

History of the Koka Ninja

The Koka ninja demonstrated fortitude and patience, dedicating themselves to their missions without seeking personal glory. Despite their low profile, they were connected to some of Japan's most famous historical figures.

During the Sengoku period (1467–1568), warlords from other regions hired Koka ninja as mercenaries and relied on ninja intelligence-gathering skills to achieve their ambitions.

First Significant Battle (1487)

In 1487, shogun Ashikaga Yoshihisa (1465–1489) launched an invasion against the Rokkaku domain of Omi Province (in present-day Shiga Prefecture). The Koka ninja rallied around the Rokkaku family, with some using surprise tactics to repel the shogun's army. Others launched a daring night raid, in which the shogun was injured. These attacks brought the Koka ninja to wide attention, and the ninja families who participated in the

battle were revered.

Close Ties with Influential Figures

The Koka ninja were loyal to warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), who was instrumental in the unification of Japan. In June 1582, Nobunaga was unexpectedly attacked by his own general Akechi Mitsuhide (1528–1582) and died at Honnoji Temple in Kyoto.

Mitsuhide's forces then tried to prevent Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), another of Nobunaga's supporters, from returning to his base in Okazaki (Aichi Prefecture). It is said that the ninja offered Ieyasu sanctuary when he passed through Koka, thus strengthening their relationship with the Tokugawa family.

Nobunaga's death was avenged two weeks later when Mitsuhide was defeated. The Koka ninja repeatedly came to Ieyasu's aid throughout various other battles until he eventually became shogun.

Siege of Fushimi Castle (1600)

The siege of Fushimi Castle was a small but historically significant battle leading up to the more famous Battle of Sekigahara later in the year that brought an end to fighting among the warlords who were ruling local domains around the country. Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) had assigned Torii Mototada (1539–1600) to protect the castle. Torii was headquartered there with his household when it was placed under siege by a massive force under Ishida Mitsunari (1563–1600), a general who bitterly opposed Ieyasu's bid to rule the country.

Torii held out for 10 days, but ultimately the castle fell. Torii and his family all perished, but a group of about 100 ninja fought for the Tokugawa side, defending the castle alongside Torii and his forces. While many died during the siege, they are remembered as heroes whose sacrifice paved the way for the later success of Ieyasu's efforts toward the unification of Japan. After Ieyasu became shogun in 1603, he invited the descendants of the Koka ninja who died in the siege to defend the castle at Edo (modern-day Tokyo).

The Edo Period (1603–1867)

Tokugawa Ieyasu unified Japan and became the first Tokugawa shogun in 1603, ushering in a period of peace. Some of the ninja took positions in central or local government or became engaged as escorts, guards, and sentinels for coastal defense.