

SIR HARRY ESCAPES ASSASSINATION

Oct 2013

Those who have read the biographical notes on Sir Harry Parkes (1828-1885) #849 in the tree will know that he narrowly escaped execution in Beijing in 1859. Trade negotiations were conducted rather differently in those days! It was during a trip to the Yangtze ports in 1865 that he heard he had been appointed Queen Victoria's Consul General in Japan. Within months of taking up his appointment his support for the Liberal Party of Japan upset the party's opponents and there followed a series of assassination attempts. We reproduce below a contemporary account by a Japanese official of one such event and its sequel.



On 23rd of March 1867, when Mr. Harry Parkes, then the Minister to Japan for Great Britain proceeded to the Imperial Palace in Kyoto for an audience to be given by the Emperor, he was assaulted by two rioters on his way. In these times it was customary that some government guardians were given to foreign ministers when they went out and on this occasion, the late Mr. Nakai Kôzô and the late Mr. Gotô Shôjirô who were made high officials afterwards, happened to be members of the guardians who followed the British Minister that day. As soon as they found that the rioters were going to assault the Minister they run to them at once and after a fighting one of the rioters was arrested and the other was cut down by Mr. Nakai with his sword. The Minister escaped safely and had an audience with the Emperor as expected. The name of the arrested rioter is Saegusa and that of the killed is Hayashida. . They both seem to have been fanatical partisan of the anti-foreign party of those days.

The British Government rewarded Mr. Nakai's courage with a sword decorated in western style which was delivered to him with the following covering letter:



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*British Legation, Yokohama,
November 6th 1868*

Sir,

Her Majesty's Government are very desirous to mark the high sense which they entertain of the praiseworthy and courageous conduct which you displayed on the occasion of the attack made upon my party when I was proceeding to an audience of the Mikado on the 23rd March last, and they have accordingly instructed me to present to you a sword which they have caused to be prepared in commemoration of your distinguished behaviour.

It naturally affords me very great satisfaction to be charged with the duty of delivering to you this testimonial, and presenting it to you I beg to add the expression of my fervent wish for your enjoyment of a long and prosperous career, which I am satisfied will be marked by entire devotion to the service of your Sovereign and country.

*I have honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient humble servant,*

Harry Parkes