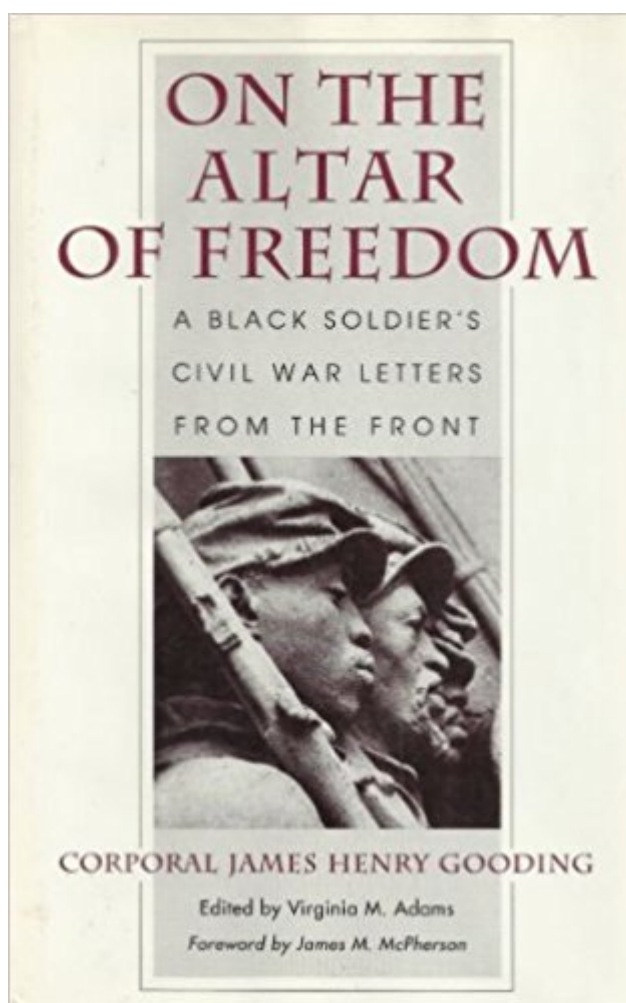


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# On The Altar Of Freedom: A Black Soldier's Civil War Letters From The Front



## Synopsis

Here is a vivid, unforgettable portrait of the Civil War as seen through the eloquent letters written by a black soldier in the Massachusetts 54th Regiment--the renowned regiment featured in the highly-acclaimed movie *Glory*. Gooding's shrewd, witty and opinionated observations of military life and the conduct of war is irresistible. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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## Customer Reviews

Gooding belonged to the 54th Massachusetts, the black Union regiment celebrated in the film *Glory*; here his wartime letters to the *New Bedford (Mass.) Mercury* are augmented with a foreword, annotations and appendixes. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gooding (1837-64) was an original member of the 54th Massachusetts, one of the first and most renowned of the Union's 166 black regiments in the Civil War. The 1989 movie *Glory* fascinated audiences with its account of the 54th's exploits, drawn mostly from letters of its young white commander Colonel Robert Gould Shaw. Gooding adds the sober strain of black manhood amid military monotony and the terrors and heroism of battle. His 48 pithy and poignant letters to the *New Bedford Mercury* begin in training camp in March 1863, move past *Glory*'s endpiece, the 54th's storming of Fort Wagner in Charleston, and stop with Gooding's death in battle in 1864. Adams ably

augments the remarkable series of letters with an insightful introduction, fact-filled annotations, and appendixes that expand our understanding of the 54th's men, their place and time, and their war. Highly recommended for Civil War, military, and African American collections.- Thomas J. Davis, Univ. at Buffalo, N.Y. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

GREAT READ.

Excellent book!!!

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." Gooding 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.

My husband loves this book!

Here's a very interesting book that shows that black soldiers during the Civil War could write, use excellent grammar, fight and endure the atrocities of war just as well or better than many of their white counterparts. The detailed letters written by Corporal Gooding give us better insight into the kind of fighting these first black troops were engaged in and how the 54th Mass. Volunteers fared in battle. It is interesting to note the reaction of the men to being offered lower pay than whites and how eventually their silent but firm protest was answered with equal pay for equal duty. I was especially interested in the steam ship *De Molay* which transported the 54th Mass. from Boston to South Carolina because it is the same steamer that my great grandfather, Richard Clow was taken on in 1865 when transported from Boston to City Point, Virginia. I had hoped that the Corporal would have given a description of the ship voyage and conditions similar or different to that described by Richard in my book, "Rough Enough", but sadly this is not so. I can only presume that between 1863 and 1864 the steamer was modified and utilized by much larger groups of soldiers to

be put it into the condition described by Richard Clow. Perhaps if he had done a private journal we might have seen a slightly different side to some of his comments. In addition to the many informative letters, I enjoyed the numerous pictures which complement the theme of the text. At the end of the book we are fortunate to see Sgt. Gooding's letter to the executive department of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the reply from John A. Andrew that, "The U. S. is wrong; and while they delay to right , we for the sake of justice and our own honor, will volunteer to do the right instead." Would that a few more persons in our society continued to show this kind of response to the plight of the poor and downtrodden in our country today.

"On the Altar of Freedom" was an interesting book in that it compiled the letters sent to a newspaper by Corporal James Gooding of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry (the "Glory" outfit). By reading the letters (ie the book), one can get a view of Civil War life from the view of a black Union soldier. The major drawback to the work is that Gooding was sending the letters to the newspaper for the express purpose of them being published. What would have been more interesting would have been to see his private (if any) correspondence. That way the reader would have been able to see the private man. This book is also an interesting read because of the mention of unapologetic black CSA sharpshooters being captured by Union forces outside Fort Wagner.

This was a look at the American Civil War from the viewpoint of an African American soldier serving in the Northern Army, in the famous 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. It offers a viewpoint of the War, not normally written about. One of the most fascinating parts about this book, is the armed African American Confederate soldiers, who were captured on Morris Island, SC. What makes this more interesting is that Pulitzer Prize winner, James M. McPherson, who attacked author Joy Masoff, for including black Confederates in her book, "Our Virginia: Past and Present," wrote the Foreword for this book and therefore knew that blacks fought for the South before he criticized her in a Washington Post article.

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