

mick kennedy

The Last Man Standing
(Christmas Truce 1914)

—for Alfred Anderson 1896-2005

I

There was no sound
but a throbbing
in my head

that didn't explode.
We searched
the gruel-colored

sky for tails of light
that said each molecule
of our bodies

needed to find more room.
Where was I—
can't recall which finger

of the trench we reached

out through to make
the Kaiser flinch,

leafed trees now blasted ribs
of some great fish
mocked by limbs once names

sticking out of the parapet.
Patrick frozen for two days,
his grimace saying, "You can have it, lads."

Small lights over
there, and song—
and we sang Noël barrages

and they tossed back jubilees
of snow and spirit across
the whine-less air.

II

The snow a thin
skin to keep the thunder under.
We exchanged vowels, consonants

and tins, footed a makeshift
soccer ball back and forth,
the tiny lights from the trenches lost

in the whirl of snowflake,
feeling cold for the first time,
and Walter went, too,

his last breath a fog
that met and mingled
with our glad cloud.

Those smiles melted

into metaphor, quarter moon,
ox-bow lake, parentheses, happy.

Frozen chocolate splintered,
frozen tobacco thawed
by gaslights and the glow

from the candles that held
us in the middle, breaths
intermingling, rough speech

like iced-over footprints.
The game over, more wine, more cognac, more...

III

The sorriest sun I'd ever seen—
whistle's screech, the screech of each whistle,
a last pull on a cigarette,

we separate and retreat
into the trench.
One last bleat and the earth

exploded again. Peering over
the battlements, ducking chunks
of sod, I couldn't see their eyes

anymore, I couldn't feel
their pulse
of time.

mick kennedy teaches creative writing, composition and literature at Elizabethtown Community and Technical College in Elizabethtown, KY where he is also editor of *The Heartland Review*. Kennedy received honorable mention for his poem “Death on a Country Road in Hardin County KY” in *New Southerner’s* 2016 James Baker Hall Memorial Poetry Contest. He has poetry and prose published in *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *The Louisville Review*, *Pikeville Review*, *Timbercreek Review*, *Cut-Thru Review*, *Willow Review*, *Indiana English*, *Pegasus*, *Mid-West Poetry Review*, *Old City Cool*, *decomp*, *Skylark*, *PoetryRepairs.com*, *Windless Orchard*, *IUS Review*, *Poets Pen Quarterly*, and *Reaching the Summit*.