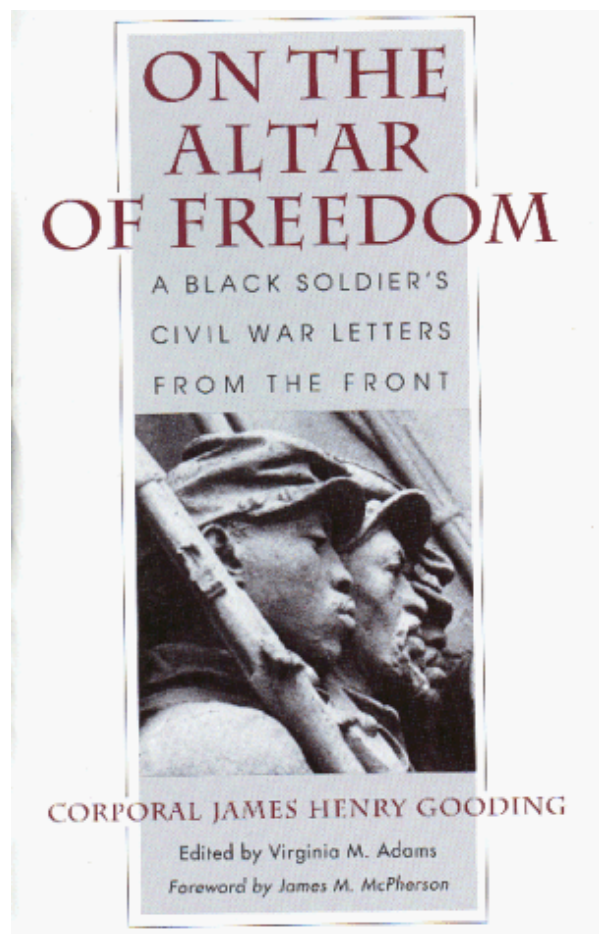


ON THE ALTAR OF FREEDOM: A BLACK SOLDIER'S CIVIL WAR LETTERS FROM THE FRONT BY JAMES HENRY GOODING



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ON THE ALTAR OF FREEDOM

A BLACK SOLDIER'S
CIVIL WAR LETTERS
FROM THE FRONT



CORPORAL JAMES HENRY GOODING

Edited by Virginia M. Adams

Foreword by James M. McPherson

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On February 14, 1863, twenty-six-year-old seaman James Henry Gooding volunteered to serve in the Massachusetts 54th, the first regiment of black soldiers ever recruited for the Union army. Over the next twelve months, he posted a series of remarkable letters from the front to his hometown newspaper, the staunchly abolitionist New Bedford Mercury. Written with insight and literary flair, his letters provide a vivid portrait of the war as seen through the eyes of a black volunteer.

From basic training at Camp Meigs in Readville, Massachusetts, through campaigns in Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida, Gooding faithfully records the activities of the 54th, including the legendary storming of Fort Wagner. He also voices the injustice felt by soldiers of his regiment over the issue of unequal pay, the refusal to promote deserving black enlistees to officer rank, and the deeply ingrained racism of whites in both the North and South.

Wounded and captured during the battle of Olustee, Florida, in February 1864, Gooding died later that year in Andersonville Prison.

In her introduction, Virginia M. Adams provides biographical details on Gooding's life and examines the antebellum history of New Bedford's large and articulate community of free blacks.

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By glory be

This is the story of a Black soldier, James Henry Gooding of the 54th Mass Infantry, who writes letters of his experiences during the Civil War.

What a wonderful way to see through his eyes back to a time when we could try but never be able to imagine what these men lived through.

He describes life in the camp as they drilled under the watchful eye of Col. Robert G. Shaw, "who detects anything out of keeping with order or military discipline."

Goodings describes life in the camps and there are the inevitable battles, as well as his comments on the New York Draft riots. Included is his letter to President Lincoln regarding the pay for Black soldiers.

Corporal Gooding was killed at the battle of Olustee Station, Florida, on February 20, 1864. His letters provide a rich legacy for those of us who have a real interest in the Civil War.

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