

History-Making Gun Battles: The Battle of Nagashino

The 1575 Battle of Nagashino is perhaps the best-known gun battle of the sixteenth century. Its outcome helped to prove the tactical value of firearms, which were still relatively new weapons at the time.

The battle took place on the Shitaragabara Plain, in what is now Aichi Prefecture, in central Japan. On one side was Takeda Katsuyori (1546–1582), son of Takeda Shingen (1521–1573), who had built one of the most fearsome armies of the era. Opposing him were the combined forces of Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) and his retainer Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the future shogun. Katsuyori's forces had surrounded a castle controlled by an ally, and Nobunaga and Ieyasu were seeking to break the siege.

According to the popular account, the battle was decided by the 3,000 gunners in Nobunaga's army. Nobunaga was known as a brilliant general and an enthusiastic adopter of firearms. He positioned his gunners in three rows behind palisades on the opposite side of the plain from the castle, then drew the elite Takeda cavalry into a charge. Firing in volleys, the gunners cut down the sword- and spear-wielding horsemen, and Nobunaga and Ieyasu went on to win the day.