

archery, but one by one they were struck down and killed. His comrades urged him to withdraw, but Yoshisada ignored them and drove his horse forward into the attack. The poor animal then received an arrow and fell like a folding screen, trapping Yoshisada's left leg under its body. At that moment an arrow smashed through Yoshisada's helmet and into his forehead. Still conscious, Yoshisada committed suicide, but not by hara kiri. There was no time for that, nor did his trapped position allow him to reach his abdomen. Instead, Nitta Yoshisada is said to have cut off his own head. It rolled into a rice paddy and his body slid in after it. To cut off one's own head sounds far-fetched, but in the heat of the battle and with a samurai sword of legendary sharpness it is entirely believable of someone with Yoshisada's fanaticism and in such desperate straits."

I first learned of Yoshisada in 1973 from a beautiful wood block print in Donn Draeger's book '*Classical Bujutsu*.' It struck a cord in my being. The name of the print is '*Yadome*.' The term means arrow stopping, and refers to the art of blocking on coming arrows with one or two swords. Most of the information above is from '*SAMURAI, The World of the Warrior*' by Stephen Turnbull. Turnbull is a prolific writer who draws from a seemingly endless series of stories about the Samurai. This latest work was just published recently and had this fascinating account of Nitta Yoshisada. The hero is also mentioned twice in the famous book '*Hagakure*' by Yamamoto Tsunetomo.

A few years ago I took Draeger's book with me to a tattoo artist named Corey Kruger. I asked if he could put the 8 1/2" X 5 1/2" wood block print on my back. He shook his head and said that if it was put on that small, the lines would all run together. If I really wanted the tattoo, he said, he would need to use my whole back as a canvas. The art work took a year to complete.

Corey changed the angle of the horse's fall and added the feeling that it was jumping over a flaming barrier. He also updated the armor from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. Looking at the picture below, you will see the horse's tail and hind quarters in the upper left on my shoulder and its head in the lower right by my hip. The horse is somersaulting towards the viewer as Yoshisada slides out of the saddle while blocking and cutting the arrows that are being shot at him. If you look closely, you can see an arrow in the horse's head and chest. This is just before he is pinned to the ground and struck with an arrow, frozen in time between life and death.



Gordon Fisher
Warrior

Source material; *SAMURAI, The World of the*

By Stephen Turnbull