

Saved by the Enemy

# Union General Francis Barlow & Confederate General John B. Gordon

Have you ever showed unexpected kindness to an enemy?

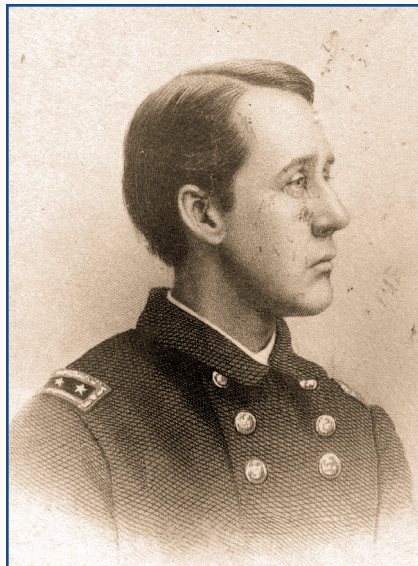
On July 1, 1863 at around 3:00 p.m., Brigadier General John B. Gordon's Georgians attacked General Francis Barlow's First Division, which was located on a small knoll north and slightly east of town. This knoll, or small hill, at the right flank of the Union line was later known as Barlow's Knoll. Gordon's assault was a success, and as the men of the First Division were retreating, one soldier's courage and devotion caught Gordon's eye.

✓ SOME THINGS  
TO CONSIDER

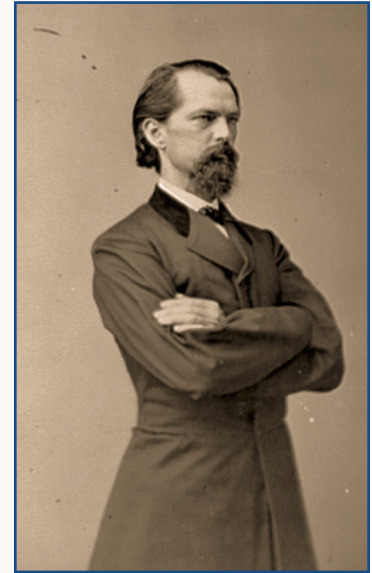
Using what you know about Civil War wounds, what would Barlow's chance of survival be?

This soldier was General Francis Barlow, who was trying to rally his troops – to get them to stop retreating and make one final, honorable stand. Suddenly, a minie bullet pierced him through the trunk, paralyzing his arms and legs as it passed near his spine (*Civil War Chronicle*, 321).

John B. Gordon found the officer, lying pale on the ground, and he was struck with pity. He dismounted his horse and gave him water from his canteen. They exchanged names. Both soldiers thought that Barlow was about to die. Gordon and several soldiers carried Barlow to the rear. His last request was for Gordon to carry a message to his wife. He wanted to make sure Mrs. Barlow knew that his last thoughts were of her, and he wanted her to know the name of the kind soldier who helped him as he lay dying.



Major General Francis C. Barlow for the Union Army, 1834-1896. One of the "boy generals" was seriously wounded in the Battle of Antietam. James Wadsworth Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., LC-MSS-44297-33-194



Brigadier General John B. Gordon.

Gordon promised to take the message to her. He found Mrs. Barlow with the Union army and delivered the message under flag of truce.

Convinced that Barlow was dead, Gordon thought no more of the incident. After all, thousands died at Gettysburg. What he didn't know was that the minie ball did NOT kill Barlow. He survived!

Next summer, Francis Barlow saw a newspaper article that said General J.B. Gordon of North Carolina had died. Barlow thought that this was the same general who had helped him at Gettysburg. What he didn't know was that J.B. Gordon was his friend's relative – not the man who helped him. For fifteen years, each general thought the other was dead.

John B. Gordon went on to become a United States Senator. One day, U.S. Representative Clarkson Potter, of New York, invited Gordon to dinner with someone named Francis Barlow. This

Barlow had been a General in the Union Army. [Potter didn't know anything about what happened at Gettysburg, and Gordon thought this was a different General Barlow. And, Francis Barlow thought there must be another General Gordon (*Civil War Chronicle*, 321-322).]

Suddenly, the two men found themselves seated across from each other at dinner. Gordon said *General, are you related to the Barlow who was killed at Gettysburg?* Barlow answered *Why, I am the man, sir. Are you related to Gordon who killed me?* Gordon replied *I am the man, sir* (*Civil War Chronicle*, 321-322). Both men were stunned! They went on to be good friends until Barlow died in 1896.

### ✓ SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

What are the chances of something like this happening? What makes this story one-of-a-kind?

Why would Gordon, who had led the attack on Barlow, stop to speak to him, make him comfortable, and deliver a message to his wife, and conduct her safely to Barlow's side?