

### Nagashino

On May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1575 Takeda Katsuyori began a march on the Mikawa Province from the stronghold of Tsutsuji-ga-saki in Kofu. It was the day after the anniversary of the death of his father. He was set on taking Okazaki castle commanded by Tokugawa Ieyasu's son Nobuyasu. Okazaki was the capital of the home province of the Tokugawa. Though outnumbered, Katsuyori planned his strategy on Oga Yashiro who was a prominent financial figure in the Tokugawa command structure. Upon Katsuyori's arrival at Okazaki castle Oga Yashiro was to open the gates of the castle allowing the army to take it with little resistance.<sup>1</sup> Yashiro was discovered before Katsuyori arrived and subsequently executed via bamboo saw. This peculiar and agonizing punishment consisted of being buried up to the neck with a wooden board separating the head from the earth. Then a bamboo saw is left by the board where anyone is free to use it. Oga Yashiro lasted seven days.<sup>2</sup>

Katsuyori moved on Asuke Castle where he learned of the fate of Yashiro and changed his target from Okazaki, continuing southeast to Tukeude. On June 23<sup>rd</sup> he burned down the outer defensive fortresses of Ushikubo and Nierengi before launching an assault on Yoshida Castle.<sup>3</sup> Upon his arrival at Yoshida he found Tokugawa Ieyasu waiting for him with 5,000 troops. Ieyasu had become aware of Katsuyori's movements and followed him for two weeks. He correctly predicted that Yoshida would be Katsuyori's secondary target and left Nobuyasu in Okazaki with 7,000 men.<sup>4</sup> Seeing the difficulty in taking the castle he withdrew and turned to Nagashino to the north.

Tokugawa knew that trying to reinforce Okudaira Sadamasa would be difficult. He sent a request to Nobunaga for support which Nobunaga initially ignored as the assault would yield no threat to his provinces. Upon sending a second message with Oguri Dairoku Shigetsune he told Shigetsune:

*Last year, I made peace with Nobunaga, promising mutual aid. Since the time when we defeated Sasaki Yoshikado, I have helped him several times for his great success. If Nobunaga will not help me now in spite of his promise, I will join Katsuyori as his vanguard, attack Owari Province [of Nobunaga], give Katsuyori Totomi Province and keep Owari Province for myself. You tell my intention secretly to Yabe Zenshichiro [a Nobunaga man] when Nobunaga refuse my request.<sup>5</sup>*

Yabe told Nobunaga and Nobunaga agreed to send troops. He feared the loss of such a powerful ally and the subsequent threat of other allied daimyos following Tokugawa's example.

By 1575 Nobunaga was estimated to have 3,000 troops armed with firearms to compliment the additional 67,000 warriors in his army, although some scholars suggest this number to be considerably larger, number upwards of 100,000.<sup>6,7</sup> Takeda Katsuyori's complete force consisted of 33,736 troops.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Turnbull, *Nagashino 1575: Slaughter at the Barricades*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2000). 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Turnbull, *Nagashino*, 30.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Okanoya, *Shogun and Samurai*, 138.

<sup>6</sup> Delmer M. Brown, "The Impact of Firearms on Japanese Warfare, 1543-98." *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 3 May, 1948, 236-253.

<sup>7</sup> Turnbull, *Nagashino*, 28.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-25. Turnbull compiles a complete listing of the clan army as well as the number of horsemen provided by the retainers. Details are taken from *Koyo Gunkan* and *Nagashino no tatakai* by Kenichi Futaki

Nobunaga sent 30,000 troops including 3,500 arquebuses to support Tokugawa's 8,000. The local garrison consisted of 500 men. This made a total of 38,500 troops for Nobunaga and 3,500 guns and at least one cannon against 15,757 Takeda troops.<sup>9, 10, 11, 12</sup> Nagashino is located within Horai town about 15 miles north of Toyohashi. The castle was constructed in 1508 by Sguanuma Motonari. In 1571 it was captured by Takeda Shingen and returned to the control of the Tokugawa in 1573. It is situated on a rocky outcropping nestled between the Takigawa and Onogawa rivers with cliff walls of 164 ft. To the north of the castle, land access was limited by swamps and the hills of Datujiyama. The castle was constructed of simple wooden buildings and stone walls covering a small fortified area. Its inner bailey, called a *hon-maru*, ran 273 yards north to south and 360 yards from east to west; a third of which was covered by an earthwork known as *Yagyu-guruwa*. Hillside access to the river was secured by a gate called the *Yagyu-mon*. The entire *hon-maru* was defended by a dry moat and stone wall. There were two more outer defenses the *ni on maru* (second bailey), and *san no maru* (third bailey), known as the Obi-guguwa and Tomoe-guruwa respectively. All three were protected on the western side by a stream flowing into the Takigawa River. It was crossed by a bridge defended by two more fortifications, the walled and earthwork *Danjo-guruwa*, and the dry moat and partial wall of the *Hattori-guruwa*.<sup>13</sup> The Northern most defensive wall was located outside the *san no maru* near the slopes of Daitujiyama and called *Fukube-maru* (The Fukube barbican).<sup>14</sup>

By June 16<sup>th</sup>, Takeda Katsuyori had reached the castle and stationed troops on both Daitujiyama and Iojiyama hills. He stationed his headquarters upon the high vantage point of Iojiyama Hill, about 3/5<sup>ths</sup> of a Mile north of the Ote-mon of the castle. From here he could see all of Nagashino protected by his personal guard of 3,000 troops. Beyond Hattori-guru in the northwest were the Takeda troops of Ichijo Nobutatsu, Sanada Nobutsuna, and Tsuchiya Masatsugu with 3,000 troops. Obata Nobusada and Natio Masatoyo lay to the west on the eastern bank of the Takigawa River with 2,500 men. To the south of the Takigawa River were Takeda Nobukado, Hara Masatane, Anayama Nobukimi, and Sukanuma Sadanao with 1,500 men. This area was known as Shinobano and was a triangular patch of land nestled between the Takigawa and Toyokawa Rivers. In the west laid Arumi-muri where Kosaka Masazumi and Yamagata Masakage were stationed with 1,000 troops. On Tobigasuyama Hill east of the Onogawa River were 1,000 troops commanded by Takeda Nobuzane.<sup>15</sup>

On June 17<sup>th</sup> Takeda Katsuyori began testing the defenses of the castle garrison by ordering an attack on the Ote-mon in the northwest. On the 18<sup>th</sup> he launched a full assault hoping to use *taketaba* (bundles of bamboo tied together to make a shield) to block gun and arrow fire. This failed miserably as the defenders set fire to the *taketaba* and caused some 800 casualties.<sup>16</sup> For four consecutive days the Takeda assaulted the 500 troops of Okudaira Sadamasa. They attempted to attack the *Yagyu-mon* by floating a raft down the Onogawa River which was soon sunken. They launched a night time raid on June 20<sup>th</sup> on the *Fukube-maru* and *Ote-mon* simultaneously. These raids were successful in capturing the fortified positions, but neither were of key significance. Once they were captured Takeda Katsuyori ordered the construction of a siege tower which was to be protected by *taketaba* and as construction

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<sup>9</sup> Turnbull, *Nagashino*, 20-23.

<sup>10</sup> Hiroaki, *Legends of the Samurai*, 227.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture 4<sup>th</sup> Ed.* (Honolulu: HA, University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 145.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, "Impact of Firearms", 239.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, "Impact of Firearms", 239.

<sup>14</sup> Turnbull, *Nagashino*, 33.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>16</sup> Turnbull references the Nagashio Nikki account in *Nagashino*, 36.

finished early on the morning of June 21<sup>st</sup>, Okudaira Sadamasa ordered the castles cannon, capable of firing 33-44 pounds loads, to fire upon the tower.<sup>17</sup> A direct hit obliterated the siege towers but did not stop the Takeda attack. They continued on against the Tomoe-guruwa which was countered by a unit from within the castle venturing forth. Lead by Yamazaki Zenshichi, Okudaira Izumo, and two samurai known only as Shoda and Kuroya, they drove off the assault losing only 10 men. The Takeda also began using miners within their ranks to dig beneath the stone walls at the western corner of the hon-maru. By evening, all that was left to the defenders were the inner hon-maru, ni no maru, and the Yagyu-guruwa. Unfortunately for the defenders, the storehouses had also fallen to the might of the Takeda.

Realizing that the casualties from a direct assault were considerable higher than expected in relationship to those of the castle defenders, Katsuyori decided to abandon a head on assault and starve the defenders beginning a blockade on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. Neither the defenders nor the assaulting forces against the castle knew that on June 20<sup>th</sup> Nobunaga had left Gifu Castle and joined Ieyasu at Okazaki Castle the following day. With the cessation of the Takeda assault, the defenders of Nagashino built a strong encircling fence around the castle and nets were with clappers were put into the water to prevent sneak attacks. The castle employed snipers to assault any foolish enough to enter their sights, and bombarded any movement within cannon range.

After capturing a messenger named Torii Sune'emon the Takeda became aware of the Oda-Tokugawa coalition marching on their position. On June 27<sup>th</sup> Katsuyori began discussing the possibility of retreat with his senior officers. The elder generals, Naito Masatoyo, Oyamada Nobushige, Baba Nobuharu, Yamagata Masakage, and Natio Masatoyo were for retreat while the younger generals like Atobe Katsusuke advocated continuing the fight. Katsuyori, urged by his string of defeats during the Mikawa raid decided to face the Oda-Tokugawa coalition in direct battle rather than retreat. Baba Nobuharu proposed taking the castle before the reinforcements arrived and using its defenses to fight the enemy's superior numbers. He believed that the muskets would only be able to get off two shots and thus the sheer numerical superiority of the Takeda could take the castle with less than 1,000 casualties. When Katsuyori refused, four of the elder commanders of Twenty-Four Generals: Naito Masatoyo, Yamagata Masakage, Baba Nobuharu, and Tsuchiya Masatsugu gathered together for a last drink before taking to the battlefield and certain death.<sup>18</sup>

Nobunaga and Ieyasu left Okazaki Castle on June 25<sup>th</sup> with 38,000 troops reaching Noda Castle on the 26<sup>th</sup>. They left on the 27<sup>th</sup> making camp about 3 ½ miles west of Nagashino on the plain of Shidarahara. Nobunaga set his headquarters to the rear on Gokurakujiyama. To the left, on Midoyama, was Kitabatake Nobuo. Oda Nobutada was forward of him on Tenjinyama. Ideada Nobuteru, Nidea Nagahide, Sakuma Nobumori, and Takifawa Kazumasu stationed themselves on Chayasuriyama. Tokugawa Nobuyasu and Ishikawa Kazumasa of the Tokugawa forces held Matsuoyama while the other Tokugawa forces set themselves along the Takeda siege lines. Tokugawa Ieyasu camped with Okubo Tadyo, Honda Tadaketsu, Hiraiwa Chikayoshi, Saki Tadatsugu, Torii Mototada, Sakakibara Ienaga and many more of the Tokugawa army on Danjoyama. The coalition forces stationed themselves out of view and protected behind Rengogawa stream. The Oda forces brought with them cut timber and built three fences of stakes across the Rengogawa. These palisades were constructed with gaps between them to allow the Oda-Tokugawa coalition to counter attack. Here he placed the arquebus troops. The forest's left flank protected the troops from encirclement.<sup>19</sup> Katsuyori prepared for the coming battle by split his forces into four divisions: right, center, left, and command center at the rear. Three were 12,000 men spread across these divisions with 3,000 continuing the siege.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 36

<sup>18</sup> Turnbull, *Nagashino*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Turnbull, *Nagashino*, 52-56.

That night Sakai Tadatsugu suggested a raid against the siege Takeda siege lines to the rear of the main forces. Nobunaga gave Sakai 500 arquebus troops commanded by Kanamori Nagachika of the *aka horo-shu* (the red horo unit).<sup>20</sup> The raiding party was composed of 3,000 troops and left at midnight that night, hidden by a heavy storm. They safely crossed unnoticed and positioned themselves near the Tobigasuyama forts where they waited for morning.

As dawn broke, Nobunaga moved into position behind the palisades, leaving his son Nobutada in command of the rear. He moved 3,000 arquebus troops behind the palisades and arranged their ranks three deep then left them under the direct command of the horo-shu samurai. The horo-shu were of the highest rank within Nobunaga's command. They served as his personal bodyguards and for him to place his most loyal and skilled commanders in charge of *ashigaru* troops was a clear sign of the importance that the role of these gunners played on his strategy. Ashigaru were the lowest class foot soldiers in Japan. They were of common birth and usually were conscripted from the provinces to act as foot soldiers. They had little training and even less armor, but Nobunaga held their value of the utmost importance as he innovated several new techniques for employing and defending them. They made up his arquebus core, archers, as well as his revolutionary long spear divisions. They were the brunt of his military force. Nobunaga believed that this force would either make or break him and that their greatest weakness was their lack of discipline. He placed the horo-shu in command of the ashigaru to maintain the strictest discipline within their ranks and to increase the moral of these common foot soldiers as his entire strategy depended on their standing their ground against the greatest mounted cavalry in the world at the time. A military force that had only two years prior, completely obliterated the gunmen of the Oda-Tokugawa coalition at Mikata-ga-hara.

As the battle began to take shape the Oda forces were stationed as follows. To the far right, within the trees was Okubo Tadayo of the Tokugawa camp with 1,000 troops.<sup>21</sup> He was not stationed behind the palisades, but rather, he was allowed to provide a roaming defense through the trees to prevent encirclement by the Takeda troops. Osuka Yasutaka and Sakakibara Yasumasa were stationed with the palisades nearest to Okubo with 1,000 men each. Honda Tadakatsu, the most legendary samurai of the Tokugawa Camp took 1,000 men in front of Tokugawa's own 2,000 troops. Tadakatsu was known to wear shinning silver armor topped with deer antlers and supposedly never received a single wound or injury in more than 100 battles. Many of the stories are myths of course but his fame is not. He was one of the most feared men in all of feudal Japan and he never faced defeat from any samurai. Next to him were Ishikawa Kazumasa with 1,000 men and Torii Mototada with 800. Behind them, with 1,000 troops, was Tokugawa Nobuyasu who was 16 years old and engaging in his first battle. From here the Nobunaga troops were arranged so that next to Torii and Ishikawa were Takigawa Kazumasa, Toyotomi Hideyoshi who had Nobunaga stationed behind him. Niwa Nagahide took up position next to him while Mizuno Nobumoto and Sakuma Nobumori closed the left.<sup>22</sup>

On June 28<sup>th</sup> of 1575, at 6:00 AM Takeda Katsuyori ordered an advance, thus beginning the battle. The Takeda vanguard swept from the hills led by Baba, Yamagata, and Naito only to be slowed by the Rengogawa River. At 165 ft from the palisades the ashigaru gunners opened fire. They fired in a three rank rotation meaning that after the first volley is shot, the first rank retreats to the third position and reloads, while the second rank moves to the front and the third rank moves to the middle. This rotation of fire allowed for a consistent wall of fire to attack the charging horsemen. The Takeda troops were expecting a single volley of fire but the repetition and speed created by the three man rotating ranks had

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<sup>20</sup> One of the elite body guard units of the Go-umamwari-shu. They were identified by a red *horo*, or armor cloak which was suspended from a bamboo frame on the back of the samurai's armor.

<sup>21</sup> Turnbull, *Nagashino*, 62.

<sup>22</sup> Turnbull, *Nagashino*, 62-63.

never been seen by the Takeda before. The only other instance of the use of this strategy in the world prior to this battle had actually been against Nobunaga by the Ikko-ikki Monks of Ishiyama Hongan-ji five years prior.<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Park notes that Europeans would not use the rotating volley until the 1590's.<sup>24</sup> The effective range of the arquebus used during the battle was at most 650 ft at which only superficial damage would be incurred by the armor of the Takeda. At 165 feet, the distance from the river to the palisades, the rounds fired by the gunmen would have been able to pierce the armor and the speed of the cavalry would have been slowed considerably by fording the river. The Takeda cavalry was noted as being able to reach speeds of 24 mph in open field and could make the distance of 165 in roughly 5 seconds at full speed.<sup>25</sup> Takeda incorrectly assumed that the gunpowder used by the Oda-Tokugawa coalition was wet from the previous night's storm.<sup>26</sup> The samurai who reached the palisades found the ranks of the ashigaru protected by the 18ft long spears of Nobunaga's spearmen. The cavalry of Takeda Katsuyori was rendered completely ineffective against the rotating volleys, protective palisades, and long spearmen set by Nobunaga. This system allowed the Oda-Tokugawa to defeat wave after wave of Takeda cavalry with minimal casualties.

At 8:00 AM Sakai's raiding party launched their assault on Tobigasuyama. Tobigasuyama laid along the southern and eastern border Nagashino, following the Toyokawa and Onogawa Rivers. He divided his force into three sections and first attacked Nakayama's fort. It was immediately abandoned for Tobigasu which was under attack by Sakai's other two divisions. Sakai began the assaults with the firing of the arquebuses and the launching of burning arrows against the wooden fortifications. As the fort burned the Takeda forces across the river banks watched helplessly. Reinvigorated by the sight of the smoke from Sakai's raid, Okudaira Sadamasa opened the gates of Nagashino and attacked the Takeda. 200 of the Takeda troops were killed while the Tokugawa force only lost Matsudaira Koretada, a high ranking samurai and one of Okudaira's two assistant commanders.<sup>27</sup>

The Battle of Nagashino lasted for eight hours and changed the course of Japanese history forever. The Oda-Tokugawa coalition had effectively demolished the Takeda killing 10,000 of the 15,000 troops. Of the 97 named samurai present on the Takeda side, 54 were killed and 8 of the Twenty Four Generals of Takeda Shingen were killed.<sup>28</sup> Katsuyori retreated back to the mountains; his final defeat would come in 1582 to the Oda-Tokugawa forces at Temmokuzan. With the Takeda effectively out of the way Nobunaga return to the ten year siege Ishiyama Hongan-ji. In 1576 he was named *Udajin* (Minister of the Right) to coincide with that of Ukon etaisho.<sup>29</sup> A year later he resigned from both positions. Nobunaga, being of the Taira lineage, could not rise to the position of Shogun through traditional means, as that title was reserved for descendents of the Minamoto Clan. Nobunaga would endure attacks by the Takeda, the Mori, and the Uesugi but with the death of Uesugi Kenshin in 1578 by mysterious means, he was virtually free to take the country.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Brown, "Impact of Firearms", 19.

<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey Park, *The Military Revolution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 140.

<sup>25</sup> Turnbull, *Nagashino*, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Clements, *A Brief History of the Samurai: A New History of the Warrior Elite*. (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2010), 175.

<sup>27</sup> Turnbull, *Nagashino*, 76.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>29</sup> Wakita, Osamu. "The Emergence of the State in Sixteenth-Century Japan: From Oda to Tokugawa." *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol 8, No. 2 (Summer, 1982), 347.

<sup>30</sup> Turnbull, *The Samurai*, 162.

