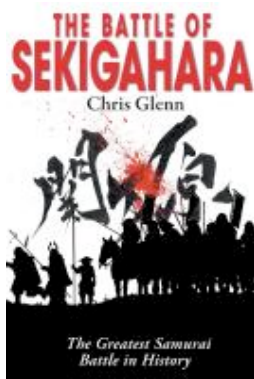


THE BATTLE OF SEKIGAHARA

Chris Glenn



*The Greatest Samurai
Battle in History*



The decisive **Battle of Sekigahara** was the greatest samurai battle in Japan's history. It lasted just seven hours but saw the deaths of over 30,000 samurai. The loyalist forces, despite superior numbers and excellent battle formations, were defeated. Discover the developments leading to the outbreak of war, the characters involved, the battle, and the aftermath. Samurai weapons and armor are also fully explained, along with little known customs of the samurai and their warfare. **FEATURES MORE THAN 80 COLOR PHOTOS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.**

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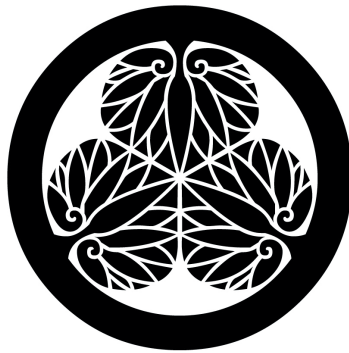
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The Roads East and West



Map of 16th century Japan

From even before the Edo period, (1603–1868) there were five major arterial routes linking the old capital, Kyoto, and Edo (now Tokyo). People, merchandise, and culture traversed these highways mostly by foot, stopping at the government-designated post towns and checkpoints along the way. Each of these post towns featured special inns, *Honjin*, *Waki-honjin*, and *Hatagoya*. These establishments provided lodging, places for meals and rest, and stables for horses too. Hatagoya were for the use of common folk, merchants, craftsmen, pilgrims, and lower-ranked samurai. The Honjin and Waki-honjin were reserved for the highest-ranked samurai, aristocratic nobility, and the daimyo.

The two most vital of these highways were the Tokaido and the Nakasendo. The Nakasendo, or Central Mountain Route, was built in 702, connecting Kyoto and Edo. It was also known as the Kiso-kaido as it followed the route of the Kiso River for much of its length. The road featured 69 post towns along its 542 km. The Tokaido or Eastern Sea Route was the name given to the highway between Edo and Kyoto that traversed the Pacific Ocean side of Japan's coast with 53 stations on its 514 km length.

The roads approached each other about 20 km west of Gifu, where the only real pass between the mountains lay. At the bottleneck of the narrow plain known as Sekigahara, a track from the Tokaido branched off to the Nakasendo while another wound its way north around the foot of Mt. Ibuki. The importance of these two vital arteries as military targets cannot be overestimated. Whoever had control of these thoroughfares at the gateway between east and west had control of the land.



Antique map of the Sekigahara region. Ishida family collection.

The Western army at this stage held a number of castles along the Nakasendo. As well as Ishida Mitsunari's fiefdom of Sawayama Castle, they held the strategically important Ogaki Castle, which lay just

south of the Nakasendo. East of Ogaki stood Gifu Castle, overlooking the central route from high on Mt. Kinkazan, and Inuyama Castle a little further east along the Kiso River. Between Gifu and Inuyama lay Takehana, a small hilltop castle, more akin to a stockade than a fortress.

Further along the Nakasendo and some distance to the north, in what is now Nagano Prefecture, sat Ueda Castle. Ueda Castle was the home of the Sanada clan, former vassals to the military genius and warlord Takeda Shingen. It was a humble castle, built in 1583, but well designed and strongly built. This was proven first in 1583 when the castle withstood an attack by a numerically superior Tokugawa force. Moreover, it was the fortitude of the samurai within the fortress that saw that attack, and another similar siege in 1600, repelled by the Sanada. Despite being such a distance from the battlefield of Sekigahara, events at Ueda Castle would almost destroy the intentions of the Tokugawa legions.

The Eastern forces held most of the Tokaido from Ieyasu's base castle in Edo, all the way to Kiyosu Castle northwest of Nagoya City. Behind the Western lines, Otsu Castle overlooking Lake Biwa was held by Eastern allies, as was Fushimi Castle south of Kyoto.

Ishida Mitsunari had originally planned for the battle between his Western forces and the Eastern forces led by Ieyasu to take place near the Kiso River, on what was the border between Mino and Owari Provinces (now Gifu and Aichi Prefectures), with the Uesugi entering the stage from the north, while his own army attacked from the west. Had this plan come to fruition, Ieyasu would have most likely been surrounded and possibly defeated.

Mitsunari advanced eastwards from Osaka towards Ogaki Castle, which was under the command of Ito Morikage. On August 6, his army of 6,700 passed through Sekigahara, but continued on to Tarui where they stopped for a few days. From there they continued to Ogaki, arriving on August 10, and made the castle the base for the Western army. Ogaki lay just south of the Nakasendo, and thus was a strategically important fortress.

From Ogaki, Mitsunari sent word to the keeper of Kiyosu Castle, a stronghold of equally strategic importance, to capitulate or face attack. Kiyosu was commanded by Fukushima Masanori, and while

he was with Ieyasu in the Kanto region, Osaki Gamba was installed as caretaker. Gamba, also known as *Oni* or “Devil Gamba” thanks to his ferocity and willingness on the battlefield, steadfastly refused, and in defiance sent word to his master who, along with other allies, hurried back to prevent Mitsunari from taking the castle.

The nation was abuzz as warriors of all standing rushed to take their positions, East or West, and be ready for the oncoming storm. Mitsunari was joined at Ogaki by key allies, including Ukita Hideie, Konishi Yukinaga, Shimazu Yoshihiro, Shima Sakon, and Gamo Bitchu amongst others, and as the number of western troops began to swell, the small castle and surrounding areas were soon brimming with armored soldiers.



Ogaki Castle.

ISHIDA MOVES FIRST



Ishida Mitsunari. Ishida family collection.

Ishida Mitsunari was shocked at the number of former allies defecting to the Eastern side. In an effort to prevent any more withdrawals he devised a plan to keep various daimyo “loyal.” He would take hostage the families of those he feared would turn, and among the first families taken in Osaka was that of Lord Hosokawa Tadaoki, a daimyo with lands just outside of Kyoto worth about 230,000 koku.

Hosokawa Tadaoki and his father, Fujitaka, (or Yusai as he was known since having taken religious vows upon the death of Oda Nobunaga) had been much-valued retainers of Oda Nobunaga, and at their lord’s urging, Tadaoki had married the daughter of Akechi Mitsuhide. The lady in question was a famed beauty with intelligence to match, and the marriage had been organized by Nobunaga so that ties between his close vassals might be further strengthened. When Akechi reneged against Nobunaga, he had sought assistance from Hosokawa Tadaoki, who, disgusted at the actions of his father-in-law, steadfastly

refused. It also caused a rift between the couple as she was torn between loyalty to both her husband and father, and for her safety, Tadaoki sent her into exile for two years.

Later, upon the intervention of Hideyoshi, the husband and wife reached reconciliation, but relations remained partially strained, as, during exile she had converted to Christianity against his wishes, taking the name Gracia. According to the records of the missionaries she associated with, Tadaoki was a jealous man, and rarely allowed her to make contact with the world outside their mansion.

It had been her husband who had inadvertently introduced her to the religion. He had heard about this foreign faith from a friend, Takayama Ukon, during a tea ceremony. Tadaoki later passed on what he had heard to his wife. She was impressed with what she heard and duly sought out the foreign religion. Ukon would fall from grace with Hideyoshi, and later be expelled from Japan by Ieyasu for his Christian beliefs, and would die in exile in Manila, in 1615. Hosokawa never felt anything for the religion himself, but thought a great deal of his wife, and would not allow her to become a follower of Christianity. At one stage, it is said the volatile lord had taken a dagger to his wife's throat, threatening to take her life unless she renounced her new-found faith. She refused.³

When the arresting authorities sent by Ishida Mitsunari forced their way into the Hosokawa mansion in search of potential hostages on August 25, 1600, the clan's loyal retainer, Ogasawara Shosai, approached his then 37-year-old mistress, Gracia, and informed her of her husband's orders that they were all to die before submitting to Mitsunari's troops. It is often incorrectly believed that Gracia then committed suicide; but being a follower of the Christian faith would have prevented her from doing so. This much is recorded in the still-existing "Chronicles of the Hosokawa Family," a diary of sorts that explains that with her consent, Ogasawara rammed a spear through her body, before setting fire to the mansion and disembowelling himself. Gracia's body was consumed in the flames. Tadaoki later gave her a Christian funeral at which he cried.

³ *It is interesting to note that the family long remained politically active, and nearly four hundred years later, in 1993, one of this couples' descendants would become the seventy-ninth prime minister of Japan, Hosokawa Morihiro.*

Despite their religious and political differences, Hosokawa Tadaoki truly loved his wife. When he died 45 years later at the age of 83, he had his tomb built next to hers at the Taisho-ji Temple in Kumamoto City, Kyushu. Another grave dedicated to the couple can be found in the Daitoku-ji in Kyoto, and features a stone lantern used by the great tea master Sen no Rikyu as a gravestone. Tadaoki lived his final years alone, never remarrying.

The Hosokawa family chronicles mention the defiance shown by both Tadaoki and Gracia against capitulating to Ishida Mitsunari's samurai, and also records that the matter seems to have surprised and angered the samurai community. The backlash proved another setback for Mitsunari, turning many potential allies away. Realizing his mistake, he then ordered his men to simply surround the mansions of the other Tokugawa generals, Kato, Kuroda, and Ikeda, rather than try to arrest the families and occupants. Mitsunari then attempted to recover his lost ground through propaganda. Five days later he prepared a list of 13 grievances against the Tokugawa in the hopes of spurring other daimyo into once again backing him against Ieyasu in battle. This list, dated the 17th day of the seventh month (August 30), 1600, he distributed amongst the daimyo.

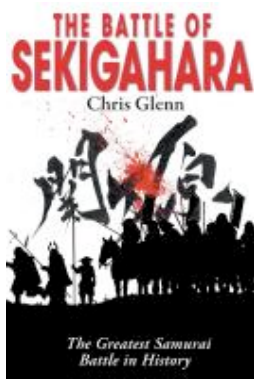
Mitsunari's primary grievance focused on Ieyasu moving into the late Hideyoshi's residence at Fushimi, something he saw as a blatant way of usurping the power promised to Hideyori. Many of the complaints concerned Ieyasu's being in direct contravention of laws instigated by Hideyoshi. Ieyasu's arranged marriages between his and strategically important families, and his building of and then residing in a small tower keep within the Nishi no Maru grounds of Osaka Castle, despite a ban on all castle building and maintenance, received particular criticism. Ieyasu was also accused of purporting to have told "lies" regarding his actions to younger members of the council and daimyo ranks, making strategic promises of land and titles without the consent of the Council of Regents in an effort to gain followers.

Further scrutiny fell upon his combative behavior, his conflict with Uesugi Kagekatsu, and his taking Maeda Toshinaga's mother as hostage. However, perhaps most telling was that Mitsunari accused

him of adopting too much political power. Ieyasu had taken it upon himself to allow the daimyo who had fought in Korea to return to their fiefs for “purposes of rest” without consulting the other regents, before suggesting that Ishida Mitsunari and Maeda Toshinaga resign their Hideyoshi-appointed positions of Bugyo, as those positions, according to Ieyasu, were no longer required now that the Taiko was no more.

Ieyasu then began to face criticism from other lords too, many of whom demanded he resign his position. Natsuka Masaie, Mashita Nagamori, and Maeda Gen'i were among those writing damning letters about the Tokugawa leader and sending them to other daimyo. Neither paying attention to the accusations, nor answering directly to these lords, caused further rifts between Ieyasu and the other regents.

Thus the country was instantly divided into East and West, and both sides began preparations for the war that was by now inevitable. It was not a case of if, but when and where it would happen.



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