

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 51.

Last time, Cao Cao and his huge army were on the move toward Jing Province. Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang managed to scorch his vanguard, but with his numerical advantage, Cao Cao just shrugged off this bloody nose and kept marching, so Liu Bei took a bunch of civilians with him and fled.

While that was happening, Liu Cong (2), the younger son of the now deceased Liu Biao, surrendered to Cao Cao and handed him Jing Province. Cao Cao summoned Liu Cong for a meeting, but Liu Cong was too afraid to go, and one of his officers, Wang (2) Wei (1), advised Liu Cong to launch surprise attack on Cao Cao instead.

Liu Cong, however, told his uncle Cai Mao what Wang Wei had said, and Cai Mao, who had been pushing for Liu Cong to surrender, was not about to put up with this.

“How dare you go against heaven’s will and speak such nonsense?!” he chided Wang Wei (1) angrily.

“You traitor! I wish I could eat your flesh!” Wang Wei retorted equally angrily.

Cai Mao was irate and wanted to kill Wang Wei, but the adviser Kuai (3) Yue (4) played peacemaker and reminded Cai Mao that he had to go see Cao Cao. So Cai Mao and his fellow officer Zhang Yun (3) went to see Cao Cao at the city of Fancheng (2,2), which laid across the river from Xiangyang (1,2), where Liu Cong was holed up. There, Cai Mao and Zhang Yun (3) met Cao Cao and launched into hyper-suck-up mode to get on his good side.

“How much troops and provisions does Jing Province possess?” Cao Cao asked them.

“50,000 cavalry, 150,000 infantry, 80,000 navy, for a total of 280,000,” the two sycophants answered. “Most of the money and provisions are stored at Jiangling (1,2), the rest are spread out. It’s enough to last a year.”

“How many warships do you have? Who is in charge of them?” Cao Cao asked.

“We have more than 7,000 warships, large and small,” Cai Mao answered. “We two oversee them.”

Satisfied with their answers, Cao Cao now heaped a couple marquiships on Cai Mao and Zhang Yun. He also named Cai Mao superintendent of his navy and made Zhang Yun the assistant superintendent. This made them very happy, and they bowed to thank Cao Cao.

“Liu Biao is dead, and since his son has submitted, I shall write a memorial to the emperor and recommend that he remain the master of Jing Province for the rest of his life,” Cao Cao told them. Hearing this, Cai Mao and Zhang Yun were delighted and took their leave to relay the news back to Liu Cong.

After the two left, one of Cao Cao’s advisers, Xun (2) You (1), asked Cao Cao, “Cai Mao and Zhang Yun are sycophants. Why does your excellency bestow such honors upon them and put them in charge of your navy?”

“How can I not recognize what kind of men they are?” Cao Cao laughed. “But my soldiers are from the North and are not adept at naval warfare. That is why I’m making use of these two for now. After we win, I will deal with them.”

Meanwhile, Cai Mao and Zhang Yun returned to Xiangyang and told Liu Cong that Cao Cao had guaranteed that he would be the master of Jing Province for life. Liu Cong was delighted to hear this, so the next day, he and his mother, Lady Cai, crossed the river with the seal of office and the tally of command to go welcome Cao Cao. Cao Cao gave the young man some words of comfort and assurance, and then ordered his army to garrison outside Xiangyang. Cai Mao and Zhang Yun rolled out the red carpet for their new master. They ordered all the civilians in the city to line the streets and burn incense to welcome Cao Cao, and of course Cao Cao greeted them all with kind words.

After Cao Cao settled into his seat at the city's hall of administration, he asked Liu Cong's adviser Kuai (3) Yue (4) to come forward and said to him, "I am more delighted about obtaining your services than obtaining Jing Province." He then appointed Kuai Yue as governor of Jiangling (1,2) and gave him a marquiship. In fact, marquiships were handed out left and right to most of Liu Cong's staff of advisers, which, of course, was meant to buy their loyalties.

Now, as for Liu Cong, Cao Cao had something special in store for him. He appointed Liu Cong as the imperial protector of Qing (1) Province. That's Qing (1) Province, one of the Northern provinces, not Jing (1) Province. But ... umm ... what happened to the whole "I'll let you reign over your home province forever" promise?

Liu Cong was wondering that too, because when he heard Cao Cao's orders that he was to set out at once for his new post, he prostrated and said, "I would rather give up my office and just remain in my homeland."

"Qing (1) Province is closer to the capital, so that you may serve as an official at court," Cao Cao said. "If you stay here, you would be in harm's way."

Well, Liu Cong knew Cao Cao was probably not doing this for his interest, and he tried time and again to beg off the assignment. But Cao Cao refused to allow it, and Liu Cong had no choice but to set out with his mother. They were accompanied only by the officer Wang (2) Wei (1), the one who had remained loyal to Liu Cong while most everyone else was busy ingratiating themselves with Cao Cao. The rest of Liu Cong's former officials saw them off at the river cross.

And won't you know it. As soon as Liu Cong and his mother had gone off, Cao Cao summoned his officer Yu (1) Jin (4) and told him, "Lead some light cavalry and chase down Liu Cong. Kill him and his mother so as to eliminate any future concerns."

Yu Jin went as he was ordered and soon caught up to Liu Cong.

“By his excellency’s command, I am here to kill you and your mother! Offer up your heads now!”

Yu Jin shouted.

When she heard this, Lady Cai pulled Liu Cong into her arms and wailed. Yu Jin was unmoved and ordered his men to kill them. Wang Wei put up a dogged fight to defend his master, but he was just one man after all, and in the end, he was overwhelmed and cut down. The soldiers then dispatched Liu Cong and his mother. When Yu Jin reported back to Cao Cao, he was rewarded handsomely.

That little nasty bit of business concluded, Cao Cao then sent out men to search for Zhuge Liang’s family so as to exact a little revenge on the man who twice scorched his troops. But there were no sign of them. As it turned out, Zhuge Liang was a step ahead and had already moved his family into hiding far away, much to Cao Cao’s dismay.

Still, despite this little disappointment, the campaign was going pretty well for Cao Cao so far. He had control of Xiangyang, one of the key cities of Jing Province, without having to fight for it. And he has already disposed of the former master of the province.

But there was still the little issue of Liu Bei remaining at large and on the run. He was heading toward Jiangling (1,2), a key strategic location with ample money and grain. So of course Cao Cao was not about to let him get there. Cao Cao ordered that one of the newly surrendered officers from Xiangyang should lead the way for his army as they pursued Liu Bei.

At that moment, all of the Jing Province officers were present except for the general Wen (2) Pin (4). So Cao Cao sent someone to look for him. Only then did Wen (2) Pin (4) come to see him.

“Why have you come so late?” Cao Cao asked him.

“As a servant, I could not help my master protect his territory,” Wen Pin replied. “The thought of this fills me with sadness and shame. If anything, I have come too early.” He then started to weep.

“What a loyal official!” Cao Cao said. He then named Wen (2) Pin (4) the governor of Jiangxia (1,4) and bestowed upon him, you guessed it, a marquiship. He then ordered Wen Pin to lead the way for the army.

Just then, scouts reported that Liu Bei and his flock of civilians were traveling only a few miles a day and were only about a hundred miles away. Cao Cao immediately ordered 5,000 crack light cavalry to press ahead, with orders to chase down Liu Bei within a day, while the main army followed.

As for Liu Bei, he was traveling with a meager 3,000 troops but over 100,000 civilians, trudging along toward Jiangling (1,2). The general Zhao Yun was protecting Liu Bei’s family, while Zhang Fei was bringing up the rear of this huge traveling party. Remember that Zhuge Liang had previously sent Guan Yu on ahead to the city of Jiangxia (1,4) to ask Liu Biao’s elder son, Liu Qi (2), to come rendezvous with them at Jiangling. But they have not heard any news from Guan Yu since he left, and Zhuge Liang was getting a little concerned.

“May we trouble you to go to Jiangxia yourself?” Liu Bei said to Zhuge Liang. “Liu Qi is indebted to you for giving him life-saving advice before. If you go to see him, he would surely come.”

Zhuce Liang agreed and went on ahead with Liu Bei’s adopted son, Liu Feng (1), and 500 soldiers.

Later that day, while Liu Bei was traveling with a few of his advisers, a raging wind suddenly kicked up, sweeping dirt toward the sky and blocking out the sun. Liu Bei was alarmed and asked what this omen meant. One of his advisers, Jian (3) Yong (1), was skilled at divination. He took the auspices and was alarmed.

“This is a sign of grave misfortune, tonight!” he said. “My lord, you must leave the civilians behind and go on ahead.”

“They have followed me from Xinye all the way here, how can I bear to abandon them?” Liu Bei said.

“If you do not abandon them, calamity will not be far behind,” Jian Yong pressed.

Still, Liu Bei was unmoved. He asked what laid ahead, and his attendants told him that it was Dangyang (1,2) County, which sat next to Mount Jing (3). So he ordered the traveling party to set up camp on that mountain that night. It was the end of autumn, and that night, a bone-piercingly cold wind blew through the masses that followed Liu Bei around dusk. The sounds of people crying could be heard everywhere.

That night, around 1 am., the sounds of crying were suddenly drowned out by roars coming from the northwest, loud enough to shake the ground. Liu Bei hurriedly mounted his horse and led his detachment of 2,000-some soldiers to face the enemy. But this was the 5,000 crack cavalry that Cao Cao had sent, and they were unstoppable as they poured into the mass of humanity that surrounded Liu Bei. Liu Bei was fighting for his life. Just then, Zhang Fei and his troops arrived, and they carved out a bloody path and protected Liu Bei as they fled toward the northeast, fending off enemies as they ran.

They ran and ran and ran, until dawn had cracked and the cries of battle gradually faded into the distance behind them. Only then did Liu Bei pull up his horse. By now, he only had about a hundred riders with him, including Zhang Fei. Everyone else -- the civilians, his advisers, his family, and Zhao Yun, who was protecting his family -- were nowhere in sight.

Seeing this pitiful state of affairs, Liu Bei wailed.

“A hundred thousand-some lives have met with such calamity because of me! And I don’t even know the fate of my officers and my family! Even if I were made of wood, I would be heartbroken!”

Just then, he saw his adviser and brother-in-law Mi (2) Fang (1) stumbling toward him, with several arrows stuck in his face.

“Zhao Yun has turned on us and defected to Cao Cao!” Mi Fang shouted as he approached.

“Zhao Yun is my old friend. He would never betray me!” Liu Bei chided him.

But Zhang Fei was not so sure.

“He must have seen that we are in dire straits and decided to defect to Cao Cao for wealth and rank!” he said.

“No! Zhao Yun has been with me through thick and thin,” Liu Bei said. “He has a will of iron, and he cannot be moved by wealth or rank.”

“But I saw him heading toward the northwest with my own eyes!” Mi Fang said.

“Let me go look for him myself!” Zhang Fei said. “If I find him, I will run him through with my spear!”

“Do not be fooled by mistrust!” Liu Bei said. “Do you not remember how your brother Guan Yu once slayed Yan Liang and Wen Chou while serving Cao Cao? Zhao Yun must have gone off for a good reason. I doubt he would abandon me.”

Still, Zhang Fei would not listen and went off with 20-some riders. When they arrived at Changban (2,3) Bridge, he noticed a stretch of woods to the east. And to his credit, Zhang Fei suddenly had a brilliant idea. He ordered his riders to cut down some branches, tie them to their horses' tails, and ride back and forth within those woods. This kicked up a lot of dust, which, from a distance, looked like a large army. With this decoy in place, Zhang Fei parked his horse on the bridge, sat on top of it with spear in hand, looked to the west and waited.

So what did become of Zhao Yun? Just as Liu Bei guessed, he was no turncoat. When Cao Cao's light cavalry first swept in, he was enveloped in the melee, and he kept fighting until dawn. By then, he had been separated from Liu Bei, as well as Liu Bei's family, which he was supposed to protect.

"His lordship entrusted me with the lives of Lady Gan (1), Lady Mi (2), and his young son A (1) Dou (3)," Zhao Yun thought to himself. "But now I've lost track of them in the chaos. How can I face his lordship? I might as well fight to the death and try to find his family!"

When he looked around, he only had 30-some riders with him, but what the hell. Let's do this thing anyway. So Zhao Yun rode around amid the chaos looking for Liu Bei's family. Everywhere he heard the wails of the civilians, loud enough to make the heaven and earth tremble. And everywhere he saw countless wounded civilians leaving their loved ones behind as they fled.

As he was wading through this madness, he suddenly spotted the adviser Jian (3) Yong (1) lying in a patch of grass.

"Have you seen the two ladies?" Zhao Yun asked him.

"They abandoned their carriage and were fleeing on foot while carrying the young master," Jian Yong replied. "I tried to catch up on horseback, but when I went around a hill, an enemy officer stabbed me off my horse. My horse was stolen, and since I am unable to fight, I've been lying here."

Zhao Yun ordered one of his men to give a horse to Jian Yong and then sent two soldiers to escort him to go meet up with Liu Bei.

"Tell his lordship," Zhao Yun said, "That I will find the ladies and the young master, even if I have to go to the ends of the earth. If I cannot find them, then I shall die on the battlefield." He then galloped off toward Changban (2,3) Hill.

Just as he was traveling, he suddenly heard someone cry out to him. He held up and asked the man who he was. Turns out this guy was one of the soldiers escorting the two ladies' carriage. He had

been wounded by an arrow and was just lying on the side of the road. When Zhao Yun asked him if he knew the two ladies' whereabouts, he answered, "I just saw Lady Gan (1), with her hair hanging loose and her feet bare. She was heading south with a group of civilians."

When he heard this, Zhao Yun could not even tend to the wounded man and instead sped off toward the south. Sure enough, he saw a group of a few hundred civilians scrambling for safety.

"Is Lady Gan among you?!" Zhao Yun shouted.

Indeed she was. Lady Gan was running in the rear of the group, and as soon as she saw Zhao Yun, she began to cry aloud. Zhao Yun dismounted, stuck his spear in the ground, and wept.

"It is my fault that we were separated," he said. "Do you know where Lady Mi and the young master went?"

"We were being pursued, so we abandoned our carriage and mixed in with the civilians," Lady Gan answered. "But then another squad of soldiers set upon us and scattered the group. I've been running for my life. I don't know where Lady Gan and A (1) Dou (3) went."

Just then, the civilians began to cry out. Another squad of enemy troops had arrived on the scene. Zhao Yun grabbed his spear and hopped on his horse to go take a look. In this squad, he saw a man tied up on a horse. It was none other than Liu Bei's adviser Mi (2) Zhu (2). Behind him was an enemy officer carrying a saber and leading about a thousand men. This guy was a lieutenant under the general Cao Ren. He had just captured Mi Zhu and was on his way to report his accomplishment and receive his glory. Unfortunately for him, he ran into Zhao Yun.

Zhao Yun now let out a mighty roar and galloped toward the enemy officer. As you may have guessed, the guy I'm not even bothering to tell you the name of was no match for one of the top warriors in the novel. Zhao Yun's spear struck, and the enemy officer fell dead off his horse. Zhao Yun rescued Mi Zhu, chased off the enemy soldiers, and seized a couple horses, which he gave to Mi Zhu

and Lady Gan. He then opened a path through the enemy ranks and escorted them all the way to Changban (2,3) Bridge, where he saw Zhang Fei standing on the bridge.

“Zhao Yun, why did you betray my brother?!” Zhang Fei shouted.

“I was separated from the ladies and the young master, so I fell behind looking for them,” Zhao Yun answered. “Why do you say I have betrayed his lordship?”

“If Jian Yong had not come on ahead and told me what happened, I would have it with you now!” Zhang Fei said.

“Where is his lordship?” Zhao Yun asked.

“Not far ahead,” was Zhang Fei’s answer.

Zhao Yun turned to Mi Zhu and said, “You may escort Lady Gan and go on ahead. I will go back and search for Lady Mi and the young master.” He then rode off again with a few riders, back along the way he had come.

As Zhao Yun was riding along, he saw an enemy officer leading about a dozen riders heading his way. This officer held a spear in his hand and carried a sword on his back. Zhao Yun did not even bother exchanging words with him and instead just charged right at him. After just one bout, Zhao Yun ran the guy through with his spear, and the other riders all scattered.

As it turns out, the guy Zhao Yun just killed was Cao Cao’s sword-bearer. Cao Cao had two fine swords. One was named Heaven’s Prop, which Cao Cao wore himself. The other sword was named Black Pommel, which this guy carried around for Cao Cao. This Black Pommel sword was extremely sharp and could cut through metal as if it were mud. In the midst of this chaos, Cao Cao’s sword-bearer, thinking that he was hot stuff, snuck away behind Cao Cao’s back with a few men and was looting and pillaging. Well, he got his just deserts when he ran into Zhao Yun, and now Zhao Yun

had one of Cao Cao's prized swords, and he recognized it as such when he saw the name of the sword engraved on the blade.

Wearing the sword around his waist and hoisting his spear in his hand, Zhao Yun dashed once again unto the breach. By now, he was all alone, yet he had no intention of turning back. He kept riding to and fro, asking every civilian he came across whether they had seen Lady Mi.

Finally, one civilian pointed and said, "The lady was carrying the baby. She took a spear wound in her left leg and could not walk, so she's sitting in a crevice in a wall."

Zhao Yun headed off in that direction and came upon an abandoned house. The mud wall had been damaged by fire. Lady Mi was holding the baby A Dou, sitting by a dried-up well at the foot of the wall, and weeping. Zhao Yun hurriedly dismounted and prostrated on the ground.

"General, now that you're here, A Dou is saved!" Lady Mi said. "I hope you will take pity on the fact that his father, after a life of roaming everywhere, has nothing but this little scrap of blood and bone. Please protect this child. If he can see his father, then I would die without regret!"

"My lady, it is my crime that you have suffered so," Zhao Yun said. "There is no need to say anything. Please take my horse. I will fight to the death on foot to escort you through the enemy ranks."

"No! How can a general be without his horse?!" Lady Mi objected. "This child's life is all in your hands. I am seriously injured. It matters not if I die. You should take the baby and leave at once. Do not let me burden you."

"My lady, the cries of battle are drawing near; the enemy is upon us! Please get on the horse at once!" Zhao Yun pleaded.

"I really cannot move. Do not let me bring us all down!" Lady Mi said as she tried to hand the baby to Zhao Yun. "This child's life is all in your hands, general."

Zhao Yun pleaded time and again for Lady Mi to take his horse, but she steadfastly refused. At that moment, the enemy's cries were all around them. Zhao Yun raised his voice and said sternly,

"My lady, if you do not listen to me and the enemy gets here, what would we do then?!"

Upon hearing this, Lady Mi made it simple for Zhao Yun. She tossed the baby on the ground and threw herself into the dry well, plunging to her death. A poet later commended her noble sacrifice.

The embattled general had to have his steed;

On foot he could not save the little prince.

Her death preserved the Liu dynastic line:

For bold decision mark this heroine.

Now that Lady Mi was dead, Zhao Yun was afraid the enemy would try to recover and dishonor her body, so he knocked over the mud wall to cover up the well. This done, he loosened the strap on his armor, removed his chest plate, and corralled the baby into his bosom and secured him there. No sooner had he climbed back on his horse and grabbed his spear did an enemy officer arrive on the scene with a squad of foot soldiers. This was a lieutenant under the general Cao Hong. Wielding a two-edged, three-pronged blade, he made straight for Zhao Yun. But within three bouts, Zhao Yun's spear sent him to meet his maker, and Zhao Yun scattered the foot soldiers and carved out an escape path.

Just then, another squad of Cao Cao's troops blocked his path. This time, the guy at the front was not some no-name lieutenant. Instead, it was Zhang He (2), who used to be one of Yuan Shao's top generals before defecting to Cao Cao. Zhao Yun did not bother with words and let his spear do the talking instead. After about a dozen bouts, Zhao Yun forced his way past Zhang He and ran, since he was carrying precious cargo. As Zhang He gave chase, Zhao Yun whipped his horse hard. Suddenly,

with a loud crash, he and his horse both sank into a ditch. Zhang He was just about to stab him when suddenly a beam of red light shot up from the ditch, and Zhao Yun's horse leaped out of the ditch with its master on board.

Zhang He was so unsettled by this miracle that he fell back, which was just fine with Zhao Yun. But just as he began to flee again, two other enemy officers shouted from behind, demanding his surrender. Meanwhile, two more officers waited for him up ahead. All four of these guys used to serve Yuan Shao before defecting to Cao Cao. Zhao Yun took on all four of them and showed no sign of backing down. Just then, Cao Cao's troops swarmed in. Zhao Yun pulled out his newly acquired sword and started hacking away. Wherever he swung his blade, it sliced through armor and made blood gush like springs. Incredibly, he managed to fight off this swarm and make his way through the enemy ranks.

While this was happening, Cao Cao was watching from his perch atop Mount Jing (3). He noticed this unstoppable warrior down there, wreaking havoc among his troops. Cao Cao asked who that was, so his general Cao Hong galloped down the hillside and shouted, "Warrior, please leave your name!"

"I am Zhao Yun of Changshan (2,1)!" was the immediate reply.

When Cao Hong reported this back to Cao Cao, the latter could not help but admire Zhao Yun's valor.

"What a warrior! I must capture him alive," Cao Cao said. So he quickly sent out word to all his troops that if Zhao Yun came their way, they were not to shoot arrows at him and must instead try to capture him alive.

Well, his soldiers were probably looking at each other and thinking, "Are you kidding me? You DID see what he's been doing to everyone he comes across, right? Try to catch him alive? Yeah, no thank you." So thanks to Cao Cao's order, Zhao Yun was able to fight his way through swarms of enemy

troops. In this one battle, Zhao Yun managed to cut down two of the enemy's standards, took three spears, and killed 50-some enemy officers, all with his lord's infant son strapped to his chest.

This feat was the battle that made Zhao Yun a household name for centuries to come. This also happens to be one of my favorite parts of the book and one of the reasons that Zhao Yun is one of my top two or three favorite characters in the novel. It's such a memorable part of the novel that this is one of those scenes you look forward to every time there's a new Three Kingdoms movie or TV show. I have posted videos of several versions of this scene on the website. Go see Zhao Yun kick butt.

Obviously, a fight this memorable cannot go without its own poem in the novel:

In blood-soaked battle gown and armor bloody red,
He faced down every foe at Dangyang (1,2) town.
Of all who ever fought to keep a lord from harm,
Who could exceed Zhao Yun, hero of Changshan (2,1)?

But while Zhao Yun may have fought his way through Cao Cao's army, he and Liu Bei were still not in the clear, as Cao Cao remained hot on their tail. To see how this chase will end, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.