

## **Himeji in the Modern Age**

### **Imperial Army Base**

Japan abolished its domains in 1871, replacing them with the modern system of prefectures. Himeji became the administrative seat for Shikama Prefecture (now part of Hyōgo), and the residential quarters in the castle's Third Bailey were converted into government offices. With the introduction of mandatory conscription in 1873, the castle became a military base, home to the Imperial Army's 10th Regiment. The area in front of the main gate—once occupied by the homes of samurai warriors—was turned into a parade ground, and a barracks and other facilities were built inside the compound. More facilities were added to the castle and surrounding city in 1898 to accommodate additional army units. The age of the shogun and the samurai may have been over, but Himeji remained an important military center.

### **New Threats and Preservation Efforts**

The end of feudalism created challenges for the castle. Neglect took its toll on the historic buildings, and repair work by the military was hampered by funding shortages. Finally, in the 1930s, the government approved a major restoration. World War II soon interrupted the project—and brought new threats. American bombing raids destroyed the city of Himeji in 1945, but the castle escaped mostly unscathed. Renovation work at the castle resumed in 1950 with the rebuilding of the city and was completed in 1964. As part of the project, the keep was completely dismantled, repaired, and reassembled.

### **A Crumbling Watchtower**

Under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868), the lords of Himeji were responsible for maintaining the castle. Their departure at the end of the feudal age led to a period of neglect and disrepair. Buildings like this watchtower near the keep deteriorated almost to the point of collapse, prompting the first restoration efforts during the Meiji era (1868–1912).

### **Jōnan Parade Ground**

A district in front of the castle's main gate where samurai warriors used to live, was cleared to make way for an Imperial Army parade ground.

### **World War II Air Raids**

The city of Himeji was heavily damaged by air raids in 1945, but the castle survived with little damage. There are local stories about a stray firebomb that landed in the

castle without exploding.

### **Castle Under Camouflage**

A camouflage cover was placed over the keep to protect it from American air raids.

### **Broken Replacement Pillar**

Procuring the massive timbers needed to repair the castle was not easy. A tree trunk that was supposed to replace one of the keep's main pillars broke while it was being transported from the Kiso Mountains in the Japanese Alps.

### ***Shachi* Removed from the Keep**

*Shachi*, mythical fish-like creatures that adorn the roofs of Japanese castles, were believed to protect the buildings from fire and other threats. Himeji's *shachi* were removed and replaced when the keep was dismantled for repairs in the 1950s.