

New turn

The trail to raise funds for a film about the Kokoda Track is about to take a new turn.

DOUGLAS KENNEDY reports

GOLD Coast independent film-maker George Friend is heading to America in a bid to raise the corporate profile of his movie company, Rising Sun Films, and hopefully come a step closer toward realising his dream of bringing the Kokoda Trail to the big screen.

Friend has been working full-time for three years to turn Man From Snowy River screenwriter John Dixon's original script into a \$9.7 million movie and develop other ideas from a pool of nearly two dozen projects.

"The whole thing has been six years in development and we're still working around the clock on turning the Kokoda trail story into an epic film, but I'm convinced that it will happen," says Friend.

"It's worth remembering that Schindler's List took a decade to reach the screen and then Shine was nine years in development before the

producers invested a further three years in raising the money."

Friend, the Rising Sun Film's chief executive who caught the movie making fever producing the 60-minute Australian Army Training Command documentary Kokoda — The Bloody Track, is one of 10 Coast business operators selected to take part in an aggressive marketing venture with University of California, Los Angeles, Master In Business Administration.

The project is a joint venture conceived and instigated by the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry and UCLA who would work with 65 MBA students forming short

and long-term marketing strategies.

Friend is due to fly to American in June along with nine other operators to take part in a 72-hour intensive strategic planning session which will lead to programs to be presented to local investors.

"This is not just about the Kokoda project but rather concerned with developing the whole company as these senior MBA students are key operators in their own world," says Friend.

"We're talking about executives in the Californian business structure and some of them even hold key positions within the film world."

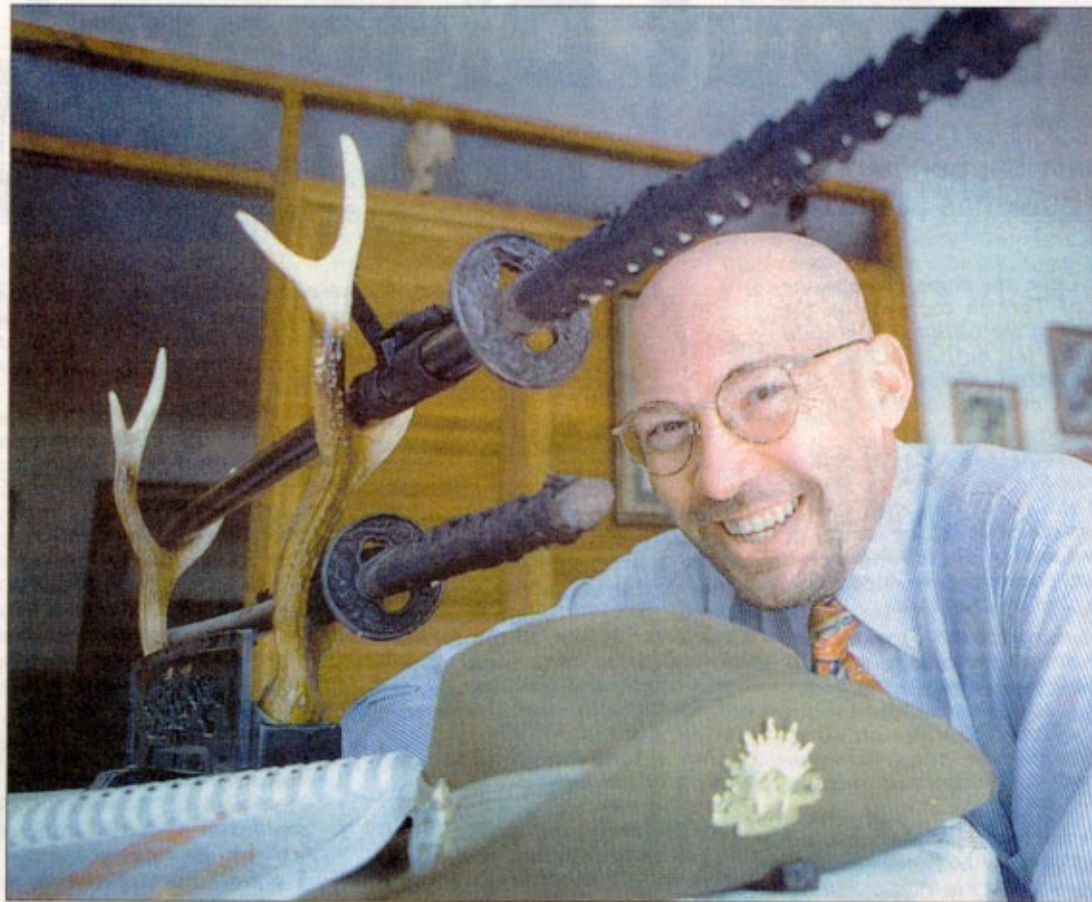
Friend concedes that Kokoda has taken a long time to become a reality

because Rising Sun Films is determined to see the project get off the ground as an epic.

"We see this venture as a \$9.7 million film although we could easily raise somewhere in the region of \$4 million to \$5 million immediately," says Friend.

"That's what Australian film more often than not cost, but no one involved in the Kokoda project wants to see it short changed."

Friend insists that Rising Sun Films is about more than Kokoda, but never loses sight of the major project which has already won the hearts and minds of leading industry people in Australia and Japan.



Film-maker George with some of the trappings of war.

Picture: SHANE BELL

In 1996, Gold Coast retired Japanese businessman and former adviser to Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, Tota Kondo, the Professor of Film and Television at Bond University, Bruce Molloy, and the former assistant commissioner for securities in Hong Kong, barrister and The Southport School old boy Derek Murphy invested in RSF and moved on to the board of directors.

Friend, who is also an old TSS trooper and Australian army major, says Kokoda is one of three fully developed projects (two feature films and a mini-series) in the pipeline.

"With UCLA refining the RSF slate and procedures to meet US venture capital requirements and product entry for distribution in the north American market, the outlook for the company looks positive and secure," says Friend.

"We will be establishing new benchmarks in the Australian film industry in order to be globally competitive, create growth and secure employment for the future.

"The company already has someone interested in globally distribution of the Kokoda product and I'm hoping that by the time we go to north America we'll be able to looking into nitty-gritty aspects of the production such as casting.

"The reality is that the Coast is where Hollywood was some 30 or 40 years ago, but Kokoda is going to be an Australian production with home-grown control and values."