

Site of Utena Fort

Utena Fort, also known as Mizushima Fort, was one of more than a dozen medieval strongholds built by the Kikuchi clan to defend the castle town of Waifu. The fortress faced west on the edge of a plateau around 5 kilometers west of the clan's castle and had an unimpeded view far downstream along the Kikuchi River. This strategic location, along with the additional protection provided by the Uchida River directly beneath the hill, made Utena Fort extremely difficult to invade.

The most famous battle in the fort's history took place in 1375, when the Kikuchi clan was fighting against the Ashikaga shogunate, the warrior-led central government. The Kikuchi, who only a few years prior had controlled all of Kyushu, had been pushed back to their ancestral lands after successive setbacks at the hands of the Ashikaga general Imagawa Ryoshun (1326–1420).

Seeking to end Kikuchi resistance for good, Ryoshun brought tens of thousands of warriors to the Battle of Mizushima, but was defeated by a force of 2,000 under Kikuchi Taketomo (1363–1407), the newly appointed clan leader who was only 12 years old at the time. Taketomo's victory delayed Ryoshun's conquest of Kikuchi, which he nonetheless completed six years later.