

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 25.

So, happy new year, everybody. We're back from our holiday hiatus. Before we pick up where we left off, since I haven't done this in a little while, I just want to encourage you to check out our website, 3kingdomspodcast.com, spelled with the number 3, for supplemental material such as maps and transcripts of the episodes.

Also, if you enjoy this podcast, please consider rating the show on iTunes to help others discover it. Just as a reminder, I have a challenge going on until Jan. 31. The details are on the website, but basically, the more ratings and reviews the show gets on iTunes before January 31, the more supplemental episodes I will produce in 2015. So take 20 seconds and rate the show. Thank you for your support. Now, let's get back to it.

So last time, Cao Cao was on his way to attack Lu Bu's strongholds, and Lu Bu was going to go do something about it. His father-and-son adviser team of Chen Gui (4) and Chen Deng (1), however, were in cahoots with Cao Cao, and they were busy plotting Lu Bu's defeat. Chen Deng was going with Lu Bu, while Chen Gui was to guard Xu Province in their absence. But Chen Gui was worried about the fact that Lu Bu's family and many of his loyal men were still in the city.

So Chen Deng went to see Lu Bu and said, "The province is under attack from all sides, and Cao Cao will no doubt throw everything he's got at us. We should have a fallback plan. We can move our grain and money to the city of Xiapi (4,1). If Xu Province is surrounded, Xiapi (4,1) can provide relief provisions. You should think about that."

"That's a good idea," Lu Bu said. "I will move my family to Xiapi." So he ordered his officers Song (4) Xian (4) and Wei (4) Xu (4) to escort his family, along with money and grain, to Xiapi, while he himself, along with Chen Deng, led an army to go lift the siege on the pass of Xiao (1).

Along the way, Chen Deng said to Lu Bu, "Let me go on ahead to scout out the situation, and then you can proceed."

Lu Bu consented, and Chen Deng went on ahead. When he arrived, Chen Gong, the adviser who WAS loyal to Lu Bu, greeted him.

"The general is displeased that you have not advanced your army, so he sent me to admonish you," Chen Deng told Chen Gong, lying through his teeth.

"Cao Cao's army is strong, and we cannot underestimate them," Chen Gong said. "We are mounting a stiff defense of this pass. You should advise the general to focus on protecting Xiaopei. That's the best plan."

Chen Deng said ok, sure. But that night, he went to the top of the walls and saw that Cao Cao's army had advanced all the way to the foot of the pass. He wrote three copies of a letter, tied each to the stem of an arrow, and under the cover of night, fired the arrows into Cao Cao's camp.

The next day, Chen Deng took his leave of Cheng Gong and hurried back to see Lu Bu. He told Lu Bu, "The Mount Tai rebels are talking about surrendering the pass to Cao Cao. I have left Chen Gong to hold down the fort. General, you should attack at dusk to relieve him."

"If not for you, good sir, this pass would be lost," Lu Bu said. So he ordered Chen Deng to hurry back to the pass first to tell Chen Gong the plan and that they were to start a fire as the signal for Lu Bu to attack.

Well, Chen Deng did go back to see Chen Gong, but he brought him a different message. "Cao Cao's forces have already found a way around the pass," Chen Deng said. "The general is concerned about the safety of Xu Province, so he's asking you all to return at once."

So Chen Gong immediately abandoned the pass and led his forces back toward Xu Province. After they left, though, Chen Deng started a fire at the pass. Lu Bu, seeing the signal to attack, led his men

in under the cover of night, and of course, they ran smack dab into Chen Gong's forces heading the other way, and the two sides, each thinking the other was the enemy, got tangled up in a fight.

Somebody else saw the fire, too -- Cao Cao's forces. And for them, that was the signal to rush in and attack the pass. The Mount Tai rebels defending the pass scattered, and the pass belonged to Cao Cao.

Meanwhile, Lu Bu and Chen Gong's armies were in the dark until the darkness lifted. They fought each other until dawn, when finally, they realized, "Wait a second, you look familiar, oh crap." So they hurried back to Xu Province. But when they went to the foot of the city and called for the gate to be opened, they were greeted with a shower of arrows. Mi (2) Zhu (2), Liu Bei's adviser who had been moved with Liu Bei's family to the city when Lu Bu sacked Xiaopei, now stood at the top of the walls and shouted, "You took my master's city, and now it is back with its rightful owner. You will not enter this city again!"

"Where is Chen Gui?" an angry Lu Bu asked.

"I've already killed him," Mi Zhu answered, though of course he didn't kill Chen Gui since Chen Gui was in on the whole thing with him.

Lu Bu turned and asked Chen Gong, "Where is Chen Deng?"

"General, you still haven't figured it out? Why do you still ask where that traitor is?" was Chen Gong's reply.

Lu Bu searched his entire army, but Chen Deng was nowhere to be found. Chen Gong now advised him to quickly turn toward Xiaopei, which was garrisoned by his generals Gao Shun and Zhang Liao. Lu Bu agreed. But halfway to Xiaopei, they saw an army approach. At the head of the army were Gao Shun and Zhang Liao. So, uhhhh, what the heck are you guys doing here?

"Chen Deng came to us and said that you were surrounded and had ordered us to come help you," Gao Shun and Zhang Liao answered.

“This must be another of that traitor’s tricks,” Chen Gong said.

“I am going to kill that traitor!” Lu Bu said. They hurried back to Xiaopei, but by now, the city walls were lined with Cao Cao’s banners, as Cao Ren had used the opportunity to sack the city. So yeah, Chen Deng really did a number on Lu Bu. Lu Bu stood at the foot of the city and cursed Chen Deng, but Chen Deng stood atop the city wall and cursed back, “I am a servant of the Han. How could I ever serve a rebel like you?!”

Lu Bu was red in the face and shooting steam out of his ears by now, and he was just about to lay siege to Xiaopei. But suddenly, he heard loud roars coming from behind. An army had arrived, and at its head was Zhang Fei. Gao Shun rode out to fight him, but was no match. Lu Bu then went out to fight Zhang Fei himself. In the midst of their duel, another wave of loud cries rose up. This was Cao Cao arriving with his main force. Lu Bu figured he was not going to be able to withstand this attack, so he led his army to the east, with Cao Cao hot on his tail.

Just as Lu Bu’s men were nearing exhaustion, another army stormed out and blocked their path. The general at the front shouted, “Lu Bu, stop! Guan Yu is here!” Lu Bu went up to fight Guan Yu, but then Zhang Fei caught up from behind, and Lu Bu lost heart, so he and Chen Gong fought their way out and fled to Xiapi (4,1), their fallback position.

Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, now reunited, wept and related to each other what they’ve been up to since they were separated after their defeat outside Xiaopei. Turns out Guan Yu had camped out on one of the nearby roads and had been sending out scouts to check on the situation. When he heard the news of the offensive at Xiaopei, he hurried over. Zhang Fei, meanwhile, had been holed up on Mount Mangdang (2,4).

After they traded stories, they went together to meet up with big brother Liu Bei, and the two of them prostrated on the ground before him in tears. Liu Bei was overcome with joy and sadness, and

he led them in to see Cao Cao and then they all followed Cao Cao to Xu Province. There Mi Zhu greeted them and informed Liu Bei that his family was ok.

Chen Gui and Chen Deng then came to pay their respects to Cao Cao, and Cao Cao threw a huge feast to reward all his officers. Cao Cao rewarded Chen Gui and Chen Deng handsomely, with the income from 10 counties and a generalship for Chen Deng. After this celebration, Cao Cao got back to business and started preparing for an offensive on Xiapi to finish the job.

“Right now, Lu Bu only has Xiapi left,” his adviser Cheng (2) Yu (4) said. “If we push him too hard, he will get desperate and go seek refuge with Yuan Shu. If those two join up, they will be hard to attack. We should send a capable man to guard the road to Huainan (2,2) to keep both Lu Bu and Yuan Shu at bay. Also, Lu Bu still has Zang (1) Ba (4) and the Mount Tai rebels in the Shandong region, and we must not forget to be on guard against them.”

“In that case, I will personally handle Shandong, and I will ask Liu Bei to watch the road to Huainan (2,2),” Cao Cao said.

“I will obey your excellency’s orders,” Liu Bei said.

The next day, Liu Bei left Mi Zhu and Jian (3) Yong (1) at Xu Province, while he led Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and Sun Qian to go guard the road to Huainan. Cao Cao, meanwhile, led his army to attack Xiapi.

So things were looking pretty dire for Lu Bu, but inside Xiapi, he wasn’t particularly worried. Thinking that he had ample provisions to hold out, plus the geographic advantage of the Si (4) River that stands between the city and Cao Cao’s forces, Lu Bu figured he could hole up safely.

“Cao Cao’s army has just arrived,” Chen Gong said to him. “If we attack now, before they get their camp set up, we will no doubt prevail.”

“I have suffered a string of losses recently; I cannot give battle lightly,” Lu Bu said. “I will wait till they start laying siege and then attack, and that will drive them back into the river.”

So he ignored Chen Gong's advice. A few days passed, and Cao Cao's army had set up camp. Cao Cao now led his officers to the foot of the city and shouted that he wanted to talk to Lu Bu. Lu Bu went to the top of the city wall to hear what he had to say.

"General," Cao Cao said, "I have heard that you were thinking about accepting Yuan Shu's marriage alliance proposal again, so I've led my army here. Yuan Shu bears the crime of treason, while you, sir, have the merit of eliminating Dong Zhuo. Why do you abandon your previous service to join up with a traitor? When your city falls, it will be too late for regrets! Surrender now and help serve the royal house, and you will be assured of a great rank."

Upon hearing this, Lu Bu said, "Prime minister, why don't you go back to your camp and let me think it over."

But Chen Gong, who was standing next to Lu Bu, did not need to think anything over. He started cursing Cao Cao and calling him a traitor. He then fired an arrow at Cao Cao, which struck the parasol over Cao Cao's head. This pretty much nixed any chance for a peaceful settlement, as Cao Cao pointed at Chen Gong and declared, "I swear I will kill you!" He then ordered his men to begin a siege of the city.

Inside the city, Chen Gong told Lu Bu, "Cao Cao has come a long way, and he cannot keep this up for long. You should lead a detachment of men and set up camp outside the city, while I lead the other officers and defend the city. If Cao Cao attacks you, then we will attack his rear. If he attacks the city, then you can attack him and lift the siege. Cao Cao's provisions will run out soon, and then we can defeat him in one fell swoop."

Lu Bu thought this was a great idea and so he went home to pack his stuff. It was winter, so he told his men to pack heavier coats. His wife, Lady Yan (2), heard this and asked him where he was going. When Lu Bu told her about Chen Gong's plan, she said,

“You are going to leave the whole city and your wife and child to venture out with a single army? If something goes wrong, I will no longer be yours.”

Well, this gave Lu Bu second thoughts, and he went back and forth for three days. Chen Gong was impatient by now, so he went to see what’s going on.

“Cao Cao is surrounding the city,” Chen Gong said. “If you don’t go out now, we will be trapped.”

“I’ve been giving it more thought,” Lu Bu said. “It seems to me that staying in and defending the city might be the better approach.”

“I’ve recently got word that Cao Cao is running low on provisions and has had to send men back to Xuchang to fetch more, and the supplies will arrive soon,” Chen Gong said. “You could lead some crack troops and intercept the shipment.”

Lu Bu thought that’s a good idea, so he went back inside his residence and talked to his wife about it. But then she turned on the waterworks.

“If you leave, general, how can Chen Gong and Gao Shun hold this city?” she wept. “If something goes wrong, it’ll be too late for regrets. When we were in Changan, you abandoned me once. Thankfully someone hid and protected me and we were able to reunite. Who knew that you would abandon me again? Fine. General, your future is bright. Please do not let me hold you down.”

At this, she started bawling. This made Lu Bu very unhappy and conflicted. He went to talk to Diao Chan about it, and Diao Chan said, “General, you must think of me. Do not leave lightly.”

“Do not worry,” Lu Bu said. “I have my halberd and my Red Hare horse. Who would dare to even come near me?”

He then went back out and said to Chen Gong, “This business with Cao Cao’s provisions might be a trick. I don’t want to move rashly.”

Chen Gong could do little but leave. As he walked out, he sighed, "We are all done for!" For his part, Lu Bu just stayed cooped up in his home every day, drinking with Lady Yan (2) and Diao Chan to drown his problems in booze.

But he couldn't just sit around and do nothing. Two of his other advisers suggested that he ask Yuan Shu for help. So Lu Bu wrote a letter, sent these advisers as his messengers, and ordered the generals Zhang Liao and Hao (3) Meng (2) to lead a thousand men and open a path through Cao Cao's army so the messengers can get through. Around 9 o'clock that night, the group set off, with Zhang Liao in front, the advisers in the middle, and Hao (3) Meng (2) bringing up the rear. They skirted through a corner of Liu Bei's camp, and managed to get out. They then split up, with Hao (3) Meng (2) leading 500 men to escort the messengers to see Yuan Shu, while Zhang Liao led the rest and returned to the city. When Zhang Liao turned around, Guan Yu was blocking his path, but before they could exchange blows, Gao Shun had led a force out to help Zhang Liao get back into the city.

When Lu Bu's messengers got to Huainan (2,2), Yuan Shu told them, "Lu Bu had previously killed my messenger and broken his agreement to our marriage alliance. Why is he asking about that again?"

"Your majesty, what happened before was due to Cao Cao's deception," the messengers said.

"[Scoff] If your master wasn't under siege by Cao Cao, would he even be thinking about this?"

Yuan Shu scoffed.

"If your majesty does not come to our master's rescue now and he falls, you will be vulnerable as well," Lu Bu's messengers replied.

"Lu Bu is not one to keep his word," Yuan Shu said. "Tell him to deliver his daughter here first, and then I will mobilize my forces to help him."

So Lu Bu's envoys had no choice but to go back. When they arrived on the outskirts of the city, they decided to wait till night before trying to break through Liu Bei's camp, with the envoys going first and Hao (3) Meng (2) bring up the rear. Well, the envoys got through, but Hao (3) Meng (2) was cut off by Zhang Fei, and after just bout, Zhang Fei captured him alive, and the 500 soldiers they had were all scattered.

Zhang Fei brought Hao (3) Meng (2) to see Liu Bei, who immediately took him to see Cao Cao. Hao Meng told Cao Cao that Lu Bu was asking Yuan Shu for help. Cao Cao immediately had Hao Meng executed and then sent word to all the camps that everyone must be on guard, and that if anyone lets Lu Bu or anyone else from the city slip through, they would be punished according to military law. This got everybody's attention.

When Liu Bei returned to his camp and relayed Cao Cao's orders to his brothers, Zhang Fei was not amused.

"I captured an enemy officer, but instead of a reward, we just get this. What? Is Cao Cao trying to scare us?"

"You're in error, brother," Liu Bei said. "Cao Cao is commanding a large army. If his orders are not strict, then who would follow them? Just be sure we don't run afoul of them."

Inside Xiapi (4,1), Lu Bu's advisers told him what Yuan Shu said, and Lu Bu asked how he could send his daughter to Yuan Shu when there's siege going on outside.

"Now that Hao (3) Meng (2) has been captured, Cao Cao no doubt knows our plan and will be on guard," his advisers said. "You must personally escort her; no one else can break through that siege."

So they decided to do this the next day. Lu Bu ordered Zhang Liao and Gao Shun to take 3,000 men and prepare a small carriage and follow him. Once they break through, he would let them escort his daughter to Yuan Shu. The next night, around 9 p.m., Lu Bu wrapped his daughter in silk fabric and

then covered her in a layer of armor and tied her to his back like a bundle. He then hopped on his horse, grabbed his halberd, opened up the gate and went out with Zhang Liao and Gao Shun.

Once again, they made for Liu Bei's camp, since that sits directly on the road to Huainan. But this time, Liu Bei was ready. At the sound of a drum, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei blocked the path, shouting for Lu Bu to stop. Lu Bu had no desire for battle, so he just tried to storm through. But Liu Bei led another force onto the scene, and the two sides engaged in a melee. Since Lu Bu was carrying his daughter on his back, he did not dare to dash into the thick of the action lest she be injured. By now, two of Cao Cao's generals, Xu (2) Huang (3) and Xu (2) Chu (3), also arrived with reinforcements, and everyone on Cao Cao's side was shouting, "Don't let Lu Bu get away!"

In the face of this wall of enemies, Lu Bu decided to fall back into the city. Cao Cao and Liu Bei's armies returned to their respective camps, and not a single man from Xiapi (4,1) had gotten through. Inside the city, Lu Bu once again tried to wash his troubles with alcohol.

This stalemate went on for two months. Lu Bu could not break the siege, but Cao Cao could not sack the city. Suddenly, Cao Cao got word that Zhang (1) Yang (2), the governor of Henei (2,4) Prefecture, had mobilized his forces to come to rescue Lu Bu. But along the way, he was assassinated by a lieutenant who was going to bring his head to Cao Cao. But then this lieutenant was then killed by another officer who was loyal to Zhang Yang, and now that officer has led the army to Xuancheng (3,2). Cao Cao immediately dispatched a force to go chase down that rogue army, and then he gathered his advisers and officers.

"It's fortunate that Zhang Yang (2) doomed himself, but there are still Yuan Shao, Liu Biao, and Zhang Xiu to worry about," he said. "We have not been able to sack Xiapi. I'm thinking about returning to Xuchang to give the army a rest. What do you think?"

“You cannot,” Xun Yu quickly objected. “Lu Bu has suffered a string of defeats and his fighting spirit has been sapped. An army draws its spirit from its commander. If the commander is weak, then the army has no desire to fight. And although Chen Gong is smart, it’s too little too late. Right now, if you attack quickly, before Lu Bu recovers and before Chen Gong can come up with another idea, we can capture him.”

Guo Jia chimed in: “I have an idea that can immediately sack Xiapi and is better than having 200,000 troops.”

“Are you thinking of redirecting the water from the Yi (4) and Si (4) Rivers?” Xun Yu asked.

“Exactly!”

Cao Cao was delighted by this suggestion and immediately ordered his men to redirect the flow of the two rivers to flood the city. Cao Cao’s army took up position on the high ground and watched as the water poured into Xiapi. Only the east gate remained dry, while all the other gates were flooded.

When Lu Bu’s men reported this calamity to him, however, he was unfazed. “I have the Red Hare horse, which can traverse water like dry land. What do I have to worry about?” he said. So he went back to binge-drinking with his wives.

But Lu Bu has been binge-drinking for most of two months now, and that kind of bender will catch up with you eventually, and it started to show. One day, he looked in a mirror and was taken aback by his appearance.

“All this drinking has done me harm,” he said. “I will stop starting today.” So he sent out an order that anyone in the city caught drinking from that day forth would be executed.

Well, prohibition was about as popular back then as it was in 1920s America, and it didn’t take long for the ban to stir up trouble. One of Lu Bu’s officers, Hou (2) Cheng (2), had 50 horses stolen

from him by a stable hand who was going to offer them to Liu Bei. But Hou Cheng found out about it, caught up and killed the guy, and recovered his horses. He wanted to celebrate a little bit with the other officers, so he had brewed a few jugs of fine wine for this party. But then came Lu Bu's ban on drinking. Fearful of punishment, but not so fearful that he would call off the party, Hou Cheng brought five bottles of his concoction to Lu Bu, along with a note that said, "Thanks to you, general, I have recovered a herd of stolen horses. The other officers came to congratulate me, and I brewed some wine for the occasion. But we dare not drink without offering some to you first as a token of our respect."

If Hou Cheng thought this little gesture would get him an exception, he was dead wrong. Lu Bu flew into a rage when he saw this.

"I just banned drinking, and yet you dare to brew wine and throw a party?! Are you people plotting against me?!"

So he ordered the guards to take Hou Cheng outside and execute him. The other officers quickly went in to beg for his life, and Lu Bu relented.

"You should be executed for violating my order," he told Hou Cheng. "For the sake of the other officers, I will spare your life and just give you a hundred strokes."

The other officers begged a little more, and Lu Bu relented again and only gave Hou Cheng 50 strokes on his back. All the officers, who had been gearing up for a party, ended up going away disheartened. Two of them, Song (4) Xian (4) and Wei (4) Xu (4), went to check on Hou Cheng at his home, and Hou Cheng wept and said, "If not for you, I would be dead."

"Lu Bu only cares about his wives. We're but weeds to him," Song Xian said.

"Our city is surrounded by the enemy and the water at our feet is rising," Wei Xu said. "We're done for."

"Lu Bu is without kindness or honor," Song Xian said. "Why don't we abandon him and leave?"

“That’s not the act of real men,” Wei Xu said. “Why don’t we capture him and present him to Cao Cao?”

So apparently leaving your master is not the act of a real man, but betraying your master is. So the three of them got down to planning how to betray Lu Bu into the hands of Cao Cao.

“What makes Lu Bu fearsome is his Red Hare horse,” Hou Cheng said. “If you two really want to surrender the city and capture Lu Bu, then I will steal his horse first and go see the prime minister.”

So it was settled. That night, Hou Cheng sneaked into the stable, stole Red Hare, and galloped toward the east gate. Wei Xu opened the gate for him, and then pretended to give chase. Hou Cheng arrived at Cao Cao’s camp, offered up the horse, and told him that Song Xian and Wei Xu were prepared to surrender the city and that he should watch for the white flag as the signal.

When Cao Cao heard this, he ordered his men to tie dozens of copies of an announcement to arrows and fire them into the city. The announcement read:

“Regent-general Cao Cao is on an expedition against Lu Bu at the behest of an imperial decree. If anyone resists his army, when the city falls, their whole family will be killed. Anyone, whether they be officers or commoners, who can capture Lu Bu, or can offer up his head, will receive rank and reward. It is for this reason that we have distributed this announcement, so that you may all be aware.”

The next morning, just after dawn, roars rose up outside the city, loud enough to shake the ground. Lu Bu was surprised and hurriedly went to the top of the city walls to oversee the defenses. He scolded Wei Xu for letting Hou Cheng escape with Red Hare and was about to punish him. But Cao Cao’s forces began to throw everything they had at the city when they saw the flag at the top of the wall, and Lu Bu had no choice but to drop the matter for the moment and personally oversee the defensive effort.

The siege went on from dawn till midday before Cao Cao's forces temporarily backed off. Lu Bu was exhausted by this point, so he sat down in a chair for a breather, and before he knew it, he had dozed off. This was all the opportunity the traitors needed. Song Xian first chased off the few guards in the vicinity and took away Lu Bu's halberd. He and Wei Xu then bound Lu Bu tightly with a rope. Lu Bu startled from his dream and called for help, but Song Xian and Wei Xu beat off anyone who tried to come to his rescue.

The two then started waving the white flag, and Cao Cao's army advanced to the foot of the wall. At the top of the wall, Wei Xu shouted, "We have captured Lu Bu alive!"

But Xiahou Yuan, the general leading the siege forces, wasn't convinced. So Song Xian threw Lu Bu's halberd down from the walls as proof. He then opened the gates to the city, and Cao Cao's forces flooded in. Gao Shun and Zhang Liao, who were defending the west gate, were trapped by the flood and eventually captured alive. Chen Gong tried to flee toward the south gate but was captured by Xu (2) Huang (3).

So the battle at Xiapi has concluded with a complete victory for Cao Cao. To see what will happen to Lu Bu and company, tune in next time on the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.