

FEBRUARY–JUNE 2026

BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD

A TALK SERIES PRESENTED BY THE KOKODA TRACK MEMORIAL WALKWAY



Here are details of the first three Friends of Kokoda (FoK) Beyond the Battlefield military history talks in 2026.

WHERE:

Ralph Honner Education Centre, Killoola St, Rhodes Park, Concord West.

WHEN:

See program for time and dates.

COST:

FoK members will be free; all others \$5.00. Light refreshments served.

RSVPS:

to admin@kokodawalkway.com.au or call (02) 9166 0890 a week before the talk.

PROGRAM

Saturday 14 February 10.30am start



Bill James: 'Uncovering the Kokoda Track Battlefields'

Presentation summary:

After WWII, very few visitors trekked the Kokoda Track. Villages shifted locations as new gardens were cut; some tracks fell into disuse; the jungle regrowth covered many vestiges of the battlefields.

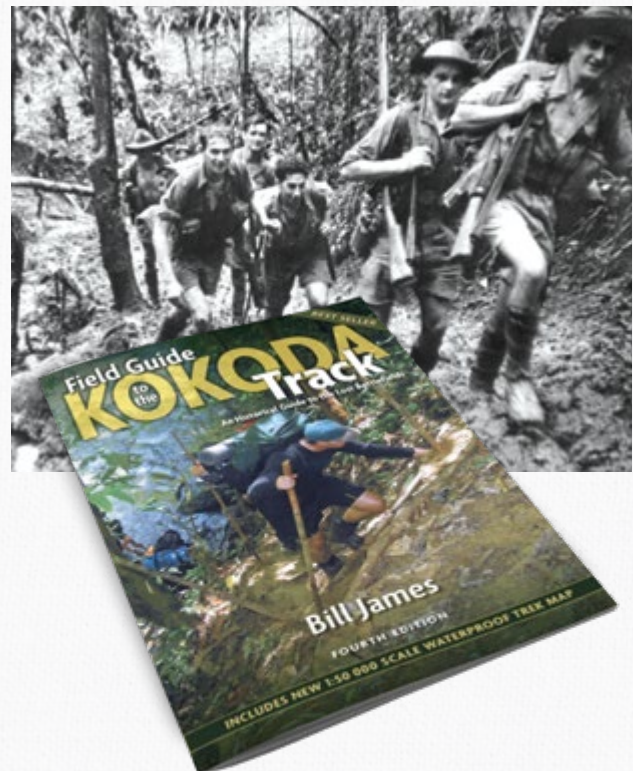
With the assistance of the veterans themselves, Bill James spent two decades uncovering these sacred sites. They are now a place of pilgrimage for many young Australians.

About the speaker:

Bill James was born in Sydney in 1949 and, after completing an Economics Degree, travelled extensively overseas. After arriving in London in 1973, Bill co-founded Topdeck Travel, now one of the UK's leading youth tour operators. On his return to Australia in 1984, Bill was a founding director of the Flight Centre Travel Group and remains a shareholder in the company. He was a founding director of the Flight Centre Foundation and is currently a director of the Kokoda Track Foundation. Bill has published the 'Field Guide to the Kokoda Track', a comprehensive guide for trekkers to this

significant WWII battlefield in Papua New Guinea.

Bill is married to Elizabeth and has two sons and six grandchildren. He now pursues his interests in history, travel, surfboarding, golfing, hiking and philanthropy.



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Saturday 11 April 10.30am start



Dr Peter Williams: 'What did Japanese veterans think about WWII?'

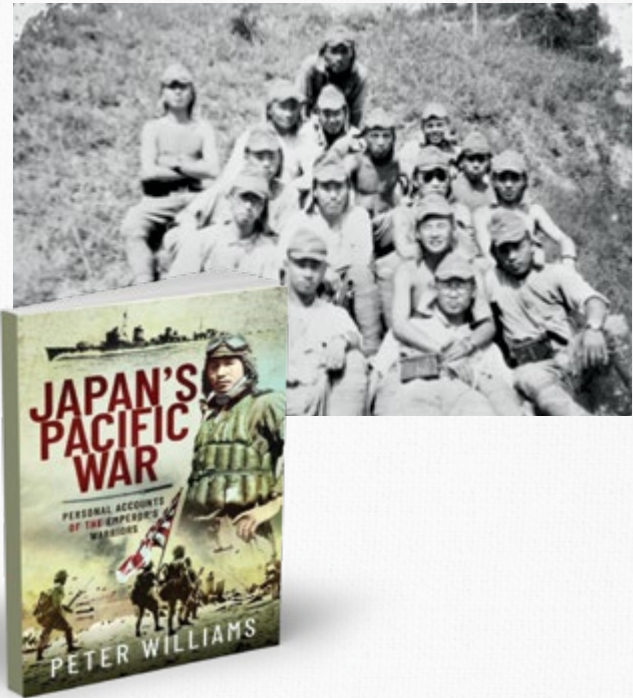
Presentation summary:

When he interviewed Japanese veterans from WWII, Peter Williams found their views candid, provocative and shocking. There are accounts of the killing of prisoners; appalling fighting conditions; cannibalism and some non-too complimentary opinions about their enemies. But then there are descriptions of family life, of the joy they found in serving their nation, of camaraderie. Like all veterans, the Japanese held a variety of viewpoints. Some thought the war was a mistake, others were unrepentant, believing that Japan's surrender was a disgraceful act and they should have fought on. Dr Williams will read excerpts from his book *Japan's Pacific War: Personal Accounts of the Emperor's Warriors*, and attempt to explain the Japanese veteran's viewpoint.

About the speaker:

Peter Williams was born in Hobart. He taught history and English in Japan, where he interviewed 100 WWII veterans. He lives in Canberra, where

he worked for the Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs. His PhD topic was the Kokoda Campaign and his latest book is *Kokoda: Japanese Defeat in Papua 1942-43*.



Saturday 13 June 10.30am start

Colin Burgess: 'Australian Nurses Under Fire'

Presentation summary:



Based on his soon-to-be-published book *'Sisters Under Fire'*, Colin Burgess tells of the heroics of two Australian nurses - Vera Torney and Margaret Anderson - who demonstrated extraordinary courage and dedication when their ship (the *'Empire Star'*) was attacked by Japanese aircraft during the seaborne evacuation of Singapore. Both Vera and Margaret received awards for bravery. The talk will also tell of the desperate need to evacuate Australian nurses safely back to Australia as Japanese troops swept into Singapore.

About the speaker:

Colin Burgess is the author of more than 40 published books on the subjects of human space exploration and Australian military history. In his working career he was a cabin crew member with Qantas Airways for 30 years before leaving to concentrate on his writing in 2002. For the past 22

years he has also been the sole Series Editor for an award-winning collection of books on the history of space exploration for the University of Nebraska Press in the United States, now totaling 25 volumes. Colin and his wife Pat live in Sydney's southern suburbs.



Scan for more details on the Beyond the Battlefield talk series, including payment options.