



# Shinsengumi: The Shogun's Last Samurai Corps

By Romulus Hillsborough

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## Shinsengumi: The Shogun's Last Samurai Corps By Romulus Hillsborough

*Shinsengumi: The Shogun's last Samurai Corps* is the true story of the notorious samurai corps formed in 1863 to arrest or kill the enemies of the Tokugawa Shogun. The only book in English about the Shinsengumi, it focuses on the corps' two charismatic leaders, Kondo Isami and Hijikata Toshizo, both impeccable swordsmen. It is a history-in-brief of the final years of the Bakufu, which collapsed in 1867 with the restoration of Imperial rule. In writing Shinsengumi, Hillsborough referred mostly to Japanese-language primary sources, including letters, memoirs, journals, interviews, and eyewitness accounts, as well as definitive biographies and histories of the era.

The fall of the shogun's government (Tokugawa Bakufu, or simply Bakufu) in 1868, which had ruled Japan for over two and a half centuries, was the greatest event in modern Japanese history.

The revolution, known as the Meiji Restoration, began with the violent reaction of samurai to the Bakufu's decision in 1854 to open the theretofore isolated country to "Western barbarians." Though opening the country was unavoidable, it was seen as a sign of weakness by the samurai who clamored to "expel the barbarians."

Those samurai plotted to overthrow the shogun and restore the holy emperor to his ancient seat of power. Screaming "heaven's revenge," they wielded their swords with a vengeance upon those loyal to the shogun.

They unleashed a wave of terror at the center of the revolution - the emperor's capital of Kyoto. Murder and assassination were rampant. By the end of 1862, hordes of renegade samurai, called ronin, had transformed the streets of the Imperial Capital into a "sea of blood."

The shogun's administrators were desperate to stop the terror. A band of expert swordsmen was formed. It was given the name Shinsengumi ("Newly Selected Corps") - and commissioned to eliminate the ronin and other enemies of the Bakufu.

With unrestrained brutality bolstered by an official sanction to kill, the Shinsengumi soon became the shogun's most dreaded security force.

In this vivid historical narrative of the Shinsengumi, the only one in the English language,

author Romulus Hillsborough paints a provocative and thrilling picture of this most fascinating period in Japanese history.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"So, what do the Hell's Angels and the Shinsengumi have in common? They both had a propensity for violence, a strict internal code of conduct, and an alarmingly excessive reaction to insult, real or perceived. Also, they probably would have slaughtered each other on sight." —*Goodreads*

#### From the Author

*Shinsengumi: The Shogun's Last Samurai Corps* is the only English-language history of the shogun's notorious hit-squad in Kyoto during the final years the shogun's government. It is my most controversial book. I think that much of the controversy is due to the language. I experimented in this book, repeating certain phrases to stress certain characteristics of the Shinsengumi leaders, including their "propensity to kill." Readers either love it or slam it. But I stand behind my original language and would not change a single word.

#### About the Author

Romulus Hillsborough, originally from Los Angeles, lived in Tokyo for sixteen years, immersing himself in the study of Japanese language, history and culture. Most of his reading focused on major literary and historical works of Japan. He was particularly drawn in by the tumultuous history of the final years of the shogun's government and the return of political power to the Emperor.

To compliment his reading, the author traveled to historical cities and towns around Japan where his samurai subjects lived and died and where the revolution to overthrow the shogun unfolded. During that time he worked as a writer for a popular weekly magazine in Tokyo and later as a contributing journalist to a number of other Japanese publications.

Upon returning to the United States, Hillsborough settled in San Francisco. Since then, he has returned to Japan many times to resume his travels to historical cities and deepen his understanding of his samurai subjects.

Romulus Hillsborough is an acclaimed expert in the field of Japanese history and culture. His books have been published in seven languages. The author has appeared numerous times on television and radio including The History Channel special "The Samurai," first aired in 2003, and an NHK television special about the Shinsengumi in 2004. He has spoken at such internationally recognized venues as the Asian Art Museum (San Francisco, CA), the Pacific Asia Museum (Pasadena, CA), the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (Tokyo) and the Japan Information Center, Consulate General of Japan (San Francisco, CA).

Hillsborough's other books include "Ryoma: Life of a Renaissance Samurai," "Samurai Tales," and the forthcoming "Samurai Revolution: The Dawn of Modern Japan Through the Eyes of the Shogun's Last Samurai." Hillsborough currently lives in San Francisco.

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