WHAT IS THE TAFE CONNECTION between the Australian Army, Motor Mechanics and the Northern Territory? Well it might surprise you to know that it is Wodonga Institute of TAFE, located in the North East Victoria.

During April and May 1996, Tony Ross, a project officer with Wodonga Institute of TAFE and Army Warrant Officer Class Two, Pat Jacobs, undertook to validate training on behalf of the Directorate of Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (DEME-A). The Army training system requires all training to be validated and the spotlight was turned on the training of the motor mechanics and recovery mechanics.

With a large component of the Army operating in the northern half of Australia, the validation concentrated on how well soldiers are being prepared to provide the maintenance support to the mobile forces operating out of Darwin, Tindal and Townsville.

Wodonga Institute of TAFE is working with the Army Logistic Training Centre at its Bonegilla and Bandiana campuses in North East Victoria, to provide high quality accredited training to the Army’s technical trainees. The contract signed in May 1995, sees Wodonga Institute teachers working alongside military and Australian Public Service instructors in what is now the largest Army training centre. The Army Logistic Training Centre formed in December 1995, also has campuses at Portsea and Puckapunyal and is commanded by Colonel Colin Sharp.

The institute is working with all campuses to align the high quality Army training with nationally accredited training. “By aligning the training already done by the Army, the value of that training is enhanced not only to the Army but to the soldier,” says the institute’s director, Geoff Smith.

An example of the alignment process is in the Army Medical Assistant Training undertaken at Portsea. This training which has recently been put to good use supporting UN peacekeeping forces in Rwanda is being considered for alignment to the Certificate 4 in Nursing.

A detailed examination of both the Army syllabus and the accredited training has revealed an alignment possibility of 70%. The process also identifies to the soldier any training that could be completed in their own time to gain the full credential. This alignment is currently before the Nurses’ Registration Board for their endorsement.

And what did the validation of the vehicle and recovery mechanics training reveal? In the report to DEME-A prepared by Tony Ross and WO2 Pat Jacobs, a number of recommendations to improve training were made, but generally the customer feedback suggests that the training is of the quality required and trainees agreed that they had been well prepared for the task of maintaining the Australian Army’s wheeled fleet.

Tony did make one rather obvious observation upon his return. When in the Darwin area in between conducting validation interviews, he went down to the water’s edge to read a sign warning of the dangers of the box jellyfish. What the sign didn’t warn about was the three salt water crocodiles drifting by. The waters may be colder around Wodonga but they are a lot safer.