

Deasy, Rickard

by Maurice Cronin

Deasy, Rickard (1916–99), army officer and a founder of the National Farmers' Association, was born 13 March 1916 in Leeson St., Dublin, the youngest of three children (one son and two daughters) of Major Henry Hugh Peter Deasy, car manufacturer, explorer and son of the Clonakilty, Co. Cork, brewing family, and his wife, Dolores Hickie. He was educated at Ampleforth College, Yorkshire (1928–35), where he was a founding member of St Wilfrid's house, and Christchurch, Oxford (1935–8), graduating BA (1938) in politics, philosophy and economics. He subsequently attended Rathmines College of Commerce (1939). He joined the Defence Forces as a private on 5 September 1939, was commissioned lieutenant in the sixth field battery, Kildare barracks, in 1940, and eventually made commander of this unit. Later he was appointed an instructor at the depot and school of artillery at Kildare. Before the end of the Emergency he became OC of the thirteenth field battery.

Following the death of his mother in October 1944, he left the army to take over the family farm at Carrigahorig, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, and extended the holding to close on 200 acres. A founder member of the National (later the Irish) Farmers Association (NFA, later the IFA) in 1956, in Terryglass, Co. Tipperary, his progress in the association mirrored his army career. He became president of the NFA in 1961, taking over the leadership from the founder, Dr Juan Greene (qv), and held office until 1967. Making the voice of farmers heard at the highest levels of government, he showed the effectiveness of a strong united organisation in furthering the interests of the farming community, and was the central figure in the militant campaign by farmers to secure price increases for agricultural products during the 1960s. Carrying his trademark blackthorn stick and wearing a black beret, on 8 October 1966 he led the farming community from Bantry, Co. Cork, on a mass march to Dublin, arriving eleven days later. He and his followers came into direct confrontation with the then minister for agriculture, Charles J. Haughey (1925–2006), whose refusal to meet the farm leaders resulted in a 22-day sit-down on the steps of the department. The campaign eventually won formal negotiating rights for farmers with the government.

After retiring from the NFA he became involved with Gorta, the famine relief agency, and stood as a Labour party candidate in north Tipperary in 1969, receiving an insignificant vote. He was involved with the Glenstal ecumenical conference and maintained a strong interest in current affairs, particularly issues of reconciliation in Northern Ireland. He married Sheila O'Kelly, daughter of Count Sean D. O'Kelly, of Gortray, Portumna, Co. Galway, on 19 May 1947. They had three sons, Rickard, Ruaidhri, Robin, and a daughter Lucila.

Deasy died at Nenagh hospital, 13 July 1999.

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*Cork Examiner*, 13 July 1999; *Ir. Times*, 17 July 1999; *Ampleforth Journal*, iv, pt 2 (autumn 1999); personal information, Rickard and Ruaidhri Deasy, sons

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