Russo-Japanese War / “Blood-Stained Cherry Blossoms”

When the Russo-Japanese War began in 1904, the Infantry 32nd Regiment was also ordered to be dispatched soon after. The 8th Division to which the regiment belonged was initially assigned to guard Ryoyo, but in January of the following year it advanced to Kokkotai, where it faced the crisis of annihilation under Russian attack. While suffering heavy casualties, the regiment held its position to the death and contributed to Japan’s victory. This was the Battle of Kokkotai, said to have been a decisive factor in the outcome of the war.

After the war, the regiment continued to be stationed in the Ryoto region and returned to Japan in 1906. Among the survivors, there arose a plan to plant commemorative cherry trees for the fallen soldiers, and what was planted became the cherry trees of present-day Kajo Park.

A cherry blossom tree served as a symbol of the regiment even before the Russo-Japanese War. It was called the “blood-stained cherry blossom tree”. This name originates from a legend involving Mogami Yoshiaki and his rival, Shiratori Juro Nagahisa, the lord of Yachi (present-day Kahoku Town). Yoshiaki feigned illness to lure Nagahisa to him. Once Nagahisa arrived, Yoshiaki executed him, spilling blood that stained the surrounding cherry blossoms.

The cherry blossom tree remained a symbol of Yamagata Castle and Kajo Park until it withered after being relocated due to the construction of a baseball field in the park.