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## HISTORICAL JEWELS OF LIMERICK

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# The Rise and Fall of Krups

SANDRA QUINN

**I**n its prime, Krups employed more than 1,400 people in the factory on the Roxboro Road in Rathbane.

The staff members were treated like royalty and former workers described it as being like a palace.

More than half a century on, the German company remains a source of fond and indelible memories for former workers and their family.

They were brought on complimentary trips to Europe, enjoyed a number of social engagements on the company tab and for some, love blossomed on the factory floor.

For anyone who didn't have accommodation nearby, one of the eleven

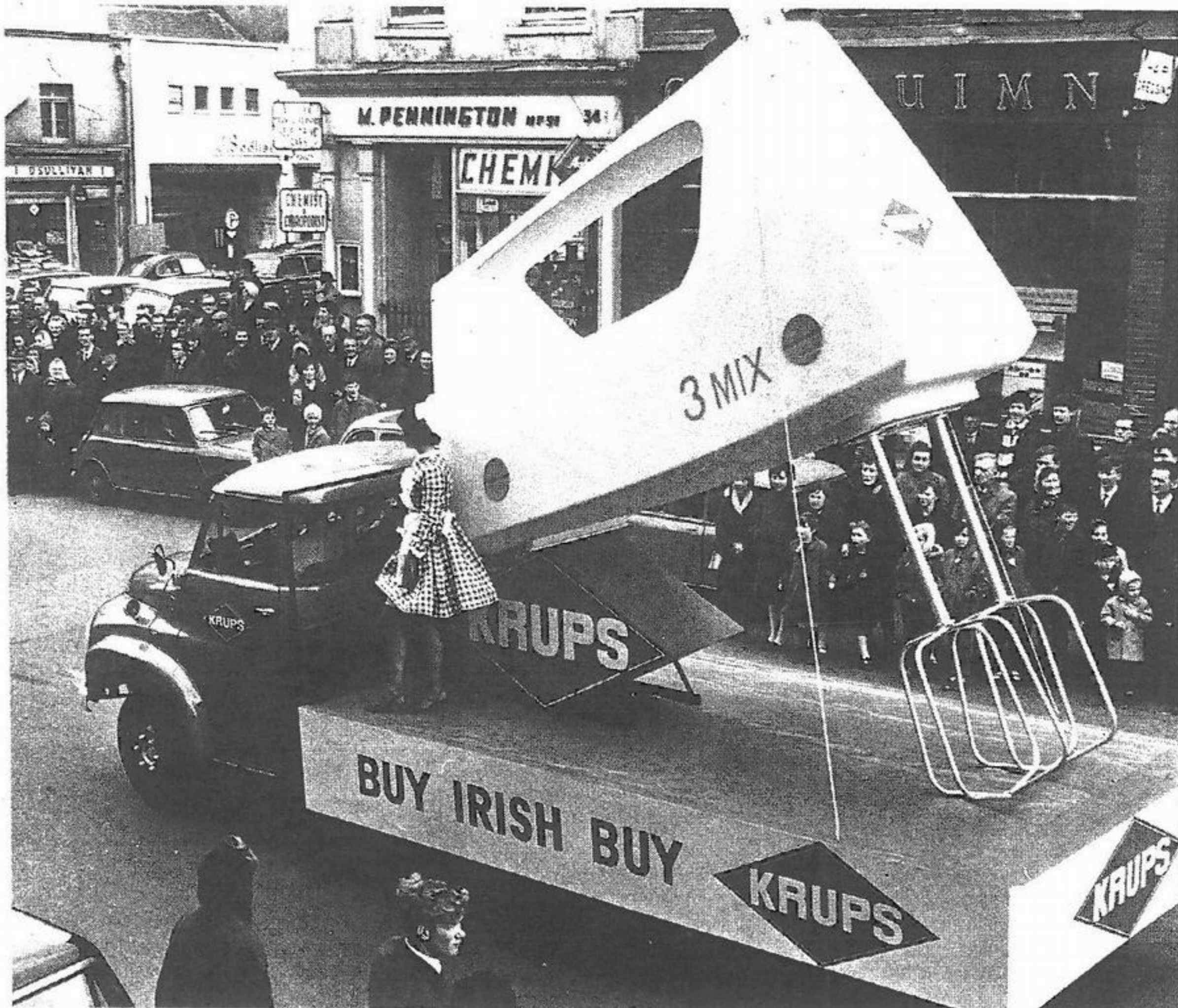
Krups houses, complete with a tennis court, swimming pool, laundry, garage and manicured lawn was offered up and it was widely accepted that this was not merely a housing stopgap, but instead your home for as long as you so wished.

The social element to working at Krups was a strong one, as the company held social dinner dances, had a fishing club, a soccer club, golf society, photography society and athletics club.

Former fitter Joe Le Gear and electrician Frank Harty, both from Caherdavin, spoke to Limerick Life about their time with Krups and how things changed over the years.

Joe was in Krups for twenty-nine

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and a half years, while Frank was there for 25 years.

After life in Krups, Joe went on to do a number of courses before working in Ardscoil Ris as a general maintenance worker, while Frank went on to work in Dell and then did contract work, as he had done before life in Krups.

Frank recalled that when Krups first came, he was working there on contract and that at that time, there was no road leading to it – most of the workers went through the fields to head home for their lunch in the middle of the day.

"It was like a palace compared to other places," Joe said.

On one occasion, a plane load of employees were brought to France for a sporting event, as the company had their own jet.

"People were happy there," Joe stressed.

Joe added that it was largely a young workforce and Frank said that most workers were living at home with their parents when they started.

Frank said that the way that Krups operated from an engineering viewpoint was unique, in that a big roll of steel came into the factory and then it was worked down using various machines so that at the end of the production line, an appliance was ready to go out in a box to a customer.

"The training was tremendous, when you qualified, there was a pool of expertise that went on to benefit many of the companies in the locality and we were all cross trained, so everyone learned about other people's jobs, so that we could do a number of tasks, instead of just one," Frank explained.

"We were among the first in Ireland to take up cross-trade craft. We were like a Jack of all trades and you could have one man doing two jobs and getting extra money for it," Frank said.

Joe and his wife Betty will be married 44 years next January and they are one of the many couples to come out of Krups.

They got together after a 21st birthday party for a Krups colleague and over the years, Joe's children, Grace, Robert and Andrew all worked in Krups either on summer jobs or work experience for college. That was the case with many families.

For Frank, at one point, his two sisters and brother were all working there and he also secured a job for his niece.

Recommendations from current employees held a lot of weight in those times.

Moulinex had taken over Krups about nine years before they closed and similar to Krups, they were dedicated to their workforce.

"They even brought in a French teacher to give us one-to-one les-

sons, so that we could talk to the French technicians," Frank told Limerick Life.

During a visit to mark the 25-year anniversary of Krups being in Ireland, Frieder Krups said: "The first production in Ireland started in June 1964, but the story actually started

more than a year earlier, when my father decided that Limerick was just the right place for the new production plant, which he was planning to establish.

"Ireland was seen as the ideal location for such a facility and a large green field in Roxboro was selected for the site of the actual plant, close to the Airport of Shannon and close to the city of Limerick, where future employees could easily be recruited.

"My father was taking a very active role in the start-up of the plant here, so he decided to move over his whole family to Ireland for almost a year."

Dell took on many of the Krups workers after its closure and many workers chose to take advantage of the training fund on offer and went on to do courses and upskill before returning to the workforce.

Speaking about the closure, Frank said that "there were no rumblings", and Joe added that "it came out of the blue".

Prior to the closure, numbers had been dropping over the years from 1,400 to 1,000, then down to 500 or so, due to automation and streamlining of work practices.

On October 30, 1998, just eight weeks before Christmas, all staff members were called to the canteen for a 9am meeting.

The workers had thought that they might be getting less overtime or that a cutback would be announced; they were not expecting to be told that their jobs would be no more.

The announcement was made by Liam McElligot.

"He just came out with one sentence 'Krups in Limerick is closing' – there was no humming and hawing, there were ooh's and aah's throughout and the closure happened gradually, one went then another," Joe told Limerick Life.

Speaking about how the factory soon became a mere shadow of its former self, Frank said that he was



*I remember looking across the whole factory floor and there was a lone pigeon cooing – it was a poignant moment and it really struck home that it was gone*

there until May 19, 1999 and there were pools of water on the factory floor.

"I remember looking across the whole factory floor and there was a lone pigeon cooing – it was a poignant moment and it really struck home that it was gone. There was just an empty floor."

Joe added that there were less than ten people in with him on the last day. He was the last remaining, as he made sure the heating and cooling systems were shut down and that everything was taken care of.

While the Krups closure was a blow for everyone, it was worse for people whose entire family livelihood came from the factory, but Krups made sure to honour its workers and many got handsome payments and went on to upskill through courses paid for by the company.

"It was a tough luck story, but we got a long run and I got my house paid for because of Krups," Frank said.

The legacy of Krups still lives on in many kitchens all over Ireland

and the world, as many people still have the mixers, coffee machines and other appliances from years gone by, with many reports that they are still going strong.

"My mother's Krups mixer is now 42 years old and it's still mixing cakes and going strong," Frank said.

**KRUPS TIMELINE**

1846: The Krups story began in a forge in the town of Wald in Northern Germany. The owner Joshua Kortz had several friends working for him, as well as his nephew Robert Krups. It is Robert's son, also Robert, who would go on to turn the forge into an internationally thriving industrial company.

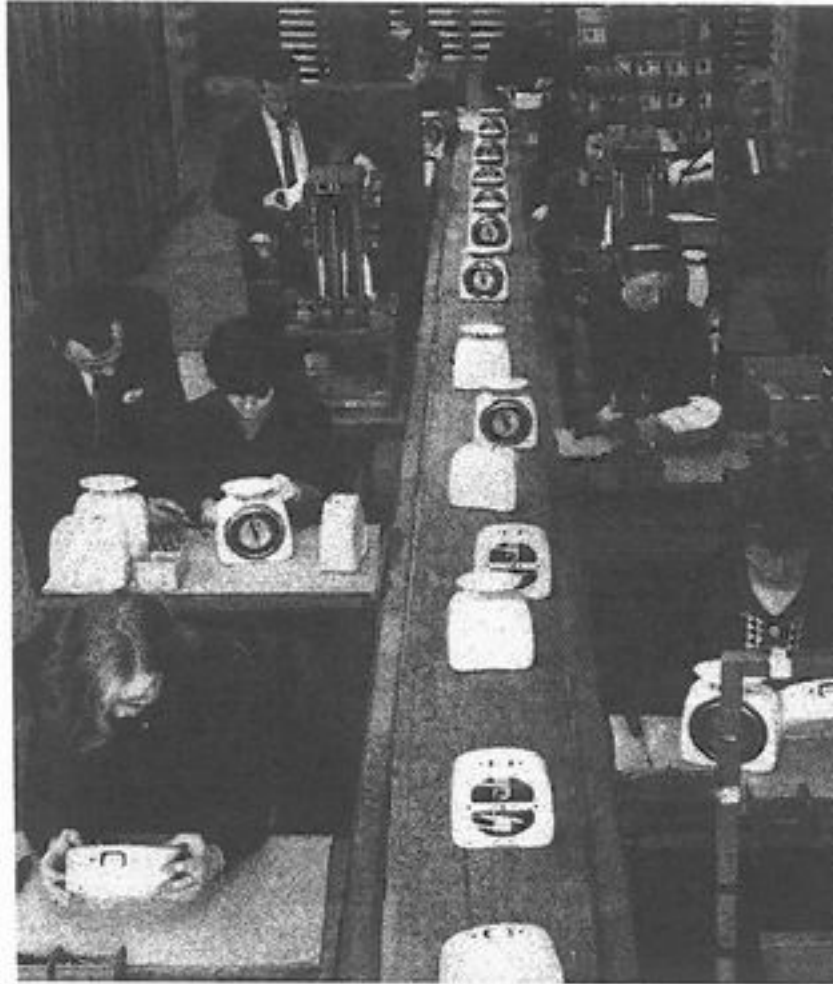
1866: Robert Krups (the second to bear his name) and four of his nine children moved the company to Solingen and set up a factory, which delivered products to Holland and Switzerland.

1900: Krups becomes one of Germany's leading manufacturers of scales.

1951: Despite the devastation brought to Germany by the Second World War, the third generation of the Krups family (Fritz Krups and Dr Karl Körner) take a huge risk and re-launch the company with barely thirty employees.

They made quite the business duo – Karl Körner was a lawyer and was good at anticipating the needs of the post-war market, while Fritz Krups was an experienced technician who transformed his original and innovative ideas into successful products.

1956: For 110 years, Krups dedicates itself to the manufacturing of scales under the brand Krups Ideal and in 1956,





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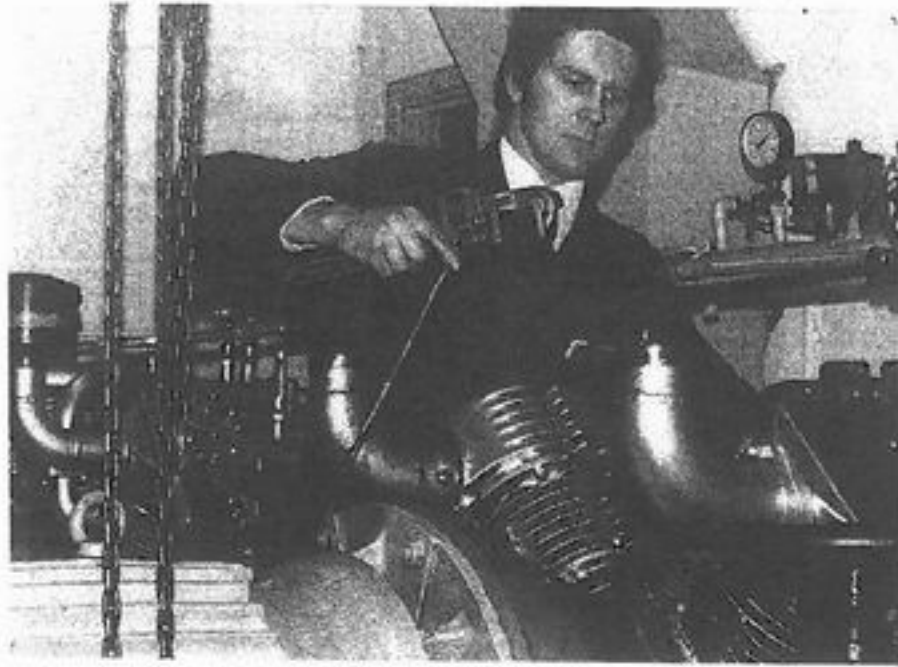
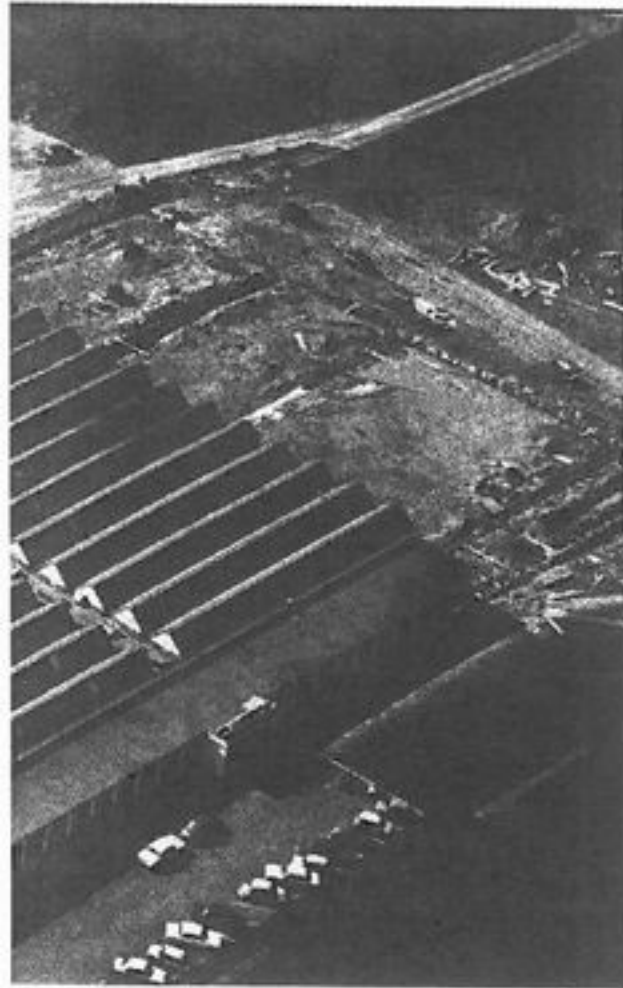
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**“** A plane load of employees were brought to France for a sporting event, as the company had their own jet

they launched their first electric coffee grinders. They sold one million of these in the first year of manufacturing and quickly established themselves as a name within the coffee sector (even now, they are often referenced in many coffee loving blogs).

1959: They created the '3-Mix' mixer – a practical and ingenious addition to the modern kitchen.

1962: Building began on the Krups site on the Roxboro Road, Rathbane, Limerick to develop a factory, which would become a

large part of life in Limerick for many years to come. The closure of this factory decades later would cause widespread unemployment and devastation across the city, as entire families would lose their livelihood.

1964: There are now four Krups factories in Solingen in Germany and one in Limerick.

1983: The first Krups espresso machine is launched.

1990: Krups employs nearly 3,000

people with a turnover of 541 million DM and coffee machines and mixers represent the bulk of their sales.

1991: In partnership with Nestle, the Krups Nespresso machine is launched.

1996: Krups celebrates its 150 year anniversary.

2001: Krups joins Groupe SEB (Société d'Emboutissage de Bourgogne), a French company and the headquarters are still in Solingen, Germany.

**QUIRKY FACTS ABOUT KRUPS**

The Krups Type 223 Coffina Super coffee grinder was so ahead of its time and futuristic in fashion that it featured as a prop in the 1979 film Alien as part of a spacecraft. It also appeared in Back to the Future as Mr Fusion.

Robert Krups once said; "My deepest desire has always been to reach the summits of technical perfection."

The motto was 'Beyond Reason' and Krups were globally renowned for their innovation, quality, technical expertise and vision for what the future could hold.

The public Krups Eng, Limerick Ireland Facebook group has 606 members and it acts as a forum for former colleagues and their friends or family members to keep in touch, reminisce about the days in the factory, share photographs and sadly in recent years to lament the loss of friends who have passed away.

**KRUPS IN LIMERICK**

1962: Building began on the Roxboro Road site in Rathbane, Limerick.

1964: The Krups factory opened and employed 120 people from Limerick and across Munster.

1977: Employment figures in Krups rose to over 1,000 and it was classed as one of the biggest employers in the Mid-West Region.

1989: Frieder Krups came to Ireland to mark the 25-year anniversary of Krups in Ireland and the company was then employing almost 800 people.

1991: The ownership of Krups changed, as the French company Moulinex took over.

1998: Due to a combination of the collapse of the Russian market and Asian competition, Krups closed down causing the loss of 500 jobs.



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