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Preface

This brief history of Japan's first modern army covers events from the 1850s through 1945. It is an introductory synthesis told mainly from secondary sources, most in the Japanese language. I made use of the many excellent English-language monographs on Japan's army but relied more heavily on Japanese-language materials because military history scholarship in Japan has become impressively sophisticated and diverse over the past twenty years. No longer do Japanese historians dismiss the old imperial army with sweeping generalizations. Instead, extensive research in primary documents, the appearance of new evidence, and fresh interpretations of the army's larger role in the context of Japanese society have revised the standard narrative of an army inherently bent on aggression. One goal, then, is to introduce the English-language readers to this new Japanese military history.

I describe major military campaigns briefly and focus on institutional issues arising from those conflicts that shaped the army's strategy, doctrine, and values. These subjects are well known to specialists of modern Japanese history, but a chronologically arranged, balanced English-language account of the army has not previously been available. Overviews of the army tend to be weighted to its twentieth-century performance, especially during World War II, creating a lopsided impression of an army with unique qualities. This narrative, generally divided by decades, gives roughly equal attention to army affairs during the 1880s and World War II. Such an approach offers a balanced perspective on the army's evolution and helps to explain the action and conduct of an institution whose major legacy is suicidal disgrace.

From an ad hoc confederation, the army became the single most powerful institution in the nation. Its leaders wrestled with describing the army's role in the newly unified nation, defining its mission, and designing its values. The intellectual foundations of the institution shifted as the army constantly reinvented itself to fulfill the changing military and cultural imperatives of a transformed Japanese society. In other words, though the outward appearances

of the army of 1895 and that of 1925 were similar, the institution was substantially different.

It was not just a matter of adapting western technology or mimicking the West's pattern of modernization. Japan developed a first-class army with an efficient military schooling system, a well-organized active duty and reserve force, a professional officer corps that thought in terms of the regional threat, and tough, well-trained soldiers armed with appropriate weapons. Changing social and political ideas, personal rivalries, new concepts of warfare, evolving military doctrine, regional geography, and potential enemies and allies shaped the army's place in society. Throughout its existence the army sought its core values in real or imagined precedents and relied increasingly on an emperor-centered ideology to validate it as a special institution in the Japanese polity.

The Japanese soldier's propensity for self-immolation, the military's emphasis on intangible or spiritual factors in battle, and a fanatical determination to fight to the death became the army's hallmarks. Overemphasis of these characteristics skewed an understanding of strategy, high-level policy, and the army's evolution, especially for the period before 1941. I suggest that historical circumstances shaped Japan's first modern army and that international pressures determined the army's options, if not its fate. To deal with common danger, the army idealized traditional values, many of them imaginary but nonetheless offering a vision that a wider Japanese audience understood and shared. The formative days of the army occasionally resembled a B-grade samurai movie replete with wild sword fights in back alleys, assassinations, and murderous blood feuds over the institution's future. These sensational and sanguinary events, much like the later military coup d'états, atrocities, and suicidal banzai charges, inform our perspective of an army run amok, led by fanatics whose blind devotion to the emperor encouraged barbaric behavior. The administrative and operational expansion and development of the army, including its strategy and doctrine, did not make headlines, but this institutional process was decisive in forming the contours of the mid-1930s army, the force that fought in Asia and the Pacific.

The Japanese way of war or style of warfare evolved over seventy years. Subsequent interpretations of the immediate past layered with hoary samurai myths burnished the army's self-image. Layer upon layer of precedent and tradition formed the bedrock of the edifice by 1941. There were, of course, dramatic events that affected the army's course, but it was the accumulated past that shaped the army, narrowed its options, influenced its decisions, and made it the institution that conquered most of Asia.

I am grateful to many people in Japan and the United States for their generous assistance. Professor Akagi Kanji of Keiō University responded to my questions with celerity and accuracy. Professor Tobe Ryōichi, National Defense Academy, led me through recent Japanese military historiography; and

Professor Hata Ikuhiko, the doyen of Japanese military historians, was always helpful in explaining the fine points of Japan's prewar army. I am also indebted to the faculty and staff of the National Institute for Defense Studies, Military History Department for their sustained assistance over the years.

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Japan's Imperial Army



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1

Prelude to Imperial Restoration

The arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry's black ships in 1853 shattered Japan's self-imposed isolation. The *bakufu* (shogunate)—the military government under the Tokugawa shogun or generalissimo that ruled Japan—was unable to deal effectively with the foreign intrusion, and despite violent internal opposition, within five years it concluded a commercial treaty that opened eight ports to trade, unilaterally set tariffs, and established extraterritoriality. By exposing its weakness, the *bakufu* emboldened its enemies. In an effort to rally support, the shogun's chief councilor broke tradition and sought approval for the treaty from Emperor Kōmei in Kyoto.¹ Kōmei's refusal to sanction the treaty split the *bakufu* and the court and began ten years of intrigue, violence, terror, and negotiation that culminated in the shogunate's collapse. During that tumultuous decade, radical loyalist warriors, usually of the middle- or lower-ranking samurai class, were in the forefront of efforts to overthrow the Tokugawa regime. Many were xenophobic, but the military might of the Europeans and Americans sobered upstart samurai and shogunate authorities alike.

Aware of the devastation wreaked by the Anglo-French attack on Peking in 1860 and concerned about Russian probes toward Tsushima Island, the *bakufu* established arsenals to manufacture bronze cannon, ordered a steam-driven warship from Holland, imported tens of thousands of small arms, and sought western, mainly French, military and technical experts to organize its forces into a modern army and navy.² By 1862 it had revitalized its military forces and assigned priority to a navy in order to control the ports and coast, the locations most imperiled by the foreign military threat. A handful of small frigates and corvettes allowed the *bakufu* to control the inland coastal shipping lanes and move troops quickly by sea to potential trouble spots. The shogun's reorganized army fared less well because it had to depend on samurai selected by local *han* (domain) authorities or resort to unpopular mandatory quotas to fill its ranks. In either case, a *han* would not necessarily send its best men to the shogun's army, and the shogun lacked the power to arbitrarily carry through military

reforms. Furthermore, many warriors scorned the new lock-step western-style drill and disdained firearms and bayonets in favor of their traditional swords and spears. Their resistance to change was the first indication that the warrior class was abandoning its monopoly on military power.³

Kyoto emerged as the center of national politics, where loyalists from southwestern Japan's Chōshū domain and court aristocrats who wanted to restore the emperor and expel the barbarians maneuvered against moderate *bakufu* officials, samurai from Satsuma *han* in southern Kyūshū, and some aristocrats who favored a union of court and shogunate. Pressured by radical reformers, in January 1863 Kōmei set June as the deadline for the *bakufu* to expel the western barbarians from Japan. This was easier decreed than done, particularly since the foreigners punished the offending domain, not the shogun.

Moderates among the shogunate's leaders understood that they were no match for western military technology and armaments and preferred a more passive resistance. At the southern tip of Honshū, however, in late June Chōshū extremists enforced the imperial command and attacked foreign commercial ships passing through the narrow Strait of Shimonoseki, cannonading a French warship and later damaging a Dutch merchantman. Retribution followed on July 26 when the gunboat USS *Wyoming* sank one Chōshū vessel, mauled a second, and knocked out several guns, all the while lying outside the range of the domain's ancient cannon.⁴ A few days later, French warships bombarded the Chōshū forts and then sent a landing party ashore that spiked the guns, seized rifles and swords, and burned scores of nearby houses. This typical mid-nineteenth century punitive expedition foretold what was in store for those who resisted the power of the West.

About a month later, in mid-August, British warships appeared in southern Kyūshū's Kagoshima Bay to enforce demands that Satsuma pay an indemnity that the *bakufu* had agreed to and surrender one of its samurai who had murdered a British subject the previous year. The fleet's arrival coincided with a typhoon, but the flagship commander ignored the high winds and heavy rainsqualls to give battle. He unintentionally steered his ships into the Satsuma gunnery range, making them easy targets for the well-trained Japanese gunners. Ten coastal batteries (eighty-three cannon total) raked the British vessels as they maneuvered in the howling winds between the towering backdrop of Mt. Sakurajima and the castle town of Kagoshima, inflicting sixty-six casualties. Kagoshima, however, suffered the greater damage. The heavier British guns outranged the coastal batteries and demolished them. Strong winds compounded the effects of British incendiary rockets falling into the town and burned through large swaths of wooden neighborhoods.⁵ The fighting ended in a draw, the British sailing away and the samurai dousing the flames.

Despite their antiforeign outbursts, individual domains like Chōshū and

Satsuma had experimented since the 1840s with western-style artillery to strengthen their military power vis-à-vis the *bakufu* and keep the West at arm's length.⁶ It was not unusual then for Satsuma to react to its setback by arranging through British diplomats in Japan to hire English military advisers to reorganize and reequip its military forces. Satsuma samurai quickly adopted the new, dispersed infantry tactics taught by their foreign advisers and dropped the traditional massed assault formations. Satsuma's leaders also modified their political policies. In September 1863 they allied themselves with warriors from northeast Japan's Aizu domain and restored more moderate nobles in Kyoto to control the imperial court.

Chōshū responded to its defeat by organizing mixed warrior-commoner rifle units commanded by 24-year-old Takasugi Shinsaku, an antiforeign extremist recalled from internal exile (for setting fire to the British consulate) to fix the domain's army. In the late 1850s Takasugi had been a follower of loyalist leader and ideologue Yoshida Shōin and through him had connections with other young radical samurai like Maebara Issei (age 25), Itō Hirobumi (18), and Yamagata Aritomo (21). Takasugi's slight frame and reputation as a womanizer and heavy drinker belied a young man of unparalleled bravery with a passionate devotion to radical reform.

Takasugi was far more than a hired sword. He was intelligent, well versed in western military science, and on record that hereditary warriors were too cowardly to fight for an imperial restoration. He dramatized his contempt for his class by cutting off his top-knot, a samurai status symbol. To replace the reluctant samurai, by mid-1863 Takasugi had organized samurai, peasants, merchants—indeed, anyone willing to join him—into the *kiheitai* (extraordinary units), a name derived from Sun Tzu's injunction that the standing army fixes and distracts the enemy; the extraordinary (*ki*) forces strike when and where they are not expected.⁷ *Kiheitai* militia units initially were supposed to back up Chōshū's standing samurai army. They were poorly equipped with various obsolete muskets and matchlocks and usually consigned to patrolling the domain's coastlines.

After the Satsuma-Aizu coup, Chōshū extremists, whose radicalism now alarmed the court, fled from the imperial city. But without an effective strategy to deal with the foreigners, the shogunate continued its conciliatory policy. Encouraged by the shogunate's weakness in dealing with the Westerners, in mid-August 1864 Chōshū radicals marched on Kyoto to restore the emperor. A combined Satsuma-Aizu force blocked their approach and fighting erupted at the Forbidden Gate, one of several entrances to the imperial palace grounds.

In the day-long battle, Aizu samurai's skill in traditional hand-to-hand combat and Satsuma's modern artillery soundly defeated the Chōshū insurgents, including the attached *kiheitai* units. Gunfire, explosions, and arson destroyed

thousands of Kyoto dwellings as fires raged for three days. Thousands of refugees from the blackened neighborhoods huddled along the riverbanks, carrying whatever possessions they had on their backs. Sixteen Chōshū ringleaders and their lieutenants committed suicide just outside the capital. Radical court nobles fled the capital, and the court demanded that the shogun punish Chōshū.

Chōshū suffered another setback on September 4 when an allied fleet of eighteen warships carrying more than 5,000 troops and almost 300 cannon moved into the Shimonoseki Strait. In dense fog the next morning the ships unwittingly sailed within range of a *kiheitai* battery, where a young samurai named Yamagata Aritomo opened fire, damaging the flagship. Retaliation came swiftly. Around noon, about 2,000 western troops landed and scattered the Chōshū defenders. During the next two days the foreigners seized all the coastal defenses, spiked cannons, and tossed any remaining ammunition into the sea. After posing for a commemorative photograph atop an occupied coastal battery, the landing force carried off swords, armor, and samurai helmets as trophies.⁸

Meanwhile the shogun obtained an imperial command to punish the rebellious domain and in late 1864 launched the first Chōshū expedition. Rather than extensive fighting, the overpowering show of force by the 150,000-man coalition sufficed to oust Chōshū's discredited and isolated radical loyalists. The shogun replaced them with conservative bureaucrats and, after punishing senior Chōshū officials for encouraging the loyalists and enforcing other punitive measures, disbanded the military coalition in mid-January 1865.

After being driven from the capital, Chōshū's younger reformers concluded that inferior weaponry, not the *kiheitai* concept, was to blame for Chōshū's setback at Kyoto's Forbidden Gate. They resisted the newly installed Chōshū authorities' attempts to disband the *kiheitai* and denounced the domain's moderate leaders for suppressing the radical cause and submitting to the *bakufu*'s humiliating demands. They also scorned warriors who insisted on fighting in traditional fashion and encouraged more mixed commoner-warrior volunteer units using modern western tactics and weaponry.

Loyalists marked time while Takasugi expanded the *kiheitai* peasant militias and rifle units and armed them with modern weapons purchased from British arms dealers in Shanghai by Satsuma agents and covertly delivered to Chōshū. Takasugi enforced draconian discipline, purging *kiheitai* ranks by executing dissidents and deserters. Ōmura Masujirō, another of Chōshū's young, dynamic military reformers, trained *kiheitai* rifle units in modern western skirmisher tactics. A self-taught tactician, Ōmura used translations of Dutch military manuals to develop a tactical doctrine for the *kiheitai* to fight as guerrillas or *franciers* in support of regular forces.⁹ In early 1865 Takasugi's *kiheitai* units raided the domain capital at Shimonoseki, throwing Chōshū into civil war.

The mixed warrior-and-commoner *kiheitai* units displayed great tactical skill in employing their new weaponry and soon became the armed vanguard of reform. By March 1865 Takasugi controlled Shimonoseki and had routed government troops sent to oust him. He then ousted Chōshū's pro-shogunate conservatives, but by that time Takasugi was mortally ill with the consumption that eventually killed him in 1867. Because of his deteriorating physical condition, domain authorities appointed Ōmura to reorganize the army. Besides his military expertise, Ōmura was more pro-emperor than antiforeigner, which made him attractive to Chōshū's new leaders, who were trying to present a more moderate face to court and *bakufu*.

Ōmura guided army reform, sold samurai armor and helmets to raise money to buy modern small arms, and trained *kiheitai* rifle units. Recruits were armed with new Minié rifles, and close-order bayonet drills replaced traditional swordsmanship. By mid-1865 Ōmura had assembled a 4,000-man infantry force, divided equally between warriors and commoners. Word of these military initiatives alarmed the *bakufu* enough that it ordered another military expedition against Chōshū. This time, however, domains were divided over the value of such a campaign and wary of the resurgent *bakufu*. Satsuma leaders, covertly assisting Chōshū's rearmament, later concluded a secret military alliance with Chōshū. Satsuma also used its considerable influence to dilute support for another Chōshū expedition.¹⁰

Nevertheless, in June 1866 the *bakufu*'s weakened expeditionary army marched on Chōshū, intending to surround the domain and attack it along exterior lines. Unable to forge a strong military alliance because Satsuma refused to join the coalition, the expedition's dilatory advance gave Ōmura time to prepare his defenses. Commanding units along Chōshū's northern border, Ōmura employed flanking attacks or struck enemy forces from the rear—tactics he termed “rabbit hunting,” designed to drive defenders from their warrens. Relying on such highly mobile infantry tactics, *kiheitai* units offset their inferior numbers and lack of artillery.

A *bakufu* war diary described the encounter of a government column with two ranks of *kiheitai* riflemen who fired at them from across a stream at ranges of 400 and 500 yards. The galling fire forced the densely packed *bakufu* formation to disperse and sacrifice tactical control or suffer heavy losses, either way losing operational integrity. Later that day concealed skirmishers sniped at the column from village rooftops, tree lines, or undergrowth, rarely firing more than a single round before fleeing, but still disrupting an entire column's march.¹¹ A combination of modern small arms and guerrilla tactics checked the *bakufu*'s advance as the *kiheitai* ambushed, outflanked, and encircled the shogun's half-hearted allies, who fought in the traditional massed formations and relied

on muskets, spears, and swords. By October Ōmura had gone over to the offensive and scattered the shogun's demoralized forces.

Meanwhile, on the southern front Takasugi and his chief lieutenant, Yamagata Aritomo, led *kiheitai* units across the Shimonoseki Strait. *Kiheitai* raiding parties launched amphibious attacks against *bakufu*-held ports, burning docks and supplies. Small, nimble gunboats and launches harassed the shogunate's larger warships, which had difficulty maneuvering in the restricted waters and soon were forced to abandon the strait. Without Satsuma's military support, the *bakufu* had to throw badly armed and poorly motivated warriors from several minor fiefs into the fighting but refused to reinforce or resupply them. Troop morale cracked, and the dispirited shogunate army fled to Nagasaki.¹² Takasugi's innovative guerrilla-style ground and naval tactics had eliminated the threat on Chōshū's southern flank and given the radicals control of the Shimonoseki Strait.

The heaviest fighting against the main shogun armies raged back and forth along Chōshū's northern border, where *kiheitai* units held the mountainous high ground and ambushed the *bakufu* armies marching through passes or heavily forested areas. Peasants armed with bamboo spears or long-bladed hoes harried the shogun's troops. One *bakufu* commander was astonished at the sight of local women and children armed with bamboo spears harassing his withdrawing units. By September the *bakufu* deputy commander concluded that the inability to feed or pay his troops, coupled with their obsolete weaponry and the determination of the commoner and peasant units, made success impossible.¹³ The shogun's death later that month provided the face-saving justification to end the foundering expedition.

Ōmura's *kiheitai* performance confirmed for up-and-coming Chōshū captains like Kido Kōin and Yamagata Aritomo that commoners could indeed make good soldiers. The *kiheitai* units were less effective, however, against domains like Aizu that were trained in western tactics and used artillery.¹⁴ That experience convinced Ōmura that rifles and bayonets could not overcome well-defended breastworks; he immersed himself in studying the latest artillery tactics.

During the final campaign, Takasugi suffered a tubercular relapse. Although Yamagata had served as his chief lieutenant and displayed organizational talent, shortly before Takasugi's death in April 1867 he named Ōmura his successor. Ōmura was less politically minded and ideological than Yamagata, and his technical and tactical experience better qualified him to lead the new Chōshū army.¹⁵ As for the *bakufu*, it tried to rebound from defeat with foreign assistance to reorganize its army. In January 1867 French military advisers had organized two modern infantry battalions and two batteries of artillery. With the shogunate and its enemies rearming and reorganizing, a military showdown was inevitable.

The Boshin Civil War

Emperor Kōmei's death in early 1867 and succession by his 14-year-old son Mutsuhito (who would become the Meiji Emperor) provided Satsuma and Chōshū the opportunity to legitimize their rebellion against the shogunate. That November the new shogun agreed to resign, hand over administrative power to the throne, and withdraw government troops from Kyoto to Osaka. Loyalist troops, including large contingents from Chōshū and Satsuma, quickly replaced them in Kyoto. The newcomers soon staged a military review. As the new emperor, shielded behind bamboo blinds in his royal box, looked on, 170 drummers paraded through the capital's streets, leading uniformed Satsuma units that performed successive demonstrations of British-style drills and tactical maneuvers.¹⁶ The imperial presence conferred legitimacy on the new army, and the public display of pomp and military muscle was a thinly veiled warning to the *bakufu* that loyalist forces would fight.

Abetted by court radicals, leaders from Satsuma and Chōshū next obtained a rescript (memorial) from the boy emperor authorizing them to overthrow the shogun. Armed with the imperial writ, on January 3, 1868, Chōshū and Satsuma forces seized the imperial palace in Kyoto, proclaimed an imperial restoration, and ordered the shogun to surrender all his power and lands. Unwilling to accept such humiliating terms, the shogun quickly dispatched troops from Osaka to crush the rebel stronghold. Thus on the morning of January 27, about 5,000 loyalist troops, mainly from Chōshū but stiffened by Satsuma and Tosa allies, were blocking three times that many *bakufu* warriors gathered at Fushimi, a small commercial port and administrative center just south of Kyoto.¹⁷

Satsuma forces commanded by Saigō Takamori, a charismatic loyalist and a key domain leader, barricaded the two main roads leading from Fushimi to Kyoto. The advance echelon of a lengthy column of *bakufu* troops strung out along the Toba highway arrived at the roadblocks and demanded entry to Kyoto. Refused, they withdrew, but in late afternoon again demanded passage. The Satsuma clansmen answered with a volley of artillery fire, and the *bakufu* warriors, armed with spears and swords, rushed the well-defended barricades. Deadly artillery fire and infantry skirmisher tactics inflicted heavy losses on the massed attackers. Lacking centralized command and control, the shogun's forces fought individual skirmishes, not a coordinated battle, and eventually retreated.¹⁸

The cacophony of musket and cannon carried eastward to nearby Fushimi where warriors from Chōshū, Satsuma, and Tosa were blocking the shogun's columns. When pro-Tokugawa supporters from Aizu tried to force their way along the Fushimi highway, loyalist artillery and rifle fire halted the Aizu spearmen's attack and drove them back to Fushimi. Reinforced by *bakufu* supporters,

the Aizu warriors fought pitched battles with loyalists in Fushimi's broad streets and narrow alleyways. Both sides torched homes and buildings to drive enemies into the streets. Cannon fire and explosions also destroyed homes and warehouses and set the large shogunate administrative complex ablaze. The fighting subsided as the Tokugawa forces withdrew after midnight under a sky reddened by flames.¹⁹

Meanwhile along the Toba highway, the retreating *bakufu* forces improvised a hasty defense. Fighting from behind barricades made from sake barrels, straw tatami mats, and wooden doors, they fought the pursuing Satsuma troops to a standstill, inflicting heavy casualties of the attackers. The turnabout elevated *bakufu* morale, and commanders expected to rout the Satsuma army the next morning. Saigō and other key officers realized that their cause hung in the balance and prepared to spirit the young emperor to the safety of a mountain redoubt in case the loyalists were defeated. As long as the young ruler remained in their hands they could legitimately conduct a war against the government forces. Possession of the emperor, real or symbolic, was essential for the new army, which was determined to avoid the impression that the fighting was merely a personal quarrel pitting Satsuma and Chōshū against the *bakufu*.²⁰

At dawn on January 28, loyalists ambushed a Tokugawa column trying to force its way up the Toba road. Formations of *bakufu* spearmen collided with one another while attempting to maneuver from march to tactical formations along the narrow dirt track, horses bolted at the sounds of cannon and gunfire, and a steady fusillade from skirmishers hidden in the undergrowth made the loyalists seem to be everywhere. Several *bakufu* commanders fell to well-aimed Minié balls, and the disorganized column fell back. They quickly regrouped, however, and charged the heavily outnumbered Satsuma defenders.

At that critical point, 21-year-old Prince Ninnaji (Yoshiaki) appeared at the head of a column of reinforcements sent from an imperial general headquarters located on Kyoto's southern fringes. Unfurling the imperial brocade banner and carrying a sword that the emperor had presented to him as commander in chief, Ninnaji personified the unity of the court and the new army. Loyalist morale soared at the sight of the imperial banner that signified their cause transcended domain interests and enjoyed the emperor's support.²¹ They repulsed the assault and then pursued the retreating *bakufu* forces, harassing their flanks with artillery and rifle fire.

Little fighting had occurred near Fushimi because the greatly outnumbered Satsuma forces were reluctant to provoke a major battle and contented themselves by burning part of the town, leaving a holding force to pin down the pro-shogun units, and maneuvering to reinforce Toba. The shogunate had expected to outflank the loyalists near Fushimi and attack them from the rear. But the shogunate commander had fled two days before, and without overall

leadership, piecemeal attacks soon collapsed and the dispirited government troops withdrew.

Throughout the fighting the separated *bakufu* columns had no single commander. Troops along the Toba highway fought one battle while those along a nearby parallel road fought a separate one. Each domain fought according to its idiosyncratic tactics without coordination between the two forces or with the rear guard. The shogun's army squandered its numerical superiority, left troops massed along narrow highways instead of sending them to outflank the smaller loyalist units, and frittered away warriors in a series of uncoordinated attacks that left them increasingly isolated and susceptible to ambushes. Thoroughly defeated, the *bakufu* leaders agreed to surrender Osaka castle, but during the transfer of control a fire of mysterious origin exploded the ammunition magazine and destroyed the castle.

The four days of fighting claimed about 300 Satsuma or Chōshū warriors and more than double that number of *bakufu* troops. A Satsuma shock troop unit led by Kirino Toshiaki habitually spearheaded loyalist assaults and lost twenty-eight of its forty men. During the course of the war, Satsuma and Chōshū would suffer just over 25 percent of all government army casualties.²²

The relatively few casualties obscured the disproportionate importance of the clashes. A loyalist defeat in the opening battle would have discredited the imperial cause and diminished the emperor's role in modern Japan's history. A military stalemate with a reinvigorated *bakufu* would have delayed Japan's political unification, leaving the country more vulnerable to foreign intervention. Instead the loyalist army had defeated the shogun's forces and done so in the name of the emperor, forging an enduring bond between throne and Japan's first modern army.

