

TENTH ENGINEERS, WORLD WAR I

- Fry: Oh, were you in the Tenth Engineers Corps?
- Kelley: Yes. I was a Captain in the Tenth Engineers.
- Then I became a Major in the Tenth Engineers, later on. I was in France by that time.
- Fry: According to some of the notes I've taken, in France it was the duty of the Tenth Engineers to try to locate the timber needed for war-time purposes. Is that right?
- Kelley: There were several men who did that, but they were in France before we got there, negotiating with the French for timber and getting agreements from the French that they'd give this timber here or that timber there to the Tenth Engineers. And when we got over there, some of that timber had been--I don't think any of it had been paid for--but it had been agreed that we could cut this timber or cut that timber. And later on, as time went on, we had the responsibility for finding more timber. And then these men who were over there first would come along and negotiate with the French for that timber.
- Fry: I see. And what parts of this operation were under you?
- Kelley: I had to build the sawmills and see that the lumber was cut. And I also had to get the stuff hauled to some point wherever the operators would say they needed it.
- Fry: What did Du Bois do?
- Kelley: I don't know what Du Bois did. He went to France with the Tenth Engineers, but he was never a part

Kelley: of our organization. I never could understand that. [Henry] Graves was over there. And I think that Du Bois must have had some understanding, some connection with Graves, because Coert was never with our organization there. I never saw him over there.

Fry: What did you think he did?

Kelley: I don't know what he did. He didn't stay over there anything like the length of time we did. He came home to organize the Twentieth Engineers in the West.

Fry: I was going to ask you to give an evaluation of Du Bois and his work here in California.

Kelley: He was a fine, fine thinker, and a good presenter of problems. In some of these books I have around here, I had to do with writing a section on Du Bois for a book that Kotok wrote on forest fires. He was an able fellow and a very fine fellow to work with.

He and I made a trip one time from Lake Tahoe, from Truckee clear up to the top of the mountains there--the Truckee Range--and rode those tops all the way to the edge of the Walker River. We got along famously. Except that we came to such steep hills to go down on the Walker River that he couldn't go down those steep hills. It would make him dizzy. So he tried to go down backwards. [Laughter] I took the horses down, and he tried to go down those steep hills backwards. Then out on the Walker River we climbed up to the headwaters of the Cherry River, which heads way up in Yosemite Park. We ended the trip way up there at the headwaters of the Cherry River in the Park. Then we came out of there and rode west and got rid of our horses.

Fry: What did you do then when you came back from World War I?

Kelley: Our regiment came home in January, 1919. I didn't come with my regiment. I stayed over there with part of the Twentieth Engineers, repairing roads that the American army had worn out, for the French

Kelley: people. I did that at the request of the Chief Engineer of the United States Army in France. And I had the wherewithal to crush a rock and cut it up in pebbles and pack it around and put it in the roads and repair the roads.

Then the big job--it almost makes me sick to the stomach to think about it--we had a lot of lumber piled up in a place called Esertil. And the army wanted that lumber resawed to use for burying the boys who had been killed wherever their bodies could be found.

Fry: Oh, to make coffins.

Kelley: That's right. And I was told that I could put that job in the hands of young Germans who had been arrested and put in prison around Esertil.

Fry: You mean prisoners of war?

Kelley: Yes. So I went down there and signed up those boys. And they were just boys. And I put several of them to work remaking those sawmills. Making small sawmills out of big sawmills, and resawing some of those big boards and making small boards out of them. They landed on wagons and hauled them up into places where our boys were to be buried, which today are those big cemeteries that you've probably read about. And my job was to see that that lumber was delivered up there.

Then when I was doing that I could see those trucks come in there with all those bodies in boxes--big boxes. And those boys of that organization having to do with burial, would pull those bodies out of those boxes and try and identify them. Some of them had their dog tags on and some of them didn't. And they were down in the bottom of the box. That didn't worry those men very much. Their job was to get those fellows in the ground. And if they had to put somebody else's little old iron metal on their bodies, it wouldn't worry them at all. They just tied it on. And I'd see that going on. And I'd say, "My God, that's a heck of a way to do a job."

Fry: So there was a good deal of misidentification.

Kelley: Yes. Then a month went by and there would come the mothers and fathers of these young boys looking for their boy's grave. And they'd take the bodies out and take them back home. I never could see the justification of taking a dead man out of a hole in the ground and taking him back home to put him in another hole in the ground.

Well, I did a lot of that kind of work during the time I was a major. A major is supposed to be a big guy, you know, but that's what I did. [Laughter] But in the course of time I came home.

Fry: A question I'd like to ask you is if there was any intellectual cross-pollination between French lumbermen and foresters and American foresters on methods and techniques during this period?

Kelley: The only place we had any association with other organizations was with the Canadians. They operated in the same general territory as I did when I was running the sawmill. Within two or three miles from where I was operating my sawmill were some Canadians operating the same type of sawmill. I never was around any other organizations.

Fry: Then your job really didn't have a great deal to do with forest protection or silvicultural practices or anything like that. You were there to harvest lumber.

Kelley: Yes. And the French told us what they wanted done. Their foresters came out and marked our timber. And they told us--some of their big gun foresters for the French--would tell their men what they should do and what they shouldn't do. And my theory was that we were over there to do the best we could to satisfy the French because maybe we would want some more timber. I never had any trouble with the French.

Fry: Did they employ different cutting methods?

Kelley: Oh yes, different philosophies entirely.

Fry: Do you think it influenced us at all?

Kelley: No. They were very reasonable as far as my exper-

Kelley: ience was concerned.

Fry: I meant for post-war development of forestry and cutting practices.

Kelley: No. The forester that I had most to do with when I left France--headed to leave France--I went up to a place called Pontarleille to say goodbye to him, and he was upstairs on the third story, in the town of Pontarleille. And I had a very nice visit with him. I got so I could talk enough French to keep myself out of trouble. And he followed me down these three steps of stairs and out on to the street. And he had a moustache and he had long whiskers. And he had both his moustache and these long whiskers and his nose all shined up with moustache wax. And when we got out on the street he grabbed me around and said, "Major, your men down there have been very, very cooperative and are very, very fine fellows to know. I've known lots of foresters in my experience with French foresters. But I've never had anybody any more agreeable to be with than you fellows. I'm greatly indebted to you." So with moustache and whiskers and all, he kissed me on both cheeks. [Laughter] That was just amusing.

Fry: Then when you came home I suppose you were mustered out, but did you stay in the reserves?

Kelley: No. When I came home I didn't know what I was going to do. But I'll tell you what I did do. I came home to see my mother. She lived in San Francisco at that time. I went to see her one morning. That same morning I went down to the Forest Service office in San Francisco and walked down the hall and the first man I saw was Coert Du Bois. And he said, "My God I'm glad to see you." He wanted to see me because before Mr. Graves went to France he had worked for a long time in Congress to get an appropriation for the construction of roads and trails in California. And Congress appropriated quite a lot of money to do that. Then Mr. Graves came back from France and he found out that none of that money had been spent, not a dollar of it, and he felt as if the Congress would think that he didn't play square with the Congress.

Kelley: So he called all the regional foresters together--the western regional foresters--to meet him in Spokane, Washington. And he gave all these regional foresters in Regions 5 and 6 the devil. He had said to Congress that it was absolutely necessary for the welfare and protection of those forests. So he laid down the law that these regional foresters, just as soon as they got home, would get a hold of somebody of their organization that would start road building and do it quick.

So the thing that Du Bois told me to do that morning when I got home to get busy and build these roads and do it damn quick. [Laughter] And spend that money.

Fry: This was like the experience you had in France.

Kelley: Yes. Do something and do it quick.

Fry: What about equipment for road building then?

Kelley: Oh we didn't have any. We had to buy it. I kept at that job--

Fry: Excuse me, what was your title in this job?

Kelley: I guess my title was the same one as when I left.

Anyway, I was supposed to go out and stir up a lot of enthusiasm on the part of the supervisors building roads, and see what they needed. I traveled through the country to see what roads we should actually build and what prospect we had of getting machinery.

Oh, I was retired then. I retired in 1947. I came down here in 1947. But when the Second World War broke out this country was practically rubberless. And we needed rubber. And the only