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誠 SHINSENGUMI

The history of *Shinsengumi* is one riddled with secrecy, intrigue and violence. Run according to strict guidelines which saw the demise of many of its members and eventually the group. The article that follows starts at the very beginning explaining the origin, its values and its end; looking at the key figures and their roles not only in the group but their part in the history of a changing Japan on the brink of the Restoration.



Matsudaira Katamori

Roshigumi

In 1863 the *Bakufu** began recruiting unemployed *samurai* (*ronin*) to guard *Shogun Iemochi* whilst he visited Kyoto to meet *Emperor Komei*. Not since the third *Shogun*, *Tokugawa Iemitsu*, had a shogun travelled to Kyoto. Japan was a country in turmoil, violently struggling to deal with the threat of American and European naval aggression. *Tokugawa Iemochi*, as head of the military government, was being summoned to discuss how to execute the recent imperial edict calling for the expulsion of all foreigners, backed up by the use of possible force.

Matsudaira Katamori, daimyo of the *Aizu han*, was granted Protector of Kyoto and charged with its policing as well as guaranteeing the *Shogun's* safety during his stay, considering the *Sonno Joi* (revere the Emperor; expel the foreigners) movement by pro-imperial *ronin*, was becoming an ever-increasing problem. The plan was to gather *ronin* and form them into a security group: the *Roshigumi* – credited to *Matsudaira Chikaranosuke*, *kenjutsu* instructor at the military academy *Kobusho*.



Kiyokawa Hachiro

Kiyokawa Hachirō of *Shonai han*, was charged with the responsibility of recruitment, while *Yamaoka Tesshu*, *Kiyokawa's* longtime friend, provided support and additional leadership.

In actual fact, *Kiyokawa* had anti-*Tokugawa* sentiments and was a strong supporter of the principles of *Sonno Joi* and proceeded to recruit like-minded *ronin* to fill the *Roshigumi's* ranks. Additionally,

Right: Umanosuke Kashio, kenjutsu master from the Shinsengumi.

Left: Possibly Sukegoro Miyagawa. A most unlikely pair associated with such a violent group.





Mibumura Roshigumi's flag

Kiyokawa secretly intended to turn the *Roshigumi* into a pro-Sonno Joi group upon arrival in Kyoto, abandoning their mission to protect *lemochi*. With this in mind, Kiyokawa marched out of Edo with 250 men on the 8th February, 1863, as the vanguard of *Shogun lemochi's* procession to Kyoto.

Not long after arriving in Kyoto, Kiyokawa's intentions became clear. Though this did not come as a surprise to some of the senior *Bakufu*, who had regarded Kiyokawa as a dangerous subversive for a long time. Keen to get Kiyokawa and his men out of Kyoto, orders were given telling Kiyokawa to bring the *Roshigumi* back to Edo and make preparations to expel the foreigners.

Finally arriving in Kyoto on the 23rd February, 1863, Serizawa and his group took up lodgings in Yagi Gennojo's estate, while Kondo's group were to stay at Maekawa Shouji's estate (both in Mibu). The next day, Kiyokawa asked them all to assemble at the *Shintokuji* Temple. Kiyokawa, a shrewd individual, gathered the troupe of *ronin* together in the name of the *Bakufu*, wanting to train them all to be *Ishin Shishi*, professing *Sonno Joi*. A few days later, Kiyokawa then commanded the *Roshigumi* to go back to Edo and serve the Emperor. But Serizawa, Kondo and a group of 13 men refused to go. Following a stand-off and a furious argument, the *Roshigumi* departed from Kyoto heading back to Edo, but without Serizawa, Kondo and their men. (Though Aizu records state there were 24 men that stayed in Kyoto).

Out of interest, the reason that Serizawa and Kondo could oppose Kiyokawa was down to a secret alliance between Matsudaira Katamori and the Kyoto Shugoshoku (The

Military Commissioner of Kyoto). The Kyoto Shugoshoku and Matsudaira Katamori, came to an agreement that the group would be taken care of whilst in Kyoto, calling the group Mibumura Roshigumi.

The remaining ex-*Roshigumi* members were later strengthened by the arrival of new recruits. Matsudaira Katamori, after careful consideration, felt it was necessary to change the Mibumura Roshigumi's mission, from protecting the *Shogun* to one of patrolling the streets of Kyoto and restoring it to order, which is exactly what happened.

When the *Shogun* went back to Edo, the *Choushu* aides worked harder to end the regime of the *Bakufu*, and reinstall the Emperor as the true governor of Japan.

Meanwhile, Kiyokawa had planned for his new *Roshigumi*, now called *Shinchogumi*, to attack the foreign settlement at Yokohama; set fire to the buildings and kill the foreigners, so that the *Bakufu's* foreign policy, as well as their image, would be forever tarnished and plummet to new low. The *Bakufu* though had been informed of the plans, and so sent assassins to intercept him. Kiyokawa was killed on April 13th by Sasaki Tadasaburo, a *kodachi* master (who would be the

chief of the *Kyoto Mimawarigumi*, *Shinsengumi's* stable mates) before his plan could be carried out.

When the *Shogun* went back to Edo, the *Choushu* aides worked harder to end the regime of the *Bakufu*, and reinstall the Emperor as the true governor of Japan. The *Choushu Ishin Shishi*, led by Katsura Kogorou, Takasugi Shinsaku and Kusaka Genzui, were able to infiltrate the Imperial Palace so establishing loyal aides, the most prominent being Sanjo Sanetomi. *Choushu* still had the duty of guarding the Imperial Palace gates, so getting in and out of the Palace was not an issue, enabling them to plot unhindered against the *Bakufu*.

On August 13th it was announced that the Emperor would visit the tomb of the Emperor Jinbu, and then go on to the Ise Palace. It was actually a diversion aimed at the *Choushu* men, who had virtually imprisoned the Emperor by burning the city, whilst also marching their armies to Edo with a view to end the *Bakufu*. This information quickly reached the ears of Matsudaira Katamori. He met with a confident of the Emperor, and they realised that if they were to face the *Choushu* army they were going to need a larger force. To do this they had to join their forces with the *Satsuma* province men, which was governed by Shimazu Hisamitsu, who weren't against the *Bakufu*. The Emperor had to be told of the true purpose of the visit to Kyoto. The Emperor, although against the foreigners, wasn't considering going against the *Bakufu*.

In early hours of 18th August, there was an Imperial order postponing the visit. At the same time, several provinces led by the Aizu and *Satsuma* contingent who were defending the

palace, and the seven *Sonno Joi* aides who had devised the plan, were expelled from the palace and banned from re-entering.

The expelling of the men had implications on the *Choushu* province, and from that moment on were forbidden to protect the gates of Kyoto, and were ordered to take all their men back to *Choushu*. This became known as the *Kinmon no Seihen* (The Political Upheaval of the Forbidden Gates) or the *Hachigatsu Juhachinichi no Seihen* (The Political Upheaval of August 18th). When the *Choushu* Army had learnt about what had happened, they hurried to the gates of the palace, but they faced heavy defenses around them. They finally retreated to the east and eventually went back to *Choushu*, protecting the seven aides, in what is famed as *Shichigyou Ochi* (The Flight of the Seven Aides).

During the attempted coup, representatives of the Public Office of Aizu went to Mibu and requested the presence of the Mibumura Roshigumi to ask their aid in protecting the gates of the palace. It would be the first time for the Mibumura Roshigumi to fight as a real army. Serizawa would lead the Mibumura Roshigumi into two rows of 40 men each, sporting a big red flag measuring 6ft square and everybody wearing yellow *haori*, the colour of Aizu. All the members were excited to finally see battle for the cause they believed in, dieing happily if need-be. It was on this day that the Mibumura Roshigumi were officially renamed "Shinsengumi", with the permission of the Emperor.

Serizawa Kamo led the *Shinsengumi*, in the middle was Kondo Isami and at the rear, Niimi Nishiki. When they arrived at the *Hamaguri* gate, there were already Aizu soldiers

there. Threateningly, they pointed their swords and spears at the *Shinsengumi*, shouting, "Who are you?" Serizawa drew his iron fan, and laughed, as he fanned the spears. "We are the *Shinsengumi*, working under orders of the Aizu province. Don't misunderstand our purpose, or you'll face the consequences." The soldiers were surprised by the daring of Serizawa, and it is said that the Aizu men, from this moment, changed their opinion of the *Shinsengumi*. The Aizu men, were at first stunned, but soon recovered and threatened again. Unfortunately for the *Shinsengumi* though, there was no battle, and the first official confrontation for the *Shinsengumi* ended in nothing. But it wouldn't always be that way.

Shinsengumi

From the remnants of the *Roshigumi*, did the *Shinsengumi* emerge. Matsudaira Katamori named it's three commanders: Kondo Isami, leader of the eight-man *Shieikan* faction; Serizawa Kamo (famous for his association with the Tengu Party) was leader of a five man *Mito* faction; and Niimi Nishiki, another member of the *Mito* faction, who was actually just a nominal commander and held no real power. These two *Mito* groups formed the *Tengu* Faction. Kondo and Serizawa were intense rivals and the



Hamaguri gate

Shieikan faction

The *Shieikan* is the *Tennen Rishin Ryu Dojo*, situated in Ichigaya, Tokyo. It was established by Kondo Shusuke in 1839.

After Kondo Isami joined the *Roshigumi*, Sato Hikogoro maintained it until 1867. The *Shieikan* was known as the place where the prominent *Shinsengumi* members gathered: Hijikata Toshizo, Okita Soji, Inoue Genzaburo, Yamanami Keisuke, Nagakura Shinpachi, Harada Sanosuke and Todo Heisuke.

Founded by Kondo Kuranosuke Nagahiro in about 1789. The style was popularised by Kondo Shusuke (1792-1867), the third generation master of the style, who, together with Sato Hikogoro, spread its fame and practice throughout the Tama district.

Since the first and the second generation masters adopted a student with superb skills to be the next master, so did Kondo Shusuke. So in 1849 the childless Kondo decided to adopt a sixteen-year-old student named Miyagawa Katsugoro, later known as Kondo Isami.

The style – like other *koryu*, teaches *kenjutsu*, *bujutsu*, and *jujutsu*. Eventually, in 1861, Kondo Isami became the fourth head master of the style, spreading its fame during his time with the *Shinsengumi*. Noted practitioners were Hijikata Toshizo, Inoue Genzaburo, and the famous prodigy Okita Soji (who mastered all the techniques of the school and attained *Menkyo Kaiden* status at eighteen.) *Tennen Rishin-ryu* is still practiced today, among other *koryu*.



Entrance to the Yagi residence in Mibu where Serizawa Kamo and his group lodged



Kondo Isami



Serizawa Kamo



Niimi Nishiki

The rules of the Shinsengumi

First:

It's not allowed to deviate from the path of a proper man.

Second:

It's not allowed to leave the *Shinsengumi*.

Third:

It's not allowed to raise money privately.

Fourth:

It's not allowed to take part in other's litigation.

Fifth:

It's not allowed to engage in private fights.

There were more rules that were read to every Shinsengumi members, here are some of the most famous ones:

If the leader of a unit is mortally wounded, all the members of the unit must fight and die on the spot.

Even in a fight where the death toll is high, it is not allowed to retrieve the bodies of the dead, except the corpse of the leader.

And the most dreaded one was:

"If a Shinsengumi member engages in a fight with a stranger, be it on duty or not, if he is wounded and can't kill the enemy, allowing him to run away, even in the case of a wound in the back (meaning a treacherous attack), seppuku is ordered."

tension between them was reaching a critical point. This tension goes back to the initial formation of the *Roshigumi*.

Initially, *Kondo Isami* was purely an ordinary member of the 6th unit of the *Roshigumi*. Three days out of Edo, *Kondo* was helping *Ikeda Tokutaro* find lodging in a post town, when *Kondo* accidentally forgot all about *Serizawa*. Though *Ikeda* and *Kondo* apologised, *Serizawa* didn't listen, and in protest and spite, he set a huge fire at the very center of their lodgings. Eventually, *Kondo* convinced *Serizawa* to put out the fire, but *Serizawa* had by now become uncontrollable, and had already knocked down a

government officer with his famous iron fan (weighing over 1kg). So from the very outset, *Serizawa* was a problem, and an-accident-waiting-to-happen. This was the start of the tension between *Kondo* and *Serizawa*.

Kondo and his Vice-Commander *Hijikata Toshizo*, began to plan the demise of the *Mito* faction. Their opportunity came in early September 1863, when *Niimi* was found guilty of extorting money and was forced to commit *Seppuku*. *Serizawa's* violent and unruly behavior gave *Kondo* the chance he needed to finish the job and seize power of the *Shinsengumi*. It was felt that *Serizawa* was damaging the group's

reputation, so *Matsudaira Katamori*, ordered *Serizawa's* assassination and his closest cohorts. Around the 16th September, *Hijikata* along with the talented swordsman *Okita Soji* and two others loyal to *Kondo*, assassinated *Serizawa* and *Hirayama Goro*. A third assassination target, *Hirama Jusuke*, escaped. With the *Mito* faction broken, *Kondo* and *Hijikata* had absolute control over the *Shinsengumi*.

The group grew to over 140 men, and included farmers and merchants whose livelihood would be threatened if the *Shogunate* was overthrown. The regulations set up by *Shinsengumi* were strict and it was *Hijikata* who enforced them earning the nickname "*The Demon of the Shinsengumi*". Deserters and traitors were forced to commit *seppuku*; as happened to *Yamanami*, one of *Hijikata's* oldest friends, when tried to leave the *Shinsengumi* in 1865.



Shuntaro Furutaka

In 1867, all the *Shinsengumi* were granted the status of *hatamoto*.

The Ikedaya Incident

8th July, 1864.

Kyoto was attracting many unemployed *samurai (ronin)* from various provinces and allegiances. Some of southern provinces – namely *Choshu* and *Tosa* – were heavily influenced by the rise of the *Sonno Joi* philosophy, supporting the removal of all western influences in Japan. The Emperor and the *Aizu* and *Satsuma* clans supported the unification of the *Bakufu* and the Imperial court. The *Bakufu* tried to maintain their rule, though difficult, as *ronin* from the various groups began to attack and kill each other. Hence, the *Bakufu* organised and backed groups, including *Shinsengumi*, and issued orders for them to arrest or kill the *Sonno Joi Shishi* (antagonisers).

The *Shinsengumi* had suspicions about some of Kyoto's inhabitant's. So they sent spies to watch their activities, and activated the city patrols. The spies followed the followers of *Miyabe Teizo*, one of *Ishin Shishi's* leaders, and from this discovered a storehouse which was a secret liaison place of the *Shishi*. When they entered the store, they found guns and ammunition. The owner, *Kiemon*, who was actually a *Choushu Shishi* named *Furutaka Shuntaro*, who was caught the day before.

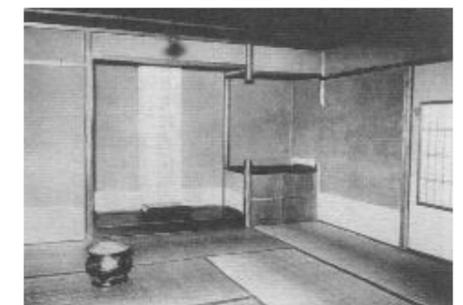
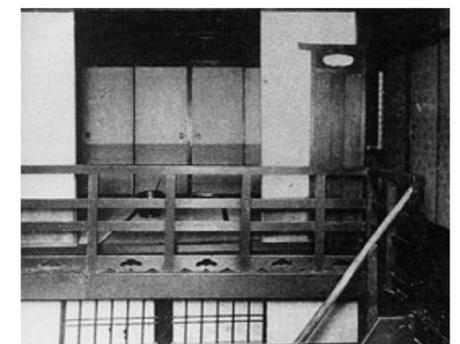
Following the arrest of *Furutaka*, he was interrogated by a brutal method:

At first, *Kondo* himself began to interrogate *Furutaka*, but he kept quiet. He endured the punishment though, his back had been crushed from the torture. Frustrated, *Kondo* resorted to letting *Hijikata* take charge – the man who was known

as '*The Demon of the Shinsengumi*'. He suspended him by his ankles, restraining his wrists, and drove five-inch spikes into the heels of his feet. Then, placing lit candles upon the holes, allowed hot wax to drip deep into his calves. From the information he gave, *Hijikata* found that the *Shishi* were planning to set fire to Kyoto, capture *Matsudaira Katamori*, the *daimyo* of the *Aizu*, and kidnap the Emperor. The urgency of the situation thus revealed, *Kondo Isami* led a group of *Shinsengumi* troops into action.

Furutaka, by-the-way, eventually died, but not of his injuries. He was killed in jail during the Kinmon Incident.

The *Shinsengumi* didn't know exactly where the *Shishi* held their meetings, so *Shinsengumi's* troops were divided into two so they could search all over the inn and the teahouse in Kyoto. The first group led by *Kondo* included *Okita*, *Todo*, *Nagakura* and six others, and they moved to the *Ikedaya Inn*,



Ikedaya Inn (Taisho era)



Katana scars at the Sumiya where the Shinsengumi partied, and held a party for Serizawa Kamo just before his assassination. Many scars exist at the now restaurant as proof of Serizawa's temper and actions.

Kondo Isami

Isami was first known as *Katsugoro* and was born to *Miyagawa Hisajiro*, a farmer residing in *Kami-Ishihara* village in *Musashi* Province, now in the city of *Chofu* in Western Tokyo. He had two older brothers, *Otojiro* and *Kumezo*. *Katsugoro* began training at the *Shieikan* (the main dojo of the *Tennen Rishin-ryu*) in 1848.

As a young man he was said to be an avid reader, and especially liked the stories of the Forty-seven Ronin.

His renown as a scholar and his fame at having defeated a group of thieves who tried to break into his family home caught the attention of *Kondo Shusuke*, the third generation master of the *Tennen Rishin-ryu*. *Shusuke* wasted no time in adopting the young *Katsugoro* in 1849.

Kondo and his wife, *Otsune*, were married in 1860. This was an advantageous match for *Kondo*; *Otsune* was the daughter of *Matsui Yasogoro*, a retainer to the *Shimizu-Tokugawa* clan. On September 30, 1861, *Isami* became the fourth generation master of *Tennen Rishin-ryu*, assuming the name *Kondo Isami* and taking charge of the *Shieikan*.

A year later, his daughter *Tamako* (1862–1886) was born. *Kondo's* only grandson, *Kondo Hisataro*, was killed in action in the Russo-Japanese War.

Although he was never employed by the *Shogunate* before his *Shinsengumi* days, *Kondo* was a candidate for a teaching position at the *Kobusho* in 1862. The *Kobusho* was an exclusive military training school, primarily for the use of the *shogunal* retainers, set up by the *Shogunate* in 1855 in order to reform the military system after the arrival of *Perry's Black Ships*.

while the second group led by *Hijikata*, consisting of *Inoue*, *Harada*, *Saito* and 20 others took positions at the *Shikokuya Inn*. *Hijikata's* group found nothing, but *Kondo's* group found the opposite.

At about at 22:00, *Kondo* entered through the rear door of the *Ikedaya* Inn, and asked for the guest book to be checked out. Unexpectedly, a guard ran upstairs giving a warning. Quickly, *Kondo* went up to the second floor, and broke into a room through the *shoji* screen and found himself amongst 30 *shishi*. One of them blew out the light – suddenly they were alone in the dark. Though completely dark, *Kondo* didn't hesitate, and started cutting out at the seated *Shishi*. Other members of the *Shinsengumi* ran upstairs to help, whilst the rest waited downstairs to catch any *Shishi* who tried to escape. There were casualties on both sides: *Shinsengumi*: 1 dead, 2 wounded (one died the next day). The *Shishi*: 16 dead, 20 were arrested that night and the next day.

It was a victory for the *Shinsengumi* who were outnumbered 3:1. Though the *Kyoto's* inhabitants never could accept the *Shinsengumi*, it was undeniable that they had done such a noble deed for them and their city.

This incident made it clear to all that the *Shinsengumi* were a powerful force in *Kyoto*, and to be feared by the *Sonno Joi ronin*.

Serizawa Kamo

The *Serizawa* family were *Goshi* from the *Seizawa* village in *Hitachi* province. *Serizawa Mitsumoto* was adopted into the *Shimomura* family and his name was changed to *Shimomura Tsuguji*. *Tsuguji* was jailed for involvement in the *Tamatsukurigumi* which was a *Sonno Joi* group within the *Mito han*, however he was released in 1862 and changed his name to *Serizawa Kamo*.

Niimi Nishiki

Niimi was born in 1836, and rose to the rank of commander in the *Mibu Roshigumi* around 1864, having joined with *Serizawa Kamo*. He was later demoted to vice commander because of his poor conduct and raucous behaviour, and was ordered to commit *Seppuku* due to breaking regulations.

Strangely, *Niimi Nishiki* is enshrined in *Ryozen Gokoku Shrine* by *Katsura Kogoro*. It is rumoured that he may have been a spy from the *Choshu han*.

Hijikata Toshizo

Hijikata Toshizo, the vice-commander of *Shinsengumi*, was a great swordsman and a talented Japanese military leader who resisted the *Meiji* Restoration.

His full name was *Hijikata Toshizo Yoshitoyo*, and was born on 31st May, 1835 in present-day *Hino*, a suburb of *Tokyo*. He was the youngest of six children, and his father, a well-to-do farmer, died shortly before his birth. *Hijikata's* mother also died when he was a young boy, and he was therefore raised by his older brother and sister-in-law.

He was apparently tall compared to the average Japanese man of the period, and was said to have been spoiled at an early age and was alleged to be mean to all but his friends and family. This changed



The Sumiya's courtyard



Hijikata Toshizo



Nagakura Shinpachi



Okita Soji

when a 21-year-old swordsman from the *Aizu* clan known for opposing the Reformists was forced to commit *seppuku*. When *Hijikata* attended the man's funeral, he apparently cried in public.

Hijikata spent his youth selling his family's *Ishida Sanyaku* (medicine for treating injuries such as bruises and broken bones) while practicing his self-taught *kenjutsu*. His brother-in-law, *Sato Hikogoro*, managed a *Tennen Rishin-ryu* dojo in *Hino*. It was through *Sato* that *Hijikata* later met *Kondo Isami* and was formally enrolled at the *Tennen Rishin-ryu's Shieikan* in 1859. Although *Hijikata* himself never fully mastered the *Tennen Rishin-ryu*, it is said that he managed to develop the *Shinsengumi-Kenjutsu* fighting style from the *Tennen Rishin-ryu*.

Hijikata's death poem reads:

Though my body may decay on the island of Ezo, My spirit guards my lord in the east.

Nagakura Shinpachi

Nagakura Shinpachi was captain of the second unit of the *Shinsengumi*. He was born in the *Matsumae* clan's upper residence in *Edo* in 1839. His father, *Nagakura Kanji*, was a retainer of the *Matsumae* clan. Like *Okita Soji*, *Nagakura* was a true product of the *Edo* period, being the son of a retainer of a domain he had never seen, and had lived in *Edo* for his entire life.

At eight, *Nagakura* entered *Okada Jusuke Toshisada's Shindo Munen-ryu dojo*, and by eighteen he received the *menkyo kaiden* certification. At age nineteen he left the service of the *Matsumae* clan in order to travel and improve his technique. He spent some time at *Yurimoto Shuzou's Shinto Munen Ryu dojo*, and also at *Tsubouchi Shume's Shingyoto Ryu dojo*, where he met *Shimada Kai*, the future vice-captain of the *Shinsengumi* second unit. Around 1861, he started "taking his meals" at *Kondo Isami's Shieikan*.

Nagakura became assistant vice commander in 1863, then became the captain of the second unit in 1865.

Right after the Battle of *Kishi* in April 1868, *Nagakura* left the old *Shinsengumi* with *Harada Sanosuke* and formed the *Seiheitai* (after disagreements with long-time comrades, *Kondo* and *Hijikata*.)

Nagakura kept memoirs that testify first hand to the bloody lifetime of the *Shinsengumi*. These memoirs were lost for decades before being found and published in book form in 1998.

Okita Soji

Captain of the first unit of the *Shinsengumi*, and one of the best swordsmen along with *Saito Hajime* and *Nagakura Shinpachi*.

He was born to a *samurai* family in the *Shirakawa* domain's *Edo* mansion. *Okita* proved to be a prodigy of *kenjutsu*, and he mastered all the techniques and attained the *menkyo kaiden* scroll in the *Tennen Rishin-ryu* at the age of eighteen.

It was often said that he was honest, polite, and good-natured by those around him, but he was also known to be a strict and quick-tempered teacher to his students at the *Shieikan*.

Okita changed his name to *Okita Soji* some time before his departure to *Kyoto* in 1863. He soon became a founding member of the *Shinsengumi*. *Okita* was the second youngest among the *Shieikan* members, most likely with *Todo Heisuke* being the youngest. He was one of the *Shieikan* members involved in the *Serizawa Kamo* and the *Uchiyama Hikojiro* assassinations in 1863.

Equally skilled with *shinai*, *bokuto*, and *katana*. His signature technique was named the *Mumyo-ken* (which roughly translates as "unenlightened blade") or *Sandantsuki* which translates as "Three piece thrust", a technique that could attack one's neck, left shoulder, and right shoulder with one strike. (The *Mumyo-ken* supposedly could hit all three points simultaneously, but this is an embellishment). The *Mumyo-ken* was his own invention and may have been derived from an invention of *Hijikata's*, the *Hiratsuki*.

In 1865, *Okita* became the captain of the first unit of the *Shinsengumi* and later that year, he was appointed by *Kondo Isami* to be the fifth master of the *Tennen Rishin-ryu* after him.

Saito Hajime

Captain of the third unit of the *Shinsengumi*. He was one of the few core members who survived the numerous wars of the *Bakumatsu* period.

Saito was born in *Musashi Province Edo*. Very little is known about his early life. He was born to *Yamaguchi Yosuke*, an *ashigaru* of the *Akashi* domain, who had bought the rank of *gokenin*, a low-ranking retainer directly serving the *Tokugawa shogun*. According to the published records, *Saito* left *Edo* in 1862, after accidentally killing a *hatamoto*. His style of *kenjutsu* comes apparently from *Itto-ryu* or *Mugai Ryu*.

As a member of the *Shinsengumi*, *Saito* was said to be an introvert and a mysterious person. His duties included being a *kenjutsu* instructor. *Saito* was considered to be on the same level of swordsmanship as the first unit captain *Okita Soji* and the second unit captain *Nagakura Shinpachi*. In fact, it is rumoured that *Okita* feared his swordskill.

Saito's heavy drinking is believed to have contributed to his death from a stomach ulcer. He died in 1915 at age 72, sitting in *seiza* in his living room.

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Members of the *Shinsengumi's* graves at the *Mibu* temple in *Kyoto*. One of the more famous graves is that of *Serizawa Kamo*.