

Goodbye to NT's

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Special report by NIKKI VOSS

HE'S survived shipping disasters, plane emergencies and multiple backstabbing but nothing could save Shane Stone from a little old referendum on Statehood.

The man dubbed Little Napoleon and the Fat Controller (and that was by his admirers) finally called it a day on Monday after a turbulent decade in Territory politics.

The former chief minister threw in his Government-issue tie, quit his Port Darwin seat and let fly at his detractors yesterday before he embarks on a high-flying career in business consultancy.

But what of the sometimes enigmatic, always arrogant, former school teacher whose political career came to a rather unspectacular and unsatisfying end so suddenly this week.

What made business court him, the media frequently loath him and the bulk of voters grudgingly admire him?

For a man without ill-feeling, Mr Stone was yesterday still rambling about back room deals, his crushing 1997 general election victory and "grubby" CLP colleagues who tried to besmirch his name, admitting his political plans "went off the rails at the end".

He said: "I go without any recriminations or looking over my shoulder.

"(These days) there is a lack of humour and a lack of colour on both sides of politics and the media."

Rocky

After a rocky start to his political career, including being found guilty of unprofessional conduct by his NT Law Society peers in 1989, Mr Stone was elected as Port Darwin MLA a year later.

From then on the cowboy in a suit was always one to speak his mind, throw in a few surprises and thumb his nose at protocol.

From the time he was sworn in as chief minister on May 26, 1995, Mr Stone made the rules and broke them at whim.

Every interview or public address was a masterful stage performance.

As chief minister he thrust mandatory sentencing on the Territory, vehemently

Shane Stone ends local political career

fought to save our euthanasia laws, appointed himself a Queen's Counsel and dropped in for a feed of chops with the Queen on one of his many overseas jaunts.

As other polities revelled in the newly-discovered joys of ties and suits, Mr Stone would call weekend press conferences at his home dressed in board shorts.

While his fellow ministers preferred the hands-on method of dealing with annoying journos — such as microphone cords or in the case of Mr Palmer, foreheads — Mr Stone fought his battles with a tongue slightly sharper than a freshly ground butchers'



Former chief minister Shane Stone in a rare moment of reconciliation with NLC chief Galarwuy Yunupingu ... Mr Stone was better known for his 'monsterring and stomping' remarks

knife. His words sent more than one female reporter scurrying from Territory media careers in a flurry of tears and hairspray.

When quizzed once about a personal matter he fired back at a female journalist that he'd heard rumours about her alleged dalliance with a married CLP member.

She was made unwelcome at Parliament House social functions forever after.

The beloved Mr Stone never had to take his gloves off when it came to a good stoush — he never wore them in the first place.

Former ABC Radio *Drivetime* presenter Kath McKenzie left the NT soon after an embarrassing encounter with the ex-chief at

a footy game in mid-1996.

Slugging on drinks in a private box, Mr Stone made comments about McKenzie's waistline after she squeezed through a partially closed door and then when she adjusted her shirt.

He later apologised.

All this from the man affectionately dubbed the Fat Controller after waving in a Variety Club car drolled up to look like Thomas the Tank Engine outside Parliament House a few years back.

The former primary school teacher and lawyer had the ability to reduce a journalist or a political opponent to jelly with the accuracy of a point blank blast from a .308.

Of his relationship with the media, he

said: "It has been feisty but it has been good.

"I never had a reputation for ringing up to complain. If I thought something was un-

toward I would ring up the journalist in question and have it out with them. But I wasn't like other politicians, always whingeing and griping."

And Shane Stone had his softer side.

When he wasn't "monsterring and stomping" drunks or fending off "whingeing, carping blacks", he could also shell out the odd compliment.

And very odd they were. During a rousing argument on the floor, former Labor MLA Neil Bell was turfed out of Parliament for wearing blue jeans and a workshirt.

Clare Martin said she had worn a denim skirt before to Parliament and asked if it would be acceptable for her to wear jeans.

Mr Stone replied: "You would look good in them."

Swank

And his problem-solving techniques were legendary.

When his neighbours in swank Larrakeyah were too noisy, he simply bought their house for \$295 000 and kicked them out.

When the gun debate threatened to escalate he got himself an armed guard for 24-hour protection.

And he was humble — on rare occasions.

During an official visit to the Philippines in late 1995, Mr Stone was addressing a media pack on the steps of the presidential palace when he made a boo-boo.

Little Napoleon

"I said I was delighted to have a meeting with President Marcos.

"Marcos this and Marcos that."

That was the corrupt, long-dead dictator Marcos, as opposed to the very much alive and respectable President Fidel Ramos.

Realising he had stuffed up, and without missing a beat, he said: "I had also had the pleasure of meeting with President Ramos.

"They said everyone made that mistake."

Advisers remember a trip across Hong Kong Harbour, when their ferry was rammed by a dredger.

As chaos erupted, a cool-headed Mr Stone took control, screaming at everyone to shut up and calm down — his experience in the NT Legislative As-

sembly bear pit no doubt standing him in good stead for dealing with a sinking ship full of hysterical commuters.

And then there was the light aircraft scare over Central Australia in 1996.

Mr Stone recalled how when he and his fellow Cabinet ministers learned the plane had mechanical problems, Minister Mick Palmer had whipped out his mobile phone.

He said: "I didn't know who he was going to ring and even that didn't work. We had a good laugh about that."

As Country Liberal Party faithful clamoured around the former chief the night of

the crushing August, 1997, election victory, it was hard to imagine the flamboyant Shane Stone would ever disappear from centre stage.

His casual abandon and disarming control of the floor transformed political reporting from a chore to a form of entertainment.

He was overtly ambitious, not afraid to blast opponents to oblivion, then crawl over the casualties to get what he wanted.

And he was a walking contradiction.

Mr Stone decriminalised dope but threw people in jail for stealing a lighter.

He once worked as a barrister briefed for the North Australian Aboriginal Legal Service, then called for drunks to be jailed in 1994.

We would have a liquid natural gas plant and oil refinery supporting one of the region's top ports — very close Mr Stone.

His final statement was a stinging attack on the CLP "grubs" who made his personal life miserable.

Incidentally, that was a tag he once gave to former MacDonnell MLA Neil Bell and most recently to housebreakers when defending mandatory sentencing.

Mr Stone will be remembered for his crushing August 1997 election wins and forging ties with our Asian neighbours.

But among his legacies are losing the Northern Territory's Statehood referendum and the fallout from his mandatory sentencing regime.

But as Mr Stone said: "This has closed a chapter on my life.

"All I can say is a simple thank you."



The worst day of all ... during lost the Statehood referendum vote



Clare Martin ... dress remark

His plans were grandiose, but some came to fruition.

In the early 1990s he bragged he'd attract visitors to the Territory by making us Australia's new Las Vegas and re-

claiming our beaches from crocodiles.

In 1994, Mr Stone told an Australia-Indonesia Institute gathering of his vision for Darwin in 2014.

His fantasy included 40 high-rises thrusting skywards in the city centre, only a couple short of the dozens dominating the skyline now.

A 2000-seat convention centre would be flanked by a 350-room Hyatt International Hotel.