

Death of a Cyprus friend

From Superintendent John Cooper

Pareskevou Michelli, known to Australians who served in Cyprus over the past 15 years as Paras, was fatally injured in a car accident in Nicosia on 17 November 1989, at the age of 63.

Paras was employed by the United Nations for 15 years, most of them with the Australian Police contingents.

To most Australians, Paras was more than the cleaning lady. She was a person they looked forward to seeing and chatting with each day.

Some saw her as a mother, some as an older sister, but all saw her as a friend.

Paras was born on 21 November 1925 in the village of Paliometocho, east of Nicosia. Her parents were too poor to send her to school so like many her age she worked in the fields.

She married at a young age to Michalis. Their first child Andros was born in 1952 and the second, Michalis, in 1954.

Michalis, junior, was 11 days old when his father was killed in a traffic accident near the family home.

Paras went to work as a cook at the Nicosia General Hospital for a number of years before she found better employment at the Ledra Palace Hotel, the largest in Nicosia.

Always ready to help

In 1974, the hotel was taken over by the United Nations because it was situated in what became the Buffer Zone. She lost her job because at that time civilians were not employed at the Ledra Palace, but was offered employment as a labourer and almost immediately took up duties with the Australian contingent.

Throughout her life she worked hard and could never resist a call for help from anyone. She met her death while returning home after cleaning a friend's house.

Her funeral was attended by members of the 31st Australian Contingent, local employees from the UN Protected Area and many from her own village.



This picture of Paras, centre with Superintendent Jim Jamieson, and Mrs Mina Jamieson, was taken in June last year.

Held in High Regard

"Paras was held in high regard by all," Commander Alan Bird, Commander of the 30th Cyprus Contingent said last week.

"She did everything she was required to do, and more. No job was too much for her."

Commander Bird said many AFP members had reason to be saddened by the news.

"I don't know," he said. "What do you say about someone like Paras. She was just a great lady who looked after our people."

Won't be the same

Superintendent Jim Jamieson, who served in Cyprus with three police contingents and one British Army Unit, said Paras would be sadly missed by all members who return for further service there.

"Headquarters will not be the same without her," he said. "She assisted my wife Mina for three years in maintaining the married quarters in a spotless condition and was regarded not as a

servant, but as a very good friend.

"All who had known her in Cyprus contributed to the many floral tributes at her funeral.

"An example of her dedication came when she took a long-deserved holiday in London to be with her family. She spent the entire time, from morning until night, working in the family's fish and chips shop. That was her idea of a holiday.

"No matter how busy she was, she always had time to stop and help. And it was always with a smile on her face," he said.

Deeply saddened

"She was just one of those delightful old dears and a part of the establishment," Terry Parker, who was a Sergeant in the last contingent to serve in Cyprus, said.

"I feel I can speak for a lot of the blokes in that respect. She came to a lot of functions and her family was closely involved with the Australians.

"Everyone I know is deeply saddened by her loss," he said.