft. Chaffee camp and to make political courtesy calls. Mr. and Mrs. Ford are on their way to a 15-day "working vacation" in Vail, Colo.

Mr. Ford took off his jacket in the 98-degree Arkansas heat as he drove out to the refugee camp for the enthusiastic mass welcome and a 45-minute visit he described as "inspirational."

Nearly the entire refugee population of about 21,000 turned out to see the President, with most of them standing in the baking sun, lining the highway behind restraining ropes.

Many cheered, clapped and waved as Mr. Ford passed. Others simply smiled.

Inside the relocation center, cheers welled up from time to time as the President moved from one facility to another. A crowd of about 200 held up hand-lettered signs with such greetings as "Vietnamese fishermen welcome President Gerald Ford."

Outside a camp day care center, Vietnamese youngsters sang a song about coconuts in English to the obvious delight of the President.

Asked his impression of the camp, Mr. Ford told a reporter: "It makes all the efforts of so many people really worthwhile. It's so inspirational to see so many young people and old people getting an opportunity to be a part of America."

White House press secretary

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# PRESIDENT

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Ron Nessen told reporters Mr. Ford believes the adverse public opinion that greeted the refugee influx when it began last spring has largely "blown over."

As Mr. Ford toured a hospital ward, an elderly Vietnamese man wearing blue pajamas stopped him, shook his hand and said in halting English, "All of the people at Ft. Chaffee thank you very much for your help, and we pray for you, your family and your people."

Mr. Ford told Donald MacDonald, senior civil coordinator at Ft. Chaffee, "I want to thank you on behalf of all Americans who I understand properly and enthusiastically opened their hearts to the thousands who suffered adversity with us."

One refugee, identified as Vu Tring Ky, 67, handed Mr. Ford a letter in which he asked that refugees be given plots of land as settlers under the Homestead Act.

The President met a Vietnamese family — a young man, his wife and their four children — about to depart for their new home in Mr. Ford's native Grand Rapids, Mich. The children gave Mr. Ford a watercolor they had painted in the camp.

Mr. Ford returned to Ft. Smith for a meeting with Arkansas Republican party leaders before he and Mrs. Ford — who did not accompany him to Ft. Chaffee — continued their trip to Vail.

Ft. Chaffee is the largest of four centers set up in the United States to accommodate the refugees from South Vietnam and Cambodia.

United Press

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