Female Combatants and Japan’s Meiji Restoration: the case of Aizu

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Japan’s modern period began not with universal acclaim, but with the Boshin Civil War.¹ From January 1868 to June of the following year, Japan was torn by bitter battles between supporters of the ousted Tokugawa regime and those of the newly established Meiji government. Such dissension has too often been portrayed as an aberrant aspect of a very popular ‘Imperial Restoration’, a change especially championed by mid-ranked members of the military class (buke). This paradigm is belied by the activities of Aizu domain’s ‘samurai’² women during the Boshin conflict.

I. Background

Out of over 250 domains which formed Edo Japan, it was Aizu (modern Fukushima Prefecture) in north-eastern Honshū that displayed the deepest commitment to Tokugawa rule. This support was not altruistic; Aizu’s ruling family, the Aizu-Matsudaira, was a collateral branch of Japan’s de facto ruling family, the Tokugawa. One indication of the trust accorded the Aizu-Matsudaira by the shogunate (bakufu, ‘military government’) was that they were permitted to maintain a fortified castle, known as ‘Crane Castle’ (Tsurugajō³), within the domain’s capital, Aizu-Wakamatsu. The power of Aizu’s lords was not predicated solely upon kinship ties to the Tokugawa shogun; the Aizu-Matsudaira

¹ This war is named for the sexagenary cycle year in which it began, i.e. the year of ‘Senior Earth (bo) Dragon (shin)’. The conflict began with the ‘Battle of Toba-Fushimi’ on the ‘third day of the first month’ (27 Jan., according to the Western calendar) of 1868 and ended on the 18th day of the fifth month of 1869 (27 June 1869), with the battle of Goryōkaku near Hakodate on Hokkaidō.
² In accordance with western custom the term ‘samurai’ is used here to refer to all members of the warrior (buke/bushi) class; however, this is inaccurate. The term ‘samurai’ (lit. ‘one who serves’) refers to a retainer of low rank; by the Edo period, all samurai were bushi, but not all bushi were samurai.
³ The original fortress was built in 1384; a number of its buildings, including the donjon, survived until 1942. The current ‘castle’ is a reconstruction, one completed only in 1974.
also had the support of their own hereditary military vassals, individuals loyal first and foremost to the Aizu-Matsudaira.

Aizu’s leader during the late Edo period was Matsudaira Katamori (1835–93).4 Closely involved in shogunal politics, he was appointed military governor (shugo) of Kyoto in 1862; as such, his primary duty was to ensure Tokugawa control of the imperial capital and – not coincidentally – of the imperial family. Katamori fulfilled his duties so well that in 1866 he was permitted to adopt as his heir Mito (Tokugawa) Nobunori, younger brother of the current shogun. Although the shogunate was pleased with Katamori, the imperial court was not, and he increasingly came into conflict with the self-styled ‘Imperial Faction’. This was an anti-shogunate coalition legitimated by imperial support, but controlled by warriors from Satsuma, Chōshū and other domains located throughout western Japan. In late 1867, Katamori resigned his position in an effort to relieve the growing tension between the imperial court and the shogunate.

The move was ineffective, and the opening salvo of the Boshin War followed shortly thereafter. A newly formed ‘imperial’ army consisting of conscripted commoners as well as hereditary warriors from the western domains captured Kyoto by year’s end. The young Meiji emperor (1852–1912) legitimized this action by officially ‘dismissing’ Shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu (1837–1913) and proclaiming a return to direct imperial rule. In reality, however, it was the leaders of the western domains, particularly those of Satsuma and Chōshū, who were in control.

The shogunate and its supporters did not let this so-called Imperial Restoration go unchallenged. On 1868.1.3 (27 Jan. 1868),5 Aizu and other pro-shogunate forces attempted to retake Kyoto. In the resulting battle of Toba-Fushimi, an imperial force consisting of some 4500 commoners and warriors defeated the shogunate’s 15 000 (primarily Aizu) warriors. Flushed with victory, the imperial army marched on Edo, trapping the shogun in the city. Yoshinobu quickly agreed to surrender, turning over control of Edo in exchange for his life and various perks. Thus it was that in May imperial forces were able to occupy Edo with a minimum of bloodshed.6 The city was renamed ‘Tokyo’ (‘Eastern Capital’) and made the seat of the new Meiji government.

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4 Katamori was the Edo-born sixth son of Matsudaira Yoshitake, a member of the Bizen Takase branch-family of the Owari Tokugawa line; his mother was from the Furomori family. He was adopted by Katataka on 27 Apr. 1846 and 4 months later was accorded an audience with Shogun Ieyoshi. Katamori married Katataka’s daughter Toshihime (1835–54) at age 16; he became a widower after only 4 years of marriage when she died childless in 1854.

5 Year–month–day, according to the Japanese calendar. Whenever possible, an approximate Western date has been provided.

6 Although the US officially maintained neutrality during the Boshin conflict, Americans then in Japan appear to have favoured the Aizu contingent. According to a 26 May 1868 diary entry by US naval surgeon Dr Samuel Boyer, ‘[f]rom all accounts the cause of Aidsu [sic] is not a bad one. We all are anxious to see him [Matsudaira Katamori] win the day . . .’ Dr Samuel Pellman Boyer, _Naval Surgeon: Revolt in Japan 1868–1869_, ed. E. and J.A. Barnes (Bloomington, IN, 1963), p. 48.
Despite the shogun’s capitulation, Aizu’s leader, Katamori, continued to resist the ‘new order’; for his efforts, the Meiji government declared him to be an enemy of the state and ordered his execution. Katamori’s response was to join the Ōuetsu Reppan Dōmei, an ‘anti-imperial’ alliance made up of 31 domains located in the Tōhoku region which eventually was able to field approximately 80,000 troops. With Sendai domain’s lord, Date Yoshikuni, serving as the league’s military commander, Matsudaira Katamori succeeded to the position of second-in-command.

Even before the opposing sides had clearly defined themselves, foreign nations were seeking to profit from Japan’s internal crisis; indeed, some like the United States sold obsolete and/or surplus weapons (including ships) to both sides. Rather than relying on, and

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7 Ōuetsu is an acronym formed by the Chinese characters for Dewa, Mutsu and Echigo, the home provinces of the ‘anti-imperial’ league. As part of the attempt to dissuade Imperial Prince Arisugawa no Miya Taruhito from leading the imperial army against Aizu, the lord of Sendai had organized a coalition of 14 domains that petitioned the new government not to attack either Aizu or Shonai domain (in modern Yamagata Prefecture). Following the Meiji government’s first rejection of the request, Sendai warriors assassinated a Meiji representative; 11 more domains joined the Ōuetsu and the petition for leniency was resubmitted to the imperial government. The government’s second rejection of this plea resulted in the addition of 6 more domains to the ‘rebels’ league and a formal alliance with Aizu against the so-called imperial forces.

8 This actually is a misnomer; in reality, both sides had an imperial scion as their figurehead leader. The young Meiji emperor legitimated the western faction, while the eastern faction claimed validation through its ceremonial head, Imperial Prince-Abbot Rinnōji, and his ‘second-in-command’, Kujō Michitaka, a one-time regent (kampaku) for the emperor.

hence becoming vulnerable to, any one particular nation, however, each side also had its own ‘independent’ arms source: Britain’s Thomas B. Glover in the case of the imperial faction, and the Dutch Schnell brothers, Eduard and ‘Henry’,10 in that of the ‘rebels’.11

At the very least, domains sought to provide their troops with .58-calibre Minie12 rifles, which were in essence improved muzzle-loading. Minies, however, were faster to reload as they used a paper cartridge system (powder and projectile being combined) and skirted bullets smaller than the barrel’s diameter (hence the process of ramming down was simplified). These firearms also tended to shoot more accurately than muskets thanks to being rifled, as well as having greater range and penetration.13

Because each domain provided its own soldiers with whatever arms it had available, there was a marked disparity in units’ firepower. A comparison of guns used by four pro-Imperial domains – Matsudai, Ômura, Satsuma and Nabeshima – reveals that some troops were armed with American-made Spencers14 (900-m range; 2000 for Nabeshima, 250 for Satsuma), while others possessed English Imperial rifles (1300-m range; 1300 for Nabeshima, 16 015 for Satsuma, 192 for Ômura). Matsudai’s force was fortunate in that it had access to 881 Sniders15 (1400-m range) and innumerable Remingtons, yet Ômura troops had to make do with 192 Sniders while Nabeshima units relied on a total of 300 Remingtons. Satsuma troops alone possessed some of France’s state-of-the-art Chassepot (shasupô: 1200-m range).16

10 K. Meissner, “‘General’ Eduard Schnell’, Monumenta Nipponica iv (1941), p. 398. Meissner contends that the Schnells were German rather than Dutch.
11 The Schnells’ extensive gun-running so angered the Meiji government that one contemporary foreign observer noted, ‘it would have gone hard with these gentlemen had they been captured.’ J.R. Black, Young Japan: Yokohama and Yedo 1858–79, ii (New York, 1883), p. 231.
12 In 1848/9, Capt. Claude Etienne Minie designed a 3-skirted cylindro-conical projectile with a conical cavity (which might or might not contain an iron cup). The skirting expanded upon firing, trapping the gas and so propelling itself forward. On the downside, Minie’s bullets had various problems; they were more complex to make and required more powder to ‘launch’, and the iron cup had a nasty tendency to separate from the body of the projectile as it left the barrel – something which increased ‘friendly-fire’ casualties.
14 Spencers repeating rifles were invented in the US in 1860. Foreign traders first introduced these 7-shot weapons into Saga domain some time between 1865 and 1868. Aizu forces, armed predominantly with muzzle-loading rifles, were consistently outgunned by Satsuma and Chôshû troops, the majority of whom seem to have had Spencers. Aizu shidankai hen, Aizu sensô no subete, p. 260. The breech-loading Spencers fired elongated 12.5 mm bullets which weighed 25 g. Adara Yoshio, Aizu Tsurugajo no onnatachi (Aizu-Wakamatsushi, 1981), p. 62.
15 The Snider rifle, first manufactured in 1866, essentially was a breech-loading redesign of the Enfield. Aizu shidankai hen, Aizu sensô no subete, p. 260.
16 Ikeuchi Gihachi, Aizu shi 9 (Aizu-Wakamatsushi, 1897), pp. 187–8. Shasupô, named after their designer, Antoine Alphonse Chassepot, were first produced in France in 1855; an improved version, with an 11-mm caliber, was introduced in 1866. The improved rifle was 130 cm long, weighed 4 kg, and used ammunition consisting of a 31.5-g bullet (including its paper cartridge). Napoleon III presented 2000 of these weapons to the new Meiji government. Op cit., p. 260. (My thanks to the editors for
Both sides were aware that some firearms were better than others, and both wanted the best. Unfortunately, it was a seller’s market; what the Japanese wanted, what they could afford, and what the foreign powers were willing to sell them were all separate issues. In 1867, a British 1851 Minié muzzle-loading rifle went for $36; a British 1853 .577-calibre muzzle-loading Enfield (and, given its similar problem, probably an American 1855 .58-calibre Springfield), $68; a British 1864 Snider (essentially a breech-loading Enfield), $104; and an American 1859 breech-loading .54-calibre Sharps, $120. Even more expensive were the American 1863 muzzle-loading .58-calibre Remington Zouave and 1860 breech-loading .52-calibre rapid-fire Spencer. In fact, to all intents and purposes, Spencers—which had a rate of fire 10 times that of Minié rifles—were the best weapons available; it appears that the 1866 bolt-action needle-fire Chassepot was available only as an official gift/’carrot’ from the French government.

By the time the imperial army invaded Aizu, it consisted of men drawn from 34 domains, primarily from those in western Japan. This force, numbering 74,539, consisted of approximately 67,969 general troops, plus five artillery units (120 men each: 600 total), two groups with 500 men each (1,000), eight groups with 100 men each (800) and 139 units of 30 men each (4,170). The arsenal available to these troops included 100 cannon of various types (e.g. Armstrongs, ‘four-pounders’, ‘six-pounders’, ‘boat-guns’, 12-cm portable ‘boat-guns’, 20-cm. mortars). The enemy was neither so well armed, nor so numerous.

While possessing a small number of similar weapons, members of the Ōuetsu Reppan Dōmei were forced to rely heavily upon older technology. Even Aizu, arguably the most advanced of the ‘rebel’ domains, lacked much of the up-to-date weaponry possessed by the invaders. This was despite the best efforts of the previously mentioned Schnells, who were operating out of Echigo Province’s Niigata, then Japan’s largest port and the eastern forces’ primary access to foreign resources. In fact, Niigata and the eclectic assortment of weaponry being delivered there were so important that Aizu ultimately committed over 300 troops to the harbour’s defence.

18 Both Enfields and Springfields were susceptible to jamming caused by ‘fatigue fracture’. The last of a Minié bullet’s three ‘skirts’ would break off and remain inside the barrel.
20 Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, p. 260.
21 The English-made Armstrong cannon was the newest on the market; only the imperial troops possessed these. The cannon fired incendiary as well as standard munitions. Aizu’s traditional, less powerful cannon could not challenge the Armstrong’s 3000-m range.
This was done by order of General Saigō Tanomo (1829–1903), Katamori’s highest-ranking personal retainer and the direct commander of Aizu’s army. This had been reorganized, following the devastating defeat at Toba-Fushimi, by incorporating townsmen and farmers as well as warriors into its force. All together, Aizu forces numbered approximately 7000 individuals divided among 41 or so individual units: 2800 warriors\(^{23}\) were split among 31 standard units, with an additional 200 being divided among two artillery units, one unit of engineers and one unit of shock troops. The remaining units consisted of both official and ad hoc irregular bands. Formal irregular squads consisted of both elites and commoners: 4000 peasant troops,\(^{24}\) 400 elderly warriors (members of the Black Warrior Group) detailed to northern Aizu; 900 from the Blue Dragon Group assigned to the eastern part of the domain; 1200 in the Red Sparrow Group directed to guard south Aizu; and 300 teenage members of the White Tiger Group ordered to protect the western section of the domain.\(^{25}\) Of the numerous quasi-independent informal bands, the one most prominent was the so-called ‘Women’s Army’, the Jōshigun.\(^{26}\)

For women of Aizu’s military caste to take part in hand-to-hand combat was not an aberration. Under the Tokugawa regime, technically all women of the warrior class were required to receive instruction in at least the basic martial skills required to protect their wards, to prevent their families from being dishonoured, etc. Just how much of such training they received, however, depended greatly upon individual families’ (or domains’) politico-economic circumstances. One [male] spokesman for officially unemployed, poverty-stricken samurai (kobushin) noted that young girls initially should be taught sewing, (samurai) hairstyling and self-sufficiency so that by adolescence they could ‘... do things for [themselves] and learn to read and write as well as the average [merchant class?] person’.\(^{27}\) Likewise, among the warrior families of the theoretically august Mito domain (ruled by one

\(^{23}\) Of these, 854 had been members of the former Tokugawa regime’s infantry (shōhōtae); of this group, 300 came to be led by Furuya Sakuzaimon (age 35).

\(^{24}\) Each of Aizu’s four districts was required to provide contingents consisting of 24-year-old male commoners. Each district’s group was overseen by the respective district’s village headmen, registrars and managers – all of whom were permitted to wear swords, thus elevating them to quasi-warrior status. Aizu-Wakamatsushi Shuppan Inkai, Aizu-Wakamatsu shi 5: gekidō suru Aizu (Aizu-Wakamatsushi, 1966), p. 134.

\(^{25}\) In accordance with an ancient Chinese prototype, warriors were assigned to formal age-specific squadrons: the ‘Black Warrior Group’ (Genbutai) consisted of males over the age of 50; ‘Blue Dragon Group’ (Seiryūtai), men aged 36–49; ‘Red Sparrow Group’ (Shujakutai), men aged 18–35; ‘White Tiger Group’ (Byakkotai), male adolescents aged 16–17.

\(^{26}\) Hayakawa Kiyoji, Shinjitsu Aizu Byakkotai (Tokyo, 1976), p. 221; Konishi Shirō, ed., Bakumatsu Ishin shi jiten (Tokyo, 1988), pp. 110–12. One of the more unusual units was that of the Shugentai; led by Machino Gennosuke, this 80-person group of commoners had been organized independently by, and included, quasi-Buddhist itinerant mountain priests (yamabushi). Yamabushi historically had served as spies and guerrilla fighters.

of three Tokugawa families eligible to provide shogun), women’s halberd (naginata) training was superficial, being seen as ‘spiritual discipline’ than ‘practical’. This is ironic, given that Mito’s isolation from actual power – and relative poverty – resulted in its retainers taking up arms against the shogunate in the mid-1800s.

Aizu’s women-warriors, on the other hand, received in-depth combat drilling, particularly in the use of the halberd. Educated to be equally skilled in the ‘ways of the pen and sword’, they also were indoctrinated with the belief that their duty was first to protect their domain and lord, and then their families.

This training was tested almost immediately after imperial forces invaded Aizu in late autumn. They demolished the town of Tonoguchi, and then moved on to Takizawa and Aizu-Wakamatsu, urban centres by then inhabited primarily by samurai females and males too young or old for combat.

By the second week of the invasion, most warrior family members had fled to Aizu-Wakamatsu and moved into Beidai, the elite residential area behind the city’s walls. This district came under attack on 1868.8.23 (8 October); although the invaders were driven out of the city, it was a costly victory for the Aizu contingent: 460 of its (male) warriors were killed.

Along with the residential area being torn apart by rifle-fire, it also was set aflame by the imperial forces’ use of incendiary cannonballs. By midday of the 18th, things had become so desperate for the defenders that the official watch bell was sounded, indicating to all that they should move into the well-fortified Crane Castle. The reactions of Aizu’s samurai women to the invasion were as varied as those of their male counterparts, for direct combat is not the same as sparring, and not all are ‘natural-born killers’. Women warriors responded by adopting one or more of the following options: suicide, evacuation to the countryside, withdrawal into Crane Castle and/or direct combat.

Many middle-aged, lower-ranking warrior women whose male providers had died in previous battles committed suicide rather than enter the castle or take refuge with peasant families. While some may have chosen to commit suicide because of the limited rations within the fortress, or because of emotional reasons, most did so out of perceived

29 Satsuma’s female warriors seem to have trained as seriously as those of Aizu; their participation in Satsuma’s own 1877 revolt against the Meiji state has been immortalized by Nagayama Umōsai in his 1877 woodblock print, Kagoshima’s Fighting Women’s Army. See B. Smith, Japan: A History in Art (Garden City, NY, 1964), pp. 268–9.
30 Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, p. 39.
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political necessity. Twenty households consisting of more than 230 mid-ranking military family members and their retainers committed mass suicide just as the imperial army was breaching Aizu-Wakamatsu’s outer city walls. These individuals were not the domain’s most wealthy; they were, however, among the more endangered, for they constituted the families of Aizu military officers.

The classic example of Aizu group suicides remains the self-destruction of the household of the aforementioned General Saigō

33 Yoshikawa, ‘Aizu fujoshi no junsetsu’, in Aizu sensō no subete, p. 75. See also Adara, Aizu Tsurugajō no onnatachi, p. 195.
34 Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, pp. 32–40; Hoshi Ryōichi, Byakkotai to iu na no seikun (Tokyo, 1987), pp. 62–71.
Tanomo, commander of the Aizu forces. Twenty-one of his relatives, plus at least four family retainers, died rather than flee or be captured. Among his immediate family, his mother Ritsuko (née Komori, age 58), younger sisters Misuko (26) and Yūko (23), wife Chieko (the 34-year-old sister of both Aizu commander Yamakawa Ōkura’s mother En and the mother of the sole Mt Iimori White Tigers survivor, Inuma Sadakichi), and Tanomo’s five daughters (Taeko, 16, Takiko, 13, Tatsuko, 9, Towako, 4 and Sueko, 2) committed suicide or were killed by other relatives. Also among the dead were branch-family members like Saigō Tetsunosuke Chikatora (67) and his wife, Kikuko (59); Komori Hideko (Tanomo’s 77 year-old grandmother and wife of Komori Kazutsuratada); Hideko’s daughter-in-law Miwako (24), Miwako’s son Chiyoyoshi (5), and her daughters Tsuneko (10) and Mitsuko (2). Retainers who committed suicide with Saigō’s family included Machiya Nobuhatsu (61), his wife, Fusako (59), his older sister Horoko (65), his second daughter, Tatsuko (24), and her son Hiko (2), attendants Akutagawa Jūzō and his wife (51), his daughter-in-law and older sister, and one Mori Kizaemon.

Not all chose to die so passively. For example, commander Inoue Okazumi’s married daughter Yukiko chose to fight as a member of the Jōshigun, while Kawahara Asako, the wife of the magistrate Zenzaemon, cropped her hair, grabbed her halberd and set out to seek death in battle after executing members of her family. (It was noted by an observer that Asako’s previously spotless white clothing had been drenched with fresh blood from her decapitation of her mother-in-law and daughter during the day’s mass suicide frenzy).

Group suicides were not limited to those who remained in the city. Of those women who had taken refuge in the countryside (option two) because they were caring for the elderly, sick or children, a small number killed themselves and their dependants despite being in relatively safe locations.

It must be emphasized that Aizu’s warrior women committed suicide not because of some blind adherence to an ideological concept like ‘loyalty’ (chūsetsu). Aizu’s inhabitants deliberately chose death for

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35 On 1868.8.22 and 8.23 (7–8 Oct.), Mt Iimori (360 m) was the site of a group suicide by an isolated Byakkotai group. Having fled to Mt Iimori to escape the invading imperial forces, 19 of the 20 youths committed suicide upon seeing Aizu-Wakamatsu’s city area (20 km from the mountain) set afame; to them, it appeared that the castle itself had fallen to enemy troops. Inuma Sadakichi (1843–1931) also had attempted to take his own life, but was found by Inasui Hatsuko, who carried him on her back for 12 km, so that he might be treated by a doctor, Miki Jūan, in Shio-gawa-mura. Miki’s use of the Western pharmaceutical sulfa powder prevented serious infection. Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, pp. 177–9; Aizu shidankai hen, Aizu senso no subete, p. 260.

36 The term Jōshigun is a post-Boshin appellation; both the appellation and the unusual kanji used to write it were selected in accordance with a historic Chinese precedent. Hayakawa, Shijitsu Aizu Byakkotai, p. 235.

themselves and their kin to prevent capture by ‘foreigners’,\(^{38}\) that is, the primarily western Japan-derived army of the new imperial government. The Meiji regime’s proclamation of a scorched-earth policy in regards to the ‘eastern rebels’, combined with rumours of an imperial army plan to slaughter all Aizu males and sell Aizu women to ‘Occidensals’, made death an appealing alternative to capture. Indeed, it was a given that, to paraphrase Mao, war is not a tea ceremony; Aizu samurai women harboured no expectations of leniency should they be captured.\(^{39}\)

The vast majority of these women, even those with dependants, chose the third option, i.e. to barricade themselves within Crane Castle itself and resist the invaders. While children, young adolescents and the elderly provided support services for those men and women defending the fortress’s walls, adult women in general were responsible for making ammunition,\(^{40}\) fighting the fires ignited by the attacking army’s incendiary cannonballs, cooking for the multitude and caring for the wounded.

II. *Jôshigun*: External Female Combatants

The last option open to samurai women – direct combat – was particularly suited to those without dependants and/or skilled in military arts, especially those trained in the use of swords, halberds or rifles. One group of such women fought in the front lines, neither asking for nor receiving quarter; it was they who formed the *jôshigun*. More accurately described as a platoon, this ad hoc volunteer force was solely organized by, and consisted of, women from middle-ranked warrior families. Although 20 to 30 women are believed to have made up the unit, the names of only 10 are known:\(^{41}\) commander Nakano Heinai’s wife Kôko (40 or 44 years old) and her daughters Takeko (22) and

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\(^{38}\) The presence of ‘domainial ethnicity’ has been used to describe the existence of the ‘us/them’ polarity. C. Totman, ‘Ethnicity in the Meiji Restoration: An Interpretative Essay’, *Monumenta Nipponica* 37 (1982), pp. 269–87.

\(^{39}\) The names listed above represent only a small sample of those who died. Among many notable suicides was Commander Inoue Okazumi (age 54), who assisted in the suicide of his wife, Tomeko (52), and eldest daughter, Chikako (21), and then killed himself.

\(^{40}\) The basic procedure was to take small pieces of paper, roll them around a thin bamboo pipe to form a paper tube, crimp one end, insert a bullet and firmly pack in gunpowder. After the cartridges were closed by twisting the open end, they were delivered to the sharpshooters by 10–13-year-old children. Yamakawa Misako, ‘Jôshichisai nite Aizu Tsurugajo naka ni jikken seshi shin’, in *Aizu Boshin sensô shiryôshû*, pp. 165–6. This article (pp. 165–71) was based on an interview with Yamakawa Misako when she was 58; it first appeared in *Fujin sekai* (July 1909). Appendixed to this is ‘Tsurugajo no omoidasu’ (pp. 172–3), an article written by her sister-in-law Sakai [née Koide] Takako which was first published in *Aizu shidan* 16 (Oct. 1937).

\(^{41}\) Yamauchi Tsuyoshi, ‘Nakano Takeko to jôshigun’, in *Aizu sensô no subete*, p. 86.
Masako (16); Hirata Kochō (Chôko, 18); Jimbô Yukiko (26);42 widow Okamura Sukiko (30);43 Okada Rinko; Suwa Kochiko;44 Yoda Makiko, the 35 year-old widow of commander Koike Genji;45 and her sister Yoda Kikuko (18).46

The Jôshigun was formed on 8.23/8 October, the day that the invaders swarmed into Aizu’s capital and the mass suicides occurred. When the castle’s warning bell sounded, Nakano Kôko and her daughters Takeko and Masako abandoned their residence in the Beidai ward of Aizu-Wakamatsu, and took up swords to participate in a sortie outside the castle’s walls as part of a mixed-gender force. Unfortunately, while the group was out fighting, the castle’s defenders barred the entry-gate; thus, when it attempted to return to the safety of the fortress, the band was unable to enter. It was at this point that the Nakano were joined by Yoda Masako, her younger sister Kikuko, and Okamura Sumako. According to Kikuko, all had previously – and independently – cropped their waist-length hair to shoulder length and tied it back in a young male’s hairstyle, complete with ponytail and sidelocks. Wearing white silk headbands, modified women’s upper garments with the sleeves tied back by white silk strips, young-male-style loose trousers (hakama) and straw sandals, the women armed themselves with halberds, as well as both long and short swords.47 Since the younger members of the Jôshigun lacked the blackened teeth of married women, they especially looked like adolescent males.

42 Jimbô Yukiko was the daughter of Inoue Takasumi and widow of Jimbô Shûri. Shûri (1838–68), the oldest son of Aizu warrior Jimbô Kuranosuke, was one of Aizu-Matsudaira Katamori’s closest aides during his time as military governor of Kyôto. He was ordered by Katamori to committed suicide as penance for his (Shûri’s) defeat at Toba-Fushimi. Yukiko also was known as ‘Sonoko’; there remains some uncertainty about her exact age – 18, 23, and 26 are all cited. Given her husband’s age, and reflecting the majority opinion, 26 appears to be the most accurate estimate.

43 In addition to Okumura’s husband having been killed in a previous battle, her children also were dead.


45 Hoshi, Byakkotai to iu na no seishun, p. 77. Koike Genji, who had been adopted into the Yoda family as a son-in-law, was killed in the battle of Toba-Fushimi (1868.1.3).

46 Mizushima [Yoda] Kikuko, ‘Aizu joshitai jûgun no omoidasu’, in Aizu Boshin sensô shiryô, pp. 184–6. Kikuko was the second daughter of Aizu retainer Yoda Komanomichi. She had lived in Kyoto with her sister and mother until the death of her brother-in-law Koike Genji at Toba-Fushimi, after which the family fled back to Aizu. Both Kikuko and her sister had been trained in the use of halberd by Monna Umeko, the wife of Aizu retainer Monna Jibu. Kikuko noted that she had planned to learn about using a ri from Umeko, but had been unable to do so. She acquired on-the-spot instruction during the siege of Crane Castle. The memoirs of Kikuko and Hirata Kochô are the primary sources for information about the Jôshigun.

47 Mizushima [Yoda] Kikuko, ‘Aizu joshitai jûgun no omoidasu’, in Aizu Boshin sensô shiryô, p. 186. Nakano Kôko, Okamura Sumako and Yoda Makiko wore modified kimonos; Kôko’s attire was slate-grey on black, Sumako’s was slate-grey, and Makiko’s was light yellow silk. The younger members of the band adopted shorter-length servants’ clothing; Nakano Takeko’s was of blue-green crepe, while that of her sister Masako was of purple crepe. Kikuko remembered herself as wearing a kimono of red-bean colour with vertical stripes.
Although her mother, Kōko, was the official head of the band, it was Nakano Takeko who was its driving force. Born in 1847, she was the eldest of Kōko’s and then-Wardroom Official Nakano Heinai’s three children. She subsequently was adopted by Lord Katamori’s personal retainer Akaoka Dainosuke, a master of both martial arts and calligraphy. Prior to being posted to Edo as the official ‘watchdog’ (ometsuke) for Aizu, Akaoka had served as halberd instructor to the ‘Lady of the Domain’, Katamori’s adopted younger sister Teruhime (1833–84). It was Akaoka who taught Takeko her initial combat skills and helped her sharpen them after she entered his training school in Aizu, where some 20 other girls were also studying halberd combat techniques.

Takeko and the other Jōshigun women cautiously made their way to Kawahara, a previously designated gathering place for Aizu forces just beyond the city’s western outer gate. It was there that they heard that Lady Teruhime had been evacuated to Bange, a post-station just to the north-west; the squad immediately decided to go to her aid.

Although Bange was 11.8 km from Crane Castle, the women managed to reach the post-station after three hours of struggling through heavy rain and sleet. Along the way, the group was joined by Jimbō Yukiko and Hirata Kochō, Takeko’s foster-sister. When the squad reached Bange, it rested at the temple of Hōkaiji, where according to one account its members were fed by locals who remembered Takeko as a teacher at the local school after her return from Edo. (Judging from the memoirs of one Jōshigun member, however, not all of the group’s provisions were attained so amiably; according to Yoda Kikuko, even though she had brought with her some 100–200 yen for pro-

50 Op. cit., p. 88. The second child, son Toyonori, was a 19-year-old member of ‘Red Sparrow Group’ during the Boshin War; he later became principal of Niigata Normal School and one of Niigata’s prefectural school inspectors. The youngest child, daughter Masako, was a 16-year-old member of the jōshigun.
51 Born in Edo, Teruhime was the third daughter of Kazusa Province Niino domain lord Hoshina Masahiro. (The Hoshina were descended from the same ancestor as the Aizu Matsudaira.) She was adopted by then-Aizu lord Matsudaira Katataka in 1843; Matsudaira Katamori was adopted as Katataka’s heir in 1846. Teruhime was married at 18 to Matsudaira Okudaira Daizen-daifu Masamoto (holder of Buzen-Nakatsu domain), but was divorced and returned to her Aizu-Matsudaira family, possibly in 1867 because of Katamori’s falling out with Shogun Yoshinobu, although this is unclear.
52 Yamauchi Tsuyoshi, ‘Nakano Takeko to jōshigun’, in Aizu sensō no subete, p. 79. While still within the city, Nakano originally had sought these others to form a squadron for the protection of Teruhime; although she failed to locate any of them at that time, it is suspected that some of these trainees were later incorporated into the jōshigun.
53 Kochō, like Takeko, had been adopted by Akaoka Dainosuke.
visions, she and other members of the squad ‘snatch[ed] lumps of sugar [and presumably more substantial food] like naughty boys from peasants’.\(^{54}\)

Late that same night, Takeko led a delegation to seek permission from the commander of the Machiya Cannon Brigade, also in Bange, to join his forces. He refused outright, arguing that if the enemy saw Aizu women participating in combat, they would take it as a sign of the domain’s weakness and desperation. Nonplussed, Takeko repeated her request, ultimately threatening to commit suicide if her squad was not permitted to link up with his regular force. The commander urged the women to wait until the arrival of some former shogunate soldiers and then to return with them to the castle. Since it had become clear that Lady Teruhime was not at Bange, but was in fact still in Crane Castle, Takeko tentatively consented on behalf of the group.

The next morning (9 October), the squad was taken to Takaku post-station (part of present-day Aizu-Wakamatsu City), where it received an audience with field commander Kayano Gonbei. Although impressed by the earnestness of their pleas to be allowed to fight, Kayano also felt that the women should go back to the castle and placed them in the care of newly arrived commander Furuya Sakuzae-mon and his troop. Once away from Kayano, however, Furuya designated the Jōshigun as a separate squad with Takeko as its leader. That having been decided, the women remained in Takaku overnight, staying in the home of Jōshigun member Hirata Kochō’s natal family. Late that night, Kikuko was awakened by, and participated in, an intense conversation between Takeko and her mother, Kōko, over what to do about Takeko’s 16-year-old sister, Masako. Given her youth, it was thought that she should be placed in hiding with a local family. Masako, who also was awakened by the conversation, strongly disagreed with such a plan. The four women discussed how to prevent being taken alive as well as how to protect Masako. In the end, fear of what the enemy would do should they discover Masako in hiding led to the decision to keep her with the squad.\(^{55}\)

The Aizu forces awoke the next morning (10 October) to find that their position suddenly had become precarious. An imperial force consisting of Tosa, Ōgaki and Chōshū warriors armed with up-to-date rifles had moved into position at Echigo road’s Yanagi bridge,\(^{56}\) located some 5000 m south of Takaku, directly between Aizu’s troops and Crane Castle. The Aizu contingent split into three divisions; the first, with Furuya’s group as its nucleus and supplemented by the Jōshigun and a volunteer force of peasants, moved south along Echigo road and


\(^{56}\) Yamauchi, ‘Nakano Takeko to jōshigun’, in Aizu sensō no subete, p. 83. Yanagi bridge (Yanagibashi, ‘Willow bridge’) also was known as Rui bridge (Ruibashi, ‘bridge of tears’), since executions were conducted there.
directly attacked the imperial army at Yanagi bridge. The second division, commanded by Oba Kyôheï, formed the force’s right wing, which was to detour to the east and attack the left wing of the imperial force. The third division, commanded by Kayano, formed Aizu’s left wing and attacked from the Yonezawa Road.

Because of the imperial army’s greater size, the plan of attack was to strike suddenly and break through, rather than engage in an extended battle. The fôshigun women had no illusions about what to expect. Committed to the battle and determined not to be taken alive, they charged directly into the line of fire despite being armed only with halberds and swords. As the conflict degenerated into hand-to-hand combat, the imperial troops realized that they were facing female warriors and a howl to take the women alive was raised. Many of these overconfident invaders died at the hands of fôshigun members. Indeed, Takeko ‘...with her tied-back hair, trousers, and steely eyes, radiated an intense male spirit and engaged the enemy troops, killing five or six with her halberd’. She was prevented from killing more when she was shot through the chest (and/or head) at the peak of battle. Her sister Masako attempted to sever Takeko’s head from her body in order to prevent the head from being taken as a trophy; however, due either to Takeko’s matted hair or to Masako’s own exhaustion, she was unable to complete the task and required assistance from Aizu soldier Ueno Yoshisaburô. The head then was wrapped in a scarf and, after the battle, taken back to Bange’s Hôkaiji temple for cremation.

The ‘battle of Yanagi bridge’ raged throughout most of that morning. During 20–30 minutes of especially intense combat, Hirata Kochô had been surrounded by enemy soldiers and had to be rescued by Jimbô Yukiko. Both supposedly later died in battle. However, an oral history concerning Jimbô Yukiko’s death was passed down through the family of Yoshimatsu Hayanosuke, company commander of the Tosa troops at the Yanagi bridge battle. According to this account, after the fight, Yoshimatsu had visited Chômyôji, the encampment of Ôgaki domain’s forces; there he discovered a defiant Yukiko being interrogated. Her stubborn refusal to provide information resulted in her being condemned to death; Yoshimatsu, however, was so moved by her spirit that he lent her his own short sword, thus enabling her to commit suicide.

57 Yamauchi, ‘Nakano Takeko to jôshigun’, in Aizu sensô no subete, p. 85 (emphasis added).
58 Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, pp. 44–5.
60 Supposedly from 9 a.m.–12 p.m. Mizushima [Yoda] Kikuko, ‘Aizu Joshtai jûgun no omoidasu’, in Aizu Boshin sensô shiryôshu, p. 183. This is based on a memoir dictated by Mizushima Kikuko when she was 85; it first appeared in Nichiyô hôchi cxvii (7 Nov. 1932).
61 This again is according to Mizushima Kikuko. Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, p. 45.
62 Yamada, ‘Nakano Takeko to jôshigun’, in Monogatari: Aizu sensô hiwa, p. 244.
Similarly, the details of Hirata Kochō’s involvement in the battle were remembered as part of her great nephew Nakamura Hideo’s family history. Born in Aizu domain’s secondary Edo residence in 1847, Kochō was the second of Hirata Monjūrō’s three daughters (Tomiko being the eldest and Yoshiko the youngest). Like Takeko, Kochō had been adopted by halberd-master Akaoka Dainosuke and thus became Takeko’s younger foster-sister (hence their shared Akaoka-given nicknames, ‘Kochiku” and ‘Kochō”, respectively). After Takeko’s death, Kochō became deputy commander of the Jōshigun, eventually returning to Crane Castle with other Jōshigun members and participating in the castle’s defence.

Outnumbered and outgunned, Aizu forces suffered high casualties at Yanagi bridge. In the end, while the second Aizu division reached the castle and safety, Aizu divisions 1 (with the Jōshigun) and 3 were forced to retreat back to Takaku. There, they regrouped and withdrew to Bange. It was during this period that Takeko’s head received death rites at Hōkaiji, with her halberd being donated to the temple.

On 13 October, Jōshigun survivors were ordered by Kayano to return to the castle; he provided them with an escort of Aizu warriors (six, all armed with rifles, according to Kikuko) and the tiny band made a dash for Crane Castle. Gaining access to the fortress following the exchange of the passwords ‘mountain’ and ‘valley’, the women found that within the castle living conditions were rapidly deteriorating. (Still, when told that they would be accorded an audience with Katamori, the group managed to purchase five carp as a gift for him.) Taken to the castle’s keep, the Jōshigun met first with Lord Katamori and his heir, Nobunori, both of whom listened to the women’s report of the battle. It was only then that Jōshigun members received an audience with Lady Teruhime, who had been in the main castle compound the entire time.

III. Jōhei: Internal Female Combatants
While Jōshigun members never fought again as a unit after returning to the castle, they did join other female combatants (jōhei) in the defense of the fortress. The formal siege of Aizu-Wakamatsu’s castle had begun on 8 October, the day of mass suicides. For the next 30 days, the castle’s continued resistance rested with the women within the fortress. Although she took tonsure (possibly as a safety measure should the castle fall) and adopted the religious name of Shōkei’in, Lady Teruhime continued to direct the activities of some 600 women

65 Hayakawa, Shijitsu Aizu Byakkotai, p. 82. Katamori’s ‘audience gift’ to the women appears to have been candy.

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and children as well as the care of more than 500 wounded soldiers from her headquarters in the castle’s keep. She also used all means at her personal disposal, including supernatural aids, to prolong the castle’s resistance. Teruhime arranged for two Nichiren priests to work for the defeat of the invading army by a continual recitation of the Lotus Sutra; she also enabled them to perform esoteric rites of protection by providing them with a mandala painted by Nichiren himself.\textsuperscript{66}

By 9 October, the many who had chosen to survive rather than join in the suicides of the previous day had either gathered in the castle or sought refuge with peasants. On the 10th, while the Jōshūshigun was fighting in the battle of Yanagi bridge, the imperial army increased pressure on the castle bybombarding it using Armstrong cannon placed on Mt Odagawa (371 m high, 1500 m south-east of the castle). Unable to silence the cannon, some of the Aizu women attempted to limit damage ‘whenever a cannonball landed, [by running] to the spot and [covering] it with wet mats and rice sacks before it could explode’.\textsuperscript{67}

Treatment of the many castle defenders who were wounded during this assault taxed the resources of those providing medical care. Things inside the castle were made more desperate by the arrival that same day of over 1000 warriors, many of whom also were gravely wounded. The injured were so numerous that only the most seriously wounded could be housed in the three buildings (Nisshinkan, the domain’s elite academy, Daishoin and Koshoin) that served as the castle’s medical facilities. Located within the Nisshinkan was the Nōsōbyōin, the actual medical clinic. This had been established as Aizu’s first Western-style medical care institution, probably during the 1850s.\textsuperscript{68} During the siege, the castle’s female ‘medics’ tried to follow European medical protocol, particularly in regards to the use of sterile techniques to prevent infections, but their supplies of alcohol (specifically, shōchū, an inferior-grade, high-alcohol content liquor) and bandages were soon exhausted. When gauze and cotton cloth ran out, sash and kimono material was used as bandages; as the brocaded silk became soaked with blood and pus, it provided an excellent medium for breeding germs. Cases of blood poisoning and gangrene increased rapidly.

\textsuperscript{66} Miyazaki Tomihachi, ‘Tōgun jimbutsu jiten’, in Aizu sensō no subete, p. 205. The two priests are identified as ‘Nikkai’ of Bange’s Daini-ji and ‘Nishō’.


\textsuperscript{68} It was founded by Matsumoto Ryōjun (1832–1907). Born the second son of Sakura domain’s doctor Satō Taizen, Ryōjun was adopted by the shogunate’s head physician, Matsumoto Ryōsuke, an advocate of Western medicine. He was sent to Nagasaki to study Western medical practices with the Dutch physician J.L.C. Pompe, and subsequently served as personal physician to Shogun Iemochi. It was after this that Ryōjun returned to Aizu-Wakamatsu and established the Nōsōbyōin School of Medicine. By 1868, he had trained 4 disciples; it was they who went on to spread Western medical procedures throughout Aizu while Ryōjun became Katamori’s personal physician. Komatsuyama Rokurō, ‘Matsudaira Katamori kankei ninmyō jiten’, in Tsunabuchi Kenjō, ed., Matsudaira Katamori no subete (Tokyo, 1984), p. 210.
Treatment also was hampered by the fact that, unlike the imperial army, Aizu’s defenders lacked chloroform, thus limiting the potential for surgical treatment.

In accordance with Western beliefs about nutrition, the wounded and sick initially were fed beef, chicken, fish, vegetables and cows’ milk to help them recover. Such foodstuffs were in short supply, and the need to provide food for the wounded resulted in women making risky forays outside the castle. In one instance, when guerrilla-band leader Sagawa Hirobē’s 60-year-old mother left the fortress to ‘buy’ vegetables for the wounded, an enemy soldier tried to rob her. She stabbed him to death with her dagger and returned to the castle, presumably with vegetables, although that is not recorded.69

Even the fort’s supply of basic staples was totally insufficient; at the onset of the siege, food stores had consisted of 11.9–14 bushels of polished rice (from Teruhime’s own supplies: reserved for the wounded), 479–995 bushels of unpolished rice (for unwounded male and female combatants), minimal salt and bean paste, old beetle-infested powdered glutinous rice (used to make the gruel eaten by unwounded non-combatants) and dried pond snails. The degree of deprivation suffered by the defenders may be judged from the fact that mothers were unable to nurse their infants, many of whom died as a result.

Shortages of medical supplies and food were not the only problems confronting the castle’s defenders. There also were sanitation problems posed by dead bodies piling up everywhere; this crisis was solved by making the best of a desperate situation. As the water supply within the castle dried up, the dead were dumped into the empty wells. When these were filled to capacity, the elderly risked their own lives perfunctorily to bury the dead in an open area of the castle’s Second Compound.70 A more immediate threat was posed by the fact that, by 11 October, ammunition had become so scarce that old women were detailed to collect enemy bullets for reuse71 by the fortress’s sharpshooters, a mixed-gender group which included fūshigun survivors and women like the indomitable Yamamoto Yaeko.

Yamamoto (Nijjima) Yaeko (1845–1932), 23 years old at the time of the siege, was the third daughter of gunnery instructor Yamamoto Gonpachi (killed while defending the castle).72 Her older brother

71 Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, p. 48.
72 Nijjima [Yamamoto] Yaeko, ‘Dansō shite Aizujō ni hairitaru tōji no kushin’, in Aizu Boshin sensō shiryōshu, p. 176. This article, written by Nijjima Yaeko when she was 61, first appeared in Fujin sekai (Nov. 1909). See, too, Hayakawa, Shijitsu Aizu Byakkotai, p. 206. She also had an older sister, Urako, and younger brother, Saburō (died age 21 at Toba-Fushimi). Around 1857 she married Kawazaki Takanosuke, a rōnin from a Tsushima Izushi doctor’s family. He studied Western science, particularly physics and chemistry, became a dependant of her older brother, Kakuma, and came to teach Western subjects at Aizu’s Nishihankan Academy. It was then that she met and
Kakuma, who had trained using Dutch firearms in 1857, had taught her Western gunnery skills; Yaeko was competent in the use of both old-style muskets (gebëru)\(^{73}\) and the most up-to-date repeating rifle, the Spencer. Indeed, on 8 October, having had her hair cropped by another female combatant, Takagi Tokio, Yaeko began participating in night sorties armed with two swords and her own Spencer, wearing men’s clothing and occasionally women’s armour. When she returned that first night, she encountered Kawahara Asako, the previously mentioned magistrate’s wife. Having sought death in combat outside the castle, a frenzied Asako had been swept back behind the fort’s walls by a wave of retreating Aizu warriors. Leaving her to her own devices, Yaeko, Ebara Toshiko, the aforementioned Takagi Tokio and Tokio’s younger sister formed a bodyguard for Teruhime and Katamori’s two secondary wives, Saku and Kiyo.\(^{74}\) After the bombardment began, Yaeko instructed women in the manufacture of ammunition. She also assumed command of the (male) soldiers manning the old-fashioned ‘four-pounder’ cannon guarding the entrance of the fortress’s Third Compound – the only cannon directed against the deadly Armstrong on Mt Odagawa. She and her crew remained at that station even during the height of the bombardment on 28 October, when at least 1208 cannonballs were fired into the fortress.\(^{75}\)

In the end, the castle’s defenders were forced to surrender after a month-long siege, though not due to any lack on their part. On 18 October the Ōuetsu Reppan Dōme’s figurehead leader, Prince-Abbot Rin-noji, had submitted a letter of apology to the new Meiji government, accepting a demotion to commoner status in exchange for a pardon.\(^{76}\) On 25 October, Yonezawa domain surrendered to imperial forces, though those Yonezawa troops who managed to reach Crane Castle fought on to the end. The next day, the invading army breached Aizu-

married him. Yaeko was a force to be reckoned with in more ways than one; it was said that since the age of 13, she had been able to lift 60 kilos to her shoulders four times without stopping.

\(^{73}\) Gebëru, from the Dutch word for ‘rifle’, were made in Holland; they were first imported into Japan in 1832 at Nagasaki. Although originally a flintlock, the 1845 model used percussion caps. Unfortunately for them, Byakkotai members were issued with flintlock gebëru, inaccurate muzzle-loading weapons with an effective firing range of 940 m. Aizu shidankai hen, Aizu sensō no subete, p. 259. The round 17.5-mm bullets weighed 26.8 g. Adara, Aizu Tsurugajo no onnatachi, p. 62.

\(^{74}\) According to her letter to author Hiraishi Benzo, who relied on it to a fair degree for his Aizu Boshin sensō (Tokyo, 1926). Hayakawa, Shijitsu Aizu Byakkotai, p. 237.


\(^{76}\) In 1870 he adopted the name ‘Fushimi Mangu Yoshihisa’. Later that same year, he went to study at the Prussian military academy. He returned to Japan in 1877 and, as he had raised to the Third Imperial Rank in 1872, inherited the Kita-Shirokawa no Miya line. He was readopted by his former emperor-father and returned to imperial prince status. In 1880 he was raised to the Second Imperial Rank, in 1892 served as a lieutenant-general in the army, and became head of the Imperial Guards division in 1895. He then led troops against Taiwanese aborigines, but became ill in Tainan and died at the age of 49. His hōmyō is Chingō’in. Nihon Rekishi Gakkai, Meiji Ishin jinmei jiten (Tokyo, 1981), pp. 1073–4.
Wakamatsu’s defences and began torching the city. A 72-hour bombardment of the fortress began on 30 October; on 31 October, Sendai domain surrendered; finally, on 5 November, Katamori ordered Crane Castle’s surrender. Even then, it was not until two days later that the castle’s defenders hung the prerequisite white flags of surrender at the fortress’ main gates.

When the castle fell, the Imperial army acquired 4956 prisoners (including 576 mid-ranked warrior women, plus 84 elite warrior women), 77 51 cannon, 78 2845 guns of various types, 79 25 000 rounds of ammunition, 1300 lances and 81 halberds. 80 The negotiated articles of surrender stated, among other things, that men older than 60 and boys younger than 14 were not to be harmed; that women were to be allowed to live in their homes without harassment; and that Katamori and his heir, Nobunori, each were limited to 25 male attendants and 12 female attendants, but were permitted to keep all of those women’s children with them. 81 Both were taken to Tokyo and placed under house arrest: Katamori with the Ikeda of Inaba domain, Nobunori with the Arima of Kurume domain. Teruhime survived the castle’s fall as well and was permitted to return to her natal family in Tokyo. Five of Aizu’s major commanders were taken to Tokyo to be beheaded; one of them, the same Kayano Gonbei who had refused to allow the fōshi-gun into battle, committed suicide before reaching the capital. The fortress’s male warriors were transferred to nearby Inawashiro, and the wounded (with family members) were sent to hospitals in Aogimura and Miyamamura. The majority of Crane Castle’s survivors were forced to seek temporary shelter in nearby Shiokawa village, since over two-thirds of Aizu-Wakamatsu lay in ruins.

The Meiji government initially prohibited the burial and/or cremation of Aizu’s warrior dead; the bodies were to be left to the wild animals. Health concerns led to a cancellation of this prohibition. Instead, the dead were ordered to be buried in the old execution grounds at Yanagi bridge, as befitted those deemed traitors. 82 Battles during the Boshin War, from that of Toba-Fushimi to Crane Castle’s surrender, took the lives of 2973 members of Aizu’s warrior class; 2558

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77 Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, p. 194. 570 warrior women, according to Hoshi, ‘Aizuhan no kakyūrō to hanron’, in Matsudaaira Katamori no subete, pp. 124–5.
78 All of Aizu’s cannon were ‘4-pounders’. Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, p. 194. There were 51 cannon according to the Nihon Shiseki Kyōkai’s Aizuhan chōkōroku 6 (Tokyo, 1969), p. 467.
79 Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, p. 226. These were primarily ‘Japanese guns’ (wajin: muskets adapted from those introduced by the Portuguese at Tanegashima in 1543), and muzzle-loaders (gebēru: both flintlock and percussion-cap), plus a small number of Spencer repeater rifles.
80 Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, p. 194. The imperial forces found 23 000 rounds of ammunition, 1300 lances, and 81 halberds, according to Anzai Sōji, Fukushima no Boshin sensō, (Aizu-Wakamatsushi, 1981), p. 201.
of these were soldiers, 233 were women, 130 were men over the age of 60 and the rest were children.\footnote{Op. cit., p. 216. The magnitude of Aizu’s sacrifice becomes clear when compared to the number of war dead from all other domains belonging to the Ouetsu coalition: 7308 male combatants. Aizu male warriors made up 26\% of the Boshin (male combatant) casualties.}

Although eventually Katamori’s new infant son was allowed to resume the Aizu-Matsudaira family name and Katamori himself was made a viscount,\footnote{Miyazaki, ‘Tōgun jimbutsu jiten’, Aizu sensō no subete, p. 212. His previous heir, the adopted Mitō scion Nobunori, returned to his natal family in 1873. Katamori eventually would be promoted to the position of ‘Tōshōgū Miya no tsukasa’ and in 1893 was raised to the ‘Sr. Third [Court] Rank’ shortly before his death. Satō Masanobu, ‘Rekidai hanshū oyobi Matsudairake keifu’, in Matsudaira Katamori no subete, pp. 240–1.} the Aizu-Matsudaira family and its vassals remained in disgrace. In late 1869 the infant domain leader Kataharu and 1700 Aizu warrior families were forcibly relocated to Tanami, a tiny domain at the northernmost tip of Honshū utterly inadequate to support them.\footnote{Tanami’s productivity theoretically equalled 30 000 koku, one koku being approximately 5 bushels of rice – the amount that would feed one man for one year. Ikeuchi, Aizu shi 9, p. 197. Aizu’s pre-Boshin income had been set at 280 000 koku.}

There is little information about the fate of most of Aizu’s female combatants. At least four of the jōshigun survived the collapse of Aizu, although one of them (Yoda Kikuko) had been wounded.\footnote{Kikuko was wounded during the bombardment of Crane Castle; according to her, although shot twice, she required only three days to recuperate from her wounds. Hayakawa, Shijitsu Aizu Byakkotai, p. 83.} Hirata Kochō married Toda Emon, a former Aizu samurai who became a Yamagata prefectural police officer. During her final years she lived in Tokyo’s Asakusa district, dying there in 1885 at the age of 38.\footnote{Yamada, ‘Nakano Takeko to jōshigun’, in Monogatari: Aizu sensō hihou, pp. 245–7.} Nakano Masako married Gamō Seiichirō (the fourth son of Yamaura Tetsushirō\footnote{Yamauchi, ‘Nakano Takeko to jōshigun’, in Aizu sensō no subete, p. 88. The identity of Gamō Seiichirō is a matter of debate; he also has been identified as Yamaura Tetsushirō himself. (Yamada, ‘Nakano Takeko to jōshigun’, in Monogatari: Aizu sensō hihou, 241).},) survived the forced relocation to Tanami domain and eventually settled in Hakodate on Hōkaidō. Yoda Kikuko married Mizushima Atsushi, the eldest son of a former low-ranking Aizu retainer, also survived the relocation and resettled in Hakodate. Her older sister Makiko accompanied her, eventually becoming a Hōkaidō Girls’ School teacher and ‘house mother’.\footnote{Mizushima [Yoda] Kikuko, ‘Aizu joshitai jūgun no omoidasu’, in Aizu Boshin sensō shiryōshū, pp. 185–90.} As for artillery-commander Yamamoto Yaeko, she remained a forceful personality throughout her life. She divorced her husband shortly after Crane Castle’s surrender and moved to Kyoto to care for her brother Kakuma, who later became council chairman for metropolitan

\footnote{War in History 2001 8 (4)}
Kyoto. In 1876 she married Niijima Jō, and along with him and Kakuma went on to found Kyoto’s Dōshisha University.\footnote{Miyazaki, ‘Tōgun jimbutsu jiten’, in Aizu sensō no sabete, p. 213. Dōshisha, besides being a Christian educational institution, was one of the first universities in Japan to offer women training for a career in nursing.}

Perhaps the most extreme example of Aizu female warrior survival, however, is that of Yamakawa Sakuko (Sutematsu, 1860–1919). The youngest daughter of Aizu commander Yamakawa Ōkura\footnote{Yamakawa, ‘Jūshichisai nite Aizu Tsurugajō naka ni jikken seshi shin’, in Aizu Boshin sensō shiryōshū, p. 164. Yamakawa family members who experienced the siege from inside the castle included Ōkura’s 52 year-old mother, En (Karakoromo), his sisters Futaba (25 years old), Miwako (age uncertain), Misako (17 years old), Towako (11) and Sakuko (9), and his wife, the 19 year-old Toseko. His younger sister Misako (1852–1931) married ex-Aizu retainer Koide Mitsuhiro. Upon the death of her husband, Misako returned to her natal family. She then went abroad to further her education. After studying French in Russia, Misako served as lady-in-waiting to Empress Haruko (Shoken), the royal consort of the Meiji emperor. She received the Fifth Court Rank, and died at age 79.} and his formal wife, Toseko, at the age of 9, she had seen her mother die from gunshot wounds received while protecting Teruhime during the final assault on the fortress. Having survived both Crane Castle’s capture and the domain’s forced relocation, 12-year-old Sakuko found herself chosen in 1872 by Meiji officials to be sent to America. One of five government-sponsored female students, she was to acquire the knowledge that would enable her to serve as a model of the new ‘Meiji woman’. She was placed with Dr Ronald Bacon’s family in New Haven, Connecticut, while attending school. After graduating from Vassar College in 1882, Sakuko then spent two more months studying nursing at New Haven Hospital, becoming the first Japanese person to be certified in nursing.\footnote{Ito, ‘Tsurugajō no onnatachi’, in Monogatari: Aizu sensō hiwa, p. 158. It was while she was in New Haven that she changed her name to ‘Sutematsu’. Her interest in nursing appears to have been due in part to her experiences during the siege of Crane Castle.} The following year she returned to Japan, where the Meiji Japan’s total reuniﬁcation was articulated by her arranged marriage to widower Oyama Iwao (1842–1916), one-time commander of Satsuma’s Second Cannon Squad on Mt Odagawa, that is the man who had directed the final bombardment of Crane Castle.\footnote{Rekishi Shunjūsha, ed., Tsurugajō (Aizu-Wakamatsushì, 1984), p. 96.} It is worth noting that even then Sakuko kept true to her Aizu heritage, for she remained just the independent type of female that the Meiji state became committed to remaking into a ‘good wife and wise mother’.

IV. Conclusion

In 1868, forces ostensibly dedicated to a return to direct imperial rule brought an end to the Tokugawa shogunate. This change in government has been described as everything from a ‘restoration’ to a revolution, one that occurred because the shogunate had politically alienated those on whom it relied most, the members of the warrior
class. The limitations of such a paradigm become clear when it is recognized that the new Meiji state was forced to deal with numerous military challenges to its authority for as much as a decade after its establishment.

As demonstrated throughout the Boshin civil war, many of the old warrior class participated in these insurrections. By their actions, the

Joshigun and other of Aizu’s ‘female combatants’ demonstrate the degree to which substantial numbers of the mid-ranked members of Japan’s military class had been committed to the established order, i.e. the Tokugawa shogunate. These individuals, and their male counterparts, were not dissatisfied with the status quo and indeed had every reason to fight to maintain it. Moreover, there is no indication that they perceived themselves to be ‘anti-imperial’, although they were decidedly ‘anti-western domain’. At a time when Japan faced the threat of Western imperialism, warriors of both genders fought to preserve a system which had protected ‘their’ country for more than one thousand years.

After armed opposition had been suppressed, the Meiji state sought to consolidate its powering by co-opting the support of those it had so recently defeated. It did this by integrating the former champions of resistance, female as well as male, into the ‘new’ social elite.

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