

THE KERRY-PERSHING '61 CONNECTION

During his stump speech at the Academy this past January 21, Senator John Kerry began his remarks by good-naturedly acknowledging his ties to several other New England boarding schools. “I want you to get out all your hostility right away,” Kerry, a St. Paul’s alumnus, said with a laugh. He then proudly noted his strong connections to Exeter, which include his wife, Teresa Heinz Kerry ’56 (Hon.), a trustee from 1978 to 1987 and widow of the late Senator John Heinz ’56; and one of her sons from that marriage, Andre ’88. Kerry also called his chief of staff, David McKean ’75, up on stage.

On a more somber note, Kerry also reflected on another very meaningful connection to the Academy, his friend the late Richard Pershing ’61. Pershing, who died in combat during the Vietnam War, was among Kerry’s closest companions while at Yale. According to Douglas Brinkley, author of *Tour of Duty: John Kerry and the Vietnam War*, Kerry and Pershing—grandson of General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing—first became friends while attending the Fessenden School outside Boston and remained close throughout high school and on into college.

By all accounts, Pershing was a first-rate cutup and mischief-maker. Rick Mahoney ’61, now director



Presidential candidate John Kerry (above) has spoken often on the campaign trail of his childhood friend (and Exeter alumnus) Dick Pershing ’61 (right), who died while serving in Vietnam.



of financial aid at the Academy, lived in Amen Hall with Pershing for three years, and recalls him as being “footloose and fancy free—a constant source of entertainment for the entire dorm.” Mahoney says with a laugh that his most vivid memories of Pershing wouldn’t be suitable for print. “Now that I’m on the other side of the fence working at the Academy, I’m sure he drove the faculty crazy.”

“Dick was incredibly enthusiastic about the things that interested him,” recalls another friend,

Michael Howard ’60, who grew up with Pershing in New York City. “He was something of a prankster, but he always knew that the best joke was always the one played on yourself. He brought a lot to the PEA community.”

According to Brinkley, while Pershing may best be remembered for his waggish ways, he was also a very bright young man who blossomed into a serious and skillful soldier. A second lieutenant with the 101st Airborne Division, Pershing was killed when his platoon was ambushed near Hung Nhon, 400 miles north of Saigon, while searching for a lost comrade.

At Exeter, Kerry spoke of the power he

has derived from friendships such as the one he shared with Pershing. “The bonds and friendships that will follow you through your lifetime will go through ups and downs,” he told the crowd. “I hope that you will draw the same strength and sense of the possibilities of life that I have from mine.”



(A) Appearing with Senator Kerry during his January 21 visit was his wife, Teresa Heinz Kerry ’56 (Hon.), a former Academy trustee. (B) Earlier in the evening Kerry’s chief of staff, David McKean ’75 (right), caught up with history department chair Rick Schubart (left). (C) The senator thanked Brady Hiatt ’04 for introducing him, and, (D) at the evening’s end picked out a few chords on a guitar loaned to him by Academy music instructor Robert Squires (at right).

