



O'Neil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr.

October 15, 1947 - December 7, 2017

O'Neil James "Jim" Newkirk aged 70 of Scottville passed away on Thursday, December 7, 2017. Jim was born on October 15, 1947, the oldest child of O'Neil "Boots" and Lyana June (Reinoehl) Newkirk and attended Mason County Central graduating with the Class of 1965. While at MCC he participated in various sports earning many awards and accolades. His love of sports followed him to Central Michigan University where he played football and loved participating in the intramural leagues. After graduation he continued displaying his athletic abilities pitching in local recreation softball leagues where he continually was at the top of the leaderboard in wins and home runs. As much as he loved playing, he found coaching and officiating just as fulfilling. A registered official since college, Jim officiated his last football game in September of 2017 completing a career spanning almost 50 years. He coached football, baseball, basketball, two seasons of track, and was registered to officiate football, basketball, volleyball, baseball, and softball.

On June 12, 1971 he married Constance "Connie" Mates and they celebrated 44 years together before Connie preceded him in death on January 4, 2016. Jim was also preceded in death by his parents Boots and June Newkirk. Earlier this year on May 28th, Jim married Lois Schleder Bongard and they have blessed each other lives every day since.

Jim called the CMU Social Studies department his “home away from home”. Being the son of revered MCC Social Studies teacher “Boots” Newkirk, Jim had grown up learning from one of the best. He was hired by Hart Public Schools in 1969 to teach Social Studies and coach JV football and freshmen basketball. He continued teaching at Hart High School for the next 40 years. During his career he received several notable awards including the Ferris E. Lewis Michigan History Teacher of the Year by the State of Michigan Historical Society and Hillsdale Publishers and History Teacher of the Year by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). “To be recognized by one’s peers for the work and effort put into teaching was truly gratifying, but the best recognition a teacher can hope for is to have former students return to share their love of history with the person whom they credit with helping their passion develop.”

Jim continued his passion for education after retirement from Hart High School and began teaching a variety of classes at West Shore Community College.

Over the years at Hart Jim taught Michigan History, US History, World History, Government, Economics, Psychology, Sociology, and a self-developed “Living History” class he created the curriculum for. Other activities for the history students have included a very successful Michigan History Club which travelled the state’s historic sites after the culmination of each school year. He also developed a “Black Powder Club” in which students would build and then shoot, with help from local police agencies, period black powder pistols. He had no idea what would develop when he approached a local welder to help the group build a cannon to shoot at Memorial and Veteran’s Day services.

That group evolved into what is today Battery D, 1st Michigan Light Artillery. The Battery would become one of the largest and most respected Civil War artillery reenactment groups in the country. Jim was elected as the

commander of the Battery each year since 1980. The strength and quality of the group allowed him to be recognized by the National Civil War Artillery Association as the George McDonald Artillerist of the year in 1996. That same year he would be honored by the Field Artillery Association of the United States Army with the Honorable Order of St. Barbara medal. Shortly thereafter, Jim was elected to 4 terms as National Chairman of the National Civil War Artillery Association serving longer than any chairman before, or since. Jim has served as a commander at over 30 national Civil War reenactments, presided over and taught at several National Artillery Schools and appeared in the movies "Gettysburg" and "Mickey Matson and the Copperhead Treasure". In an effort to continue to grow professionally he developed and presented "first person" programs to various groups from not only the Civil War, but from the French and Indian War, American Revolution, Spanish-American War, WWI, and WWII all in correct period dress.

Jim was an Eagle Scout with Bronze Palm, member of the Order of the Arrow, Explorer Scout, Cubmaster and Scoutmaster for the Scottville Troop when his son Jimmy was active in scouting. In addition to Battery D, he was a member of the Mason County Historical Society, Michigan Historical Society, 40th Combat Engineers WWII living history group, and the Ludington Lions Club.

Faith in God and family are the cornerstones of the Newkirk family. When one is hurting, all are hurting. When one is weak, the strong lift them up. Surrounded by his family Jim was lifted to Heaven. He was a lifelong member of, and raised his family, in the Scottville United Methodist Church. He held many leadership positions on boards and committees, taught Sunday School, and many times stepped in when a substitute pastor was needed. Jim was most proud of his family. With every addition his joy grew. Nothing pleased him more than seeing his wife, children, and grandchildren grow and succeed. He will be greatly missed by all of them.

“History must be alive and meaningful for young and old to learn from, or our future citizens will most certainly make the same mistakes our ancestors did,” is a quote pulled from one of the speeches Jim wrote to address his teaching beliefs. Jim subscribed to the idea that it is a teacher’s duty to relate the past to today’s society. “Many seek to be entertained as they learn, and this creates a unique challenge to those who teach. The competition for the attention of our youth is unquestionable, but we must strive to pass the lessons of the past on to them, or they surely will be lost.” The world has lost one of the great soldiers dedicated to that quest.

Jim will be greatly missed by his wife Lois, his children O’Neil “Jimmy” Newkirk III and wife Heather of Oscoda, and Kerry Krzymicki and husband Chad of Edmore; Lois’ children Troy Bongard and wife Deb of Clare, Shannon Bongard and wife Kristen of Sterling Heights, Mark Bongard of Ludington, and Rebekah Lane and husband Rich of Olympia, WA; his grandchildren Savanna and Cassidy Newkirk, Abraham and Gabriella Krzymicki, Ashland Chilson, Kelsey and Lucas Bongard, Jennifer Dana, Jessica and Julie Kroll, and Leona Lane; his great-grandchildren Evan, Haley, Addison, and Espen; his brother William Newkirk and wife Paula of Sanford; his sisters Susan Kelly and husband Bruce of Stony Lake, and Cynthia Yenkel and husband Marc of Clare; his father-in-law Carl Mates of Wisconsin; his sisters-in-law Ruth Ann Farrier of Alma, Muriel Derby of Ithaca, and Elisa Schleder of Mt. Pleasant; and many nieces and nephews.

Funeral services will be held for Jim at 7:00 pm on Friday, December 15 at the Ludington United Methodist Church. Burial with full honors by the Battery D, 1st Michigan Light Artillery will take place at Riverside Cemetery in Custer in the spring. Friends may meet with his family for a time of visitation on Thursday from 4:00 – 8:00 pm at Wyman Funeral & Cremation Services – Stephens Funeral Home in Scottville and on Friday evening from 6:00 – 7:00

pm at the church. Those who wish to remember Jim with a memorial donation are asked to consider the following: The Newkirk Family Scholarship, Covenant Christian School, the Civil War Preservation Trust, or the Scottville United Methodist Church.

Cemetery Details

Riverside Cemetery

800 South Custer Road
Custer, MI 49405

Previous Events

Visitation

DEC **14**. 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Wyman Funeral & Cremation Services - Stephens Funeral Home
305 E. State St.
Scottville, MI 49454
(231) 757-3333
wyman-stephens@sbcglobal.net
<https://www.wymanfuneralservice.com>

Visitation

DEC **15**. 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

United Methodist Church of Ludington
5810 Bryant Road
Ludington, MI 49431

Service

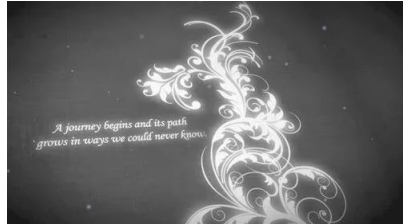
DEC **15**. 7:00 PM (ET)

United Methodist Church of Ludington
5810 Bryant Road
Ludington, MI 49431

Tribute Wall



“ *Wyman Funeral & Cremation Services created a Tribute Video in memory of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr.*



Wyman Funeral & Cremation Services - December 13, 2017 at 09:26 PM

MP

“ *Anyone in a 1987 after-lunch Mrs. Peterson algebra class will remember (hopefully without nightmares!) Mr. Newkirk entering the room, zeroing in on me, and demanding in no uncertain terms an explanation as to how I broke a classmate's egg. I don't remember the reply I stammered, but I do know that his teachings served me extremely well in the military (don't screw around) and have thought of that instance many times over the past years. Thanks to him and blessings to his family. Mark Peters*

Mark Peters - December 29, 2020 at 11:50 AM

SH

“ One of my favorite memories of Jim is at the Civil War muster at Historic Charlton Park. I'd never experienced a reenactment before, so I didn't understand how the battle scenarios worked. We had an opportunity to ride together at one point, and he carefully and thoroughly answered all my questions. He was an amazing speaker, and captivated people while sharing his knowledge. He is missed!

- Shannon, Historic Charlton Park staff member



Shannon - January 10, 2018 at 03:18 PM

LC

“ Jimmy and Kerry - I was saddened to learn of the passing of your parents. They were two very special people. John and I spent many years with Battery D and traveled all over with your parents, grandparents and the group. I treasure the pictures and memories of those times and the enjoyment we had with everyone.
Lois - I'm so glad that you and Jim were able to marry and be together although for such a short time. I know what it's like as I lost John 12 years ago and was blessed to have reconnected with someone who was in my life in the sixties. My condolences to you and your family in your loss. My thoughts and prayers are with you all.

Leida (Gustafson) Compton

Leida (Gustafson) Compton - December 19, 2017 at 01:17 PM



“ *Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr..*



December 18, 2017 at 02:47 PM



“ *Mr. Newkirk was a brand-new teacher at Hart High School when I had him for Sociology. I remember his first words were "I can teach you how to take Sociology tests at CMU, or I can teach you how to make wise choices in your lives." He certainly helped me make those wise choices.*

He was one of my favorite teachers, and I loved his Bill Cosby impressions. He made learning fun.

With deepest sympathy, Jerianne Hallack Block, HHS 1970

Jerianne Block - December 18, 2017 at 11:33 AM



“ *Terry Williams sent a virtual gift in memory of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr.*



Terry Williams - December 16, 2017 at 11:31 AM

SR

“ I first met Mr Newkirk in 1972 when I was a freshman in high school. He was also my freshman basketball coach & also my varsity baseball coach. Mr Newkirk years later started a Junior Achievement class in school and he had me come in as an advisor. I really enjoyed this and it is through this class I saw how much the kids at Hart meant to him. He became a very good friend. I was so lucky to also have my three children also be Mr Newkirk's students. They enjoyed him as much as I had as a teacher and after high school my son Steve had him as a college instructor up to West Shore CC. He will be greatly missed by all he came in contact with. Rest In Peace Mr. Newkirk.

Steve Rossiter

Steve Rossiter - December 15, 2017 at 09:58 PM

KB

“ He was a great teacher, so sorry to hear about your loss. You're in my prayers. Krista class of 1997

Krista Baird - December 15, 2017 at 05:56 PM

SZ

“ To the entire family, extended, of Jim Newkirk, we send our prayers and thoughts to you today. My first memory of Jim was changing his diaper when he was a baby. Loved him then, still do.
Lee and Aunt Sue Zajic

Susan Zajic - December 15, 2017 at 11:29 AM

DE

“ So sorry I won't be able to drive over for the Viewing. Jim was a great individual, instructor, churchgoer, and leader. He cast a GIANT footprint down through the years and he will be missed greatly by friends and family alike. May God hold all the family in his hand during this time.

Dennis Emery - December 14, 2017 at 10:58 AM

LR

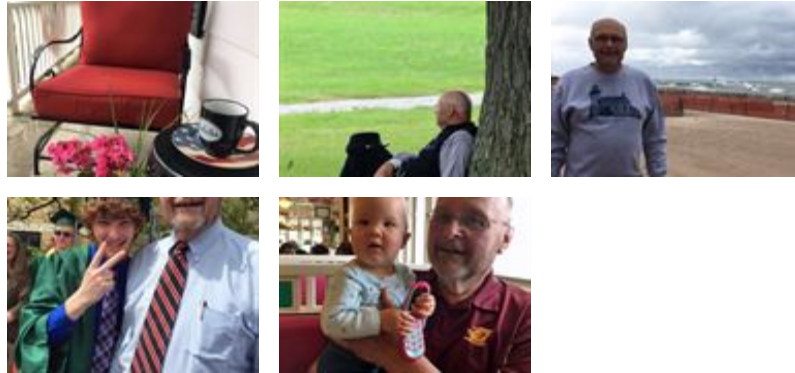
“ We are greatly saddened by Jim's passing. We first met Jim and Battery D in Escanaba in 1998 when they were presenting a Civil War Living History. He and the other members have always warmly welcomed us to Fort Wilkins and other events over the years. We will greatly miss his wisdom, advice, storytelling, and love of history. We will miss the great conversations we shared under our tent fly. The American Civil War reenacting world as well as the education community has lost a real patriot. Our sincere condolences to Jim's family as well as his reenacting family and the students he reached in his many years in teaching.

*Doug and Laurie Rasmussen
2d Wisconsin, Company E*

laurie rasmussen - December 13, 2017 at 09:18 PM



“ 37 files added to the album Life Tributes



Wyman Funeral & Cremation Services - December 13, 2017 at 08:02 PM



“ I met Jim in the first grade at MCC. Over the years we shared time in Sunday school, Boy Scouts, Explorer Scouts, school events, and athletic teams. Jim was a straight arrow in the best sense of the word. Jim and his family helped make Scottville a special place in my early years. From reading these memories, I'm glad to see that many of his students recognize the important role he played in in their lives.

In Boy Scouts we learned that you should always leave a campsite looking better when you leave, than when you arrived. Jim did that with every campsite he occupied.

*Tony McLain
Class of "65" MCC*

Tony McLain - December 12, 2017 at 10:34 AM

HD

“ *Hank Doorenbos lit a candle in memory of O'Neil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr.*



Hank doorenbos - December 12, 2017 at 04:58 AM

MG

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Mark Glover - December 11, 2017 at 09:36 PM

LD

“ *Sadness. He was my government professor at college and had a good time telling us about the civil war reenactments he took part in. It was important to him that we learned these stories, even though it wasn't part of the lectures or exams. I thank him for this. He was a true treasure, and I'll miss him. My thoughts go out to his family, loved ones, friends and all whose lives he touched.*



Lisa Dibble - December 11, 2017 at 03:52 PM



“ *Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr..*



December 11, 2017 at 03:45 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr..*



December 11, 2017 at 11:52 AM



“ *Enchanted Cottage was purchased for the family of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr..*



December 11, 2017 at 10:01 AM

AS

“ I remember sitting in his classroom chatting like young girls that age do with my neighbor in class. He had asked us several times to be quiet but we of course kept chatting. He was telling a story that I today would love to hear again. I stopped chatting when I heard him say, "That little boy's father had a heart attack and died while he was rocking him to sleep as a baby." That stopped me in my tracks because that was my grandfather that he was talking about. I always listened to him in class from that day forward. It was then that I learned we were distantly related. When my grandfather passed away, I called and spoke with him and he asked me to come and see him in his home. I and other family members went to see him when he presented me with a package of photos of my grandfather when he was just a baby and lots of photos we had never seen before. I was so grateful to him for that, in a way it helped lift some of the sorrow of losing my grandfather. He took the time to know where he was from and he had so much knowledge to share if you were willing to listen. He was a very wise and kind man. I am a better person for having known him. Prayers for all of the family that God would comfort you during this time of loss.

Anna Shellhouse - December 11, 2017 at 09:50 AM



“ Florist Choice Bouquet was purchased for the family of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr..



December 11, 2017 at 08:52 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr..*



December 11, 2017 at 08:40 AM



“ *It's obvious by the words in these memories he has touched many lives. Jim was my cousin and I've known him my entire life. I hold him and his entire family in high regard and have many many fond memories of special times spent together. He will be missed but it is up to us to keep his spirit alive. So touched to know he has touched so many lives in so many ways!*

mark hickok - December 11, 2017 at 08:36 AM



“ *"Battery, attention!" Some of the first words I heard Jim speak. He loved to tell stories and he and my dad (John Clark) constantly tried to one each other in the story department. I always enjoyed being the "powder monkey" for Jim. His advice was encouraging as I was a beginning teacher. Let's not forget that Jim was a CMU grad. Go Chips, we'd told each other often. Jim was a good friend to my father and always made time for him Jim will be missed in this world but the world is better place because Jim made it that way. David Clark*

David Clark - December 10, 2017 at 08:00 PM

GD

“ George and Marcia Dailey purchased the Heartfe It Memories for the family of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr..



George and Marcia Dailey - December 10, 2017 at 05:53 PM

KH

“ Such a loss to the Civil War Reenacting world. I knew Jim for over 30 years and he was such a knowledgeable person always a great to work with on the field. My only hope though is when he arrives at the pearly gates and is asked to account for himself, St. Peter does not request a presentation. He'll be there for hours. I'll miss that.

Keith Harrison - December 10, 2017 at 09:51 AM

EP

“ Mr Newkirk taught me how to dance the box step on one of the history club trips. He was a great teacher! Prayers to the family, May God shine his perpetual light on him and bring him peace.

Evajewel Pressley - December 09, 2017 at 12:38 PM

GS

“ My prayers to the family 🙏 Jim was a good teacher & friend!

gladys swihart - December 09, 2017 at 12:24 PM

CG

“ A true class act! He definitely left the world better than he found it. He will be missed 🙏

Christina Griffis - December 09, 2017 at 12:02 PM



“ My heart goes out to his family..... may the peace of the Lord be in your hearts.....RIP Mr. Newkirk.....

Mary Jo Schaner - December 09, 2017 at 10:55 AM



“ My favorite teacher at Hart High. Years later he came into my workplace in Gun Lake wearing his war uniform (he was attending a reenactment at Bowens Mills in Middleville) we had a wonderful chat. He made any history class interesting and fun!

Vickie Backing - December 09, 2017 at 10:03 AM



“ The man wrapped great advice into class discussions. I remember one in particular. What do you want your legacy to be? your children (which he was very fond of), your life's work, how you treat people ect. Let's look at his life's work. He was a teacher with great wit, authority, and respected in our HHS single hall school. i enjoyed having my locker in close proximity of his class for my freshman and sophomore year. He was jovial but stern, had a great laugh and quick wit on whatever the students dealt him. His love for history was even better. He was all about showmanship. And he was very proud of his part in his civil war movie...his rear end made the cut! He has imprinted himself in many student's education, minds, and will leak into our stories when we describe high school experiences. He will be missed. His Legacy, it lives on in 41 years of teaching and every student he had. God bless the hearts of his family. They, like the many students have so many memories that we can pocket and pull out from time to time and smile.

Katrina Carlson Russell
HHS Class of 2002

Katrina Russell - December 09, 2017 at 09:53 AM

FB

“ Fredrick "Fritz" Brohn purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr..



Fredrick "Fritz" Brohn - December 08, 2017 at 06:10 PM

BW

“ Thoughts, prayers and hugs for the Newkirk family. Jim will be so missed. As we reflect, we appreciate even more the many fond memories of Battery D at Fort Wilkins and the great conversations on the Fort Wilkins parade grounds.

In memory of Jim, a candle has been lit at the San Xavier Mission in Tucson, AZ.

Rest in peace.

Love, Barb and Jim Wachowski

Barb Wachowski - December 08, 2017 at 01:02 PM



“ Jamie McDonald lit a candle in memory of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr.



Jamie McDonald - December 08, 2017 at 11:42 AM

HM

“ *Mr. Newkirk was my favorite teacher. He will truly be missed by many.*

Heidi Moul - December 08, 2017 at 11:33 AM



“ *Sandi Williams lit a candle in memory of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr.*



Sandi Williams - December 08, 2017 at 11:21 AM

Jenni
Clark
Miller

“ *A wonderful and respected friend to my Dad. I am glad they can be together again. Jenni Miller, daughter of John Clark*

Jenni Clark Miller - December 08, 2017 at 11:20 AM

RG

“ *I remember fondly the days at MCC sitting in History class with Jim and his dad. Watching the dynamics of father and son. The adoration for Dad was evident and time bore it out with Jim's choice of profession.
My guess is his students loved him as much as we all loved his dad!
Sorry for the loss and rejoice with the victory!
Rich and Laura Greiner*

Richard Anthony Greiner - December 08, 2017 at 10:45 AM



“ *Lloyd lit a candle in memory of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr.*



Lloyd - December 08, 2017 at 03:52 AM



“ *Debra Wolf lit a candle in memory of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr.*



Debra Wolf - December 08, 2017 at 12:55 AM



“ *Strength & Solace Spray was purchased for the family of ONeil James "Jim" Newkirk Jr..*



December 07, 2017 at 09:54 PM