



President Roosevelt's Second American War Plant Tour at Camp Joseph T. Robinson, Ark., the presidential procession passes between two rows of troops presenting arms. The Chief Executive visited this camp Palm Sunday, April 18, 1943, and attended church services with 3400 officers and men in the camp gymnasium., 04/18/1943. Photo courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.

Questions to Think About

1. Describe the people you see in this picture.
2. Why do you think President Roosevelt wanted to tour Camp Robinson?
3. Why do you think these soldiers were at Camp Robinson in 1943?

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN WORLD WAR II ARKANSAS

People that refuse to join the military for religious reasons are known as conscientious objectors. There have been conscientious objectors throughout American History. In World War II the military made certain exceptions for religions that had long been recognized as conscientious objectors. Members of these religions - the Quakers and the Mennonites - were allowed to serve in non-combat roles, or not serve at all, depending on their beliefs.

There was a religion that was not as well known as the Quakers or the Mennonites but that also had conscientious objectors. These people were called Jehovah's Witnesses. Part of the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses was a strict interpretation of the Bible verse, "Thou Shalt Not Kill." Jehovah's Witnesses also did not believe in saluting the flag, which was considered a very important patriotic gesture by most Americans at the time.

Jehovah's Witnesses ran into problems in Arkansas, as well as other areas. In one incident, a farmer went to the town of Marshall to get federal relief goods for his family. A worker at the welfare office suspected the man was a Jehovah's Witness and demanded that he salute the flag before getting his benefits. The man refused to salute the flag. He stated that he believed in the ideas behind the flag, but that the flag itself was only a "rag." The man was denied benefits and also arrested under a law passed during the First World War that made it a misdemeanor to insult the flag. He was fined \$50 and sentenced to twenty-four hours in jail.

Jehovah's Witnesses faced other difficulties around the state. In some instances Jehovah's Witnesses were attacked as they tried to distribute religious literature or hold meetings. In order to curb the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, two towns in Arkansas went so far as to require anyone who wanted to preach, distribute literature or make public speeches to get permission to do so. Local draft boards also denied most Jehovah's Witnesses official conscientious objector status, telling some that they would join the army or go to jail.

Questions to Think About

1. How does the above passage relate to the Four Freedoms? Were Jehovah's Witnesses denied any of the Four Freedoms? If so, which ones?

2. How is what happened to the Jehovah's Witnesses similar to what happened to Japanese Americans in the relocation camps? How does it differ?