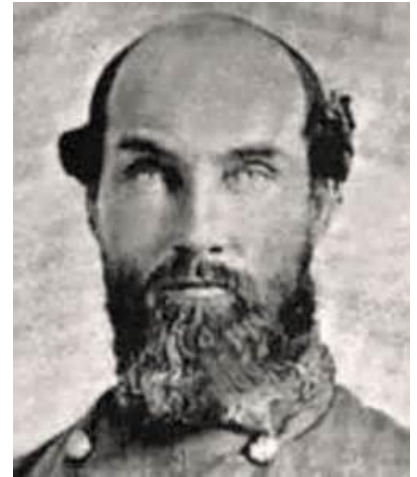


## Murder Among the Staff Officers

I am not sure just how many times during the War Between the States that a Colonel murdered a Major General, but the chances are real good that this was a once in a war occurrence. And if not, I am willing to wager that it was the only time the killer got away scot free. Just in case I lose that wager, I will double down and say it was the only time a colonel killed a major general, got away with it and then became a noted Texas Ranger.

George Wyeth Baylor was born in Fort Gibson, Cherokee Nation, on August 2, 1832. Two years later his father, John Walker Baylor, died, and he went to live with his brother John Robert Baylor (photo at right) in Weatherford, TX. John was an ardent Comanche hater and organized a vigilante force of about one thousand men to fight the Comanche. On June 5, 1860, George was riding with John and three other members of the vigilantes when they ran down a small party of Indian raiders in the battle of Paint Creek. To avenge the murder and scalping of a young white boy, they killed and scalped nine of the Indians.



George Baylor is reputed to have raised the first Confederate flag in Austin. He was commissioned a first lieutenant in Company H of the Second Cavalry, John Robert Baylor's Arizona Brigade, and served as regimental adjutant before resigning to become senior *aide-de-camp* to Gen. Albert Sydney Johnston in August or September 1861. After General Johnston was killed in the Battle of Shiloh on April 6, 1862, George Baylor (photo at left) returned to Texas and was elected lieutenant colonel and commander of the Second Battalion of Henry H Shibley's army. His new battalion merged with the Second Cavalry regiment of the Arizona Brigade, Baylor was elected its colonel. He also commanded a regiment of cavalry during the Red River Campaign of 1864 and was commended for gallantry at the battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill.

On April 6, 1865, Colonel Baylor was at General John B. McGruder's headquarters in the Fannin Hotel in Houston, Texas.

John Austin Wharton was born to Sarah Ann (Groce) and William Harris Wharton on July 23, 1828, near Nashville, Tennessee. As a small child his family moved to the area of Galveston, Texas. His father was an orator and leader in the Texas Revolution. At the age of eight John was sent to his uncle, Leonard W. Groce, for schooling under a Boston instructor. From 1846 to 1850 he attended South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina), where he served as a commander in the student cadet corps. In 1848 he married Eliza Penelope Johnson, daughter of David Johnson, the governor of South Carolina.



**General John Austin Wharton**

After college, John returned to Texas and studied law with former United States Senator William Preston, Jack Harris, and Elisha Pease, future governor of Texas. After his admission to the bar, he opened his own practice and was extremely successful. He also entered into politics and in the 1860 presidential election he was an elector for John C. Breckenridge. He then represented Brazoria County at the state Secession Convention, voting for secession. Wharton was also a planter of considerable means. The 1860 tax roll for Brazoria County showed that he owned \$167,004 of taxable property, including 135 slaves.

When the War of Northern Aggression began John Wharton was elected captain of Company B, Eighth Texas Cavalry which was popularly known as Terry's Texas Rangers. He rose to command the regiment after the deaths of Col. Benjamin F. Terry and Lt. Col. Thomas S. Lubbock. He led his troops with distinction in the battle of Shiloh, but he suffered a wound. On November of 1862 he was promoted to brigadier general on the basis of the leadership he had shown in General Braxton Bragg's invasion of Kentucky. His heroic actions at the battle of Chickamauga earned him his final promotion to major general.

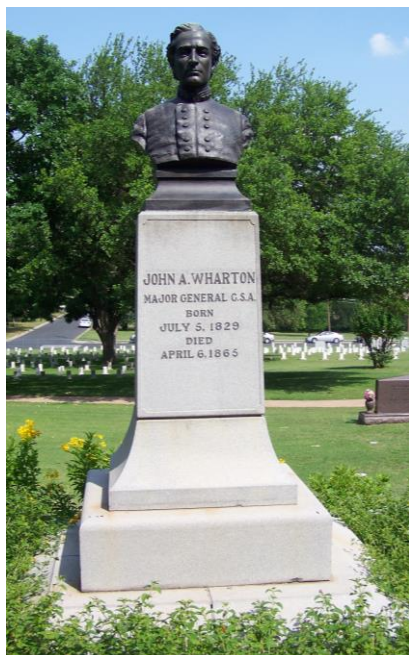
In February 1864 the general was transferred to Richard Taylor's Trans-Mississippi Department in Louisiana. Upon his arrival he was assigned to lead the cavalry and took part in the closing scenes of the Red River campaign.

On April 6, 1865, General Wharton went to meet General John B. Magruder in his Houston, Texas headquarters in the Fannin Hotel.

According to Texas historian Walter Prescott Webb in his book *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense*, Baylor quarreled with and killed fellow staff officer John Austin Wharton. Their fight was said to have been about "military matters," specifically the reorganization of the Trans-Mississippi Department of the Confederate States. Wharton reportedly slapped Baylor's face and called him a liar, whereupon Baylor drew his revolver and shot the unarmed Wharton. Baylor

later said that the incident had a been a "lifelong sorrow" to him. Even though Wharton was found to have been unarmed, Baylor was acquitted of murder charges in 1868.

Wharton was originally buried at Hempstead but was later moved to the State Cemetery in Austin, Texas.



After the war was over, Texas Ranger Lieutenant John B Tays, commander of Company C, Frontier Battalion of the Texas Rangers in El Paso, Texas, resigned. In September of 1879, Baylor was commissioned a lieutenant in the Texas Rangers and ordered to take over the command. Webb tells us that, "On August 2, 1879, Lieutenant Baylor set out from San Antonio with his wife and two young daughters for the six-hundred-mile trip to El Paso. A large wagon drawn by mules hauled a square piano, other household goods, and on the rear a family of game chickens, consisting of a rooster and four hens. A second wagon carried rations for the men and provender for the animals. Mrs. Baylor, her sister, and the two girls, aged four and fourteen, occupied a mule-drawn hack or ambulance; two men on their way to New Mexico followed in a two-wheeled cart. This party, protected by six mounted Texas Rangers, one of whom was Sergeant J. B. Gillett, spent forty-two days on the road, arriving at Ysleta in September. There they were joined by nine Rangers of Tays's Company, and there they made headquarters for a number of years."

Baylor fought the last Indian battle on Texas soil. Chief Victorio of the Apaches slipped the reservation in New Mexico in the fall of 1879 with 125 warriors and a hundred women and children. After Victorio was killed in Mexico, Lieutenant Baylor became captain Baylor.

A party of twelve warriors deserted with four women and four children, made their way through the mountains of west Texas, and began attacking small parties of Texans, including a stagecoach in Quitman Canyon, killing the driver and a gambler named Crenshaw. Baylor investigated and began to trail

the Apaches. The tracking was difficult. It was intensely cold, and the ground was so frozen that the Apaches left no track. They lost the trail. A group of Rangers led by Lieutenant Charles Nevill picked up the trail on the west side of Quitman Canyon. Baylor's group joined Nevill's group and they trailed the Apaches for five days. Early in the morning of January 29, 1881, the Rangers attacked the Apache camp. The Apache braves ran "like a herd of deer," according to Webb. The Rangers, not being able to tell men from women in the light of dawn, killed 4 warriors, two women, and two children, and wounded many more. "One Indian, whom the Rangers named Big Foot, ran four hundred yards in full view while not less than two hundred shots from Winchesters and Springfields were fired at him."

Baylor's company was so successful in capturing Indians and desperados that it practically put itself out of business and was an easy choice for disbandment when cost-cutting became a necessity on March 13, 1885.

Baylor continued an active life and was elected from El Paso to serve in the Texas State House of Representatives. He also served as clerk of the district and circuit courts for a number of years. He died on March 17, 1916 in San Antonio. He is buried in the Confederate Cemetery in San Antonio.



**Source:** Webb, Walter Prescott (2010-07-22). *The Texas Rangers* (Kindle Locations 6378-6384). University of Texas Press. Kindle Edition.  
*Handbook of Texas Online*