immersed in excellent sake, and carried on the shoulders of two of Takahira’s servants. Long ago, Lord Su even carried his own provisions himself; now Takahira had his men carry the governor’s head. All those who watched this are said to have wiped their tears, soaking their sleeves.

KUSUNOKI MASASHIGE: A GUERRILLA OF UNFLINCHING LOYALTY

The Kamakura Bakufu (1185–1333), established by Minamoto no Yoritomo, never enjoyed the kind of systemic stability usually associated with the Tokugawa Bakufu (1603–1868). Yoritomo’s practice of killing off potential political rivals was entirely inherited by the Hōjō family that took over the military government as regents, and it could only have a splintering effect. Within the Hōjō family itself internecine struggles continued unchecked.

In the meantime, the imperial court, with institutional legitimacy as the true government, suffered from its own internal schisms, of which Kamakura was never loath to take advantage. However, even while the court remained deferential or acquiescent to Kamakura most of the time, there occasionally appeared men from among the aristocracy who became resentful enough of their secondary position to take action against Kamakura. Gotoba (1180–1239), who was installed as emperor in 1183 after his brother, Emperor Antoku, was taken out of Kyoto by the fleeing Taira clan, was one of them. In 1221 he, by then long “retired,” raised an army against the Hōjō. He was easily defeated and exiled.

In 1331 Emperor Godaigo (1288–1339) took the same route. His military venture also ended in defeat; he was exiled, albeit briefly, and his imperial hegemony did not last long. But during the civil war touched off by his revolt a genius of guerrilla warfare emerged: Kusunoki Masashige (1294–1336). The following account of Masashige—the greatest nationalist hero until Japan’s defeat in the Second World War—is taken from the Taiheiki (Chronicle of Great

1. In 1193, four years after killing Yoshitsune, Yoritomo had Noriyori murdered. He had started destroying powerful men in his own camp during the war against the Taira clan.
Peace), a historical narrative of Japan from 1318 to 1367. A few abbreviated portions within the quoted narrative are bracketed.

Masashige’s lineage given at the beginning of the account below has not been ascertained despite centuries of admiration for him and scholarly digging. Indeed, there are few facts recorded about Masashige before he came on the scene. One theory holds that he was able to wage the kind of guerrilla warfare he did because, beside being a free-moving warrior common at the time, he controlled an extensive commercial guild and had sufficient means of retaining the allegiance of a wide spectrum of people.

The account begins with Go-daigo taking the unusual step of moving his court from Kyoto to a mountain temple to the south.

On the twenty-seventh of the eighth month in the first year of Genkō [1331], the emperor went to Kasagi Temple and established the Imperial Palace in its main hall. For the first few days, afraid of the power of the military government, not a single person came to visit. But after hearing that a Rokuhara force was beaten in a battle at Higashi-Sakamoto, on Mt. Hiei, soldiers in provinces nearby, first among them the monks of this temple, began to gather in a hurry. Even so, not a single warrior of good repute came or a man with large holdings leading a hundred, two hundred, horsemen.

The emperor fretted that with such a puny force he would not even be able to protect the Imperial Palace. While so worried, he dozed and had a dream [revealing that something related to a camphor tree, *kusunoki*, might bring him luck]. When the day broke, he summoned a ranking monk of the temple’s Jōju-bō and asked, “Is there a warrior by the name of Kusunoki near here?”

“I have yet to hear of a man nearby who bears that family name, Your Majesty,” replied the monk. “However, to the west of Mt. Kongō, in Kawachi Province, there is a man called Kusunoki Tamon Masashige, of the Middle Palace Guards, and he has established his reputation in bow and arrow. He is a descendant of His Excellency Minister of the Left, of Ide, Tachibana no Moroe, a fourth grandson of Emperor Bitatsu, but it has been many years since he began living outside Kyoto. His mother, when young, went to pay her respects to Bishamon Temple on Mt. Shigi for a hundred consecutive days. As a result, she had an oracular dream and conceived him. That’s why his boyhood name was Tamon.”

The emperor decided that this had to be the man revealed to him in his dream, and issued a command: “Summon him at once.” Consequently, Kusunoki Masashige was quickly summoned, with Lord Fujitsusa as imperial messenger.

When the imperial messenger carrying the command reached Kusunoki’s fort and explained what happened in detail, Masashige thought that for a man of bow and arrow no honor could be greater than such a summons and, without further deliberation, came at once to Kasagi in secrecy. The emperor spoke through Lord Fujitsusa: “Concerning the punishment and subjugation of the Eastern barbarians, His Majesty had a certain reason to turn to you, Masashige, and sent a messenger. He is deeply satisfied that you hurried to this place without wasting any time. Tell us your candid thoughts on the unification of our land: what schemes must be employed to win a swift victory and bring peace to the four seas.”

Masashige respectfully replied: “Now that the Eastern barbarians’ recent traitorous act has invited imperial censure, it should be easy to take advantage of their deteriorated and chaotic condition and punish them on His Majesty’s behalf.

“In essence, for achieving the unification of our land we must have military power and strategic resourcefulness. If we fight them head-on in strength alone, it would be difficult to win even if we faced the provinces of Musashi and Sagami with all the soldiers of the sixty states combined. If we contest them with strategy, however, their might is likely to prove to be no more than a force that can shatter a sharp sword and break tough armor. It should be easy to defeat them, and there shouldn’t be any need to fear them.

“Of course, since we are talking about war, please do not make up your mind by just looking at a victory or defeat in a single battle. As

2. The *Taiheiki*, which incorporates a number of legendary Chinese episodes, is studded with Chinese-style rhetorical flourishes. But dates and certain other factual data in the narrative are deemed surprisingly reliable. The book opens as Go-daigo ascends the throne and ends as Hosokawa Yoriyuki assumes the regency for the third Ashikaga Shōgun Yoshimizu.

3. Rokuhara, east of Kyoto, had a *tandai*—Kamakura’s outpost which was administrative, judicial, and, above all, military in nature. In one of the skirmishes a force supporting Emperor Go-daigo defeated a Rokuhara unit.

4. An emperor normally spoke to his low-ranking subjects through an intermediary.

5. The Hōjō, because they operated out of the East.
long as you hear that Masashige—if only he—is still alive, please assume that luck will eventually be with the imperial force."

After making these reassuring remarks Masashige returned to Kawachi.

Kasagi Temple was on a craggy mountain so difficult to attack that the Rokuhara army had to spend almost a month doing little more than laying siege until, on the night of the twenty-eighth of the ninth month, a few men managed to scale a cliff and set fire to the temple. A few days later Emperor Godaigo was captured while straggling with a few of his men not far from Mt. Kasagi.

Long before then, in the middle of the ninth month, word had come to Rokuhara that Kusunoki Masashige had revolted, entrenching himself with 500 men on Mt. Akasaka. Meanwhile, notified of Godaigo’s move Kamakura had begun sending large armies westward as early as the fifth of the ninth month.

The great host that came west from distant Eastern provinces were so sorely disappointed to learn that Kasagi Castle had fallen even before they entered Omi Province that none of them bothered to enter Kyoto. Instead, they headed for Akasaka Castle in which Kusunoki Masashige, of the Middle Palace Guards, had entrenched himself, some over the mountains of Iga and Ise, others crossing the roads of Uji and Daigo.

As they passed the riverbed of the Ishi River and looked up, they saw the castle was obviously a puny affair built in great haste: the moat wasn’t carefully dug, the wooden fence was merely single-fold, and, within an enclosure one or two hundred yards square perhaps, twenty or thirty lookout towers were set up. Everyone who looked at it thought:

Well, what a pitiful enemy we’ve got here! I could grab the whole damned castle with one hand and throw it away, if that’s what I wanted to. I wish by some kind of miracle Kusunoki could hold out for just one day, so I could get rewards for my bounty and exploits!

So the attack force of 300,000 mounted soldiers jumped off and let go of their horses the moment they’d pressed close enough. They leapt into the moat, lined up under the towers, and began vying with one another to be the first to break in.

Now Masashige was someone who could “plot stratagems within his tents of encampment and ensure a victory a thousand miles away” as if born between the chests of Ch’en-p’ing and Chang-liang. He had two hundred superb bowmen within the castle and had placed on a different mountain his own brother, Shichirō, and Wada Gorō Masatō, accompanied by three hundred horsemen. The attackers never dreamed of any such thing. Furiously intent on breaking the castle in a single sweep, all at once a great many got to the bottom of the rising cliffs. Steady, rapid shooting began from atop the towers and through the openings. Within a short while those killed or wounded reached 1,000.

Thwarted, the men of the Eastern forces retreated somewhat from their initial attacking positions, saying among themselves, “No, sir, the way this castle is made, we can’t possibly scale it in a day or two. Let’s regroup, set up camp, and separately fight as called for.” They took down the saddles off their horses, removed their armor, set up their tents, and rested in them.

Kusunoki Shichirō and Wada Gorō, who were looking down on all this from a distant mountain, decided that the time was right and divided their three hundred horsemen into two groups. Then, from the mountains to the east and the west, through the woods, carrying two banners with the chrysanthemum-on-the-water crest flapping through the pine wind, they advanced their horses quietly through swirls of mountain haze. The soldiers from the Eastern provinces saw them, and they were wondering whether they were the enemy or friendly forces, when the three hundred horsemen, from both sides, raised battle cries and, in wedge formations, galloped into the 300,000 soldiers massed like clouds. They raced to the east, west, south, north, brandishing their swords. A great many of the attackers were thrown into such consternation that they were unable to gather into formations.

At that juncture the three wooden gates of the castle suddenly opened at once and two hundred horsemen dashed out, shooting as fast as they could. The size of the attacking force was huge indeed, but they were so confounded that some jumped on their tethered horses and kicked and whipped them, while others tried to shoot from

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6. "Plotting stratagems," etc., is a phrase in Han Shu (The History of the Former Han Dynasty). Ch’en-p’ing and Chang-liang are two strategists who served Kao-tsu, the founder of the Han Dynasty.

7. Masauji; later changed to Masasue.
unstrung bows. Several jumped onto a single suit of armor and squabbled over it, shouting, "It's mine!" Even while such things were happening, the attackers retreated to the riverbed of the Ishi River, scattering like baby spiders as they did so, some soldiers unaware that their master-commanders were killed, others that their own fathers were. The road of about three miles in between was so thickly strewn with abandoned horses and suits of armor that you couldn't step onto it without bumping into something. It appears that the people of the entire county of Tōjō enjoyed windfall profits.

The renowned Eastern soldiers had made an unexpected mistake and suffered a defeat in the initial battle. Perhaps because they decided as a result that Kusunoki's strategic resourcefulness couldn't be made light of, even though some advanced to Handa and Narabana the main force did not seem eager to mount another attack soon. In the war council that was held, some argued that they should stay where they were for a while and, using guides from the region, cut down the trees on the mountains and burn down the houses to prevent a rear assault, and then attack the castle without any worry. But many among the soldiers from Honma and Shibuya had had their fathers or sons killed, and these men were furious, saying, "What's the use of living on like this? We don't give a damn if anybody else comes with us. We'll just go attack them and die!" Prompted by these words, a great many raced forward.

The Akasaka Castle we've been talking about had rising layers of terraced paddies to the east, and it seemed somewhat difficult to attack it from that direction. But it was adjacent to flat land in the three other directions, and those sides were protected only, it seemed, by a single moat and a single-layer fence. That being the case, even if a demon or a god were inside, he couldn't possibly hold it for long, all the attacking soldiers thought, making light of the situation again. So the moment they reached where the castle was, they got into the moat, got to the other bank, and removed the obstacles, ready to climb up. But there was not a single sound from within the castle.

"This means," they decided, "that just like yesterday they're going to shoot at us and wound many, and when we start to run in confusion, they will release a force for a rear attack and throw us into chaotic battle."

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8. Villages east of Akasaka
9. Place-names in Sagami Province.
spot, some had their arms and legs burned and could not stand, while others became ill with their whole bodies injured, and these numbered a couple of hundred.

The attackers had attacked with a new approach, and those in the castle had defended themselves with a new stratagem. The council decided that now there was nothing special that could be done but to wait until the enemy's food ran out. After this decision they altogether gave up any kind of battle; instead, they built a lookout tower in each camp and constructed obstacles around it as they laid siege. As a result, the warriors in the castle began to lose their mettle, with little to divert them.

Kusunoki had built this castle in great haste, with no time to prepare adequate provisions. In a mere twenty days after the battle had started and the castle was surrounded, there were only four or five days' worth of provisions left in the castle. So Masashige faced his men and said:

"We've won several battles and destroyed countless enemies. But their number is so great they didn't think anything of it. Meanwhile we're running out of food and there isn't any rescue force. Since I was the first among the soldiers of this country to rise with a decision to help His Majesty unify the land, I wouldn't hesitate to give up my life if the time was right and the act was just. Still, a courageous warrior is someone who takes precautions on an important occasion and chooses to plot things out. For this reason I, Masashige, would like to let this castle be taken and make the enemy assume that I have committed suicide. Let me explain why.

"If they find out that I have committed suicide, the men from the Eastern provinces will be overjoyed and return to their lands. When they have, I’ll come out and fight; if they come back here, I’ll again withdraw into deep mountains. If I annoy the forces from the East in this fashion four or five times, they’re bound to become exhausted. This is how by preserving myself I plan to destroy the enemy. Gentlemen, what do you think of this?"

His men gave him full assent, so at once they dug a large hole about ten feet deep in the castle, picked up twenty to thirty corpses from those killed and lying in the moat, threw them into the hole, piled up charcoal and firewood on top of them, and waited for a night of powerful wind and rain. Masashige's fortune must have been what Heaven favored. A sudden wind began kicking up sand and the rain that also started fell like bamboo shot down from the sky. The night was pitch dark, and everyone closed up his tent.

It was exactly the kind of night they had been waiting for. Masashige left a man in the castle with the instruction: "When you have determined that we are four or five hundred yards away from here, set fire to the castle." Then the men removed their armor and left in fives and threes, mingling with the attackers, quietly passing by the officers' quarters and the pillows of the soldiers lying asleep.

When Masashige was passing in front of Captain of the Imperial Police Nagasaki Takasada's stable, an enemy soldier spotted him and asked, "Sir, why are you passing in front of our officer's quarters without announcing your name and so surreptitiously?"

"I'm one of the general's retainers, but I lost my way," Masashige said as he quickly walked away. The one who tried to stop him cried, "He's damned suspicious! I'm sure he's a horse thief. Shoot him dead!" And he himself ran up close and shot at him. The arrow struck Masashige's elbow and should have implanted itself deeply, but it did not; it bounced back, its direction reversed. Later, when Masashige checked the spot, he saw that the arrow had struck where he carried a talisman containing the Sutra of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara that he had believed in and read for many years. In effect, miraculous though it may seem, the poem in two phrases in praise of the bodhisattva had blocked the tip of the arrow.

So escaping death to be brought by a deadly arrow, Masashige went on about 2,000 yards, then turned back to look. As had been agreed upon, the man left behind had already set fire to the officers' quarters in the castle. The men on the attacking forces were startled by the fire and raised battle cries: "Look, the castle's fallen! Don't let a single man get away!" They made a big commotion among themselves. When the fire quieted down and they went into the castle to check, they found a number of corpses burned in a large hole stacked with charcoal. When they saw this, there was not one among the many who did not praise Masashige, saying, "Poor fellow! He committed suicide. Though our enemy, he met his death with dignity as a man of bow and arrow."

10. The Confucian Analects has a sentence: "Make sure to take precautions on an important occasion and choose to plot things out."

11. "If you intently praise the Lord, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara will in the end hear your voice and absolve you of all sufferings."
On the fifth of the third month of the second year of Genkō [1332], Lieutenant of the Inner Palace Guards, Left Division, Tokimasu and Echigo Governor Nakatoki were appointed to the two Rokuhara offices and arrived from Kantō. For the last three or four years Suruga Governor Tokiwa Norisada had administered the two Rokuhara offices by himself, but he had firmly refused to continue, it was said.

Kusunoki Masashige, of the Middle Palace Guards, had let on in the previous year that he committed suicide and had his body burned at Akasaka Castle. The military government accepted this as fact, installed Yuasa Magoroku, the lay priest Jōbutsu, as constable in his place, and was satisfied in its belief that there would no longer be anything untoward in Kawachi Province. But, on the third of the fourth month, Kusunoki suddenly materialized leading 500 horsemen, broke into Yuasa’s castle, and carried out a breathtaking assault.

Perhaps because Yuasa did not have adequate provisions on hand in the castle, he planned to have several hundred laborers carry provisions from Azegawa, his own land in Kii Province, and let them into the castle during the night. When Kusunoki got wind of this, he placed his soldiers at a strategic point, had them rob all the provisions and replace the contents of the rice bags with armor and weapons. These men then had horses and laborers carry those bags, with a couple of hundred of them accompanying them, pretending to be their guards. As they were about to get into the castle, Kusunoki put on a show of driving them away, starting a round of chasing and being chased among his own men.

Yuasa saw this and decided that the soldiers trying to bring in his provisions were fighting Kusunoki’s force. He dashed out of the castle, and brought in all those enemy soldiers he shouldn’t have. Kusunoki’s men, having gotten into the castle as planned, quietly took out their armor and weapons from the rice bags and, after fully equipping themselves, raised a battle cry. In response, the men outside broke down the wooden gates or climbed in over the fence. Surrounded by the enemy both inside and outside the castle, Yuasa had no way of fighting and promptly surrendered.

Kusunoki added Yuasa’s men to his own, making a force of seven hundred horsemen. With these he made the two provinces of Izumi and Kawachi follow his bidding, creating an even larger force. So on the seventeenth of the fifth month, he advanced close to Sumiyoshi and Tennō temples and took up a position south of the bridge at Watanabe.

While he was doing this, one express rider after another galloped from Izumi and Kawachi, reporting that Kusunoki was about to attack Kyoto. This threw the capital into considerable turmoil. The warriors raced to the east and to the west, and both the high and the low became miserably confounded. Even so, an amazing number of soldiers from in and out of the Kinai region gathered to the two Rokuhara outposts, and these waited for Kusunoki to come to attack Kyoto imminently. But there was no such sign. In the end they decided that contrary to what they had heard, Kusunoki’s forces had to be small and that they themselves might as well go forward, attack, and crush him. The two Rokuhara commanders appointed Suda and Takahashi marshals and, joining together the soldiers of the forty-eight “watchfire posts,” those stationed in Kyoto, and men from the Kinai region, sent them off toward Tennō Temple. These totaled 5,000. They left Kyoto on the twentieth of the same month, took up positions in Amagasaki, Kanazaki, and Hashiramoto, and spent the night burning watch-fires, impatiently waiting for the day to break.

When Kusunoki learned of this, he divided his 2,000 horsemen into three groups, hid these main forces in Sumiyoshi and Tennō temples, and kept only about three hundred lined up south of the bridge at Watanabe with a couple of large watch-fires burning. His aim was, he said, to induce the enemy to cross the bridge, drive them into the deeper part of the water, and decide the outcome of the battle at once.

The day broke on the twenty-first of the fifth month. The 5,000 horsemen from Rokuhara, combining all the forces from various positions into a single unit, came to the bridge at Watanabe and surveyed the enemy forces facing them on the other side of the river. There were only a couple of hundred of them, and these soldiers were riding skinny horses, using straw ropes for reins. When Suda and Takahashi saw this, they said to themselves:

“This is just what we had expected. These bastards from Izumi and Kawachi are puny nothings. There isn’t a single worthy man in the enemy force. We’ll capture every one of them and hang their heads at the gallows at Rokujo Kawara. That should gain us a lot of gratitude from the lords of Rokuhara!”

Even before they finished saying this, they dashed straight across the bridge, unaccompanied by a single man. Seeing this, the

5,000 riders vied with one another in advancing their horses, some making them walk on the bridge, others making them wade through the shallows, before scrambling up the other shore. Kusunoki’s men shot a couple of arrows from a distance, but without engaging in a single battle started to withdraw toward Tennō Temple. The Rokuhara forces, emboldened by what they took to be a winning momentum, chased after them, galloping breathlessly, chaotically, until they reached the farmhouses north of Tennō Temple.

Kusunoki, having decided that he had tired out the enemy forces, both men and horses, as much as he wanted, sent one group from the 2,000 men he had divided into three galloping out of the east side of Tennō Temple to face the enemy to the left; one group galloping out of the stone torii at the West Gate in a wedge-shaped formation; and one group galloping out of the pine trees of Sumiyoshi to make a crane-wing formation.

The Rokuhara forces were so much larger in comparison as to seem impossible to oppose, but they were so clumsy in their groupings that it now looked as if they had been surrounded by a much bigger force. Suda and Takahashi issued a command: “The enemy has trapped us with a large force hidden in the rear. This ground is poor footing for the horses and we won't be able to fight. Lead the enemy out into the open, size up the condition of each force, and fight them again and again until we win!”

But the 5,000 soldiers, afraid their rear might be cut off, started to retreat toward the bridge at Watanabe. The Kusunoki forces took advantage of this and, raising battle cries, chased them from three directions. Near the bridge, when Suda and Takahashi saw the actual size of the Kusunoki forces, they galloped back and forth, back and forth, barking a command, “The enemy isn’t large! Turn back and fight! You can’t have a large river at your rear! Turn back, turn back!”

But now that a great many people were on the retreat, no one turned back, but everybody raced toward the bridge, ignoring its precarious condition. As a result, countless men and horses fell from the bridge and drowned. Even among those who tried to wade across the river, some who did not know where the water was deep or shallow died in the process. Some fell with their horses as they tried to ride down the bank and were shot on the spot. There were many who abandoned their horses and armor and tried to run, but not one tried to turn back and fight. So only a greatly reduced portion of the 5,000 horsemen scrambled back to Kyoto. The next day, who did it we don’t know, but a high notice board was put up at Rokujo Kawara with a tanka verse written on it:

Watanabe no mizu ika bakari hayakereba
Takahashi ochite Suda nagaruran

How rapid was the water at the crossing?
The high bridge fell down and a corner field flowed away.

As was the habit among Kyoto children, this satiric piece was turned into a song and sung or otherwise bounced back and forth with laughter. As a result, Suda and Takahashi lost face, and they did not go to their offices, feigning illness.

The two Rokuhara officers were disquieted to hear this and held a council to mount another attack. They invited to the council Assistant Minister of Civil Administration Utsunomiya who was in Kyoto, sent by Kantō because the capital was too defenseless, and said to him: “We know that, as has happened since ancient days, winning or losing in battle sometimes depends on luck. Nevertheless, we lost in the recent battle in the south because of our commanders’ tactical clumsiness, and also because of our soldiers’ cowardice. So many in the land ridicule us that there’s no way of shutting their mouths.

“Now Kantō sent you here, sir, even after they sent Nakatoki, so that you would pacify any criminal uprising. As things stand now, we don’t believe we can put up a meaningful fight no matter how many times we gather together the defeated soldiers and send them off. This, then, is a time of grave national crisis. Please, sir, rally forth and eliminate the criminal.”

Utsunomiya, showing no inclination whatsoever to decline, said: “I do wonder about the advisability of Sallying out with a small force after a large one was defeated. However, ever since I left Kantō I have been of a mind to think nothing of my own life in a time of crisis like this. At this moment I’m in no position to tell whether I can win or lose in battle. So I will simply go out to engage in battle, even by myself. If I face any difficulty then, I may ask you for reinforcements.”

With these words Utsunomiya left, looking grave and determined. Now that he was going to face a great enemy at the order of the
military government and had no intention of valuing his life, he did not even bother to return to the place where he was staying, but immediately after leaving Rokuha he left the capital, around noon, of the nineteenth of the seventh month, and headed for Tennō Temple.

As far as Tō Temple, his force seemed to consist of only fourteen or fifteen riders, master and servants combined. But as his men, who were scattered throughout the capital, raced to join him, by the time he reached Yotsuzuka and Tsukurimichi he had 500 men. As they rode forward, they robbed horses from the people they met on the road, whether or not they were of families of influence and power, and drove off their laborers. As a result, travelers changed their routes and village people shut up their houses.

That night they took up a position in Hashiramoto and waited for the day to break. Not one of them thought they would return alive.

When Wada Magozaburō, a resident of Kawachi Province, heard about this, he came to Kusunoki and said:

"Sir, I understand Kyoto was incensed by its defeat in the battle the other day and has sent down Utsunomiya. Tonight he has arrived in Hashiramoto, but I hear his force is made up of no more than six or seven hundred horsemen. Even when we faced Suda and Takahashi's 5,000, we made them scamper away with a small force. Besides, we now have a winning momentum and our force is much greater, while our enemy, having lost his momentum, is small. No matter how masterful a soldier Utsunomiya may be, he shouldn't be able to do much. What would you say, sir, about attacking him tonight and making him run?"

Kusunoki pondered the matter for a while and said:

"Victory or defeat in battle doesn't necessarily depend on the size of the forces involved. The question is whether or not the officers and their men are united in their minds. This is why it's said, 'Make light of a great enemy; be fearful of a small force.'

"Now, when you think of it, Utsunomiya by himself has come forward to face me with a small force after a far larger force suffered defeat and retreated in the previous battle. This means there isn't a single man on his force who wants to return alive. On top of that, Utsunomiya is the best handler of bow and arrow in the Kantō. And the soldiers of the Ki and Kiyohara clans think of their own lives so lightly in a battlefield that they regard them as less worthy than dust. If seven hundred of these men fought with a single mind to decide the outcome, most of the soldiers on our side would be killed even if they had no mind to retreat.

"The fate of our land should not depend on this battle. We are bound to have to fight far into the future. If most of our soldiers are killed in initial battles, when we don't have many of them in the first place, who will come to help us in later battles? It's said, 'A good commander wins without fighting.' I'd like to follow this dictum for now and deliberately decamp and retreat tomorrow. That way we can make our enemy think he has earned an honor. Then, four or five days later, we'll light up watch-fires on the surrounding hills and give him a 'roast.' If we do that, it's just the Kantō warriors' habit—they're bound to get tired of the whole affair and everyone will begin to say, 'No, no, it's no good staying here for so long. We better go while we still have our honor.'"

"The saying, 'Advancing or retreating depends on the occasion,' speaks of a situation like this. Look, it's almost daybreak. I'm certain that our enemy is very close to us now. Come along with me."

And so Kusunoki left Tennō Temple. Wada and Yuasa also withdrew, along with their men.

As the day began to break, Utsunomiya pushed forward to Tennō Temple with a force of seven hundred horsemen, set fire to the houses in Közu, and raised a battle cry. But no enemy came out because there were none of them there.

"They must be trapping us," Utsunomiya said, and gave an order: "The land around here has poor footing for horses and the roads are narrow. Don't allow the enemy to gallop into the midst of you and divide you or allow them to surround you from the rear!"

The Ki and Kiyohara men, their horses' feet aligned, galloped into the temple from the east and west entrances. They repeated this maneuver a couple of times, but not a single enemy was there, only some embers left in the watch-fires burned out and abandoned in the gradually whitening night.

Utsunomiya felt he'd earned a victory even before fighting. He dismounted in front of the main hall, prostrated himself, and offered prayers to Prince Jōgū.15 "This has not been brought about because of

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14. The two clans served the Utsunomiya family.

15. Another name of Prince Shōtoku (574-622), who wrote Japan's first constitution. A devout Buddhist, he built Tennō and other temples.
my military strength, but because of the protection of the deities and buddhas”—as he intently thought this, he became blissful.

Soon he dispatched an express rider to Kyoto to report, “We have driven away the enemy at Tennō Temple in short order.” There was no one among the many who heard the news—from the two officers of Rokuhara on down to the common soldiers of the hereditary and non-hereditary retainers—who did not praise him for his outstanding act.

Still, while feeling that he had made the enemy at Tennō Temple scamper away and thereby earned honor, Utsunomiya knew that with his small force he could not simply go ahead and march into the enemy camp; he also knew that he would not feel right if he went back without waging a real battle.

Even while he was trying to resolve this dilemma, four or five days passed. Then Wada and Kusunoki, who had rounded up four or five thousand warrior-bandits in Izumi and Kawachi to join them, sent them, along with a couple of hundred soldiers, to the area surrounding Tennō Temple, and had them light up watch-fires. Utsunomiya’s men were thrown into turmoil, exclaiming, “Look, the enemy has come out!”

As they watched in the gathering darkness, the fires visible in Akishino and Toyama villages and on the hills of Ikoma were more numerous than the stars on a clear night, and the watch-fires lit on the bay of Shigizu noted for its seaweed, as well as in Sumiyoshi and Namba villages, looked as if they would burn up the waves like the fishing fires burned on fishing boats. Throughout the hills and bays found in Yamato, Kawachi, and Kii provinces there was not a single spot where a watch-fire wasn’t lighted. There were so many of them that the estimate of the enemy force ran to several tens of thousand.

This went on for three nights. And the watch-fires gradually came closer so that they seemed to begin to fill the entire universe—from the east and west to the south and north, from the northwest and southwest to the northeast and southeast, not to mention above and below—as if dark night was replaced by bright day.

Watching this, Utsunomiya was resolved to quickly settle the victory or defeat if the enemy came forward. He waited, with the saddle kept on his horse, the outer strap on his armor untied. But there was no battle, though the enemy kept up pressure. Utsunomiya’s courage began to wear down, his spirit to fight to soften, and in the end a desire grew to just call it off and retreat.

At that point the men from the Ki and Kiyohara clans said, “In the end we wonder if it’s a good idea to face a great enemy with our kind of small force. Let’s say we earned some honor the other day when we drove our enemy off from this spot, and go back to Kyoto.”

Everyone agreed to this proposal. And as Utsunomiya withdrew from Tennō Temple at midnight, on the twenty-seventh of the seventh month, and returned to Kyoto, early morning the very next day Kusunoki came back to replace him. Truly, if Kusunoki and Utsunomiya had fought to determine the outcome, it would have been a battle of two tigers or two dragons, ending in the death of both. Perhaps because the two of them thought this, Kusunoki withdrew once to plot stratagems 1,000 miles away, while Utsunomiya also withdrew once without losing his honor after a battle. There was not one man in the world who did not praise them as outstanding commanders of deep insight and far-reaching planning.

As time passed, people of considerable means, not only of nearby provinces but also of far-off lands, began to hear that Kusunoki Masashige, of the Middle Palace Guards, out at Tennō Temple, exercised enormous power but never gave trouble to ordinary people while remaining deferential and considerate to his officers and soldiers. As a result, a great many gathered to join him, in the end making his force so strong and large that it appeared difficult for Kyoto to send a punitive army against him with any ease.

There were no decisive battles throughout the year, but uprisings near Kyoto became so frequent that in the ninth month and the tenth month, 1332, Kamakura again dispatched large armies. In early 1333 these forces moved against three main targets: Akasaka Castle, now defended by the lay priest Hirano Shōgen, Yoshino Castle, defended by Prince Morinaga,¹⁷ and Chihaya Castle, defended by Masashige.

¹⁶. Nobushi, peasants and samurai who have become marauding bandits. In the age of great social upheaval the line between samurai and bandit must often have been thin. Masashige’s father may have been classifiable as a “warrior-bandit” at one point.

¹⁷. Godaigo’s son (1308–35) who abandoned the priesthood to work to defeat the Kamakura Bakufu. He succeeded in rounding up a good deal of support for the cause, briefly served as shogun, but was eventually arrested and killed. He is called Prince Otsu.
Akasaka fell on the twenty-seventh of the second month, Yoshino on the first of the intercalary second month. What Hirano said to the enemy commander in surrendering—rather than fighting to the last man—tells a good deal about the unsteady state of personal allegiance of the fighting men. He said:

"Because Kusunoki subjugated the two provinces of Izumi and Kawachi and began to wield enormous power, I joined your enemy, against my own wishes, in order to get out of the predicament for the time being. I had meant to come to Kyoto to explain this in detail, but before I managed to do that, you came with a great force to press upon me."

The surrender was a mistake. Contrary to the enemy commander's promise of rewards and leniency, all two hundred two soldiers defending Akasaka Castle were bound up as criminals upon their surrender, sent to Kyoto, and beheaded at Rokujo Kawara.

Now the assault on Chihaya Castle began.

The attackers of Chihaya Castle numbered a million as the forces against Akasaka and those against Yoshino galloped to join the 800,000 that had headed there from the outset. These packed the space for five to seven miles from the castle on all four sides, like the viewers of sumo wrestling leaving not an inch of ground unoccupied. The banners and flags flapping in the wind were more numerous than the pampas grass in an autumn field, while the swords reflecting the sun and glinting looked like the frost carpeting the withered grass at daybreak. Each time a great army moved, a mountain shifted its position; each time a battle cry rose, trembling, the axis of the earth shattered in an instant. Kusunoki, unafraid of such a force, putting up a defense in his castle with a small force of less than 1,000, with no one to count on or wait for, truly had an indomitable mind.

This castle had, to the east and the west, deep valleys cutting so steeply that there was no way of climbing them. To the south and the north, it lay contiguous to Mt. Kongo with peaks soaring high. Nevertheless, it was a small castle about two hundred yards high and with a circumference of two miles. So the attackers thought nothing of it, making light of the situation. For the first couple of days they didn’t even bother to set up their camps or prepare attack devices.

Indeed, many vied with one another climbing up to the wooden gates of the castle. The men in the castle were not at all perturbed by this but kept quiet. They simply threw down large rocks from the towers, shattering shields, and, as the men below moved about in aimless confusion, shot at them rapidly. Men tumbled down the slopes on all sides, falling on one another, wounded and dying. The number of these reached five to six thousand a day. Lieutenant of the Outer Palace Guards, Left Division, Nagasaki Shirō, being a marshal and required to make eyewitness records of casualties, had to keep twelve scribes plying their brushes without respite for three days and nights. Consequently, an announcement was circulated: "Henceforth any soldier who engages in battle without a general's permission shall be punished." Thereupon the attacking forces suspended fighting for a while and concentrated on building their camps.

Now Kanazawa Umanosuke, the general at Akasaka, turned to Osaragi and Oshū and made this statement:

"The other day we brought down Akasaka Castle, but that we managed to do not because of any exploits of our soldiers. We guessed the layout within the castle and stopped the water supplies, and that made our enemy surrender.

"When you look at the castle here, you can’t believe that it has a stream of water coming into it, sitting as it does on such a small space on a hilltop. Also, there isn’t any device for getting elevated water from a different mountain, either. The reason they still seem to have plentiful water is, I think, that every night they go down to get valley water running at the base of the mountain to the east. I suggest, then, that you order a couple of your able commanders to prevent them from getting the water."

"We agree entirely with you, sir," the two generals said. They then had Echizen Governor Nagoya set aside 3,000 men and, with him as general, take up a position near the water, with obstacles constructed along the paths that people from the castle were likely to take.

It happens that Kusunoki, a man endowed both with courage and resourceful thinking, had checked, when he began building this..."

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18. The size of the Kamakura forces tends to be greatly exaggerated with Chinese-style hyperbole. It may be kept in mind, however, that any large military unit in those days was an assemblage of opportunistic groups whose numbers greatly fluctuated at a moment's notice.

19. One such record surviving from this battle concerns Kumagae Naotsune, a descendant of Kumagae Naozane (see p. 116). It details the wounds that he and his flag carrier sustained. Each wound was worth a reward.
castle, if there was a continuous supply of water. He had found that on top of the hill were five hidden water holes, which itinerant mountain monks passing it used secretly and which produced about 250 gallons of water a night. These holes never dried up even during the worst drought, and in ordinary circumstances the water from them should have been adequate to quench his men’s thirst.

But during battle water was also needed to put out fires and people became thirsty far more frequently than usual. With this thought he decided that this water supply by itself would be inadequate. He had two or three hundred boat-shaped tubs carved out of large trees and filled them with water. In addition, he had the gutters of all the several hundred shacks linked up in such a way that all the rainwater could go to the tubs without a drop being wasted. At the same time, clay was laid at the bottom of each tub to prevent the water from going bad. With all this water it should be possible to hold out for fifty to sixty rainless days. And, anyway, if you waited that long, there was bound to be another rainfall.

Such was the profound thinking with which Kusunoki reasoned things out. Because of this people in the castle did not have to get water from the valley.

Meanwhile, the soldiers assigned to block the water would tense up every night, expecting men to come down at any moment. But that was at first. Later, they gradually became lax and, with the tension gone and deciding in the end that no one was coming down to get water, they began to neglect taking precautions.

Having observed this carefully, Kusunoki lined up a couple of hundred reliable bowmen and sent them down from the castle one night. With the day yet to break wholly under eastern clouds, these men pressed forward hidden in the mist, cut down the twenty-odd men standing watch near the water, following this up with a relentless attack with swords. Governor of Echizen Nagoya was unable to hold them back, and withdrew to his camp. Learning about this, several tens of thousand men among the attackers wanted to rush to fight. But the path was on the other side of the valley and trailed narrowly along the base of a hill. So not many soldiers managed to get there. While this was going on, Kusunoki’s men picked up the abandoned flags and large-size tents and calmly went back to their castle.

The next day flags with a three-umbrella crest were raised and tents with the same crest spread above the main gate of the castle. Then soldiers inside called out and roared with laughter:

“Sir, these are all flags Lord Nagoya was kind enough to present us with, but they carry his lordship’s family crest and are useless to others. May we perhaps suggest that some of his retainers come into our place to collect them?”

When worthy warriors saw this they all said, “Heavens, what a terrible embarrassment to Lord Nagoya!”

The members of the Nagoya family, greatly disquieted by this, barked an order: “All the men of our forces shall die, without exception, at the wooden gate of the castle!”

Accordingly, the 5,000 men of Nagoya’s forces, with grim determination and utterly ignoring those who were shot and killed, rode again and again over dead bodies, tore away the first layer of obstacles, and many finally managed to reach the base of the other cliff of the moat. But the cliff was high and steep, and, for all the desperate drive they had, they were unable to climb it. They just glared up at the castle, trying to contain their anger, panting.

At that moment, about ten large trees laid at the top of the cliff were cut off and dropped, crushing and knocking down and killing four or five hundred attackers in swift succession. Even while the remaining soldiers were struggling chaotically to escape a similar fate, men on the towers in all directions shot directly down at them as they pleased, leaving few of the 5,000 untouched.

With that the battle of the day was over. But because these men, for all their furious bravery, did not accomplish anything great but allowed so many to perish, people never stopped saying, “Poor fellows! That’s injury added to disgrace!”

Having seen these unusual battles, the attackers must have decided they should not take the enemy casually. Unlike the initial stage there was no longer anyone who would bravely volunteer to lead an attack.

Lieutenant of the Outer Palace Guards, Left Division, Nagasaki Shirō assessed the situation and issued an order: “Attacking this castle with sheer might alone will merely produce casualties and accomplish little. Simply lay siege until their food runs out.”

As the fighting stopped entirely, the men soon had to fight unbearable boredom. So renga masters of the orthodox school were summoned from Kyoto, and rounds totaling 10,000 verse links started.

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The opening verse on the first day was by Nagasaki Kurō Moromune, of the Outer Palace Guards, and went like this:

Sakigakete katsu iro mise yo yamazakura

Be first and show us your winning color, mountain cherry

Lieutenant of the Outer Palace Guards, Right Division, Kudō Jirō responded with the second, which went:

arashi ya hana no kataki naruran

a storm is your enemy, I must say

Truly, both verses were skillful in the use of puns and they read elegantly indeed. But people realized later that by comparing the enemy to a storm when the first verse depicted the friendly forces as cherry blossoms, the second one ended up using expressions that ought to have been avoided.

At any rate, because the entire army followed a general's order and stopped fighting, they must have found not many worthy ways of diverting themselves; while some spent whole days playing go and backgammon, others whiled away the nights indulging in contests such as "a hundred-tea tasting" and verse-matching. The soldiers in the castle became all the more annoyed by this, they themselves having no means of distraction.

When some time passed in that fashion, Masashige said, "Well now, friends, let's trick our attackers again and shake them out of their sleep."

He had twenty to thirty life-size dolls made with garbages, put suits of armor on them, and attached weapons to them. He then had these dolls placed at the base of the castle during the night, with foldable shields erected in front and, deployed behind them, 500 carefully selected soldiers.

As the night gradually turned light through the haze, the soldiers all at once raised a battle cry. When the attackers on all sides heard it, they raced to attack, shouting, "They're out of the castle! They're in their last desperate frenzy! They're finished!"

As arranged beforehand, Kusunoki's men at first pretended they were there to fight with arrows, thereby attracting more and more enemy soldiers. But they gradually climbed into the castle in small groups, leaving only the dolls behind the trees. The attackers, thinking that the dolls were real soldiers, gathered to kill them. Masashige, drawing them as close as planned, suddenly launched forty to fifty large rocks simultaneously. Three hundred of those gathered near were killed instantly, with the number of men gravely wounded reaching 500.

When examined after the battle, none of the soldiers who had seemed to be truly formidable men, never retreating a step, turned out not to be humans but dolls made of straw. The many men who had gathered to kill them but had been killed instead, struck with rocks or shot by arrows, could not add their deaths to their honor, while those who had been too afraid of them to go close merely ended up exposing their timidity, to their embarrassment. Either way, both groups became laughingstocks for all the people.

On the fourth of the third month of the same year, an express messenger arrived from Kantō with an order, "You shall not suspend battle and spend your days uselessly." In response, the principal generals held a council and worked out a scheme: They would span a bridge over the deep moat steeply cut between this side and the enemy castle and send soldiers across it into the castle. For this purpose they summoned 500 carpenters from Kyoto and had them assemble lumber five or six, eight or nine inches thick and build a suspension bridge five yards wide and sixty yards long.

When the bridge was ready, two to three thousand thick ropes were tied to it, and it was pulled up erect with pulleys, then one end of it was dropped on the top of the cliff across the moat. It was so well built that one wondered if Lu Pan's "bridge to the clouds" was perhaps something like it. In no time several thousand excited soldiers jumped on it and started to run up. Now the castle's fall appeared imminent.

But Kusunoki had made preparations for this. His men lit throwing-torches, threw them onto the bridge in such a way as to make stacks of

21. In the original, sakigake, "to be first," means, in the military jargon of the day, "to ride out or run out ahead of everyone else to reach the enemy ground," an act traditionally regarded as highly commendable and honorable, although, as this account shows, it began to be discredited during this period. The word katsu, "to win," also has an obvious military association.

22. By following an utterly conventional (and safe) poetic notion that a storm is a foe of cherry blossoms in bloom, this one inadvertently manages to reverse the auspicious idea given in the opening verse.

23. Lu Pan, a master carpenter of Lu, is reputed to have made a ladder extendible to the clouds when his king was attacking Sung.
firewood on it, then directed at them torrents of oil with pumps. As a result, the fire started to burn the bridge girders, and the wind from the valley spread the flames. The soldiers who had first started to cross the bridge without much thought would have burned themselves in the raging fire if they advanced further, whereas they could not really turn back even if they tried to because those immediately behind them kept pushing them, not realizing what the difficulty was. Jump off the side they could not; it was too scary, the valley too deep with crags soaring in it. They were not in that writhing predicament for long, pushing and shoving, before the burning bridge broke in the middle and smashed into the valley. Several thousand soldiers fell in piles with it into a raging fire, and all without exception burned to death. The spectacle was such that one could wonder if the Eight Great Hells were perhaps something like this—where criminals are said to be skewered on sword mountains and in saber trees, scorched in raging fires and cooked in molten iron baths.

In the meantime, the warrior-bandits of Yoshino, Totsugawa, Uda, and Uchinokōri who had gathered in response to the command of Prince Otoho (Godaigo's son Morinaga), 7,000 in all, hid themselves on this hill or in that valley and blocked the roads used by those attacking Chihaya. As a result, the soldiers gathered from various provinces soon ran out of provisions, and both men and horses became exhausted. Unable to wait any more for deliveries by land or water, they started to withdraw in groups of two or three hundred.

As they did, they were killed by the warrior-bandits who knew the region well and waylaid them at tactical spots in various places. The number of soldiers so killed day and night was anyone's guess. The few people who were waylaid but managed to save their lives abandoned their horses and armor or were stripped of their clothes. Some covering themselves with torn straw raincoats merely to hide their naked bodies, some wrapping grass leaves around their waists shamelessly, these turned into stragglers and streamed away in all directions every day. It was an unprecedented disgrace.

While the assault on Chihaya Castle was continuing, in the intercalary second month Emperor Godaigo, who had been exiled to Oki Island in the previous year, escaped, and returned to Kyoto in the sixth month. Even before Godaigo's return, in the fourth month, Ashikaga Takauji (1305-58), one of Kamakura's important commanders, revolted, and on the twenty-second of the ninth month the Kamakura Bakufu came to an end, with Hōjō Takatoki committing suicide along with many others. Even though Masashige never won a decisive battle, his successful defense of Chihaya Castle is believed to have helped turn the tide against Kamakura.

Still, the fall of the Kamakura Bakufu merely set off another round of civil strife. Takauji, initially appointed General of the Ezo Pacification Headquarters by Godaigo, soon proved unwilling to follow his orders and, as Godaigo's reform measures soured, revolted once more—this time against the imperial court. By late 1335 Godaigo was issuing commands to "pursue and destroy" Takauji.

In the first month of 1336, Takauji returned to Kyoto from Kamakura where he had gone at Godaigo's command to "pursue and destroy" another rebel. But his army was routed by Masashige and others, and he escaped to Kyūshū. By the fourth month, however, he had regrouped more than sufficiently and, along with his brother, Tadayoshi, started to head back to Kyoto with large armies.

Courtier Yoshiyada24 sent an express rider to the Imperial Palace to report that because Lord Takauji and Courtier Tadayoshi were returning to Kyoto with large forces, he had withdrawn to Hyōgo to attempt to block them at a strategic point. Greatly alarmed by the news, the emperor summoned Captain of the Imperial Police Kusunoki Masashige25 and told him, "Hurry to Hyōgo and join forces with Yoshiyada to fight."

Masashige respectfully offered his opinion: "Since Lord Takauji is returning to Kyoto leading forces of the nine provinces of Kyūshū, I am convinced that his forces are immense. Our forces are exhausted and small. If in such a state you confront and fight a large enemy force, which is also gaining momentum, you are bound to be defeated. For this reason, may I suggest that Lord Nitta be simply summoned back to Kyoto and His Majesty visit Mt. Hiei as he

24. Nitta Yoshiyada (1301-38), who was appointed by Godaigo Lieutenant General of the Outer Palace Guards, Left Division, in 1333. By the time Takauji started his march back to Kyoto, Yoshiyada had become Godaigo's top commander.
25. Godaigo appointed Masashige Captain of the Imperial Police and Lieutenant of the Outer Palace Guards, Left Division—the same appointments Yoshiyada received. In effect, the men holding these posts were the top imperial bodyguards.
did before? I myself will return to Kawachi and try to block Kawajiri with forces from the Kinai. If then we attack our enemy in Kyoto from both sides until his provisions run out, he will gradually become exhausted and weak while day by day we will gain forces racing to join us. At an appropriate moment Lord Nitta will press down the mountain, and I will come to attack from the enemy’s rear. By so doing we may be able to destroy the imperial enemy in a single battle.

“I am certain that Lord Nitta himself thinks the same way. But he must feel that it would be a disgrace if he, as someone on the road, returned without waging a single battle and people thoughtlessly condemned him as ineffectual. I think that’s why he has decided to stay in Hyōgo and fight.

“Many things may happen in battles, but what is essential is a final victory. Let us hope that His Majesty will think into the future and have his court come to the right conclusion.”

The emperor responded by saying, “Truly, leave military matters to a soldier.” But in the council held by ranking aristocrats Imperial Adviser Kiyotada repeated his view:

“There may be some grounds for what Masashige proposes. But even before Yoshisada, as special emissary commanded to subjugate Takauiji, carries out his battles, His Majesty is being asked to abandon the imperial capital and visit Mt. Hiei for the second time within a year. This strikes us as making light of the throne; as well, such an action would undermine the position of the imperial army. Takauiji may indeed return to Kyoto leading the forces from Kyushu, but these forces are most unlikely to exceed those he led from the eight provinces of Kantō when he returned to Kyoto this year.

“In general, from the start of this war until the defeat of our enemy, our forces, though small, never failed to bring our great enemy into submission. This was possible not because our military strategies were superior; it was simply because our Emperor’s destiny was what Heaven approved. This persuades us that it cannot be difficult to decide the outcome of this battle and annihilate the enemy outside the imperial capital. Masashige must go immediately, not sometime in the future.”

26. To avoid Takauiji’s army when he returned to Kyoto in the first month of the year, Godaigo had gone up Mt. Hiei for “a visit.” The Enryakuji, a large temple complex on that mountain, had its own sphere of influence and was able to provide such protection. As is clear from Masashige’s subsequent argument, he is saying that Yoshisada ought to be part of the “visit.”

27. The port town at the estuary of the Yodo River, an important transportation route between Kyoto and Osaka.

Masashige said, “Now that it has come to this, I see no use in voicing my disagreement.” On the sixteenth of the fifth month he left the capital and headed for Hyōgo with 500 horsemen.

The Baihō Ron (On the Plums and Pines), a history compiled around 1349 from the viewpoint of the Ashikaga Shogunate, gives a somewhat different account of Masashige’s argument:

. . . . in spring earlier that year, when the news reached Kyoto that the shogun [Takauiji] and his brother [Tadayoshi] headed from Hyōgo to Kyushu, the emperor felt relieved and was sharing his joy with his ranking courtiers that there no longer was anything to worry about. It was then that Masashige submitted his opinion and said, “His Majesty should kill Yoshisada and summon Lord Takauiji back in order to make peace between ruler and subject. I myself would serve as envoy.”

People said it was such a puzzling thing to propose and ridiculed Masashige in various ways. Thereupon, he submitted his view again and said, “The destruction of His Majesty’s previous enemies can all be credited to Lord Takauiji’s loyalty. There is no doubt that Yoshisada brought down Kantō, but all the warriors under Heaven submit themselves to the general [Takauiji]. The evidence of this is that his army, though defeated, was able to go to a distant place with even those in Kyoto gladly obeying and following him, abandoning His Majesty’s victorious army. This should prove to His Majesty that Yoshisada has no personal appeal.

“As I ponder the reality of the matter, I am certain that the two men will easily make the western provinces follow them and return to attack during the third month. When they do, there will be no way to defend ourselves and fight. His Majesty is thoughtful in a thousand ways, but when it comes to military matters, this humble Masashige cannot be wrong. It is my wish that His Majesty will reconsider the matter.”

As he made this statement, he shed tears. We think he was truly a brave warrior with profound insight.

Some historians think that Takauiji’s popularity among samurai and Yoshisada’s ineffectiveness as military commander make it likely that Masashige made such a proposal. The Baihō Ron goes on to note that when the
imperial court rejected his strategy, Masashige decided to be “the first to die” at the front.
    So back to Taiheiki.

Masashige resolved that this would be his last battle. So with some thought, from his house in Sakurai he sent back to Kawachi his son, Masatsura, eleven years old that year, whom he had brought along. The instructions he left at the time were:

“It is said that a lion throws his cub down a stone wall several thousand yards high three days after its birth. If the cub has a lion’s mind, he bounces back up halfway, without being told, and will not die. You are already eleven years old. If you retain a single word of mine in your ear, please do not go against what I now have to say. I think the coming battle will decide the fate of our land, and this will be the last time for me to see your face in this life.

“When people learn that Masashige has been killed in battle, assume that our land is bound to be run by General Takaui. But even if that happens, do not destroy our loyalty of many years and surrender to save your own life. As long as a single young man remains alive in our clan, hide yourself near Mt. Kongō and fight the enemy, if he comes, with the kind of determination you would need if targeted by Yang Yu, comparing your righteousness with the loyalty of Chi Hsin. That will be your first filial duty. . . .”

And so, as the day broke on the Twenty-fifth of the fifth month, around eight, in the rifts of haze in the offing, some boats came faintly into view. While people were wondering if they were boats returning from fishing or boats crossing the strait of Awaji, enjoying, as they were, the grand seascape, into a far wider sweep of the briny route there emerged tens of thousands of naval boats, rowing and churning starboard and port, with banners erected at bow and stern, a tail wind swelling their sails. Across the hazy, expanding surface of the sea, for a distance of about forty miles, they were continuous as they rowed, gunwale squeaking against gunwale, bow touching stern, suddenly turning the sea into solid land, their sails shutting the mountains out of view.

29. First Han Emperor Kao-tsu’s subject known for his single-minded loyalty.

So innumerable were they that while looking at them in amazement people were wondering if even the number of soldiers who joined battle at the Red Cliff when Wu and Wei contested hegemony, or that of soldiers at the Yellow River when Great Yuan destroyed the Sung Court, could have exceeded the number of these, when from Ueno and Shikamatsu Hill, of Suma, as well as from Bulbul’s Pass, several hundred banners with the crests of Futatsuhikyō, Yotsuyuyui, Sujikai, Hidaritomoe, and Yosekakari no Wachigai pressed forward like clouds, flapping in a continuous stream.

Both the naval boats in the sea and the soldiers on the land were far more innumerable than had been thought, far exceeding what had been rumored, and the men of the government army felt overwhelmed when they looked at their own forces. Still, both Courtier Yoshisada and Masashige were brave men endowed with the kind of mind that Kuang-wu had, who would make light of a large enemy while never making light of a small one. They showed no sign whatsoever of flinching, but began by leading their men to a small pine wood on Cape Wada and quietly deploying them.

One group, headed by Wakiya Uemon no Sagisuke as general and commanded by twenty-three of his relations, close and distant, had 5,000 horsemen, and these waited at Kyōgashima. One group, headed by Ōtachi Samanosuke Ujiakira as general and commanded by sixteen of his relations following him, had 3,000 horsemen, and these waited on the shore south of Tōrōdō. One group, headed by Captain of the Imperial Police Kusunoki Masashige, who deliberately avoided mixing other forces with his, had 700 horsemen, and these waited at the station south of the Minato River to face the enemy coming on land. Middle Captain of the Outer Palace Guards, Left Division, Yoshisada, being commander in chief, was in charge of orders to be issued to his officers. He had curtains put up on Cape Wada and waited with his 25,000 horsemen.

As the initial battles began and Yoshisada moved his forces in an attempt to prevent the enemy soldiers’ landing, the distance between his forces and Masashige’s became considerable.

30. To make an enclosure for temporary field headquarters.
At once 6,000 horsemen of Kira, Ishitō, Kō, and Uesugi galloped to the east side of the Minato River and encircled the Kusunoki force to cut off its rear. Masashige and Masasue turned back and attacked these forces, killing or wrestling the enemies down as they galloped in and out of them. In about six hours they had sixteen engagements. Their force was reduced gradually, until only seventy-three riders remained.

Even with this small force they could have broken out of the enemy and escaped, but since leaving Kyoto Kusunoki had had a mind to bid farewell to the world here, so he fought without retreating a step. But their spirit now drained, he and his men hurried into a house in a village north of the Minato River. When he removed his armor for disembowelment, he found eleven sword wounds on his body. Each of the remaining seventy-two men also had five to ten wounds. The thirteen members of the Kusunoki clan and their sixty retainers sat in two rows in the guest room with six pillars, chanted a Buddhist prayer ten times in unison before disemboweling themselves.

Masashige, sitting at the head of the group, turned to his brother, Masasue, and asked, “They say your thought at the last moment determines whether your next life is going to be good or bad. Tell me, brother, what is your wish in the Nine Realms?”

Masasue laughed cheerfully and said, “I’d like to be reborn in the Human Realm seven times so that I may destroy the imperial enemy.”

Masashige was pleased to hear this and said, “That’s a truly sinful, evil thought, but I think exactly as you do. Well then, let us be reborn in the same way and realize our wish.”

With this vow the two brothers stabbed each other and died side by side. The eleven other principal members of the clan, including Governor of Kawachi Usami Masayasu, Jingūji no Tarō Masamoro, of the Middle Palace Guards, and Wada Gorō Masataka, as well as the sixty retainers, disemboweled themselves all at once, each sitting in the place of his choice.

Kikuchi Shichirō Takeyoshi, who had come to observe the battles in Sura as the representative of his older brother, the Governor of Higo, happened upon Masashige’s death. Perhaps he thought it would be a disgrace to see something like this and return. He also killed himself and fell into the fire.

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31. “Sword-bearer,” tatehachi, is the title given to men assigned to guard the crown prince’s quarters. There were thirty of them.
32. As noted before, Tadayoshi (1306–52) is Takauji’s brother. His relationship with Takauji later soured and he was eventually killed by him.
33. The Nine Realms are those of hell, hungry demons, beasts, asura, humans, heaven, sraavaka, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas.