

and the products of the looms were piled up upon the shelves. How long they might be there in the disturbed state of things we had no idea, but the mills had been opened to give employment and we went on giving it. We piled up the webs of material and there were moments when I looked at the laden shelves and wondered would we ever empty them, or would the process go on until we reached the roof. Actually, we learned from that period the wisdom of accumulating stocks — when the inevitable influx of orders came after the period of stagnation, we were able to supply the goods immediately and the customers were pleased. From that time forward we always carried big stocks and have found it a sound policy.

We had our drama of the Civil War. One day a young man who was a member of the Free State Army, as the government forces were then called, came into our wareroom. He talked a while to one of our men — they were in a gay mood and after some laughing conversation they both left together. The Republican Forces — the Irregulars, who were in opposition to the Treaty were active in North Mayo; the two men, who left our mills as if they were going on a picnic, went to intercept them with others — only a short time afterwards both were killed and we had two sad funerals to the local cemetery. I have always remembered their laughing departure as if bound for some happy event.....

The member of the "Free State Army" that called to the woollen mills on that fateful morning was Captain Tom Healy, commander of the army garrison then based in the ex-RIC barracks in Foxford, and he had come to the mill to seek the help of his former comrade in arms of the pre-Truce IRA, Volunteer Sean Higgins; they had both been members of the 2nd. Battalion of the North Mayo Brigade; in fact Sean Higgins was one of the six Foxford men who had been dumped into the River Moy by the Black and Tans in May of the previous year.

Captain Healy led his troops out of Foxford in gay spirits to engage the enemy, but fifty three miles away on a lonely winding road at Glenamoy near Bangor Erris, four Irregular snipers had taken up position at Gortleetha Lodge, whilst the main body of the large Flying Column with machine guns placed themselves in an ideal ambush site with a full field of fire, on the mountain overlooking the road. The advance guard of the army troops made their way up towards Gortleetha, and Tom Healy and Sean Higgins fell dead with four other soldiers from the first volley on Saturday 16 September 1922.....

The engagement at Glenamoy was a defeat for the newly

formed army of the Irish Free State, and the Republican brigade involved in the action submitted this report to their divisional adjutant:

On 14th. inst. the major general with a small party ambushed a body of 50 Free State forces between Ballycastle and Beiderrig at Glenosra Lodge. The advance guard of Free State troops was captured without a shot and 16 rifles were taken. The main body retreated to Ballina for reinforcements. Arriving on the morning of 16th. Sept. at daylight, they moved towards Gortleetha Lodge assuming the general had an outpost there, whereas his full column were in the vicinity. Four of our snipers were placed in position at Gortleetha Lodge and the main body took up an ambush position on the mountain overlooking the road and covering the enemy from whatever position he chose to advance. The advance guard of 16 Free State troops moved down the road towards Gortleetha and were accounted for by the 4 snipers who killed 6 and wounded 3 seriously and 3 or 4 others. The main body of Free State forces advanced across country and engaged our troops. After three and a half hours engagement, they surrendered; 35 prisoners were taken excluding the 6 killed. We captured 80 rifles, approximately 100 bombs and some revolvers. Suffered no casualties.

When the Treaty was signed on 6 December 1921 and the Irish Free State established, deep divisions of opinion and allegiance arose within the newly formed army commands; the pre Truce IRA became two armies, and as a division or a brigade took its character from the majority of the men in it, the members opposed to them would leave and join a unit where their own views prevailed; three out of the four Western Divisions became anti-Treaty, opposing the forces of the newly established state. The horror had begun, civil war: brother against brother, comrade against comrade in the final convulsion of tortured emotions and passionate ideological beliefs; there were many other military actions in Mayo, where the Free State army were the victors with the casualties on the Republican side. The conflict was to continue until the anti-Treaty forces were defeated in the field, and by 12 May 1923 the cataclysm was over.

It is to the eternal credit of the hundreds and thousands of Irish men and women who were involved on either side in the tumultuous events of those years, that those two fine institutions of the state, born in such distress — the Army and the Garda Síochána, were able to transcend politics and establish themselves as pillars of the Republic of Ireland, serving with total loyalty successive Irish governments of every political hue.

The intensity of the feelings generated by the Civil War, the tragedy and the poignancy is enshrined in a letter written at the time