

## **Guns and the Struggle for Power**

Guns were introduced to Japan during a period of prolonged conflict. The Ashikaga shogunate (1336–1573) began to lose its grip on the country in the 1460s, leaving a power vacuum that provincial daimyos battled to fill for more than a century. Firearms helped determine the outcome of these conflicts; daimyos who adopted firearms gained an advantage against those who didn't.

Other changes in warfare made the impact of guns even more significant. When muskets were first introduced in 1543, daimyos were already realizing the effectiveness of armies composed mainly of foot soldiers called *ashigaru*, who had begun displacing mounted samurai on the battlefield. Firearms, which could be used with much less training than weapons like bows, were vital to the role played by *ashigaru*. They soon became the main gunnery troops of daimyo armies.

### **The Early Adopter: Oda Nobunaga**

Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) is the daimyo most closely associated with firearms. Nobunaga was a cunning and tenacious leader who set out to establish himself as ruler of Japan. He deposed the last Ashikaga shogun in 1573 and went on to defeat or subordinate most of his rivals. Nobunaga's campaign gained great momentum, but his bid to become shogun ended with his betrayal and assassination in 1582.

Nobunaga was known as an innovative and unconventional strategist. In 1550, at the age of 16, he was already training his troops in the use of firearms, and soon he was using gun-wielding *ashigaru* to great effect. At the Battle of Nagashino in 1575, a unit of 3,000 gunners in Nobunaga's army cut down the charging cavalry of Takeda Katsuyori (1546–1582). Takeda was a rival daimyo and one of the last obstacles preventing Nobunaga's rise to power.

### **The Militant Insurrectionists: Ikkō-Ikki**

The Ikkō-ikki were not daimyos; they were a loose collection of peasants, low-ranking samurai, and militant Buddhist monks who rebelled against daimyo rule. The fighting forces of the Ikkō-ikki were especially quick to adopt and manufacture firearms.

In 1569, the Ikkō-ikki clashed with the Oda family for control of what is now the city of Nagoya. In 1570, Nobunaga's army was ambushed by an Ikkō-ikki force that included warrior monks from Negoroji Temple, an early center of gun production. The insurrectionists' gunners helped force the great daimyo into retreat, and these attacks were the start of a decade-long conflict that Nobunaga won at great cost.