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Facing true ANZAC spirit

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PUT away your phones, forget about updating Facebook and just bask in the glory and sacrifice of our nation's proud warriors.

That was the advice of Royal Australia Engineers Captain Timothy Rowe to a group of schoolchildren travelling to Gallipoli next month to mark the centenary of the ANZAC landings.

"Don't get obsessed with online media, don't be worried about getting that perfect photo of the beach – just absorb it all," he told the teenagers from Cronulla High School and Caringbah's De La Salle Catholic College.

"Don't worry about updating your status on Facebook because it's not as important as the experience of being there."

"Embrace the company of each other just like the soldiers who landed there did."

It was the sage advice from Capt Rowe, a nineteen year Defence Force veteran who has served in Afghanistan and is currently posted with the army's 2nd Division in Sydney.

Sydney Soames, from Cronulla High, is among 100 students and 28 teachers who will spend one week in Gallipoli next month, including Anzac Day, thanks to an initiative launched by the state government.

The 15-year-old's great uncle and grandfather fought on the Western Front during the Great World War. "We built our nation on the back of what our Diggers did for us, so I'm so grateful... I still can't believe I'm going to Gallipoli so I can pay my respects," she said.

The students went through a rigorous process to win their spots on the trip including creating an original piece of work outlining what Anzac Day means to them, followed by interviews with their principals and local politicians.

Fellow Cronulla High student Jazmaree Dawson, 15, said: "People ask about what the Anzac spirit means to today's youth but let's remember that these soldiers – these men who fought at Gallipoli – were in their youth, many of them were 18 or younger."

Veterans Affairs Minister Victor Dominello urged the students to spread the word. "If you ask any Digger what they want to see out of the centenary commemorations, it's to make sure the next generation continues to hold onto that torch."



Students from Cronulla High School and De La Salle meet Timothy Rowe, a Captain in the Royal Australian Engineers, about their planned trip to Gallipoli for the ANZAC commemorations. Pic Stephen Cooper