



空手研究室

HONOR AND
COURAGE OF A
RYŪKYŪ OFFICER

by Yabu Kentsū

YABU KENTSŪ – NO. 2

Yabu Kentsū, a Ryūkyūan by birth and a former middle school student in Okinawa, wrote to his old principal just before his first deployment in the First Sino-Japanese War, expressing his eagerness and sense of duty. In his letter, he describes his regiment's movements, anticipates the coming battle in China, and pledges to fight heroically to honor his teacher's instruction.

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www.karate-kenkyu.com

Honor and Courage of a Ryūkyū Officer (1895)

Yabu Kentsū was originally a Ryūkyūan who previously attended an ordinary middle school in Nagasaki¹. Later, he moved to Tōkyō and joined the Non-Commissioned Officer School (教導団), where he completed his training and became a Sergeant. When the conflict between Japan and China broke out, he received the deployment order and prepared for the crossing. He then wrote a letter to Momo'o Takatoshi, the principal of the middle school where he studied, and said:

(Excluding the beginning)

In my regiment, namely the 13th Infantry Regiment, we received the order to relocate on October 23 [1894]. We left Kumamoto and arrived at Maizuru Castle in Fukuoka on October 29. There, we were assigned to the 2nd Division and received the deployment order. On December 31, we left Fukuoka and arrived in Kokura on the same day, where we are currently quartered.

The time to cross over to China will soon come. Until now, I have been waiting for the order, suffering from inactivity. Finally receiving this deployment order is the greatest happiness and the best opportunity to fulfill our long-held desires. With all my might, I will fight heroically so that you can proudly say that Kentsū, whom you taught, is capable of such deeds. If I return as a survivor, I will show you a blood-soaked handkerchief and tell many heroic stories. Until then, this is my farewell. Swiftly.

For twenty years, I have practiced martial arts.² I often lament with a sigh over my graying hair. The negotiations between Japan and Qing China³ have already failed. [It's now] possible to slaughter⁴ all of China's four hundred provinces.⁵

From the barracks of the 3rd Company, 1st Battalion, Infantry Regiment, Kokura
A samurai from Shuri, Okinawa Prefecture
In January of the 28th year (1895) Respectfully, Yabu Kentsū
To Mr. Momo'o Takatoshi at the ordinary middle school of Nagasaki Prefecture

The nobility and courage of our soldiers are essentially all of this nature. It is hardly a coincidence that the Imperial Army has no enemies wherever it goes.⁶

¹ It was in fact the first middle school in Okinawa and not in Nagasaki, as has already been demonstrated by research conducted by scholars from Okinawa.

² This suggests that Yabu Kentsū had been active in Karate since 1875. Whether he had already trained under Matsumura Sōkon at that time remains uncertain.

³ This refers to the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912).

⁴ 屠る - to slaughter; to massacre; to butcher, to defeat soundly; to overpower; to vanquish.

⁵ The “Four Hundred Provinces” can also be translated as “all of China.” However, I chose to remain faithful to the original wording. The term “Four Hundred Provinces” can also be found, for instance, in the writings of Nogi Marusuke, who had presented it to the Meiji Emperor a few months earlier.

⁶ Nisshin Senwa: Gunjin Kikan – Jōkan, 1895, p. 97-98.