

## Spoils of War

One hot summer's day, I found myself standing on the battlefield. I was holding a formation of men, of whom I was the oldest, although the youngest were only four or five years below me. Some were very close to my age. On their faces, I saw expressions of nervousness, determination, and amongst some of them, excitement. I was charged with the command of this formation, and I was shivering in anticipation for the moment the battle would begin!

My troops and I had loosened up, and we were ready to fight at any moment. Finally, the signal from the supreme commander came! The younger men, who just a moment ago had been waiting tensely, rushed headlong at the enemy, as if every one of them wanted to be the first to attack. In no time at all, fierce battle broke out.

In command, my plan in the opening battle was to send forth the fastest runners as decoys, and then launch a stronger attack. It worked! The enemy began to pursue one of our fastest soldiers, who led them into a group of our waiting comrades. As they passed the line, and were welcomed by our waiting team, we could see the despair in the enemy runners.

The battle was only just beginning, however, it was too early to celebrate. The enemy had come up with a new tactic, throwing bombs at us. Their red bombs flew towards a vital target. If we couldn't keep up, all would be lost. We returned in kind, sending our white bombs back at the target. It was a desperately close battle, and even now, looking back, it is difficult to say who came out victorious.

After many long hours, the battle entered its climax. The enemy had prepared their horses, and we had prepared ours. The enemy had veterans of horseback warfare, so I decided to enter the battle myself. I commanded six units in all. Leading the charge, I saw several of my comrades' collapse, but suppressing my emotions, I charged in a straight line towards the enemy general. In the end, we lost four of our units, but I was finally able to knock the last enemy general from his horse, and the day was ours.

In the aftermath of the battle, our brave warriors received their awards. Dance broke out, and the day ended in celebration.

On the road home, I walked with four or five of my closest comrades, and we talked and laughed about our memories of the battle. Just before we got to each of our homes, one soldier said to the rest of us, "my mother said if we won today, she'd buy me a new game! You all have to come and play it this weekend!" Truly, these are the spoils of war.

### Questions, Answers and Hints:

#### 1. The narrator seems strangely happy about telling his war tale. Why?

**Answer:** Because he is reflecting on a sports festival (体育祭) from elementary school, not an actual war story.

**Hints/Clues:** (This will also help students to answer the following questions) In the final paragraph, one of the 'soldiers' says "my mother said if we won today, she'd buy me a new game! You all have to come and play it this weekend!" This is a hint that the narrative is not actually a war story, but an embellished recollection by an elementary school student, employing metaphor to describe a fun sports festival.

#### 2. About how old is the narrator?

**Answer:** 11~12 years old.

**Hints/Clues:** In the first paragraph, the narrator mentions leading a group 'of whom I was the oldest.' This would suggest that he is in his final year of school. Also given that some of the 'younger men' were four or five years below him suggests that this is not junior or senior high school, but elementary (as the youngest in junior or senior high school could be *at most* three

years younger).

**3. What event began the ‘battle’?**

**Answer:** Relay race.

**Hints/Clues:** Very common in Japanese sports festivals. Although all of the events are described in metaphor, allusions to the ‘fastest runner,’ and ‘pass[ing] the line [...] welcomed by our waiting team,’ at which point the ‘enemy’ had been defeated, suggests a relay race.

**4. What event included ‘throwing bombs’?**

**Answer:** *Tamairi* (玉入れ).

**Hints/Clues:** Another common event at elementary school sports festivals. ‘White bombs’ and ‘red bombs’ provide the most significant clues – of course, this is based on understanding of Question 1.

**5. What event involved ‘horses’?**

**Answer:** *Kibasen* (騎馬戦).

**Hints/Clues:** As above.

**6. How might this story change for future elementary school students?**

**Answer:** Open-ended, answers will vary.

**Hints/Clues:** While answers will vary, there had been a lot of resistance amongst parents towards *kibasen* as being dangerous. It is possible that such an event will be banned in future. This also presents an interesting discussion point for the appropriateness of some activities for young children.