

The Roshigumi and Shinsengumi

In 1863, a ronin from Dewa province named Hachiro KIYOKAWA formed a group of 234 soldiers called the Roshigumi (or "Kyoto Defenders") to be protectors of the Tokugawa Shogun in Kyoto. On April 10th, while in Kyoto, Kiyokawa revealed that the true intentions of the Roshigumi was to be the protector of the Emperor and commanded the soldiers to return to Edo. This act resulted in the group breaking up, and of the original 234 ronin (unemployed samurai) that made up the Roshigumi, 13 members left to become the founding members of the Mibu Roshigumi (aka "Miburo" or "Ronin of Mibu"). The Aizu clan soon granted them permission to officially police Kyoto, battling revolutionaries who advocated direct Imperial rule. It was during this time that they were given the title Shinsengumi (or "newly chosen group"). This special police force consisting of ronin, farmers and peasants trained in the Mibu district of Kyoto and became the first samurai group of the Tokugawa Era to allow non-samurai classes to join. In 1864, led by Isami KONDO, the Shinsengumi attacked and defeated the anti-shogunate forces known as the Ishin Shishi, effectively preventing the burning of Kyoto and the capture of the Daimyo of the Aizu clan. After this stunning victory, known as the Ikedaya Affair (which is closely depicted in this film), the Shinsengumi became instantly recognized as a force to be reckoned with, and their immediate fame brought new recruits by the dozens. At its peak, the Shinsengumi numbered around 300 people, most of whom were samurai. They remained a strong force for several years, until the collapse of the Tokugawa Bakafu (the "Shogunate") in 1868, when they were driven from Kyoto and most of their members, including Isami KONDO and Toshizo HIJIKATA, were killed, effectively putting an end to the Shinsengumi's reign of terror (or protection, depending on what side you were on).

The Shinsengumi followed a strict set of regulations:

1. All members must follow the code of Bushido
2. No member can leave the Shinsengumi
3. No member can raise money privately
4. No member can take part in another's litigation
5. No member can engage in private fights

Punishment for deviating from any of the rules was seppuku.

The Renaissance Brigade

During the mid 1800's, Isami KONDO, a Shogunate loyalist and an owner of a small, little-known dojo in Tama, Musashi (now a part of Tokyo), gathered together peasants who showed strong interest in the sword. Under the leadership of Toshizo HIJIKATA, Soji OKITA (sometimes called Soushi OKITA) and Isami, the men practiced their own 'ryu' (a style, in this case, sword style) called "Tennenrishin-ryu" (literally Nature, Logic and Heart).

During the 1860's, Anti-Shogunate activists, many of whom were ronin from major Daimyo provinces such as Satsuma, and Imperialists challenged the Tokugawa's authority more frequently than ever before. In 1863, the Shogunate sponsored Kondo's brigade of ronin, now christened "Shinsen-gumi" (which is roughly translated to "Renaissance Brigade") by authorizing it to investigate a series of crimes in the Kyoto area committed by ronin formerly resident in Daimyo provinces. That year the group uncovered a plot in which seven rebels, who were staying at the Ikeda Inn, planned to set ablaze a village in Kyoto which would have enabled them to assassinate an Aizu Daimyo. The Shinsen-gumi then arrested the rebels and executed them immediately. The incident at the Ikeda Inn is portrayed somewhat amusingly in the film.

The group, which was eventually stationed in the Edo area, was ordered to investigate anti-Shogunate activities there and to execute criminals at will. They were praised for their heroism and patriotism, but were also known for occasional rowdy behavior. The Renaissance Brigade, and a broader look at the Shinsengumi story was more extensively portrayed in an excellent 1970 film starring Toshiro MIFUNE called Shinsengumi: Assassins of Honor, also available from AnimEigo.

Imperial Loyalists vs. Shogunate Supporters

(Note: During this time of Japanese history, the Shinsengumi was on the side of the Shogunate, which was about to fall. However, this film does not cover the fall of the Shogunate.)

As Japan in the mid 1800's witnessed the diminishment of the centralized authority of the Tokugawa

government, the powerful southwestern domains, such as Choshu and Satsuma, mainly Imperial loyalists, challenged the Shogunate for control of the nation. By late 1866, the Tokugawa forces and Choshu units were at war. The former had planned to attack Choshu by surrounding its borders. The latter, a much more agile group of warriors, had an advantage as the Tokugawa forces at the time were a carelessly led collection of vassal warriors. Even though the Shogunate had strengthened its military through extensive foreign assistance --- namely through one Leon Roches, the French minister who offered military and political reform in exchange for Japan's assistance with the silk trade --- for the past couple of years, its poor tactics had disastrous results. Meanwhile, Shogun Iemochi passed away, and Yoshinobu TOKUGAWA (or Keiki), the Shogunate's acting chief officer, declares that "the battle would have to be broken off and seized upon the Shogun's death as a face-saving reason for a cease-fire." (Jansen)

As soon as Yoshinobu became the 15th Shogun, in the final year of the Tokugawa Era, the Shogunate undertook a major reconstruction. Yoshinobu's continued interest in French military, political and social matters was certainly instrumental in implementing policies calling for regulation of foreign relations and the 'opening' of the nation. The reform efforts essentially replaced the old Shogunate system with a successful, modernized one, much of which was later adopted by the Meiji government.

The death of Emperor Komei in 1867 sparked important changes at court. (His successor, Mutsuhito, who became the Emperor Meiji, was only a boy at the time.) In Kyoto, Imperial courtiers such as Tomomi IWAKURA suggested that the imperial rule must be restored, that "the Emperor should issue orders to the Bakufu that from now on it must set aside its selfish wars, acting in accordance with the public principle... and that thereafter the Tokugawa house must work in concert with the great domains in the Emperor's service." (Jansen)

With the loyalists in Kyoto and Shogunate bureaucrats in Edo both claiming to rule the nation, Japan was clearly in need of a single central government. It also made it difficult for foreign representatives who wanted guarantees of their privileges and a clear understanding as to the channels of power: "Roches accepted the (Shogunate) as a legitimate national government and devoted his efforts to help it become a more effective one. His British counterpart Harry Parkes was not sure and suspected that Japan would not have a real government until basic changes in Edo-Kyoto relations took place." (Jansen)

In 1866 and 1867, negotiations took place between the great domains of Satsuma, Choshu and Tosa. Their agreements, all working for "the glory of the Imperial country," established a mutual defense policy, should they be attacked by Shogunate forces. The domains strove towards the goal of imperial rule and the abolishment of the Shogunate. They proposed that the Shogun be asked to step down, to again become just one of the Daimyo, "in a new conciliar structure under the aegis of the throne." (Jansen) They threatened Yoshinobu that should the settlement fail they were prepared to use force.

By November of 1867, the Satsuma-Choshu leaders were preparing themselves for war with the Shogunate. Meanwhile, representatives from Tosa met with Yoshinobu, urging him to voluntarily restore power to Emperor Meiji. Their proposal stated that: "The court would rule, but a two-house council, made up of Daimyo and court nobles, would be established; new treaties would be worked out; an Imperial army and navy would be established; 'errors of the past' in procedure and institutions would be abolished; 'wrong customs' in the court would be reformed; and once again, self-interest would be put aside." (Jansen)

Yoshinobu concluded that the restoration of power to the court was necessary to settle the crisis facing the nation. "Several loci of power had developed and he was searching for a political system that would incorporate the various factions in such a way as to allow the new government to function effectively." (Hane) Without consulting his own government, Yoshinobu accepted the proposal. However, his resignation as Shogun, which signaled the end of almost 300 years of Tokugawa rule, did not mean that he would also step down as the head of Tokugawa Clan and its domains; his clan was bound to be "a significant force in the new order as long as this situation remained unchanged." (Hane)

The anti-Tokugawa faction felt that they were still threatened by the Tokugawa, and they were prepared to destroy the clan by force. The military leaders of the Shogunate were determined to fight, and even Roches offered Yoshinobu extensive support. The ex-Shogun, however, tried to avoid conflict, and fled to Kyoto in late January 1868, only to find Satsuma and Choshu forces waiting. (Meanwhile, several imperialist groups were on their mission to spread anti-Shogunate sentiments through certain parts of Japan. "Akage" (Red Lion, also released by AnimEigo, portrays one such group and its deceived member, played by Toshiro MIFUNE. More

information about the film, as well as history behind it, can be found at our website). At the Battle of Toba-Fushimi, the bloody, four-day-long fighting was clearly won by the Imperialists. Yoshinobu's army escaped to Edo, where it was dismantled. In April, he permitted his subordinate Shogunate official Kaishu KATSU to surrender Edo to the Imperial Army. Brief conflict followed, but "without much trouble...the whole country submitted to the rule of the Emperor..." (Sansom) Japan's feudal era had finally come to an end.

The Men of the Shinsengumi

Isami KONDO (1834-1868) played by Tomisaburo WAKAYAMA, Shinsengumi Commander

Kondo Isami was the most famous of the Shinsengumi warriors who fought to preserve the Shogunate. Born into a farming family in the Musashi Province in Western Tokyo, Isami was a studious reader and trained in the Ten-nen Rishin-style swordsmanship under third generation master Shuusuke KONDO; he later became the fourth generation master himself and trained his Shinsengumi soldiers in this style of fighting.

He was captured and beheaded on May 17th. Although his actual grave site is unknown, his friend Toshizo HIJIKATA erected one in Aizu.

The characters of Isami and his Shinsengumi brigade have appeared in numerous television shows, books, anime, manga, and films, including AnimEigo's Shinsengumi: Assassins of Honor, starring Toshiro MIFUNE as Isami.

Toshizo HIJIKATA (1835-1869) played by Shigeru AMACHI

Toshizo HIJIKATA was Isami KONDO's best friend and chief advisor throughout the Shinsengumi years, and served as an executive officer of the group.

Born in the Hino district of Tokyo, Toshizo was raised by his older brother and spent his youth selling Ishida Sanyaku (his family's home remedies) and teaching himself the art of kenjutsu. He first met Kondo in 1859 when he enrolled in his Tennen Rishin-ryu's school and began to develop his own fighting style, the "Shinsengumi-Kenjutsu."

In addition to his duties as an executive officer and later Deputy-Commander, Toshizo was responsible for writing the official Shinsengumi regulations. As portrayed in the film, Toshizo forced each member of the Shinsengumi to dutifully follow the strict code of Bushido, which often included seppuku for disobedience.

After Isami's execution, Toshizo led the Shinsengumi through several more battles. On June 20th, 1869, he was killed by a bullet to the back during the Battle of Hakodate.

His statue stands at the Takahata Fudo Buddhist Temple in his hometown of Hino, Tokyo.

Soji OKITA (1844-1868)

Soji OKITA served as the senior staff officer for the Shinsengumi and was known as one of its best swordsmen. Born in an Edo mansion, Soji came from a distinguished samurai family and began training with Shuusuke KONDO's Ten-nen Rishin-style school at age nine. He was immediately recognized to be a prodigy and by age 18 he received the "Menkyo Kaiden" scroll which showed that he had attained "total transmission" of his swordsmanship. In addition, his signature technique, called the "Mumyo-ken or Sandanzuki" (or Three-piece thrust), was rumored to hit an opponent's left shoulder, neck, and right shoulder in one strike.

Soji contracted tuberculosis around the time of the Ikedaya Affair in 1864, but lived through many more battles before succumbing to the disease on July 19th, 1868. He was buried in his family temple in Edo.

Susumu YAMAZAKI (1833?-1868) Played by Raizo ICHIKAWA

Originally from Settsu (Yamashiro Province), Susumu grew up as the son of either a doctor or medical wholesaler. As he got older, he became a tall, good-looking young man and was known to have a calm, quiet personality. He learned medicine from a court physician named Ryojun MATSUMOTO (who could be a model for Shima's father in the film; however, he lived until 1907).

Around 1863, he joined the Shinsengumi and beginning in 1864, was in charge of the Observation and Information Collections troop. He was familiar with the geography of Kyoto and Osaka, as well as the situation of wealth in Osaka, and was often used as a guide to the city.

Regarding his contribution to the Ikeda-ya Affair, there are mixed records. Some point out his contribution was similar to the film, others say he was in Ikeda-ya at the time of the incident dressed as a medicine merchant, and others state that he had no real contribution because he was not listed as a member who was later rewarded for the case. However, there are many records of his successful time in the Shinsengumi, most notably involving espionage and battle situations.

To this day, his death remains a mystery. Some records indicate that he was injured in the Battle of Toba-Fushimi in 1872 and later died in the Fujisan-maru ship upon his withdrawal. However, other records indicate that he died during the battle.

Most records state that during his time with the Shinsengumi he was treated well by Isami and Toshizo. There are even some records that state he was loved by Isami (which could explain the latent homoeroticism of the film).

SERIZAWA's Faction

Kamo SERIZAWA (1826-1863)

Kamo SERIZAWA was the first commander of the Shinsengumi. He came from a family of Goshi rank samurai in Mito, which is now the capital of the Ibaraki Prefecture. Kamo was the youngest son, and began practicing swordsmanship as a young child. He grew into a bold and fearless leader known for his pro-Shogunate idealism, but he was also terribly selfish and volatile, possibly because of his heavy drinking. His full name was Serizawa Kamo Taira no Mitsumoto, and in his free time, he enjoyed drawing, long fights on the beach, and expelling foreigners from his country.

Nishiki NIIMI (1836-1863)

Nishiki NIIMI was one of the three original commanders of the Shinsengumi and a master of Shintomunen-ryu school of swordsmanship. Nishiki was an original member of Kamo's band of ronin and was forced to commit seppuku on October 19th for his reckless actions which had tarnished the reputation of the Shinsengumi.

Goro HIRAYAMA (1829-1863)

A close confidant of Kamo, Goro was assassinated on the same night.

Cast

Raizo ICHIKAWA (Susumu YAMAZAKI)

Raizo was born August 29, 1931 in Kyoto, Japan, and had a highly successful film career in mostly period dramas, however his roles as ISHIKAWA Goemon in the Shinobi no Mono film series and the nihilistic samurai NEMURI Kyoshiro in the Sleepy Eyes of Death films catapulted him to true stardom.

Appearing in over 150 films, Raizo worked with legendary directors Kenji MIZOGUCHI, Kon ICHIKAWA, Kenji MISUMI, and Teinosuke KINUGAWA, and also co-starred with Shintaro KATSU (Zatoichi) in at least a dozen features. During his 15 year career he worked exclusively for the Daiei Motion Picture Company, and, along with Shintaro, was one of the studio's top box-office draws.

His romantic presence garnered him legions of female and male fans, and earned him the nickname of the "Japanese James Dean." He died of cancer on July 17, 1969, at the young age of 37, cutting short what would have been an even more brilliant career.

Within two years of his death, Daiei, one of the five biggest studios in Japan, went bankrupt.

Many in Japan regard him as the best Japanese film star of all time. His good looks and charismatic charm made him a box office superstar, while his superb acting skills (rooted in Kabuki stage acting) gave him the ability to portray dozens of diverse roles.

Raizo's awards include the 1958 Blue Ribbon Award for Best Actor in Enjo (1958), as well as the Kinema Junpo Awards for Best Actor in Enjo (1958) and The Wife of Seishu Hanaoka (1967).

Kenzaburo JOO, aka Tomisaburo WAKAYAMA (Isami KONDO)

Born Masaru OKUMURA on September 1, 1929, Tomisaburo spent his childhood performing and touring with his father and his younger brother, Shintaro KATSU. During this time he learned how to play the shamisen and was steeped in traditional Nagauta songs.

As a teenager, Tomisaburo withdrew from performing and began studying judo where he eventually reached the rank of fourth degree black belt. However, in his early 20s he began to receive acting offers from Shin Toho studios. After some deliberation, he signed a contract with the studio and began to train for samurai roles, engaging himself in various martial arts, such as Shorinji Kenpo (as seen in Sleepy Eyes of Death), Kendo, laido, and Bo-Jitsu.

At the beginning of the 1960s, he signed with Daiei Studios and his career took off. Throughout the decade, he appeared in Daiei's top film series, including Sleepy Eyes of Death, Shinobi no Mono and opposite his brother in the Zatoichi film series. His signature role came at the beginning of the 1970s with the release of the Lone Wolf and Cub films.

His first English language film was 1979's The Bad News Bears go to Japan, where he played the head coach of Japan's best little league team. Ten years later, Hollywood came calling once again, when he made a brief appearance in Ridley Scott's Black Rain (1989). However, he will always be best-known in the west as the Ogami Itto in Shogun Assassin and the Lone Wolf and Cub films.

In 1980 he won the Best Actor Award from four separate organizations, including the Japanese Academy for his performance in Shodo satsujin: Musuko yo (My Son! My Son!)

Sadly, Tomisaburo died of a heart attack on April 2, 1992. The next year, the Japanese Academy bestowed on him a posthumous Lifetime Achievement Award.

Shiho FUJIMURA (Shima)

Born January 3, 1939, Shiho has appeared in over 60 films, beginning with 1962's Nagadosu chushingura, directed by legendary filmmaker Kunio WATANABE. Throughout the 1960s, she would continue as a contract actor for Daiei Studios, working in four Sleepy Eyes of Death films, and four more Shinobi no Mono films (she played Maki in the first two films). During this time, she acted alongside Raizo ICHIKAWA in 17 films.

In 1999, she received the prestigious Tanaka Kinuyo Award for her career achievement in film.

Crew

Seiji HOSHIKAWA (Screenplay)

Born in Tokyo on October 27, 1926, Seiji (aka Kiyoshi HOSHIKAWA) wrote the screenplay to over 80 films.

In addition to adapting/writing the bulk of the Sleepy Eyes series, Seiji wrote Zatoichi 4: The Fugitive and Zatoichi 8: Fight, Zatoichi, Fight, as well as Renzaburo SHIBATA's samurai story Ken ki.

His last screenplay was 1980's Za uman (The Woman).

Ichiro SAITO (Music)

Ichiro (1909-1979) was a prolific film composer. Over his 33-year career, he scored over 140 films, including

Ugetsu, five Sleepy Eyes of Death films, four Zatoichi films, and one Shinobi no Mono film (#7).

Ichiro won the Mainichi Film Concours Best Film Score Award for Himitsu, Saikaku Ichidai Onna, Inazuma, and Okaasan, all in 1952.

Kenji MISUMI (Director)

Born on March 2, 1921, Kenji got his start in the early 1950s, serving as an assistant director to Teinosuke KINUGASA, which included work on the Oscar-winning Gate of Hell. (The film also won the Grand Prix at Cannes.)

Beginning with his first film, Asa Taro Garasu in 1956, Kenji made almost 50 films in just under twenty years. During his tenure at Daiei in the 1960s, he was one of the studio's three biggest directors, along with Tokuzo TANAKA (Sleepy Eyes #1, #10) and Kazuo IKEHIRO (Sleepy Eyes #4, #9, #12), however, his visual style eclipsed many of his contemporaries and earned him the nickname "Little Mizoguchi." His work in the Zatoichi series, as well his 14 films with Raizo ICHIKAWA (which included three Sleepy Eyes of Death films and the Ken trilogy), established Kenji as a Master Jidaigeki (Period Samurai Films) Director in Japan.

After the collapse of Daiei, Kenji moved to television for a short period. In 1972, he returned to films and was given the task of directing the first Lone Wolf and Cub film for Shintaro KATSU's production company. That same year, he directed the first Razor film (starring and produced by Shintaro).

In 1974, he wrote and directed his last film, The Last Samurai. He then moved to television to work on the Zatoichi series.

Kenji died of liver cancer at age 54 on September 24, 1975.

Five years after his death, Shogun Assassin (a re-edit of his first two Lone Wolf and Cub films) was released in America, exposing Kenji's genius to a new generation of fans.

Selected Filmography:

Sleepy Eyes of Death 2: Sword of Adventure (1964)
Sleepy Eyes of Death 5: Sword of Fire (1965)
Sleepy Eyes of Death 8: Sword of Villainy (1966)

Zatoichi 1: The Tale of Zatoichi (1962)
Zatoichi 8: Fight Zatoichi Fight (1964)
Zatoichi 12: Zatoichi and the Chess Expert (1965)
Zatoichi 17: Zatoichi Challenged (1967)
Zatoichi 19: Samaritan Zatoichi (1968)
Zatoichi 21: The Festival of Fire (1970)

Lone Wolf and Cub 1: Sword of Vengeance (1972)
Lone Wolf and Cub 2: Baby Cart at the River Styx (1972)
Lone Wolf and Cub 3: Baby Cart to Hades (1972)
Lone Wolf and Cub 5: Baby Cart in the Land of Demons (1973)

Program Notes

“You know what the townsfolk are calling the Shinsengumi, don’t you? ‘Miburo. Miburo.’ Like they’re stray dogs bearing their fangs.”

Mibu is a neighborhood located in Kyoto, Japan. The original Shinsengumi members were known as “Miburo” or “Ronin of Mibu.” However as their reputations became tarnished they soon earned the nickname “Wolves of Mibu.”

“I am actually a farmer from Tama, in Bushu Province.”

Bushu is another name for Musashi province, which comprises the present-day Saitama, Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefectures.

“I’ll bet his sword wasn’t even real.”

A Takemitsu is a mock sword worn for show when an impoverished ronin has hawked his real sword.

“Exactly. I’m Okamoto Kyuzo, from Tosa.”

The Tosa fief was located in the present-day Kochi Prefecture.

The Tosa Domain was a feudal domain in Tosa Province of Japan (present-day Kochi Prefecture) during the Edo period. Some from the domain played important roles during the the end of the Edo period. Among them are Ryoma SAKAMOTO, Mitsue YUI, Shojiro GOTO, Taisuke ITAGAKI, Chomin NAKAE.

“Where are you from?” -- “Otsu.”

Otsu is the capital city of Shiga Prefecture, and was officially founded on October 1, 1898, and was home to the legendary haiku writer Basho MATSUO. The area was also the site of the 12th century Battle of Awazu of Genpei War, and from 667 to 672, was the site of the Imperial Palace under Emperor Tenji.

Hikohei’s journey from Otsu to Kyoto would have been roughly 15.6 km (9.7 miles).

“If you see a Choshu ronin, you must kill him. Find a reason to do it.”

Choshu was a feudal domain of Japan during the Edo period, occupying the whole of modern-day Yamaguchi Prefecture. Because of an earlier defeat at the hands of Shogunate forces, Choshu was a hotbed of anti-Tokugawa activities.

“You have stolen much money, and used it for your own pleasure. Sumi-ya in Shimahara. Yamano’o in Gion.”

Gion is a district of Kyoto, Japan, famous for its “Yasaka Shrine,” as well as for its diverse festivals and entertainment. Their geisha are known locally as “geiko,” and are highly skilled entertainers. Though the number of geiko have considerably declined in the last century, the district is still famous for its preservation of traditional forms of architecture and entertainment. The district’s largest modern attraction is the Miyako Odori, or “Cherry Blossom Dances” staged by the geiko, which run for a month during the cherry blossom season and attract visitors from around the world.

“Kondo is a skilled swordsman of the Ten’nen Rishin-ryu style.”

Ten-nen Rishin-ryu was a sword-fighting style founded in 1789 by Kondo Kuranosuke Nagahiro. The style teaches kenjutsu (the use of the katana), bojutsu (the use of the bo staff), and jujutsu. Isami KONDO was a master of Ten-nen Rishin-ryu, and he taught it to the core members of the Shinsengumi. The style is still practiced today, despite the fact that several of the techniques were lost at the beginning of the Meiji era.

“He’s just a country samurai from Kanto. Just riff-raff.”

During the Edo period, despite the fact that that Edo (Tokyo) and the Kanto region surrounding Edo was the center of politics, people from Kanto were regarded as less sophisticated compared to people from the Kansai region (Kyoto and Osaka); Kansai had remained the center of culture even after the capital moved from Kyoto to Edo in the early 17th century.

Isami KONDO and Toshizo HIJIKAWA were from the Kanto region (Tama area) and this is why they were regarded as “country bumpkins.”

“We execute our plan either just before or just after the Gion Festival.”

The Gion Festival is one of the most prominent festivals in Japan and takes place in downtown Kyoto over the

entire month of July. A form of the festival originally began in 869 as a purification ritual; in 970, it became an annual event.

During the festival, a visitor will see a lantern parade, a float parade, a shrine parade, as well as song and dance. Vendors and artisans line the streets and on one evening, a handful of private homes open their doors for the public to catch a glimpse of traditional heirlooms.

“The Daibutsu of the capital of Kyoto... burned up from heavenly fire. But the Sanju-sangen-do didn’t burn down...”

On August 12, 1798, the Daibutsu (Large Buddha) of the Hoko-ji temple was struck by lightning and completely burned down. The Sanju-sangen-do is a Buddhist temple located in the Higashiyama District of Kyoto.

The distance between the two structures is approximately 1 km (.62 miles).

“His nickname is ‘Hitman Kyuzo.’”

The term “Hitman” here is literally “Human Cutter,” which relative to the time translates to “Killer.”

Poster caption: “The first man across the Uji River.”

This image is from the ninth scroll of the Heike Monogatari (The Tale of the Heike), an account of the Taira and Minamoto (aka Genji) clans at the end of the 12th century.

More specifically, this particular image details the competition between SASAKI Shiro Takatsuna and KAJIWARA Genda Kagesue, two young Genji samurai who happened to be long-time rivals. The legend states that when the Genji warriors reached the Uji River, their commander asked how they might get across. Immediately, Takatsuna and Kagesue rushed forward on their horses and began to cross, fighting against the rapid current. Takatsuna eventually won the race.

“Tell the Aizu that in the hour of the dog, we will be waiting at the Gion Kaisho.”

The Gion Kaisho was meeting place where cultural events took place, such as poetry readings, shows, etc. Today, it is best known as the meeting place for the Shinsengumi before the Ikeda-ya Affair.

The Gion Festival, Yoiyama Parade.

On the night before the Gion Matsuri, July 16th, festival organizers line the neighborhood streets of Shijo-Karsumi with floats that will be used for the following day's festivities. This “preview” night has become in many ways superior to the tourist-filled days that follow as Kyotoites flood the streets to get a glimpse of the floats and taste the food of nearby vendors.

References

A considerable amount of historical research was necessary. Among the many sources we have consulted, the following were especially helpful:

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