

Obituaries

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GLEN SHORTLIFFE, 72 » DIPLOMAT, CIVIL SERVANT

Privy Council clerk served three prime ministers

He epitomized the non-partisanship of a senior civil servant, but he was a no-nonsense man who could make tough decisions and who became known as The Enforcer for his involvement in a major civil service downsizing

BY FRANK B. EDWARDS

Glen Scott Shortliffe's arrival in Ottawa from Edmonton in 1962 marked a new era in Canadian public service. Despite having no old-boys-club connections, he steadily rose to the most senior post of the civil service during a 30-year career.

"He was a pretty tough customer," recalls Paul Heinbecker, director of Sir Wilfrid Laurier University's Centre for Global Relations and a former senior diplomat. "The people who joined foreign affairs then were a different breed than those of privilege who had come before. They tended to have gone to Oxford and Cambridge, but in the 60s, you began to get people who were products of Canadian schools and Canadian thinking.

"These were no-nonsense, no-bullshit, get-it-done, shrink-from-no-one kind of people."

It was that new attitude that took Shortliffe to the top of the public service. On July 1st, 1992, he was appointed clerk of the Privy Council, as well as secretary of cabinet and head of the 250,000-member Public Service of Canada.

Promoted by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, he also served Prime Ministers Kim Campbell and Jean Chrétien during his 21-month tenure.

During that time, he earned the nickname The Enforcer for his implementation of the government's controversial plans to reorganize and downsize the public service.

By the time he retired in early 1994, 17 federal departments had been folded into other ministries, affecting the jobs of 100,000 public servants.

After his death on May 6th at age 72, his former colleagues spoke glowingly of his unflinching and non-partisan service to Canada and his ability to make tough decisions.

Mulroney called him brilliant and exceptionally creative, saying, "He had a remarkable career and made a genuinely impressive contribution to Canada. I thought he was the incarnation of a superb public servant."

Even as he wielded great power in Ottawa, Shortliffe maintained a low-key lifestyle that reflected his modest roots. He grew up in Glenora, a post-war west Edmonton suburb. His father, James Newton Shortliffe, worked as a bank clerk but eventually became chairman and a co-owner of Atlas Van Lines. His mother Hazel, a passionate reader, left high school at age 15 at the onset of the Depression.

Conversation at the Sunday dinner table was especially lively when Shortliffe's grandfather, Delbert Shortliffe, a math teacher, talked politics.

"Delbert was an in-your-face kind of guy," remembers Shortliffe's younger sister Sally Stelter, a retired elementary school principal in Guelph, Ont. "But he always presented reasoned arguments and that helped shape Glen's approach to debate."

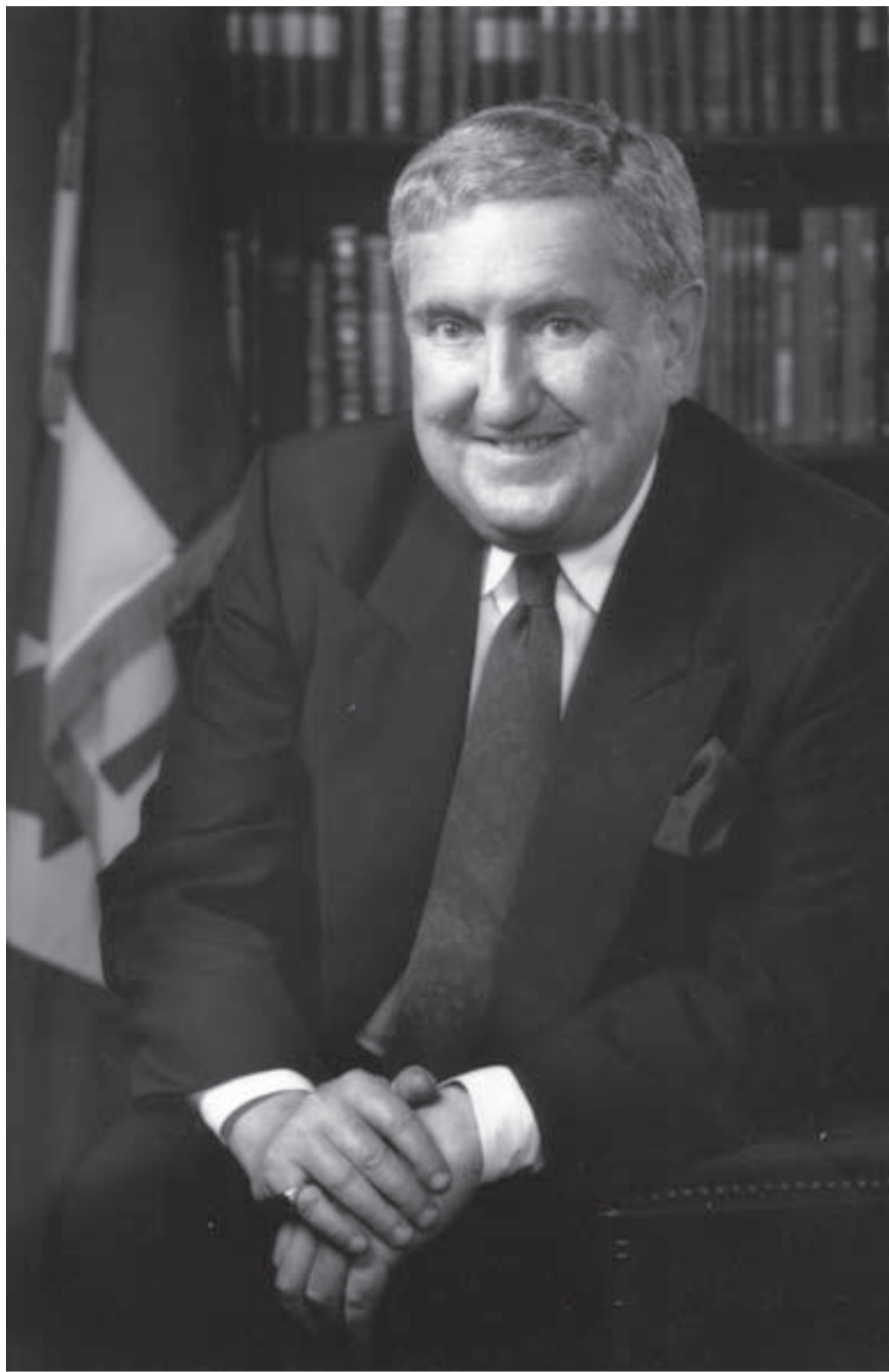
His first year of post-secondary education was spent in the pool halls and movie houses of Edmonton, but Shortliffe eventually studied history at the University of Alberta.

He married Sylvia Raysheba in 1960 and tried a year of graduate school at the University of Oregon, before setting out for Ottawa where he joined the foreign service, inspired by diplomat Bruce Rankin, a cousin by marriage.

"Glen was a tall, skinny kid, but in Ottawa he grew in wisdom and stature," Mrs. Stelter jokes in reference to her brother's size. He evolved into a big, beefy man with a booming voice. "He started out as something like the third secretary in Columbia and we used to tease him that he was going to spend his career unwrapping chocolate bars for the ambassador."

His diplomatic career took him to Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Malaysia before he became ambassador to Indonesia from 1977 to 1979.

Upon returning to Ottawa, he spent almost nine years on the policy side of external affairs. As an assistant deputy minister, he helped implement a reorganization of the department before joining the Privy Council Office (PCO) as dep-



Glen Shortliffe 'was able to bring people together and make things happen.' MICHAEL BEDFORD PHOTOGRAPHY

He would always say, 'At the end of the day someone has to take a decision.' In complicated, difficult issues he was sometimes perceived as a bit of a bruiser but he was very sensitive to people and feelings. He was a very perceptive person and he was a great listener.

Former colleague Jim Mitchell



Mr. Shortliffe, right, stands by as prime minister Kim Campbell signs documents at her swearing in, June 1993. PETER JONES/REUTERS



And swearing in Jean Chrétien in 1993. TOM HANSON/THE CANADIAN PRESS

uty secretary to the cabinet.

Although closely linked to the prime minister and the cabinet, the PCO's role is to provide non-partisan advice while administering the business of cabinet and implementing its decisions. The clerk and senior Privy Council staff must be problem solvers who can bridge the thorny demands of partisan politics and public administration and Shortliffe distinguished himself as an outstanding solver of problems.

After two years in the stately Langevin Block, he was sent in

1988 to Sparks Street to become deputy minister at Transport Canada, where a host of problems needed attention. His files included the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the privatization of Air Canada and Canadian National Railways, cutbacks at VIA Rail, and the inquiry into the 1989 air crash in Dryden, Ontario that killed 24, and which led to strict deicing regulations. He was responsible for 22,000 employees.

Don Mazankowski, deputy prime minister at the time, recalls his work with admiration.

"He didn't necessarily knock heads together. He was never that rude. But he was able to bring people together and make things happen..."

"There was trouble in the airline business when he was there - Air Canada and Canadian Airlines were having their difficulties. He brought the disparate parties together to resolve that issue... He played a very important leadership role in providing stability and direction."

Newton, one of Shortliffe's two sons, remembers the long hours his father worked, com-

ing home in time for dinner at 9:00 p.m., pausing for a scotch and soda before the meal. He enjoyed his family time but didn't turn his mind off at home.

"He was able to dominate a room or a conversation because of his powerful intellect... He would listen to what you had to say and he would then challenge: What about this? Have you thought about that? It taught us to think critically."

It was during his stint at Transport Canada that Shortliffe met Sylvie Lauzon, director of intergovernmental and industry relations, whom he married after the breakdown of his first marriage in 1991.

As deputy minister of Transport Canada, Shortliffe became involved in the Conservatives' bid to privatize Pearson Airport, a file that he continued working on after his return to the PCO in 1990 as deputy clerk and associate secretary to the cabinet. His involvement continued into 1993, by which time he had risen to clerk of the Privy Council.

As an adviser to the Conservative prime minister, he cautioned in a 1992 memo that Paxport, a consortium headed by Don Matthews, prime minister Mulroney's 1983 leadership campaign president, past president of the national Progressive Conservative Party and father-in-law to former Ontario Liberal premier David Peterson, would earn \$1-billion over 40 years in exchange for a one-time \$150-million investment.

At the same time, he got the deal done by moving recalcitrant deputy ministers out of Transport and then brokering a deal between Paxport and a rival bidder when Paxport failed to raise necessary cash.

(The deal was quashed by the Liberals when Mr. Chrétien became prime minister in 1993.)

In 1991, Shortliffe was called in to protect Conservative ministers from embarrassment during the Al-Mashat affair. After the Liberal opposition demanded to know why external affairs minister Joe Clark granted a Canadian entry visa to a former Iraqi ambassador in Washington, Shortliffe produced a letter of apology signed by the department's associate deputy minister, Raymond Chrétien, who was coincidentally a nephew of the Liberal leader.

At a later committee hearing, Chrétien revealed that he had been forced to sign the letter, written by Shortliffe. In response, Shortliffe told the committee that he had been ordered by the Conservative cabinet to insist Chrétien accept responsibility for the situation. The incident is still actively discussed in public administration courses.

While normally a new prime minister appoints a new clerk, Shortliffe also served Conservative Kim Campbell after Mulroney's resignation. Five months later, in the middle of a huge public service reorganization, Jean Chrétien convinced him to stay on through the early the Liberal transition, consulting with him for a half hour each morning.

Months before the 1993 election, Chrétien sent David Zussman, a trusted Liberal Party adviser, to privately seek advice about a possible transition of power.

"I was always struck by his professionalism," Zussman recalls from University of Ottawa's Telfer School of Management. "I was so impressed by his openness... [He would] comment on the plans we were proposing and offer feedback and better ways of doing it without ever violating his first responsibility to Prime Minister Campbell."

"It was a fine line and for me, a very lasting experience that I've talked about many times. It was a testament to the nonpartisanship of the public service."

Jim Mitchell, a colleague from both the foreign service and the PCO, says Shortliffe was held in high esteem by everyone who knew him because he got results.

"He would always say, 'At the end of the day someone has to take a decision.'

"In complicated, difficult issues he was sometimes perceived as a bit of a bruiser but

he was very sensitive to people and feelings. He was a very perceptive person and he was a great listener.

"He never thought he was the smartest guy in the room although he probably was. I've never seen a senior official who had more ability and less ego."

Upon his retirement, Shortliffe turned down a plum appointment from the prime minister and joined the younger Mitchell in a new consulting company, Sussex Circle.

While their connections could have made them successful lobbyists, they worked only as advisers to governments.

One assignment came from the United Nations in which he advised the Palestine Authority on governance and administration. Later, he offered a critical assessment of the National Capital Commission, calling for greater transparency and more public input.

In 1999, he studied the amalgamation of Greater Ottawa's 11 municipalities for Premier Mike Harris. After two months of hearings, he drafted a plan for the province that he later felt was clumsily implemented. He was especially disappointed when politicians failed to declare the new city officially bilingual. Ten years later, his recommendations are still hotly debated.

After retiring from Sussex Circle, Shortliffe settled into private life with his second wife, who continued her own consulting work.

He liked to travel to Florida and Arizona where he filled his days swimming and reading voraciously by the pool. A heavy smoker, he avoided theatres, preferring to watch movies at home on a high definition television.

He was a self-described news junkie and on Wednesday mornings, he joined a weekly conference call with his friends at Sussex Circle to chat about current events.

Throughout his career, Shortliffe promoted public service as an honourable vocation whose practitioners fulfilled the wishes of Parliament in the interest of Canada.

In 2006, he spoke out vociferously against the Gomery Commission's recommendations to strengthen the power of bureaucrats and limit the prime minister's prerogative to choose deputy ministers.

He told the Ottawa Citizen that the report showed that Gomery had no idea how government works.

"...public servants should not have a great deal of power independent of the ministerial leadership," he said. If deputy ministers disagreed with their political ministers, he suggested their ultimate weapon was resignation.

Shortliffe was suffering from inoperable lung cancer when he died, unexpectedly, of a heart attack at his home, just a few blocks from the prime minister's residence. He leaves his wife Sylvie Lauzon, sons Scott and Newton, and sister Sally Stelter.

» Special to The Globe and Mail

Former B.C. lieutenant-governor dies

Former British Columbia lieutenant-governor, the Honourable Robert G. Rogers, who served from 1983 to 88, has died.

A graduate of the Royal Military College in Kingston and the University of Toronto, he served as a member of a tank regiment in the Canadian Armoured Corps during the Second World War and participated in the Allied landing at Juno Beach, France.

Following the war he was a business executive, principally with Crown Zellerbach Canada where he was chairman and CEO.

He was serving as chair of the Canada Harbour Place Corp. when he was appointed lieutenant-governor. After he left the post, he was chancellor of University of Victoria from 1991 to 1996.

"He encouraged everyone to give back to their communities with both compassion and leadership. We are grateful for his influence on our lives," current Lieutenant-Governor Steven Point said in a statement.