

# TAKEDA SHINGEN

*Arashi no Naka no Nihon-Jin Series #15 - Takeda Shingen*

**[Japanese in the Storm Series #15]**

**By Domon Fuyuji. Published in Japan, 1983, P. 1-17**

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## PREFACE

They say that even now, if you were to go to Kagoshima prefecture and say bad things about Saigo Takamori, you would probably anger the residents. Takeda Shingen is also like that. His popularity in Yamanashi prefecture is high. Takeda Shingen was born over 460 years ago, and was a 'Warring States' warlord who died at the age of 53. From then until the present, a more famous person has yet to appear.

The fact that Takeda Shingen died on the battlefield on the way to Kyoto with [the aim of taking the realm] is probably felt as the biggest tragedy to the Japanese people. Not just Shingen himself, but the flying of the Furinkazan flag, the colorful weapons and armor of the Takeda warrior, as well as the Takeda mounted Calvary are also famous. The fact that this beautiful and powerful mounted Calvary was wiped from the face of the world in a single stroke by the rifles of the allied armies of the Oda and the Tokugawa is also a tragedy. This book tries to capture the life of Takeda Shingen as truthfully and faithfully as possible.

### (1)

#### **The Child Disliked by His Father**

When Takeda Shingen was born, his father Takeda Nobutora was in the midst of battle at Idakawara in the western part of Kofu. A warlord by the name of

Fukushima Hyogo of Totomi province (modern day Shizuoka prefecture) gathered a military force of 15,000, and led them on an attack into Kai province (modern day Yamanashi). This is what Nobutora was trying to drive out. Hyogo was a vassal of the Shugo of Suruga province (eastern part of modern day Shizuoka), Imagawa Ujichika. Nobutora defeated Fukushima's army in a fierce battle, and took his head.

Nobutora's castle was situated on the top of Maruyama mountain (820M above sea level), in northern Kofu. It was known as Yogai castle. It is said that the moment Nobutora's army returned to Yogai castle in high spirits, his first male child was born. Nobutora was extremely joyous.

"To have a son on the day of such a victory over my enemies is something to be celebrated!" Nobutora named his son. "This child's name is Katsuchiyo!" [the three Chinese characters of the name corresponding roughly to 'a thousand victories in succession'] Katsuchiyo would never cry, and even though he was just a baby, his eyes were wise and thoughtful. He had a wise face; an expression of an enlightened monk.

"This child has no charm," Nobutora thought. Thus, the first father-son encounter was not a particularly joyous one. This newborn child with the piercing gaze was destined one day to drive his father from Kai province for good. Nobutora would not support Katsuchiyo, but would put his love and energy into Katsuchiyo's younger brother, Nobushige, as well as prepare him for leadership of the Takeda clan.

The Takeda of Kai come from the Genji clan descended from the emperor Seiwa, along the line of Minamoto Yorinobu, Yoriyoshi, and Shinrasaburô Yoshimitsu. Since the time of Yoshimitsu, the Takeda have held the position of Shugo of Kai; Kai has been the territory of the Takeda for generations. The province name "Kai" comes from the [Japanese] word for 'ravine' - it symbolizes the mountainous country of Kai.

Katsuchiyo, the oldest son of the distinguished Takeda family of the Kai Genji would rarely cry. However, if anything happened that he didn't like, his howling cries would echo throughout the castle, causing the denizens to cover their ears without thinking. More than obnoxious, his cries were considered disquieting. From the start, Katsuchiyo was thought of as a strange child.

As this strange child grew, he became more of a violent and rebellious youth. It was said that according to Shingen's father, Nobutora, "a strong will is the best attribute of Kai", so of course, seeing Katsuchiyo's rebelliousness he would smile grimly, and would say, "that's my boy." However, he would not leave him alone. "I'll get him strict teacher to straiten him out." And so, a Zen priest by the name of Kishû became Katsuchiyo's tutor.

By age nine, Katsuchiyo's rough nature hadn't changed a bit, so one day, Kishû became angered and said "Calm down!" and tossed him off the balcony into the fish

pond. Katsuchiyo slowly stood up, soaking wet. He stood in the pond, and made no attempt to get out. He just stared at Kishû. He didn't really feel any hatred for Kishû. He just stood with a quiet expression. It was the same deep, penetrating gaze he had given his father Nobutora as a small child. It was Kishû who became angered. "Get out of the pond!" He said to Katsuchiyo. However, no matter how many times he said it, Katsuchiyo would not move; he stayed in the pond. The koi in the pond began circling him and snapping their jaws at him. He just ignored them. *Almost like a Zen monk*, Thought Kishû. *And I'm supposed to be the monk here... This child is probably destined for great things...*

Once, Nobutora said, "let's do some cutting practice," and had a stand set up in the garden. On the stand, he put a squash - something that even a child could cut.

"First, I'll show you how to do it," Nobutora said, and cut the squash clean in half with the sword. He then handed the katana to his second son, Nobushige. "Your turn. Cut!" He ordered. Nobushige cut his squash cleanly down the middle. "Good Job!" Nobutora said, now in good spirits.

"How about you? Shall you try?" He asked, and held the sword out to Katsuchiyo. However, it was not with the affection he had shown Nobushige. It was said with scorn, with a cold gaze. At that point, Katsuchiyo sensed that he was not loved by his father; he loved his younger brother, Nobushige. Katsuchiyo grasped the sword, and suddenly his face went pale, and he began to shake, and his knees appeared to weaken. He glared at the squash for a moment, and at last, with a tearful groan, said "I can't cut it...", and dropped the sword. Because everyone had been told of this event, a large number of Nobutora's vassals had gathered in the garden and on the veranda to watch. Many became disappointed with Katsuchiyo's poor showing, and whispers filled the crowd. "He's always so strong willed and defiant, what could be wrong?" "So that's how it is, Katsuchiyo is a coward..." However, no one voiced their opinion above a whisper.



"What the hell is wrong with you!?" Yelled Nobutora. He became enraged. However, Katsuchiyo just stood there, shaking. Nobutora struck him to the ground. "You coward! Is a squash so terrifying?" Katsuchiyo lay in the dirt where he had fallen, and stared at his father with his cold, penetrating gaze. Nobutora became more agitated.

"Don't look at me like that! Stop!" Nobutora yelled, and began to kick him where he lay. Katsuchiyo resigned himself to the beating, and didn't fight back. He was bleeding. One of Nobutora's vassals could stand it no longer. "Please, stop! The poor child!"

"I'll kill this little bastard!" He yelled, and began kicking him harder. His expression was one of insane rage. The people who happened to be there could plainly see

with which son his affection lies. At last, Nobutora stopped kicking him, and spit on the ground.

"I don't want to see your face anymore! Nobushige, come!" He grabbed Nobushige by the hand, and dragged him away. Katsuchiyo was miserable. He lay in the dirt under the contemptuous gaze of his father's vassals. *Why am I not loved by my father?* Katsuchiyo lamented. No matter how much he thought about it, he couldn't understand. He lay covered in blood and dirt, and did not get up. Rage and shame burned in his breast. The vassals left him where he lay, and walked away, saying things like "Nobushige will definitely succeed Nobutora." *Nothing can be done for the eldest son if he is not to be heir, it is time to curry the favor of the future heir to be, Nobushige*, many of the vassals thought to themselves. Katsuchiyo hated those vassals, because he could clearly see the true character of those cold-hearted people.

Of all the vassals, only a single one remained behind. The warrior, Ogiwara Hitachinosuke, helped Katsuchiyo off the ground, and dusted him off.

"What patient endurance. You suspected your father's feelings, and failed to cut the squash on purpose. You have a deep understanding of people. Excellent." Katsuchiyo looked at him silently. Ogiwara was right. Katsuchiyo purposefully pretended to be a coward. Proving himself to be above his younger brother at such a stupid and useless task was a waste of energy. He let his brother win. Nobutora didn't understand this. *Ogiwara was the only one who saw this. I have an ally. Katsuchiyo*

thought.

## (2)

### Nobutora's Love of Political Intrigue

After long years of battle after battle, Katsuchiyo's father Nobutora was at last able to suppress the last rebellious elements of Kai province.

In order to make peace with a warlord who was until yesterday your enemy, one of the bad customs of the Sengoku period was to give or receive a daughter in a political marriage, and thus become relatives. Sometimes the warlords themselves are married to the former enemies daughter, and sometimes the two parties marry their children together instead. Katsuchiyo's mother was also a victim of this 'marriage of convenience' when she was married to Nobutora. However, Nobutora already had a wife, so she was little more than a mistress.

Nobutora himself was quite a playboy, and thus liked the whole concept of the political marriage. Katsuchiyo's mother's father was Ôi Nobutatsu. His ancestors had branched from Nobutora's ancestors, so the Takeda clan and the Ôi clan were related. However, when Nobutora consolidated the Takeda clan, Ôi Nobutatsu said, "I'm supposed to make myself a vassal to this good for nothing violent fool?" and quickly left Kôfu for the Western district (modern day Nakakoma district), and shut himself up in his castle. Aside from Nobutatsu, a significant number of other powerful families had the same reaction. Nobutora was angered by Nobutatsu's behavior, and said, "As proof of your loyalty, give me your daughter!" And that is how Katsuchiyo's mother became Nobutora's mistress. That woman gave birth to Nobutora's first son. Nobutora's feelings about this were complicated, and was probably a factor in his coldness towards Katsuchiyo.

After quelling the rebellious elements of Kai, Nobutora turned his attention to the Kanto and Chûbu regions. Kai is mountainous country with a small population and little good farmland, and has no access to the ocean. Salt and fish are also hard to come by. Nobutora wanted land with ocean access, however, simply thinking about getting land won't get you anywhere. The surrounding provinces with ocean access were controlled by various powerful Daimyo. In the Kanto area, Hojo Soun's son Ujitsuna controlled Odawara, and controlling Suruga and Totomi was the distinguished family of Imagawa Ujichika. These were not weak opponents. Nobutora realized that military might alone was no good. He made up his mind to gain the support of the shogun, or join forces with some of the Shogunal Deputies - the *Kanrei*. At that time, the Shogun in Kyoto was Ashikaga Yoshiharu. His executives - the *Kanrei* - were located in Kamakura and other areas.

The Uesugi held this position, and their family lines were very complicated. Nobutora himself fell into one of the many of these lines. He had his eyes on the lord of Edo castle, Uesugi Tomooki. At first, the Shôgun gave a lot of gold and other

valuables to the Uesugi. Thus, everyone commented on how admirable Takeda Nobutora was. However, Uesugi Tomooki was weak in war, and always lost in battle against the Hojo armies. eventually, he was driven from Edo castle altogether, and moved to Kawagoe castle. Even at Kawagoe, he was in a dangerous position.

Couriers came to Nobutora one after the other on behalf of Tomooki, with the message "I need your assistance as soon as possible". At this time, Nobutora was at Tsutsujigasaki in Kofu. Kofu was the capital of Kai province. Nobutora built the mansion at Tsutsujigasaki in Eisho 16 (1519), two years before the birth of Katsuchiyo. Yogai castle on Maruyama mountain, the place of Katsuchiyo's birth, was primarily a castle for war, whereas the Tsutsujigasaki fortress was not a castle at all, but a mansion. Regarding this, Nobutora said, "we don't war on my land. We always go out on the offensive." He believed in attacking and invading other provinces, not in defending his own. His son Takeda Shingen also adopted this policy. Shingen's famous words "people are the castles, people are the stone walls..." show this. Meaning, Shingen would not war within his own lands, but would only fight abroad. Thus, castles were not needed within the borders of Kai; the warriors were the castles, the stone walls, and the builders of Kai. However, it can't be said that words such as these express Shingen's affection for his warriors. The circumstances of this age were very severe. You can not survive on affection alone. The phrase 'The soldiers are the castles of Kai' is more naturally an extension of Shingen's policy of staying on the offensive and attacking other provinces, as opposed to an expression of pride or affection for his men.

The more Nobutora got on friendly terms with the Ashikaga Shogun and Uesugi Tomooki, the more Nobutora's chief retainers began to worry about their lord. This was because the more entwined in the aristocratic atmosphere Nobutora became, the more he became used to a luxurious and decadent lifestyle. The retainers began to worry that Nobutora was becoming soft, and could be betrayed by any of these new 'friends' at any moment. They would advise, 'We think you should cut your ties with that group. We don't need them. We can fight our own battles.' But, Nobutora would not listen. He had already become accustomed to this 'aristocraticness'. Nobutora had gained a disdain for the lifestyle of the 'mountain monkeys' of Kosho and the country bumpkin Daimyo. Nobutora wanted to be surrounded by courtesans, living a gaudy and excessive lifestyle. It appears that he entertained such base dreams.

In the second year of Temmon (1533), Katsuchiyo turned thirteen. About this time, his father came to him and said, most unexpectedly, 'You're getting a wife.'

### (3)

### **Marriage at Thirteen**

Katsuchiyo was obviously surprised at his fathers statement. He hadn't even had his Genpuku (coming of age) ceremony - he was still just thirteen. Shocked, he gazed back at his father.

'Your bride will be a daughter of Uesugi Tomooki. This connection will raise the prestige of the Takeda name a bit. The Takeda mountain monkeys will now join the ranks of the more distinguished families.' Nobutora was quite pleased with himself.

'So it's come to this at last,' thought Katsuchiyo. Uesugi was little more than a treacherous aristocrat, and weak in war, but with an ability to take advantage of peoples personal weaknesses. Uesugi knew that Nobutora loved women, and had a particular weakness for the high-class courtesans. A bit before this, one of Tomooki's relatives - Uesugi Norifusa - died, and Tomooki forced his widow into becoming one of Nobutora's concubines - 'for the good of the Uesugi'. Naturally, Nobutora was thrilled with this, and took the widow as his concubine. Now, Katsuchiyo was to receive one of Tomooki's daughters as his wife - no doubt due to the influence the treacherous Tomooki had gained over Nobutora with grand words and colorful speeches.

'How's that sound, Katsuchiyo?' Nobutora sneered arrogantly at the silent Katsuchiyo. He didn't answer.

'You will take a wife!' Nobutora yelled, and struck him. Katsuchiyo felt anger well up inside himself, and without thinking, glared back at his father icily. At this, Nobutora became all the more angered. 'Don't look at me like that! You have never shown me proper respect!' he yelled. Nobutora had never forgotten the way that Katsuchiyo would stare at him as an infant. Katsuchiyo's blood ran cold. He was gripped by loneliness and misery, something the average thirteen year old boy had probably never felt.