Every year, seniors at OJR are challenged in their English courses with a variety of literary pieces and styles, ranging in thematic content and social commentary. Of those works, both *The Things They Carried*, by novelist Tim O’Brien, and *The Long Road Home*, by former White House correspondent Martha Raddatz, powerfully chronical the immediate and lasting impacts of war on the human spirit. O’Brien’s writing speaks to the deeply conflicted nature of Vietnam, while Raddatz offers a thrilling nonfictional account of Black Sunday in Sadr City, Iraq in 2004.

To help bridge the gap between these narratives and the experiences which compel them, seniors were offered the opportunity to speak with two veterans who have remarkable stories and histories of their own. After their reading of *The Things They Carried*, Master Gunnery Sergeant Andrew Worley joined them for a day of presentations regarding his experience as a soldier in Vietnam. Part of special operations for the Navy, Master Gunns trained alongside SEAL teams in preparation for his deployment, where his duties were varied and intense. In recognition for his service, which extended well beyond the period of US involvement in Vietnam and continues in his work with OJR’s JROTC program today, he earned many medals, including multiple Valor Vs and Purple Hearts.

Students switch gears a bit in preparation for the reading of Raddatz’s *Long Road Home* with Sergeant First Class Charles Kelly’s visit. SFC Kelly served overseas, first in Kosovo and then in Iraq, as a soldier in the Army National Guard. In this role, he was able to engage in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, focusing on making a positive change despite the dangers and difficulties surrounding him in combat. On the home front, SFC Kelly also served in New Orleans in 2005 to help manage the devastation left behind by Hurricane Katrina. Currently, he remains involved in the OJR community as a recruiter, helping many students find successful paths to accomplishing their goals when they graduate.

Both speakers delivered powerful, honest accounts of a soldier’s experience, leaving students with a stronger and truer grasp of how war largely affects the societies who engage in it. Although these two conflicts span decades, students are able to better understand the complexities of war, its impacts on an individual, and the remarkable bonds and struggles that tie our servicemen together, regardless of the ways and wars in which they serve. As a result of the literature they read and veterans they met, students work to become more informed and critical voters, and through the efforts of Mr. Schwenk and the Chester County League of Women Voters, they will also have an opportunity to register to vote during an upcoming voter registration drive at the high school on Thursday, March 17.





