



## The late Dermot Earley, RIP, 1948–2010

# McAleese leads tributes to legendary Dermot Earley

### Roscommon great will be laid to rest on Saturday

■ Pauline Scott

Dermot Earley, the legendary former Roscommon footballer and recently retired Chief of Staff of the Irish Defence Forces, died on Wednesday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>. He had been ill over the course of recent months. He was 62.

President Mary McAleese has led tributes to the legend. She said: "I had the honour of knowing and working with Lt Gen Earley for many years. He was an outstanding member of the Defence Forces, whose appointment as Chief of Staff rewarded a military career characterised by exceptional professionalism and dedication to service."

A native of Gorthaganny, Dermot was a son of Kitty Earley and the late Peadar Earley. He was widely regarded as having been one of the greatest gaelic footballers of all time and amongst the finest never to have won a senior All-Ireland medal. With his colleagues he went very close to achieving that goal in 1980 when he played for Roscommon in the final against Kerry.

His father Peadar was Principal of Gorthaganny NS and his mother Kitty was a teacher in the school. After attending Gorthaganny NS he went on to attend St. Nathy's Secondary School in Ballaghaderreen.

As we went to press on Wednesday night funeral details were emerging. Lt. Gen. Earley is to be buried with full military honours in Co. Kildare on Saturday. His remains will repose in St Brigid's Garrison Church, The Curragh from 1 pm to 7 pm on Friday. His remains will be removed to St Conleth's Church, Newbridge at 8.30 pm on Friday evening. The funeral will take place to St Conleth's Cemetery, Newbridge after Mass at 11 am on Saturday.

From joining the defence forces as a seventeen-year-old cadet in 1965, Dermot Earley steadily advanced through the ranks of the army, being elevated to the position of Chief of Staff in 2007.

He joined the Defence Forces as a cadet in 1965. He was commissioned into the Infantry Corps in 1967 and appointed a Platoon Commander in the Recruit Training Depot at the Curragh. He specialised in Physical Training and Education and was appointed an Instructor at the Army School of Physical Culture (ASPC) in 1969. He completed a specialist Diploma in physical education at St. Mary's College Twickenham in 1971.

He held a variety of operational and administrative appointments in the Curragh Command and completed the First Ranger Course in the Defence Forces, which led to the establishment of special operations training and the formation of the Army Ranger Wing (ARW).

Following a period as Assistant Command Adjutant at Curragh Command Headquarters (HQ), General



The late Dermot Earley.

Earley was appointed School Commandant of the ASPC. From 1983 to 1987 he was desk officer for overseas operations and later current operations in the Chief of Staff's Branch at Defence Forces Headquarters. On return from an overseas posting in 1991 he was appointed an instructor at the Command & Staff School of the Military College and in 1994/95 he helped establish the United Nations Training School Ireland (UNTSI) in the Military College.

Service overseas was an integral part of his military career. Lieutenant General Earley served with UNTSO

in the Middle East from 1975 to 1977 and was Adjutant of the 52 Infantry Battalion with UNIFIL (Lebanon) in 1982/83. From 1987 to 1991 he served as the Deputy Military Advisor to the Secretary General of the UN at UN Headquarters in New York. General Earley commanded the 81st Infantry Battalion with UNIFIL in 1997.

Ongoing education was another aspect of his military career. He completed a specialist Diploma Course with distinction, in physical education at St Mary's College Strawberry Hill Twickenham in 1970/71. He graduated from the Royal College of De-

fence Studies London (2001) and held a Master of Arts (Hons) in peace and development studies from the University of Limerick (1999).

On promotion to Lieutenant Colonel in 1995 he commanded the 27 Infantry Battalion on the border with Northern Ireland and held further appointments as OIC Conciliation and Arbitration and OIC Public Relations at DFHQ. He was promoted to Colonel in 2001 and held the appointments of Director of Administration and Director of Personnel before being selected for promotion to Brigadier General in December 2003.

General Earley was promoted to Major General in February 2004 and was appointed Deputy Chief of Staff (Support). He was elevated to the position of Chief of Staff of the Irish Defence Forces in February 2007.

While his rise to the top of the defence forces was meteoric, it is his exploits on the football field for Roscommon that endeared him to so many people across the county. He played Gaelic football for Roscommon for twenty years (1965-1985) and was the holder of five Connacht Senior medals, two All Star Awards, one National League medal (1979), one U21 All Ireland medal (1966) An All-Ireland runners up medal (1980) and two Railway Cup medals. His interests included all sports, current affairs, military history and reading.

Lieutenant General Earley is survived by his wife Mary, mother Kitty, sons Dermot, David and Conor, daughters Paula, Anne Marie and Noelle. His death is also deeply regretted by his extended family his colleagues in the Irish Defence Forces and in the GAA, neighbours, and many friends.

### 'A gentle giant'

While the death of Dermot Earley is the cause of much sadness throughout County Roscommon, his passing is most keenly felt in his home area of Gorthaganny and Ballinlough.

Gerry Coffey, Chairman of the local GAA Club, Michael Glavey's paid tribute to a man he described as a "gentle giant". "He meant an awful lot to this club. Every time someone met him, he was always asking about the club. He was always willing to come down to functions and presentations and the Michael Glavey's field and complex is in memory of his late father, a founder of the club.

"It is a sad day for everyone in this club. Growing up, everyone looked up to Dermot Earley and everyone will remember where they were when they heard that he died.

"One thing I will always remember is the firm handshake. When he spoke everyone listened. He had that aura about him. Everyone can remember him playing with the left and right and the frees he put over. He was a gentle giant.

"Even for the young people of the area today, his name is synonymous with the club. He is one of the most famous people to come from our area and to die at such a young age is a huge loss.

"The club would like to extend sympathy to his wife, mother, children, brothers, sister, extended family, colleagues and many friends," concluded Mr. Coffey.