

Martin Van Buren Phipps, a Brixeyite

By Jackie Layne Partin

We all tend to focus on the life of the leader of the Brixeyites, Calvin S. Brixey, but his followers were just as involved in his rampages. One of those ardent followers was Martin Van Buren Phipps (1843-1899) from the Pelham Valley area. Why did Martin not hang from the same old tree alongside the malicious and feared Brixey? It is my understanding that Calvin S. Brixey was not with Martin Phipps when he and others killed Anderson S. Goodman, but they were probably following orders. Isn't that what marauders did during the Civil War—raid and plunder anything or anyone who got in their way? The Phipps and Goodman families were distant neighbors, possibly good friends, before the terrible war came along. Martin was twenty-one-years old when he helped kill the highly respected Goodman. They may have been following orders, orders that they could have refused to obey. Understandably, Martin and his co-plunderers/murderers may have been just as afraid of being annihilated by their leader as were the citizens all around the area, so they obediently followed.

Martin was born in **1843** in that portion of Coffee County which would soon become part of a new county on the horizon—Grundy County. He was the son of Moses Phipps and possibly his first wife for whom we have no name. In **1860**, he was a sixteen-year-old boy still living at home helping his father on the farm. His life and the heritage he would leave behind for his children, grandchildren, and on down the line of time was hanging in the balance. Soon, he made the choice to change from a hard working young farmer to a course of life which would eventually mold him into an infamous character, the likes of whom his neighbors and people all over Middle Tennessee dreaded and feared.

Following his older brother, Andrew J. Phipps, into war, nineteen-year-old Martin took the challenge to help save the South's way of life. On **Dec. 1, 1862** at Manchester, TN, Martin Phipps enlisted for two years of service in the war and was placed by Capt. D. H. Barnes on the muster roll of Co. G, 4th Confederate Regt., Tenn. Infantry. The **Nov. and Dec. 1862** roster shows that Martin Phipps was "left sick at Manchester" on **Dec. 7, 1862** by Capt. Barnes. So six days after he volunteered for duty, he was absent from company roll call.

Two months later on the **January and February 1863** company roster, Martin Phipps was absent. He had not yet returned from Manchester where he was supposedly recuperating from his illness. This roll listed him as a "deserter." Young Martin was close to home, so maybe he went on his merry way to see a young lady in Pelham or to visit his family. I know what homesickness feels like; it will eat a hole in the pit of one's

stomach. But we all “man up” and carry on for the good of the goals we have set for ourselves. Maybe Martin decided that the military was not meant for him.

Martin Phipps was on the muster roll of Co. G, 4th **Confederate** Regt., TN Infantry for **March** and **April of 1863**, but we read on the **remarks** line that he had deserted and returned on March 15th, but deserted again. This indicates that Martin was gone from his company from **Dec. 1, 1862** till **March 15, 1863**, and when he did return, he didn't stay long. From then on, young Martin spiraled downward into degradation. More than likely, while he was in Manchester, he had come in contact with a young Coffee County man, Calvin S. Brixey, who would have an extremely negative influence on him. Quite possibly he had already been involved in sinister behavior during his 'absentee time' from his Company.

Things happen in life. Sometimes those things adversely affect the behavior of those to whom they happen. A story handed down by the Phipps family tells that at some time during the war, Martin's parents' home was burned. Apparently, while his mother (*stepmother?*) and her sister tried to extinguish the fire with a mattress, both of them lost their lives. If we had a date on this terrible incident, we might be able to ascertain the arsonist/s. The fire might have been in retaliation for behavior exhibited by Martin and his co-horts, or it may have been a plundering by the Confederates in response to Martin's choice to join the U. S. Army. We are fooling ourselves if we do not accept that factions of both armies had their share of soldiers perpetrating indecent, demeaning, and painful acts on civilians in their paths.

Pvt. Martin Van Buren Phipps had made his move from the **Confederate** Army to the **Union** Army. On **July 31, 1863**, at Pelham, TN, **C. Brixey** recruited Martin to serve in the 1st Independent Co. D of TN, Volunteer Cavalry. As Martin's guardian at the time, John B. Layne signed a “Consent in Case of a Minor” form in Tracy City stating that Martin was eighteen. Why did young Martin need a guardian if his parents were still alive? Makes one wonder, doesn't it? On the paper work, the term of a three year sign up was marked through and a one year was implemented.

On **Aug. 31, 1863** Pvt. Phipps presented himself at company roll call. Between **Dec. 9** and **Dec. 31, 1863**, Martin continued to line up with the U. S. Army and his Company. In **January and February 1864**, Martin stayed put with Co. D and his leader, Brixey. Martin Phipps married Caladonia “Dona” E. Tucker, daughter of Samuel and Jane (Meeks) Tucker, on **Jan. 7, 1864**, in Coffee Co., leading one to believe that his company was possibly stationery at the time. However, Martin may have been occupied during this time making raids under the guise of a U. S. soldier. Shy by two weeks of his one year volunteer service, on **June 16, 1864**, he mustered out of Co. D at Stevenson, AL.

According to the information on the form, Martin, up to this time, had *never* been paid; his clothing account had *never* been settled. On the line titled "Am't for cloth'g in kind or money adv'd," \$38 is stated. "Due U. S. for arms, equipment, & c. - \$18." "Remarks: Charged one Stan. Pistol" Signed J. J. Carpenter, Copyist.

On Sept. 3, 1864, Martin left the side of his leader, Capt. Brixey—he left in a really big hurry. Being captured and hanged was not for him. Surprisingly, after the end of the war, he stayed somewhere in Tennessee with his wife and children. However, between **1868** and **1870** according to the 1870 Census record of the ages of his children and their birthplaces, Martin moved his family west. What did he do during the four or five years between the hanging of his Captain and his decision to get away from Grundy County? One would think that he went into hiding.

In the **1870** Census he and his family were living in Jacksboro, Jack County, TX. He and Dona became the parents of nine children: Thomas Van Buren, **Calvin S.**, Mollie, Robert Dock, James, Elizabeth, Minnie Ola, John A., and Fletcher Carnes. And by all accounts, following the children on Census records, they seemed to have done well. Hopefully, Martin and Dona's decision to go west was the best thing they ever did.



Mollie (Phipps) and John Marion Tinkle; Mollie is a daughter of Martin and Dona Phipps



Martin V. B. Phipps' grandsons, children of the Tinkles

It is not my purpose to write about the atrocities committed by the Brixeyites. That has and will be done over and over, and rightfully so. My purpose is to shift some of the blame onto all Brixeyites, and Martin was one of the gang. On **Dec. 6, 1899**, Martin V. B. Phipps died in Jacksboro, Jack County, Texas. He was fifty-six years of age. His family buried him at the Oakwood Cemetery in Jacksboro. A military stone was ordered and provided for him; it accounted for his service in the *1st Ala. and Tenn. Vid. Cav. Co. D.* He died a veteran of the United States Army.



M. V. Phipps

CO. D.

1st ALA & TENN VID CAV

BORN

MAR. 24, 1843

DIED

DEC. 6, 1899