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A Monument to Culture and Achievement: The Samurai Suit of Armor and Katana at Gettysburg College

Abstract

Of the many artifacts found in Gettysburg College's Musselman library, perhaps the most unusual and seemingly out of place may be the centuries-old replica of a samurai suit and katana standing guard over visitors and students from an oversized glass case on the first floor. Though hard to miss, their connection with Gettysburg College is not so obvious. A plaque located below the suit reads, "Samurai Armor and Warrior Katana; Late 19th Century; Gift of Major General Charles A. Willoughby; Class of 1914." These artifacts represent hundreds of years of the ancient Samurai tradition in Japan, a crucial element of traditional Japanese culture and history that experienced a resurgence even within the twentieth century. They also symbolize relations between the United States and Japan during and after World War II as narrated by Major General Charles A. Willoughby, Chief of Intelligence under Douglas MacArthur. How and why Major General Willoughby acquired such artifacts is unclear; however, a character study set against the backdrop of this period in history allows us to extrapolate potential theories. Documents within the Gettysburg Special Collections & College Archives offer insights into the man Willoughby was and posit deeper questions about the suit and katana's journey to the college. This essay illuminates the connection between the college and an ancient culture half way around the globe as well as one of the murkiest mysteries at Gettysburg College.

Keywords

samurai suit Gettysburg College, katana Gettysburg College, samurai Musselman library, samurai suit pennsylvania

Disciplines

Asian History | Higher Education | History | History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology | Japanese Studies

Comments

Written for HIST 300: Historical Methods.

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A Monument to Culture and Achievement:
The Samurai Suit of Armor and Katana at Gettysburg College

Carolyn Hauk

History 300: Historical Methods

October 2nd, 2018

Musselman Library, the hub of scholarship at Gettysburg College, is full of artifacts teeming with history. However, these might go unnoticed by bustling, frantic hordes of students. While some artifacts draw obvious connections to Gettysburg, others hold a history with the College that is less obvious. Towards the back of the library's first floor, in a sizeable glass case, a visitor can find a 19th century replica of a 16th century Samurai Suit and Katana. Though it is hard for the naked eye to miss, their history with Gettysburg College is not so obvious. The plaque located below the suit reads, "Samurai Armor and Warrior Katana; Late 19th Century; Gift of Major General Charles A. Willoughby; Class of 1914." While this information may answer immediate questions such as, "What exactly is this?" or "How did these come to a small Pennsylvania college?", the Samurai Suit and Katana represent a couple layers of hidden history. First, they represent hundreds of years of the ancient Samurai tradition in Japan, a crucial element in Japanese culture and history. They also symbolize relations between the United States and Japan during and after World War II as narrated by Major General Charles A. Willoughby, Chief of Intelligence under Douglas MacArthur in the Pacific. How General Willoughby acquired such artifacts remains unknown, but by studying these layers of history and Willoughby's character, one is able to extrapolate potential theories.

Though the suit is likely to be a 19th century reproduction, it closely replicates the armor of 16th century Samurais.¹ In 16th century Japan, *daimyos*, vassals of the shogun, engaged in competitive combat to assert their power and dominance throughout the land. Because of this, *daimyos* needed military support from samurai in their provinces.² This became known as the Warring States Period, lasting from the end of the Onin War in 1467 to the establishment of the

¹ Dina Lowy, interview by Carolyn Hauk, Gettysburg College, PA, September 26th, 2018.

² Mitsuo Kure, *Samurai: An Illustrated History* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2002), 73.

Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603. At this time, the daimyos had not considered unifying the country with one centralized leader. Instead, they continued as warring states until Oda Nobunaga took power in the middle of the century.³ For the second half of the 16th century, Nobunaga led a widespread campaign with Tokugawa Ieyasu to unify Japan. It was not until 1567 that Japan witnessed some semblance of unity as Nobunaga invaded Kyoto. Over the course of the century, Japan flourished with the establishment of Zen Buddhism and patronage from daimyos. Large cities dedicated to commerce sprung up, opening new diplomatic and commercial opportunities for Japan towards the end of the Warring States Period. As a result, Japan established its own outpost in Manila and traded with European nations.⁴

The Tokugawa Shogunate that followed in 1603 ushered in two and a half centuries of unwavering peace under control of the samurai class, otherwise known as the Edo period.⁵ During this time, however, commerce with Western nations was banned and Japan became reliant once again on its own agricultural production.⁶ But when production began to lag and famine induced peasant uprisings, change was necessary. “There is a modernization effort in the 19th century,” explains Professor Dina Lowy, Gettysburg College. “They [Japan] no longer want to represent a shogun.” Commerce with European nations reopened, incorporating Western ideas into Japanese culture, especially within its military. “Moving forward, there is a re-embracing of the martial culture. Do we want to distance ourselves and forget it, do we want to honor the past? What do we want to remember?” remarks Lowy.⁷

³ Kure, *Samurai: An Illustrated History*, 73.

⁴ “The Warring States Period,” Nakasendo Way, accessed September 23rd, 2018.
<https://www.nakasendoway.com/the-warring-states-period/>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Tokugawa Period and Meiji Restoration,” HISTORY, accessed September 30th, 2018.
<https://www.history.com/topics/japan/meiji-restoration>.

⁷ Personal interview with Dina Lowy.

Considering such questions, the suit could represent an interest in remembering Japan's evolving military history during the 19th century. It recalls multiple components of a traditional 16th century samurai suit. Among these are a *kabuto* (helmet) adorned with a rabbit symbolizing speed, virility, longevity, and immortality in Japanese folklore. The lacing on the suit, *odoshi*, conveyed which clan a samurai belonged to through the pattern and the color. Other components include a *do* (cuirass), *sodo* (shoulder guards), *kote* (armored sleeves), a *kusazuri* (armored skirt), *suneate* (shin guards), and *haidate* (thigh guards).⁸ But the suit that stands in the Gettysburg library is too intricate to belong to a common foot-soldier. Instead, it would have belonged to an elite samurai. A *gosannokiri* crest that appears repeatedly on the suit signifies that the wearer belonged to an imperial family or high-ranking samurai families. "Samurai families would have designed new crests during this period. When the imperial family gave titles, the crest would have been bestowed unto the soldier, recognizing him as a major military figure," Professor Lowy noted.⁹ It is most likely that this samurai was a member of imperial family, the Oda family, the Ashikaga or the Toyotomi family.¹⁰ But just how does something of such historical significance to Japan find its way to Gettysburg?

In a letter to Gettysburg College President Henry Hanson dated November 2nd, 1945, Major General Charles Willoughby reminisced on his time at Gettysburg College.

In a place between activities, between the war ended, between the surrender ceremony in Yokohama, and this slow and complicated new task, the government of defeated Japan, I have given thought to Gettysburg College and the recollection of my brief year, the senior year, there, in the delightful atmosphere of a small American College, that seems more delightful as the years go on, more significant against the bewildering background of Bataan, Corregidor, the jungle of

⁸ "Samurai Armor", Gettysburg College, accessed September 23rd, 2018.

<https://www.gettysburg.edu/library/m/qf/samurai.dot>

⁹ Personal interview with Dina Lowy.

¹⁰ Dina Lowy, "Samurai Armor and Katana," *Thirty Treasures, Thirty Years: Stories from Musselman Library Collection* (Musselman Library Staff Publications, Gettysburg College, 2011) 7.

Papua and New Guinea, and the painful trek across the Pacific wilderness, into the Philippines, and then into Japan.¹¹

In the remainder of the letter, Willoughby referred to gifts he made to the college of a Samurai Sword from a defeated general in the Campaign of Northern Luzon, a large map used by Japanese Emissaries to negotiate surrender at Manila, and three boxes of Allied Geographical monographs of every landing in the Pacific.¹² To understand just how Willoughby acquired such artifacts requires a study of his service during World War II and an understanding of how the military was central in his life.

Born in 1892, Willoughby grew up in Heidelberg, Germany under his birth name Adolph C. Weidenbach. He attended various schools including the Grand-Ober-Real-Schule in Heidelberg and studied at Lycée de Nancy in France.¹³ He spent most of his college career at the University of Heidelberg, majoring in philology, French, Spanish, and German. In 1910, as Europe drew nearer to war, he joined relatives in America to continue his education and enlist in the Regular Army. He served as a private, corporal, and sergeant of Co. Y, 5th US Infantry until he enrolled in Pennsylvania College—now known as Gettysburg College—as a senior and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1914.¹⁴ Though his birth name appears in the college's yearbook, he had by this time adopted his mother's maiden name "Willoughby" likely in response to growing anti-German sentiment. An article from a later issue of the *Gettysburg College Bulletin* described Willoughby as, "an excellent student but really did nothing to distinguish himself from most of the

¹¹ Charles A. Willoughby, letter to Henry Hanson, November 2nd, 1945, *MS-024: The Papers of the Major General Charles A. Willoughby*, Box 13, Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

¹² Charles A. Willoughby, letter to Henry Hanson.

¹³ Senior Class of 1914, *1915 Spectrum* (Gettysburg, PA: Gettysburg College, 1915) 35.

¹⁴ "Charles Andre Willoughby (04615)," Public Information Office, Department of War, Washington D.C., Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

rest of his classmates”); but he was a brother of Phi Delta Gamma and an Assistant Instructor in the German Department.¹⁵

Willoughby was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in 1916 before the U.S. entered World War I. In 1917, he was sent overseas with the American Expeditionary Force and he was trained as an aviator in Chateauroux, France. After the war, Willoughby served as a military attaché for Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador. Throughout the 1930’s he continued his military training, he attended the Infantry School at Fort Benning, the Command Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, and graduated from the US Army War College in Washington, D.C.¹⁶ Though Willoughby did not know it at the time, this would all be preparation for serving under one of the most esteemed leaders of the American military, General Douglas MacArthur.

Willoughby was assigned to Intelligence Headquarters in Manila in 1940. Shortly after his arrival, he garnered the attention of MacArthur, who appointed him Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence of the US Army Forces. Within months, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the U.S. was at war. When Japan shifted its focus from Hawaii to the Philippines, Willoughby was forced to evacuate Corregidor and follow MacArthur to Australia in March of 1942.¹⁷

For the rest of 1942, MacArthur used New Guinea as a base to discover Japanese weak points, establish an air field, and then use that air power to cut off supplies from Japanese troops.¹⁸

Meanwhile, MacArthur and Willoughby also established Intelligence organizations to aid

¹⁵ Rob Brent, “On the Cover: Brig.-General C.A. Willoughby,” *The Gettysburg College Bulletin*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Gettysburg College: February 1943), Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, 3; Senior Class of 1914, *1915 Spectrum*, 35.

¹⁶ “Gen. C.A. Willoughby, Who Served in Pacific with MacArthur, Dies at 80,” *Gettysburg Times*, October 26th, 1972, 1; Campbell, “Major General Charles A. Willoughby: General MacArthur’s G-2,” 87.

¹⁷ Campbell, “Willoughby,” 88.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 88.

American advancements in the Pacific. Among these were the Central Bureau, a code-breaking unit used to intercept and translate Japanese correspondence, the Allied Intelligence Bureau, an underground organization in the Philippines used to destroy Japanese facilities and spread propaganda, the Allied Geographical Section, used to collect geographical information, and the Order of Battle Section, created to locate Japanese units, weapons, leadership, and morale. It was Willoughby's Central Bureau that broke various Japanese codes and allowed MacArthur to successfully invade Hollandia on April 22nd, 1944 during the New Guinea Campaign. Meanwhile, Lt. General Adachi Hazato was leading his 18th infantry towards Aitape and Hollandia. Willoughby assumed Hazato's army posed no major threat due to exhaustion and low supplies, despite ULTRA air reconnaissance and POW interrogations saying otherwise. On the night of July 10th, Adachi attacked American forces sparking a month-long battle that cost 3,000 American casualties.¹⁹

Willoughby's intelligence reports were crucial during the Philippine Campaign yet they tended to grossly underestimate Japanese strength. The Allied invasion of Leyte started on October 20th, 1944. Ten days later, Willoughby reported that it was unlikely that the Japanese would send in troop reinforcements just as the Japanese unloaded 11,000 additional troops. As General MacArthur prepared for the invasion of Luzon in December, Willoughby estimated around 137,000 enemy troops were stationed at Luzon—the actual number was closer to 260,000. It was the Allied Intelligence Bureau that instructed Filipino guerillas on Luzon to destroy its infrastructure, aiding Filipino and U.S. victory in the Battle of Luzon, January 15th, 1944.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid,89.

²⁰ Ibid.

Following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan announced its unconditional surrender to the United States on August 14th, 1945. Just four days later, Major General Willoughby met with a 16-body Japanese delegation, headed by Chief of Staff to the Imperial Army, Lieutenant General Torashiro Kawabe.²¹

While MacArthur was occupied with reestablishing the Japanese government, Willoughby turned his attention to the Communist efforts of the Soviet Union, as the repatriates from Soviet POW camps returned to Japan with a number of Communists.²² In a letter to Henry Luce, a publisher of LIFE magazine, Willoughby wrote: “Tokyo is an international arena, en miniature, and we are confronted by the Communist menace. What we used to do vis-à-vis the Japanese, in observation, we now must do vis-à-vis the Soviets.”²³ As he became more engaged with Counterintelligence in Japan, Willoughby reopened the Richard Sorge Spy Ring case from 1941 with the intent of prosecuting Sorge’s accomplice, Agnes Smedley, three years after Sorge’s execution. However, when Willoughby presented his report to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, it was tabled. Later, the US Army used Willoughby’s report to accuse Smedley, but retracted the accusation within a week and apologized to Smedley.²⁴ Willoughby expressed disdain towards the Defense Department’s actions in a letter to Robert McCormick, owner and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*, dated February 21st, 1949: “When the War Department, after publishing it, retracts the report publicly, they ruined me professionally right then and there...I feel that I should

²¹ Edward Drea, “Tortured History,” *World War II*, Vol. 26, No. 1. (May 2011) 40; Campbell, “Willoughby,” 40.

²² Campbell, “Willoughby,” 89.

²³ Charles A. Willoughby, letter to Henry Luce, February 10th, 1948, *MS-024: The Papers of the Major General Charles A. Willoughby*, Box 8-3, Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

²⁴ Campbell, “Willoughby,” 89.

fight this, even though the Army has already discredited me inferentially.”²⁵ In this same letter, Willoughby expressed his continued—almost obsessive—beliefs in Smedley’s guilt. In his book *Shanghai Conspiracy*, he wrote about the Sorge Spy Ring Case and continued to preach his accusations of Agnes Smedley. Moreover, Willoughby embarked on a campaign to spread awareness of Communist regimes. He concluded an article in *The American Mercury* with accusations that America was ignorant towards “the American Communist hierarchy that is slated to rule the Soviet Republics of North America, in an orgy of blood and terror, as they have ruled in Hungary.”²⁶

In the later years of his service under MacArthur, Willoughby persistently accused several countries of susceptibility to Communism—Spain among them. Willoughby sent correspondence to *Saturday Evening Post* Editor-in-Chief Ben Hibbs,²⁷ Chief of Staff General Omar Bradley,²⁸ U.S. Senator Harry Cain,²⁹ P. Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi of Vatican City,³⁰ and Madame Chiang

²⁵ Charles A. Willoughby, letter to Robert McCormick, February 21st, 1949, *MS-024: The Papers of the Major General Charles A. Willoughby*, Box 8, Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

²⁶ Charles A. Willoughby, “Espionage and the American Communist Party,” *American Mercury* (January 1959), 7.

²⁷ Charles A. Willoughby, letter to Ben Hibbs, October 15th, 1949, *MS-024: The Papers of the Major General Charles A. Willoughby*, Box 7-9 Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

²⁸ Charles A. Willoughby, letter to General Omar Bradley, May 3rd, 1947, *MS-024: The Papers of the Major General Charles A. Willoughby*, Box 6-16, Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

²⁹ Charles A. Willoughby, letter to Senator Harry Cain, July 20th, 1949, *MS-024: The Papers of the Major General Charles A. Willoughby*, Box 6-22, Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

³⁰ P. Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi, letter to Major General Charles A. Willoughby, November 26th, 1948, *MS-024: The Papers of the Major General Charles A. Willoughby*, Box 7-1, Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

Kai-Shek³¹ in which he included his theories on Communism in Spain and a copy of his essay “Bailen and the Spanish Bridgeport” —seemingly without MacArthur’s approval. His charges against of Agnes Smedley and sweeping claims of Communist activity in Spain, Japan, and China hinted at ego, paranoia, and increasing bitterness towards the War Department.

It was around the time of the Japanese surrender that Willoughby acquired his “spoils of war.” Six months later, they arrived at Gettysburg College with a letter dated February 11th, 1946. Contained in this shipment were three swords—one of which was to be presented to the College, another to Phi Gamma Delta, and the destiny of the third is unknown.³² Two of the three swords are no longer in possession of the College, but the one on display is believed to be the sword Willoughby dedicated to Gettysburg College. An appraisal revealed that the sword was crafted by master swordsmith Hidano-Kami Ujifusa of the Mino province between 1532-1595. Information traceable through an insignia on the sword is also mentioned in Willoughby’s letter.³³ In our interview, Professor Lowy noted that the sword holds more value than the armor not only because of its age, but also because of its pedigree; not everyone owned samurai swords during World War II.³⁴ Only high-ranking Japanese officers carried these swords as they were “often priceless heirlooms that had been in families for generations.”³⁵ Images of Japanese military men carrying

³¹ Charles A. Willoughby, letter to Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, October 8th, 1950, *MS-024: The Papers of the Major General Charles A. Willoughby*, Box 7-23, Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

³² Charles A. Willoughby, letter to Gettysburg College, February 11th, 1946, *MS-024: The Papers of the Major General Charles A. Willoughby*, Box 13-3, Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

³³ Frank Kramer, “Notes on Japanese Sword by Hidano-Kami Ujifusa,” *MS-004: Papers of Frank Kramer*, Box 3-37, Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

³⁴ Personal interview with Dina Lowy.

³⁵ Tom Womack, “Sword of the Rising Sun,” *World War II*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (February 1998) 34. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=565023&scope=site>.

samurai swords when meeting with Willoughby on August 19th are scattered throughout the September 3rd, 1945 issue of *Life* magazine.³⁶ Bearing samurai swords during the war had arisen from a resurgence of nationalistic pride in 1930's Japan.³⁷

It is not certain which of the three swords gifted to Gettysburg College was taken from a Japanese general during the Campaign of Northern Luzon or the origins of the other two swords. Willoughby never mentions how they were acquired in his letters to the college. Nor does he explain how he acquired the Samurai armor donated to the college in 1954, as announced in an issue of Gettysburg's *The Alumni Bulletin*.³⁸

Were these important cultural icons taken in a manner resonant of American and European imperialism or were they given out of respect and concession in the face of defeat? Professor Lowy notes that, "there was plenty of 'trophy-taking' during this time, so it is possible that the swords were collected."³⁹ Through understanding more about Willoughby's military service during World War II, it is possible to deduce that Willoughby thought highly of himself and his intuition. As Chief of Intelligence, he often issued reports that were contradicted by other reliable sources—a sheer act of stubbornness that cost MacArthur's army unnecessary casualties during major campaigns. His accusations of Communist activities in targeted, unsuspecting countries demonstrated a relentless obsession to prove himself right. Willoughby's unsanctioned letters to prominent figures around the world may have been nothing more than attempts to establish himself

³⁶ "The Japs Get MacArthur's Orders," *LIFE* (Google Books, September 3rd, 1945) 23-25. <https://books.google.com/books?id=q0kEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA23&dq=charles%20willoughby%20samurai%20suit&pg=PA25#v=onepage&q&f=false>

³⁷ Michael Herman, "The Swords of Japan: a window into modernization," *Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal* (Springfield, Ohio: Wittenberg University, 2016) 36.

³⁸ "Old Dorm Columns: Gen. Willoughby, '14, Presents Records to College," *The Alumni Bulletin*, Vol. 40 No. 5 (Gettysburg, PA: Gettysburg College, June-July 1954) 16.

³⁹ Personal interview with Dina Lowy.

as a trusted informant to powerful leaders. Perhaps, Willoughby was seeking aggrandizement; perhaps he only wanted assurance that his vision of liberty and justice would help the U.S. fight tyranny.

With this in mind, these “gifts” could represent his contributions towards Allied victory and his successes in the Pacific. In a letter addressed to Willoughby, men who served with him wrote: “The following members of your ‘crew’ during the good old days in Tokyo, Japan, wish to extend their best wishes to you and Mrs. Willoughby for a most happy and prosperous New Year; in this behalf, we enclose the ‘royal insignia’ of your former ‘empire’ and hope that you will wear this memento in fond remembrance of your devoted followers.”⁴⁰ Though the quotations around “crew” and “empire” suggest playful intention, the word choice still suggests the degree of Willoughby’s influence on the troops, the war effort, and Japanese history. Surely this is deserving of a memento or two.

The actual facts of how Willoughby obtained Japanese swords—at least one of genuine Samurai pedigree dating back almost five hundred years—and a 19th century samurai armor may be lost to time. Historians will have to rely on their own interpretation of his character to determine which scenario is more likely. Historians cannot disregard that his efforts contributed to a greater cause; yet his intentions may not have been pure and benevolent.

The Samurai Armor and Katana represent many layers of cultural tradition: the role of the samurai in 16th century Japan and the resurgence of Japanese militarism and nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries; the entitlement of victory, the mementos of war. The armor is a loyal depiction of ancient Samurai history; the sword is genuine Samurai legacy. Both connect Gettysburg College

⁴⁰ Letter to General Charles A. Willoughby, January 2nd, 1952, *MS-024: The Papers of the Major General Charles A. Willoughby*, Box 13-2, Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

to important military events through alumnus Charles A. Willoughby. And both connect Willoughby to Gettysburg through what he must have hoped would be important, exotic, memorable monuments to his power and achievement.



Samurai-Image for Thirty Treasures Booklet, 2011, Special Collections and College Archives, Gettysburg College.

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Samurai-Image for Thirty Treasures Booklet. 2011. Special Collections and College Archives, Gettysburg College.