

The ***Shinsengumi*** (新選組, "Newly Selected Corps") was a small, elite group of swordsmen that was organized by commoners and low rank samurai, commissioned by the bakufu (military government) during Japan's Bakumatsu period (late Tokugawa shogunate) in 1863. It was active until 1869.^{[1][2]} It was founded to protect the shogunate representatives in Kyoto at a time when a controversial imperial edict to exclude foreign trade from Japan had been made and the Chōshū clan had been forced from the imperial court. They gained considerable fame in the Ikedaya incident and the August 18 coup events, among others.^[2] The men were drawn from the sword schools of Edo.

History

Rōshigumi

Japan's forced opening to the west in 1854, which required it to open its shores for trade or face military conflict, exacerbated internal political instability. One long-standing line of political opinion was *sonnō jōi* (meaning, "revere the emperor, expel the barbarians").^[3] Loyalists (particularly in Chōshū Domain) in Kyoto began to rebel. In response, the Tokugawa shogunate formed the *Rōshigumi* (浪士組, "the *rōnin* squad") on October 19, 1862. The *Rōshigumi* was a squad of 234 *rōnin* (samurai without masters) drawn from the sword schools of Edo.^{[4]:168}

The squad's nominal commander was the hatamoto Matsudaira Katamori, and their leader was Kiyokawa Hachirō, a *rōnin* from Shōnai Domain. The *Rōshigumi*'s mission was to protect Tokugawa Iemochi, the 14th *shōgun*, during an important trip to Kyoto to meet with the Emperor Kōmei.^{[5]:65} There had not been such a meeting since the third *shōgun* of the Tokugawa bakufu, Tokugawa Iemitsu, had visited Kyoto in the 17th century. Tokugawa Iemochi, the head of the military government, the *bakufu*, had been invited to discuss how Japan should enact the recent imperial edict calling for the expulsion of foreigners.^{[6]:186}

Although the *Rōshigumi* was funded by the Tokugawa bakufu, the leader Kiyokawa Hachirō and others had strong loyalties to the emperor and planned to gather other *rōnin* in Kyoto to police the city from insurgents. On March 26 (lunar calendar February 8),

Shinsengumi	
新選組	
	
Flag of <i>Shinsengumi</i>	
Active	August 18, 1863
Disbanded	June 23, 1869
Country	<u>Kyoto, Japan</u>
Allegiance	<u>Tokugawa bakufu</u>
Branch	<u>Rōshigumi</u> <div>(disbanded in 1863)</div> <u>Bakufu Army</u>
Type	Military unit
Role	To protect the <u>Tokugawa bakufu</u> representatives and <u>Kyoto</u>
Size	302
Colors	light blue, white
Engagements	<u>Ikedaya incident</u> <div><u>Kinmon incident</u></div> <div><u>Zenzaiya incident</u></div> <div><u>Akebonotei incident</u></div> <div><u>Sanjo Seisatsu</u></div>

1863, Kiyokawa led the *Rōshigumi* out of Edo as the vanguard of *shōgun* Iemochi's procession to Kyoto, which they arrived on April 10 (lunar calendar February 23), 1863.

Mibu Rōshigumi

When Kiyokawa's scheme was revealed in Kyoto, he immediately commanded the *Rōshigumi* to return to Edo. The members were disbanded and then returned to Edo where they would later form the *Shinchōgumi* (新徴組) under the patronage of Shōnai Domain. However, nineteen *Rōshigumi* members, mainly from the Mito clan, remained and formed the *Mibu Rōshigumi* (壬生浪士組).^[7]

Founding members

Serizawa's faction:

- Serizawa Kamo
- Niimi Nishiki
- Hirayama Gorō
- Hirama Jūsuke
- Noguchi Kenji
- Araya Shingorō
- Saeki Matasaburō


Kondō's faction:

- Kondō Isami
- Hijikata Toshizō
- Inoue Genzaburō
- Okita Sōji
- Nagakura Shinpachi
- Saitō Hajime
- Harada Sanosuke
- Tōdō Heisuke
- Yamanami Keisuke

Tonouchi's faction:

- Tonouchi Yoshio
- Iesato Tsuguo^[5]: 76
- Abiru Eisaburō
- Negishi Yūzan

Initially, the *Mibu Rōshigumi* were called *Miburō* (壬生浪), meaning "*rōnin* of Mibu". At the time, Mibu was a village south west of Kyoto, and was the place where they were stationed. *Mibu Rōshigumi* was initially formed in three factions under Serizawa (the *Mito* group), Kondō (the *Shieikan* group) and Tonouchi. Abiru Eisaburō later died of illness, a month after arriving in Kyoto.

<u>incident</u>
<u>Aburanokōji</u>
<u>incident</u>
<u>Tenmaya incident</u>
<u>Boshin War</u>
— <u>Battle of</u>
— <u>Toba–Fushimi</u>
— <u>Battle of</u>
— <u>Kōshū-</u>
— <u>Katsunuma</u>
— <u>Battle of</u>
— <u>Utsunomiya</u>
— <u>Castle</u>
— <u>Battle of</u>
— <u>Shirakawa</u>
— <u>Battle of</u>
— <u>Bonari Pass</u>
— <u>Battle of Aizu</u>
— <u>Battle of</u>
— <u>Miyako Bay</u>
— <u>Battle of</u>
— <u>Futamata</u>
— <u>Battle of</u>
— <u>Hakodate</u> 

Commanders	
Notable commanders	<u>Serizawa Kamo</u> (1863)
	<u>Kondō Isami</u> (1863–1868)
	<u>Tonouchi Yoshio</u> (1863)
	<u>Hijikata Toshizō</u> (1868–1869)
	<u>Saitō Hajime</u> (1868)
	<u>Sōma Kazue</u> (1869)

Internal strife soon developed within the group, Tonouchi was assassinated by Kondō on Yojō bridge, Serizawa had ordered a member, Iesato Tsuguo, to commit *seppuku* for deserting, Negishi Yūzan also deserted and returned to Edo, where he joined the *Shinchōgumi*.

Shinsengumi

Matsudaira Katamori, after the careful evaluation of the political scene in Kyoto, felt it was needed to change the scope of the *Mibu Rōshigumi*'s mission from protecting the shogunate to patrolling the streets of Kyoto and restoring order in the name of the Tokugawa *bakufu*. On August 18, 1863, the *Mibu Rōshigumi* was renamed the *Shinsengumi*.^[8]

The new name *Shinsengumi* may have been coined by Matsudaira Katamori (the *daimyō* of the Aizu clan) around this time.^{[9][a]} The opposition forces included the *Mori clan* of the Chōshū and the Shimazu clan of Satsuma.

The *Shinsengumi* were led by Serizawa Kamo (born 1830, Mino Province), Niimi Nishiki, and Kondō Isami (born 1834, Musashi Province – he came from a small dojo in Edo called *Shieikan*). The *Shinsengumi* submitted a letter to the Aizu clan, another powerful group who supported the Tokugawa regime, requesting permission to police Kyoto. The request was granted.



Flag of the *Shinsengumi*.

Saeki Matasaburō, having killed Araya Shingorō, was believed to be killed by a Chōshū samurai *Kusaka Genzui* on September 22, 1863.

On September 30, 1863 (lunar calendar August 18), the Chōshū (anti-Tokugawa) clan were forced from the imperial court by the Tokugawa, Aizu and Satsuma clans. The *Shinsengumi* were sent to aid the Aizu and guard the gates of the imperial court. The opposition forces included the *Mori clan* of the Chōshū and the Shimazu clan of Satsuma.

Serizawa's erratic and disruptive behavior in Kyoto eventually led to Matsudaira Katamori of Aizu giving the *Shinsengumi* an order to assassinate Serizawa and his group. On October 19, 1863, Niimi Nishiki, a member of the Serizawa faction was forced by Yamanami Keisuke and Hijikata Toshizō to commit seppuku for breaking regulations. On October 30 (or October 28), a few selected *Shinsengumi* members led by Hijikata went into the Yagi Gennojō's house and assassinated Serizawa, his woman Oume, and Hirayama Goro, with Hirama Jūsuke being the only survivor who fled that night. All this infighting left Kondō as leader. Three months later, Noguchi Kenji was ordered to commit *seppuku* for an unknown reason.

On July 8, 1864, in an incident at the *Ikedaya Inn* in Kyoto, thirty *Shinsengumi* suppressed a cell of twenty Chōshū revolutionaries, possibly preventing the burning of Kyoto. The incident made the squad more famous and led to soldiers enlisting in the squad.

Squad hierarchy after Ikedaya

- Commander (局長, *Kyokuchō*): Kondō Isami, fourth master of the *Tennen Rishin-ryū*
- General Commander (総長, *Sōchō*): Yamanami Keisuke
- Vice Commander (副長, *Fukuchō*): Hijikata Toshizō

- Military Advisor (参謀, *Sanbō*): Itō Kashitarō
- Spies: Shimada Kai and Yamazaki Susumu.

Troop Captains (組長, *Kumichō*):

- Okita Sōji (instructor in Kenjutsu).
- Nagakura Shinpachi (instructor in Kenjutsu).
- Saitō Hajime (instructor in Kenjutsu).
- Matsubara Chūji (instructor in Jujutsu).
- Takeda Kanryūsai (instructor in military strategies).
- Inoue Genzaburō
- Tani Sanjūrō (instructor in spearing skills).
- Tōdō Heisuke
- Suzuki Mikisaburō
- Harada Sanosuke

Members of the group

At its peak, the *Shinsengumi* had about 300 members. They were the first samurai group of the Tokugawa era to allow those from non-samurai classes (farmers and merchants, for example) to join. Many joined the group out of a desire to become samurai and be involved in political affairs. However, it is a misconception that most of the *Shinsengumi* members were from non-samurai classes. Out of 106 *Shinsengumi* members (among a total of 302 members at the time), there were 87 samurai, eight farmers, three merchants, three medical doctors, three priests, and two craftsmen. Several of the leaders, such as Sannan, Okita, Saitō, Nagakura, and Harada, were born samurai.



Ancient Kondō Isami's quarters at Nagareyama, Chiba Prefecture, Japan. One of the former *Shinsengumi* headquarters

Shinsengumi regulations

The code of the *Shinsengumi*, famously created by Hijikata Toshizō, included five articles, prohibiting deviation from the samurai code (*bushido*), leaving the *Shinsengumi*, raising money privately, taking part in others' litigation, and engaging in private fights. The penalty for breaking any rule was *seppuku*. In addition, if the leader of a unit was mortally wounded in a fight, all the members of the unit must fight and die on the spot and, even in a fight where the death toll was high, the unit was not allowed to retrieve the bodies of the dead, except the corpse of the leader of the unit.

Uniform

The members of the *Shinsengumi* were highly visible in battle due to their distinctive uniforms. Following the orders of the *Shinsengumi* commander Serizawa Kamo, the standard uniform consisted of the *haori* and *hakama* over a kimono, with a white cord called a *tasuki* crossed over the chest and tied in the back. The function of the *tasuki* was to prevent the sleeves of the kimono from interfering with movement of the arms. The *Shinsengumi* wore a light chainmail suit beneath their robes and a light helmet made of iron.

The uniform was best defined by the *haori*, which was colored *asagi-iro* (浅葱色, light blue). In the old days of Japan, during the ritual, the samurai committing *seppuku* would wear an *asagi-iro kamishimo*. Thus the colour, in the samurai's eyes, characterized an honourable death.^[8] The *haori* sleeves were trimmed with "white mountain stripes", resulting in a very distinctive uniform.^[10]

Boshin War

In 1867, when Tokugawa Yoshinobu withdrew from Kyoto, the *Shinsengumi* left peacefully under the supervision of the *wakadoshiyori*, Nagai Naoyuki.^{[5]:172–174} The new emperor had been named the head of a new government (meaning the end centuries of military rule by the *shōgun*). This marked the beginning of the Boshin civil war.^[4]

Following their departure from Kyoto, the *Shinsengumi* were one of the shogunate forces fought in the Battle of Toba–Fushimi against the Imperial forces consisting of allied forces of Chōshū, Satsuma and Tosa in January 1868 where Kondō would suffer a gunshot wound at Fushimi during the battle.

Kōyō Chinbutai

The *Shinsengumi* returned to Edo, where it was later reformed into a unit known as the *Kōyō Chinbutai* (甲陽鎮撫隊, "Pacification Corps") and departed from Edo for Kōfu Castle on March 24 on orders to suppress uprisings there. However, upon receiving news on March 28 that the Kōfu Castle was taken by the Imperial forces led by Itagaki Taisuke, they settled at a town of Katsunuma 5 miles (8.0 km) east of Kōfu.

On March 29, 1868, the *Kōyō Chinbutai* resisted an attack by the Imperial forces at the Battle of Kōshū-Katsunuma for about two hours but lost, with eight dead and more than thirty wounded, while the Imperial forces had only one dead and twelve wounded. The surviving members were scattered and retreated to Edo.

Right after the Battle of Kōshū-Katsunuma, Nagakura Shinpachi, Harada Sanosuke and some of the members left the *Kōyō Chinbutai* after disagreements with long-time comrades Kondo and Hijikata and later formed a new unit *Seiheitai* with a former Tokugawa retainer Haga Gidou as its commander.

On April 11, 1868, the *Kōyō Chinbutai* departed Edo again and set up a temporary headquarters at the Kaneko family estate, northeast of Edo. They would later move to a new headquarters in Nagareyama on April 25, 1868.



Mannequins dressed in *Shinsengumi* uniform



Coat of mail and helmet of Kondō Isami

However, on the same day, the Imperial forces' Staff Officer Kagawa Keizō of Mito Domain received news that an armed unit had set up camp at Nagareyama and dispatched the forces there.

Death of Kondō Isami

During their training at Nagareyama on April 26, 1868, the *Kōyō Chinbutai* members were caught by surprise by the 200-strong Imperial forces, the Imperial forces' vice-chief of staff Arima Tota of Satsuma Domain ordered Kondō to go with them to their camp at Koshigaya. Kondō was later brought to Itabashi on April 27 for questioning. Kondō was declared guilty of participation in the assassination of Sakamoto Ryōma on April 30, 1868 and was beheaded three weeks later at the Itabashi execution grounds on May 17, 1868.^[4]

Battle of Aizu

Due to Hijikata being incapacitated as a result of the injuries sustained at the Battle of Utsunomiya Castle in May 1868, the *Kōyō Chinbutai* fought in defense of Aizu territory under Saitō Hajime in the Battle of Shirakawa in June 1868. After the Battle of Bonari Pass in October 1868, when Hijikata decided to retreat from Aizu, Saitō and a small group of *Shinsengumi* parted with Hijikata and continued to fight alongside the Aizu Domain against the Imperial forces until the very end of the Battle of Aizu, where he and a handful of surviving members were apprehended and became the prisoners-of-war.

Joining with the Republic of Ezo

In December 1868, Hijikata and the rest of the surviving *Shinsengumi* joined the forces of the Republic of Ezo in the north.^{[5]: 217–230}

The *Shinsengumi* numbers decreased to around one hundred in this period and they fought on despite the fall of Edo and clear defeat of Tokugawa.^[4] In the Battle of Miyako Bay on 6 May 1869, Hijikata led a daring but doomed raid to steal the imperial warship *Kōtetsu*, in the early morning, from the *Kaiten* warship, a number of oppositionists, including Nomura Risaburō, managed to board the ship, but were soon mowed down by its Gatling gun. Many others including the captain of *Kaiten* were also killed by gunfire from the Imperial ships. The battle lasted only thirty minutes and the survivors and *Kaiten* retreated to Hakodate.

On the fourth week of May 1869, Hijikata led 230 Republic of Ezo forces and the surviving *Shinsengumi* against the 600 strong Imperial forces during the Battle of Futamata for sixteen hours and were forced to retreat. The Imperial forces attacked again on the next day, only to retreat. On the following night, Hijikata led a successful raid on the Imperial forces' camp, forcing them to flee. Hijikata and his forces would later retreat to Hakodate on June 10.

End of the *Shinsengumi*

Hijikata was killed from a gunshot wound on June 20 (lunar calendar May 11), 1869, during the Battle of Hakodate in Hokkaido. Before his death, he wrote of his loyalty to the Tokugawa on the death poem sent by his page Ichimura Tetsunosuke to the house of his brother-in-law:

Though my body may decay on the Island of Ezo,
My spirit guards my lords in the East.

A remaining group of survivors, under the last commander Sōma Kazue, who had been under Nagai Naoyuki's supervision at Benten Daiba, surrendered three days later on June 23, (lunar calendar May 14), 1869, marked the end of the *Shinsengumi*.^{[5]:246} The forces of the Republic of Ezo would later surrender on June 27, (lunar calendar May 18), 1869, which marked the end of the Boshin War.

A few core members, such as Nagakura Shinpachi, Saitō Hajime, and Shimada Kai survived the war. Some members, such as Takagi Teisaku, went on to become prominent figures.^[12]

Monument

In 1875, Nagakura Shinpachi, with the help of the physician Matsumoto Ryōjun and several surviving former *Shinsengumi* comrades including Saitō Hajime among others, erected the monument for Kondō Isami, Hijikata Toshizō, and the fallen comrades of the *Shinsengumi* at Jutoku-ji temple boundary known as Graves of Shinsengumi in Itabashi, Tokyo and held requiems for their past comrades' souls.

In popular culture

The *Shinsengumi* have become a staple of Japanese popular culture in general,^[10] and of period dramas (*jidaigeki*) in particular.

- The *Shinsengumi* have often been adapted in television drama, for example *Shinsengumi Shimatsuki* (*Shinsengumi, its birth to end*) (TBS, 1961); and *Shinsengumi Keppuroku* (NTV, 1967). In 2004, the Japanese television broadcaster NHK made a year-long television drama series following the history of the *Shinsengumi*, called *Shinsengumi!*, which aired on Sunday evenings.^[13]
- An early film, *The Legend of Shinsengumi* (1963) was based on a 1928 novel of the same name.^[4]
- In 1969, a full-length film, *Shinsengumi: Assassins of Honour*, starring Toshiro Mifune was released.^[14] It depicted the rise and fall of the *Shinsengumi*.
- The main characters of *Space Battleship Yamato* (Japanese: 宇宙戦艦ヤマト, Hepburn: *Uchū Senkan Yamato*) were named after the *Shinsengumi*.
- The 1999 film *Taboo* (*Gohatto*) depicted the *Shinsengumi* one year after the Ikedaya affair. The film shows the *Shinsengumi*'s strict code and acceptance of homosexuality among the samurai members.^[4]
- In 2003, a Japanese samurai drama, *When the Last Sword Is Drawn*, depicted the end of the *Shinsengumi*, focusing on various historical figures such as Saitō Hajime.^[15]
- Manga artist Nobuhiro Watsuki is a self-proclaimed fan of the *Shinsengumi* and many of his characters in *Rurouni Kenshin* are based on its members, including Sagara Sanosuke (inspired by Harada Sanousuke); Shinomori Aoshi (modeled after Hijikata Toshizō); Seta Sōjirō (based on Okita Souji); and Saitō Hajime.
- The 2003 manga, *Getsu Mei Sei Ki* or *Goodbye Shinsengumi* by Kenji Morita depicted the life of Hijikata Toshizō. The manga *Kaze Hikaru* presents a fictional tale of a girl joining the *Shinsengumi* in disguise and falling in love with Okita Soji.
- The manga *Peacemaker Kurogane* by Nanae Chrono is a historical fiction taking place during the end of the Tokugawa period, following a young boy. Ichimura Tetsunosuke, who tries to join the *Shinsengumi*.

- The anime series *Soar High! Isami* features three 5th graders who are fictional descendants of the *Shinsengumi* and they fight against the evil organization, the Black Goblin.
- The game series/anime series/anime movie franchise *Hakuōki* (*Hakuōki Shinsengumi Kitan*, lit. 'Demon of the Fleeting Blossom: The Mysterious Tale of the *Shinsengumi*') follows a girl, looking for her lost father (a doctor who worked with the *Shinsengumi*). The premise mixes supernatural elements and fictional enemies and historical events. The *Shinsengumi* characters are fictionalized adaptations of the real members and retain their real names throughout the show.^[16]
- *Touken Ranbu* (2015) is a free-to-play collectible card browser video game developed by Nitroplus and DMM Games. It has spawned multiple different anime series, *Touken Ranbu: Hanamaru* (2016) and *Zoku Touken Ranbu: Hanamaru* (2018), both for a younger audience, as well as the more sophisticated *Katsugeki/Touken Ranbu* (2017). In the *Touken Ranbu* universe, the legendary swords, spears, and guns of famous warriors from Japan's feudal past are granted human form and come to life in a swashbuckling historical adventure. The swords of *Shinsengumi* heroes like Okita Souji, Hijikata Toshizo, and Isami Kondo are featured. One of the most prominent characters in *Touken Ranbu* is Hijikata's long sword, which bore the name Izuminokami Kanesada.
- The 2004 video game *Fu-un Shinsengumi*, which was developed by Genki and published by Konami, is based on the *Shinsengumi*.^[17]
- In March 2012, a stand-alone expansion for *Total War: Shogun 2* set during the Boshin War was released. *Fall of the Samurai* features the *Shinsengumi* as recruitable agents used for assassination and bribery, and as an elite combat unit capable of fighting both at range and in melee.
- *Moeyo Ken* is a video game and also an anime series about girl members of the *Shinsengumi*.
- *Moeyo Ken* ("Burn My Sword") is the name of a famous 1964 novel by Ryōtarō Shiba about the Boshin War (1868 to 1869 CE) from the point of view of Hijikata Toshizō. It is regarded by *Shinsengumi* fans as the 'bible' of *Shinsengumi* fiction and was the first literary work to focus on Hijikata; previously, *Shinsengumi* stories tended to focus on the commander Isami Kondo. Shiba also published short stories about the *Shinsengumi*. His *Shinsengumi* fiction has not yet been translated into English; it is available in Japanese and Chinese.
- *Shinsengumi Keppūroku* Japanese television *jidaigeki* period drama was broadcast on TV Asahi in 1998.
- The *Shinsengumi* appear in the mobile game *Fate/Grand Order* as one of two teams players can side with during the GUDAGUDA 2: Meiji Restoration event. Members of this team include Servant versions of Okita Souji and Hijikata Toshizo, which are both limited Servants. *Shinsengumi* is also the name of Toshizo's Noble Phantasm, which gets much stronger as his HP gets lower. Furthermore, in GUDAGUDA 5: Yamanataikoku, servant versions of 3 other members, Saitou Hajime, Keisuke Yamanami and Serizawa Kamo, are introduced, with Saitou Hajime and Keisuke Yamanami being currently playable.
- The *Shinsengumi* feature heavily in the plot of the 2014 video game *Ryū ga Gotoku Ishin!*. In this game, main protagonist Sakamoto Ryoma, a 19th-century doppelgänger of main series protagonist Kazuma Kiryu, becomes the group's third unit captain under the alias of Saito Hajime.
- The *Shinsengumi* appears in the app "*Bakumatu Hanafuda*". Players are confrontations to *Shinsengumi* members by Koi Koi.
- In the manga *Golden Kamuy* and its anime adaptation, Hijikata appears as the leader of one of the contending groups trying to locate a cache of gold on Hokkaido soon after the Russo-Japanese War. He would have been in his seventies at the time the story takes place.
- The manga and anime *Gintama* features its own alternate reality version of the *Shinsengumi* as regular characters, including members with surnames such as Kondo, Hijikata, and Okita.

See also

- [Battotai](#)
- [Hwarang](#)
- [Ishin shishi](#)
- [Ryōtarō Shiba](#)
- [Samurai](#)

Further reading

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Notes

- a. An argument for Matsudaira Katamori bestowing the name can be made by comparing the similarity of the name *Shinsengumi* to one of Aizu's later frontline combat units, the *Bessengumi* (別選組, the "Separately Selected Corps").

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External links

- SHINSENGUMI (<https://shinsengumijapan.com/>) 新選組 Shinsengumi Website
 - Hajimenokizu (<http://www.hajimenokizu.com/>) A site dedicated to Saitou Hajime and the Shinsengumi in various fictional and historical incarnations.
 - Samurai archives – Shinsengumi (<http://wiki.samurai-archives.com/index.php?title=Shinsengumi>)
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