

Môri Motonari

Part one

by
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INTRODUCTION

The life and career of Môri Motonari (1497-1571) in many ways encapsulates the history of the Sengoku Jidai (Age of the Country at War) in Japan. This period began with the terrible Ônin War of 1467-77, which accomplished nothing but the destruction of Kyoto and confirmation of the political impotence of the Ashikaga shogunate. Hundreds of virtually sovereign rulers and thousands of their retainers across Japan must have realized with a thrill of horror or excitement that their authority now rested not with the rule of law (albeit dispensed by the whim of an autocrat) but by their own powers of survival; by the keenness of sharpened blades, and clever political intrigue.

Into this world was born Môri Motonari in 1497. From obscurity he had, by his final years, put the Môri into a position which would make it the most important family in western Japan until 1868 and the Mêmji restoration. Most of the well known families of his early years were extinct by 1615.

The study of Motonari is instructive in what it can tell us about the way in which a samurai family maintained and expanded its position by skillful use of diplomacy, political marriages, use of human and other resources and the prosecution of war. Motonari was adept at all of these.

One slightly unusual feature is Motonari's ancestry. A major aspect of the Sengoku Jidai is known as *gekokujô* (the low oppress the high); many of the old ruling families of ancient lineage were overthrown by underlings of obscure origins such as Hôjô Sôun. and Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The Môri were one of the few old families, although a minor one, to survive. According to family tradition they claimed descent from one Amenohohi no Mikoto, a prince of the imperial blood. Historically they are known to be descendants of Ôe Hiromoto, a retainer of the Kamakura Bakufu (Kamakura regime). Hiromoto's fourth son, Suemitsu, took the name "Môri" from Môri-shô, the name of the shôen (estate) over which he governed in the Kanto (eastern Japan). Suemitsu's grandson, Tokichika, became a *jitô* (estate manager, the actual owner usually lived near the seat of power) of Yoshida-shô in Aki province in western Japan. It was in the capital, Kôriyama castle, of this small territory where Motonari was born.

Below I will present a narrative of the main events in Motonari's career followed by more detailed accounts of a few of the salient campaigns and battles. I will end with a regrettably brief discussion of the Môri army. Before beginning please accept my apologies if the narrative seems to pack too much in and if the continual bombardment of names seems tiresome. I have tried to keep things as simple as possible but inevitably, there were a lot of characters and castles!

SURVIVAL AND CONSOLIDATION

Motonari was the second son of Môri Hiromoto (1466-1506). After his official retirement as head of the family in 1500 Hiromoto was succeeded by his eldest son Okimoto, who was at that time about eight years old. At the succession of his brother Motonari accompanied his father to Surukake castle (it was customary in Japan for the capital of a domain to be occupied only by the family head and his immediate family and retainers, even if the titular head was only a child).

In 1501 Motonari's mother died at the age of 43, and in 1506 his father also died, at the age of 39. In 1516 Okimoto died from natural causes and was succeeded by his two year old son Komatsumaru. Motonari ruled as regent from this date and in this capacity saw his first military action in 1517 against Takeda Motoshige (leader of an

immigrant branch of the more famous Takeda of Kai province). Motoshige was the lord of Kanayama castle in southern Aki. This action, in support of Oda Nobutada of Arita castle was a major victory (see below) against the odds and resulted in Motonari gaining half of Motoshige's territory.

Motonari now began his political career by marrying the daughter of Kikkawa Kunitsune, the lord of Ogurayama castle. This was an important alliance as the Kikkawa were powerful in Aki and their land lay directly to the north of Yoshida, the Môri heartland, on the border with Iwami province. Motonari had thus already extended his influence north in the direction of the silver rich Iwami and south towards the Inland Sea. Further campaigns during 1518-1522 consolidated Motonari's position in Aki province.

In June 1523 the powerful Amago family of Izumo province began expanding into Aki, which lay directly between the Amago and Ouchi power blocks. Their leader was the renowned Amago Tsunehisa. Motonari wisely joined the Amago, sandwiched as he was between Ouchi based further west in Suo and Nagato provinces. The lords of Aki had to take sides to have any prospect of survival. At this stage in his career even the cunning Motonari could not hope to stand alone. As a vassal of Tsunehisa, Motonari led an expedition of 4000 men, including those of his ally Kikkawa Kunitsune, against Kagamiyama castle, ruled by Kurata Fusanobu, who was allied to Ôuchi Yoshioki. The castle was captured by the end of June.

Suddenly on 27 July the young Komatsumaru died. The senior Môri vassals met and decided to offer the leadership to Motonari and in August 1523 Motonari entered Koriyama castle as its new lord. In the following year Motonari learned of a conspiracy led by a vassal, Sakagami Sôsuke, to murder him and elevate his half brother Mototsuna to the leadership. The rebellion was crushed at Funayama castle in April.

In March 1525 Motonari decided to change sides and join the Ouchi. In June he attacked and defeated Okisada of Kameyama castle. He also destroyed the Takahashi, vassals of the Amago, and took their lands into direct Môri control.

By 1533 the Môri position in Aki was quite secure; by diplomacy means Motonari had gained as allies Kumagai Nobunao of Takamatsu castle and Shishido Motoyoshi of Goryû castle. The alliance with Motoyoshi was cemented in 1534 when Motonari married off his daughter to Motoyoshi's grandson, Takaie. The Shishido were a valuable asset, being strategically placed to the north east of Yoshida on the road to Izumo and between Iwami and Bingo provinces. The Shishido would also prove to be loyal allies.

Over the next twelve months Motonari defeated the Miya and Tagayama families. By the end of the decade the more important Ouchi and Amago families must have begun to see the Môri with new respect and suspicion; the Amago, clearly would not have any faith in Motonari as he had betrayed them and defeated their allies. Although he was now their ally the Ouchi could not afford to trust a turncoat, particularly when he was taking the kind of independant line that he was. So, in 1537 Motonari sent his eldest son, Takamoto, to the court of the latest Ouchi leader, Yoshitaka, at Yumaguchi as a hostage. He stayed until 1540.

In Yamaguchi Takamoto would have found a very different environment to that of the court of his father in Koriyama castle. The Ouchi were one of the great families of the day, in fact the greatest and most powerful anywhere west of Kyoto. Over a long period of time they had grown rich on trade with China; they controlled the coastal provinces along the straits between Honshu and Kyushu and therefore all shipping bound to and from Kyoto and the home provinces. The Ouchi capital of Yamaguchi, in Nagato province was known as the Kyoto of the West, such was its wealth and importance as a centre for the arts. Itinerant nobles frequented the town, and even an Emperor on one occasion.

The new lord Yoshitaka had shown vigour at the beginning of his reign, successfully campaigning against enemies in Kyushu, but at heart Yoshitaka was not interested in politics. His talents and interests lay with literature and the arts. Perhaps if he had been born a century

later he might have made a good contribution to the life of the peaceful early Edo period. His own day however was far from peaceful.

By the early 1540's Mōri Motonari was one of Yoshitaka's chief vassals and the other was Sue Harukata. After suffering a defeat in 1543, Yoshitaka withdrew from public life, against the advice of Motonari and Harukata. They feared he might be overthrown by a vassal in the manner of "gekokujo"

In 1540 when Takamoto returned from Yamaguchi the above was still in the future. Motonari had more immediate concerns to deal with when the Amago leader Tsunehisa retired and was replaced by the fiery and ambitious Amago Akihisa. The belligerent Akihisa possibly wished to confirm his new status, and encouraged by rash advice from the majority of his senior vassals decided to punish the Mōri first. This might have been part of a wider plan, more about which we will see below. Only two men advised against this: Amago Hisayuki whom Akihisa accused of cowardice, and the ailing 82 year old Tsunehisa. Akihisa rejected the advice of these two wise old campaigners.

Akihisa despatched against the Mōri his elite division, the feared Shinguto, numbering 3000 warriors. They entered Aki and were met by Motonari with the Shishido at Inukaibira in June. They suffered defeat and were forced to return to Izumo.

Akihisa must have been enraged by this humiliation. More so since the expedition was meant to be a mere preamble to his real objective. The Amago wanted what most of the Sengoku daimyō were after in the sixteenth century — Kyōto. He who controlled Kyōto controlled the Emperor and could either become Shogun or, if he was not descended from the Minamoto, he could control the Emperor through whichever Ashikaga puppet was Shogun. The power that could be wielded through the force of "law" (imperial decree or even "advice") could be decisive if used skillfully. Later in the century Oda Nobunaga could maintain honour by presenting a negotiated settlement to the siege of the Ishiyumu Honganji as "advice" from the Emperor. If an enemy was declared a "barbarian" by the Emperor, in need of chastisement, then the Sei Tai Shogun (barbarian quelling generalissimo) could legally request armies to assist in the destruction of that enemy. Anyone defying him would also be an outlaw, and since all daimyō wanted to grab as much land and wealth as they could get, they would need no more excuse than such defiance to justify attacking the outlaw.

Akihisa wanted the ultimate power, "Tenka", but like so many Sengoku daimyō could not proceed in the direction of the home provinces without securing his rear. Motonari was now too powerful to ignore and far too clever. Therefore despite the above reverse, in fact you might say because of it, in September of 1540 Akihisa personally led an invasion of Aki at the head of 30,000 men from five provinces. What followed was decisive for the fortunes of the Amago and Mōri.

Motonari could not meet the new invasion in the field. Although during his reign he had greatly enhanced the position of the Mōri in Aki he was not in the first rank of samurai and he could only muster a few thousand men at the very most. He had to sit behind the walls of Koriyama castle in his home fief of Yoshida and hope for reinforcements from his master Ouchi Yoshitaku. Motonari held out until December when a relief force of 10,000 men led by Sue Harukata arrived. In January of 1541 they sallied forth and defeated the Amago (see below), effectively ending their pretensions for power. Motonari was able to exploit the Amago defeat and take more land.

LORD OF AKI

Motonari now led the Mōri against Takeda Nobuzane the latest Takeda incumbent of Kanayama castle. He captured the castle, forcing Nobuzane to flee to Izumo. Thus the Takeda of Aki were extinguished. This left the Mōri in possession of land on the coastline of Aki and gave direct access to the sea.

In November of 1541 the old enemy of Motonari and the Ouchi, Amago Tsunehisa, died, leaving Akihisa completely in control of the Amago. No doubt Ouchi Yoshitaka sensed that his moment of triumph had presented itself; with Tsunehisa out of the way and a possibly difficult transition period taking place in Izumo, particularly so in light

of the recent defeats, now was the time to attack.

In January 1542 Ouchi Yoshitaka personally led 15,000 warriors from Yamaguchi to invade Izumo. Along the way he picked up the armies of Mōri Motonari, Kobayakawa Masahisa and Kikkawa Okitsune. By March they had mustered at Futatsuyama in Iwami. By July they had captured Akana castle, owned by an Amago vassal.

The progress thus far had been slow and by early winter Yoshitaka was forced to move his base camp into a more appropriate place where he was better protected from the elements. The north coast of Japan, where lies Izumo, faces the Japan Sea, and the bitterly cold winds bring snow from Manchuria. Motonari and his son (Takamoto?) wintered at Shitagata (modern Matsue), deep in Izumo.

In late winter and early spring of 1543 Yoshitaka moved his camp again, and Motonari laid siege to Toda castle, the Amago capital. Motonari also fought and defeated an Amago force in Hasuike. Still the Ouchi invasion force, after many months of hard fighting, had not succeeded in achieving a decisive victory. At this point a number of Ouchi vassals switched sides. Misawa Mitoya, Honjo, and Kikkawa Okitsune entered Toda castle as new allies of the Amago. This was the final straw for Ouchi Yoshitaka, who a few days later in early May withdrew his army.

Motonari and Kobayakawa Masahisa had to escape as quickly as possible. Motonari retreated with great difficulty along the Iwami-ji pass back to Aki, fighting all the way against the Amago where just a few years before he had been pursuing them. Kobayakawa Masahisa attempted a similar retreat, but was less fortunate; unable to escape he was forced to commit suicide.

In June, still weakened by the disastrous Izumo campaign, Motonari was attacked by a vassal of the Amago, Yumana Tadaoki of Bingo province. The attack was defeated.

In 1544 Amago Akihisa, having regained the initiative, led operations in the adjoining province of Bingo, where the Amago were overlords. Possibly he sought to outflank Motonari, who by now was the most important lord of Aki. He besieged the castle of Miyoshi Hirotsuka, but had to break off the attack when Motonari sent a relief force.

A new development occurred now as the diplomatic efforts of Motonari bore new fruit. His third son Takakage had been adopted by the lord of the Kobayakawa, Okikage. He now died, with no hint of suspicion that can be seen, and so Kobayakawa Takakage became lord. The Mōri domain, de facto, gained important new land on the coast of Aki bordering on Bingo. This kind of activity was not of course new, marriage alliances and adoptions being normal, but Motonari did it better than most. He had cast his net as wide as he could, marrying his daughter off to another family, the Shishido, but in a discriminating fashion. He had many children, but he used only the progeny of his chief wife (polygamy was normal among the powerful), saving only Takamoto, who was to succeed to the Mōri leadership itself. It is believed that he used only the children of his senior wife in order to clearly emphasise the difference in status between them and the rest. That way he hoped to avoid the kind of sibling conflict that plagued other families. If true he seems to have succeeded. His senior children never regarded the rest as a threat to their authority and were unusually loyal to each other.

The Mōri were already related to the Kikkawa as well, who were currently in political turmoil. The problem was that Okitsune, who had recently gone over to the Amago during the Izumo campaign had done so with little resolve, or even the appearance of it. He was in fact dithering indecisively for all to see, therefore making them appear totally unreliable as allies or potential allies. The senior Kikkawa vassals were aware of this and in frustration overthrew Okitsune, who remained for the time being titular head. They then approached Motonari and asked for his son Motoharu to be adopted by Okitsune with a view to becoming the new lord of the Kikkawa. Motonari seized his chance and in February 1547 approval was given for the adoption of Motonari's second son, by Okitsune as his son and heir. In August Okitsune retired as leader and Motoharu succeeded. By now Motonari himself had officially retired, but that did not mean he did not lead,

Western Japan 1540



Key Provinces ruled by Ōuchi, Amago or Ukita (*provinces split between the great families)

<u>Ōuchi</u>	<u>Amago</u>	<u>Ukita</u>	<u>Mōri</u>	Underlined names indicate family homelands
Chikuzen	Izumo	Bizen		
Buzen	Hōki	Mimasaka*		
Nagato	Iwami*	Harima*		
Suō	Bingo*	Bicchū*		
Iwami*	Bicchū*	Bingo*		
Bingo*	Mimasaka*			
Aki*	Aki*			

September Motonari's other son, Takakage, succeeded to the leadership of the Kobayakawa, and formally entered the Kobayakawa capital, Takayama castle.

SENGOKU DAIMYO

1551 was a year of crucial importance in the career of Mōri Motonari, and some clues to the nature of his subsequent conduct lie in what has just been mentioned about 1550. We will come back to that in a moment. In the summer of 1551 Sue Harukata performed a successful coup against his master, Ōuchi Yoshitaka who committed suicide in September. Harukata later offered the titular headship to Ōtomo Haruhide, brother of the famous Ōtomo Sōrin of Kyushu, who was against the arrangement. Haruhide accepted and changed his name to Ōuchi Yoshinaga. Harukata remained the real power. Harukata probably needed an Ōuchi to keep on board the former senior vassals in Suō and Nagato, who were staunchly loyal to the Ōuchi family.

It is often said (Sansom, p.235, Turnbull, Sam. p.124) that the war that followed between Motonari and Harukata was fought to avenge Yoshitaka's death, but this seems unlikely. He had already fought against the Ōuchi himself in support of the Amago earlier in his career and we have seen that he was not above murder. The fact is that before Harukata attacked Yoshitaka, Motonari was besieging and taking castles owned by vassals of the Ōuchi. This happened earlier in August, some days before Harukata's attack. The seizures included the ominous capture of the island of Miyajima, where lies the sacred and supposedly inviolable Itsukushima shrine, beloved of the ancient Taira family who ruled Japan in the twelfth century.

It is doubtful whether the timing of Motonari's unprovoked attacks on Ōuchi possessions, with the coup of Harukata are a coincidence. It is

merely that he was free to dispense with the burden of day to day administration and concentrate on extending the Mōri net.

In 1548 the Mōri, assisted by an Ōuchi army, attacked Yamana Tadaoki, the Amago vassal from Bingo province who had attacked the Mōri in the wake of the Izumo disaster of 1543. He was besieged in his castle at Kannabe.

In the following year Motonari, with his two younger sons (known as the "two rivers") visited Ōuchi Yoshitaka in Yamaguchi. Yoshitaka adopted the daughter of Naito Okimori and promised to marry her off to Mōri Takamoto. Motoharu meanwhile exchanged solemn vows of brotherhood with the other chief vassal of the Ōuchi, and their great ally during the siege of Kōriyama castle, Sue Harukata. In September 1549 the Mōri/Ōuchi army in Bingo succeeded in capturing Kannabe castle. Yamana Tadaoki followed Takeda Nobuzane's example and fled to Izumo.

1550 was an important year for the Mōri. In February Motonari's son Kikkawa Motoharu entered Ogurayama castle, the Kikkawa capital, in state to formally affirm his leadership. Not being content with this, later in the year Motonari had Kikkawa Okitsune and his son murdered. In

also significant that this followed the consolidation of Mōri power in Aki. There is no evidence of a formal alliance between Motonari and Harukata, but perhaps there was an understanding.

In early 1552 Motonari began mopping up operations against the last few castles in Aki not under Mōri control, except for a few belonging to Sue Harukata whose main territory lay just across the border in Suō. Then he began extending Mōri power into the neighbouring province of Bingo. At the same time Amago Akihisa, viewing the fall of Ōuchi Yoshitaka as his chance to seize territory from divided foes also began operations in Bingo, besieging Fukunaga castle. A Mōri army was swiftly despatched to the aid of the castle and beat off the attack. Soon after, the Mōri were campaigning in Bicchū province, presumably at the expense of the Ukita. By April however they were facing a renewed campaign in Bingo by the main Amago army. In May the Amago were defeated at the battle of Haginose, which allowed the Mōri to capture more territory in the province.

So far the arrangement, if it existed, between Harukata and Motonari had worked, but Harukata was becoming increasingly worried by Mōri successes. They could now more than hold their own against the Amago, something unthinkable ten years before. Harukata felt that a test was needed to put Motonari in his place as a vassal of the "Ōuchi". Harukata demanded that Koyama castle, one of Motonari's recent acquisitions, be handed over to Era Fusahide, his own vassal. Motonari complied, but began his preparations for war.

Meanwhile, in early 1554 an Ōuchi loyalist, Yoshimi Masayori, rebelled against Harukata and appealed for help to Motonari. In response Harukata demanded support from Motonari, who was thus faced with an uncomfortable dilemma. Should he help Harukata, his enemy, and crush a potential ally or should he declare war on Harukata and risk an invasion by the Amago in his rear and be squashed in a pincer movement. For some time Motonari remained undecided. His sons were not united over the issue either. Motonari wished to avoid conflict with Harukata if possible, as they were sworn blood brothers. Takamoto on the other hand realised that the real agenda of Harukata was the destruction of the Mōri as rivals and that war was inevitable.

By May Motonari had decided for war and began raising an army for the subjugation of Harukata. Harukata quickly came to an armistice with Yoshimi Masayori, who handed over his son to Harukata as a guarantee of good behaviour. Motonari acted even more swiftly, seizing Sukurao, Kusatsu, and Nihojima castles, the last strongholds in Aki not under Mōri control.

Harukata was surprised by the speed of these actions and responded by sending a punitive force of 3000 men against the Mōri. While on the march their numbers were swelled to 7000 by hordes of *ikki* joining them, presumably for the opportunity of easy loot. If this was the case they were soon to be disappointed; Mōri Motonari heard of a rumour that the Sue army was led by Sue Harukata in person, and led the entire Mōri army against the Sue. Harukata, luckily for him, was not in fact leading the army, which was exterminated at the battle of oshikibata in September.

Despite these successes Motonari knew that the Mōri were heavily outnumbered by the Sue. Some of his vassals suggested the unprecedented move of fortifying the island of Miyajima in order to command the inland sea straits between there and the coast of Suo and Bingo. The idea was unprecedented because there was and still is a serious religious taboo against death on the island, where lies the ancient Itsukushima shrine. This did give some concern, as did the prospect of having an army trapped on the island because the sea was controlled by the superior Sue/Ōuchi fleet. The Mōri had a fleet as well, but the real power on the waves lay with the Murakami corsairs, who had not yet decided to support.

The advice of Motonari's men however planted the seeds of a plan typical of Motonari's treacherous cunning. He decided in June 1555 to fortify a promontory of the island near the shrine with a castle. It could only be approached on land from one side and with a small garrison might be able to hold out against a large army for some time. Motonari seems to have forgotten about the sacred nature of the island!

Harukata was taken aback by the audacity of Motonari fortifying

Miyajima and swallowed the bait. He personally led his main army of 20,000 men to attack the small garrison. He invested the fortress, which managed to hold out, though with great difficulty. Now came the most dangerous part of Motonari's plan. Motonari had a mere 4000 men at his disposal, the rest being scattered in garrisons, particularly on the frontier with the Amago where the trusty Shishido kept watch. Of course Harukata knew that Motonari had limited numbers and thought that an offensive against his army was inconceivable, particularly since the small Mōri fleet could not hope to match his own. Motonari was counting on this and had one trick up his sleeve; he had persuaded the Murakami corsairs to ferry his army across to Miyajima.

The attack would be clearly visible from the island so Motonari crossed the straits at night, and in a blinding storm. Given the poor design of Japanese ships and boats this was an even more dangerous thing to attempt than with much better contemporary European vessels. Motonari took the appalling risk because he knew the only weapon he had was surprise. The troops were successfully landed and took up positions on the thickly wooded slopes above and behind the Sue lines. The surprise was complete, as was the defeat of the Sue army. Trapped on the island and unable to escape Sue Harukata committed suicide.

Soon after the battle Motonari invaded Suō and Nagato, the core provinces of the former Ōuchi realm. The Mōri crushed risings of *ikki* and in march 1556 defeated Ōuchi Yoshinaga, the former puppet of Sue Harukata at the battle of Misegawa. At the same time Kikkawa Motoharu was despatched to conquer Iwami province, and secure its resources of silver.

In the first quarter of 1557 Ōuchi Yoshinaga and former Ōuchi loyalists in Suō and Nagato continued to resist until Yoshinaga and his most important ally Naitō were forced to commit suicide in the face of defeat.

The rest of 1557 was spent in mopping up Ōuchi remnants and establishing further inroads in Iwami at the expense of the Amago.

The Mōri returned to Koriyama castle in Aki, for the winter where they prepared for a spring offensive against the Amago.

In 1558 Kikkawa Motoharu led a new invasion of Iwami, where he met a combined Amago army led by Ushio Yukikiyo, Honjo Tsunemitsu and Ogasawara Nagataka and defeated them at the battle of Dewa Omote. Motoharu was now joined by Motonari, Takamoto and Takakage. Ogasawara Nagataka was defeated again at his castle, but a similar attempt against the castle of Honji Tsunemitsu in 1559 failed.

Takamoto met with more success in Kyushu, where the Mōri, were establishing claims to former Ōuchi territory. They fought the Ōtomo in Buzen province, defeating the army of Ōtomo Yoshishige at Moji castle.

By now Mōri activities were being officially recognised by the *Chōtē* (imperial court) and the *Bakufu* (Shōgun's court). By contributing to the coronation expenses of the new Emperor Ōgimachi in 1560 Motonari was able to secure imperial court ranking for Takamoto and Kikkawa Motoharu. The Shogun, Ashikaga Yoshiteru formally recognised Takamoto as *Shugo* (governor) of Aki and was used as an intermediary between Mōri Motonari and Amago Akihisa, who ceased hostilities in Iwami.

The peace did not last long as in July 1562 Motonari led an army of 15,000 directly into Izumo itself. The Bakufu in Kyoto however did not seem too embarrassed as they promoted Takamoto to *Shugo* of Bingo and Bicchū shortly afterwards, formally recognising the status of the Mōri in western Japan. In November Kikkawa Motoharu was able to surprise Honjo Tsunemitsu, the chief Amago vassal, in his camp at Harimaya. He and his family were slaughtered. Some of the former Amago lords now within the Mōri sphere were provoked to rebel by the outrage. This however did not prevent the conquest of Iwami and continued operations in Izumo itself.

In 1563 after more fighting Motonari and Ōtomo Sōrin made a compromise peace deal which included a marriage alliance between Mōri Terumoto (son of Takamoto) and the daughter of Ōtomo Yoshishige. In May Takamoto was made *shugo* of Suō and Nagato but in August, while travelling to Izumo, he died suddenly of natural causes.



Top left: Mori command group.

Lower left: Mori troops.

Above: Another Mori unit.

Below: Kikkawa troops, allies of the Mori.

All figures 15mm by Two Dragons Productions, painted by the author.



The rest of the year was spent fighting the Amago in Izumo. A 10,000 strong Amago army was defeated in Shiraga in September and by the end of October Shiraga castle was captured. An Amago army escorting supplies to the Amago capital, Toda castle, was also defeated.

The war against the Amago continued throughout 1564 with more Mōri victories and in 1565 an all out attack on Toda castle began. Mōri Terumoto, having officially come of age, accompanied the army for his first taste of war. The siege was long and drawn out, not unlike the one conducted by Ōuchi Yoshitaka years before. The fighting did not all go well for the Mōri but at last the Amago, now led by Amago Yoshihisa, surrendered. Yoshihisa and his brother were permitted to retire in peace to a temple in Aki.

Motonari's career did not end here; he was actively engaged in politics until his death in 1571. This seems a good place to bring the narrative to an end however. With the capture of Todu castle the last of his old rivals in western Japan were gone. True, the Mōri were still fighting the Ōtomo in Kyushu, and under Terumoto would face new

challenges in the east which would end in defeat during the Sekigahara campaign of 1600. Even after this however the Mōri, from then based at Hagi castle in Nagato, would remain an influential force in Japanese politics until the Meiji restoration of 1868.

Motonari himself seems to have sensed that with the passing of the Amago a watershed had been reached, at least for him. In recent years he had been ill several times and perhaps guessed that he had not long to live. In November 1567 he held a huge banquet to thank his men for the sufferings they had endured over the long years. At the beginning of his career he had been the minor lord of one corner of the province of Aki, which was a war zone between the Amago and Ōuchi. A little to the east they squabbled with the Ukitu for control of Bingo. By 1567, after a generation of chaotic warfare, brutal massacres and murders, order was restored in the west under his leadership.

Next Month: Campaigns, Battles and Armies of Mōri Motonari

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Môri Motonari

Part two

Campaigns, Battles and Armies

by
Tim Cockrell

THE BATTLE OF ARITA CASTLE

Motonari showed an audacity of approach to warfare which might seem quite reckless at times. His lively approach meant that he was usually heavily outnumbered while in the field, where he would take appalling risks with the few men at his disposal and his own life. This was not, surprisingly perhaps, because of any sense of bravado, He often preferred to avoid battle if possible and achieve his aims without risk. Thus the elite Shinguto division of the Amago were eventually destroyed; Motonari used Ninja to spread rumours about a possible coup by their leader, including letters from Motonari to the Shinguto leader which were "captured" by the Amago. Amago Akihisa believed the lies and destroyed the entire division in a surprise attack! When backed into a corner however Motonari would act decisively and was prepared to take any risk.

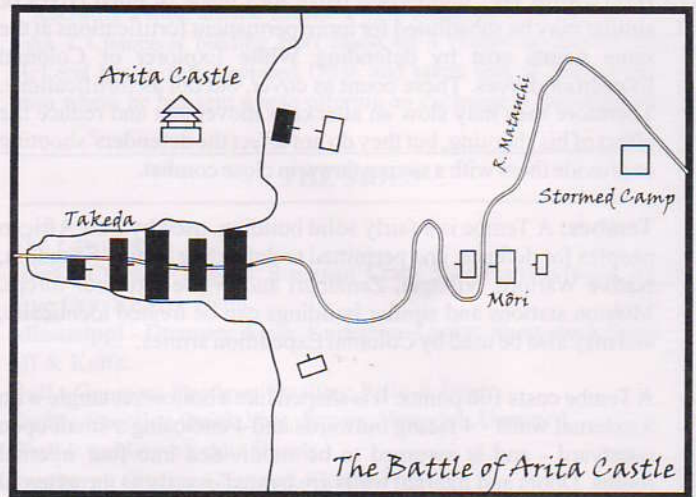
All of what would become Motonari's hallmarks can be seen in his first battle, beneath the walls of Arita castle in 1517. Motonari was only 20 years old, and as his elder brother Okimoto had died the previous year he was now regent for the two year old Komatsumaru. Motonari was regent of Yoshida, a district of the province of Aki. He was one among many there who were mere minnows compared to the likes of Amago, Ukita and Ouchi, yet even here lords had their pretensions. Thus Takeda Motoshige, the lord of Kanayama castle, wished also to rule Arita castle in Nakaidae. The Takeda of Aki had once been powerful in times past and Motoshige appears to have been hot headed and desired to restore the family fortunes swiftly.

Motoshige had 5000 mounted samurai, and sent ahead a detachment of 500 men into Môri territory as well. They were defeated by Motonari at the head of his personal retinue of 150 mounted samurai and retreated to a camp in the vicinity of Arita castle. Here they felt safe behind a palisade and near their comrades. In the meantime however Motonari had been reinforced by the main Môri army and their allies the Kikkawa. His numbers now swelled to 1700 Motonari led a dawn attack on the camp the following morning and stormed it easily.

Motoshige, with the rest of his army, was still encamped at the foot of the mountain where Arita castle stood. The two armies were separated by the river Matauchi. Motonari decided to attack. Although badly outnumbered, Motonari knew that Motoshige was a hot head and hoped to provoke a fatal error.

Motonari marched alongside the river, with it between the armies. He then sent 700 men across the river in two bodies to face the Takeda, keeping 700 men with himself in the van and stationing 100 to his rear. Then Motonari sent 200 men on a wide flanking movement to his left to take up a position to the rear of the Takeda lines before the castle.

Takeda Motoshige had been outflanked by a far inferior force, and the castle garrison could sally forth down the mountainside to his front. He left a covering force to watch the castle while retreating with 4,800 men further down a nearby valley to redeploy. Motoshige redeployed in five lines with himself in the fourth. He decided to march out of the valley into the river plain and use his superior numbers to surround and crush Motonari and his small band of warriors. What happened next is not clear but it seems that Motonari simply withdrew the men in the forward bodies in a feigned flight across the river. Motoshige, his blood up, pushed to the front of his army and led the advance across the river. Motonari saw his chance, about faced his men and shot dead Motoshige in the river.



THE SIEGE OF KORIYAMA CASTLE

The victory over the Takeda had established Môri Motonari's reputation as a general and had secured the first expansion of Môri territory. In the wake of this Motonari demonstrated equal ability as a strategist and politician. He cemented his alliance with Kikkawa Kunitsune by marrying his daughter. The Kikkawa lands lay to the north and the Takeda acquisitions to south. Over the next few years Motonari further strengthened the Môri position in Aki, but was forced to recognise the overlordship of Amago Tsunehisa, who held sway over northern Aki. In 1523 however Komatsumaru died, and Motonari became the official head of the family.

The political map changed. It was known that Motonari took an independent line and would be a vigorous lord. This was dangerous in a volatile region like Aki. Motonari might be subverted by the Ouchi to the west or even the Ukita to the east. Some of Motonari's vassals were secretly in touch with a senior vassal of the Amago and plotted to replace Motonari with his half brother Mototsuna. The plot failed and Motonari killed Mototsuna. Motonari knew of the Amago connection and began cultivating friendlier relations with the Ouchi, though no formal break with the Amago yet occurred. Naturally the Amago were aware of the situation and became increasingly irritated.

In 1525 Motonari formally became an Ouchi vassal and over the next years strengthened his position in Aki, undermining Amago power and spoiling their plans to march on Kyoto in all likelihood.

By 1539 the Amago, now led by Akihisa, were smarting at the humiliation of seeing their power in Aki being weakened. At a conference in Toda castle Akihisa proposed a full scale invasion of Aki to destroy the Môri. Of his advisors only the aged Amago Tsunehisa and his brother Hisayuki dissented. The enraged Akihisa accused Hisayuki of cowardice. The invasion was launched in the summer of 1540.

There were two passes into Yoshida, the Môri heartland, One via Iwami and the other via Bingo. Akihisa sent as an advance force the dreaded Shinguto, 3000 strong, via Bingo. The plan was to cross the river Enokawu and take the castles of Iwaya and Goryu (the castle of the staunch Môri loyalists the Shishido) before attacking Koriyama castle, the Môri capital. However the river was so bravely defended by the Shishido that the Shinguto were forced to give up and return to Izumo.

Undeterred, Akihisa marched with his whole army of 30,000 men in August. The army marched via Iwami to within four kilometres of Kotiyama castle and encamped on Kazakoshiyama ("Yama" means "mountain"). The Amago aim was to make an example of the Môri. Although the Môri were becoming powerful in northern Aki, Akihisa meant to demonstrate the immense superiority of Amago power to all in the region as well as crush the Môri.

Using Kazakoshiyama as a base, Akihisa sent large contingents out to surround the castle. One such contingent was that of Kikkawa

Okitsune; the Mōri allies of 1517 were now supporting the Amago.

Meanwhile Motonari did what he could to prepare for the onslaught. His allies Shishido Takaie and Amano Okisada joined him at Koriyama castle. Others such as Kobayakawa Okikage and some Ouchi troops took up positions in the vicinity. Motonari also sent an urgent message to Yamuguchi, begging his master Ouchi Yoshitaka for a relief army.

Preparations for the defence of the castle itself included bringing in the population of the castle town at the foot of the mountain. The castle population was now 8000, of which 2,400 were skilled warriors. The people knew that the besieging army was very great but Motonari exhorted them to keep their nerve and assured them that the disparity in numbers was irrelevant.

Motonari believed that superior numbers, even overwhelming numbers, would not succeed alone and he had some clever tricks up his sleeve. Across the valley from Koriyama was Aomitsuyama. That and the valley below were clearly visible from the Amago base camp four kilometres away. From Aomitsuyama Motonari constructed a palisade running down to the valley, resplendant with flags and apparently well defended. He left the wooded slopes to the rear of Koriyama exposed, but here stationed small detachments of soldiers in ambush.

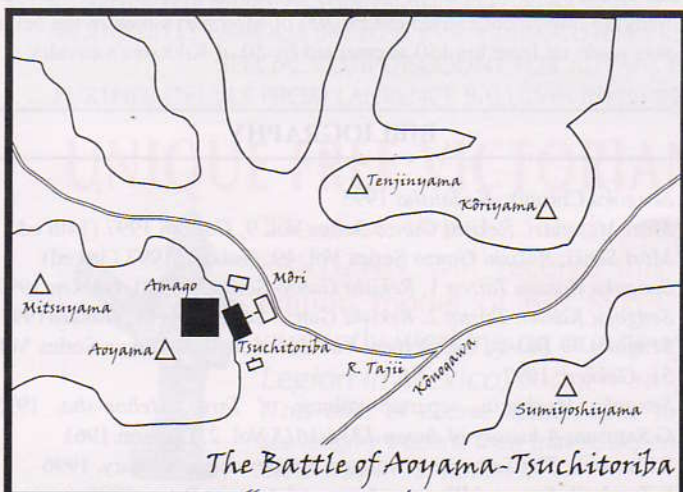
In early September the fighting began in earnest. Amago soldiers advanced to the western slopes of Koriyama and began burning houses. On 6 September 4,500 ashigaru made a direct assault on the castle but were repulsed.

On 12 September the battle of Otaguchi was fought. Motonari sent a group of 20-30 ashigaru across the river Tajii to provoke an Amago attack. They fled as soon as the Amago appeared and reentered the castle via the southern entrance. The Amago followed. One of the ambush forces stationed on the far side of the castle now came into play. From around the southern flank of the castle they came, taking the Amago completely by surprise in their flank. The Amago were immediately routed and fled back to Kazakoshiyama.

On 23 of September Akihisa moved his headquarters to the mountains across the valley from Koriyama, while still keeping a garrison on Kazakoshiyama. Presumably he had realised that the Mōri fortifications were empty. A few days later one of the most dramatic episodes of the siege took place.

Some distance to the south of the immediate area of hostilities an advance force of Ouchi soldiers was stationed with the men of Kobayakawa Okikage, both Mori allies. Akihisa sent a force of 1500 men to end this threat. Motonari sent a force after the Amago, who were then caught between the allied forces and crushed.

Although defeated on several occasions the huge superiority of numbers enabled the Amago to continue offensive operations. On 11 October they sallied forth in great numbers to harry the environs of Koriyama and put to the torch any remaining buildings outside. Motonari was aware of the effect this might have on his people's morale so decided he must take action. The fighting would have to take place in the valley between the castle and camp. The Amago attack was 10,000 strong, including the Shinguto, and Motonari could only take



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the field with 2000 men. Motonari had not wavered from his belief that even small forces could prevail with the use of a clever stratagem. He split his army into three divisions. To his right he sent 500 men to occupy a bamboo wood near the river Tajii. Another 200 he sent to occupy a thicket to his left at the foot of Aoyama, right under the noses of the Amago army. Motonari himself conspicuously led, the rest of the army directly across the centre of the valley towards Tsuchitoriba, a place at the foot of Aoyama directly beneath the Amago camp.

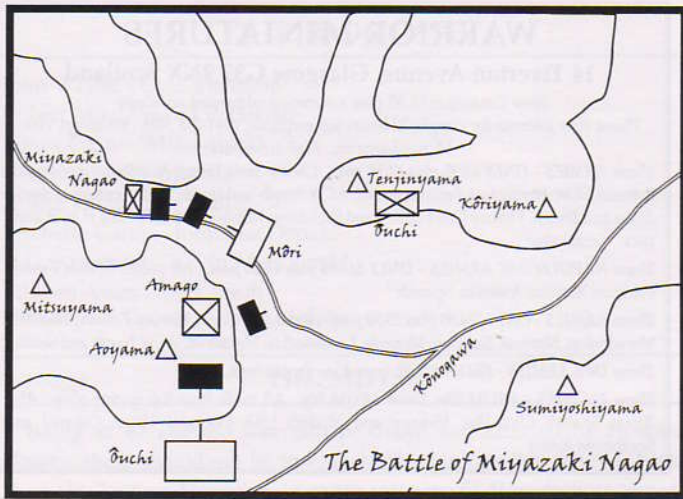
The Amago army, under the command of Misawa Tameyuki with three other generals, advanced straight down the mountain towards Motonari's contingent. Motonari signalled his hidden troops with *hata* and *nobori* standards and all three divisions attacked at once. The large Amago army, attacked from three sides, broke in panic and escaped back up the mountain to their camp. The victorious Mōri gave pursuit, actually breaking into the camp near Amago Akihisa's headquarters. The Mōri army was too small to exploit the victory properly but before returning to Koriyama they were able to slay a number of important people, including the aforementioned Misawa Tameyuki.

The rest of October was quiet, but during November sporadic fighting was renewed. On 26 November the long awaited Ouchi relief force left Yamaguchi. Sue Harukata led 10,000 men which arrived in the mountains to the south east of Koriyama. The army planted its flag on the summit of Sumiyoshiyama from where they could see Koriyama, Aoyama and the valley between. They announced their arrival by beating a *jindaiko* (signal drum) as loudly as possible. As the morale of the Mōri was raised that of the Amago was lowered. This was compounded by their many defeats and the imminent onset of winter. During December there was little fighting as the snows had come.

Early in January Harukata moved his army to a new camp at Tenjinyama and took council with Motonari. Motonari knew that the time had come for a decisive battle before Spring came and renewed the flagging morale of the Amago.

Motonari decided to strike with his full force (now over 3000) including the armies of Shishido Motoyoshi and Kobayakawa Okikage, against the Amago lords Takao Hisatomo, Kuramasa Hisayumi and Kikkawa Okitsune who were encamped at Miyazaki Nagao. He realised however that the main Amago army would storm down the slopes of the nearby mountains and attack his rear. He asked Sue Harukata to lead the Ouchi army down the valley and around the base of Aoyama on its far side to keep the Amago occupied. Harukata agreed.

On the following morning, 13 January 1541, Motonari led his



warriors out into the valley. Curiously, instead of wearing armour he wore only a simple red-yellow *kosode* (a kind of soldier's forerunner of the *kimono*) while he viewed his dispositions from the comfort of his *shogi* (camp stool). Perhaps this was designed to impart an air of confidence to his men. Certainly his second son Shoyu Jiro (later Kikkawa Motoharu) was confident enough to plead with his father to allow him to join the warriors, even though he was a mere 12 years old! Motonari relented and Jiro had his first taste of battle.

Since Motonari was leading out every available warrior he equipped the women and children in the castle with bamboo sticks, tipped with silver and gold foil, or even silver and gold fans and ordered them to mill around behind the palisades to trick the Amago into believing it was heavily defended.

At Miyazaki Nagao the Amago formed two lines before their camp of 2000 and 1500 troops respectively. The camp itself was defended by the Kikkawa, troops of high military reputation. The first two lines were defeated by the Mōri and fled down the valley behind the camp, but Kikkawa Okitsune and his 1000 men held off the Mōri from behind their palisades. Motonari was still well satisfied when sunset came and he had to retire; two thirds of the Amago had been put to flight and part of the camp had been burned.

While battle raged in the valley Harukata led the Ouchi against the main camp of Amago Akihisa. He took a circuitous wide sweep down the valley and around the southern flank of Aoyama in order to bypass an Amago detachment guarding the crossings of the river Tajii. At the Amago camp panic had begun to set in as they realised that with many soldiers having been deployed in the surrounding valleys the main camp was inadequately defended. Akihisa himself was in danger.

Amago Hisayuki, one of the few to counsel against the campaign, took the decision to attack the Ouchi with his own modest retinue in order to buy time for Akihisa's own troops to organise a better defence. Wearing scarlet armour and a red headband he called to his peers to witness "this coward's" brave actions and pull themselves together. Then, in a mad charge he led his 500 warriors down the mountainside against the 10,000 Ouchi. His attack was so fierce that he actually checked the Ouchi advance for some time. Meanwhile one of the victorious Mōri generals came up the mountainside with some men to observe the battle. He complimented Hisayuki's brave fight and then shot him dead through the eyebrow with his bow.

Further down the mountainside the Amago guarding the river heard the commotion and hurried back to save the day and Amago Akihisa's life. The fighting continued for some time until both sides parted.

On the same night Akihisa took council with his remaining vassals. The Ouchi had actually suffered slightly higher casualties, but the implications of the day's fighting were clear; after months of fighting the stronger Amago had suffered several severe defeats. Morale was low, the snow and cold had worsened the situation and the logistical outlook was deteriorating. With the arrival of the Ouchi they no longer commanded the countryside and had completely lost the initiative. The latest battle confirmed that the Amago were now the besieged. That

night they lit fires to fool the Mōri and Ouchi into believing the camp was still manned and then hurried off north. When the Mōri realised the situation they gave pursuit, but were forced to halt by heavy snowfalls.

MORI ARMIES

It will be seen from the above that the period of Motonari's career that interests me the most is his early and middle period, the time when he was struggling against the odds. In fact I have not even dealt in detail with his greatest victory, the battle of Itsukushima, which ranks in fame with some of the greatest battles of sixteenth century Japan.

This has an inevitable effect on how we see the composition of his armies. For one thing the *teppo* (arquebus) was not used in anger by a warlord until 1549, and then only in modest numbers by the great *daimyo* before the battle of Nagashino in 1575. Motonari was dead by 1571 and his first known use of the *teppo* was at Itsukushima in 1555. Perhaps then we should dispense with the idea that the Mōri used them much before this date.

In fact the most common weapon used by all ranks, ashigaru and samurai alike, was the *yari*. Its career began in the Nanbokuchō wars of the fourteenth century, when the traditional tactics of mounted bowmen engaging in arrow shooting duels became redundant on the thickly forested slopes of the mountains between Kyoto and Yoshino. The weapon was basically a spear. Over the years its blade became narrow and quite long and very sharp. The shaft also lengthened in time, by Hideyoshi's day in the late sixteenth century appearing more like a pike. This elegant weapon was more than a spear; when meeting a cavalry charge or other infantry at spear's length it was indeed an effective stabbing weapon. At closer quarters however it was designed to be used as a slashing weapon, so as to avoid the point being stuck for too long in an enemy corpse.

Most of Motonari's soldiers would have been armed with the above as a primary weapon. The bow and even the *naginata* were still used but much less than in previous epochs. Swords were side arms, even for samurai, much of the mythology surrounding them being developed in the subsequent (and peaceful) Edo period.

For the period of Motonari's career in question his army only numbered a few thousand soldiers at most. A large proportion of these were probably *ashigaru* (peasant recruits). His supply of actual samurai, though modest, might have been better in proportion to his ashigaru than that of his more powerful rivals. It is possible that ashigaru were recruited in greater numbers as a lord outgrew his resources in traditional samurai manpower. Thus Takeda Motoshige in 1517 is reputed to have led an army made up entirely of samurai, and all mounted. This might have been unusual however; their cousins in Kai province were renowned for their cavalry precisely because it was unusual to be so strong in that arm.

Motonari might have been quite weak in mounted samurai. In 1517 we know his personal retinue of such troops was only 150 strong. With the Kikkawa his total force was only 1700. It is possible that the wide flanking movement carried out by 200 of Motonari's men in the battle was made up from his 150 augmented by 50 of Kikkawa's cavalry.

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