

# OBITUARIES

## Walter Sheridan Dies; Helped to Investigate Hoffa

By Martin Weil  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Walter Sheridan, 69, a prominent federal investigator for many years who played a key role in the epic struggle between the government and Teamsters union leader Jimmy Hoffa, died of lung cancer Jan. 13 at his home in Derwood.

He was a staff member of the Senate rackets subcommittee of which Robert F. Kennedy was chief counsel and on which John F. Kennedy served as a senator. He was also an associate of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), who lauded him yesterday as "an extraordinary investigator and an extraordinary human being."

By 1962, long years of contentious investigation and dramatic, nationally televised hearings had made celebrities of the Senate subcommittee's lawyer, Robert Kennedy, and Hoffa. Hoffa had become one of the best-known labor leaders of the postwar era.

After John Kennedy became president in 1961 and his brother became attorney general, Robert Kennedy asked Mr. Sheridan to become his special assistant. In that job, he and a small group of lawyers were made responsible for prosecuting federal crimes associated with the Teamsters.

The lawyers in the unit described themselves as the "Get Hoffa Squad," and Mr. Sheridan, though himself not a lawyer, was their chief, Arthur A. Sloane wrote in "Hoffa," his 1991 biography of the labor leader. In his 1971 book "Kennedy Justice," Victor Navasky also described Mr. Sheridan as the unit's chief.

In 1962, Hoffa was brought to trial in Nashville. The chief prosecutor and his assistants, according to Sloane's book, operated "under the overall direction of . . . Walter Sheridan . . . who himself was in daily telephone contact with Attorney General Kennedy."

In a brief interview last night, Na-

vasky said Mr. Sheridan "knew the worst things there were" about Hoffa and "devoted those years to doing something about that."

The trial, on a misdemeanor charge, ended in a hung jury.

But that trial led to a second trial on a charge of jury tampering, based at least in part on evidence gathered and investigated by Mr. Sheridan, according to Sloane's book. In 1964, Hoffa was convicted of jury tampering and began serving a prison term three years later.

In 1960, Robert Kennedy published a book called "The Enemy Within," based on his Senate committee investigations into labor matters. In it, he described Mr. Sheridan this way: "A slight, quiet friendly-faced man" who "was one of our best and most relentless investigators."

"His almost angelic appearance hides a core of toughness and he takes great pride in his work," Kennedy said.

"In any kind of fight, I would always want him on my side."

Mr. Sheridan was born in Utica, N.Y., served in the Submarine Service during World War II and later graduated from Fordham University. He was an FBI agent for four years and spent three years with the National Security Agency.

He was a regional coordinator for John Kennedy in the 1960 presidential campaign and had key roles in the political campaigns of Robert and Edward Kennedy.

As a Senate investigator in the 1980s, he helped show that clinical data submitted to the Food and Drug Administration had been tampered with, which led to new safeguards. He also led investigations into improper payments to physicians to influence how they prescribed medicines. His investigations into mine and on-the-job safety

and health and into exploitation of farm workers also were credited with leading to new federal protections.

From 1965 to 1970, he was a special correspondent for NBC and his unit received a Peabody Award for a documentary on the 1967 Detroit riots.

He was the author of "The Fall and Rise of Jimmy Hoffa."

In his statement yesterday, Edward Kennedy said Mr. Sheridan "had a heart as large as his ability, and his courage and dedication to justice and the public interest were unmatched by anyone."

Survivors include his wife, Nancy; five children, Walter Sheridan of Gaitersburg, Hannah Shorey of Dallas, John Sheridan of Germantown, Joseph Sheridan of Lansdale, Pa., and Donald Sheridan of Harrisburg, Pa.; and 14 grandchildren.