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The Book of Corrections

Reflections on the National
Crisis during the Japanese
Invasion of Korea, 1592–1598

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FOUR

Korea Informs Ming of the Japanese Plot

In Hideyoshi's letter was the remark, "I will lead my army and jump over [Korea] to invade Ming China." I said, "We had better pass this information to the Ming imperial court right away with an explanation of what happened." The chief state councilor [Yi Sanhae] replied, "If we do, I am afraid that it may make our relationship with the Japanese suspect and demand an explanation from us. Therefore, in my opinion, it will be better not to tell them." I said again, "Trafficking with neighboring countries is unavoidable. During the years of Chenghua,¹ the Japanese wanted to pay tribute to China with our assistance. We conveyed their wish to the Chinese court, which, in turn, tried to appease them by sending them an imperial letter. So we already have a precedent in such matters. I do not believe that it is right to keep these things to ourselves, without reporting them to the Chinese court. If the Japanese are really serious about their intention to invade China, and China happens to learn this fact from some other sources, the Chinese government will suspect that we deliberately concealed the information in conspiracy with the Japanese. Then we'll find ourselves in far more serious trouble and our faults will not be limited only to sending the envoys to Japan on our own."

My idea prevailed in court, and at last, it was decided that we send Kim Ŭngnam to China to report on the information we had.²

¹ The era belonging to Emperor Xianzong of Ming China (1465–1487).

² Kim Ŭngnam (1546–1598) was the grandson of Kim Malson, the military commander of Ch'ungch'ōng province. Throughout his political career, he served as the magistrate of Cheju Island, censor-general, first counselor, minister of war, second state councilor, and so forth. In 1591, he was appointed to the imperial birthday embassy (*sōngjōlsa*) and visited Ming China. When the Japanese invaded in 1592, he was appointed minister of war as well as deputy supreme commander (*much'ach'oleo*) on the recommendation of Yi Sanhae.

At that time, Xu Yihou and Chen Shen, residents of Fujian province who had been captured and detained in Japan for some time, had already sent a secret report to China on the situation in Japan. Crown Prince Syōnei of the Ryukyus also dispatched several envoys to report the information he had gathered on the same subject.³ However, because our Korean envoy had not yet arrived in China, the Ming imperial court began to suspect and openly complain that we were having some secret dealings with the Japanese. But Grand Secretary Xu Guo,⁴ who had been to Korea before, tried to defend us. He said, "Korea has been most sincere in serving the Great Ming empire, and therefore, it will not betray China. Why don't we wait a little bit longer?" And not long afterward, Kim Ŭngnam from Korea arrived at the Chinese imperial court to deliver the long-awaited information on Japan. Grand Secretary Xu, who had argued for patience, was very pleased, and the controversy within the Chinese court soon subsided.

³ The Ryukyus, presently the Okinawa Islands, was an independent state before being annexed to Japan.

⁴ The minister of rites during the reign of Emperor Shenzong, Ming China.

FIVE

Controversies over Rebuilding the National Defense

Concerned about the move of the Japanese, our government selected high officials who were knowledgeable about border defense and ordered them to make rounds of inspection of the three southern provinces and make preparations [for the potential invasion of the Japanese]. As a result, it appointed Kim Su as the governor of Kyōngsang province, Yi Kwang as the governor of Chōlla province, and Yun Sōn'gak as the governor of Ch'ungch'ōng province, with orders that they check the weapons and repair the walls of the strongholds and moats.¹ The work of repairing or rebuilding the fortresses was concentrated mostly in Kyōngsang province, especially in Yōngch'ōn, Ch'ōngdo, Samga,

¹ Kim Su (1547–1615) was born in Andong, Kyōngsang province, and studied under Yi Hwang, a famous neo-Confucian scholar. Before he was appointed governor of Kyōngsang province, he served as the governor of P'yōngyang. However, he was a controversial figure involved in factional fights and failed in carrying out his duty as a military leader during the Japanese invasion. On numerous occasions, he was impeached by censors and inspectors.

Yi Kwang (1541–1607) served as the governor of Chōlla province during the Japanese invasion. With Governor Kim Su of Kyōngsang province and Governor Yun Sōn'gak of Ch'ungch'ōng province, he led an army of about forty thousand soldiers to fight against the Japanese forces in Seoul but failed to recapture the capital after losing a battle at Yong'in, south of Seoul. He was impeached by the censorate for his defeat at Yongin and exiled. However, he was released and returned home in 1594.

Yun Sōn'gak (1543–1611) passed the state examination in 1568 and served as fourth censor, drafter (*ūngkyo*), first counselor, and second royal secretary (*chwasūngji*); he became the governor of Ch'ungch'ōng province when the Japanese invaded in 1592. He soon joined the joint forces led by Governor Yi Kwang to fight against the Japanese. He was dismissed from his post because of his failure in the battle. Later, he was reinstated as mobile border commander (*sunbyōnsa*) of Ch'ungch'ōng province and rose to minister of works in the early years of Kwanghaegun (*HITS*; *SJS*).

Taegu, Sōngju, Pusan, Tongnae, Chinju, Andong, and Sangju. As a result, headquarters of the commanders of the Left and Right Provincial Army of these walled towns were reinforced either by constructing new walls or expanding the existing ones.

Our country, by that time, had enjoyed peace for so long that the people throughout the land had grown accustomed to a life of ease. Therefore, they were reluctant to do any hard work, and their voices of discontent were loud enough to be heard in the streets. Yi No, former librarian and one of my old friends, whose home was Hapch'ōn, sent me a letter in which he said, "Building fortresses is not a good idea."² And he added, "Since the district of Samga is protected by the Chōngjin [ferry], how can the Japanese cross the river?³ Do they know how to fly over the water? Why do you have to harass the people, making them work on the fortresses for no good reason?"

He was not the only one to voice this sort of complaint. Most people were of the same opinion during this time. My friend foolishly believed that a little stream could protect us from the enemies while even the great sea was unable to prevent them from crossing over. Even the officials of the Office of the Special Counselors expressed a similar opinion in their memorials submitted to the king.

The fortresses constructed in Kyōngsang and Chōlla provinces failed to take advantage of their strategic locations. They were built only for the sake of convenience and simply enlarged to accommodate as many people as possible. The fortress in Chinju was relocated to lower ground on the east side only because the old one, being built on top of steep hills, was too narrow and inconvenient to use. Later, it fell easily to the Japanese forces because its location made it vulnerable to enemy attack.

Generally speaking, an ideal fortress is narrowly restricted and strongly built. But the people were more concerned about

² Yi No (?) was a man from Kosōng in Kyōngsang province. After passing the state examination in 1586, he worked as an aide to Recruiting Officer (*ch'oyusa*) Kim Sōng'il when the Japanese invaded in 1592. He was called one of "the three brave men (*samjangsa*) of Ch'oksōklu" (*Inmulji*).

³ Samga is in Ūiryōng, between Chinju and Hapch'ōn, Kyōngsang province. The Chōngjin ferry was in the Namgang River, a branch of the Nakdong River. The ferry was a passage to connect Haman and Ūiryōng of South Kyōngsang province. In the middle of the river was a big rock that looked like a standing cauldron, and because of this rock, people called the ferry "Chōngjin" or "Chōng'amjin" (*TYSN*).

convenience than security, and this had largely to do with the public opinion at that time.

What is important in the administration of the military is building an effective system as well as training soldiers and securing the right people as commanders. But we failed to employ any of these military arts and eventually lost the war.

SIX

Yi Sunsin Appointed as the Navy Commander

The court appointed Yi Sunsin, the district magistrate of Ch'ŏngŭp, as navy Commander of Left Ch'ŏlla province.¹ He was brave as well as masterful in military strategy, and also outstanding at archery and horsemanship. Years before, he was the lesser garrison commander (*manho*) of Chosan (of North Hamgy'ŏng province), a northern frontier where the barbarians² often came down and caused disturbances. Our concerns about the Jurchen disappeared when Yi planned to lure a Jurchen, Yuyi Jinai, to

¹ Yi Sunsin (1545–1598) was one of the most distinguished military commanders throughout Korean history. His ancestral home was T'ŏksu in Ch'ungch'ŏng province, but he was born in Seoul. Since the Kory'ŏ dynasty, his forebears had served the country as high-ranking officials and ministers; however, his family status began to decline after his grandfather Yi Paengnok was involved in *kimyo sahtwa*, the purge of literati in 1519. He passed the state examination for military career at the age of thirty-one and finally became district magistrate of Ch'ŏngŭp, a small town in North Ch'ŏlla province between Ch'ŏnju and Kwangju, after serving a number of assignments on the frontiers. A couple of years before the Japanese invasion took place, he was unprecedentedly promoted to navy commander of Left Ch'ŏlla province on the recommendation of Minister Yu S'ŏngnyong, his childhood friend and the author of *The Book of Corrections*. The Japanese invasion was a turning point in his distinguished military career. Starting with the Okp'o naval battle in 1592, he defeated the Japanese navy one ship after another until he died in battle at Noryang in 1598. Yu S'ŏngnyong in *The Book of Corrections* stated that Yi Sunsin's successive victories seriously disrupted the Japanese supply line and prevented the Japanese forces on the western front from advancing further to the north above P'y'ŏngyang. For more details about his achievements in battle as well as his loyalty and patriotism, see Yu S'ŏngnyong's book as well as Yi's own war diary, *Nanjung ilgi* (SJS; SSJS; S'ŏaejip; YLSKS; NJCN).

Left Ch'ŏlla province is the eastern part of Ch'ŏlla province. "Left" signifies the east, while "Right" represents the west from the king's perspective; seen from the eyes of the king looking down at the country from Seoul, the left side of the country is the east and the right side the west.

² Manchurian tribes such as the Jurchen.

rebel, ultimately capturing and sending him off to the provincial army commander, who decapitated him.

On another occasion, by the order of Concurrent Mobile Inspector (*sunch'alsa*) Chŏng Ŏnsin, Yi guarded the military colony (*tunjŏn*) on Noktun Island.³ One day it was very foggy, and our soldiers were all out in the fields for the harvest, and only a dozen soldiers, including Yi himself, remained in the camp. All of a sudden, Jurchen on horseback attacked us on all sides. Yi quickly closed the gate of the camp and started shooting willow-leaf *yuyŏppjŏn* arrows at the enemy.⁴ Dozens of Jurchen bandits fell off their horses. The Jurchen were so shocked that they ran off in retreat. Watching the enemy run away, Yi opened the gate and pursued them single-handedly, shouting aloud. Thus, he was able to bring back all the things plundered by the barbarians. Despite his achievements and talent, however, no one in the government recommended him for promotion. From the time he passed the state examination for military service it took him ten years to become the district magistrate of Chŏngŭp.

Around this time, the news of the impending Japanese invasion was becoming increasingly serious, and the king ordered the Border Defense Council (Pibyŏnsa) to recommend competent individuals to take the office of military command.⁵ Therefore, I was able to recommend Yi Sunsin, and he was unprecedentedly promoted from the district magistrate of Chŏngŭp to the commander of the navy, jumping over the regular line of promotion, which made people suspicious.

³ Chŏng Ŏnsin (1527–1591) was provincial army commander of Hamgyŏng province who successfully repulsed the invasion of Jurchen tribes in 1582 with the help of his competent officers; Yi Sunsin was one of his lieutenants. He earned a good reputation for governing his district well and became third state councillor in 1589. However, he was impeached by his political opponents led by Chŏng Ch'ŏl and banished to Kapsan in the north of Hamgyŏng province for his alleged relationship to Chŏng Yŏrip, who rebelled against King Sŏnjo (*HITS*). Noktun Island is in North Hamgyŏng province.

⁴ *Yuyŏppjŏn* is an arrow whose head looks like a leaf of the willow. It is smaller and faster than regular arrows, and, therefore, suitable for close encounter with the enemy.

⁵ The Border Defense Council was originally created in the mid-sixteenth century to deal with the frequent attacks by Japanese pirates. The council was jointly staffed by high-ranking civil and military officials including state councillors and ministers; its main function during the war with Japan was to carry out all the matters related to war efforts.

Among the military commanders of that time, Sin Ip and Yi Il were known to be the most distinguished, and Cho Taegon, provincial army commander of the right (*ubyŏngsa*) for Kyŏngsang province was too old and weak to discharge his duties.⁶ So there was a good deal of concern about General Cho's incompetence.

During the lecture in the royal presence, I urged the king to replace Cho Taegon with Yi Il. Minister of War Hong Yŏsun disagreed.⁷ He said, "Transferring such an outstanding general to a remote region is not a good idea. He should be kept in Seoul." So I argued, "Whatever the case may be, good preparation is a sure step toward success. Our military readiness cannot be accomplished in a day. If the war breaks out, we will have no choice but to send Yi Il away. If we have to let him go in the near future despite our wishes, it would be more advisable to send him as soon as possible so that he can have time to prepare for potential disasters. If we dispatch a man in a hurry, he will have difficulty comprehending the real situation of the troubled area in a limited time, and besides, he would not know who was brave among his men and who was not. These are the things avoided

⁶ Sin Ip (1546–1592) passed the state examination for military career at the age of twenty-three and distinguished himself by repelling the invading Jurchen armies led by Ni Dangje when he was the district magistrate of Ŏnsŏng, North Hamgyŏng province. He not only defeated them but also attacked their military base, crossing the Tumen River, which was the national boundary. Because of this victory, he was made the military commander in charge of Hamgyŏng province. When the Japanese invaded the country, the court made him a commanding general (mobile border commander of the three provinces) and sent him down to Ch'ungju to stop the advancing enemy forces. However, he was defeated and killed in battle at a place called T'an'gŭmdae, a few miles away from Ch'ungju (*HITS*; *SJS*; *KJIG*).

Yi Il (1538–1601), like Sin Ip, had a reputation for bravery for defeating the Jurchen army that invaded Korea in 1587. In the following year he crossed the Tumen River and destroyed the villages as well as the enemies themselves. In 1589 he worked with Sin Ip and Chŏng Ŏnsin in devising strategies to defend the national border. When the Japanese invaded, he took a small recruit army and went down to Sangju, Kyŏngsang province. He was outnumbered by the enemy and fled to Ch'ungju to join the forces of Sin Ip but, again, escaped to P'yŏngyang after losing the battle. In 1600, he was appointed military commander of South Hamgyŏng province but was dismissed after a short while. He died in Chŏngpyŏng, on his way to Seoul (*HITS*; *SJS*; *NJCN*).

⁷ Hong Yŏsun (1547–1609) served as minister of war as well as inspector of the northern provinces during the Japanese invasion. Deeply involved in factional fights, he played a leading role in driving Yu Sŏngnyong out of office at the end of the Japanese invasion. However, he was impeached for his wrongdoings and died in exile (*HITS*).

by all military men, and when ignored, they are bound to bring about regrets." However, His Majesty did not reply.

After visiting the Border Defense Council and discussing military matters with the officials, I urged the king to reinstate the old *chin'gwan* system that was established by his forebears. The details of my proposal were basically as follows:

"In the early years when our country was founded, the military forces were divided according to each province and placed under the commander called *chin'gwan*. This military system was designed to deal with emergency situations more effectively. If disturbances were to break out in a particular area, *chin'gwan* or the garrison commander would quickly summon the troops under his command and wait for orders from his superiors. So the chain of command looked like fish scales starting from small units to the large ones. In the case of Kyōngsang province, for instance, it was divided into six garrisons: Kimhae, Taegu, Sangju, Kyōngju, Andong, and Chinju. The good thing about this system was its flexibility. Even if one of the garrisons was to fall into the hands of the enemy, the others would still be able to hold out, and could eventually prevent the whole province from being captured at once.

"However, after the Ŭlmyo Japanese rising of 1555, Kim Sumun, the commander of Chōlla province at that time, changed the old military system into a new one called *chesŭng pangnyak* (sure strategies for victory).⁸ He reorganized the military commands as well as the districts of Chōlla province as follows: mobile border commander, defense commander (*pang'ōsa*), auxiliary defense officer (*chobangjang*), supreme field commander (*towōnsu*), and provincial army and navy commanders (*p'yōngsa* and *susa*). This new military system was soon adopted by other provinces, and, as a result, the old *chin'gwan* system became useless, though its title is

⁸ In the Ŭlmyo year (1555), the Japanese invaded South Chōlla province, plundering and devastating Talyang fortress and Ŭranp'o harbor in Yōng'am as well as Kūmgap and Namjo on Chindo. The military commander Wōn Chōk was killed in fighting against the enemy. Kim Sumun (?-1568) was a military commander during the reign of Kings Chungjong and Myōngjong. On a number of occasions he successfully repelled the Jurchens in the north, and he defeated the Japanese who invaded Cheju Island in 1555. He had a reputation for being a good magistrate and rose to chief magistrate (*p'anyun*) of Hansōng (Seoul) (MJS). According to James B. Palais, Yu Sōngnyong was mistaken in his facts. Palais points out that the author of the *chesŭng pangnyak* strategy is not Kim Sumun but Yi Il, an army commander who was dispatched to Sangju in 1592 to stop the Japanese invading armies.

still intact. One of the problems with the revised system, however, is commanding large troops effectively. When emergency calls are issued, soldiers sometimes arrive at their designated places far ahead of their commanders, and this can cause serious confusion. Under this system, everyone is supposed to act together regardless of where they are, but realistically, this is not possible. There is a chance that the field commanders who often stay far away from the troubled spots can be late for leading the battle at a critical moment, and without their commander, the troops cannot be expected to win their battles. What good is it, then, to have an excellent commander if we lose the war, and even if the commander arrives, how can he fight without soldiers? Once the troops fall into chaos, it is impossible to restore order, no matter how good their leader may be. I earnestly believe, therefore, that the old *chin'gwan* system should be reinstated right away. This system has a number of advantages because it makes it easy to train soldiers during the days of peace and mobilize them in an emergency, and also, it will facilitate the coordination among our forces by making the operation run more smoothly. So, the worst situation like the world tumbling down will never be allowed to happen if we go back to the old ways."

After this discussion, I sent down a copy of my proposal to Kyōngsang province for an opinion. Governor Kim Su replied, "The current system has been established for so long that it cannot be altered overnight." Thus, my proposal was at last rejected.

SEVEN

Generals Unable to Foresee the Imminent War

In the spring of the Imjin year [1592], the court dispatched Sin Ip and Yi Il to the provinces to inspect our military readiness. The latter was assigned to the Ch'ungch'ōng and Chōlla provinces and the former to the Kyōnggi and Hwanghae regions. Both of them wasted time for more than a month and came back to Seoul. What they checked were only things such as bows, arrows, spears, swords, and so on, along with the paperwork that was prepared for the inspection. They came up with no new ideas for the defense of the country.

Sin Ip had a reputation for having a cruel and ruthless character. Wherever he went, he killed men in order to establish his own authority. So the district magistrates were afraid of him. During his visit, they mobilized the citizens to repair the roads as a sign of their respect for him and carried themselves with excessive deference toward him. Furthermore, they did not spare any expense in entertaining him, and not even the highest-ranking ministers in the court could have been treated better than he.

After reporting to the king the result of his inspection, Sin Ip came to see me at my house on May 11 [1592.4.1 lunar]. I said to him, "I am afraid that something will happen sooner or later. If something happens, it is you who will have to go out and defend the country. Considering the enemy situation at the moment, what is your idea?" Sin Ip took the enemy very lightly and just said, "You should not worry." I said again, "What do you mean? In the old days, the Japanese had only swords and spears. Now they have new weapons like muskets. You should not overlook this fact." But he was quick to respond to my question. He said, "Even if they have muskets, how can they score every time they shoot?" I said to him, "Our country has enjoyed peace for so long that our soldiers have become weak and timid. Therefore, I am

afraid that it won't be easy for them to deal with sudden disturbances if indeed they do break out. We might be able to overcome this crisis, though I cannot figure out how, after a few years when our people get used to the military matters, but for now, I am very worried." Despite what I said, Sin Ip did not show any sign of regret or reflection and left.

Some years back, in 1583, when Sin Ip was the district magistrate of Onsōng, northern barbarians who used to work for Koreans surrounded a garrison called Chongsōng.¹ Sin Ip with only ten soldiers or so rushed to the scene and succeeded in breaking the siege and forcing the enemy to withdraw.

This act of bravery brought him recognition from the court, which was soon followed by a series of rapid promotions. He was appointed the provincial army commander of Hamgyōng province and, later, of P'yōngan province. The trust of the court in him was such that people expected him to be called soon into the court and awarded the title of *chahōn taebu*,² and he eventually became minister of war. It appeared, therefore, that the high spirit of Sin Ip found no limit. He reminded one of Zhao Gua in the ancient Zhao Kingdom of China, who dared to despise the Qin kingdom, a country much more powerful than his.³ Sin Ip showed little signs of discretion in discharging his duty, and the people who knew him were worried.

¹ Onsōng was in the northern frontier of Hamgyōng province. Chongsōng was at the Tumen River right below Onsōng. It was one of the six garrisons established by General Kim Chongsō during the reign of King Sejong.

² An honorific title bestowed on the officials (senior second rank) of both civil and military ranks.

³ General Zhao Gua of the Zhao kingdom, overconfident in his knowledge of warfare, suffered a humiliating defeat in his war with the Qin kingdom (TGCV).

Invasion of the Japanese

The king dismissed Cho Taegon, provincial army commander of the right for Kyongsang province, and by a special order appointed Royal Secretary (*sŏngji*) Kim Sŏng'il to that post. The Border Defense Council remonstrated with the king: "Kim is a Confucian scholar. He is not the right person for the job of border commander at this time." However, the king did not grant their request. At last, Kim Sŏng'il took leave of the king and set out for the post of his new assignment. On May 23 [1592.4.13 lunar], the Japanese army invaded our land. They captured Pusanp'o, and Garrison Commander (*ch'ŏmsa*) Chŏng Pal died.¹ Before this incident, Shigenobu and Genso, who had followed our envoys from Japan, were staying at the Tongp'yŏnggwang guesthouse. The Border Defense Council asked the king to send wang Yun'gil and Kim Sŏng'il to the guesthouse with some wine and food so that they could gather the latest information on the Japanese situation for the purpose of formulating a defense strategy. The king gave his permission.

Kim Sŏng'il met with Genso at the Tongp'yŏnggwang guesthouse, and Genso, as expected, talked to Kim in confidence: "Hideyoshi is furious and ashamed because China has refused to establish a diplomatic relationship with Japan for so long, not allowing Japan to pay tribute [to China]. This is the very reason that Hideyoshi came to think of war. If Korea takes this message to the Chinese court and persuades it to allow Japan to pay tribute [to China], everything will be fine, and the Japanese people of sixty-six prefectures can be also relieved from the sufferings of the

¹ Chŏng Pal (1553–1592) passed the state examination for military career in 1579 and served as royal messenger (*sŏnjŏn'gwŏn*), and district magistrate of Haenam and Kŏje Island; he became garrison commander (*ch'ŏmsa* or *ch'ŏmjŏlchesa*) of the Pusan garrison at the time of the Japanese invasion in 1592. Though he fought bravely against the enemy, he was outnumbered and killed in battle (*HITS*).

war." Listening to them, Kim and others reproached them for making unreasonable demands on the basis of moral principles. To their reproaches, Genso replied rudely, "In the old days, guiding the army of the Yuan kingdom, Koryŏ tried to invade our country, and so, there is nothing wrong with Japan paying back an old debt to Korea."² Their words were perverse from that time on. After this incident, Kim and others stopped visiting the Japanese, and Shigenobu and Genso returned to their country.

In the summer of the Sinmyo year (1591), Yoshitoshi again appeared in Pusanp'o and said to our border commander, "Japan wants to establish a relationship with China. If Korea takes this message to China, everything will be fine. Otherwise, the friendship of our two countries will suffer a great setback, and since this is no little matter, I came to let you know."

Our border commander [of Pusanp'o] made a report on Yoshitoshi's remark, but the court at that time was in the middle of arguing over the mistake of sending envoys to Japan. Also, the court was so offended at the rude remarks made by the Japanese envoys that it did not care to give an answer. Yoshitoshi waited for ten days or so and sailed back home, carrying spite in his heart.

After he left, the Japanese stopped coming back. Normally several tens of Japanese people used to stay at the inns of Pusanp'o, but their number began to decrease, and at last all the inns became vacant. People thought this was strange. On May 23 [1592.4.13 lunar], the battleships of the Japanese fleet from Tsushima covered the sea, and as they were approaching, there seemed to be no end to them. Garrison Commander Chŏng Pal of Pusan, on his way to Chŏllyŏng Island³ for hunting, saw the enemy ships approaching. He hurried to return to his post, but the Japanese army landed in no time and gathered themselves like clouds from everywhere. Our stronghold quickly collapsed.

² During the Koryŏ dynasty period, the Mongols (Yuan dynasty) forced Korea to participate in their invasion of Japan on two occasions, 1274 and 1281. But their war campaigns against Japan failed because of bad weather and the reluctance on the part of Koreans to construct battleships and provide supplies to the Mongols, who used to be their enemies (*NHK*).

³ Modern Yŏngdo in Pusan.

NINE

Our Fortresses Fall One after Another

Pak Hong, navy commander of the left (*chwasusa*) for Kyōngsang province, scared and overwhelmed by the appearance of the massive Japanese forces, ran away from his command post without even fighting.¹ Dividing their army into two groups, the Japanese captured the garrisons of Sōp'yōngp'o and Tadaep'o.² Garrison Commander Yun Hūngsin of Tadaep'o fought hard against the enemy and died in battle.³

Provincial Army Commander of the Left (*chwabyōngsa*) Yi Kak heard the news [of the collapse of these two garrisons] and left his provincial army headquarters for Tongnae.⁴ As Pusan fell, Yi Kak was so terrified that he scarcely knew what to do. He tried to abandon the fortress and set up his camp at Sosan post station, making excuses that he intended to stop the enemy outside the fortress. Song Sanghyōn, the district magistrate of Tongnae, asked

¹ Pak Hong (1534–1593) was originally from Ulsan and served as the magistrate of Chōngp'yōng and Chongsōng in Hamgyōng provinces until he became the navy commander of Left Kyōngsang province in 1592. Finding that his forces were outnumbered by the enemy, he abandoned his post and fled to the north to join the army led by Supreme Field Commander Kim Myōngwōn. However, he lost the battle again and ran to P'yōngyang, where the king stayed. There he was impeached for evading the battle with the enemy and violating the military rules, but he was pardoned. When P'yōngyang collapsed in the same year (1592), he joined the army led by Yi Il without much success. He fell sick in 1593 and died on his way home to restore his health (*HITS*).

² Sōsaengp'o and Tadaep'o were port towns a little above Pusan.

³ Yun Hūngsin (?–1592) was the magistrate of Chinch'ōn, but he was dismissed from his post because of his incompetence in handling administrative work. Later, he was reinstated and transferred to Tadaep'o as military commander but was killed in the battle (*HITS*; *SJS*).

⁴ Tongnae is now a part of Pusan, the second-largest city in south of Korea.

Yi to fight together inside the fortress, but Yi would not listen to his plea.⁵

On May 25 [1592.4.15 lunar], the enemy forces arrived. Song Sanghyōn urged his soldiers to fight, standing on top of the South Gate. Despite his efforts, the fortress collapsed within half a day after the Japanese attack started. However, Song sat up straight in his seat and accepted the enemy sword to die. Admiring his courage and soldiership, the Japanese placed his body in a coffin and buried it outside the fortress with a wooden sign to acknowledge his bravery.

As the crisis escalated in this manner, the people in the nearby towns and villages were badly shaken and began to crumble at even the rumor of the enemy attack.

Upon returning from Tongnae in a hurry, Pak Chin, the district magistrate of Miryang, established his camp at the narrow passage in Chakwōn in order to stop the advancing enemy.⁶ As they captured Yangsan and advanced to Chakwōn, the Japanese found that the place was guarded by our army. The enemy soldiers started crawling up the mountain from its backside like ants. Our soldiers, who were still guarding the narrow passage, were scared, and scattered when they saw their enemy coming that way. As this happened, Pak Chin rushed back to the garrison in Miryang. Then he destroyed all the weapons in the armory and escaped into the mountains, abandoning his fortress.

⁵ Song Sanghyōn (1551–1592) was magistrate of Tongnae at the time of the Japanese invasion. Although he was a Confucian scholar and not a soldier, he fought bravely against the Japanese invaders and died in battle. Before the battle started, the Japanese forces sent him a message that said, "If you want to fight, we will fight; if you do not, let us pass through your country." Song replied, "To fight and die is easy; to allow you a passage is difficult." Deeply impressed by Song's patriotism and bravery, the Japanese commanders buried him outside the fortress (*SJS*; *KJIG*).

⁶ Pak Chin (?–1597) was made magistrate of Miryang in 1592. He failed to defend Miryang; however, later in August of the same year, he succeeded in recapturing Yōngch'ōn, a town near Kyōngju, with the help of civilian guerrilla forces (*ūibiyōng*). He also attacked the enemy in Kyōngju, using a bomb called *pigyōk chinch'ōnro* (heaven-shaking explosive shell), and finally captured the town after killing hundreds of enemy soldiers. As a result, the Japanese forces had to retreat to Sōsaengp'o, a town below Kyōngju. Pak also won a number of battles, and these successes led to his promotion. In 1594, he was appointed Provincial Army Commander of Right Kyōngsang province, and later in the same year Magistrate of Sunch'ōn. In 1596, he was appointed provincial army commander of Hwanghae province and concurrently magistrate of Hwangju; he was finally promoted to the position of second minister (*ch'amp'an*) (*HITS*; *SJS*; *KJIG*).

Yi Kak [provincial army commander of the left], who had fled, quickly came back to his garrison. The first thing he did was to evacuate his concubine to a safe place, and this made the people confused and agitated. Being extremely nervous, the soldiers awoke four or five times during the night. Early in the morning, Yi escaped secretly, and the whole army collapsed and dispersed. The enemy divided their forces and ransacked the villages one by one, but there was none on our side that dared to confront them.

Sō Yewōn, the district magistrate of Kimhae, closed the gate tightly to defend the fortress, but the enemy filled up the moats with the bundles of barley gathered in the field, which in a few moments were piled up high to reach the top of the defending walls.⁷ As the Japanese soldiers started to jump in, a man named Yi something, the district magistrate of Ch'ogyē, started to run away, and Sō Yewōn, the commander in charge, followed him. The fortress collapsed.

Concurrent Mobile Inspector Kim Su was in Chinju⁸ when he first heard the news of the Japanese invasion. He hurried to the Tongnae garrison, but while on his way he found himself unable to advance any further because he learned that the Japanese forces were already close at hand. He became scared and did not know what to do. So he returned to Right Kyōngsang province after ordering a public notice for evacuation to be posted in several districts. Because of this, the whole province was empty, and there was nothing we could do.

U Pongnyong, the district magistrate of Yonggung, led the troops from his district to the headquarters of the provincial army commander.⁹ He stopped en route to eat on the roadside in

⁷ Sō Yewōn (?–1593) was one of the garrison commanders guarding Hoeryōng in the northern border of the country. In 1585, leading about eighty soldiers under his command, he went into enemy territory on a scouting mission. However, he failed and barely escaped, losing most of his men. He was court-martialed and imprisoned in Chōngsōng, but soon released. As the district magistrate of Kimhae, he was incompetent and failed to defend his town. Later, he joined the forces of Kim Myōn, the leader of civilian volunteer guerrilla armies, and defeated the enemy at Chirye. He also joined the army led by Kim Simin in the first battle of Chinju, which turned out to be successful. However, he was killed in the second battle of Chinju in the following year. He was known to have been in hiding in the woods at the time of his death (HITS).

⁸ A city in South Kyōngsang province.

⁹ U Pongnyong (1547–1613) was a scholar who studied at Sōnggyun'gwan Confucian Academy. On the recommendation of Yi I, a renowned neo-Confucian scholar, he entered the civil service. When the Japanese invaded, he successfully defended Yonggung, a town under his charge, and, as a reward, was promoted to

Yōngch'ōn, and it happened that several hundred soldiers from Hayang belonging to the defense commander passed by him. They were on their way to join the forces in the upper province. U Pongnyong watched them passing by and took offense at their manner. Because they did not dismount their horse, he thought that they had no respect for him. Thus, he tried to find fault with them, charging them with being rebels. The soldiers protested against his charge, presenting him with an official order from the provincial army commander. At that moment, U Pongnyong gave a secret sign for attack to his men and massacred them all. The dead bodies of the soldiers were piled up high in the field.

Concurrent Mobile Inspector Kim Su, however, stated in his report that U Pongnyong did an outstanding job in crushing the rebels. As a result, U was rewarded with the title *t'ongjōng taebu*¹⁰ and promoted to the district magistrate of Andong in place of Chōng Hūijōk.¹¹

Some time later, the families of the Hayang soldiers, including the widows and children of the dead, tried to appeal their grievances whenever they saw government representatives, but had little success. U's position was so firmly established by this time that no one was willing to take the risk of defending these poor people.

magistrate of Andong. Contrary to what Yu Sōngnyong said, however, *Hanguk'innul'daesajōn* states that U was a good civil servant and executed his duties competently and impartially (HITS).

¹⁰ An honorific title bestowed on a person who rendered a service to the country (senior third rank).

¹¹ Chōng Hūijōk (1541–?) passed the state examination in 1568 and was serving as the magistrate of Andong when the Japanese invaded. Instead of fighting the invading enemy, he went to Kilju on the excuse of escorting the king. Having had himself appointed magistrate of Kilju, he made an alliance with the civilian volunteer guerrilla armies led by Chōng Munbu and fought with the Japanese. However, he was impeached after the war for evading fighting the enemy in Andong (HITS).

TEN

Urgent Reports Come In

Early in the morning of May 27 [1592.4.17 lunar], the first emergency report arrived, sent by Pak Hong, navy commander of the left [for Kyōngsang province]. High officials and the Border Defense Council gathered in the conference hall and requested an audience with the king. The request was not granted. Losing no time, I submitted a memorial to the king with the following result: Yi Il was appointed mobile border commander and ordered to take the middle route; Song Ŭnggil was appointed defense commander of the left (*chwabang'ōsa*) and ordered to take the eastern route; Cho Kyōng was appointed defense commander of the right (*ubang'ōsa*) and ordered to take the western route; Yu Kūngnyang was appointed auxiliary defense officer and ordered to defend the Chungnyōng garrison; Pyōn Ki was appointed auxiliary defense officer and ordered to defend the Choryōng (Bird's Peak); and, finally, Pyōn Ŭngsōng, the former district magistrate of Kanggye, was appointed chief magistrate of Kyōngju.¹ Pyōn was in

¹ Cho Kyōng (1541–1609) passed the state examination for military career and served as magistrate of Cheju Island and Kanggye. During his magistracy in Kanggye in 1591, he was impeached and dismissed for providing hospitality to Chōng Ch'ōl, who was banished from the royal court. In the following year (1592), Cho was appointed defense commander of Right Kyōngsang province and fought against the Japanese at Hwanggan and Ch'up'ung. Despite his initial failure to stop the Japanese forces, he was made magistrate of Suwōn. During this time he came to the rescue of General Kwōn Yul, who had been surrounded by the enemy. Later at Haengju fortress he joined the forces led by Kwōn Yul and played an important role in winning one of the greatest victories during the Japanese invasion. Later he served in several important posts, including commander of the Military Training Agency (Hullyōnwōn), third minister-without-portfolio (*tongji chungch'ubusa*), and provincial army commander of North Hamgyōng province. Although he was a soldier, he was learned in Chinese classics as well as military sciences (*HITS*).

Yu Kūngnyang (?–1592) was born of a mother who was a slave of Minister Hong Sōm. He studied by himself and was finally able to take the state examination for military career through the kindness of Minister Hong. In his days a slave was not

mourning because of a death in his family at that time. He replaced the incumbent magistrate, Yun Inham, who, being a Confucian scholar, was known to want toughness to deal with a war-time situation.² These newly appointed officials were told to choose officers of their own and leave for their respective posts.

A little later, again, a report came in that Pusan had collapsed. That time, Pusan was completely surrounded by enemy forces, and the downtown streets were closed. Commander Pak Hong said in his report, "Looking down from the top, we saw the fortress filled with red banners." From these words, we came to realize that Pusan had indeed fallen.

Before his departure, Yi Il checked the list of soldiers sent by the Board of War. He wanted three hundred elite soldiers from Seoul. He found that, however, the ones on the list had very little military experience. Half of them were either Confucian scholars or petty government functionaries. Furthermore, the scholarly enlistees showed up in traditional costumes holding notebooks in their hands [as if they were taking the civil service examination],³ and the petty government functionaries showed up wearing caps unique to their class. These people were only interested in avoiding their military duty, and therefore, good for nothing. Thus, Yi Il was unable to depart, even though three days had already passed since his appointment. So I had no choice but to order Yi

allowed to take the state examination. Therefore, Minister Hong made him a free man. When the Japanese invaded, he was made auxiliary defense officer (*chobangjang*) to defend Chungnyōng. When he failed, he escaped and joined the forces led by Sin Hal. Yu and Sin met with the enemy at the Imjin River. Being overconfident like his brother General Sin Ip, who had died in Ch'ungju, Sin wanted to attack the enemy right away. Yu tried to persuade Sin to wait little longer so that his troops could get some rest, but Sin refused to listen to Yu's advice. Although Yu found it foolish and reckless, he had no choice but to follow Sin's order. The troops led by Sin, as expected, fell under attack by the enemy, and Yu died in battle after striking down several enemy soldiers (*HITS*).

Chungnyōng garrison was situated at a strategic point in the northeast of the Sobaek Mountain Range, between P'unggi in North Kyōngsang province and Tanyang in North Ch'ungch'ōng province. Choryōng is a strategic point at Yōnp'ung; it is right above Mun'gyōng in North Ch'ungch'ōng province.

² Yun Inham (1531–1597) was chief magistrate of Kyōngju when the Japanese invasion took place. He was dismissed because of his failure to defend the town. After he lost Kyōngju to the enemy, Yun raised a civilian volunteer guerrilla army and killed hundreds of Japanese soldiers. In 1596 he became second minister of punishments, but he died suddenly when he went out to welcome the Ming generals (*MJS*; *SJS*; *KJPM*; *KJIG*).

³ In the old days when the students took the state examination, they were supposed to bring their own paper on which they wrote their answers.

to leave by himself, and told Special Commander (*pyöljang*) Yu Ok to follow him later with the soldiers.⁴

Then I submitted a memorial to the king. I said, "Minister of War Hong Yösun is not the right person for his job; he is incapable of discharging his duty.⁵ Besides, as there is a good deal of complaint about him among the soldiers, he should be dismissed." As a result, the king appointed Kim Ŭngnam as the new minister of war, and Sim Ch'unggyönm as second minister (*ch'amp'an*) of war.⁶

The Censorate also submitted a memorial to the king: "You should appoint one of the high officials (*taesin*) as supreme commander (*ch'ech'alsa*) to check and supervise all the generals."⁷ When the king granted the request, Chief State Councilor [Yi Sanhae] recommended me to the job.⁸ I asked the king to appoint Kim Ŭngnam as my deputy. I also requested the king to pardon the former magistrate of Ŭiju, Kim Yömul, who was in prison at the time for being involved in some sort of incident.⁹ Kim was an

⁴ Pyöljang is the special commander of Dragon Tiger Regiment of the Forbidden Soldiers (Yonghoyöng) (junior second rank).

⁵ Hong Yösun (1547–1609) was a controversial figure with a bad reputation. He was minister of war when the Japanese invaded, but, because of Yu Söngnyong's memorial submitted to the king, he was transferred to the Board of Revenue. For this reason, he became the enemy of Yu and later played a leading role in driving Yu out of office. However, he was also impeached and died in exile (SJS; KHIG).

⁶ Sin Ch'unggyönm (1545–1594) passed the state examination in 1572 and rose to first counselor after serving as fourth inspector (*chip'yöng*) and third censor (*hönnap*). When the Japanese invaded, he was promoted to second minister of war and escorted the king to P'yöngyang. Later he was appointed minister of war, but he died of sickness in 1594 (KJIG).

⁷ Supreme commander was a temporary position concurrently held by high-ranking civil officials during a national crisis, such as war. By the orders of the king, the supreme commander was dispatched to the provinces in trouble and supervised the whole operations of war. The main purpose of creating this office was to diffuse the conflicts and tensions among the commanding generals and magistrates over the issue of their power and authority so that they could carry out their war efforts in a more productive way.

⁸ Yi Sanhae (1539–1609) passed the state examination in 1561 and held numerous high-ranking positions until he became chief state councilor in 1589. Deeply involved in factional conflicts, he led the Easterner faction and later the Northerner faction. As the leader of these factions, he succeeded in driving out members of the Westerner faction including Chöng Ch'öl and Yun Tusu. When the Japanese invaded, he escorted King Söngjo up to Kaesöng, but he was impeached and dismissed from office for bringing the country into crisis. However, he became chief state councilor once more in 1599 after the war with Japan. He was talented in literature as well as painting and calligraphy (HITS; MJS; SJS; KHIG).

⁹ Kim Yömul (1548–1592) was a man accomplished in both literary and military arts. However, when he was the district magistrate of Ŭiju in 1591, he was im-

excellent soldier, distinguished in his ideas and wisdom. Then I recruited the warriors and selected about eighty men out of them who could take up the job of military officers.

A little later, emergency reports kept coming in. The vanguard of the enemy had already passed through Miryang and Taegu, and now it was approaching Choryöng. Upon hearing these reports, I said to Kim Ŭngnam and Sin Ip, "The Japanese army is already deep inside our land, and the situation is really serious. What should we do?" Sin Ip answered, "Yi Il is now at the front and isolated with his troops. He will need the support from the rear very badly, but nothing has been done yet. Your Honor is about to go down with your soldiers, but you are not a fighting general. Why don't you, then, quickly dispatch a courageous general and let him run down through the night to rescue Yi Il?"

The way Sin Ip argued gave me the impression that he himself wanted the job he had just described. So Kim and I reported to the king what Sin Ip had said. The king immediately called Sin Ip in and made him general circuit defense commander (*to'sunbyönsa*).

Sin Ip personally recruited the men he needed, standing outside the palace gate, but found no volunteers to go with him. That time, I was busy preparing for my departure at the Office of Ministers-without-portfolio (Chungch'ubu).¹⁰ Sin Ip happened to notice a crowd of volunteers gathered in my place while he was strolling around. His face grew red with anger, and he said to me, pointing at Minister Kim [Ŭngnam] who was my deputy, "What good is it to take a man like this? I beg Your Honor to make me your deputy to go with you."

prisoned, being suspected to be a member of Chöng Ch'öl's party, which was driven out of power in political feuds. Yu Söngnyong released him from prison to make him his assistant; however, General Sin Ip also wanted to take Kim with him when he went down to Ch'ungju. Kim reluctantly joined Sin and arrived at Tanwöl post station in Ch'ungju. He surveyed the area and suggested that the rugged Choryöng Pass be chosen to establish a military headquarters; however, General Sin Ip, Kim's superior, did not listen to his advice and chose Talch'ön and T'an'gümdae instead, which were on flat ground. Consequently, both Kim and Sin, with the rest of their troops, were defeated and killed during the battle. Before the battle took place, Kim knew that his army would lose and sent his last words to his son (HITS).

¹⁰ Chungch'ubu was one of the offices that belonged to Ŭjöngbu (State Council). Its members consisted mostly of *tangsangwan* (officials of the upper end of the hall), high-ranking officials of the first, second, and part of the third ranks.

The reason that he made such a remark, as I well knew, was that he was frustrated at his inability to recruit the men he wanted. So I said to him, laughing, "Whatever we do, it is all for the country. What difference does it make? I think you had better take my men with you and leave now, since there is no time to lose. I will follow you as soon as I recruit my own men."

I gave him the list of the recruited soldiers. As he took it, he looked around the soldiers gathered in the yard and called them in a loud voice, "Come over here!" In a few moments he led the soldiers out, and those who followed him looked very disappointed. Kim Yömul also joined Sin Ip's party, but he seemed reluctant to go.

On the day of the departure, the king called Sin Ip in and gave him a precious sword with this remark: "If anyone under your command dares defy your orders, including Yi Il, cut him down with this sword."

Sin Ip took his leave of the king and went into the conference hall, where the high officials were gathered. He met with them and bid them farewell. However, the moment he turned around to leave and walked down the steps of stone, the cap on his head fell off to the ground. The people were shocked to see it, and the color of their faces changed. When Sin Ip arrived in Yong'in, he sent a report to the king without signing his name.¹¹ It was so strange that people suspected Sin Ip's mental condition.

¹¹ Yong'in is a little town in Kyönggi province, between Seoul and Ch'ungju in Ch'ungch'öng province.

ELEVEN

Criminal Charges against Kim Söng'il for His Report

The king ordered Kim Söng'il, provincial army commander of the right for Kyöngsang province, to be arrested, but acquitted him before he was brought to Seoul for trial. Subsequently, he appointed Kim as recruiting officer, and appointed Yu Sung'in, district magistrate of Haman, as provincial army commander of Kyöngsang province.¹ Prior to this event, when he arrived in Sangju, Kim Söng'il heard the news that the enemy had already crossed our border. He ran his horse day and night trying to get to the military headquarters; and on his way, he ran into Cho Tae-gon and exchanged official seals and warrants.

In the meantime, the enemy had already captured Kimhae and, dividing their army, had started plundering the villages in Right Kyöngsang province. Kim launched out against the Japanese, but as his troops approached their enemy, his officers and soldiers became scared and tried to run away. Kim dismounted his horse and sat down on a chair, showing no signs of fear. He sent for Yi Chong'in and said to him, "Since you are a brave warrior, you should not run away from the enemy."² At that moment, one of

¹ Yu Sung'in (?-1592), although he was a civil official, fought against the Japanese forces bravely and defeated the enemy on a number of occasions. When he was the magistrate of Haman, he led his troop to attack the Japanese soldiers whose passage was cut off by the civilian volunteer army led by General Kwak Cheu. He beheaded forty-seven enemy soldiers. He also fought together with Admiral Yi Sunsin in the battle of Tanghangp'o by attacking the enemy from the rear, and later, once again, defeated the Japanese army in the Küm-gang River with Pak Üi, the district magistrate of Chiksan. As a result, he was promoted to provincial army commander (*pyöngsa*) of Right Kyöngsang province. However, he died in battle while he was trying to rescue our beleaguered army in Chinju in 1592 (HITS).

² Yi Chong'in (?-1593) was a military officer who worked for Kim Söng'il, provincial army commander of right Kyöngsang province. He fought bravely in the battle of Chinju, cutting down a number of enemy soldiers, and became the district

the enemy soldiers with an iron mask dashed forward to attack, wielding his sword. Yi Chong'in ran his horse to meet his opponent and killed him by shooting an arrow. Watching his man killed, the enemy did not dare advance further and ran away.

As Kim Sŏng'il was about to reassemble the scattered troops and devise strategies to stop the advancing enemy, sending out notices to all districts, the king remembered that Kim had made a false report on the possibility of the Japanese invasion after he had been to Japan as his ambassador. The king believed that Kim should be held responsible for misleading the court and bringing about the current crisis. Therefore, he ordered the lieutenant (*tosa*)³ of the State Tribunal (Üigumbu) to arrest Kim and bring him to Seoul. It seemed that the situation was so serious for Kim that no one could tell what would happen to him.

Governor Kim Su of Kyŏngsang province went to see him off on the road when he heard of Kim's arrest. However, Kim Sŏng'il neither changed his expression nor said a word in relation to his personal affairs. Urging the governor to repulse the enemy, he seemed to be concerned only about the national crisis. Ha Cha-yong, an old yamen attendant who happened to be standing by Kim, was deeply moved by Kim's attitude and remarked, "The man is truly a loyal subject. Showing no sign of sorrow over his impending death, he is only worried about his country."

When Kim Sŏng'il arrived in Chiksan, the wrath of the king relented. He came to know that Kim had won the hearts of the people in his region and sent down orders to pardon him. Furthermore, he appointed Kim recruiting officer (*ch'oyusa*) of Right Kyŏngsang province with the purpose of raising a civilian army to repulse the enemy.⁴ The king also appointed Yu Sung'in to provincial army commander, jumping over the regular order of promotion, as a reward to the outstanding contributions he had made during the battles.

magistrate of Kimhae. When Sŏ Yewŏn, the district magistrate of Chinju, tried to flee in the midst of the battle, Yi tried to stop him and waged a brave fight with the help of Kim Ch'ŏn'il, the commander of volunteer guerrilla armies. Yi fought in the forefront of the battle and finally ran out of arrows. He was soon killed by a bullet discharged by the enemy. According to another version of the story, he killed himself, jumping into the river with the enemy soldiers in his arms (*HITS; KJIG*).

³ Junior fifth rank.

⁴ It is generally believed that Yu Sŏngnyong played a crucial role in persuading King Sŏnjo to pardon Kim Sŏng'il, who was a close friend of the author.

TWELVE

The Court Appoints Kim Nŭk to Stabilize Public Feeling

The court appointed Fifth Minister-without-Portfolio Kim Nŭk as pacification commissioner (*anjipsa*) of Left Kyŏngsang province.¹ Because Governor Kim Su was in Right Kyŏngsang province at that time, and the enemy forces occupied the middle section, blocking off the communication with Left province, the district magistrates abandoned their posts and ran off, and the people were completely dispirited. On hearing this news, the government decided to send down Kim Nŭk, who was originally from Yŏngch'ŏn and well aware of the way the people felt, so that he could set them at ease and gather them together. After discussing the matter, the ministers urged the king to appoint Kim to the new assignment. When Kim arrived at his post, the people in Left [Kyŏngsang] province started coming back one by one. Fortunately, the enemy had not reached towns such as Yŏngch'ŏn and P'unggi yet, and the volunteer guerrilla armies had increased in large number.²

¹ Kim Nŭk (1540–1616) was a student of Yi Hwang and passed the state examination in 1576. During the Japanese invasion, he was appointed district magistrate of Andong, Kyŏngsang province, and later pacification commissioner to allay the troubled public opinion at the time of crisis. Throughout his political career, he held various high-ranking positions including first royal secretary, censor-general, headmaster (*taesasŏng*) of the National Confucian Academy, and so forth (*HITS*). Pacification commissioner was a temporary position; he was dispatched to bring order to a troubled area by allaying the fear of the people.

² The volunteer guerrilla armies consisted of civilians and monks. As the Japanese invaded the country and the regular armies collapsed, the common people throughout the land rose to fight against the enemy forces.

THIRTEEN

Commander Yi Il Flees as Sangju Falls

As the enemy overthrew Sangju, Mobile Border Commander Yi Il ran away and returned to Ch'ungju.

What happened was the following: When Concurrent Mobile Inspector Kim Su of Kyōngsang province received a report on the invasion of the Japanese, he immediately took action according to the current military rules of *chesŭng pangnyak*. Sending out official dispatches, he ordered all the districts to bring their soldiers to a designated place and wait for the commanding general, who was supposed to come down from Seoul.

Following this order, the district magistrates from various towns south of Mun'gyōng assembled at Taegu with their troops. Setting up their camps at a creek, they waited for the commander from Seoul for a few days. However, the commander they were waiting for never showed up. All the while, the enemy was approaching little by little. Our soldiers, naturally, were very nervous and agitated. To make matters worse, there was heavy rain. The soldiers and their equipment were drenched with rain, and their provisions were running out. As night fell, all the soldiers stole away and disappeared, and the district magistrates also mounted their horses and ran off.

When Mobile Border Commander Yi Il arrived in Mun'gyōng, he found the entire village empty. He personally opened the state warehouse and took out the grain to feed the soldiers that he brought with him. Passing through Hamch'ang, Yi Il finally arrived in Sangju.¹ But Kim Hae, the district magistrate of Sangju, had fled into the mountains with an excuse that he had to go out

¹ Hamch'ang is a small town in Chu'ungch'ōng province, right below Mun'gyōng. Sangju is a town in Kyōngsang province, between Sōnsan and Mun'gyōng.

to wait for the commanding general.² Only Kwōn Kil, his deputy (*p'an'gwan*), remained to watch over the town.³ Yi Il was furious when he discovered the situation. Reproaching Kwōn Kil, Yi dragged him out into the courtyard and threatened to kill him. Kwōn begged that he be allowed to look for the soldiers and bring them back. He searched the villages all night long and brought several hundred people with him, but most of them were farmers.

Yi Il stayed in Sangju for a day. As he opened the state warehouse and distributed provisions to the people, those who had run away started coming back from their hideouts in the mountain valleys, their number reaching several hundreds. Yi Il quickly organized a fighting army out of these civilians, but most of them were unfit for carrying out real warfare.

The enemy forces by this time had already reached Sōnsan. Toward evening, a man from Kaenyōng district came in to report that he had seen the enemy in the vicinity.⁴ Yi grew suspicious of the man and tried to kill him on charge of instigation. The man begged in a loud voice, "Please trust me. If you cannot, why don't you put me in jail for a while and see if they are really coming? You will find out the truth by tomorrow morning. If I am wrong, it will be still not too late for you to kill me."

On the same night, the enemy forces advanced and pitched their camp at Changch'ōn. Although the distance between Changch'ōn and Sangju was only twenty *li* [about five miles], Yi Il was totally unaware of this fact because he had no scouts to check out the movement of the enemy. The next morning, observing that the enemy had not still showed up, Yi Il ordered the prisoner to be taken out to be executed and his dead body displayed to the public.

The size of Yi Il's army amounted to about eight or nine hundred soldiers including civilian volunteers and the regulars dispatched from Seoul. Yi Il took these soldiers to practice battle formation at the outskirts of Pukch'ōn. With the mountains behind

² Kim Hae (?), a native of Yean, passed the state examination in 1586 and became the district magistrate of Sangju. He tried to fight against the Japanese, but his troops were outnumbered and he was killed in battle in 1593 (*Ŭppi*).

³ Kwōn Kil (?-1592) originally came from Andong; his courtesy name was Ŭngsōn. He was appointed *p'an'gwan* of Sangju in 1592 when the Japanese invaded. Despite the overwhelming odds against winning the battle, he joined Yi Il's army but died in battle after waging a brave fight (*HITS*).

⁴ Kaenyōng is a small town between Sōnsan and Kimch'ōn in Kyōngsang province.

him, he set up a battle camp and in the center placed a banner of the commanding general. Wearing armor and sitting on his horse, he took his position under the big banner, and behind him, his four lieutenants lined up, dismounted from their horses. They were Attending Officers Yun Söm and Pak Chi, Administrator Kwön Kil, and Chief of Sagün Post Station Kim Chongmu.⁵

Some time later, a few men were seen hanging around in the forest, keeping their eyes on our camp and disappeared. Our soldiers suspected them to be the scouts sent by the enemy, but they were too scared to report it because of the incident of the man from Kaenyöng. Shortly, they saw smoke rising from several places inside the walled town, and then Yi Il sent one of his officers to go over and check it out.

The officer rode on a horse, and two soldiers from the post station walked by him slowly, holding the bridle of the horse. Hiding in ambush under the bridge, Japanese soldiers with muskets shot down the officer from his horse and cut off his head and ran off with it. Upon seeing this, our soldiers lost all their fighting spirit.

After a short while a number of enemy soldiers suddenly emerged and started attacking us with ten or more muskets. The ones hit by the bullets were killed instantly. Yi immediately ordered the archers to counterattack using their bows, but their

⁵ Yun Söm (1561–1592) passed the state examination in 1583 and served as third diarist (*kömyöl*) of the Office of Royal Decrees (Yemun'gwan), recorder (*chusö*) of the Royal Secretariat (*chöngja*) of the Office of Diplomatic Correspondence (Süngmunwön), fourth censor, and fourth inspector. In 1586, he visited Ming China as an envoy and succeeded in correcting the misspelled name of Yi Sönggye's forebears in the official records of the Ming empire. Thanks to this achievement, the government bestowed on him the honor of Kwangguk Merit Subject Second Class. When the Japanese invaded, he became an aide (*chongsagwan*; junior sixth rank) of General Yi Il; he died in the battle of Sangju in 1592.

Pak Chi (1567–1592) passed the state examination at the age of eighteen, winning the highest honor, and served as second drafter (*kyori*) of the Office of Diplomatic Correspondence. When the Japanese invaded the country, he became an aide of General Yi Il and died in the battle of Sangju along with Yun Söm. Before the battle began, he said, "At the age of eighteen, I had the honor to win the first place in the state examination, and I am too much indebted to our country. Now the country is in crisis. How can I expect to survive and see the face of the king?"

Kim Chongmu (?–1592) became the chief (*ch'albang*) of Sagün post station in 1591. When the Japanese invaded in the following year and the enemy forces threatened to overrun his town, he ran hundreds of miles to join General Yi Il's army to fight against the Japanese invaders. He was killed in the battle of Sangju (HITS; KJIG; YNIK).

arrows fell far short of their target. Dividing their armies into the left and right wings and carrying their banners, the enemy forces advanced fast and encircled our army from behind.

As the situation became dangerous, Yi Il pulled his horse and ran off toward the north. Our soldiers, now confused and thrown into chaos, also tried to run for their lives, but most of them failed to escape the siege of the enemy. The attending officers and the rest of the soldiers who were unable to find horses to ride on were all captured and killed.

The enemy immediately started pursuing Yi Il, and the latter ran to escape after abandoning his horse. Now, with his clothes changed and his hair let loose, he arrived in Mun'gyöng, virtually naked.⁶ The first thing he did was to look for paper and brush to make a report to the king of his defeat and the dangerous situation. Next, he was going to withdraw and defend the mountain passes at Bird's Peak (Choryöng),⁷ but instead he ran up to Ch'ungju after finding out that Sin Ip was now in Ch'ungju.

⁶ In the northwest of North Kyöngsang province, Mun'gyöng was a strategic point connecting the northern and the eastern sections of Korea.

⁷ A strategic point leading to Ch'ungju.

FOURTEEN

Debates on the Defense of Seoul and the Departure of the King

The court appointed Third State Councilor Yi Yangwŏn as the commanding general in charge of defending Seoul; Yi Chin and Pyŏn Ōnsu as his left and right deputies; Lord of Sangsan Pak Ch'unggan as inspector (*sun'gŏmsa*) of Seoul with the mission of repairing fortresses; and Kim Myŏngwŏn, who was in mourning, as supreme field commander to guard the Han River.¹

Around this time, as the news of Yi Il's defeat had already arrived, the people in the court were full of fear and anxiety. Inside the wall of the royal palace, there were already opinions that the king should leave Seoul for his safety, but the people outside the palace were unaware of this development. Kim Ŭngsu, an official (*ima*) in the Royal Stable Court (Saboksi),² visited the

¹ Yi Yangwŏn (1526–1592) served as governor, minister of punishment, director, inspector general, third state councilor, and finally chief state councilor after he defeated the Japanese army at Haeryŏng in Hamgyŏng province with General Sin Kak and Yi Hon. He starved himself to death when he heard a rumor that the king had fled to Liaodong, China.

Pak Ch'unggan (?–1601) rose to political eminence by accusing Chŏng Yŏrip of alleged conspiracy and rebellion against the government. However, he was impeached and dismissed because he ran away in the middle of battle with the Japanese.

Kim Myŏngwŏn (1534–1602) passed the state examination in 1561 and served as the district magistrate of Chongsŏng, Tongnae, Naju, Chŏngju, and other districts. This was just the beginning of his long political and military career. In 1579, he was appointed to many government posts, including magistrate of Ŭiju, and later, provincial army commander of P'yŏngan province, vice-minister of taxation, and governor of Chŏlla and Kyŏnggi provinces. When the Japanese invaded, he became supreme field commander and defended the Han River and the Imjin River without much success. However, he rose to third and second state councilor (*uŭijŏng*; *chwauijŏng*) when the war was over. He was distinguished in both literary and military arts (*HITS*; *SJS*; *SSJS*; *KJIG*).

² Office in charge of managing the king's stable as well as the royal carriage; the *ima* held senior sixth rank in the Saboksi.

conference hall in the royal palace to see the chief state councilor. He was seen whispering in the ears of the chief state councilor, going in and out, and his strange behavior made the people in the hall wonder what was going on. In those days the chief state councilor was also in charge of running the Royal Stable Court.

First Royal Secretary (*tosŭngji*) Yi Hangbok wrote a few words in the palm of his hand and showed them to me: "Get your horse ready inside Yonggangmun Gate."³

The Censorate urged the king to fire the chief state councilor for ruining the affairs of the state. But the request was not granted. Members of the royal family gathered outside Hapmun Gate and, weeping aloud, begged the king not to forsake Seoul.⁴ First Minister-without-Portfolio (*yŏngbusa*) Kim Kwiŏng, more emotional than anyone else, entered the royal palace with other ministers to see the king.⁵ Entreating him to remain in Seoul, Kim said, "The ones who argue for abandoning Seoul are men of low moral standards (*soin*)."⁶ The king answered through a writ of instruction, "The ancestral shrines of the royal family and the guardian deities of the state are all here in Seoul. Where else can I go?" With this assurance from the king, the ministers left the royal palace. However, the situation kept deteriorating.

The government drafted residents of the wards in the capital, public and private slaves, clerks, and the personnel in the Three Palace Medical Offices (Samŭisa) to defend the battlements on top

³ Yi Hangbok (1556–1618) was a renowned state councilor during the reign of Kings Sŏnjo and Kwanghaegun. In his long and brilliant political career, he served as chief royal secretary, inspector-general, director, minister of punishment, and later third state councilor and chief state councilor. Despite the chronic factional fights of his time, Yi tried to stay away from the disputes and maintained an attitude of impartiality and fairness. Nevertheless, at the end of his career, he was driven out of power and died in exile (*HITS*; *SJS*).

⁴ Hapmun Gate is probably the name of the main gate reserved only for the use of the king.

⁵ *Yŏngbusa* or *yŏngjungch'ubusa* was the highest-ranking official in charge of the Office of Ministers-without-Portfolio (senior first rank). Kim Kwiŏng (1520–1593) passed the state examination in 1547 and became third state councilor in 1581 and second state councilor in 1583. At the initial stage of the Japanese invasion in 1592, he served as *yŏngbusa*, and he escorted Prince Imhae to Hamgyŏng province. However, along with the prince he became a captive of Japanese commander Katō Kiyomasa. At the request of Kiyomasa, who released Kim with the princes, Kim recommended to the king a negotiation with the Japanese, a recommendation that incurred the impeachment of the Censorate. He was finally stripped of his rank and title on the charge of failing to protect the princes; he died in exile at a place called Hich'ŏn (*HITS*).

of the fortress walls.⁶ The total number of these forces reached only about seven thousand, but the posts to be defended were more than thirty thousand. Having no military training, these people knew nothing about warfare and only thought of ways to evade their military duty. Furthermore, the soldiers belonging to the Board of War, who were transferred to Seoul from the local regions, collaborated with the petty government functionaries by taking bribes and secretly releasing many civilian recruits. The civil officials who supervised them did not say anything, nor did they try to investigate these irregularities. The remaining forces, therefore, were good for nothing in an emergency situation. This shows how seriously disarrayed the military administration was.

The ministers urged the king to allay public anxiety by nominating the crown prince as his successor. Their request was granted.

The court sent Fourth Minister-without-Portfolio (*tongjisa*) Yi Tökyöng to the Japanese camp as our emissary.⁷

At the time when Yi Il's army lost the battle in Sangju, a Korean translator named Kyöng Üngsun was captured by the Japanese. Konishi Yukinaga, a Japanese commander, gave Kyöng the letter of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and an official document directed to the Board of Rites, with the following remark, "When we were at Tongnae, we captured the district magistrate of Ulsan and made him carry our message to your government, but have received no answer yet. (The district magistrate of Ulsan was Yi Önham. After his release, Yi concealed the fact of his capture and lied that he had escaped from the enemy fearing that he might be punished. As a result, the message from the Japanese was lost, and our government knew nothing about it). If Korea is interested in making peace with Japan, send Yi Tökyöng to meet with us in Ch'ungju on the twenty-eighth day of this month." Yukinaga wanted to see Yi Tökyöng because Yi had entertained the

⁶ Samüisa, the three institutions for healthcare in the royal palace, consisted of Naeüiwön, Chönnügam, and Haeminwön.

⁷ *Tongjisa* was junior second rank. Yi Tökyöng (1561–1613), like his best friend Yi Hangbok, was a renowned statesman during King Sönjo's reign. He was the son-in-law of Chief State Councilor Yi Sanhae and had a reputation as a man of talent. He became third state councilor at the age of thirty-eight, chief state councilor (in 1602) at the age of forty-one. During the Japanese invasion, he performed a variety of diplomatic missions, meeting with Japanese commanders and entertaining Chinese generals (HITS; SJS).

Japanese envoys as a diplomatic representative from the court (*sönwisa*) early in the previous year.

When the translator Kyöng Üngsun arrived in Seoul with the message from the Japanese, the general situation had already deteriorated too much, and no one in our court had any idea about how to deal with the crisis. It was believed, therefore, that the Japanese overture could be turned into an opportunity for holding off their attack for a while. Besides, Yi Tökyöng himself showed willingness to go down to see the Japanese. So it was decided that the official letter be drafted by the Board of Rites and that Yi take Kyöng Üngsun with him for translation. On his way to meet the Japanese, however, Yi heard that Ch'ungju had already fallen to the enemy. He ordered his translator to go ahead to find out the real situation. However, the translator was captured and killed by Katō Kiyomasa.⁸ So Yi changed his plan and returned to report this to the king at P'yöngyang.

Mars invaded a constellation of six stars in the south (Namdu).⁹ The government decided to mobilize a new army out of provinces such as Kyönggi, Kangwön, Hwanghae, P'yöngan, and Hamgyöng to save Seoul from the enemy. It appointed Minister of Personnel Yi Wön'ik and Third Minister-without-Portfolio Ch'oe Hüngwön as concurrent mobile inspectors (*sunch'alsa*) of P'yöngan and Hwanghae provinces, respectively, and ordered them to leave on the same day.¹⁰ Since there were talks about the

⁸ Katō Kiyomasa (1562–1611) stood at the front line with Konishi Yukinaga during the Japanese invasion and captured two Korean princes of King Sönjo in Hamgyöng province. Among the many Japanese generals who participated in the war, he was known to be the most ferocious and cruel (NJD).

⁹ Mars symbolizes great disasters such as war or human catastrophe. The Namdu constellation was believed to be in charge of the king's life.

¹⁰ Yi Wön'ik (1547–1634) was a man of integrity and dedication. He worked with Yu Söngnyong during the Japanese invasion to save the country. At the time of the Japanese invasion in 1592, he served as concurrent mobile inspector of P'yöngan province and played an important role in recapturing P'yöngyang with the help of the Ming's relief army. Deeply trusting him, King Sönjo valued his competence and contributions to the war efforts. Although he served as chief state councilor five times in his long political career, he was so poor that his friends worried about his meals. During the reign of Kwanghaegun, he was opposed to driving out Queen Consort Inmok and sent to exile. However, when King Injo ascended to the throne, he was reinstated as chief state councilor. He also escorted the crown prince to Chönju during the Manchu invasion of 1628 (HITS; SJS; KHIG; IJS).

Ch'oe Hüngwön (1529–1603) passed the state examination in 1568 and, after serving as fourth censor, third inspector, second censor (*sagan*), second inspector (*chipüi*), governor of P'yöngan province, and third and second state councilor, final-

possibility that in the future the king might have to take a trip to the west,¹¹ it appeared to be important that the men who were familiar with those regions should go up and make the necessary preparations in advance. As the former magistrate of Anju and the former governor of Hwanghae province, Yi and Ch'oe had won the hearts of the people in their districts for their benevolent rule and good works. The appointment of these men, therefore, was to appease the soldiers and civilians and prepare for the king's trip in the days to come.

ly rose to chief state councilor in 1592, the first year of the Japanese invasion (HITS; SJS).

¹¹ "To take a trip" here means to take refuge.

FIFTEEN

The Defeat of Sin Ip's Army

As the enemy forces invaded Ch'ungju, Sin Ip tried to fight them but lost the battle and died. All our troops crumbled fast.

When Sin Ip arrived in Ch'ungju, the number of soldiers recruited from the various districts within Ch'ungch'öng province reached more than eight thousand. Sin Ip at first intended to defend the mountain passes at Bird's Peak but changed his mind when he heard the news of Yi Il's defeat. Shaken and discouraged, he hurried back to Ch'ungju and also summoned Yi Il and Pyön Ki to Ch'ungju.

Observing Sin Ip's moves, people knew that he would most certainly be defeated because he chose not to defend Bird's Peak, a stronghold that was rugged and easy to guard, and also because the way he commanded his soldiers lacked order and discipline.

On the early evening of June 6 [1592.4.27 lunar], an officer close to Sin Ip secretly came in and reported that the enemy had already crossed Bird's Peak. Upon hearing the report, Sin Ip suddenly ran out of the fortress, throwing his camp into confusion. No one knew where Sin Ip went, but he secretly came back to his quarters very late at night.

The next morning, Sin Ip accused the officer of spreading false information and had him beheaded. And he sent a report to the king in which he said, "The enemy is still staying in Sangju." He did not know that the enemy was only a couple of miles away.

Then he led his army to T'an'gümdae and set up his camp between the two rivers.¹ The campsite was surrounded by rice paddies on the left and covered with water plants on the right; therefore, the place was inconvenient for both men and horses to move freely.

¹ T'an'gümdae is in the west of Ch'ungju.