

History-Making Gun Battles: The Siege of Osaka

The Siege of Osaka Castle, fought in 1614 and 1615, was the final clash between the Toyotomi and Tokugawa families. They had feuded for power throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and the ultimate victor was Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the first of the Tokugawa shoguns and the founder of a dynasty that would last until 1868. Ieyasu understood the power of firearms; when he attacked Osaka Castle, he brought a battery of cannons from Europe.

The siege was the climax of a long rivalry. Fifteen years earlier, Ieyasu had gained control of Japan by subduing the Toyotomi family and their remaining retainers. The final holdouts were left with a single stronghold: Osaka Castle, ruled by Toyotomi Hideyori (1593–1615). But Ieyasu still saw the Toyotomi family as a threat, and in 1614, he moved to destroy them once and for all.

Ieyasu's armies had newer, better guns, including large-caliber matchlocks called *ōzutsu*. They used these heavy guns to bombard the castle day and night, supplemented with barrages from the 10 cannons Ieyasu had obtained from the Dutch and English. The bombardments did not harm the castle's heavy stone foundation, but they are said to have damaged its wooden buildings and demoralized the fortress's defenders. According to one account, a cannon ball breached the apartments of Hideyori's mother, Yododono, and destroyed a tea cabinet as she was using it.

Ieyasu's tactics proved to be successful. On the eighth day of the fifth month, the young head of the Toyotomi family committed ritual suicide as the castle burned, and the long feud came to an end.