

AUGUST–NOVEMBER 2026

BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD

A TALK SERIES PRESENTED BY THE
KOKODA TRACK MEMORIAL WALKWAY



Here are details of the final 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 will be served.

RSVPS:

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

PROGRAM

Saturday 8 August 10.30am start



Dr Jan McLeod: 'What doors of indiscipline might be opened?' Casualties and controversies in the Aitape – Wewak campaign 1944 – 45.'

Presentation summary:

In late 1944, soldiers from 6 Division AIF relieved troops of the American 6th Army in the Aitape – Wewak area of northern New Guinea. The Australians were initially tasked with undertaking a limited operation centred on 'clearing' the remaining Japanese troops from this sector. The resultant campaign continued until the end of the war.

With more than 1,500 Australians killed, wounded or missing in battle and almost 20,000 suffering from illness and disease, some questioned the necessity of Aitape – Wewak. Examining medical issues associated with the campaign lends context and perspective.

Why did so many young Australian soldiers pay such a high price at this late stage of the Pacific War? What lessons from the hard fighting in Papua and New Guinea were heeded, forgotten, or disregarded?

About the speaker:

Dr Jan McLeod has a PhD in History from the University of Newcastle where she held academic,

teaching and professional roles. She has presented widely at academic conferences and community events, and twice served as an invited judge for the Australian Army's C.E.W. Bean Prize for Military History. Jan's first book, *Shadows on the Track: Australia's Medical War in Papua 1942-1943*, was published in 2019, as part of the Australian Army History Collection. Her most recent book, *All The Broken Soldiers: Private Kennedy's War* (November 2022) is based on the wartime diary of one of two great-uncles who served with the 2/4th Australian Army Field Ambulance in the Middle East, Papua, New Guinea, and Borneo. This will be Jan's third presentation at the Walkway.



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Saturday 10 October 10.30am start



Andrew Johnston: 'From Soldier to Storyteller: Uncovering the Legacy of the 1943 Wodonga Train Disaster and the Journey to Healing'

Presentation summary:

Andrew's presentation will delve deeply into the tragic 1943 Wodonga train accident. This devastating collision between a troop-laden bus heading to Albury for a night of revelry on 8 May 1943 and the Victorian Railways locomotive travelling blindly in reverse across a notorious level crossing, not only claimed the lives of service personnel and the civilian bus driver, but left lasting emotional scars on the victims' families and communities. He will detail events leading to the disaster, including wartime operational challenges, human errors, and infrastructure limitations. His story also illustrates the transformative power of storytelling, showing how it can bridge personal and collective histories and foster healing.

About the speaker:

Andrew Johnston, a retired infantryman and military police investigator with 20 years of service, turned

his passion for history into compelling books after medically discharging in 2011. His 2025 work, *Death by Misadventure: The True Story of the Wodonga Tragedy*, uncovers the 1943 bus and train crash at Wodonga—a devastating yet forgotten chapter of Australian history. The book honours the victims and survivors while shedding light on this national calamity. Andrew, originally from the Mornington Peninsula, now resides in Queensland with his wife, enjoying retirement, time with his grandchildren, and researching new projects that preserve Australia's forgotten military past.



Saturday 28 November 10.30am start

Dr Seumas Spark: 'The Warrigal Creek Massacre, GunaiKurnai Country (Gippsland), 1843'



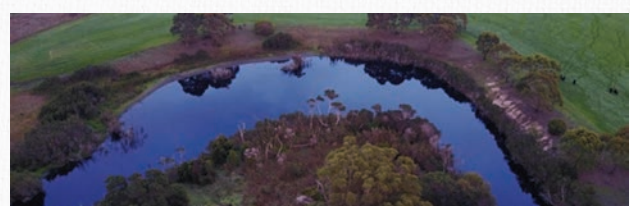
Presentation summary:

In July 1843, between 60 and 180 GunaiKurnai men, women and children were massacred by European settlers at Warrigal Creek in south Gippsland. The killings at Warrigal Creek proved to be one of the bloodiest encounters on the Australian colonial frontier. For the GunaiKurnai, the traditional owners of Gippsland, the consequences of the massacre were profound, and continue to be felt. This talk discusses different GunaiKurnai responses to, and perspectives on, this frontier war massacre.

About the speaker:

Dr Seumas Spark is an Adjunct Fellow in History, Monash University. His previous research and publications have focused on the 'Dunera Boys'. In recent years, he has worked with the GunaiKurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation on various

aspects of GunaiKurnai cultural heritage. This led to his interest in the Warrigal Creek massacre. Seumas has presented twice before at the Walkway in our talk series.



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