

Refugees Hail Ford Visit to Center at Ft. Chaffee, Ark.

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FORT SMITH, Ark., Aug. 10 —Thousands of refugees from Indochina applauded, waved to and smiled at President Ford as he toured the Fort Chaffee refugee resettlement center here today.

The President, perspiring heavily in the 98-degree heat, met a family that will resettle in Grand Rapids, Mich., his home town, visited a wooden barracks where the Vietnamese refugees are living, and watched small children at play in a camp day-care center.

"It makes all of the efforts that so many people have put into this very worthwhile," Mr. Ford said after his quick tour of the largest of the four refugee camps in this country.

Ford Extends Welcome

"It's really inspirational," he said, "to see so many young people, old people and others getting an opportunity to be a part of America. We're proud of them and welcome them all here."

The President visited the refugee center and a new hospital in Fort Smith on his way to Vail, Colo., for a two-week vacation. While staying in Vail, Mr. Ford will visit six other states on Presidential and political speaking trips.

Camp officials said that virtually all the 20,941 refugees now living at Fort Chaffee lined a long main street of the camp to greet Mr. Ford.

The officials gave the President a briefing on the slow progress of the huge effort to resettle the refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia. They said that 120,796 refugees had arrived thus far at the four refugee centers, with 43,225 at Fort Chaffee. The other centers are at Camp Pendleton, Calif., Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, and Indianhead Gap, Pa. According to the officials, 65,151 refugees had been resettled across the country, 22,284 of them through Fort Chaffee.

Several of the English speaking residents of the camp who stood outside the white wooden building where Mr. Ford was briefed said, however, that they were becoming impatient after having waited as long as three months to be settled elsewhere.

Seeks to Settle in South

One refugee, Vu Trong Ky, a 67-year-old man who said he had been a province chief in Vietnam, passed a letter to Mr. Ford through an aide urging that a new community be established for Vietnamese somewhere in the warm South.

"If the matter is not contrary to the American law and to your policy, each refugee is to be allotted a plot of land [large] enough for house con-

struction and farming," the plea from Mr. Ky said. "House is to be made of prefabricated material."

Mr. Ky's letter went on to suggest that what he described as the Vietnamese version of Chinatown be created with funds to be repaid by the refugees when they become established in this country.

White House officials said they were not sure Mr. Ford had seen the letter.

The President spoke briefly with Nguyen Van Nhan, a 34-year-old former Vietnamese helicopter pilot, whose wife and four children—one of them born June 17 at Fort Chaffee's base hospital—are scheduled to move soon to Grand Rapids.

Mr. Ford thanked the resettlement officials and representatives of nine volunteer agencies working at Fort Chaffee

for their efforts.

He doffed his brown suit coat to walk in the sizzling heat among the buildings on the huge former Army base. Mr. Ford briefly went inside one of the neat barracks buildings, glanced around, and said, "It's very nice and neat and clean."

The President spent about three minutes walking through a hospital ward where a middle-aged Vietnamese in blue patient garb told him in halting English:

"All of people of Fort Chaffee thank you very much for your help and we pray for you, for your family and your people."

Earlier, the President and his wife, Betty, took part in the dedication of a new, \$16-million St. Edward Mercy Medical Center in Fort Smith, a short

distance from the refugee camp.

The hospital was built with the assistance of a federally guaranteed loan in a program that Mr. Ford said he had helped enact eight years ago as member of Congress.

Before traveling on to Colorado this evening, the President met with key Republican party officials from Arkansas at a hotel in Fort Smith.