

## **ARMY RESERVE TRUCKING AHEAD WITH MACK**

By Flying Officer Julia Ravell

Mack Trucks Australia has joined forces with the Army Reserve in an innovative training program for apprentice mechanics.

The PATRIOT program (Partner Army To Recruit Individuals Over Time) is a 7 Brigade Reserve recruiting initiative that will supply the Army Reserve units based in Queensland with up to 15 jointly trained apprentice mechanics in 2008-09.

Mack's Brisbane Workshop Manager Mr Alan Wilkins said the program, in which six aspiring mechanics are already developing skills, was discussed enthusiastically at the company's recent national conference and that an Australia-wide roll-out was expected next year.

The four-year dual apprenticeship program offers apprentices a unique opportunity to develop and diversify their heavy commercial skills by alternating between Mack's Brisbane dealership and 7 Combat Support Battalion.

In addition to working on trucks, the apprentices will be honing their skills for half the year on ASLAVs, Land Rovers, and Unimogs – the all-wheel-drive heavy recovery vehicles.

"This initiative offers young mechanics the chance to diversify their skills and gain experience in two very valuable work areas. Introducing the program allows us to help build on the issue of skills shortage and support the industry that ultimately supports us," said Mr Wilkins.

"I've been running the Brisbane workshops for 15 years and for the past eight years or so the quality of people applying for apprenticeships has been getting worse. We have more than 200 applications a year and we're struggling to get 10 suitable candidates. After the gloss of getting an apprenticeship wears off, work becomes mundane.

"The Army work provides variety that keeps them interested and encourages them to keep fit with team sports.

"When we first started this program, I thought that the Army Reserves would be the same as all of our other apprentices but they came back from basic training totally transformed and much more mature – they were very focussed, well-mannered and well-groomed team players who were energetic and helpful."

Deputy Commander of 7 Brigade, Colonel Chris Hamilton, said the PATRIOT program had the potential to meet technical trade shortages in the ADF.

“The Mack project will deliver between five and 12 qualified Heavy Vehicle Mechanics a year into 7 Brigade. A national roll out will see equivalent numbers delivered to Army Reserve formations or logistics units in each state,” said COL Hamilton.

“Recent discussions with regional Boeing senior executives revealed that the concept is equally applicable to their organisation and would assist their Amberley operation to recruit and train aerospace technicians.

“Engagement with other Defence industries and expansion of the scheme has significant potential to meet both full-time and part-time critical trade deficiencies across the three Services.”

COL Hamilton said that Mack’s long partnership with the ADF made it the ideal host for the PATRIOT program.

“Mack was already vetting applications for all their apprentice positions so it was a simple process for them to add the additional requirement that the applicant must be willing to become a soldier in the Army Reserves,” said COL Hamilton.

“Trainees remain employees of Mack Trucks Australia during their four-year indenture period and this tenure is conditional on them also remaining an effective member of the Army Reserve (ARES).

“Mack is supplementing the gap between ARES trainee pay and normal civilian salaries for the duration of the apprentices’ employment and the company is using the balance of employer support payments from the Government to fund specialist items such as uniforms for the apprentices that they’d normally have to pay for themselves.”