

kendō-iaí-naginata

The journal of the Eikoku Kendo Renmei

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The Kyōto Budōsai



Every early May, the members of the Kyōto Butokukai, to take part in one of the most important events in the Bujutsu and Budō calendar. During the five days, 2nd to 6th May, high-ranking masters practising many different weaponed traditions come to the Butokuden within the precincts of the Heian Shrine, to take part in demonstrations, matches, examinations, browse a vast array of equipment offered for sale, or simply to observe and drink refreshing *ō-cha* with long-standing friends they haven't met for years. The 5th May is the *Boys' Festival*, historically very important to the warrior class as a whole although celebrated more widely than that.

On the first day of the Budōsai festival, many *ko-ryū* exponents of Kenjutsu, Naginata-jutsu, Iai-jutsu, Bō-jutsu, Shuriken-jutsu, Sō-jutsu, and several other traditional arts demonstrate their formidable skills. Subsequent days see 'friendly' Kendō *shiai* between members of *nanadan* and *hachidan*; some quite youthful masters, others in advanced years. These matches are often extraordinarily interesting to watch. Following this comes examination for advanced rank in both Kendō and Iai.

In a separate dōjō within the precincts, demonstrations and matches are held in Kyū-dō. These, too, are both elegant and absorbing, especially as the participants wear fine kimono and hakama and are often seen carrying their long bows and arrow quivers.

Whilst the main events are confined to the high-ranking Butokukai members, there is early morning Kendō practise for those lower ranking yūdansa, members or not, who make the effort to attend since the doors are opened at 06.30. This *asageiko* used to be held in the main Butokuden until ten or so years ago when it was moved to a huge modern dōjō close by but still within the complex. In

the past to be amongst the first ten through the doors was considered a mark of some distinction but there is a necessity to be early since this *asageiko* offers a rare opportunity to practise with leading sensei, often of *hanshi* rank. By 07.00 to 07.30 the hall is packed to bursting with as many as a thousand students and it is virtually impossible to find space with an opponent.

(The photo above was taken at the very beginning of the *asageiko* in May, 1998.)

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Editorial apology

Inadvertently the Winter 2007/8 Journal was incorrectly numbered. It should have been No. 287 and not 286. We do apologise for the error.

The Kendō Reader by Noma Hisashi

Chapter Nine: *Kirikaeshi* (The Practice of Kirikaeshi)

The importance of basic training has already been mentioned in the chapter dealing with the process of Kendō but of the many methods used in basic training perhaps *kirikaeshi* is the most essential.

Kirikaeshi is an exercise that all Kendō *shugyōsha*¹ must not neglect. Some may think that it is an exercise necessary only for beginners, they are quite mistaken. Of course it is an important drill for the beginner, but it is also a drill that is invaluable for the more experienced.

During the first stages of training a student may move on to *keiko*, *shiai* and the like, only after first of all constructing a foundation for his Kendō through basic training. If, however, from the start he engages solely in *keiko* and *shiai*, excessive concern for winning will result in the development of small technique and various bad habits. Attacking with abandon, leaping from distance, and positive striking will all suffer remiss. For the stemming of bad habits, the correction of already established bad habits, and for the fostering of large, correct, and relaxed Kendō there is nothing as effective as the practice of *kirikaeshi*. Even so, however effective the practice of *kirikaeshi* may be, if it is not done properly it will not have the desired effect.

The way to practice *kirikaeshi* is as follows: first of all, from *tōma*, or two step for one strike position, raise a loud attacking yell and leap in to strike 'men' with a large, straight blow; follow it with five or seven more oblique strikes to the left and right of the men, beginning and ending with a strike to the receiver's left side. Again, break off and step out to distance and repeat the process. When making the oblique strikes they must be accompanied with loud attacking yells of 'Men, Men, Men . . .'

Kirikaeshi-no-chui: Dos and Don'ts in *Kirikaeshi*

1. Relax the shoulders.
2. When striking, straighten the elbows.
3. Do not move the head, waist, etc., to the rhythm of striking.
4. Keep control of the gap between the feet, and the posture, during advance and retreat.
5. Take care to avoid striking with the back or side of the shinai.
6. Always strike obliquely to the men with a feeling and intention of actually cutting it.
7. Always raise the shinai and strike in fully.

It is essential to practice *kirikaeshi* fully and correctly. If one seeks only speed striking will become imprecise, insufficient, and small. Always aim for precision and then with improvement gradually increase the speed.

Kirikaeshi-no-toku: The Benefits of Kirikaeshi

- 1 Improves posture.
- 2 Develops fiercer technique.
- 3 Increases stamina.
- 4 Develops stronger and surer striking.
- 5 Shoulders become supple.
- 6 Develops clear and sharp *te-no-uchi*.
- 7 Develops free and fluid arm action.
- 8 The body becomes light and agile.
- 9 Develops free use of the long sword.
- 10 Develops ability to maintain posture.
- 11 Develops sharper eyesight.
- 12 Develops swifter technique.
- 13 Improves footwork.
- 14 Develops a calm mind.
- 15 Develops awareness of striking distance.
- 16 Corrects *tachisuji*, or cutting plane of the blade.
- 17 Develops ability to strike from *tō-ma*.
- 18 Strengthens the spirit.
- 19 Strengthens the arms.
- 20 Strengthens the body.

There are many other benefits that could be added to this list. At times, say for instance, when the technique does not flow as it should, when one's confidence for *shiai* is low, or when spirits are at a low ebb, the practice of *kirikaeshi* is the best remedy.

The person who is receiving *kirikaeshi* must allow enough distance for striking. He must also alter the intensity of the practise according to the ability and strength of the student while at the same time drawing him out spiritually.

Kirikaeshi-uke-no-toku: The Benefits of Receiving Kirikaeshi

- 1 Posture improves.
- 2 The body becomes lithe and agile.
- 3 Develops clearer eyesight.
- 4 Develops awareness of the opponent's skill.
- 5 Develops awareness of distance.
- 6 Develops parrying skills.
- 7 Develops surer and sharper *te-not-uchi*.
- 8 Becalms and quietens the mind.

Again, if we were to take into consideration other more subtle benefits we would discover many more advantages to be got from receiving *kirikaeshi*. If sound and correct *kirikaeshi* is practiced continually and without falter one will never cease to make good progress and an excellent style of *keiko* will be the result.

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The Entrance to the Underworld – by Roald Knutsen



Japan can be described in many different ways due to its myriad aspects, most largely set amongst the mountainous rural landscape. Even in the midst of the often incredibly ugly urban conurbations one can come across little pockets of great charm and beauty. What it was like before all the modernisation was described by an English traveller who visited Japan just after the 1877 civil war that ended the Bakumatsu upheavals as ‘the Garden of Eden on this Earth’. It must have been so.

To me, the Japan that I know – and I admit to being rather narrow in my outlook - is limited to either Kendō dōjō and their environs or the deep countryside and centres containing Buddhist temples or Shintō Shrines. These are where my interests outside the *Bugei* chiefly lie. Perhaps, in a flight of fancy, had I been an unattached samurai of modest means in the early Edō period, I would have wandered the provinces and indulged my thirst to know more of the *sankaku shinkō*, the all pervading and extraordinarily rich folk beliefs that still thrive everywhere that your steps take you.

Amongst the many shrines that I have visited, possibly my favourite is the Kamōsu-jingu situated a couple of miles or so to the south of Matsue-shi in Shimane prefecture. This region, a long way to the west of Kyōto, was formerly the province of Izumō, the home of many indigenous deities, the ‘*Earth-deities*’ as opposed to the Yamatō ‘usurpers’ ‘*Heavenly-deities*’. There is still a palpable difference to be felt in this ‘backwater’, little touched by the violence of the strife that characterised the second half of the Muromachi period, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Kamōsu shrine was supposedly built on the site of an important residence of a ruler named Susanō-wō, later to be deified as the powerful Storm God. *If* this ruler was an historical personage, then he probably flourished about two-thousand years ago.

The shrine buildings are in the *taisha-zukuri* style, the oldest of the Shintō architecture and said to have been built in their present form in 1348 or a little later. The original *miya*, or ‘palace’, is believed to have been constructed over the grave of the female deity, Izanami, who, together with her husband, Izanagi, created the islands of Japan and went on to people them with their offspring. These elemental children all became the progenitors of many different deities. In the race memory of the archipelago this gradually became the explanation for the origin of the ruling families by deifying the supposed founding ancestors. The first *miya* may have been constructed centuries before the end of the seventh or beginning of the eighth century, about the time that the first permanent shrines were raised. Tradition at the Kamōsu-jingu recounts that the *miya* was raised for the ‘deity’ Ame-no-hōhi-no-mikotō; before that the site may well have been revered as sacred since the most ancient of times, although, of course, successive clan chieftains probably resided on the spot just because it represented the seat of power.



Within the shrine compound and next to the *honden*, the residence of the deity, stand two small structures, also built in the ancient style, dedicated to the husband and wife deities, Izanagi and Izanami. The male deity, Izanagi, is honoured in the left hand shrine denoted by the vertically cut ends of the *chigi*, or cross-pieces, on the roof; Izanami, his wife, is worshipped to the right where the *chigi* ends can be seen to be cut horizontally. This juxtaposition suggests that Izanami is here considered more important than her consort. The pair are not enshrined there, only their *mitama*, in Shintō some object thought to embody something of the ‘soul’ of the personage, but their spirits because of this *mitama* may be attracted by supplicant worshippers. Behind these two diminutive shrines and short distance further along the low cliffs, can be seen the squarish entrance to a cave. This cave is held to be the entrance to *Yomi-no-kuni*, the ‘Land of Yomi’, the underworld ruled over by Emma-ō, the ‘Judge of the souls of those who die’. I should point out that there are several other sites in Japan claiming to be this entrance, however, I subscribe to the one at the Kamōsu-jingu because of all its associations. Unfortunately, the tunnel has been blocked off about ten feet inside by two horizontal slabs of stone; this, of course prevented me exercising my insatiable curiosity further and thereby put my nose out of joint!

A little to the right of the cave entrance, but hidden behind the shrine of Izanami in my photograph, stands a small clump of bamboo and amongst the trunks of which stand two ‘spears’ (*hoko*) with what appear to be paper ‘blades’. These are associated with Izanagi who dipped his celestial spear in the primæval waters and when he drew it out the drops falling from the blade formed the islands of the archipelago. In front of both cave and bamboo stood two very ‘temporary’ *torii*, entrances marking sacred sites, which are rustic, to say the least, being crudely constructed with rough-cut uprights and a single and double natural pole between, respectively. The horizontal poles are secured with coarse twisted ropes and decorated with *shimenawa*, sacred folded paper ‘streamers’. These primitive *torii* are very different to the other types of more permanent *torii* found elsewhere throughout Japan. There are other ‘temporary’ *torii* at the nearby Yaegaki-jinja.

Lastly, so as not to bore you, the *honden*, itself, was anciently known as the ‘Oba-no-ō-miya’². For those of you who like such information, the grave of Izanami was on Mount Hiba ‘on the boundary of the Land of Izumo and the Land of Hahaki’, (according to the *Kojiki*, (I, vii), written around 720), On the other hand, the *Nihongi* chronicle (I, 14) states ‘that she was buried at the village of Arima in Kumano in the Land of Ku’. This is now Wakayama prefecture.

This region around Izumō is redolent with ancient matters, both myths and legends, and a paradise for folklorists. For instance, the Kamōsu-jinja is said to possess a grain of rice dating from the *kami-no-yo*, the ‘age of the gods’, and that it is more than one inch long. Truly food fit for the deities. This modest-sized shrine stands on a platform roughly levelled out of the side of the hill. It has two entrances, the main one being on the north-east side and the other further along the road leading west. It is possible that the latter was the original entrance as the steep, irregularly placed, stone steps appear to have been constructed several hundred years ago, perhaps well over a thousand years. Near to these steps lies a stone-lined cistern where, until quite recently, pilgrims would have immersed their bodies whilst offering prayers before entering the sacred precincts.. These cisterns are known as *mizugori* but now are mostly empty of water or overgrown. Just a half-mile or so down the hill lie a number of important ancient sites, now contained in the landscaped grounds of a modern museum that houses a remarkable collection of Yayoi and Yamato period artefacts. This is a very progressive museum in terms of imaginative display and research – and helpful, too. A large number of important archaeological finds have been made in the last twenty years close by the shrine and museum reinforcing the clear historical significance of the immediate district, its shrine, and the whole region.

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Danish Kendōka visit Butokukan Dōjō

It was with considerable pleasure that we received a visit in February by the husband and wife leaders of the Gaku-Chou-kan Dōjō, Denmark. After a long and fruitful correspondence examining in depth the underlying differences between traditional and modern Kendō, at last these leaders were able to observe something of the cultural context of swordsmanship as understood, however imperfectly, by the *yūdansha* in the Butokukan. It would be good to think that this sort of enquiry might extend further to other groups who must surely realise that Kendō has far more to it than the modern cul-de-sac of competition. To practice an entity such as Kendō without the realisation that this has been as much as one-thousand-two-hundred years developing and only see it in part of its supposed modern form – a mere thirty or forty years old – defeats one's imagination. Either it is a deliberately blinkered approach or symptomatic of something far worse by those in authority who can and, possibly, do understand. Surely, commonsense would caution a balance between the two?

Be that as it may, we congratulate Kim and Lene Jallbjørn, and their daughter, Louise, who also practiced kata at our dōjō, for taking this brave step and wish them every success in their efforts towards 'reform', or rather to give Danish Kendō some of the 'balance' – and commonsense – so badly needed elsewhere.

Foundation of the Danish Traditional Kendō Federation

By Lene & Kim Jallbjørn

We started practising Kendō in February 2002 and the first day we became very pleased with this martial art. From that day on we discussed Kendō everyday. Our daughter Louise, 16 years old, is an only child but she is saying that she feels that she has a sibling named 'Kendō'.

Our interest in Kendō has always been in the direction of the old Japanese budō traditions, but we have problems getting answers to our questions concerning the old Japanese culture within Kendo because no one in Denmark is able to help us with the questions. Beside this aspect we observed that discipline and respect were secondary in relation to the Kendō techniques and competition. We will never forget the experience; we had only practised Kendō for about 2-3 month before the National Team Coach invited us to take part in a Kihon Wasa competition. We wondered why there was such a main focus on the competition but later we realised that this aspect is an important part in philosophy of the European Kendō. We were looking for Kendō as an old Japanese culture but we became more and more confused because we are missing this point in Denmark.

With our background within other martial arts we realised that old budō was forgotten in Kendō in Denmark. We wanted to offer an alternative Kendō and therefore we established our own dōjō, named *Gaku Chou Kan*. The purpose with our dōjō is to preserve the meditation (concentration), discipline and respect. The problem was how to do this in a proper Kendō way because we do not have the knowledge to handle the older reigi as we were raised with sport Kendo. Our dōjō was member of Danish Kendo Federation under European Kendo Federation and these organisations were not able to help us in our endeavour.

One day in the spring 2007 we suddenly recognized the website of British Kendō Renmei. We were so pleased because the written philosophy on this website was exactly the way we were thinking. From that moment on we did no longer feel alone. We decided to write to the president of British Kendō Renmei, Mr. Roald Knutsen, in order to apply about helping to establish a traditional Kendō federation in Denmark which purpose was to organise and preserve the older budō within Kendō.

This was the beginning to weekly intensive written and reading of several books recommended by Mr. Roald Knutsen. Many questions and answers were giving and we quickly realised that we had too many questions so we went for a study field trip to Mr. Roald Knutsen and his wife Mrs. Patricia Knutsen (both rokudan in Kendō) in February 2008. We do not dare to tell how many

questions we brought but the answers by Mrs. Pat Knutsen and Mr. Roald Knutsen caused always three new questions. We think it must be in this way because Kendō is a lifestyle and everybody regardless of Kendō title will always have something new to learn. Because of all our questions Roald Knutsen often looked very tired before bedtime. Nevertheless Roald and Patricia Knutsen were always the first persons who wake up in the morning and when we step down the stairs in order to get breakfast Roald Knutsen was already standing in the living room (like a museum with ancient samurai gods) with a couple of recommended books in his hand - ready for discussion.

Without the help by Mrs. Pat Knutsen and Mr. Roald Knutsen it has not been possible to establish our traditional Kendō federation in Denmark. Our visit in England made us able to hold the statutory general meeting the 1st March 2008 in order to found the *Danish Traditional Kendō Federation* (in Japanese: Denmāku Dentō Kendō Renmei).

We are deeply grateful to Butokukan Kendō Dōjō for hospitality and helpfulness and we are looking forward to meet all the other traditional Kendō dōjō in the future. We hope we will get the opportunity to repay the kindness.

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Important basic principles for Kendō establishment in Europe

**By Roald Knutsen, *rokudan renshi*,
Chairman, Eikoku Kendō Renmei**

As many Kendō masters who take an interest of 'foreign' Kendō are aware, there have existed in the United Kingdom two organisations for Kendō. On the one side is the British Kendō Association and on the other is the Eikoku Kendō Renmei.

The second group of dōjō was established 34 years ago by a number of senior *yūdansa* in order to provide an alternative for students not wishing to practice Kendō for competition or simply as a sport, but to guide them towards a deeper understanding of Japanese culture as represented by those martial traditions that survived the Meiji period and remained clear until the late-1970s.

This divide existed well before 1973 and was the main reason that this Renmei was constituted on the advice of a number of very well-known and respected Japanese teachers familiar with the problems. These masters, who have now sadly passed away, included amongst others, Nakamura Kishirō, *hachidan hanshi*, the Upper House of the Diet representative for Ibaraki-ken; His Excellency Yukawa Morio, Ambassador in London in the 1960s; Ohya Kazuo, *hachidan hanshi*, formerly Chairman of the Zen-Ken-Ren; Ozawa Takashi, *kudan hanshi*; and Arai Shigeo, *hachidan kyoshi*. Their advice was requested and given to myself over a period of years in order to ensure that this Renmei had the proper basis in place for Kendō development. They also recognised the need for this structure in the unusual circumstances to be found in this country.

There was no emphasis required on numbers of students or dōjō groups, their main advice centred on quality, a proper and constant control of ranking standards, and that we should never forget that '*Kendō begins and ends with reigi (respect)*'. Without this early advice and serious guidance over nearly three decades the establishment of proper Kendō would have been set back many years. In particular, Ozawa Takashi *hanshi* and Arai Shigeo *sensei* stressed the importance of the principle of *reigi* and took the trouble to explain the difference between *katsujin-ken* and *satsujin-ken*.

It is these basic concepts that seem at present to have been ignored or set aside by the actions of a few people who have apparently not understood the true meaning of *reigi* within Japanese culture and which, even now in the early 21st century, is thankfully preserved in a great deal of Kendō. While this may not be the opinion of all, it certainly reflects the thinking of the leaders of this Renmei.

I, personally, have been practising Kendō for over half a century since I did my best to establish the first Kendō dōjō in London after World War II. From the modest start in 1957 I have visited Japan fourteen times in order to try to understand and develop my Kendō. I have the firm belief, as a ‘foreigner’ that it takes many years of hard training and good teaching guidance to gain the essential experience for ‘one’s eyes to be opened’.

One of the aims of this article is to affirm that the Eikoku Kendō Renmei exists, why it exists, and our intended hopes for the future. Perhaps what is written here will be considered seriously by those in authority?

Please take into account that we represent absolutely no threat or opposition to any group or organisation within the United Kingdom or Europe, or, for that matter, Japan. We only wish to offer advice and guidance to those who would like to understand Kendō more deeply – a principle always followed by Arai Shigeo *sensei*. We accept that many may not think this way. That is their concern but not ours.

Referring to the question of *dan* rankings in Kendō and the important need to maintain internationally accepted standards that conform closely to the same levels in Japan, we believe that it makes little sense to apparently refuse to recognise any rank given by a stable organisation such as ours as it is not awarded according to the Zen-Ken-Ren protocol. This question needs consideration as this Renmei has conformed to these standards for many years.

As the Eikoku Kendō Renmei does not promote shiai-Kendō and has no interest in doing so, many intending students come to us for that very reason. It is their hope to find in our Kendō a greater emphasis placed on the Japanese cultural background. These new students, young and old, have little or no wish to practice Kendō for winning matches; they only look for taking part and facing their own problems through the discipline of a serious dōjō and under a respected master. They are as intent on their approach to these sword arts as anyone else.

Finally, we believe that the true value of Kendō in the modern world lies in its preservation and teaching of what some might think old-fashioned cultural disciplines applied to our own lives. *Reigi* finds little place in sport; possibly some politeness, but not *reigi*. If we are taught that ‘*Kendō begins and ends with reigi*’ and that this means something of great value then we must all practice it.

For the reasons set out here, we would ask that serious consideration should be given to this problem and perhaps we might receive suggestions for a fair and balanced solution. Such proposals and opinions will be most welcome and valued.

(*Copy of letter sent to ‘Kendo Jidai’*)

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Two Generations of the Takeda Clan in the Sengoku jidai (Part II)

Roald Knutsen



Takeda Harunobu (Shingen) - 1521-1573

In the first part of this series we looked at some of the few recorded details of the life of Takeda Nobutora, the formidable father of Takeda Shingen. This often violent dictator imposed a severe burden on both his retainers and the population of his fief in Kai province. When his son moved against him in 1541, many vassals must have felt a great sense of relief,

In carrying out the ‘bloodless coup’, Harunobu was supported by two powerful vassals whose foresightedness paid dividends later when they were numbered amongst their lord’s twenty-four generals. These two men were Itagaki Nobukata and Amari Torayasu. The new Takeda lord’s first target was to conquer the adjoining province of Shinano, setting about this in the year after his father’s banishment. Even at this early stage of his rise, this able young warrior had set his sights on aiding the weakening Ashikaga Bakufu, by war if necessary, and establishing himself in Kyōto, eventually to rule over all the provinces himself. It should be remembered that he was not alone in this ambition and other powerful chieftains entertained similar hopes.

In 1542, Harunobu crossed the border between Kai and Shinano to establish his headquarters in the already captured fortress of Un-no-kuchi. His sights were on the Suwa domain ruled by Suwa Yorishige, an ally since he was married to Takeda Nobutora’s daughter, Nene, Harunobu’s younger sister. This looks like a clear case of treachery, of course, but the *sengoku-jidai* provides many other examples, some several degrees worse. Expediency is probably a better description.

The Suwa lord, Norishige, had no inkling of the planned annexation; Harunobu’s agents and spies all sent back encouraging information. The lord of Ina, just to the west of the Suwa territory, Takatō Yoritsugu, promised to go over to the Takeda, despite that he was a relative of Lord Suwa. With his assistance, Harunobu planned an encircling movement against Uehara-jō, Yorishige’s *yashiki*³.

About the time of this incursion, Harunobu was joined by the redoubtable *heihō-jin*, Yamamoto Kansuke, a master-swordsman from nearby Tōtōmi province. Lamé in one leg, the result of a fight with a gang of brigands, and blind in one eye sustained in a single-handed encounter with an *inoshishi*, or wild boar, Kansuke’s friends had first offered his services to Lord Imagawa but had been refused. Harunobu, well-advised by his councillors, accepted the Kyō-ryū master’s request and never regretted employing him as a tactician or strategist. It may have been through Kansuke that Takatō Yoritsugu was subverted.

The Suwa domain annexed

With his able vassal's tactical planning, Harunobu advanced his own army of about 20,000 men across the Suwa clan's border. The Takatō took action to the west. When Suwa Yorishige received news on the invasion he was totally unprepared, finding it difficult to credit that his own brother-in-law and another kinsman were marching against him. He still held to the old principles of good faith and honesty, but he should have felt differently and was soon compelled to surrender. The penalty of his complacency was capture and being taken to Fuchu in Kai where he was 'allowed' to commit *seppuku*.

Over the next six years, many of the powerful leaders in Shinano submitted to the Takeda, one of them being Saneda Yukitaka, the master of Ueda-jō. The Saneda family still live in their ancestral lands and more than one descendant holds high rank in Kendō. As many as twelve major confrontations and doubtless many minor skirmishes took place during the prolonged campaign.

A period of decline

Almost inevitably, the military successes brought by his generals had their effects. Harunobu began to indulge in taking concubines, to drinking, and to addiction to linked verse. Matters became so worrying that, in 1546, his trusted vassal, Itagaki Nobukata, worried that the whole domain would be ruined, and devised a clever plan to restore the situation.

Nobukata was a rough, unlettered and forthright warrior, certainly not renowned for his artistic refinement. Pretending to be ill, he retired temporarily to his quarters and summoned a priest who had the reputation of being an excellent poet. He then studied with this tutor for a whole month before requesting Harunobu to permit him to attend the next poetry meeting.

It is believed that Harunobu remarked that Nobukata had probably never read a single book in his life, however permission was given and at the party Harunobu suggested a subject for the first verse. Without hesitation the unlettered general composed two excellent, if not brilliant, poems to the amazement of his lord.

'That was unexpected! Where did you learn such things?'

'I have learned poetic skills over just the past twenty days,' replied Nobukata.

He then admonished Harunobu strongly and bluntly. Harunobu listened to the heartfelt words and, amazingly, took them to heart. In his place his father would have struck his vassal down in rage. Immediately, Harunobu gave Itagaki Nobukata a written pledge not to repeat his misconduct then added to the '*Koshū Hattō-no-shidai*', the injunction that '*The martial arts must not be forgotten by losing oneself in merrymaking and frivolity. As the country is in a disturbed state, the priority of weapons and armour over all other matters must always be kept in mind.*'

His prompt self-reflection and repentance when his faults were pointed out, plus his sure generalship and valour, endeared him to his followers so that the Takeda developed a stronger master-vassal relationship than in any other clan. It was this growing unity and strong spirit that proved his greatest weapon, exceptional in the *sengoku-jidai*.

The Conquest of Shinano – Uedahara-no-ran

The continuous hard-fought wars to overrun Shinano continued for the best part of ten years after the death of Suwa Yorishige. It was not all plain sailing for the Takeda commanders and one serious setback came with soon after the capture of Shida-jō after a comparatively long siege in 1546/47. Shida was held by Kasahara Kiyoshige. It fell after Harunobu ordered some three-hundred heads taken when he was victorious at Odaiwara against the Uesugi to be displayed within sight of the Shida garrison. As hoped, the defenders were suitably intimidated and, wisely, Kiyoshige surrendered. Itagaki Nobukata had taken his force north to confront the Murakami army at

Uedahara and Harunobu followed with the rest once Shida was secured. This was in the second month of 1547.

The defenders were commanded by Murokami Yoshikiyo who had, amongst his *ashigaru*, or footsoldiers, some fifty men armed with the new *tanegashima-teppō*.⁴ His other infantrymen were armed conventionally with bows and spears. The Takeda vanguard commanded by Nobukata, Amari Torayasu, possibly because of constricted terrain, attacked directly and were met by concentrated ball and arrows. The attack was repulsed leaving the Murokami unshaken. Over seven-hundred Takeda were killed and wounded, including the two generals and another important vassal, Hajikano Den'emon. Harunobu, himself, was wounded by a yari thrust in his side. This battle was the first recorded use of firearms in a major engagement in Japan.⁵

Harunobu recovered from his wound and resumed his campaigns. By 1550 he had conducted more than twenty successful encounters and reached the border with the Uesugi clan in Echigo province. The two most powerful lords in central Japan were about to be in contention.⁶

The struggles at Kawanakajima

Two of the defeated Shinano lords had sought refuge with the Uesugi and urged their new overlord to take action against the very real Takeda threat. By this time it was probably evident that Shingen intended to enter Echizen and then turn west and south through the adjoining provinces on his progress to Kyōto. His other routes out of his ironbound mountain provinces were very limited and would have meant confronting the Imagawa, still his ally. While Uesugi Terutora evidently had a high regard for Shingen's prowess and personality, he knew the threat was extremely serious and decided to act.

There followed the four or five battles fought by the two generals, all taking place on the 'V' of land between the confluence of the large Chikuma-gawa and the smaller Sai-gawa, near present-day Nagano-shi. The first of the series was in 1553 and the fourth in 1561. Both sides did everything possible to gain victory but the results were always inconclusive.⁷ For the fourth of these engagements, Kenshin crossed the border into Shinano on the 14th August, 1561, and established a reserve base with 5,000 men in the Zenbō-ji temple near Nakano, just north of the two rivers. He then took 13,000 men across the Sai-gawa to encamp on the small mountain of Saijō-yama overlooking the Chikuma-gawa.

Shingen received news of this major incursion whilst at his yashiki at Fuchu in Kai. He gathered 20,000 men and marched north on the 18th August, establishing his base camp in Chausu-yama opposite Kawanakajima; his aim being to cut off Kenshin from his reserve base. When it came to planning the strategy for the coming confrontation it may have been the great strategist Yamamoto Kansuke, himself, who suggested encircling the enemy's army with Shingen's own men and to combine with a second force that was following on up the Sai river valley, expected to arrive on the morning of the 9th September. This plan was named the 'Woodpecker Strategy' inspired by the actions of a pair of woodpeckers alternating their attack on a tree trunk by flying alternately first one way and then the other from side to side to bore into the trunk.

On the night of the 9th September, Shingen's detached force of 12,000 men circled under cover of darkness to the rear of the enemy encampment around the Saijō fort while his main force of 8,000 forded the shallow Chikuma-gawa. His plan was to close in on the Uesugi from behind, using the 'Crane-wing' formation where the two extended wings would converge inwards and enfold the enemy flanks, rolling them in confusion towards the centre.⁸

Kenshin was wary of Shingen's tactics and decided, remarkably, on a similar plan in order to outwit his adversary. Leaving a few men to tend his army's watch fires on Saijō-yama, he also took the bulk of his army down to the Chikuma and placed them in position *in front of* the Takeda. All this circling by both sides was done with the utmost care and stealth. When dawn came, though, the whole valley was covered in thick mist and neither side's generals knew where their enemy was. The Takeda generals and their army stood in silence waiting for the Uesugi to appear, expecting

them to be driven towards them by the detached reserve force pressing from behind. When at last the mist began to lift, the huge Uesugi army surged forward from the ‘wrong’ direction! Shingen looked in vain for the appearance of his 12,000 men but they were blocked by the ‘*Kuruma-gakari*’, or ‘Pin wheel’ formation where the Uesugi mobilised squad after squad to press in on his enemy’s troops.

At one point in the early confused skirmishing, Kenshin with a small band of retainers, charged his horse headlong into the Takeda *bakufu*, curtained ‘headquarters’, and faced Shingen directly. The Takeda lord was seated on his folding command stool wearing full armour, ready to direct the fighting. Kenshin reined up and slashed at his foe with his tachi, slung sword, forcing Shingen to defend with his *tessen*, or war-fan. The Takeda lord received at least three deep cuts and two minor ones to his arms before one of his retainers, recovering from the unexpectedness of the attack, ran to his aid and drove off Kenshin’s horse with a spear thrust to its flank. The horse bolted back to the Uesugi army’s lines.

Shingen’s detached force eventually joined in with the general fighting about two hours before noon and the Takeda were able to launch a strong counterattack, managing to hold his advantage until the two sides separated about six hours later. Kenshin ordered his army groups to pull back to the Echigo border.

Both sides had many casualties and it is estimated that Shingen lost in the region of 4,000 with several of his commanding generals dead. One of his severest losses was Yamamoto Kansuke who was reputedly shot down by gunshots when he defied the enemy, mistakenly believing that his lord was losing the battle. His last brave defiance made a popular subject for the late-Edo period *ukiyo-e*, woodblock, artists of the calibre of Kuniyoshi who famously depicted him standing, bleeding from many wounds, supported by his war-yari, The Uesugi dead also included some of their generals and around 3,000 men.

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The keep of Matsue-jō, Shimane-ken, (April 2008)

Results of the Spring Shōdan-shinsa, 18/05/08

The following students were advanced into or within the *dan* degrees at the Renmei Shōdan examinations at Tunbridge Wells on Sunday, 18th May 2008. These examinations have been made under the Rules of the **Eikoku Kendō Renmei** implemented for the past thirty-four years and in strict accordance with the standards laid down by the **All Japan Kendō Renmei**.

To Shōdan:

Alistair Brindle (Butokukan Dōjō)

Mark Morford (Tunbridge)

Philippe Negri (Tunbridge)

Eden Swift (Butokukan)

Antonio Ybarra (Butokukan)

To Sandan:

Thomas Bowen (Butokukan Dōjō)

James Powell (Butokukan)

Matt Smith (Butokukan)

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It should be noted in passing that the examination structure for the Renmei *Shōdan-shinsa* was fully adopted as long ago as 1973 on the considered advice of such high-ranking *sensei* in Japan as Ozawa Takashi, *Hachidan Hanshi*; Nakamura Kishirō, *Hachidan Hanshi*; Arai Shigeo, *Hachidan Kyoshi*; and Kamō Jisaku, *Nanadan Kyoshi*; with the backing and endorsement of several other prominent and respected masters. Their recommendations regarding the form of the *Shinsa*, the rigorous requirements for the separate parts, and the objective detachment of the examiners, all very experienced senior members of the Renmei, were and are intended to maintain the ranking standards hopefully followed everywhere in the Kendō world, regardless of other affiliations.

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Notes

¹ Shugyōsha: one who does his or her best to practice hard and with sincerity. A person prepared to travel to do this, despite difficulties. (Ed.)

² Depending on the precise *kanji* for ‘Oba’, this title, and from ancient times the Japanese were very fond of giving titles, suggests a ‘great aunt’. This would be entirely in keeping with the place name meaning ‘Palace of the Great Aunt’ eg. Izanami. (*Oba-san* is still used as a term of respect for an elderly and therefore senior kinswoman).

³ *Yashiki*: a fortified mansion, usually defended by earthen ramparts surmounted by strong palisades, but sometimes large enough to be described as a fortress. In such case, a *yashiki* might be termed a ‘*shirō*’ (fort), or a ‘*jō*’ (castle).

⁴ These *ashigaru* were called *teppō-mochi* (matchlock bearers). These firearms had first been brought to Japan by the Portuguese and landed on the southern island of Tanegashima in the Shimazu domain in 1543. Yamamoto Kansuke, though, was of the opinion that they had first been known as long as thirty years previously from contacts with the Chinese mainland. This view is interesting but not proven.

⁵ Professor Kuroki, Saga University, recounts a story of the first use of such tanegashima-teppō in Higo province, Kyūshū, about this time during a war conducted by the Ōtomo clan.

⁶ It is often very confusing for those not deeply involved with Japanese history to understand and cope with the several changes of names or titles in the warrior groups. In 1557, Takeda Harunobu became a lay-priest of the Soto-zen sect, taking the name ‘Shingen’ by which he is now commonly known. In the following year, 1558, Uesugi Terutora followed the same path and took the Buddhist name, ‘Kenshin’. They remained as warlike as ever, notwithstanding.

⁷ It is possible that Uesugi Kenshin and his Chief Councillor, understood Shingen’s strategic plans and fought these battles in order to contain him. This is a view that I have not seen advanced and may, of course, be flawed.

⁸ When I was at the Kashima Shintō-ryū dōjō in February 1976, I was given a very interesting song originally composed in the Uesugi clan but later popular with the Takeda samurai, describing how during the night before the battle a young samurai crept silently through the reeds beside the Sai river and came close to the Takeda outposts. He overheard a Takeda sentry singing to himself of how it was a pity that two such brave lords, who should have been allies, were about to fight each other. The song handed down in the warrior folklore is called ‘*Ben-sei shiku*’. I only have it noted down by ear in Romanji, if anyone is interested. (Ed.)