

# Triumph of ADF spirit

Approaching the end of his long battle with cancer, Public Affairs Officer LTCOL Mike Harris says the Anzac spirit is well and truly alive in the current crop of ADF personnel

**T**HIS time last year, at 48, with a wife, two teenage children, a dog, mortgage and a project car, I was forced to confront the issues of depression and death.

A year on, sadly, that's where the miracle ends.

To borrow a golf metaphor, I am about to finish my round with a better-than-expected result and I'm heading for the clubhouse for some relief.

Not only have my family made me feel loved and cared for during this final, palliative phase of treatment, a group of friends have been quietly and selflessly showing what true mateship is.

Joined by colleagues, and even complete strangers, they conspired, with my wife's consent, to resurrect my British sports car, a rare 1977 Triumph Stag, under the cover of darkness and without my knowledge.

I find myself asking, why did they do it? They all had different motivations but a constant theme – mateship.

These people from Air Force, Army, Navy, APS and the general public, literally rebuilt my car with their bare hands, dipped into their pockets for loose change,

used their spare time and scoured the country (and the UK) to find the parts – and want nothing for it. It is humbling and I am lost for words.

In a race against time, they beat the odds and surprised me with the keys to my Stag a couple of weeks ago.

I hope you are picking up a theme here.

We all joined the ADF to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

We put ourselves in harm's way in order to protect our way of life, honour the Anzac tradition and make the future better for our children and future generations.

My car has become a metaphor.

Notoriously unreliable, it's a bugger to work on, and in 1987 was the most frequently stolen car in the UK. But now, my talented friends have turned it from a curbside relic to a vehicle that will hold enduring sentimental value.

It's a priceless gift to my family and it has shown me the immense good and selflessness in our people.

I am most proud that it brought people together, and I am humbled that they did it for me. I qui-

ely wish there was more time to thank them and to enjoy the fruits of their labours. I never thought I would see it going again.

On November 12 I was liberated from palliative care and drove through the streets of a quiet NSW suburb listening to the heartbeat of a 1970s British classic V8 as I basked in the sunlight of a warm spring day with the sun on my face.

I got to share laughs, smell the aroma of burnt oil, fresh car wax and 98 octane being turned into sweet smoke as I gripped the wheel and pressed the pedal for the first and likely last time.

I smiled. This was a good day. This is what life is all about.

Mateship, love, compassion. As I enter my final battle, I urge you all to take a positive view, be proud, take your holidays, spend time with your families, do something for your mates and live life.

We have a world full of amazing, compassionate people – please make sure that spirit continues.

For now, I'm heading out to tee off on a different course. See ya later.



LTCOL Mike Harris, front right, and the main drivers behind the restoration, from left, LCDR Peter Croce, MAJ Lachie Simond and LTCOL Phil Pyke with the beloved Triumph Stag.