

A Man That Did Not, Could Not, And Would Not Die

By Nathan Piche

(Content Warning: death, war)

Twenty-six veterans awaited care, may it be an ounce of
veneration, or vague hint at empathy.
Twenty-six frocks were thrown on humanoid facsimiles, fabricated
by the whirring motors of killing machines, made for the wars of yesteryear.
Twenty-six screens presented a synthetic streak, which
danced upwards and down to a downbeat of steady beeps.
Twenty-six souls teetered between the color-filled
sensations and the static nothing, succumbing on one cold noon.
Twenty-six minds were forever molded by the never-ending
churning of a national campaign forgoing the families awaiting their sons and husbands.
Twenty-six obituaries were written in woeful anticipation, detailing seventy
dutiful years of service and humility, only one having to be discarded.

Twenty-five graves now stand, scattered across a sea of grass, now a territory
ruled by twisting weeds and vines.
Twenty-five coffins lay unmovable in cool earth, underground neighbors
burrowing and scurrying past undisturbed wooden vessels.
Twenty-five beds await new bodies to host, adequately prepared,
and prior occupants gone, safe for a single second-floor inhabitant.
Twenty-five souls left a world that brutalized and broke them,
beckoned to rest by the Lord above.
Twenty-five brothers in arms, buried in a field of
aster, live on in a metaphor; buzzing memories in an anguished mind.
Twenty-five names; written on scrunched-up paper scraps, nailed
to any available surface, serving to comfort one crooked survivor.

One room of the ruined veterans' hospital, a relic of
a volatile humanity, remains occupied even during the interbellum.
One husk of a man stews in his pinewood chair, having
refused to pass, readily protested, and now raspy air still passes his paralyzed lips.
One decade passes, and the old patriot did not die, his appearance
comparable to the atrophied corpses won from yesteryear's war.
One troubled spirit trembles; a life prolonged as eighty more
hellish years elapse, the ever-living yearning for yesterday's love subsists.
One locket sways off a long silver chain, the chain hanging off
a hooked finger, and the locket bearing the name of a nurse that passed too soon.
One tear rolls down a rotted, dry cheek, a cry for a love too young to
silence; a love that persists, lives long, and dies never.

Twenty-six men fought in a war in which they would surely die.
Twenty-five were admitted to a hospital in which they would die.
One man, however, did not, could not, and would not die.