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SONS OF UNION VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR

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The Barlow-Gordon Affair

One of those rare but precious instances of humanity in the midst of war occurred on the afternoon of July 1, 1863, the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg. As the Union Ninth Corps began to fall back from its positions north of Gettysburg as a result of heavy Confederate pressure, Brig. Gen. Francis Barlow, commanding the corps' 1st Division, was wounded in his left side. Unable to ride, Barlow tried to walk off the field. As he did, he stumbled, collapsed, and was left for dead.

Soon the tide of the advancing Confederate troops swept over him. As he lay on the ground, Barlow was spotted by Brig. Gen. John B. Gordon, who was leading the attack with his brigade of Georgians from Early's division of Robert E. Lee's II Corps. Although he didn't know the seriously wounded 29 year-old Yankee brigadier, Gordon stopped, gave Barlow what comfort he could, and had him carried to a Confederate field hospital. That evening, while speaking with the wounded man, Gordon learned that Barlow's wife had accompanied the Army of the Potomac, much as his own had followed him to war with the *Army of Northern Virginia*. Gordon arranged for a safe conduct to be issued, and Barlow's wife was summoned to her husband's side.

Barlow spent ten months in a hospital before returning to duty and rising to command a corps. Gordon, meanwhile, ended the war a major general commanding a division. After the war, each man thought the other dead, Gordon because Barlow's wounds had seemed so grievous, and Barlow because a Brig. Gen. J. B. Gordon had been reported mortally wounded in May of 1864. During the post-war decades both men prospered. Barlow was several times elected secretary of state and attorney general of the State of New York, and was responsible for the prosecution of the infamous "Tweed Ring", while Gordon served his state as governor and for many years in the United States Senate. Then, about twenty years after the war, various notables were being introduced to each other at a dinner party in Washington.

The Senator from Georgia and the Secretary of State of New York were introduced to each other. The Senator politely inquired as to whether Barlow was related to that general Barlow who had died at Gettysburg. Barlow responded by saying that, indeed he was in fact the very man, having recovered from his wounds. With equal politeness Barlow inquired if Gordon was related to that general Gordon who had succored him on the battlefield but tragically died at Richmond in 1864. Gordon said that the officer in question was in fact his distant cousin, Brig. Gen. John B. Gordon, and that he himself was the general Gordon who had been at Gettysburg. The two had a happy reunion, and remained friends thereafter. Or at least that's the way tradition has it.