by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

Thanks to the diligent efforts of Asa W. Phelps, the Silver City Home Guards was organized on October 4, 1862 as a unit in the Nevada Territorial Militia. Records of the Adjutant General housed in the State Archives in Carson City document the efforts of Phelps and his Silver City cohorts on the Comstock to form a volunteer, military unit. Tragedy struck less than two weeks later when Phelps, a twenty-eight-year-old native of West Andover, Massachusetts, and 2nd Lt. in the Silver City Guards, suddenly died on October 15. Buried in the Silver City Cemetery, his gravestone has survived the ravages of time and vandalism.

So why did Silver City residents, military buffs, and their organizations beginning in 1973 honor Asa W. Phelps on Veteran's Day as a hero of the Pyramid Lake War in 1860 ("Silver City Guard," by Bill Germino, *Nevada Official Bicentennial Book, 1976*)? The answer is quite simple. Asa W. Phelps, a miner with a claim in Gold Canyon and carpenter who purchased a lot in Silver City on May 9, 1861, has been confused with A. H. Phelps, a casualty of the second battle of the Pyramid Lake War on June 2, 1860.

A private under the command of Captain Edward F. Storey (the namesake for Storey County), A. H. Phelps and fellow private James Cameron were shot in the head, according to Myron Angel's *History of Nevada* (1881). Captain Storey took a shot through his lungs during the battle with the Pyramid Lake Paiutes and their tribal allies. All three men died later that evening.

Phelps and Cameron were buried on June 3 near Camp Storey on the lower Truckee River. Their fallen comrade Captain Storey was buried in the Virginia City Cemetery. The Masons erected a monument in 1930 in tribute to Storey's military service and his membership in the secret order.

Dennis Myers, a reporter for Reno's KTVN Channel 2 TV, covered the Silver City Veteran's Day event in 1985-the community called it Armistice Day-honoring Asa W. Phelps. When it came to Myers' attention after the broadcast that Asa W. Phelps was not a war-hero, he invited Phil Earl, Curator at the Nevada Historical Society, and myself as State Archivist to explain the truth in this and other stories associated with Nevada's colorful past on his "Face the State" program.

Despite our efforts to clear up the confusion surrounding Asa W. Phelps, he is still considered a war-hero by some. Sadly, we do not know how Asa Phelps died because there are no extant newspapers containing his obituary.

The Silver City Home Guards was disbanded in November 1865 after interest waned following the end of the Civil War. The young pioneer surely deserves the honors accorded him for being the principal founder of the Silver City militia unit. However, whether intentional or inadvertent, it is a unfortunate case of playing tricks on the living and the dead to honor Asa W. Phelps for the supreme sacrifice of A. H. Phelps in the Pyramid Lake War.

Photo: Buried in the Silver City Cemetery, Asa Phelps, gravestone has survived the ravages of time and vandalism. Courtesy *Sierra Sage*

(Original version in *Sierra Sage*, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, November 2001)