

CROSSED THE BAR

Jim Walter McDonnell, Jr.

December 26, 1925 – January 25, 2024

James “Jim” Walter McDonnell passed away peacefully on Thursday, January 25th in Memphis, TN and now rests gently in the hollow of God’s hand.

Jim was born on December 26, 1925, to Irene Bond and J. Walter McDonnell. He is predeceased by his parents and his siblings, Irene McDonnell Hill, McNeal Bond McDonnell, and Michael McDonnell.

Jim attended Normal Training School in Memphis and went on to graduate from The Webb School in Bell Buckle, TN. He was Secretary Treasurer of the class of 1943, was a member of the Honor Council, and led the Hamilton Debate Society. After graduating he went to Vanderbilt University for two semesters until he was able to enlist in the Naval V-12 Officer Training program. He served as an ensign, later Lieutenant JG, on a destroyer in the Pacific during World War II. He then continued his college education through the G.I. Bill, completing his undergraduate degree at Yale University in 1948 and his law degree at Yale Law School in 1951.



Immediately following his time at Yale Law School, he was recalled to the Navy for the Korean War. He ended his naval career and returned to Memphis where he practiced law for the rest of his career. He began at Canada Russell and Turner which merged to become Wildman, Harrold, Allen, Dixon, and McDonnell. He founded McDonnell Boyd, which is now known as Wyatt, Tarrant, and Combs. He was a member of the American College of Trial Lawyers and a founding member of the Mid-South Coliseum Board. He served on the Webb School Board of Trustees for 30 years, was Chairman from 1967-1988, and, in 1993, was named a member of their Distinguished Alumni Society.

When not in Memphis, he had two places he also felt at home: Charlevoix, MI and Bolivar, TN. He loved nowhere more than Charlevoix, where he spent summers at The Belvedere Club. He loved the natural beauty and serenity of Lake Charlevoix and could often be found at the golf course. He also took great pride and comfort in his family home in Bolivar, TN: the McNeal Place. In his later life, with the support of his sister and brother, Jim assumed their mother’s passion for the care and maintenance of the home.

Jim met Katherine “K.O.” Overton in 1943, and they were married in 1945. The two were happily married for 50 years until she died in 1995 after a long battle with multiple sclerosis. Jim and K.O. loved to play golf together and had three children: J.W. McDonnell III (Martha), Faith McDonnell Campbell (Doug), and Anne McDonnell Durell (David).

Jim was 70 years old when he married Ann “Missie” Walthour Pidgeon in 1996 and the two shared a rich 27 years. They had a wonderful time traveling together, fishing from Arkansas to South America, and spending their summers in Charlevoix and Thanksgivings with the family in Bolivar, TN. Their many mutual friends were a joy to them, including the friends they made when they moved to Trezevant Manor in 2014.

Jim was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and “Uncle Jim”, and he provided endless support to all those who chose to lean on him. He was fair and wise, and he read voraciously. He was also a natural and gifted athlete, and on the golf course, he could shoot under his age well into his nineties. He was a fierce competitor and could cut to the core with a word or two, or even just a properly intoned "mmmh," as anyone who ever played golf or backgammon with him can attest. While he never shied away from a healthy debate, he was never happier than when he was surrounded by his family. He took every opportunity to recite “Granddaddy’s Rule” to remind his loved ones that family is what gets us through tough times. His legacy of integrity, generosity, competitive spirit, and commitment to family will continue to live on in the hearts of those he leaves behind. He was well loved and will be deeply missed by those who survive him: his wife Missie, his children, his grandchildren Katie, K.O., Doug, Jeanne, Elizabeth, James, and John, eleven great-grandchildren, Missie’s children Eugene Pidgeon, Perry Pidgeon Hooks, and Julia Pidgeon Halford, and her grandchildren Eugene, Annie, Battle, Meg, and Julia.

Services are scheduled for Thursday, February 1st at Holy Communion. Visitation will begin at 10am at Cheney Parish Hall followed by the funeral service at 11am in the Nave. All are welcome to attend the graveside service at Polk Cemetery in Bolivar with a reception following at the McNeal Place.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the Belvedere Scholarship Fund, (c/o The Belvedere Club, PO Box 218, Charlevoix, MI 49720) or to the McDonnell-Follin Scholars Program at The Webb School, (The Webb School, 319 Webb Road East, Bell Buckle, TN 37020) in honor of Jim's memory. The family would like to thank Bobbie Jean Robinson, Leona Hayes, Juanita Moody, Lakeva Tabron, and Aretha Franklin for their loving care. Thank you to hospice nurse Skillet Ray.