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Azzopardi's interrogator OVEN

How Police Sergeant **Adrian Lia** deceived the public, the government and the force 10 years ago

KARL SCHEMBRI

ONE of the two police officers who interrogated Nicholas Azzopardi at the Floriana headquarters had deceived the police force and the government into believing he had saved a woman from drowning 10 years

Police Sergeant Adrian Lia, who interrogated Azzopardi at the police depot where the deceased sustained the injuries leading to his death 13 days later, had duped the nation into believing he had behaved heroically by jumping into the ice cold sea in Sliema to save Mary Farrugia on 23 December 1997.

Lia - then a 23-year-old police constable - was awarded a gold medal for bravery after he claimed to have jumped into the sea to save 54-year-old Farrugia from Sliema as she was drowning near Qui Si Sana at around 5.15am.

His fabricated story not only eventually embarrassed the

tau-deneo IIII i salva mara mill-għarqa NTISTABBLI talija ngħata midalja tadbhala rikonoxximent qlubija li wera meta mara mill-gharqa

ent li sehh fit-23 ta' ru 1997 fi Qui Si as-Sliema. zzi, il-Ministru Bla I-Ufficcju tal-Prim meta pprezenta ad-deheb lill-656 Adrian Lia, aktar tissemma. gattiva milli konfront tal-

Adrian Lia eru li hemm

II-Kummissa Pulizija George ittra ta' ringraz rcieva minghand mara involuta fahhar il-kuragg biex giet evitata ghall-familja tiegh Mitlub jikkumm din 1-esperjen Kuntistabbli Lia q Nazzjon li dak inl incident hu kien x Ghassa f'Tas-Sliei rcevew telefonata hemm mara

One of the two police officers who interrogated Nicholas Azzopardi was decorated for bravery after claiming to have saved a woman's life in 1997

government and the police, but also made it to the official police press releases issued by the

In fact, his alleged heroic act was widely reported in the press, with journalists taking his word about his selfless deed and reporting how he had braved the stormy seas to rescue Farrugia, who according to the police statements was some 15 metres offshore.

Also according to the official version, Lia went on site together with Sliema Duty Sergeant Carmel Pace - who later transpired did not even go there.

His story went as far as the office of the prime minister, where former minister Joe Mizzi, together with police commissioner George Grech, had awarded him a gold medal for bravery.

"In Malta we hear more negative criticism than positive feedback about the police," Mizzi had declared at the presentation of the medal at police headquarters on 8 January 1998. **pg 6** ►

