

ANGLO-SATSUMA WAR

The short two day Anglo-Satsuma War grew out of an incident on September 4 1862. Shimazdu Hisamitsu, father and regent of the daimyo of the Satsuma region of south Kyushu, was returning home from Edo with his entourage along the Tokaido road after his regular biannual visit when their passage was interrupted by a small party of Englishmen on horseback at the village of Namamugi, near to Kawasaki. Hisamitsu's retainers attacked 3 British citizens who they claimed had failed to yield the right of way – under the rule of *kiri-sute gomen* samurai were allowed to kill people of lower class for lack of respect. One of the British, Charles Lennox Richardson, a merchant, later died of his wounds and the event became known as the “Richardson or Namamugi Affair”.

This particular incident was simply one of many at that time which shows the tensions in Japanese society following Japan's “opening up” in the previous decade and which would lead ultimately to the demise of the shogunate and the Meiji Restoration by the end of the decade. The interpreter of the first American Consul had been assassinated in similar fashion the previous year and the Choshu port of Shimonoseki was shelled by western warships the following year after Choshu took the lead in attempting to drive the foreigners out of the country. The Tokugawa government, the *bakufu*, had a difficult line to tread, balanced between the need to conciliate foreign powers demanding the full implementation of new treaty rights and xenophobic samurai and provincial daimyo accusing it of treason and collusion with the hated foreigners. A regiment of soldiers from Hong Kong had to be brought into the country in 1864 and stationed in the capital to protect foreign representatives.

Richardson's death sparked outrage from Europeans for violating the extraterritoriality they enjoyed under the terms of the Unequal Treaties imposed upon Japan in previous years. Lieutenant-Colonel Edward St. John Neale, the British Chargé d'Affaires, demanded from the *bakufu* (the central government of the Tokugawa Shogunate) an apology and a huge indemnity of £100,000 (\$440,000 in Mexican silver dollars), representing roughly 1/3 of the total revenues of the *bakufu* for one year. Neale threatening a naval bombardment of Edo, the Tokugawa capital city, if the payment was not made. Britain also demanded the Satsuma Domain arrest and trial the perpetrators of Richardson's

death, and £25,000 compensation for the surviving victims and the relatives of Richardson.

The *bakufu* was led by Ogasawara Nagamichi, governing in the absence of the *Shōgun* Tokugawa Iemochi who was in the Imperial capital of Kyoto. Eager to avoid trouble with European powers, Ogasawara negotiated with France and Great Britain on 2 July 1863, on board the French warship *Sémiramis*, apologized and paid the indemnity to the British authorities.

The Satsuma refused to apologize, to pay the compensation of £25,000 demanded by the British, or to convict and execute the two Japanese *samurai* responsible for the murder, arguing that disrespect to the *daimyō* was normally sanctioned by the immediate death of those showing disrespect. Legally, their claim was allegedly invalid, due to the extraterritoriality clauses in the unequal treaties forced upon Japan. Japanese customary law did not usually apply to foreigners. However, politically, Satsuma felt it could not be seen as submitting to European demands in the very anti-foreign context at that time in Japan.

The British wished to make a point against anti-foreigner outrages in Japan. Other anti-foreign troubles were occurring throughout the country at the same time, reinforced by Emperor Kōmei's 1863 "Order to expel barbarians". The European powers chose to react militarily to such exactions: the Straits of Shimonoseki had already seen attacks on American, Dutch and French ships passing through, each of which had brought retaliation from those countries.

Eventually, on 14 August 1863, a multinational fleet under Admiral Kuper and the Royal Navy commenced the bombardment of Shimonoseki to prevent further attacks on western shipping there. The American-European operations against the Japanese succeeded.

Following protracted and fruitless negotiations with Satsuma that had taken over a year, Lieutenant-Colonel Edward St. John Neale, the British Chargé d'Affaires eventually had had enough. Under British Government instructions, he required the Royal Naval Commander-in-Chief of the Far East and China Station to coerce Satsuma into complying with the British Government's demands. On the 5th, a vice-minister from Edo visited Lieutenant-Colonel Neale, but far from opposing the expedition of the European empire actually transmitted that the Shogunate intended to send one of its steamers with the squadron. The steamer in question however, did not join the expedition.

The British squadron left Yokohama on August 6. It was composed of the flagship HMS *Euryalus* (with Colonel Neale on board), HMS *Pearl*, HMS *Perseus*, HMS *Argus*, HMS *Coquette*, HMS *Racehorse* and the gunboat HMS *Havock*. They sailed for Kagoshima and anchored in the deep waters of Kinko Bay on August 11, 1863. Satsuma envoys came aboard *Euryalus* and letters were exchanged, with the British commander pressing for a resolution satisfactory to his demands within 24 hours. The Satsuma clan prevaricated, refusing to comply. The deadline expired, and diplomacy gave way to coercion. Deciding to put pressure on Satsuma, the Royal Navy commander seized three foreign-built steam merchant ships (*Sir George Grey*, *Contest*, *England*, with an aggregate value of about \$300,000/£200,000 sterling) belonging to Satsuma which were at anchor in Kagoshima harbour, to use them as a bargaining tool. Picking their moment, just as a typhoon started, the Satsuma forces on shore vented their anger by firing their round shot cannons at the British ships.

Surprised by this hostility, the British fleet responded by first pillaging and then setting on fire the three captured steamships. Then, after nearly two hours getting ready (they had not expected or intended to get into any exchange of fire with Satsuma), a line of battle was formed, which sailed along the coast of Kagoshima and fired cannon shells and round shot. One of the British warships, the gunboat *Havoc*, set five Ryukyuan (from Okinawa) trading junks on fire.

The naval bombardment claimed five lives among the people of Satsuma (the city had been evacuated in anticipation of the conflict), and 13 lives among the British (including Captain Josling of the British flagship *Euryalus*, and his second-in-command Commander Wilmot, both decapitated by the same cannonball). Material losses were considerable, with around 500 wood-and-paper houses burnt in Kagoshima (about 5% of Kagoshima's urban area), the Ryukyuan embassy destroyed, and the three Satsuma steamships and five Ryukyuan junks destroyed. The Satsuma forces were slowly pushed back; however the fact that the British were not expecting such armed resistance meant that their ships ran low on food and ammunition, forcing a premature retreat of the British navy. The encounter was face-saving for Satsuma, and was even claimed as a victory by the Japanese side, considering the relative number of casualties. The British ships did not land troops or seize cannons (which would have

signalled the absolute defeat of Satsuma), Kuper having decided that enough was enough.



Japanese and British plans of the engagement, August 21-22 1863

Satsuma however later negotiated and paid £25,000 (which they borrowed from the bakufu and never repaid, due to the fall of the bakufu in 1869 and its replacement by the Meiji administration). They never produced or identified Richardson's killers, but despite this, the reparation received was enough to obtain an agreement by Britain to supply steam warships to Satsuma.



Satsuma representatives

Satsuma was in the forefront of Japanese attempts to industrialise and the British fleet was engaged by locally produced cannon which was able to cause some degree of damage. However the military might displayed by this incident led the Satsuma leaders to realise the futility of the exclusionary policies (*sakoku*) followed by

the Tokugawa *bakufu* and made them even more determined to follow their own path and adopt to a more open door approach.

The conflict actually became the starting point of a close relationship between Satsuma and Britain, which became major allies in the ensuing Boshin War. From the start, the Satsuma Province had generally been in favour of the opening and modernization of Japan. Although the Namamugi Incident was unfortunate, it was not characteristic of Satsuma's policy, and was rather abusively branded as an example of anti-foreign *sonnō jōi* sentiment, as a justification to a strong European show of force.

An interesting historical footnote to this incident was that a teenaged Tōgō Heihachirō was manning one of the cannons used to defend the port, and is reported to have attributed his future career as head and "father" of the Imperial Japanese Navy to this moment. Togo would achieve immortality in Japan after leading the Japanese fleet during the battle of Tsushima in 1905 which annihilated the Russian fleet and led to Japanese victory in the war.

Satsuma negotiated with their former enemy to send a delegation of Satsuma students to Britain to study British industry and technology. The British government was happy to recognise the power of Satsuma and promoted this visit. In the event 19 young men were sent to the UK and Europe in 1865 where they travelled extensively and sent back regular reports on their findings. As part of the independent Satsuma policy being followed, these same young men represented Satsuma at the 5th International Exposition in Paris in 1867 in a deliberate act to show Satsuma's independence from the Japanese government, which also sent a delegation to the event.

Upon returning to Japan, many of these young men played an important role in the modernisation of Japan following the Meiji Restoration of 1868.