

# Excerpt from *Come You Masters of War*

by Craig Challender

*Marye's Heights, Fredericksburg, Virginia  
13th December 1862*

*They seemed to melt like snow coming down on wet ground. I guess if you're an officer behind the lines that's how it looked. For us no such poetry. A stiff wind. Freezing weather, flat stretch of ground pocked with bodies, mounds of Union blue we had to pick our way around like cow pies in a pasture. We were the twelfth assault. The only heat that night was man-made fire—line of muskets from behind a chest-high stone wall at the base of that goddamned hill, cannon above. No snow melt, just cold harvest: men cut down like winter wheat. Fitzgerald burst apart beside me—*splut!*—and my feet slicked skyward.*

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**Craig Challender** is an Emeritus Professor of English at Longwood University in Farmville, VA, where he taught American literature, mythology and creative writing (poetry) for thirty-six years and also directed the school's reading series. His poems have appeared in many literary journals, among them *The Sewanee Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, and *Arts & Letters*. He has published three chapbooks and four full-length collections: *Familiar Things* (Linwood Publishers, 1998); *Dancing On Water* (Pecan Grove Press, 2005); *As Details Become Available* (Pecan Grove, 2012); and *Capable Ways* (Scurfpea, 2017). *Come You Masters of War*, a decade-long project, is now looking for a home.