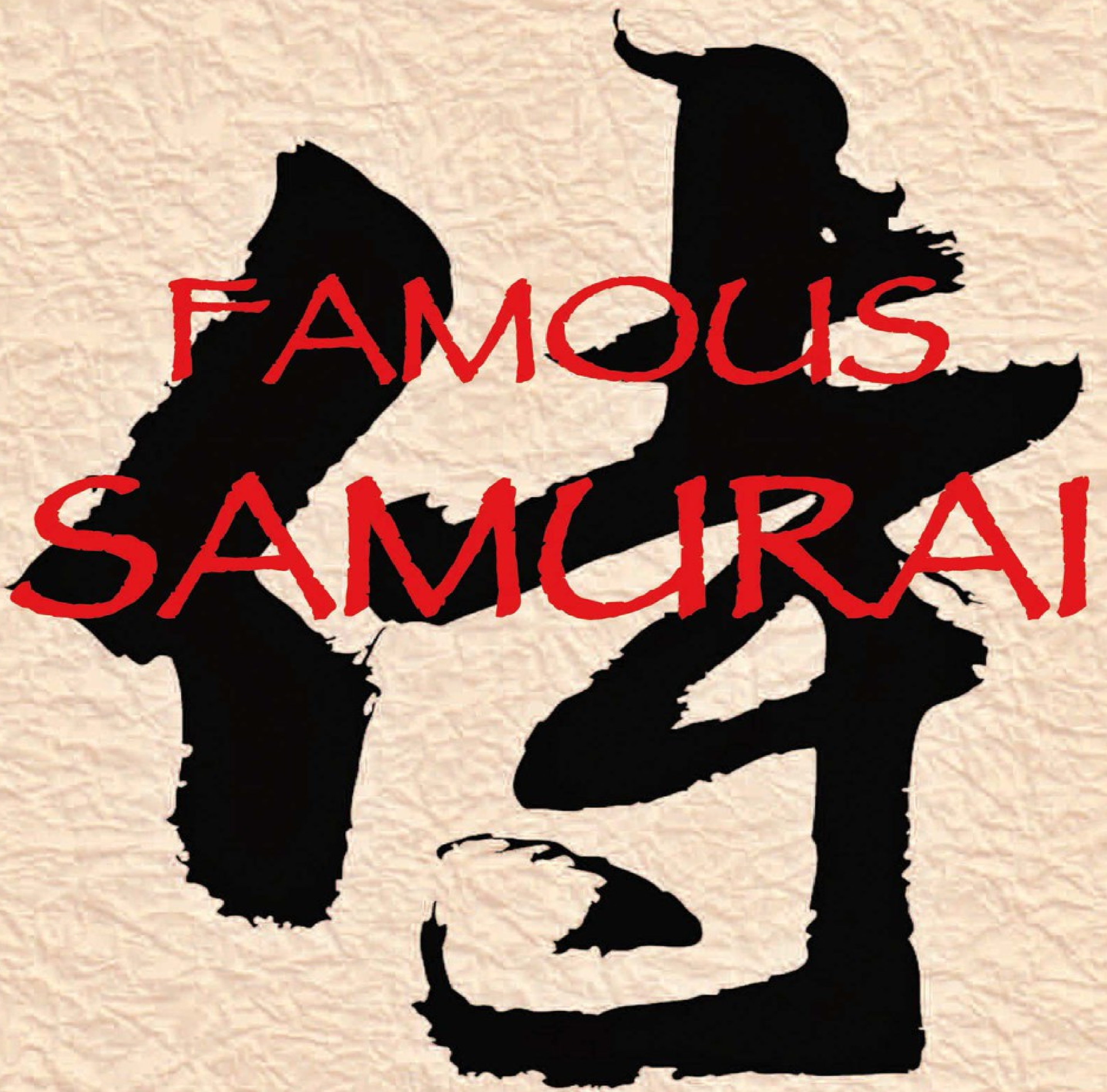
WILLIAM de LANGE



FAMOUS SAMURAI

YAGYŪ MUNENORI

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Yagyū Munenori

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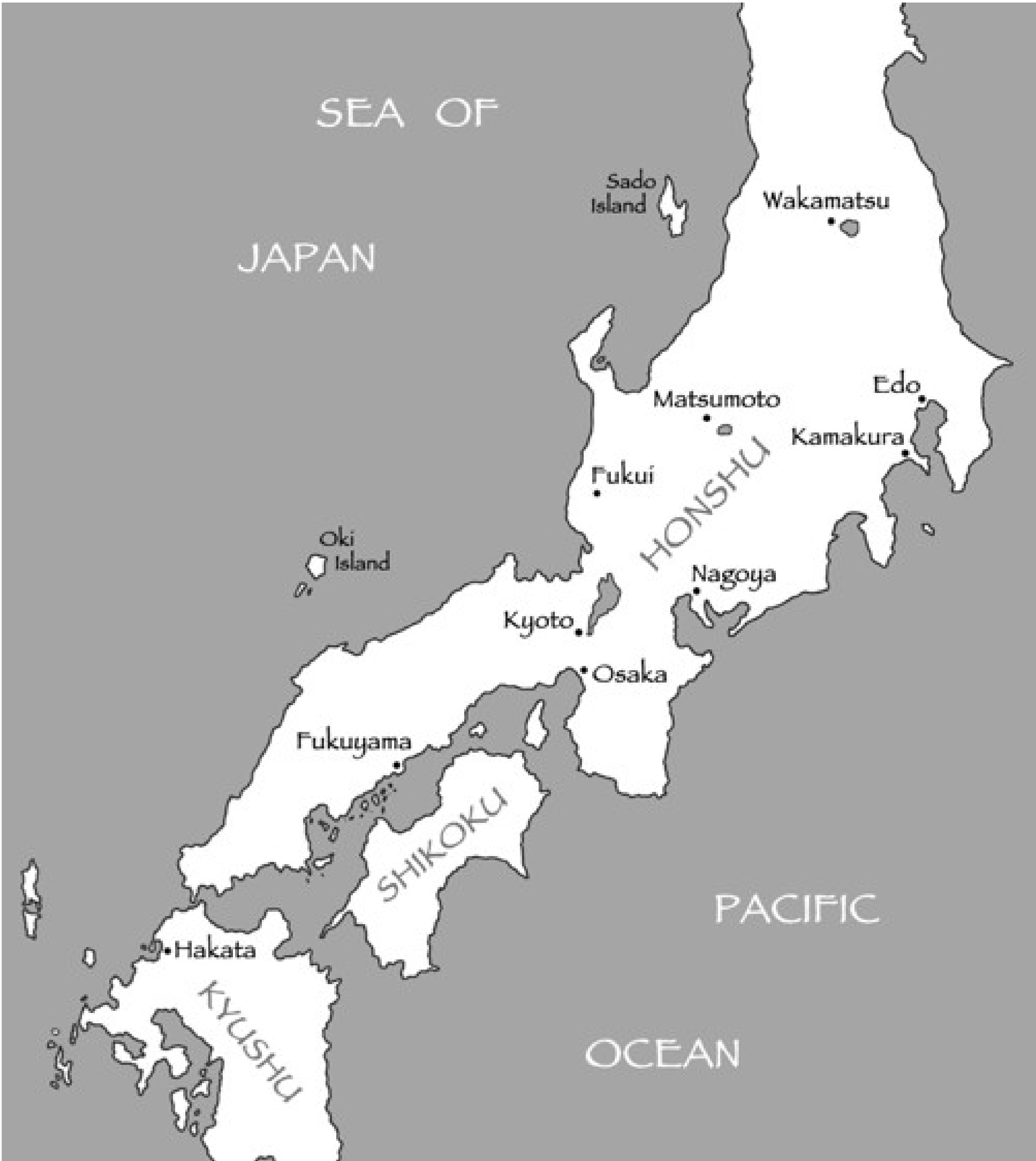


CHAPTER I

Yagyū Munenori was born in 1571. He had four older brothers—Yoshikatsu, Yoshihide, Munetaka, and Muneaki. Being the youngest, Munenori was destined to spend his early youth in relative idleness, practicing the art of fencing with his brothers and making votive offerings at the local shrine for the repose of his ancestors' souls. To the clan, however, the birth of another boy was the symbol of renewed hope, for the Yagyū at this time were struggling hard to recover from a string of misfortunes.

Those misfortunes had begun in 1544, when the Yagyū domains were overrun by the Tsutsui, a clan from the Nara basin. Munenori's father, Muneyoshi, had fiercely resisted their expansion, but paid for his bravery with the loss of Yagyū castle. Eventually he submitted and set about to rebuild the stronghold.

Sixteen years later, the world of the Yagyū had been turned upside down again. The year was 1560, when the Tsutsui were subdued by the Miyoshi, who hailed from the province of Awa on the island of Shikoku. Again the Yagyū were forced to adjust to a new overlord, the influential Miyoshi Chōkei, in order to survive.

Miyoshi Chōkei, a shrewd and able administrator

While a warlord in the typical mold of his time, Chōkei was an upright man, widely respected for his administrative talents, and for a while the Yagyū accepted their fate with resignation. This changed in 1564, when Miyoshi Chōkei was succeeded by Matsunaga Hisahide, a one-time tea merchant from Kyoto, who had insinuated himself into

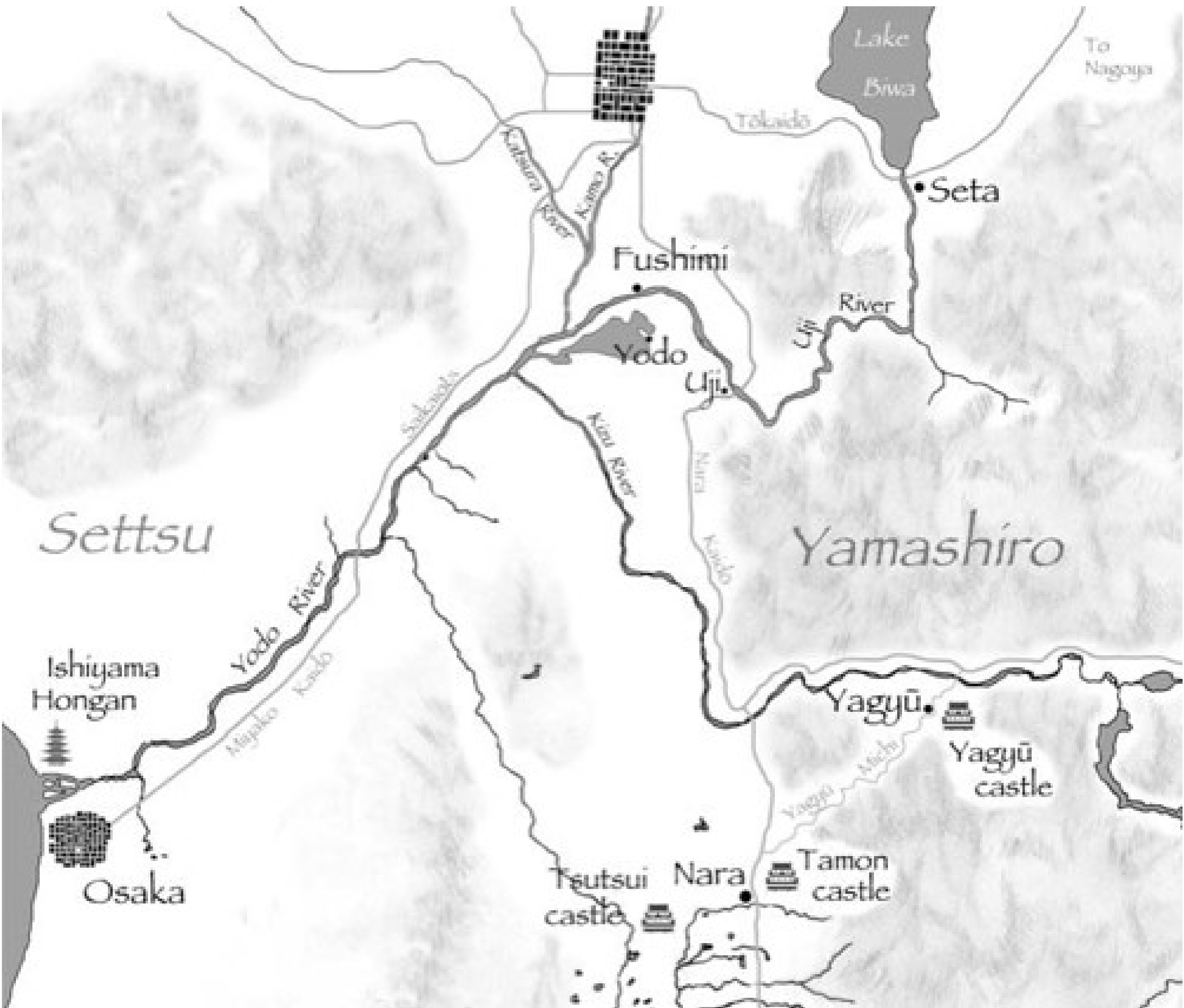
the position of Chōkei's senior counselor and succeeded him by poisoning his rightful heir.

So, at least, went the rumors—rumors that were readily accepted as fact when, within only a year of his succession as chieftain, Hisahide had the thirteenth shogun of the Muromachi Bakufu, Ashikaga Yoshiteru, assassinated, along with his wife and mother. That assassination had forced Yoshiteru's younger brother, Yoshiaki, to fall back on the military clout of Oda Nobunaga, giving the latter, in turn, a pretext to seize the capital.

For the Yagyū clan Nobunaga's arrival in the capital was welcome news. With each year Hisahide's behavior had become more erratic. At first he had been kept in check by his brother, Nagayori, the vice-governor of Tanba province. In every way the opposite of his brother, Nagayori was a warrior of great moral stature, who was respected by the Miyoshi clan. Indeed, it was more out of respect for his brother than for any of his qualities that the Miyoshi had acquiesced in Hisahide's chieftaincy.

Thus it came as no surprise to the Yagyū that, when Nagayori died in battle in 1565, the majority of the Miyoshi clan fell out with their new leader and launched a large-scale campaign to recapture the strongholds that he had subdued on their behalf a few years earlier.

The first castle to fall into their hands was that of Tsutsui, at the heart of the Nara basin, the clan's traditional power base. Over the next year the fighting spread eastward, toward Nara and Hisahide's headquarters of Tamon castle. The castle stood at a stone's throw from the famous Daibutsuden, the great hall on the premises of the Tōdai monastery. For more than eight centuries the wooden structure had housed a forty-eight-foot-tall bronze Buddha that attracted pilgrims from the far corners of the country. Part of the Miyoshi troops had taken up quarters in and around the premises of the venerated building.



Untrammelled by conscience, Hisahide had ordered his men to open fire on the building. The Miyoshi troops were scarcely harmed, but the roof of the building went up in flames, causing the top part of the statue to melt away. The string of depredations by their new overlord eventually forced Yagyū Muneyoshi and his clan to go into hiding among the mountains.

Little did Muneyoshi know at the time that it would be their period in isolation that was to lay the foundation for his clan's remarkable recovery. For when the Yagyū went into hiding, they did so in the company of none other that Kamiizumi Ise no Kami Nobutsuna, founder of the famous Shinkage school of fencing.

CHAPTER II

Kamiizumi Nobutsuna had arrived in Yamato in the fall of 1567. He had been on a *musha shugyō*, in the company of two other swordsmen, Jingo Muneharu and Hikida Bungorō, two trusted vassals with whom he had survived the siege of Minowa castle. He and the Yagyū chieftain had met at a fencing contest at the Kōfuku monastery. [1]

The contest had been organized by Hōzōin Kakuzenbō In'ei, chief abbot of the Kōfuku monastery and founder of the Hōzōin school of spear fighting. In'ei introduced the two swordsmen. Muneyoshi had engaged in a *taryū shiai* with both Nobutsuna and his pupil Bungorō. Muneyoshi had lost both contests, but had been wise enough to invited the three swordsmen to come and stay at Yagyū castle.

Over the next years they had immersed themselves in their studies, Nobutsuna writing long tracts on the Shinkage-ryū, Muneyoshi absorbing from his newfound teacher all that he could about this new and exhilarating school of fencing. Meanwhile they anxiously followed events, pinning their hopes on the day when forces larger than they could ever hope to muster would turn things in their favor and enable them to reemerge from their self-imposed exile. That day arrived on November 9, 1568, when Oda Nobunaga entered Kyoto in full panoply.

Nobunaga had closely followed the actions of Yamato's warlords, even before marching on the capital. He had denounced their senseless bellicosity, yet he was most critical of Hisahide.

Discussing the matter with his ally Ieyasu, Nobunaga had observed that Hisahide was a man of whom they should be extremely wary, as he had "gained notoriety in this world for three crimes." The first was the assassination of the rightful Miyoshi heir. The second the assassination of the shogun. The third the destruction of the Great Buddha of the Tōdai monastery. Such men belonged to a bygone era, an era in which the guiding principle in life was the dictum of *gekokujō*—the world turned upside down—an inverted social order in which the lowly came to reign over the elite through sheer talent and cunning.

Oda Nobunaga, intent on unifying a torn country

How different it was with Nobunaga's own ambitions. His motto, carved into his seal of state for all to read, was *tenka fubu*, to "rule the whole country by force." He was well on his way to achieving that aim, and having just subdued the strategic province of Mino, he was eager to turn his attention to the subjugation of the Home Provinces and lay the foundation for a unified Japan.

Yet despite his vexation at Hisahide's outrages, Nobunaga's chief concerns still lay with the *sōhei* of the Tendai and Ikkō sects, who had their headquarters at the Ishiyama Hongan monastery near Osaka. And thus, to deal with the lesser threat from the local

warlords, he had put a force of some ten thousand troops under the command of Sakuma Nobumori, an old vassal from Harima province, who had once served his father.

Nobumori marched into Yamato in the autumn of 1568. The Miyoshi resisted. They had thus far held the upper hand in the conflict, and were eager to hold on to what they had gained. But they were no match for Nobumori's well-organized troops, armed as the latter were with lethal *teppō*. One by one they had to abandon the castles they had recaptured from Hisahide, until, by the end of 1569, they had been forced to flee across the Inland Sea, back to their old domains on the island of Shikoku.

The shrewd Hisahide played his cards differently. Even before Nobumori had crossed the Kizu River he had begun to ply Nobunaga with costly gifts of exquisite Chinaware and coveted tea utensils. Never a man to turn down the fawning of a sycophant, Nobunaga responded to the overtures. In spite of his cautious words to his ally Ieyasu, he now decided to grant Hisahide control over the province of Yamato on the condition that he grant amnesty to other local clans and refrain from forging liaisons with those who opposed the drive toward unification.

The beautiful Kizu River

Hisahide was quick to comply with Nobunaga's demands. He moved back into his old headquarters of Tamon castle, from where he sent missives to those with whom he had been at loggerheads.

It is doubtful whether the Yagyū would have complied with Hisahide's request had not Nobunaga himself dispatched a missive to the Yagyū clan (as well as many other smaller clans in the region) encouraging them to place themselves under Hisahide's rule, and promising them the necessary financial and military aid if they had to fight on his behalf.

Nobunaga's motives in doing so were clear enough. His objective was to secure the capital, whatever the costs, and the ruin of one or more small clans to achieve that objective was a small price to pay.

For the Yagyū clan, however, there were few other options, and thus, in the first months of 1670, they came out of hiding and Yagyū Muneyoshi resumed his rightful place as lord of Yagyū castle.

The main gate to Yagyū castle.

It had been not long after their return to Yagyū castle that Muneyoshi’s wife again became pregnant. And while the prospect of a new child brought new happiness to the Yagyū, there were many worries, too.

The Yagyū estate at this time was only a fraction of what it had once been. The Yagyū had to live from the little that their estate brought in, which was far too little to support them, their parents, and their ten children. The older of their six daughters had been married off or promised to the sons of neighboring chieftains, while one of their sons had already taken the tonsure and entered one of Nara’s many monasteries.

It seemed inevitable that, when the new child came of age, it would share the fate of its brothers or sisters. Yet, as so often in life, unforeseen events caused the unborn child to tread a path quite different from the one its parents had foreseen.

CHAPTER III

It was in the summer of 1570, not more than a few months after the Yagyū clan had returned to Yagyū castle, that the fate of the yet unborn Munenori was decided by the actions of a clan that had once ruled supreme in the province of Yamato. In that year, the once powerful Tsutsui clan rose against Matsunaga Hisahide.

Following their expulsion from the family stronghold of Tsutsui castle they had fallen back on Katsuragi castle, along the border with Kawachi province, from where they held on tenaciously to their last remaining foothold in their former province. They were led by the twenty-year-old Tsutsui Junkei, who had just laid to rest his uncle and patron, Tsutsui Junsei.

Since the death of Junkei's father, his uncle had worked tirelessly to strengthen the position of his clan, but he had not had the resources to resist the combined threat of Matsunaga-Miyoshi alliance, and when he died in exile in Sakai, he had done so a broken and disillusioned man.

Tsutsui Junkei, intent on reclaiming Yamato for his clan

Junkei had lost many of those close to him in the atrocities that attended Hisahide’s rise to power. Only the year before, the daughter and son of two of his close vassals had become the youngest victims of Hisahide’s abominations, when at a gruesome festival celebrating his capture of Ido castle, the youths had been impaled alive and put on display outside the castle walls.

The gruesome act was all the more unbearable as both youngsters had been sent as hostages in order to placate Nobunaga’s new representative in the region.

Junkei was not the only one to hate Hisahide with a vengeance. Many of the smaller chieftains in the region had also come to loathe Hisahide’s rule, and were quick to submit to their former overlord. Hisahide’s ability to unite his opponents was remarkable, for even the Miyoshi, once such sworn enemies of the Tsutsui, now joined the fray and eagerly conspired in Junkei’s plans to overthrow the hated tyrant.

Those plans were put into action in the summer of 1670, when, on July 25, Junkei led a force of some five hundred men into Yamato province and captured Tōchi castle, near the town of Kashihara. From there they marched northward, toward Nara and Hisahide’s headquarters of Tamon castle, setting fire to large parts of the town and ensconcing themselves in the grounds of the Kōninji, an ancient temple on the crest of Takahi hill, on the town’s southern outskirts.

The assault had taken Hisahide by surprise. His obligations toward his new ally had drawn his attention elsewhere, required as he was to assist Nobunaga in the defense of the Home Provinces. This was a tall order, for even Nobunaga was hard pressed at this time.

By now Nobunaga not only had to deal with the belligerent Ikkō sectarians, but also the powerful Miyoshi, who had signed a pact with the sectarians and landed in force near the Ishiyama Hongan temple. From there they had marched into Yamashiro and Kawachi to recapture their former strongholds. Then they headed for Kyoto, where, reinforced by a garrison of some three thousand Hongan musketeers, they began to attack Nobunaga’s troops, causing a great number of casualties.

Ikkō sectarians, a constant menace to Nobunaga's plans

The situation grew even more threatening when the Asai and Asakura clans, having recovered from their first defeat at Ane River, were joined by *sōhei* from the Enryaku monastery of Mount Hiei and began to stir up trouble once more in Mino.

The combined effect of these various assaults from different corners forced Nobunaga to shorten his line and concentrate on the defence of the capital and his headquarters of Gifu castle, leaving Hisahide and other local allied chieftains to deal with the Miyoshi elsewhere.

Complying with Nobunaga's orders, Hisahide had led a force of close to two thousand across the border with Kawachi to engage in battle with the Miyoshi at Tennōji, near Osaka. It was this temporary absence that gave Junkei the opportunity to slip back into Yamato. Alarmed by the swiftness with which the Tsutsui had been able to

encroach on his home base he ordered one of his chief commanders, Takeuchi Hidekatsu, to return to Nara and secure his headquarters of from Junkei's onslaught.

The very first thing Hidekatsu did on his return to Tamon castle, on August 23, was to send missives to allied local chieftains, among them Yagyū Muneyoshi. They were ordered to mobilize their menfolk and immediately come up to Nara. There they were to put themselves under the command of the Nakanobō clan and launch an attack on the Tsutsui positions that same day.

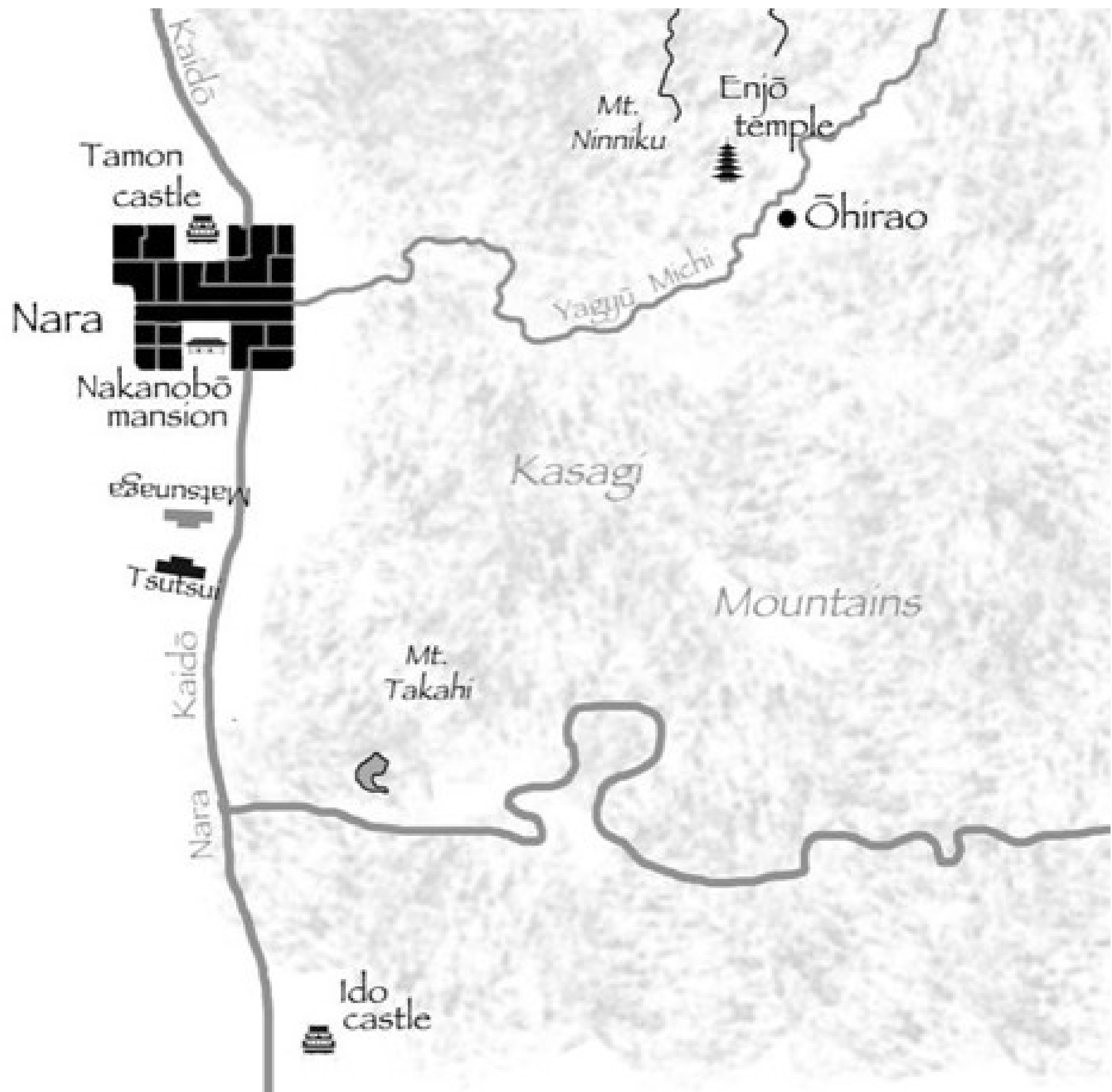
It was a shrewd move by the seasoned commander. The mansion of the Nakanobō was located in Tsubai, on Nara's southern outskirts, the area that had been most affected by the skirmishes. The Yagyū were related to the Nakanobō, and he knew that they would feel obliged to fight for the Nakanobō even while, like the Nakanobō, they might despise Hisahide.[2]

As Hidekatsu had anticipated, his appeal to the Yagyū had not fallen on deaf ears, The connection between the Yagyū and Nakanobō went all the way back to the beginning of the fourteenth century, to the events leading up to the Kenmu Restoration. Since then the two clans had remained close. They patronized the same shrines and temples in the region and regularly reinforced their old alliance through intermarriage. [3]

And indeed, when the messenger arrived at Yagyū castle in the early hours of the morning, Muneyoshi scrambled all the men he could muster and headed straight for Nara. His eldest son, Yoshikatsu, was nineteen at the time and, having entreated his father, he was allowed to join them.

The warriors of the Yagyū and Nakanobō clans fought hard and bravely that day, united as they were in the knowledge that they were fighting for their very survival.

The fighting was concentrated on the southern outskirts of the ancient capital, as it had been over the previous days. Rallying their troops at their old mansion in Tsubai, the Nakanobō had launched a counter-offensive to drive the Tsutsui out.



But when Muneyoshi and his son rode out from Tsubai to charge the makeshift defenses the Tsutsui had erected along Nara's southern approaches, they soon realized that the forces they were up against were formidable.

On his march from Tōchi castle, Junkei had been joined by other disgruntled chieftains, and the small force of five hundred men with which he had set out had meanwhile swollen to a few thousand. Among them were also *sōhei* from Negoro and Kii, many of them armed with the fearsome muskets. Some of Hidekatsu's troops, too, were armed with muskets, but the Yagyū, who had spent the previous years in hiding, were still fighting in the traditional way.

Their superior mastery of the sword still made them a force to be reckoned with, but only when fighting at close quarters.

In spite of these overwhelming odds the Yagyū and Nakanobō warriors pressed on. It seemed that history was repeating itself, for again they were fighting side by side, and again they seemed to be fighting a losing battle. After a day of intense fighting they managed to evict the Tsutsui from their makeshift defenses and drive them out of town, back to their stronghold on Mount Takahi.

Strategically, it was a victory of sorts, but in sheer numbers the Matsunaga forces had suffered a crushing defeat, and few of their ranks had escaped unharmed.

Nor had the Yagyū been spared that day. During one of the charges Yoshikatsu had been hit in the back by a bullet, and thrown off his horse by the impact. Though lodged in his back, the bullet had not made a large wound, and all seemed well when the young man began to move. The truth only dawned on Muneyoshi when he goaded his son to get back on his horse. Whether it was the damage wrought by the bullet or the way he had fallen, the young warrior was unable to rise. The nerves in his spine had been severed and he was crippled from the waist down.

CHAPTER IV

Yoshikatsu’s incapacitation proved a profound setback to the prospects of the Yagyū clan. At barely nineteen he was Muneyoshi’s oldest son, and as such he was expected to bear a large part of the burden in the management and defense of the Yagyū estate and to succeed his father in the not too distant future.

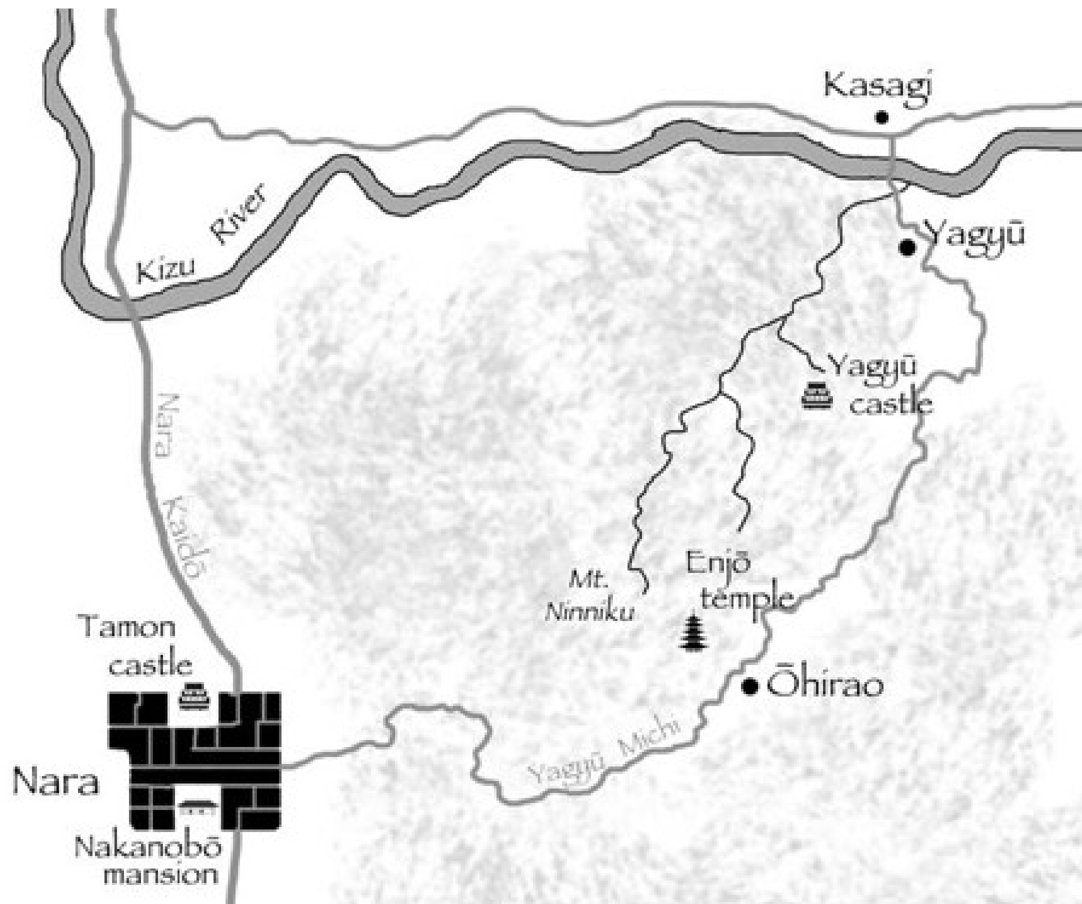
Now that future suddenly seemed a bleak one. None of Yoshikatsu’s younger brothers were of an age where they could take his position. Two of them, Yoshihide and Munetaka, had by now taken the tonsure, assumed the spiritual names of Kyūsai and Tokusai, and entered one of Nara’s monasteries. This left Muneyoshi with just Muneaki, who had turned five that year.

It was an impossible situation for the aging Muneyoshi. Fighting on behalf of Hisahide in 1566, he, too, had been wounded, his left hand pierced by an arrow. The wound had healed, but he lost much of the strength of his grip. The handicap did not affect him when fighting on horseback, when one usually brandished a sword in one hand, but on foot, when the sword was held with both hands, it considerably diminished his ability to engage in man-to-man combat.

For a warrior who prided himself on his swordsmanship it was a serious handicap—one that had contributed to his defeat at the hands of Kamiizumi Nobutsuna’s disciple, Hikida Bungorō, with whom he engaged in a duel at the Kōfuku monastery the following year.

Now, however, things were far more serious. With an aging father, a number of daughters, a five-year-old infant, a crippled son to care for, and his wife pregnant with yet another child, the continuity of his clan was in serious jeopardy.

And thus Muneyoshi and his family set out along the Yagyū Michi, the old road that connected Yagyū village with the temple town of Nara. Eager to stay near their rightful domains they went into hiding in Ōhirao, a small village at the foot of Mount Ninniku, on the hallowed grounds of the famous Enjō temple.

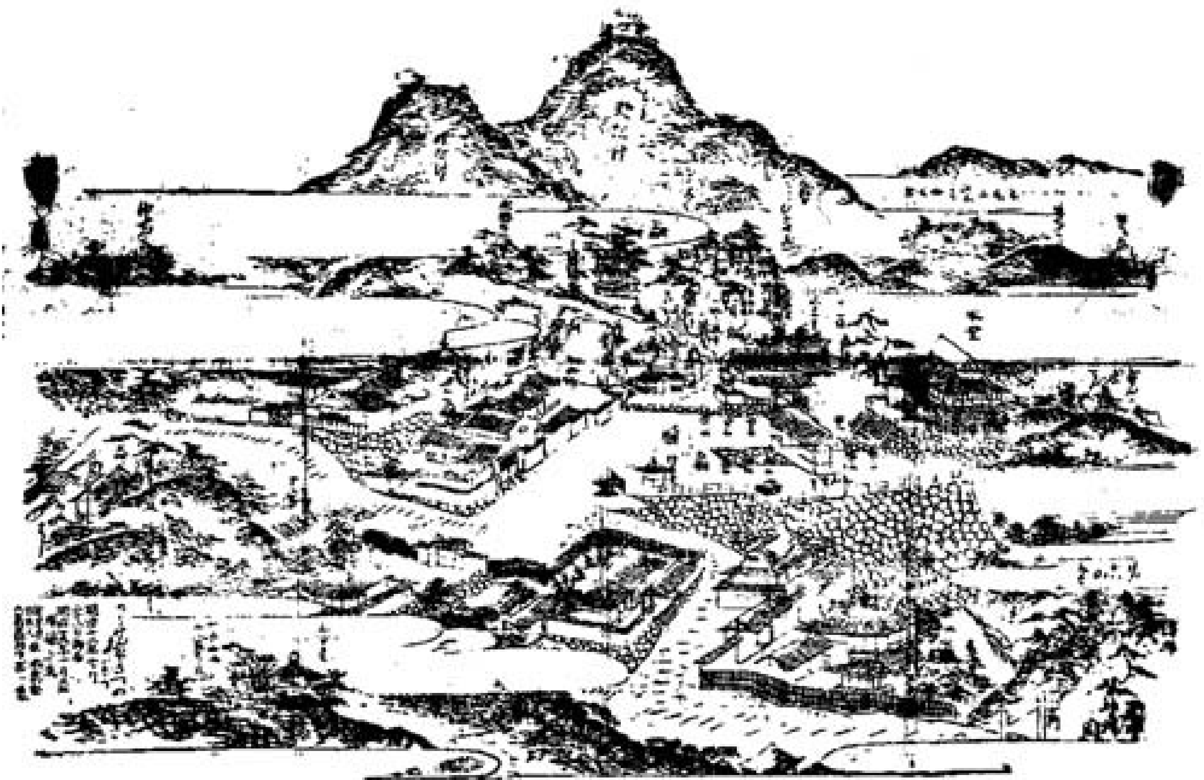


It was during the first months of their self-imposed exile at Ōhirao that Muneyoshi's wife delivered a healthy son. They named him Matasaemon. When he came of age early in the 1580s Matasaemon received his formal name of Munenori, the first of the two characters with which it was written being derived from the name of from his father, as well as many of his distant ancestors.

A lot had happened in that uncertain decade. In 1573 Nobunaga had ousted the sitting shogun, Ashikaga Yoshiaki from Nijō castle and sent him into exile, thus bringing about the end of the Muromachi Bakufu. He had forged ties with Nobunaga's archrival Takeda Shingen, calling on him to overthrow Nobunaga and restore power to the Bakufu. That year, however, Shingen died, thus removing perhaps the greatest threat to Nobunaga's plan to pacify the country. And while Matsunaga Hisahide, too, had responded to the shogun's call, his well-timed conciliatory gestures had once again saved him from the lion's clutches, and over the next few

years he made well his promises by assisting Nobunaga in the siege of the Ishiyama Hongan monastery.

Tsutsui Junkei, meanwhile, had stubbornly persevered in his campaign to evict Hisahide and reclaim his clan's former territories. It was one of those paradoxes of a country in war that Junkei, too, had formed an alliance with Nobunaga, contributing large numbers of musketeers to the battle of Nagashino, but somehow Hisahide had continued to get the better of him. In the year following his march on Nara he managed to recapture the family stronghold of Tsutsui castle, forcing Hisahide to fall back on his old headquarters of Shigisan castle. But Junkei's commitments to Nobunaga in quelling the Ikkō sectarians and Hisahide's position of power kept him from gaining much territory. What he desperately needed was an opportunity to wrest from Hisahide the trust that he so undeservedly enjoyed.



Shigisan castle, Matsunaga Hisahide's old headquarters

That opportunity came toward the end 1576, when one of Junkei's spies at Tamon castle informed him that Hisahide had entered into secret negotiations with none other than Uesugi Kenshin. Kenshin, too, had long had his sights on the capital, but thus far his archrival, Takeda Shingen, had kept him pinned down in the north. With Shingen's death that barrier was removed, and early in 1576, he began to approach Nobunaga's chief rivals in the Home Provinces in the hope of forming an alliance.

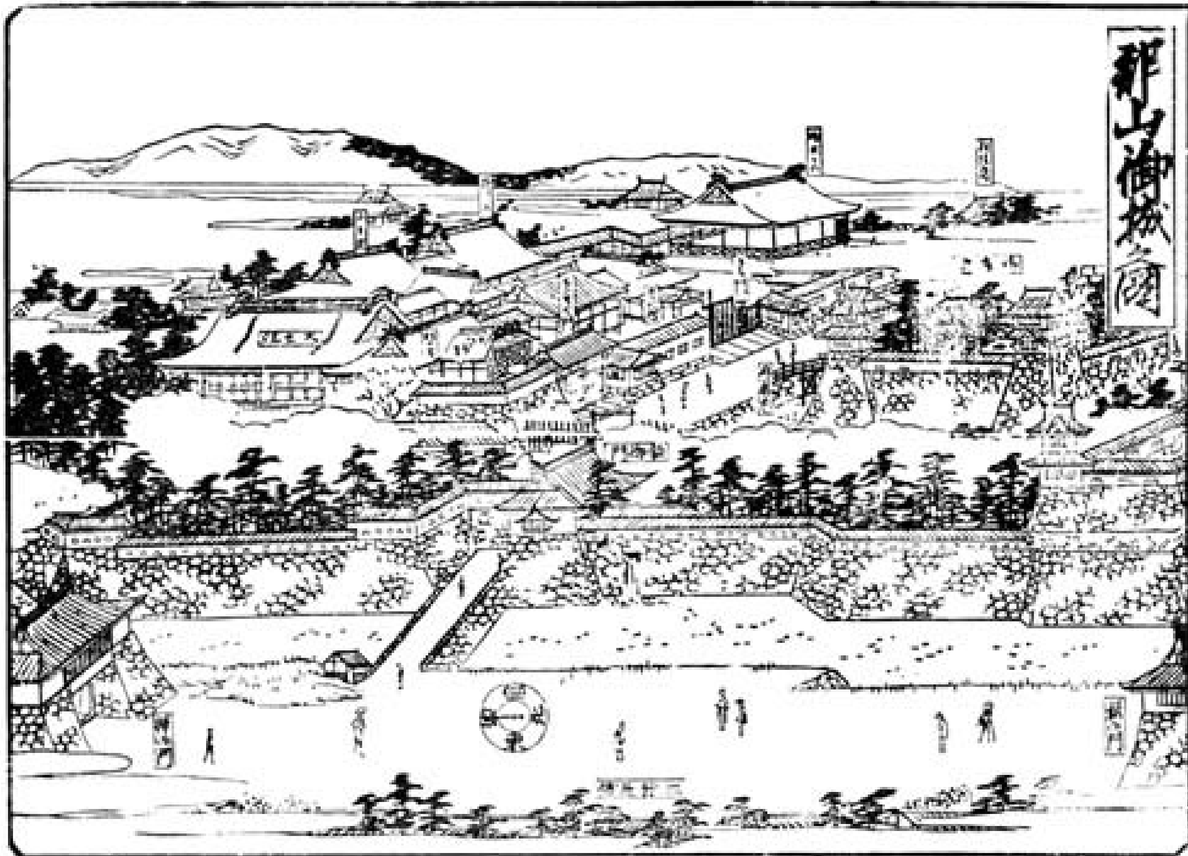
It was not long before Nobunaga was informed of Hisahide's treachery, and his response was exactly as Junkei had hoped. He immediately stripped Hisahide of his governorship, bestowing it instead on Junkei. Hisahide's response was by now predictable. Offended by Nobunaga's "betrayal," and aware that he now faced the Tsutsui and their allies alone, he reconciled himself with the Miyoshi, thus hoping to counter by force what he had failed to avoid by subterfuge.

It was not enough, for one of those allies now included Nobunaga. In the summer of 1577, Junkei, his allies, and a large contingent under the command of Nobunaga's eldest son, Nobutada, converged on Shigisan castle. Seeing that his game was up, Hisahide withdrew to the main tower of his castle and committed suicide by detonating a cast-iron tea kettle filled with gunpowder. It was the end of an ignominious career, a career that had begun ten years earlier with the destruction of the Hall of the Great Buddha.

Hisahide's death brought little relief to the smaller chieftains of Yamato province. In the summer of 1580, following the surrender of the Ishiyama Hongan monastery after a decade of almost uninterrupted fighting, Nobunaga issued a decree that all the castles and fortifications in the surrounding provinces of Settsu, Kawachi, and Yamato were to be demolished forthwith. Even major castles such as those of Tamon and Shigisan were to be destroyed.

Nobunaga's orders were executed with such rigor and at such pace that by the fall of the next year almost all the castles littering the Yamato landscape were laid in ruins. Only Junkei, as Nobunaga's appointed representative in Yamato, was allowed to maintain a

castle, a right on which he capitalized in the very same year of Nobunaga’s decree, when he began construction of a vast castle at Kōriyama, situated southwest of Nara at the center of the Nara Basin.



Kōriyama castle, the new headquarters of Tsutsui Junkei

Nobunaga’s decree was a drastic measure brought forth by an age of dramatic events. In the greater scheme of things it was an act that immediately bore fruit. Already by 1581, when most of the castles in Yamato had been laid in ruins, the monk Eishun, abbot of the Tamon monastery in Nara, recorded in his *Tamon-in nikki* the effect of Nobunaga’s policies, when he observed that: “not a single battle has upset the tranquillity that has descended on the region following the fall of the Ishiyama Hongan monastery.”

It seemed that Nobunaga's ruthless persecution of the Ikkō sectarians that had followed the fall of the Nagashima, inhuman though it had been, had had the desired effect and that at long last the peace and prosperity the fertile region had once known would again be allowed to flourish. Yet the same measures that were so beneficial to the region's common dwellers, the countryside farmers and the town citizens, sounded the death-knell for its many local chieftains.

The Yagyū, too, felt the brunt of Nobunaga's measure, for their castle had not escaped the notice of Junkei's administrators. In the fall of 1580, having weathered more than two and a half centuries of civil war and a long drawn-out siege by Junkei's ancestors, Yagyū castle, the proud abode of the Yagyū clan, was razed to the ground.

The remains of Yagyū caslte

Many a chieftain submitted, choosing to become mere retainers in Junkei's army. Others fled across the borders in the hope of establishing themselves elsewhere, where Nobunaga's power did not reach.

Not so Yagyū Muneyoshi, who could not afford to leave his family behind. His father, Ieyoshi, was now advanced in years, while Munenori, his one able son who was still with him, was still only six years old, far too young to assume any responsibility even in a feudal age. And thus he and his family continued their life of seclusion in the shadow of Mount Ninniku, biding their time.

CHAPTER V

While these dramatic events were playing out on the plains of the Nara basin, the Yagyū were making the most of their self-imposed exile. Though deeply trying, spiritually they had been rewarding times, and in the vacuum of their fugitive existence Muneyoshi had thoroughly absorbed all the tenets and intricacies of this, to him, new and revolutionary school of fencing.

It had been during their first period in hiding, between 1567 and 1568 that their guest Kamiizumi Nobutsuna had found the time to write his memoirs and to impart his knowledge of the Shinkage school of fencing to Yagyū Muneyoshi. Satisfied that he had finally found the man who could pass on his intellectual heritage to posterity, Nobutsuna had granted his disciple a so-called *inka*, a document Buddhist in origin by which a master certified that his pupil had reached maturity in training. It read:

> Since my early youth I have sought to master the arts of swordsmanship and military tactics, exploring the *okugi* of various schools. I meditated and practiced day and night, until the gods enabled me to found the Shinkage-ryū. When I visited Kyoto in my quest to propagate my school of fencing throughout the land I unexpectedly met you, and you were solicitous and sincere in many ways. And while I find it hard to find the right words to express my gratitude, I hereby declare that I have, without any omissions, transmitted to you my full knowledge of this school of fencing and the state of mind its practitioners will achieve.

More than a decade had passed since Nobutsuna had written these words. Muneyoshi was now well into his fifties, and in a world in which few reached old age he was beginning to feel the urge to pass on the intellectual heritage of his great teacher. Nobutsuna had been sixty when he had revealed the *okugi* of the Shinkage-ryū, and now Muneyoshi himself realized that the time had come to take his

rightful place in the line of transmission and instill in his son the skills that had led the then shogun Ashikaga Yoshiaki to raise Nobutsuna to the exalted rank of *jūshi-i*, or Fourth-Level Warrior Follower—an honor bestowed on no other swordsman past or present.

To Muneyoshi's great delight and comfort Munenori proved a fiercely intelligent child, with a natural aptness for learning as well as fighting. Well before the boy had come of age, it was clear to his father that Munenori was destined to become a great swordsman, while his quick insight and resolute action inspired high hopes for his future as the leader of the Yagyū clan.

Munenori's intellectual inclinations led him to look beyond the immediate needs of the day and contemplate the future. As a child he had had the freedom to travel where his father did not, and on the few occasions that he had visited his brothers in Nara he was reminded of the suffering the centuries of civil strife had inflicted on the populace. He knew that since the Ōnin war the capital had been rebuilt more than once, but in Nara many of the great buildings still bore the scars of internecine warfare.

The most terrible sight among the many ruins was the ghostly specter of the Daibutsuden. All that remained standing were the charred sections of its walls and the decapitated trunk of the once so magnificent Great Buddha. Whenever the young Munenori set his eyes on the blackened and headless torso, protruding ominously from the palisade of charred woodwork, it seemed to the young man that even the benevolence of the Great Buddha had been exhausted by the constant warring, bringing home to him the vanity of power and the need for peace in a war-torn country. That awareness strengthened the young man in his resolve to turn his martial skills to the good, an aim his father was prone to sum up in the term *katsujinken*, or the "life-giving sword."

The meanwhile restored Great Buddha of the Daibutsuden

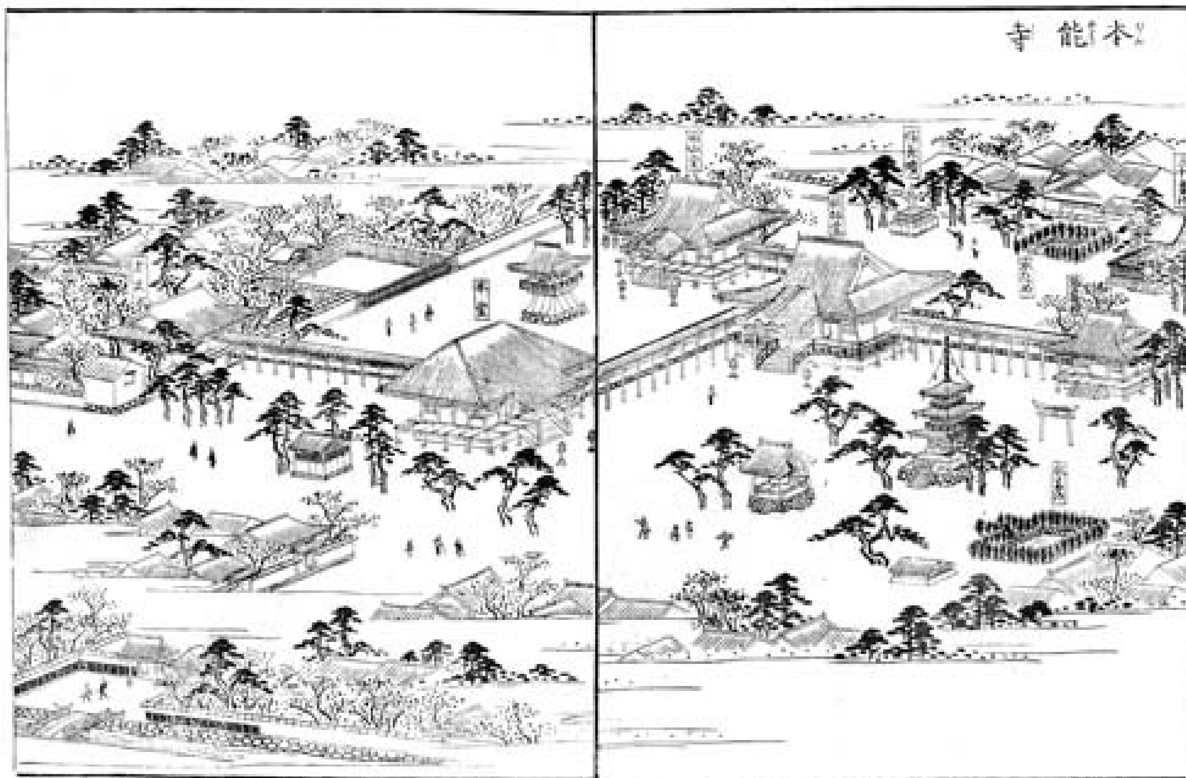
For the time being, however, Munenori and his family and all those who dwelled in the Home Provinces were in the grip of epoch-making events, and one of them was Nobunaga's assassination at the hands of Akechi Mitsuhide during his stay at the Honnō temple in Kyoto.

The first scraps of news of a disturbance at the Honnō temple had reached the village of Ōhirao toward the middle of May 1582. The reports were at first sketchy, no more than a confusing collection of rumors, but as time drew on the rumors were reinforced with more

and more strands of information until the true scale of events and its consequences for the Yamato chieftains became apparent.

CHAPTER VI

It had been early in May 1582, that Oda Nobunaga was sojourning in the capital. He had been making preparations to march for Bitchū, where his chief general, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, was laying siege to Takamatsu castle, a Mōri stronghold. The Mōri, it appeared, were offering fierce opposition, forcing the general to appeal to Nobunaga for reinforcements. Nobunaga had seemed confident of victory over the Mōri, and gone about his preparations with a degree of leisure. On the evening of May 1 he had even found the time to organize a tea ceremony at the Honnō temple, his usual abode when he visited the capital.



The Honnō monastery, site of Nobunaga's assassination

Nobunaga had been in high spirits that evening, entertaining his guests with tales from his early youth, and utterly oblivious to the

looming threat. By the time he and his guest heard the stampeding of hoofs and the clamour of metal it was already too late. Indomitable as ever, Nobunaga had rushed out, shouting that Mitsuhide would “never succeed,” but his retinue was utterly outnumbered and at length he had withdrawn into the burning building and committed suicide.

The Honnō Rebellion shocked the nation. Especially in the Home Provinces, where the effects of the Nobunaga’s drive toward unification were most palpable, people feared the worst.

To Tsutsui Junkei the shock was one of embarrassment, for the ties between the house of Tsutsui and that of Akechi were very close, and it had been through Mitsuhide’s personal offices that Nobunaga had granted him the province of Yamato on Matsunaga Hisahide’s death. Mitsuhide naturally assumed that he could rely on Junkei’s help, as well as on that of a number of other warlords, but the general response had been tepid. Like the other warlords, Junkei, too, had been reluctant to act. He had raised a small contingent, but when he learned that Hideyoshi had raised camp and begun a forced march toward the capital he balked and stayed put at his new headquarters of Kōriyama castle, unable to make up his mind whether to join Hideyoshi or Mitsuhide.

The showdown between the two antagonists came on June 13, when their forces clashed at the village of Yamazaki. There, at the strategic narrow of the Hora pass, Mitsuhide awaited the arrival of his enemy Hideyoshi and his ally Junkei. It was less than a day's ride from there to Kōriyama castle, but Junkei's reinforcements never appeared. Aware of Hideyoshi's strength and the other warlord's lukewarm response to Mitsuhide's call to arms, Junkei had sent a missive to Himeji castle in Harima, where Hideyoshi was getting ready to march on the capital. In it he pledged his allegiance to the general, vowing not to lift a finger against his troops.

In return, for his betrayal—and Mitsuhide's death—Junkei was allowed to hold on to his governorship of Yamato province and continued to reside at Kōriyama castle, where he died following a short illness in 1584.

Leadership over the Tsutsui clan was now assumed by the twenty-three-year-old Sadatsugu. Sadatsugu was not Junkei's natural heir. He was the oldest son of Tsutsui Junkoku, one of Junkei's uncles, who had helped him to capture Tōchi castle. After that he continued to support Junkei in his rise to power, but he had done so from behind the scenes, and where Junkei had confronted his enemies, Junkoku had forged ties with potential allies.

Tsutsui Sadatsugu, who brought about a rapprochement with local chieftains

Junkoku's conciliatory stance had brought about a rapprochement between the Tsutsui and many of the local chieftains from whom they had been alienated over the previous decades—a rapprochement on which Sadatsugu intended to capitalize on his succession, but his plans were upset toward the end of 1585, when he was ordered by Hideyoshi to move his headquarters to Ueno in the neighboring province of Iga.

Some of the chieftains who had found peace with the Tsutsui, among them the Nakanobō, continued to serve their newfound lord, and chose to make the move to Iga, Others preferred to keep their domains and chose to serve under the new lord of Kōriyama castle, Hideyoshi's stepbrother Hidenaga.

There were good reasons why Hideyoshi had made his stepbrother the new governor of Yamato. Together with castles in the other Home Provinces, it formed a line of defense around the center of power. Kōriyama castle, moreover, lay only twenty miles removed from the former site of the Ishiyama Hongan monastery, where he had begun on the construction of his new headquarters of Osaka castle, and he often stayed at his stepbrother's new headquarters.

Kōriyama castle as it is today

It was during this period, while his power was at its apex, that Hideyoshi planned to make the next great moves in his military campaign to pacify the country and complete Nobunaga's work. Retiring from his position as *kanpaku* and assuming the title of *taikō* (retired regent) he turned all his energies to the submission of Shikoku and Kyushu, and the subjugation of the powerful Hōjō at Odawara castle. Huge sums of money were required to finance these massive campaigns, and in a feudal age the chief source of revenue was the tax levied upon a plot of land's rice yield.[4]

It was somewhere in the fall of 1585 that Toyotomi Hidenaga's land surveyors set out along the Yagyū Michi. Already they had charted large tracts of the province. They had begun in the Nara basin, the most fertile area, where rice yields were highest. Now they had set their sights on the mountainous region of Kasagi, just east of Nara and home to the Yagyū domains. It was not long before they discovered that the Yagyū clan had gone into hiding and that, in the wake of Matsunaga Hisahide's demise, no taxes had been levied over their domains. Their actions were as drastic as the letter of Hideyoshi's policies prescribed. All the Yagyū domains, covering an area with a total yield of more than two thousand *koku*, were confiscated forthwith.

Yagyū Michi, the old road that connected Yagyū village with the temple town of Nara

Now the Yagyū were reduced to true fugitives, with no castle to live in, no land to defend, and no lord to serve. In a world in which everything depended on this inseparable trinity, the future of the Yagyū clan seemed doomed. Never in its long history, a history that had spanned the better part of five centuries, had the fate of the Yagyū clan reached such appalling depths. Even their unsurpassed mastery of the sword, an art that had seen them through so many vicissitudes, now seemed reduced to a useless anachronism, unable to hold its own against an art of warfare in which the *teppō*, the foreign rifle, took pride of place.

For the fifty-eight-year-old Muneyoshi it was too much. As family patriarch he felt responsible for the plight in which they found themselves. There seemed no end to the dreadful succession of

calamities, and when, in the winter of 1587, it was followed by the death of his father, Ieyoshi, he renounced the world and took the tonsure under the name of Sekishūsai or “Stone Vessel.” The significance of that name and the depth of Muneyoshi’s despair is revealed in a poem from his own hand, the opening lines of which read:

Without a means to live
I make the art of swordsmanship
my refuge, my sad repose.
It is good for hiding places
yet in strife it has no use
For though I may win contests
I am but a stone vessel
Unable to cross the sea of life.

CHAPTER VII

Ten more years Yagyū Muneyoshi remained in hiding, working a small plot of land belonging to the Enjō temple to feed his family, while drilling his youngest son in the techniques of the Shinkage school of fencing. Only the occasional rumor, gleaned by his wife and daughters from the nervous villagers of Ōhirao gave him and his son cause to emerge from the preoccupations of the day and consider in what way their future might be affected by Toyotomi Hideyoshi's massive campaigns: his subjugation of Shikoku and Kyushu in 1587, his siege of Odawara castle in 1590, and his invasion of Korea in 1592.

All these events took place far from the Home Provinces, and while both father and son realized that they were of great importance to the future of the country as a whole, none of them seemed to touch the lives and futures of those who dwelled in the province of Yamato.

The Enjō temple as it was in Munenori's day

It came as a big surprise, then, when, in the late spring of 1594, the tranquillity of Ōhirai was disturbed by a group of mounted warriors. They were retainers of Kuroda Nagamasa, and soon the word spread that they were looking for a certain Yagyū Muneyoshi.

Muneyoshi knew Nagamasa, though not closely. During the middle of the 1580s, when he had traveled the Home Provinces on one of his *musha shugyō*, he had visited the old Kuroda estate in the

province of Harima, an estate that had been bestowed on the Kuroda by Hideyoshi in reward for their services in the wake of the Honnō Rebellion.

Muneyoshi had been warmly received by Nagamasa, a warrior widely known and respected for his martial prowess, and had given him a demonstration of the *mutōtori*, a technique by which one could disarm an opponent without the use of one's sword. The technique had been invented by none other than Aisu Ikō, the founder of the Kage no Ryū, and had been passed on to Muneyoshi by Kamiizumi Nobutsuna.

What Muneyoshi could not understand was why Nagamasa's men would want to visit him now. Indeed, he failed to see why they should be in the Home Provinces at all. It had been more that seven years, after all, since Nagamasa and his clan members had uprooted and moved to the province of Buzen, on Kyushu, where they had received vast tracts of land in reward for their services during Hideyoshi's campaign to subdue the island. Yet something told the old warrior, who had now reached the respectful age of sixty-six, that Nagamasa's men had not come in anger.

Kuroda Nagamasa, a warrior respected for his martial prowess

It was with great relief that Muneyoshi found his instincts had not lied. Nagamasa's men explained that they had come from Fushimi, where Hideyoshi had begun on the reconstruction of the local castle. Situated on an elevation on the northern bank of the Uji River, Fushimi castle had been completed only a few years earlier. It had been intended for Hideyoshi's retirement, after he had conquered Korea and China.

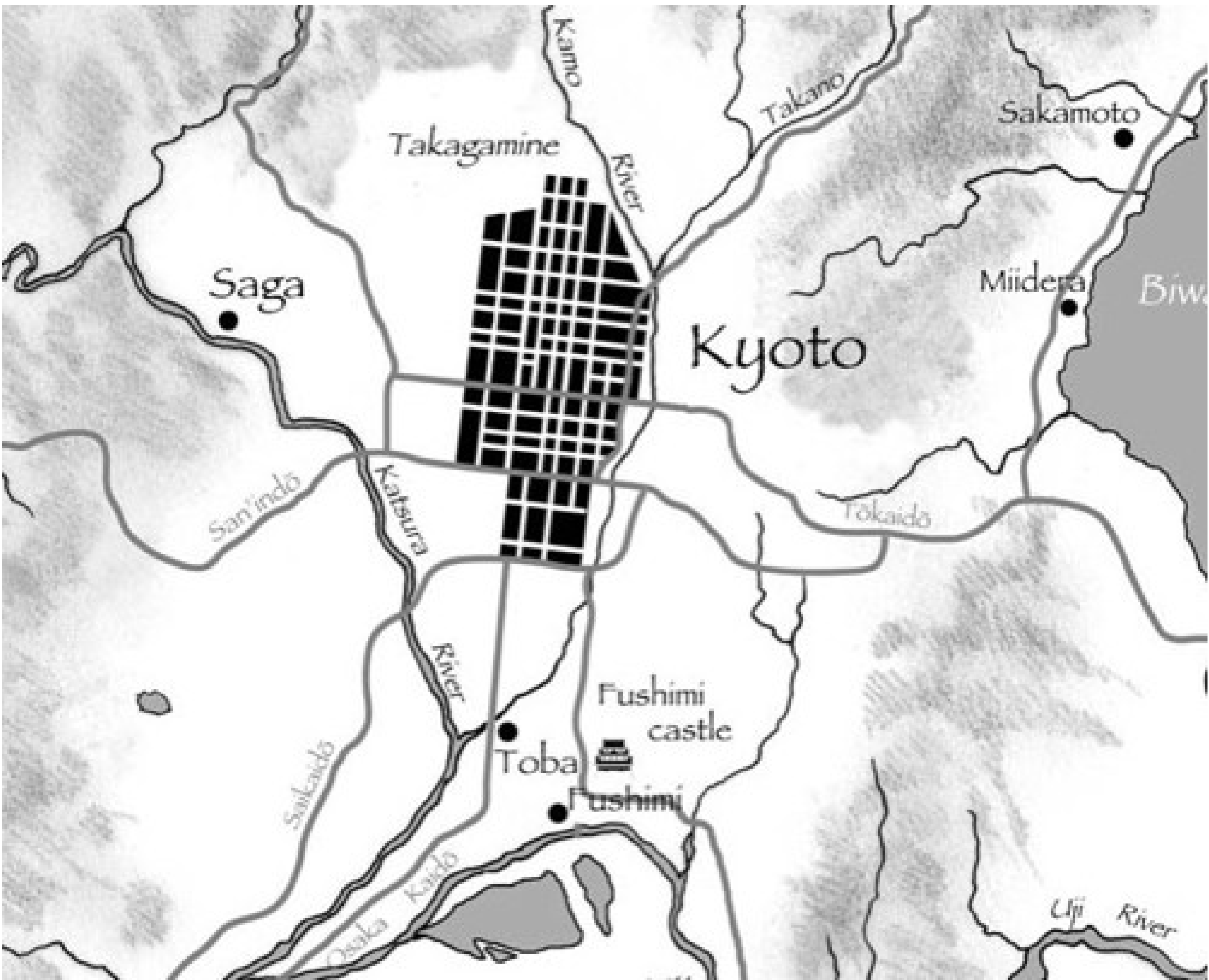
That conquest, however, although begun in a blaze of glory, had not gone as planned. After landing in force at Pusan with one hundred and fifty thousand troops, his generals had captured the capital Seoul within little more than a month, and the more northern town of Pyöngyang within another.

Exactly one year later the roles had been reversed. A large Chinese force had driven the Japanese troops back into the peninsula's southernmost provinces, while the superior Korean navy had decimated the invasion fleet. Hideyoshi's generals were in such difficulty that they felt obliged to sue for peace. Lengthy negotiations followed, and at last the Ming court agreed to send an embassy to Japan. Hideyoshi had decided that he would receive them at Fushimi castle, conveniently situated close to the capital and the imperial palace.

Fushimi castle, rebuilt to accommodate the Ming embassy

To accommodate such a grand occasion the castle needed drastic expansion, As many as six *zōei bugyō*, or “construction magistrates,” were put in charge of the project, while many of the warlords whose forces were not stationed on the Korean Peninsula were ordered to lend assistance and provide the work force of more than twenty thousand men, who were to work on the project day and night.

One of the generals ordered to assist in the reconstruction of Fushimi castle was the eastern warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu. He had set up camp at Takagamine, on the bank of the Kamo River, on the northern outskirts of the capital. Kuroda Nagamasa, who had participated in the Korean campaign with some five thousand men, had visited Ieyasu at his temporary abode on his return to Japan. The warlords knew each other well. They shared a love of military matters and the conversation had soon turned to the Korean campaign, the mainland warriors, and their art of fighting.



The Koreans, Nagamasa conceded, were good warriors, but it had only been their overwhelming number, he assured his host, that had enabled them to drive the Japanese troops out of Pyöngyang and Seoul. Eventually the conversation drifted to matters closer to home, and it was with some relief that both warlords concluded that, where it came to the art of fencing, the Japanese warrior had no equal on the continent.

Roused by the content of their conversation, Ieyasu had asked Nagamasa wether he knew of any great swordsmen in the surrounding area who might come and entertain them with his skills. The latter had immediately cast his mind back to the time he had lived in Kawachi, when an aging swordsman from the neighboring province of Yamato had impressed him with his superlative fencing skills. He told Ieyasu that he knew of a warrior from the province of

Yamato, a certain Yagyū Munenori, who had visited him on a *musha shugyō*, and who had impressed him with a technique by which he could disarm an opponent without the use of his sword.

Thus it was that, on June 21, 1594, Yagyū Muneyoshi and his son Munenori rode into Ieyasu's camp at Takagamine, dismounted, and made their appearance.

In the tradition of the times Ieyasu's quarters were encircled by a high curtain, emblazoned with his family crest and held up by a row of pikes placed at regular intervals. It was a fine day and the warlord was seated outside his tent, on a low chair covered with the hide of a deer. Rising from his seat, Ieyasu took a *bokken* and placed himself at the middle of the enclosure. It was filled with his bannermen, as well as a number of dignitaries, and it was with a degree of self-awareness that the warlord turned toward Muneyoshi and challenged him, daring him to take his weapon without the use of his own.

No sooner had he spoken than Ieyasu charged at Muneyoshi, raising his *bokken* and uttering a *kiai* at the top of his voice as he brought down the weapon on Muneyoshi's head. Yet instead of recoiling, Muneyoshi moved in upon Ieyasu. The moment they were about to clash, he swiftly moved to the left and, swivelling round on the ball of his left heel in unison with his opponent, seized the hilt of the *bokutō* from below with his left hand, causing the warlord to lose his balance and tumble forward.

A nervous silence descended on the encampment as Ieyasu rose and calmly brushed the dirt from his tunic.

Description of an old Yagyū technique (Ittō ryōdan)

Any lesser man might have felt humiliated, insulted, but not Ieyasu. He, instead, praised the aging swordsman, who was his senior by fourteen years. He offered him to join his retinue of *shihan*, his personal fencing instructors, and expressed his eagerness to learn more about the Shinkage school of fencing. Muneyoshi readily accepted.

Now it was Muenyoshi’s turn to be dazzled. While the portent of the offer was still sinking in, Ieyasu called his scribe and made him draft a written pledge in which he solemnly vowed not to “divulge to anyone that what I have learned, be they my parents or children, before I have received my *inka*.”

It was a remarkable reversal of fortune that the gods had granted the aging Yamato swordsman. For two long decades he and his family had lived in obscurity, not knowing what setbacks the dawning

of each new day would bring. Now he had become a personal fencing instructor with a stipend of two hundred *koku* to one of the most powerful warlords in the Japanese realm—a warlord whom even the great *taikō* Toyotomi Hideyoshi had deemed it prudent to keep an ally.

CHAPTER VIII

Over the next few years Muneyoshi faithfully served Ieyasu in the capacity of *shihan*. In this, Muneyoshi was not alone. Befitting a warlord of his position, Ieyasu's retinue included a host of other swordsmen from different schools of fencing.

Chief among them at this time was Ono Tadaaki, the propagator of Itō Ittōsai's Ittō-ryō. There were other swordsmen, of equally reputable schools of swordsmanship. One of them, Okuyama Kyūgasai Kimishige, was, like Muneyoshi, a one-time disciple of Kamiizumi Nobutsuna, and had gone on to found his own particular strand called the Okuyama Shinkage-ryū. Then there was Arima Ōi no Kami Mitsumori, a practitioner of Iizasa Chōisai's Shintō-ryū, whose relative Arima Kihei had duelled with the legendary Miyamoto Musashi.

All of them were great swordsmen in their own right, but none of them were from the Home Provinces, nor had any of them been the master of his own castle as Muneyoshi had once been. That, however, was more than twenty years ago, and now the old warrior had to adjust to the life of a retainer. Instead of giving orders, he had to follow orders, and in order to hold on to his position he had to compete with equally talented swordsmen, many of whom were far less advanced in years.

Muneyoshi's newly won position had its advantages too. No longer need he worry about the protection of his domains, and his stipend of two hundred *koku* was more than enough to support him and his family.

Being part of Ieyasu's retinue also allowed him to witness from close quarters the great events that occurred on the center stage of national politics in the closing years of the sixteenth century. He was at Fushimi with Ieyasu when a great earthquake in the Kyoto basin almost completely destroyed the castle, undoing within a few minutes much of the work that had been done over the previous years. That was in 1596, in the first year of Keichō. Hideyoshi had ordered his *zōei bugyō* to immediately resume work, but the castle was not ready in time, and when the Chinese embassy reached the

capital in the last month of the same year, he was forced to invite them to Osaka castle instead.

The forbidding walls of Osaka castle

The swordsman had also witnessed more auspicious events. In 1593 Hideyoshi's mistress Yodogimi bore him a second son, whom he named Hideyori. Muneyoshi was present when, shortly after, Ieyasu and the other great warlords were called to a council at Osaka castle where all were made to sign a written oath in which they solemnly pledged their allegiance to the Hideyori.[5]

Three years later, in the summer of 1598, feeling his strength ebbing and realizing his end was drawing near, Hideyoshi called into life the institutions that would ensure Hideyori's succession. Drawing on the organs of state of the Muromachi Bakufu that had survived Nobunaga's period of rule, he formed two councils of five men each.

The board with most authority was the *go-tairō*, the Council of (five) Regents. Its members were Tokugawa Ieyasu, Maeda Toshiie, Mōri Terumoto, Uesugi Kagekatsu, and Ukita Hideie. These men, his most trusted vassals, were to safeguard continued Toyotomi rule.

The second organ of state was that of the *go-bugyō*, the Council of (five) Commissioners. Its members were Ishida Mitsunari, Asano Nagamasa, Maeda Geni, Mashita Nagamori, and Natsuka Masaie. The *bugyō* were directly responsible to the *tairō* and in charge of the administrative and day-to-day affairs of government.

Satisfied that he had done all he could to secure his son's succession, on September 5, Hideyoshi once again called Ieyasu to his bedside and made him swear once more that he would obey his every injunction. Two weeks later the *taikō* was dead and the future of his heir in the hands of Ieyasu and the other *go-tairō*.

Muneyoshi knew that Ieyasu had dutifully complied with all of Hideyoshi's wishes, as had all the other warlords—to do otherwise was to court certain disaster. Hideyoshi did not question Ieyasu's loyalty and had made him his guardian, with instructions to see to Hideyori's appointment as *kanpaku* when the time was ripe. Ieyasu on his part was, at least for the time being, content with the arrangement. The death one year later of Maeda Toshiie, the new lord of Osaka castle, made him the most powerful warlord among the five *tairō*, a position that he underscored with characteristic decisiveness when, on Toshiie's death, he moved into the western wing of the vacated castle and was recognized by the other *tairō* as the *tenka dono*, the undisputed "lord of the realm."

CHAPTER IX

Yagyū Muneyoshi was now seventy years old and had been in Ieyasu's service for four years. For his family it had been a period of remarkable recovery, but not without its setbacks.

One year before his death, in one of his increasingly frequent yet always unpredictable fits of anger, Hideyoshi broke the fragile truce that had been established with China and sent another large invading force to the Korean Peninsula. Among the one hundred thousand warriors that had been ferried across the Tsushima Straits was one of Muneyoshi's grandsons, Yoshikatsu's oldest son, Kyūsaburō.

In sharp relief with the mood of invincibility that accompanied the first invasion, this mission was dominated by a feeling of doom. This mood had already taken hold of the warriors during the passage, which was fraught with so many difficulties that close to half a year passed before all the troops had been landed at Pusan. The defeatist spirit persisted on land, deepening as winter set in. Instead of thrusting northward, toward the capital of Seoul, the invasion force began to ensconce itself in the castles it began to build at Ulsan, Chinju, and Sunch'on, all situated along the southern coast, where they could be supplied with victuals and other provisions over water.

CHINA
Ch'öngjin
Sea
of
Japan
Yönsan
Pyöngyang
Seoul
1st
Korea
Bay
Ch'önan
KOREA
Ch'önju
2nd
Ming
Ulsan
Chinju
Sunch'on
Pusan
Tsushima
island
Cheju
island
Hakata

These were not makeshift fortifications, but huge strongholds, built to the exacting standards of Japanese craftsmanship, with massive stone walls and deep moats, the construction of which was labor-intensive and time consuming.

Three of the expedition’s chief generals now took it upon themselves to see to the construction and defense of the three strongholds: Katō Kiyomasa at Ulsan, Shimazu Yoshihiro at Chinju, and Konishi Yukinaga at Sunch’on.

Informed by their spies that the strongholds were not yet completed, the Koreans and Chinese commanders launched a massive counter offensive. Toward the end of 1597, they departed from Seoul at the head of some seventy thousand troops. Proceeding rapidly southward along the peninsula’s three main roads, they reached the city of Ulsan within a few days, taking the busily preoccupied Japanese utterly by surprise.

Muneyoshi’s grandson had been attached to the regiment of Katō Kiyomasa, the general in charge of Ulsan’s defense. The general had been away that day, visiting the nearby port to expedite the slow supply of victuals, which were urgently needed in the cold continental winter. Hearing of the attack he immediately rushed back, and it was only in the chaos of a town under siege and the cover of night that he was able to steal back into the Japanese stronghold.

The Siege of Ulsan, a standoff that would affect the Yagyū, too

By the next evening the Koreans and Chinese had recaptured the city's outskirts and killed a thousand Japanese warriors. Over the next few days casualties rose on both sides, well into the thousands. Fighting was concentrated around the periphery of the building site, where the Japanese sought to use to their advantage those sections of the castle that were close to completion. The attackers sought to make the most of those that were not.

After ten days of siege warfare the position of the Japanese was dire. Reports were coming in at the headquarters of the Ming army that within the castle the Japanese were by now:

> reduced to the eating of paper and leather, anything to fill their groaning stomachs, while they seek to quench their thirst by drinking their own urine, and when they prepare the food they

> have, they give it to their riflemen first, leaving the others to perish from starvation.

One of the countless warriors to come to this wretched end was Yagyū Kyūsaburō. It was from none other than Kuroda Nagamasa, the man who had rescued the Yagyū family from the brink of ruin that the old Muneyoshi received the news of his grandson's tragic end.

Kuroda had been part of a relief party of some ten thousand troops assembled to lift the siege. In this they miraculously succeeded, but not without first suffering heavy casualties themselves. When they did finally force their way through to the castle, they came upon a scene from hell. The inner court was strewn with the remains of dead warriors, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean alike. They had fallen where they had fought, and now lay frozen in grotesque embraces by the indiscriminate cold of winter.

Among the countless corpses that Nagamasa and his men inspected that day was that of thirty-year-old Kyūsaburō, still clutching the hilt of his sword. It was of some consolation to the old Muneyoshi that his grandson had died in the line of duty. At the same time Kyūsaburō's life, like the lives of so many other young and promising men in these years of turmoil seemed to have been lost in vain, cut short as it was only fifty miles from where the young warrior and his comrades had landed almost a year before.

Muneyoshi's sentiments must have been shared by the Japanese generals in charge of the invasion force. After several more months of senseless slaughter, they welcomed the news of Hideyoshi's death, as it finally opened the way to a renewed settlement with their Korean and Chinese counterparts. Hideyoshi's grand plan for the conquest of Korea and China had run its course—the dream was over.

Muneyoshi's grief over the loss of his grandson was tempered by the knowledge that at least the future of his remaining offspring was secure. Two of his sons were by now monks. As such they posed no financial burden, except of course for the seasonal contributions his clan was expected to make to their temple's upkeep.

His fourth son, Muneaki, too, had seen action on the mainland. Muneaki had entered the service of Kobayakawa Hideaki, a warlord

from Kyushu, who controlled much of western part of the island. It had been only a year since that the sixteen-year-old Hideaki had become master of Najima castle, just north of Hakata, after his adoptive father, Takakage, suddenly passed away.

Najima castle, headquarters of Kobayakawa Hideaki

Hideaki had built the castle a decade earlier, when it served as Hideyoshi's first foothold during his campaign to subdue the island once and for all. It had been in return for Takakage's services that Hideyoshi had given him control over the provinces of Chikuzen, Chikugo, as well as parts of Hizen. Takakage and his ten thousand warriors had also fought hard during the Korean campaign, when they crushed the great Ming army just north of Seoul, forcing it to retreat all the way to Pyöngyang.

Yagyū Muneaki had fought on the continent under the command of the young Hideaki, but instead of a repeat of his father's successes, the latter's youthful rashness resulted in a number of failures. Shortly before his death Hideyoshi had ordered him to leave his domains in Kyushu and remove himself to a small fiefdom in the northern regions of Echizen. By the time the order reached Najima castle the *taikō* had already passed away, and through the mediation of Ieyasu the young warlord was allowed to hold on to his possessions. Muneaki, too, had remained in Kyushu, continuing to serve his young lord.

Only his fifth son, Munenori, in spite of his many qualities, his great talent at swordsmanship, had not yet found a niche for himself. It was the source of some anxiety to the old swordsman that his youngest son had not yet found the means to realize his ambitions and live up to the great expectations he had raised in his father.

While troubled by these thoughts, Muneyoshi was also beginning to feel the weight of old age. The demands of Ieyasu's busy life were exceedingly high, especially in the wake of Hideyoshi's death, when the eastern warlord was moving to strengthen his position among the other nine members on the two councils.

Contrary to Hideyoshi's intentions there was little unity among the *tairō* and *bugyō*. Soon after his death the two councils began to fall apart into two rival factions, one coalescing around Ieyasu, the other around the western warlord Ishida Mitsunari. The real power the factions exercised was not expressed in the official position their members occupied, but in the extent of the territories that they and their adherents controlled, as this was the basis for the military muscle each faction could bring to the fore.

Ishida Mitsunari, leader of the western faction

To extend the power of his faction and consolidate his position Ieyasu began to fall back on the age-old and trusted method of intermarriage, binding to him and his adherents those warlords who could tip the balance of power in their favor. This led him to travel the length and breadth of the country, and for the aging Muneyoshi, who was often called upon to provide escort for his master's many guests, as well as demonstrate his skills for their amusement, the burden of office became heavier with every day.

Aware that he had reached a point in his life where he could no longer fulfill his obligations, he approached his lord with the request to be dismissed and that his place be taken by his youngest son, Munenori.

To his immense relief Ieyasu acceded to both, thanking him for the services he had rendered and gratefully accepted the swordman's plea to be replaced by his son. He predicted that great events were afoot. They were not far in the offing, and he assured the old man that Munenori would play his role in their unfolding.

CHAPTER X

Munenori had been in the service of the *tenka dono* for little more than a year when the prescience of Ieyasu's words to his father was revealed. Ever since Hideyoshi's death Ieyasu had watched with Argus eyes how Mitsunari had furtively positioned himself for a major confrontation, forging secret alliances with other western warlords without giving his opponents any direct cause to accuse him of treachery. What Ieyasu needed was a ploy, an excuse by which to draw the shrewd and wily Mitsunari from his den and expose his treachery to the other *go-tairō*.

That opportunity presented itself in the spring of 1600, when reports began to reach Osaka castle from Ieyasu's informants in the Kantō that none other than one of his fellow *go-tairō*, the northern warlord Uesugi Kagekatsu, was reinforcing his positions in the province of Aizu. He had issued secret orders to his vassals to prepare their strongholds for war and had even begun on the construction of a new castle at the center of the Aizu Basin.

Kagekatsu had always been a nuisance, but with his power base far removed from the center of power and only half the talent of his adoptive father, he never posed a serious threat to Ieyasu's designs. Indeed, he now provided Ieyasu with the perfect pretext to act. Already Ieyasu had repeatedly summoned Kagekatsu to come down to Osaka castle and explain his conduct. As Ieyasu had anticipated, the belligerent warlord blatantly ignored the summons and continued to build up his forces around his headquarters of Aizu Wakamatsu castle.

Aizu Wakamatsu castle, headquarters of Uesugi Kagekatsu

The time had come to act, and early in July, Munenori and his fellow *shihan* were instructed to prepare for a long journey. Their lord had decided to travel up to Edo castle, and from there to Oyama castle in Shimotsuke, from where he intended to conduct the campaign against the rebellious warlord and, more importantly, await the first signs of Mitsunari's revolt. First, however, he intended to call at Fushimi castle, for it was there that he expected Mitsunari and his fellow conspirators to strike first.

Things that summer went very much as Ieyasu expected. When he arrived in Oyama, on September 1, messengers from his allies in the west of Japan informed him that Ishida Mitsunari had departed from his stronghold of Sawayama castle in Ōmi and, on August 27, laid siege to Fushimi castle with some forty thousand troops.

Among the warlords who had chosen Mitsunari's side were Mōri Hidemoto, Ukita Hideie, and Kobayakawa Hideaki, all men from the west of Japan. They and their fathers had been forced to bend to the will of Ieyasu's predecessors, but they had done so reluctantly and had resented the influence the Kantō warlords had come to exert, first over Kyoto, then over the Home Provinces, and finally even over Japan's western provinces. Ieyasu, in turn, had always been wary of them, their general reluctance to recognize his authority, and their attempts to thwart him at every turn. The time had come to overcome their opposition once and for all and settle matters in his favor and in favor of a truly unified country.

On his departure from Fushimi castle he had left Torii Mototada and some fifteen hundred of his best warriors in charge of the castle's defense. Both men knew that it was far too small a force to withstand a sustained assault, but it was enough to keep them tied down long enough for Ieyasu to take care of Kagekatsu. He had never intended to pit his men against those of the rebellious warlord and be pinned down in the north with his rear vulnerable to attack. Yet he knew that it was that very assumption that had led Mitsunari to show his colors and move against Fushimi castle. It was all he required. Now he could rightfully claim that Mitusnari and his allies were rebels who needed to be dealt with.

On September 2 he ordered all the vassal warlords who had joined him on his northern expedition to assemble at Oyama, where he convened a council in which he set out the strategy by which he intended to counter Mitsunari's challenge. A number of warlords were to return home to their domains in order to raise yet more troops. Most of the gathered warlords, however, would lead their troops down the Tōkaidō to Kiyosu castle, just west of Nagoya. There they were to await the arrival of the others, as well as Ieyasu's son, Hidetada, who would lead the rest of Ieyasu's troops down the Nakasendō.

The scene of the Oyama war conference

On September 6 Ieyasu called to his side a number of his closest retainers, among them Yagyū Munenori. This, he told them, was the moment for which he had been waiting. During the four days that had passed since the council he had written a large number of letters. They were addressed to allied warlords throughout the country and it was the task of Munenori and the others to ensure that they were delivered to the addressees without fail. Ieyasu urged the assembled men to go about their duty with great care, but also with alacrity, for there was no time to lose if they were to intercept Mitsunari and his allies before they had passed beyond the province of Mino.

To Munenori's utter surprise one of the letters he was to deliver was addressed to none other than his father. The old man had retired to his native village of Yagyū, where he had entered a small temple and taken the tonsure. What could it be that the *tenka dono* wanted from his father?

CHAPTER XI

Deeply aware of the importance of his mission Munenori traveled without rest. Only the endurance of his horse forced him to make the occasional stop at one of the Tōkaidō's many post stations for food and water.

Taking the shortest route possible Munenori covered the huge distance in only five days. It was a three-hundred-mile journey and while most of the domains through which he passed were under the control of Ieyasu and his allies, one could never be sure where danger lurked, especially in Mino, where the western warlords could count on the support of Nobunaga's descendants at Gifu castle.

His journey, however, passed without incident, and it was with immense relief, and utterly exhausted that, late in the afternoon of September 11, Munenori drew up his horse outside his father's modest abode in Yagyū village. The last thing he saw before he was finally overcome by sleep was his father holding up to the light the unfolded piece of paper and absorbing its content with an air of grave solemnity.

In his letter to Muneyoshi, Ieyasu urged his former *shihan* to seek out all *rōnin* in his area and make contact with Tsutsui Sadatsugu, the former ruler of Yamato who had been forced by Hideyoshi to move his seat of power to Ueno in the neighboring province of Iga.

Over breakfast very early next morning Munenori informed his father that Sadatsugu had been among the many warlords who had joined Ieyasu on his campaign against Uesugi Kagekatsu. He related how, on the eve of his departure from Oyama, all the gathered warlords had attended a council convened by Ieyasu. Sadatsugu, however, had not been among them. Why he did not know. All he knew was that within only a few days of his arrival at Oyama, Sadatsugu and his large contingent of warriors had hurriedly departed. All these activities, of course, had been shrouded in a veil of secrecy, and he knew neither what had been discussed at the meeting, nor the reason for Sadatsugu's sudden departure.

Having lived in close proximity to Ieyasu for several years, Muneyoshi had no difficulty in following the warlord's line of thought.

The news of the fall of Fushimi castle had already reached him, and he knew that this was the moment that Ieyasu had been waiting for. The combined force of all the chieftains who had marched up to Aizu and attended the council would certainly run into the tens of thousands. It was only with the help of men like Sadatsugu that Ieyasu could hope to subdue Mitsunari and his allies, whose combined strength must also run into the tens of thousands.

Tsutsui Sadatsugu was indeed a powerful warlord. He could muster at least several thousand well-trained warriors. Muneyoshi had stayed in close contact with his relatives among the Nakanobō, and on his various *musha shugyō*, he had frequently visited them at their new abode on Sadatsugu's estate in Ueno. He had witnessed from close quarters how their lord had made the most of his forced removal. He had put a lot of effort in the recruitment and training of troops, and in 1587, he had begun the construction of Ueno castle, a huge stronghold, right at the center of his new domains.

Ueno castle, headquarters of Tsutsui Sadatsugu

The old man also knew that the recently erected castle had been the very reason for Sadatsugu's hasty return. On his departure, Sadatsugu had left the castle in the care of his brother. But during his absence western forces under the command of Shinjō Naoyori had marched into Iga. Sadatsugu's brother had fled into the mountains, leaving the castle to the invader. It had not been long after these events had taken place that Sadatsugu had returned in full force and recaptured the castle without much trouble.[6]

All, then, was set for the Yagyū clan to play its own modest but valuable role in Ieyasu's great scheme to unify the country. That same evening they sent out word across the region, urging all befriended clans to join them the next day, when they would cross the border into Iga and put themselves under the command of Tsutsui Sadatsugu, the lord of Ueno castle.

CHAPTER XII

It was September 12 when Ieyasu crossed the bridge over the wide moat of Edo castle and entered the imposing gate to his eastern headquarters. Following the council of warlords at Oyama he had ordered his Kantō allies to keep Kagekatsu in check and returned to Edo castle, where he intended to ready himself for the final confrontation with Ishida Mitsunari and his allies.

Bridge of Edo castle

Events were now unfolding in rapid succession. On his arrival, he learned that four days earlier Fushimi castle had fallen after ten days of intense fighting in which Torii Mototada and all his men had given their lives. A week later he learned that, having captured Fushimi castle, Mitsunari and his allies had proceeded eastward along the

Tōkaidō, entering the province of Mino, where, on September 17, they entered the small stronghold of Ōgaki castle without meeting any resistance. It appeared they wanted to entrench themselves in Mino, where they could count on the support of Oda Hidenobu.

The *tenka dono* was not in the least perturbed by these tidings. He had given the two great armies that departed on the day following the council enough time to reach their destinations—something that was confirmed by the news, shortly after his arrival, that the force that had marched down the Tōkaidō had reached the stronghold of Kiyosu according to plan. Ieyasu himself, however, did not move from Edo castle. First he wanted to ascertain the loyalty of his commanders in the field, and that loyalty could only be expressed in military feats. Such was the purport of a message delivered to the gathered forces at Kiyosu on September 26, and it had the desired effect. Two days later a contingent of five thousand men under the command of Ikeda Terumasa crossed the Kiso River upstream to attack Gifu castle in force. They came under dense rifle fire from Oda Hidenobu's troops across the river, forcing them at first to retreat. Then, however, the scales tipped. A second large eastern contingent, under the command of Fukushima Masanori, had crossed the river farther downstream by means of a fleet of small boats under the cover of night. At first the Oda forces offered fierce resistance, but when they were threatened with being cut off, Hidenobu ordered his men to retreat to the castle.

At early daybreak on September 30 the Ikeda and Fukushima forces launched a massive attack on Gifu castle. Within hours Masanori's men had forced one of the castle's gates and made their way into the castle's second compound, the last line of defense protecting the keep where Oda Hidenobu and his family were holding out. Not much later Terumasa's men forced their way into the last compound, setting sections of it afire and hurling their banner into the castle's keep shouting "today, we are the first to breach the enemy's castle." High up in the keep, Hidenobu, realizing the game was up, prepared to commit ritual suicide. But he was prevailed upon by his retainers to surrender and go into seclusion in Gifu's Entoku temple.

Gifu castle and its castle town in Munenori's day

Hearing that Gifu castle had fallen, the master of nearby Inuyama castle also surrendered. All the commanders who had led their troops along the Tōkaidō now ordered their men to advance westward, toward Ōgaki castle.

Mitsunari was stunned by the swiftness with which his enemies had turned the scales on him. In his plans the castles of Ōgaki, Gifu, and Inuyama had featured as a barrier to guard the gateway to the capital and the western provinces. It had also seemed the perfect base from which to launch his intended strike against Ieyasu's home province of Mikawa and the Kantō beyond.

Now those plans were rendered futile. Within only a few days the eastern army had captured two of his Mino strongholds, and now

threatened to do the same with the castle where he and his allies had gathered. He panicked and ordered his troops to press forward, toward Gifu, and to throw up a line of defense along the eastern shores of the Nagara River. However, the strategy backfired, and instead of throwing back the advancing eastern troops, Mitsunari was forced to withdraw to Ōgaki castle at the cost of many a casualty.

Ōgaki castle, temporary headquarters of Ishida Mitsunari

Seeing the huge force arrayed against him, Mitsunari now frantically began to write letters to befriended warlords, luring them with the promise of more territories and higher status. His efforts seemed to bear fruit, for over the next few weeks one warlord after the other led their troops into Mino and set up camp nearby Ōgaki castle. Among them were powerful men such as Ōtani Yoshitsugu, Ukita Hideie, Mōri Hidemoto, Kikkawa Hiroie, and Natsuka Masaie.

Their combined forces comprised some thirty thousand men, bringing the total of the western forces close to eighty thousand, roughly twice the number of those arrayed against them. Even warlords of doubtful allegiance made their appearance, among them Kobayakawa Hideaki, who arrived with some eight thousand men in tow.

The eastern army had meanwhile pitched camp at the post station of Akasaka, some three miles northwest of Ōgaki. There were some twenty contingents in all, varying in number from a few hundred to several thousands. The largest was that of Kuroda Nagamasa, who had put well over five thousand warriors in the field. Another large contingent was that of Tsutsui Sadatsugu. With the help of Yagyū Muneyoshi and many of the other local chieftains, Sadatsugu had managed to raise close to three thousand troops. They had departed from Ueno castle toward the end of September and joined their allies shortly after the fall of Gifu and Inuyama castles.

Akasaka, where the eastern army pitched camp

There was no sign yet, however, of Ieyasu, nor of his son Hidetada, who was to lead the second great force along the Nakasendō. And thus they impatiently awaited the arrival of Ieyasu, the great eastern commander who was to conduct the battle against Mitsunari and his western allies, and thereby decide the fate of the nation.

CHAPTER XIII

Until the afternoon of October 20 the huge host of warriors, horses, carriers, and camp followers were kept waiting for the *tenka dono* to arrive. That arrival could not have gone unnoticed, neither to them nor to the nearby enemy, for with him he had brought a contingent of thirty thousand troops, bringing the total number of men fighting on his side close to eighty thousand, almost the equivalent of those assembled under Ishida Mitsunari. His arrival was affirmed, when his retainers erected the banners with the Tokugawa crest.

It was not the weather to lift the spirits when Ieyasu dismounted his horse and strode up to his tent to receive the first reports from his commanders in the field. It was fall, the time of year when fierce hurricanes swept in from the southern Pacific to hit the Japanese islands with their relentless force. It seemed that this was exactly what lay in store for the gathered warriors, for the wind was picking up and already a thick veil of rain hung over the landscape, subduing the vivid colors of their armor, the silk banners, and the bright sparkle of the long lances.

The air of gloom among the eastern warriors, however, was lifted as if by magic when Ieyasu's messengers reported that all of the enemy forces were still stationed near Ōgaki castle, leaving unprotected the two-mile-wide strip of land that ran westward toward the old barrier town of Sekigahara.

The news seemed too good to be true. Sekigahara's geographic position was just too important to leave unguarded. From here the massive Ibuki Mountains ranged northward, all the way north to Tsuruga, where they plummeted into Tsuruga Bay. Southward from Sekigahara ran the Yōrō Mountains, an equally long and impenetrable stretch of mountains, right into the heart of the mountainous Ise Peninsula.

Situated at the point where both mountain ranges met, Sekigahara was considered the gateway between eastern and western Japan. Indeed, its very name, "Plains of the barrier," hailed back to the old Fuwa barrier. That barrier had been erected at the end of the seventh century when, in the wake of the Jinshin Rebellion, Emperor

Tenmu had ordered the erection of barriers along the Hokurikudō, the Tōkaidō, and the Nakasendō, the three main roads that connected the capital to the rest of the country.

Though the Fuwa barrier itself did not last, throughout Japanese history the passage it had guarded had proven the place of the greatest strategic significance of the three. It had been along here that, following the Heiji Rebellion, Minamoto Yoshitomo and his sons had sought to escape the wrath of Taira Kiyomori by scaling the southern slopes of Mount Ibuki in the midst of winter. And it had been here, too, that Oda Nobunaga, having first subdued Gifu castle, had defeated the Miyoshi and Kitabatake forces, opening up the way to the capital and the Home Provinces.

How could it be that Mitsunari had not seized his advantage? Was it that, as a descendant of western warlords, who had always had unhampered access to the Home Provinces, he did not appreciate the barrier's historic importance? Or was it something else? Was it perhaps the weather?

It certainly appeared that the unrelenting rain had gotten to Mitsunari's troops, for Ieyasu's scouts had detected no exceptional movements among them, even after his arrival that afternoon. Only a small group of mounted warriors had loomed up out of the haze to harass his troops stationed along the Makuse River. It was no more than a provocation, and the dreary day drew to a miserable close without any further engagements.

That same evening Ieyasu convened a council of all his commanders in the field. The next day, he told them, they would press eastward, and try to pass the barrier. They would leave behind some five thousand men, far too few to defeat the enemy, but enough to keep them preoccupied for the remainder to pass the barrier into Ōmi province. From there they would march on the castles of Sawayama, Fushimi, and Osaka, the centers of western opposition. It was a bold plan, but if they succeeded the realm would be theirs.

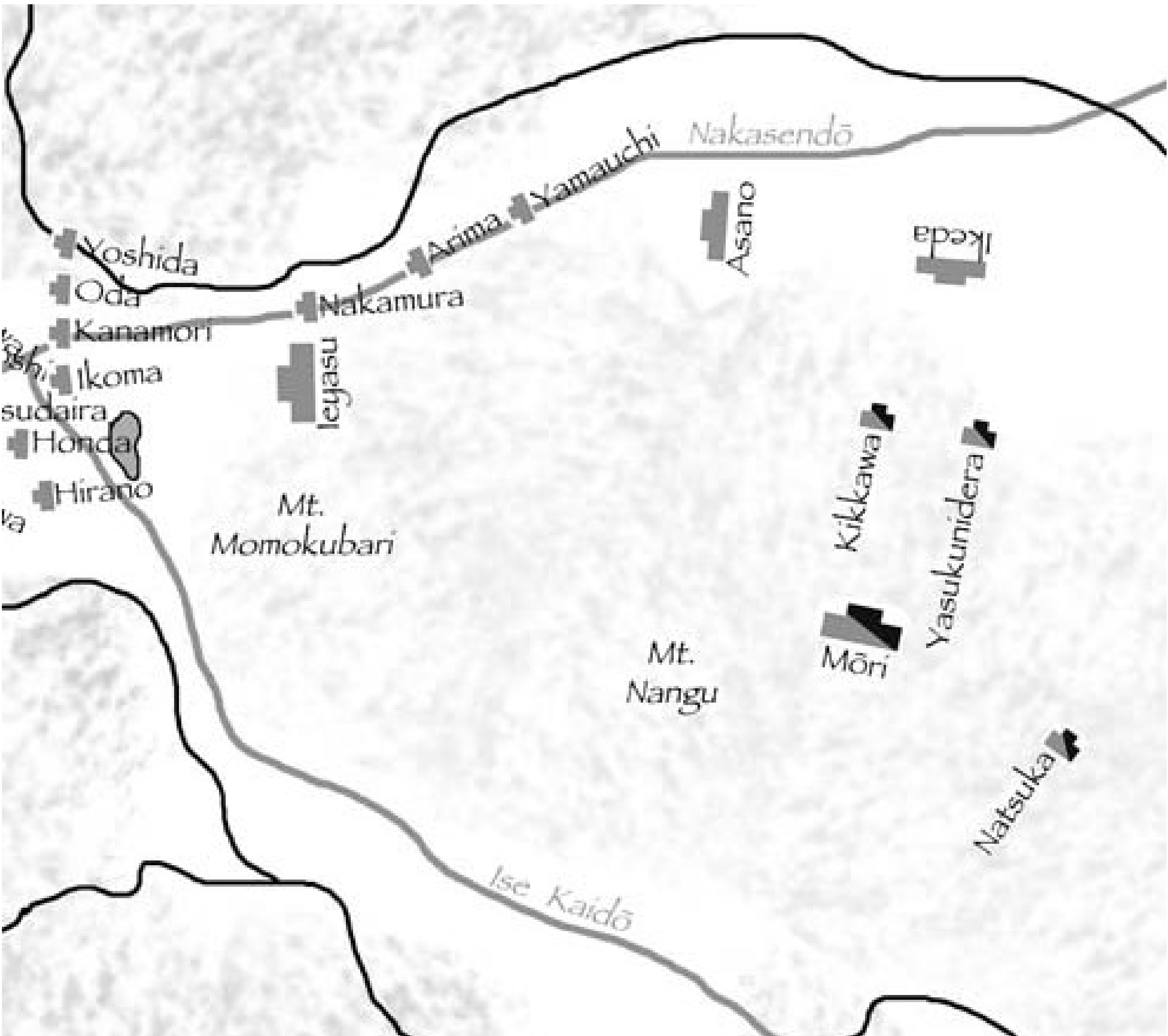
CHAPTER XIV

It was in more than one sense that, early in the morning of October 21, Ieyasu felt that he had been rudely roused from his slumber. Two messengers, one from Fukushima Masanori and one from Nishio Mitsunori, had come with disturbing news. It seemed that during the previous evening, while he and his generals had been mapping out their strategy for the next day, a huge contingent of Mitsunari's army had broken camp and begun to march eastward, straight to the plains of Sekigahara. Caught in a blinding rainstorm they had temporarily lost their way, but shortly after midnight they had reached the foot of Mount Sasao, where they had taken up positions on high ground.

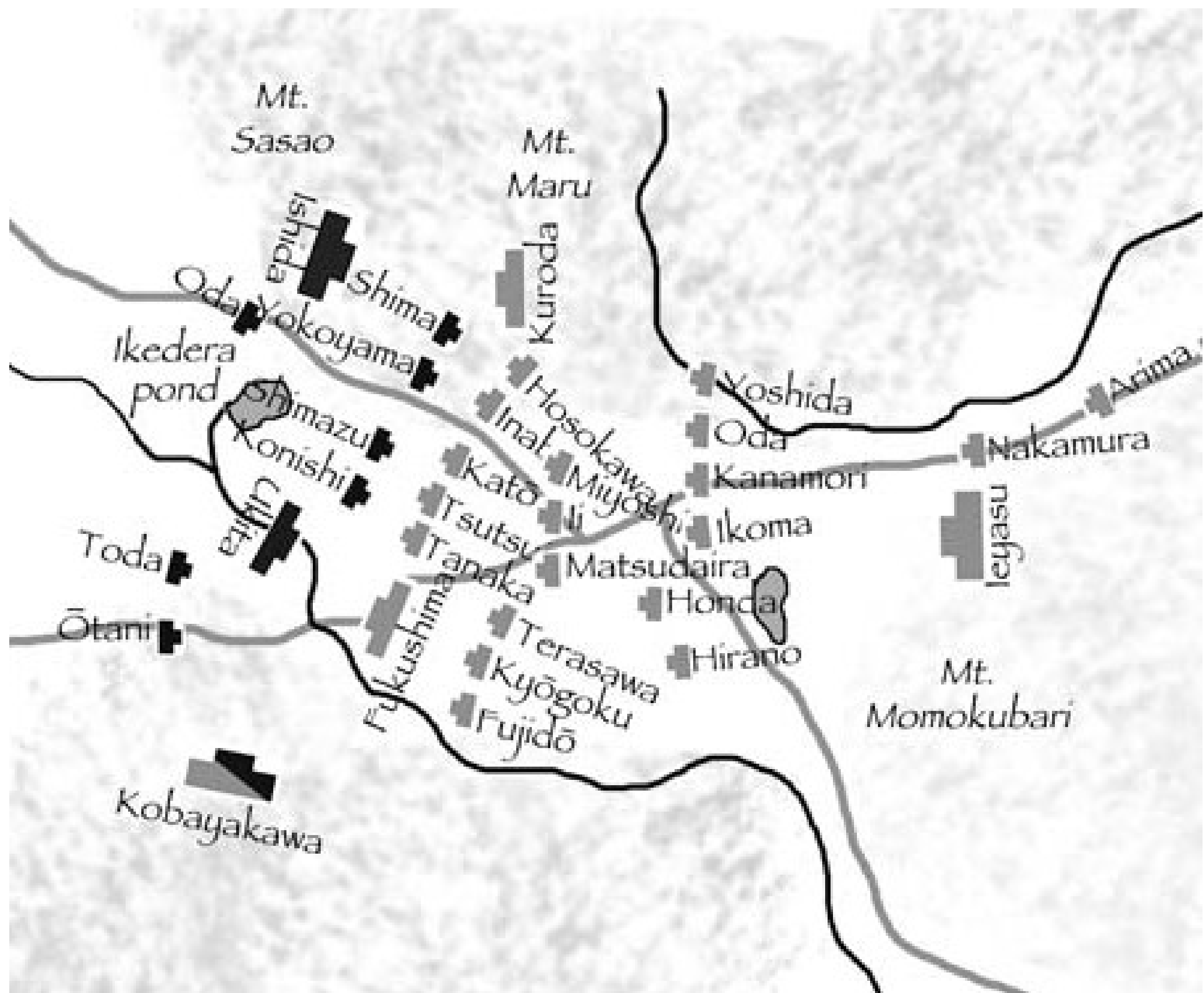
For a moment it seemed that Ieyasu had been masterfully outwitted. The mounted warriors who had come down from Ōgaki to harass his soldiers the previous day had been sent with a purpose: to distract the attention of his scouts from the larger troop movements farther afield. He had underestimated Mitsunari. The latter now clearly held the advantage: he had taken the initiative, he now occupied high ground, and it seemed that his forces held the majority, albeit by a narrow margin. Of all these setbacks it was the last one that irked Ieyasu the most. It should have been the other way round. Close to forty thousand more troops had taken the inland route along the Nakasendō under the command of his son, Hidetada. Given that Hidetada had departed from Utsunomiya on the first of October—a week before he himself had departed from Edo—those troops should long since have arrived in Mino. Lines of communication along the inland route, however, had been poor, and the last news he had had from his son was that he was tied down in Shinano, where he had laid siege of Ueda castle. This was an unnecessary diversion. Ueda castle lay not along the Nakasendō, but on a side road, into Echigo and the northwestern provinces.

The seasoned commander soon recovered from his musings. Rising from his field bed he immediately began to issue orders. All troops were to immediately depart for Sekigahara and position themselves against the western forces as best they could. He

himself would follow with his own force of thirty thousand men. Only Ikeda Terumasa and his men were to remain behind and cover the rear. Not all of Mitsunari's allies might yet have departed from Ōgaki and if they were quick they might be able to cut them off from Mitsunari's advance force. On their way they ran into such dense fog that Ieyasu was forced to halt his troops for fear of losing his way, and to wait until the clouds lifted. It was five o'clock in the morning before Ieyasu set up his field headquarters at the foot of Mount Momokubari and that his twenty contingents took up their positions on the low-lying fields below the enemy positions. By that time the brunt of the western force had positioned themselves on high ground around the Ikedera pond. Only a few of their contingents, among them those of Mōri Hidemoto, Kikkawa Hiroie, and Natsuka Masaie had lagged behind, but they too had taken up positions on high ground, a few miles south to where Ikeda's men were stationed.



Munenori and the other Yamato warriors who had joined Tsutsui Sadatsugu's army were among the first to take up their positions opposite the enemy. They were now right on the front line, just east of the junction between the Nakasendō and the Hokkoku Kaidō. Even as they took up their positions, one by one the other contingents began to arrive, Flanking them were the Tanaka and the Katō, while behind them those of the Ii, the Matsudaira, and the Miyoshi began to take up their positions. All of them were now no more than a mile removed from enemy lines, and it was with a mixture of fear and relish that Munenori and his fellow warriors awaited the break of dawn.



By eight o'clock, the unrelenting rain of the previous night had somewhat lessened. Shrouds of mist still lingered on the low-lying plain, but the troops were so closely dispersed in the narrow valley that many, including those of the enemy, were visible through the haze. It seemed as if the whole valley was alive with movement as close to two hundred thousand warriors readied themselves for the moment of truth.

From where he stood, just over the crest of a hillock, Munenori could clearly make out a black banner with a white cross, the colors of the Shimazu clan. Immediately behind them, at the foot of Mount Tenman stood the troops of Konishi Yukinaga, several thousand in all. And still farther, but more toward the south, an even larger contingent, that of Ukita Hideie, faced Tokugawa's left flank under the command of Fukushima Masanori. Turning his gaze northward,

he could make out yet more allied troops, the Hosokawa, the Katō, the Nagaoka. And beyond them, at the foot of Mount Maru, right opposite those of Mitsunari, stood the forces of Kuroda Nagamasa, the man who had played such an important role in the recovery of the Yagyū clan.

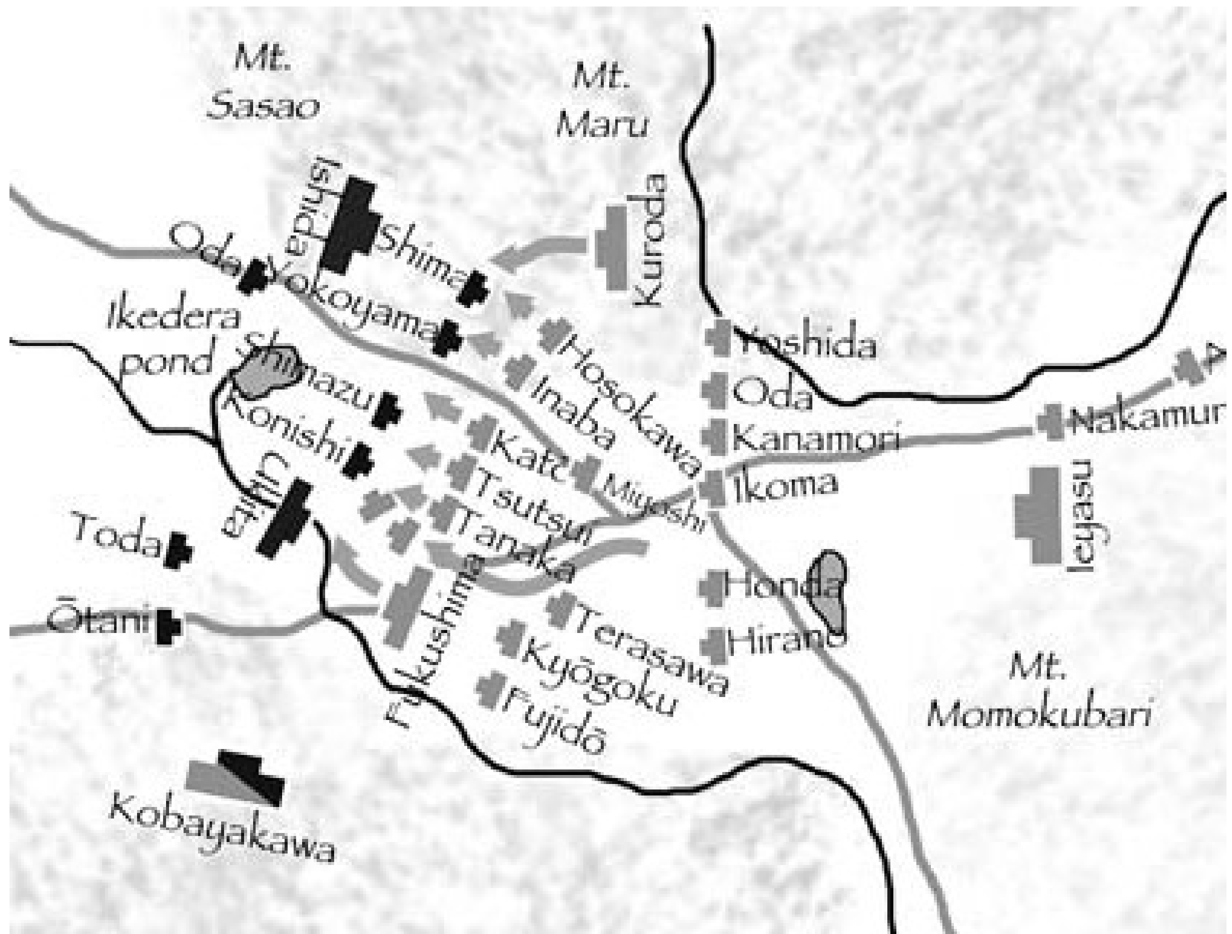
Now, Munenori realized, was the time to repay Nagamasa and Ieyasu his debt of duty by fighting to the hilt—if need be by laying down his life.

CHAPTER XV

It was more by impulse than by design that, on the morning of October 21, the first shots rang out across the plains of Sekigahara. Being on the front line, Munenori noticed how, at less than a mile, the troops of Fukushima Masanori were positioned closest to the enemy. This was a position to be envied. Being the first to see action, the commanders at the front line stood the greatest chance of being killed and one of their heads taken. If they survived, however, it would be they who would be the first to take the head of an enemy. That head would immediately be sent back to Ieyasu to inspect and be declared the *ichiban kubi*, the first enemy head to be taken in battle. Needless to say that such a feat would be copiously recompensed after the battle.

Masanori saw his chances go up in smoke when, shortly after eight o'clock, a small group of mounted warriors carrying Matsudaira and Ii banners detached itself from the troops in Munenori's rear and forced their way through the gap between his ranks and those of the Tanaka and Tsutsui. They were led by Ieyasu's fourth son, Matsudaira Tadayoshi, seconded by Ii Naomasa.

Their sudden action caused a great degree of consternation among the commanders in the front line, especially among Fukushima Masanori. For no sooner had the contingent rode out into no man's land, they swerved leftward—right in Masanori's line of attack—from where they headed straight for the Ukita and Shimazu banners in the enemy line. Fearing that the two commanders were stealing a march on him, Masanori lost his temper and ordered his riflemen to open fire. The fire was answered by the other side, causing the horsemen to be caught in the crossfire. Within moments of the first exchange of volleys a thin plume of smoke began to climb skyward from the foot of Mount Maru, signaling that, forced by the short temper of his commanders, Kuroda Nagamasa had given orders to commence overall hostilities. The battle of Sekigahara had begun in earnest.



Spotting the signal fires on their right all the commanders along the front line now ordered their musketeers to open fire. Thick plumes of smoke belched forth from the arrayed muzzles to mingle with the heavy morning air, so that within moments the thin stretch of land between the two armies was covered by a dense layer of smog. Then, after several volleys had been exchanged, Munenori could hear the bellowing voice of Tsutsui Sadatsugu, ordering the musketeers to stand aside and let the phalanx of spearmen advance.

As he rushed forward through the acrid smog Munenori could make out little except the flashes of muskets being fired on the other side, shortly followed by a sound not unlike the clattering of hail as the molten lead wreaked havoc among his fellow warriors.

The eastern army opens the attack

By now his senses were being overloaded. Underfoot, the ground reverberated with the rumble of the advancing hordes, while his ears were filled with the battle roar of men and the clatter of their armor. It seemed as if he was swept along on the crest of a wave that would soon engulf the enemy lines and drown him and his fellow warriors along with it.

Within a few agonizing moments they reached the enemy lines. There the mounted Ii and Matsudaira warriors had already picked their men, all, of course, commanders of equal rank. From the corner of his eyes, Munenori spotted how one of them, Ii Naomasa, had wrestled to the ground a western chieftain, and was about to take his head. He did not have the time to see the warrior raise the head

aloft, for at that very instant he and his fellow warriors clashed with the Ukita forces, who had dug in the rear end of their *yari* to halt the advance.

Ii Naomasa has wrestled an enemy warrior to the ground

Total mayhem now ensued around Munenori as the bulk of the two armies began to clash and warriors began to grapple with each other in man-to-man combat as their ancestors had done for more than five centuries. It was now, in the heat of battle that Munenori, without realizing it, reaped the benefits of his father’s patient training over the previous two decades.

All the precepts that had been transferred from Aisu Ikō to Kamiizumi Nobutsuna, and from the latter to his father, came now

rushing to Munenori's aid as if some invisible hand had beckoned them. He no longer had to think to position his body sideways to his opponent, to make a shield of his fists, to put his weight on his forward knee, and to let the enemy strike first. All these vital techniques now came to him naturally as he stood his ground and tackled one opponent after the other.

Opposition was fierce, especially from the Ukita and Konishi warriors, whose total number was close to twenty thousand. They fought with such determination that by eleven o'clock the eastern forces were pushed back beyond the positions from which they had advanced three hours before. Worried by the way the battle was going, even Ieyasu had become restless, leaving his camp at the foot of Mount Momokubari to take up position at the center of the plain, right behind his forces. Meanwhile the stalemate continued so that even by noon there was no way to tell which way the pendulum would swing.

Mitsunari, too, had begun to lose patience. He sent up smoke signals, urging those commanders who had not yet joined the battle to do so. The most important of these were Mōri Terumoto and Kobayakawa Hideaki. The former, who was still facing the Ikeda contingent from Mount Nangu, now found himself cut off by his vassal Kikkawa Hiroie, who had been persuaded by Ieyasu to change sides in exchange for his lord's domains. Hideaki, who had taken up positions on Mount Matsuo, toward the south of the scene of battle, also failed to move. On the eve of battle, he had arranged with Mitsunari to join the fight on the latter's signal and attack Ieyasu's forces from the rear. Even when Mitsunari sent a messenger over to Mount Matsuo with an urgent request for assistance Hideaki failed to budge.

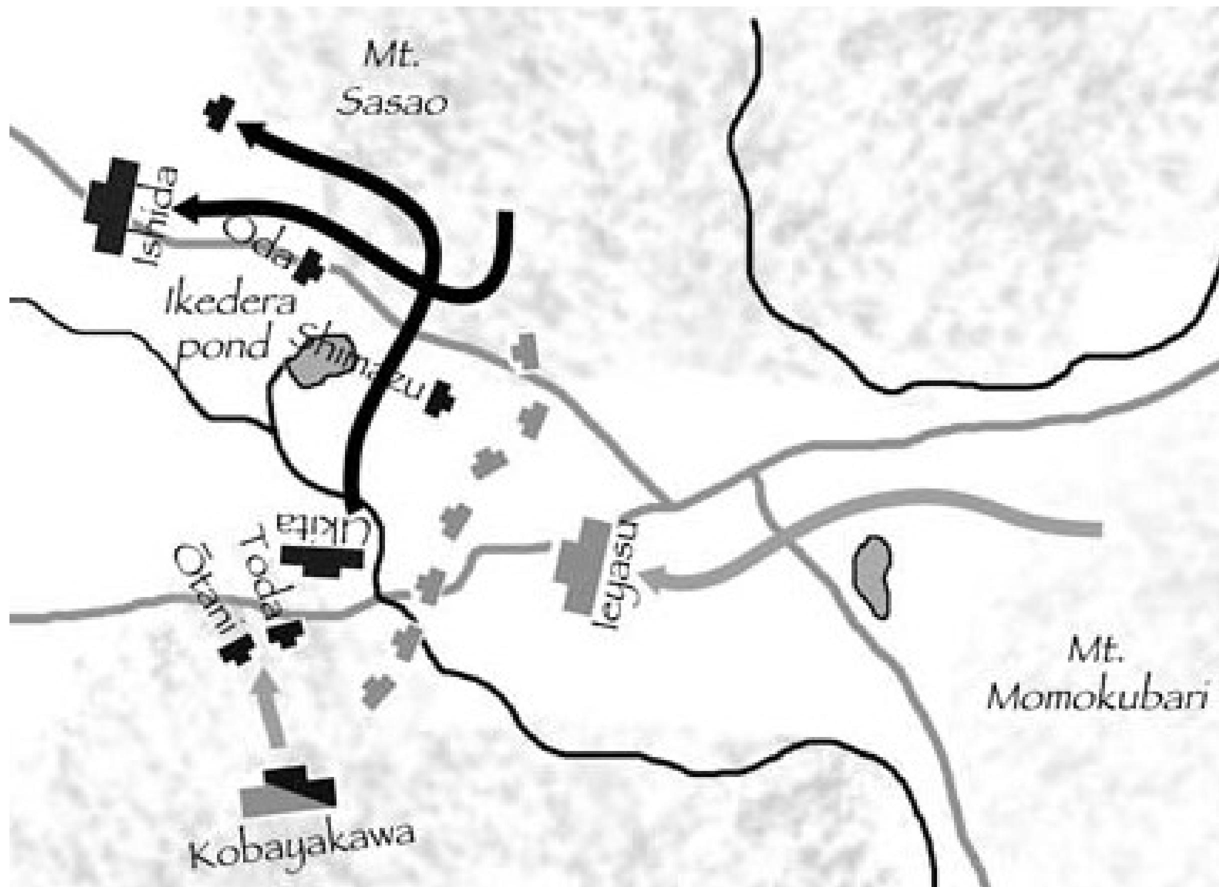
Ieyasu had also spotted the signal, and he had a good idea why Hideaki was reluctant to fight. While in Edo he had had a letter from Hideaki in which the latter had apologized for the fall of Fushimi castle, professing that circumstances had forced him to participate in the castle's siege. Seeking to capitalize on the Hideaki's sense of guilt, Ieyasu, too had sent missives to Mount Matsuo, but they had come back without any firm commitments.

The young warlord was obviously torn by conflicting emotions. What was needed was a good prodding, something to stimulate his senses. Without hesitating Ieyasu ordered his men to open fire on Hideaki's troops, hoping to thereby press him into action and declare himself. Almost immediately Ieyasu's genius for reading men's minds revealed itself. As if roused from a slumber, the young warlord stood up in his stirrups, pointed his battle fan in the direction of the Otani western forces and called out to his men "aim for the Otani ranks."

The effect of Hideaki's defection was almost instantaneous. The eastern warriors, worn down by the repeated setbacks over the previous hours, found new courage as they observed how the six thousand Kobayakawa warriors rushed down the slopes of Mount Matsuo and began to attack the Ōtani and Toda troops, who were wedged between the huge Ukita force and the foot of the mountain.

Thus far all of them had bravely withstood the continued assault, but now they began to lose the will to fight, as they found themselves confronted by an army refreshed and superior in numbers. Through superhuman effort they repelled the first attack, driving Hideaki's men back up the mountain's slopes, but then disaster struck as four other eastern commanders who had taken up positions at the foot of the mountain also changed sides and ordered their men to join those of Hideaki.

Under these enormous pressures the ranks of Ōtani and his fellow commanders gradually began to collapse until those who were still standing began to retreat northward, into the ranks of the Ukita, and then those of Konishi. Before long they, too, were overwhelmed by the two-pronged assault from the south and the east.



It was with a sinking feeling that Mitsunari watched the remnants of the Ukita and Konishi regiments, the largest he had brought in the field, now run past him, blooded, dishevelled, disheartened—a sorry sight, if ever there was one.

Yet even as the specter of defeat impressed itself on his mind, he realized that it had not been their lack of valor that had lost him his victory, but the failure of the others to come to their rescue. The Mōri, the Natsuka, the Ankokuji, the Shimazu, all of them had stood by idly as their allies were being butchered by the thousands. Unwilling to lose his men in the rescue of others, Shimazu Toyohisa had even ordered his men to erect a *yari fusuma*, a dense wall of *yari*, to keep the fleeing warriors from mingling with his own ranks and thereby weaken them. He was to pay a heavy price for his callous egotism, a price Mitsunari, who had done his bit, was unwilling to pay.

One final time he issued a command to his troops, this time to pack up and retreat west along the Hokkoku Kaidō. It was two o'clock. The fighting would go on till late in the afternoon, but Mitsunari's

flight confirmed that already the outcome of the battle had been decided.

CHAPTER XVI

A strange calm descended over the country in the wake of the Battle of Sekigahara. Things seemed to have gone topsy-turvy as those who had turned on their allies were rewarded and those who had fought valiantly were hunted down to the corners of the realm. Four days after the dust had settled on the plains of the old Seki barrier Takenaka Shigekado, a local chieftain who had joined the eastern forces at the last minute, apprehended Konishi Yukinaga as he was trying to cross the Ibuki Mountains into Ōmi. On November 6 Yukinaga was beheaded at the Rokujōgawara, the embankment of the Kamo River where it intersected with the capital's sixth main road. The bloodstained grounds had been the capital's place of execution since 1156, when the treacherous Taira Kiyomori put to death all the members of his clan who had participated in the Hōgen Rebellion.

Yukinaga's head rolled together with that of a host of others, including that of Ishida Mitsunari, the mastermind behind the western campaign. He had been apprehended by a retainer of Tanaka Yoshimasa, whose troops had faced his at Sekigahara. Following his flight from the scene of battle, the fugitive had made his way to the village of Furuhashi along the Takatoki River. There he had taken a boat from a local fisherman and, dressing himself in the guise of the boat's owner, rowed upstream to find some form of shelter among the snow clad slopes of the Ibuki Mountains.

When he was finally seized, he was found cowering in a cave, suffering from cold, hunger, and a failing health. His fate and that of his allies had been sealed by a widely distributed flyer in which Ieyasu promised high rewards to those who aided in their arrest and punishment by death for all those who abetted in their escape and shelter.

No such fate awaited the house of Yagyū. Having fought bravely in the front lines among the troops of Tsutsui Sadatsugu, Munenori's stipend was raised to a thousand *koku*. In the nationwide redistribution of lands that followed in the wake of Sekigahara, all the Yagyū domains confiscated by Toyotomi Hidenaga in 1585 were returned to Yagyū Muneyoshi, who was raised to the rank of *hatamoto*. One year later the Yagyū domains were extended by another thousand *koku*, bringing the total amount of revenue that accrued to the Yagyū clan to more than four thousand *koku*. Munenori went on to serve two successive Tokugawa shoguns, first Hidetada, and then his son Iemitsu.

The Yagyū Yashiki, new abode of Yagyū Munenori

Over the following years, the Yagyū star continued to rise, reaching its apogee in 1632, when Munenori was raised to the rank of *ōmetsuke*, or inspector general. By then the Yagyū domains had increased to well over ten thousand *koku*, making the Yagyū the first and only clan of swordsmen to reach the exalted position of daimyō.

It was at around this time that Munenori completed his work on a collection of writings that he named the *Heihō kadensho*, a record of all the hard lessons that his long and distinguished career had taught him. And it was in a chapter called *Katsujinken*, or “life-giving sword,” that the daimyō reflected on the *mutōtori*, the technique that had so impressed Tokugawa Ieyasu and had put the Yagyū clan on the road to recovery from those bleak and depressing years:

> The aim of *mutō* is neither to take someone's sword, nor to cut someone down. If your enemy is intent on cutting you down, you should take his sword, but it should not be your aim from the start. The aim is to make the right judgment. You need to judge the right distance between you and the enemy to ensure his sword does not strike you. If you are able to make the right judgment, you need not fear the strike of the enemy, and when his sword does reach you, you will be able to estimate the degree to which it does.

It has often been observed that what applies in art equally applies in life, and so it was with the techniques of the Yagyū Shinkage-ryū and the remarkable talents of those by whom they had been developed. In both realms their unsurpassed sense of judgment had given them the edge over their competitors.

Fragment of the Heihō kadensho

Way back in 1567, at the fencing contest at the Kōfuku monastery, Yagyū Muneyoshi had been humble enough to recognize the superiority of Kamizumi Nobutsuna's Shinkage-ryū and invite him to stay at Yagyū castle. Later, when the province of Yamato descended into anarchy, he had had the wisdom to go into hiding and impart Nobutsuna's teachings to his son.

In the end, it was in both realms that they finally were able to reap the rewards they so deserved. It had been Muneyoshi's superior fencing skills that had given the Yagyū clan the opportunity to play a role in Tokugawa Ieyasu's grand campaign to unify the country, and it was Munenori's ability to make the right judgments that enabled

them to build on their successes and attain a position of influence no other clan of swordsmen had, before or since. It was this position and their close association with the Tokugawa house, finally, that caused the Yagyū Shinkage school of fencing to eclipse the many other schools of fencing that had evolved in the course of the previous centuries and go on to become the most prestigious fencing school of the Edo period.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Aisu Ikō: Founder of the Kage school of fencing.
Akechi Mitsuhide: Vassal of Oda Nobunaga, who turned against Nobunaga and assassinated him at the Honnō temple, and was later routed and killed by Toyotomi Hideyoshi at the village of Yamazaki.
Ashikaga Yoshiaki: Fifteenth Muromachi shogun, who raised Kamiizumi Nobutsuna to the rank of Fourth-Level Warrior Follower.
Ashikaga Yoshiteru: Thirteenth Muromachi shogun, who was assassinated by Matsunaga Hisahide.
Fukushima Masanori: General of the eastern army, who led the second successful attack on Gifu castle and opened the Battle of Sekigahara.
Hōzōin In'ei: Chief abbot of the Kōfuku monastery, who organized a fencing contest where he introduced Yagyū Muneyoshi to Kamiizumi Nobutsuna.
Ii Masanori: Eastern commander who caused Fuku-shima Masanori to fire the first shots in anger in the Battle of Sekigahara
Ikeda Terumasa: General of the eastern army who led the first unsuccessful attack on Gifu castle.
Ishida Mitsunari: Warlord from Ōmi and leader of the western forces in the Battle of Sekigahara.
Kamiizumi Nobutsuna: Founder of the Shinkage school of fencing and teacher to Yagyū Muneyoshi during his stay at Yagyū castle and later during their period of hiding.
Katō Kiyomasa: General under whom Yagyū Kyūsaburō died in the defense of Ulsan castle during the second Korean campaign.
Kikkawa Hiroie: Western commander who was persuaded by Tokugawa Ieyasu to change sides and through whose actions Mōri Terumoto's forces failed to take part in the Battle of Sekigahara.
Kobayakawa Hideaki: Western warlord who initially joined Ishida Mitsunari in the siege of Fushimi castle, but helped Tokugawa Ieyasu into power by turning on Mitsunari in the Battle of Sekigahara.
Konishi Yukinaga: Western commander, whose forces eventually fled during the Battle of Sekigahara when those of Kobayakawa Hideaki turned against them.

Kuroda Nagamasa: Warlord from Buzen who introduced Yagyū Muneyoshi to Tokugawa Ieyasu and thereby revived the faltering fortunes of the Yagyū clan.
Matsudaira Tadayoshi: Eastern commander and fourth son of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who caused Fukushima Masanori to fire the first shots in anger in the Battle of Sekigahara.
Matsunaga Hisahide: Warlord from Yamato and lord of Tamon castle.
Miyoshi Chōkei: Warlord from Yamato who was succeeded as the leader of the Miyoshi clan by his senior counselor Matsunaga Hisahide.
Mōri Hidemoto: Son of Mōri Terumoto who joined Ishida Mitsunari in the siege of Fushimi castle.
Mōri Terumoto: Member of the Council of Five Regents who failed to chose sides in the Battle of Sekigahara.
Oda Hidenobu: Grandson of Oda Nobunaga, who resisted Tokugawa Ieyasu's forces from Gifu castle but was eventually forced to surrender.
Oda Nobunaga: Warlord from Owari, and the first of Japan's three great unifiers.
Ōtani Yoshitsugu: Western commander, whose forces eventually fled during the Battle of Sekigahara when those of Kobayakawa Hideaki turned against them.
Sakuma Nobumori: One of Oda Nobunaga's generals, who led the campaign of 1568 to subdue Yamato and drove out the Miyoshi.
Shimazu Toyohisa: Western commander whose failure to come to the rescue of the Konishi and Ukita troops led to the defeat of the western forces in the Battle of Sekigahara.
Takeda Shingen: Warlord from Kai.
Takeuchi Hidekatsu: Chief commander of Matsunaga Hisahide, who pressured the Yagyū clan to fight against the forces of Tsutsui Junkei.
Tokugawa Hidetada: Son of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who failed to join his father in the Battle of Sekigahara by laying siege of Ueda castle in Shinano.
Tokugawa Ieyasu: Warlord from Mikawa, and the third of Japan's three great unifiers.

Torii Mototada: Warden of Fushimi castle who laid down his life in its defense against Ishida Mitsunari's forces.
Toyotomi Hidenaga: Toyotomi Hideyoshi's stepbrother, who replaced **Tsutsui Sadatsugu** as the governor of Yamato and became the new lord of Kōriyama castle.
Toyotomi Hidetsugu: Nephew and adoptive heir to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who fell out of grace with his adoptive father and was eventually forced to commit suicide.
Toyotomi Hideyoshi: Warlord from Owari, and the second of Japan's three great unifiers.
Tsutsui Junkei: Warrior from Yamato who sought to restore the fortunes of his clan by overthrowing their archrival, Matsunaga Hisahide.
Tsutsui Junsei: Uncle and patron of Tsutsui Junkei.
Tsutsui Sadatsugu: Adoptive son and successor to Tsutsui Junkei, who was forced by Toyotomi Hideyoshi to move to the neighboring province of Iga from where he began the construction of Ueno castle and from where he and Yagyū Munenori later rode into battle to join Tokugawa Ieyasu in the Battle of Sekigahara.
Uesugi Kagekatsu: Member of the Council of Five Regents, whose rebellion gave Tokugawa Ieyasu the chance to create the conditions for Ishida Mitsunari's revolt.
Uesugi Kenshin: Warlord from Echigo.
Ukita Hideie: Western commander, who joined Ishida Mitsunari in the siege of Fushimi castle, but whose forces fled during the Battle of Sekigahara when those of Kobayakawa Hideaki turned against them.
Yagyū Ieyoshi: Grandfather of Yagyū Munenori.
Yagyū Kyūsaburō: Son of Yagyū Yoshikatsu who died in the defense of Ulsan castle during the Korean campaign.
Yagyū Muneaki: Fourth oldest brother of Yagyū Munenori, who entered the service of the Kyushu warlord Kobayakawa Hideaki.
Yagyū Munetaka: Third oldest brother of Yagyū Munenori, who took the tonsure and assumed the name of Tokusai.
Yagyū Muneyoshi: Father of Yagyū Munenori and founder of the Yagyū Shinkage school of fencing.

Yagyū Yoshihide: Second oldest brother of Yagyū Munenori, who took the tonsure and assumed the name of Kyūsai.
Yagyu Yoshikatsu: Oldest brother of Yagyū Munenori, who was wounded in Nara during a battle between the forces of Matsunaga Hisahide and Tsutsui Junkei.
Yodogimi: Toyotomi Hideyoshi's mistress, who bore his second son and heir, Hideyori.

POSTSCRIPT

No history of Japan's medieval era can be fully told without touching on the lives and exploits of its protagonists: the warriors. During the first two centuries (from the rise of the military at the end of the Heian period to the overthrow of the Kamakura Bakufu), their chief weapon was the bow and arrow. The sword seems to have played only a marginal role, for, as far as the records go, these centuries produced no great swordsmen of note. It is only later, following the overthrow of the Kamakura Bakufu, when war became incessant, that the quintessential Japanese swordsman made his debut and that we begin to see the first traces of a developing Japanese fencing tradition. Over the next two centuries, as Japan was increasingly drawn into the vortex of civil strife, these first attempts at systemization were gradually forged into distinct schools of fencing. Finally, with the drive toward unification and pacification, the many schools of fencing that survived the turmoil of the previous centuries were consolidated into a fencing tradition that came to dominate the martial arts of the Edo period.

The active history of the origin, growth, and maturation of Japanese swordsmanship, then, roughly spans the period from the beginning of the fourteenth century to the first decades of the seventeenth century—an epoch that can be divided into three distinct periods: the Two Courts period (1333–92), the Warring States period (1469–1573), and the Period of Unification (1573–1615).

This book tells the story of a famous swordsmen of the Period of Unification. His name was Yagyū Tajima no Kami Munenori. His life coincided with the period during which the whole of Japan was gradually brought under central control. This period of roughly half a century was a second great turning point in Japan's medieval era. The first great turning point had come in 1333, when a disgruntled emperor sought to restore to his throne the powers it had long lost and plunged the country into civil war. From then on, generation upon generation of hapless citizens knew neither peace nor rest, hostage as they were to the whims and follies of the often ruthless

and ever competing warlords. Now, after more than two centuries of almost constant strife it seemed that Japan had finally produced the kind of men who could bring the peace and prosperity for which the people were yearning. Their names were Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu.

It is largely to the credit of these greatest and most gifted of warlords that central authority was restored and that the torn fabric of feudal society could be repaired. It was a painful period, the crucial part of which spanned just over three decades and coincided with what is known to the Japanese as the Momoyama period. It began in 1568, when, following a short and decisive military campaign, the upstart warlord Nobunaga seized the capital. He did not appoint himself shogun. Instead, he installed at the head of the Bakufu a puppet figure, there merely to give legitimacy to his rule by proxy. That rule lasted just over a decade. By the time he was assassinated in 1582, he had brought under his control most of the Home Provinces, the provinces surrounding the capital and crucial to his hold on power. Nobunaga's death gave rise to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, his most gifted of generals. It was under Hideyoshi that the rest of the country, including the islands of Shikoku and Kyushu were finally subdued. Hideyoshi died a peaceful death, but the organs of state that were to secure the succession of his infant son were too weak. Its members split into two camps, one dominated by western warlords, and one dominated by eastern warlords. And it was Tokugawa Ieyasu, the leader of the eastern faction, who, in the fall of 1600 finally claimed victory in the decisive Battle of Sekigahara.

The life of our protagonist not only coincided with this period of civil warfare, but bore close witness to these dramatic events. Though Yagyū Munenori was not of sufficiently high birth to leave his mark on the larger course of Japanese feudal history, he did play his own unique and in many ways highly illustrative role in a pivotal event during this period of unrelenting warfare: the Battle of Sekigahara.

The reader will soon find that in telling Munenori's story, much room has been given to the wider military and political events through which he lived. There are a number of reasons why this should be so, For one, to anyone interested in the history of Japanese martial arts it will be of some interest to know under what

political and social conditions such military traditions were able to flourish. It was Ieyasu's promotion of the martial arts, for instance, that launched Yagyū Muneyoshi and his son Munenori on a career as shogunal fencing instructor, thereby restoring the failing fortunes of the ancient Yagyū clan and throwing into the limelight the relatively new fencing style of the Yagyū Shinkage-ryū. Ultimately, however, it was Munenori's performance in the Battle of Sekigahara that decided the social status of the Yagyū clan and, more to the point, why the Yagyū Shinkage school of fencing was to take pride of place at the shogunal court during the Edo period.

This broader perspective may also serve to put the contribution of men such as Munenori into their proper perspective. It is in the nature of the histories of heroes that they grow more extravagant with each following generation by which they are passed on, until, in the end, their lives and exploits have become distorted beyond recognition. One of the aims of these series is to place these men firmly back in their proper context, in the place and time in which they lived and, in doing so, recapture some of the atmosphere of the period of unification—how it must have been to be a warrior in a time so rife with challenges, yet so rich in opportunities.

It is, of course, no coincidence that great swordsmen such as Munenori should have lived during these trying times. Better put, it could only have been such times of upheaval and constant warfare that produced such men. It was during these times, after all, when thousands upon thousands of warriors either perished or survived simply on the strength of their martial skills and that, at the end of the day, only those with superior skills and the most effective techniques remained standing on the field of battle.

It was this same process, too, that ensured the survival of certain schools of Japanese swordsmanship and the demise of others. In this sense, it is a token of the superiority of the techniques developed by Munenori and his father, Muneyoshi, that their style of fencing has survived to this day. Japan's long feudal history has produced many swordsmen of note, but among them men such as Munenori stand out in particular. For Munenori stood at the cradle of one of the schools of swordsmanship that came to dominate the art

of fencing during the Edo period, the Yagyū Shinkage school of swordsmanship.

It is all the more remarkable, then, that so very little has been written about men like Munenori. Even in Japan, where so much weight has traditionally been given to pedigree and heritage, only a few serious books have been written about the origins of the Yagyū school of swordsmanship and even fewer about the lives of the men who spawned it. This does not mean that there are no sources to draw on, but they remain thinly spread. The few morsels of historically reliable data that can be found have to be carefully gleaned from a wide variety and, at times, most unexpected of sources.

As has already been pointed out above, given the nature of the subject, the great majority of sources tend to indulge in hyperbole to some extent. In the same way as the famous war tales such as the *Heike monogatari* and the *Taiheiki* tend to exaggerate the number of troops that engage in the battles they describe, so the few historical sources that make mention of our heroes are riddled with inaccuracies, embellishments, or outright historical fabrications.

It is the aim of this work to carefully filter out the hyperbole and, in doing so, represent our protagonist and his exploits in the true light of historical fact, this in the profound belief that even his unembellished life is sufficiently remarkable to merit our attention. If, in the telling of his tale, our hero stands to lose some of his legendary luster, it is hoped that at the same time he might gain some of that essential humanity that, in spite of all the bloodshed and horrors of the Period of Unification, never wholly left Japan, even during its darkest hours. It was that spark of humanity—that quest for an honest, simple, and quiet life—after all, that not only characterized the life of our hero, but also overcame the darker forces in human nature and eventually helped restore peace to a war-torn nation.

BATTLES AND REBELLIONS

Battles

Battle of Inukake 1534
Battles of Konodai 1538, 64
Battles of Kawanakajima 1553–61
Battle of Okehazama 1560
Battles of Sekiyado 1565–74
Battle of Ane River 1570
Battle of Mikatagahara 1572
Battle of Nagashima 1574
Battle of Nagashino 1575
Battle of Shizugatake 1583
Battle of Komakiyama 1584
Battle of Nagakute 1584
Battle of Odawara castle 1590
Battle of Sekigahara 1600

Rebellions

Jinshin Rebellion 672
Hōgen Rebellion 1156
Heiji Rebellion 1159
Jōkyū Rebellion 1221
Genkō Rebellion 1331
Honnō Rebellion 1582
Shimabara Rebellion 1637

GLOSSARY

bokken: Practice sword made of tropical hardwood.
gekokujō: Term used to describe the overthrow of higher military classes by the lower.
go-bugyō: Council of (five) Commissioners.
go-tairō: Council of (five) Regents.
ichiban kubi: The first enemy head to be taken in battle.
inka: Certificate of an apprentice's maturity in training.
kanpaku: Regent.
kanbe: Families attached to a shrine.
kenchi: Land survey.
kiai: Fearsome cry uttered by a warrior to release his powers and intimidate his opponent.
koku: Medieval unit of measurement, approximately 180 liters. One *koku* was considered the quantity of rice required to sustain one person for one year.
mokuroku: Written inventory of the techniques and tenets of a school of swordsmanship.
musha shugyō: Literally, "warrior training," but in the context of *budō*, the practice of ascetic self-discipline that goes back to the ancient traditions of the mysterious *yamabushi*, or mountain monks.
mutōtori: Disarming one's opponent without the use of one's sword.
naginata: Pole sword.
okugi: Innermost secrets of an art or craft.
ōmetsuke: Inspector general.
rōnin: Masterless samurai.
senjū: The martial art of divination.
shihan: Personal fencing instructor.
sōhei: Warrior monks of the great Buddhist temples.
sōjutsu: Art of fighting with a halberd.
taikō: Retired regent.
taikō kenchi: The nationwide land surveys conducted by Toyotomi Hideyoshi between 1582 and 1598.
taryū shiai: Literally, "contest of different schools," used to refer to a duel between two swordsmen.

tenka fubu: Rule the whole country by force.
yari: Spear or lance.
zōei bugyō: Construction magistrates.

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[1] Among the many schools of fencing that have survived the centuries, the Shinkage school stands out for its continuity. Throughout the Edo Period (1600–1867) the heritage of Kamiizumi Ise no Kami Nobutsuna remained at the forefront of martial life.

One of the secrets behind the success of the Shinkage-ryū is undoubtedly its close association with the Yagyū clan. For over four centuries this ancient clan from the hills around Nara, which traces its ancestry back to the late ninth century, has guarded over Nobutsuna's intellectual heritage and seen to it that its tenets and techniques have remained unsullied by the changing moods of time.

While the Shinkage-ryū spawned a myriad of new and diverging schools, it was the Yagyū clan that continued to practice and teach the same style of fencing throughout the centuries that followed. From the moment Nobutsuna bestowed on Yagyū Muneyoshi a *mokuroku*, a written inventory of the techniques and tenets of the Shinkage-ryū (the medieval equivalent of a teaching license), the document and the school it represents, has been passed down to each successive Yagyū generation, right down to today. It was this remarkable continuity that secured the success of the Yagyū Shinkage school of fencing.

[2] Perhaps Hisahide shared the Yagyū's sentiments, for within a year, he himself, too, was to fall out of favor with his master. He, too, would seek to mollify his master in vain by offering his son as hostage, and he, too, would eventually be forced to commit ritual suicide and become a victim of Hisahide's evil whims.

[3] It had been in 1331, in the first year of the Genkō era, that emperor Go-Daigo left the comforts of the Kazan palace in Kyoto behind in his first bid to restore to his throne the powers it had originally enjoyed. He had taken up residence at the Kasagi temple, an old temple of the Shingon sect amid the Kasagi Mountains. From there he issued an edict, calling on all warrior chieftains loyal to the throne to support his cause and overthrow the Kamakura Bakufu.

Yagyū Nagayoshi had been the first chieftain to respond to the call to arms. The Yagyū clan had long been at loggerheads with the regime

in far-away Kamakura, while Kasagi temple was situated along the Kizu River, less than a mile north of their estate. He had sent his brother, Yoshitaka, to guard the temple with all the troops they could muster.

The Genkō Rebellion came to nothing. Go-Daigo was sent into exile on Oki island, and the Yagyū clan lost its possessions. Two years later, however, Go-Daigo escaped. That escape had led to Nitta Yoshisada's revolt, the overthrow of the Kamakura Bakufu, and the Kenmu Restoration. In reward for their valiant service Go-Daigo rewarded Yoshitaka by granting him the name of Nakanobō, "monk among monks," and restoring to his clan the lands that had belonged to it since time immemorial. Yoshitaka had remained in the emperor's service and left Nagayoshi to manage the Yagyū estates, as he had done during the years prior to the outbreak of the Genkō Rebellion.

4 To determine the tax that could be levied, it was of crucial importance to know the exact dimensions of the lands under their own rule and that of their vassals. And here lay the great problem. The anarchy of the preceding century had thoroughly upset the pattern of land rights that had been in place during the early Muromachi period. As the fighting had spread, so had the often conflicting claims by local military rulers over ever more fragmented pieces of land, until even they themselves were often in the dark as to size and yield of the domains under their control. Nobunaga had already made an attempt to bring some order into this chaos by conducting vast surveys, or *kenchi*, throughout the provinces under his control, shedding light on crucial information such as area, yield, ownership, and tenancy. Though large in total area, those provinces had still been limited in number, and thus, as he was nearing the completion of his predecessor's goal, Hideyoshi set about to conduct nationwide land survey. Not surprisingly, the *taikō kenchi*, as it came to be known, was most rigorously executed in the provinces under his immediate control, such as Yamato, under the governorship of his stepbrother Hidenaga.

5 To the *taikō* Hideyori's birth was an immense relief. His first son, Tsurumatsu, had died in infancy two years before. That premature death and his own advancement in age had led him to appoint his nephew Hidetsugu (a Mitsuyoshi by descent) as his rightful heir. Bestowing on him the title of *kanpaku*, he installed Hidetsugu in the Jurakudai, the official residence of men appointed to this high post.
The new *kanpaku* took his task seriously and it was not long before his policies began to clash with those of his adoptive father. The latter had initially accepted these frictions as part of the process of succession, but with the birth of his natural son they became an irritant. His growing dislike of Hidetsugu was fanned by his almost obsessive love for his natural son, and within a year of Hideyori's birth, he began to conspire against his appointed heir.
Rumors began to make their way around the capital, rumors that the *kanpaku* was leading a dissolute life, that he enjoyed killing, that he was given to liquor and lechery, and, most outrageously, that he was plotting to capture Osaka castle by corrupting its guards. In a world in which all news was communicated by word of mouth, the rumors soon became fact, and before long the dutiful Hidetsugu, whose chief pastime was the collection of old writings, was publicly branded as the *sasshō kanpaku*, the "murderous regent."
Hideyoshi's punishment was as swift as it was brutal. In the summer of 1595 he banished Hidetsugu to the Kōyasan monastery among the Kii Mountains in the northern part of the province of Kii. Shortly afterward he sent his adoptive son a messenger with an order to commit ritual suicide. Hidetsugu's removal, however, was not enough. Jealous of everything that might threaten the succession of his natural son, Hideyori, the despot proceeded to persecute with a vengeance all the members of Hidetsugu's household, from his three infant children to his concubines and the many other women in his service. All were dragged through the long and dusty streets of the capital, right up to the execution grounds at Sanjōgawara, the river bed of the Kamo River at the height of the capital's third main road, where travelers from the Tōkaidō entered the city. There, in front of a gibbet adorned with Hidetsugu's head, they were stabbed to death one by one until the ground was sodden with their spilled blood.

Following this act of barbarity Hideyoshi ordered that all physical reminders of his adoptive son be destroyed. The order was carried out to the last letter and over the following weeks all the buildings in which the hapless *kanpaku* had dwelled, including the Jurakudai, were torn down, never to rise again.

6 The Shinjū clan hailed from Ōmi, where they had long served the Asai, who been sworn enemies of Ieyasu ever since he and Nobunaga had crushed them and the Asakura at Ane River in 1570. During the eighties Naoyori had become a trusted retainer of Hideyoshi, for whom he reduced a number of castles throughout the Home Provinces. Now he was the master of Takatsuki castle in Settsu. Given his bond of loyalty toward the Asai, as well as the geographic position of his domains he had joined the western forces. Upon Mitsunari's revolt he had seized his chance to expand westward into Yamato and Iga and marched on the strategic stronghold of Ueno castle. Sadatsugu had left behind only a skeleton force and his young and inexperienced brother had fled east across the mountains to the protection of the Kōyasan monastery.