

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 63.

First, I want to wish everyone a happy new year. Yes, we're well into January, but the show was on its regularly scheduled break last week. So let me take this opportunity to say thank you for all your support in 2015, and here's to even greater things in 2016.

So when we left off last time, Cao Cao had retreated from the South, and both the forces of Dongwu and Liu Bei were setting their sights on his holdings in Jing Province. First up was the city of Nanjun (2,4), which was defended by Cao Ren, one of Cao Cao's most trusted generals. The problem was that there was only one Nanjun, and both Dongwu and Liu Bei wanted it. Zhou Yu, the commander of the Dongwu forces, reached an agreement with Liu Bei that Dongwu would get first crack at the city. If Dongwu could not take it, then Liu Bei was free to try.

Of course, Zhou Yu only agreed to this because he figured taking the city would be easy and that Liu Bei would never even get the chance to try. Unfortunately for Zhou Yu, it turned out to be not so easy. While he was stalled outside Nanjun, Zhou Yu got more bad news. He had sent one of his top generals, Gan Ning, to attack the nearby city of Yiling (1,2) so as to isolate Nanjun. Gan Ning took Yiling (1,2) easily enough, but then was trapped inside that city by enemy reinforcements.

When word of this reached Zhou Yu, he wanted to go rescue Gan Ning, but he was also worried about the enemy inside Nanjun taking advantage of his absence and attacking while his back was turned. At this point, one of his officers, Lü (3) Meng, boldly stepped up and ... volunteered a fellow officer for the task of holding down the fort.

"We can leave General Ling (2) Tong (3) in charge here," Lu Meng said. "Then I will serve as the vanguard of the relief force, while you, commander, follow with the main army. We will be victorious within 10 days."

“General Ling, are you willing to assume my post here?” Zhou Yu asked Ling Tong.

“For 10 days, yes. Beyond 10 days, I dare not,” Ling Tong answered.

Ling Tong didn’t exactly sound like he was brimming with confidence, but it was good enough for Zhou Yu. He left Ling Tong with about 10,000 troops to defend the camp outside Nanjun, and then set off with the main army toward Yiling (1,2).

Along the way, Lü Meng offered up another idea.

“There is a backroad to the south of Yiling (1,2) that easily connects to Nanjun,” he said. “We should send 500 soldiers there to cut down trees and block that path. When the enemy is defeated, they will surely flee in that direction. When their path is blocked by the trees, they will abandon their horses and continue on foot, and then their horses will be ours.”

Zhou Yu agreed and sent some troops to carry out this plan. When the main army arrived at Yiling, Zhou Yu tasked the general Zhou (1) Tai (4) with fighting through the ring of enemy troops around the city to deliver word to their comrades inside. Wielding his blade, Zhou Tai galloped into the fray and slashed his way to the foot of the city, where Gan Ning came out to meet him. Once Zhou Tai briefed him, Gan Ning immediately ordered his troops to pack up, eat a full meal, and prepare to storm out of the city in a coordinated attack.

On the other side of the lines, Cao Hong (2) and Niu (2) Jin (1), the generals in charge of the forces surrounding Yiling (1,2), saw that Zhou Yu had brought reinforcements, so they sent word to their commander Cao Ren in Nanjun and braced for battle.

It did not take long for the battle to commence. As soon as Zhou Yu’s reinforcements arrived on the scene, the two sides collided, and the Dongwu forces trapped inside the city also charged out. Sandwiched by the enemy, Cao Hong and company could not hold their ground and soon fled. And

just as Lü Meng had predicted, they took the backroad, where they promptly ran into the roadblock that Zhou Yu had set up, forcing them to abandon their horses. Just like that, the Dongwu troops got 500 horses virtually gift-wrapped for them.

Zhou Yu was not content to merely capture horses though. He gave chase in the direction of Nanjun until he ran smack into Cao Ren, who was leading a force to come help his comrades. The two sides slugged it out until it started to get dark, and both armies called it a day.

After retreating back inside Nanjun, Cao Ren assembled his staff to discuss what to do.

“We have lost Yiling,” Cao Hong said. “The situation is dire. Why don’t we open the secret strategy that the prime minister had left for us to see how we can get out of this?”

“My thoughts exactly,” Cao Ren said. He then opened the secret message that Cao Cao had left with him before returning to the capital. Whatever was in the message cheered him up instantly, and he sent out orders for his men to start making breakfast at 3 a.m. and that at first light, they were to abandon the city while leaving its walls lined with their banners to keep up appearances.

In the Dongwu camp outside the city, Zhou Yu had returned after rescuing Gan Ning. Around dawn, he saw enemy troops streaming out of the city through three of the four gates. Zhou Yu went up to his command perch to take a look from on high, and he noticed that the defensive walls were only lined with flags, not soldiers. He also noticed that the enemy soldiers running out of the city had bundles strapped around their waists. This suggested that Cao Ren and his men must be preparing to travel, so it looked like they’re abandoning the city for real.

So Zhou Yu deployed his forces in two detachments, one on each flank. The order was that as long as the troops in front were winning, the army was to keep advancing until it heard the gong. He put

the veteran general Cheng Pu in charge of the rear, while Zhou Yu himself led the force in front to attack the city.

When the war drums sounded, Cao Hong rode out from the enemy lines to challenge for battle. On Dongwu's side, the general Han (2) Dang (1) rode out to meet him. After they fought for 30 bouts, Cao Hong turned and fell back in defeat. At that point, Cao Ren himself came out to fight, and he was met by the general Zhou Tai (4). After a dozen bouts or so, Cao Ren also turned and ran, and his lines fell into disarray. Zhou Yu then ordered his flanks to sweep in, and they routed Cao Ren's troops.

With his army gaining the upperhand, Zhou Yu led his men and charged all the way to the foot of the city. Cao Ren and his defeated forces did not dare to enter the city with the enemy hot on their tail, so they fled toward the northwest instead. A couple of the Dongwu generals led the front column in pursuit.

As for Zhou Yu, he saw that the city gates were left wide open, with nary a soul on the city walls. Basically, the city was being handed to him on a silver platter, so he ordered his forces to storm in. Zhou Yu himself rode in right behind the first few dozen riders.

BUT ... there was a catch. Cao Ren did not actually abandon the city. There were archers hiding all around the city wall, waiting for the Dongwu troops to come in. As soon as Zhou Yu entered, a signal sounded, and arrows began to rain down on him and his men. At the same time, the first group that had stormed into the city discovered that the ground was booby-trapped as well, as they fell into some deep pits.

Zhou Yu was caught up in the ambush. As he held up his horse and tried to turn around, an arrow struck him in the left side and knocked him off his horse. Now, the troops that Cao Ren had hidden inside the city stormed out to capture him. Fortunately for Zhou Yu, a couple of his officers put up a dogged fight and managed to save him.

The rest of the Dongwu forces, however, was not so fortunate. In addition to the enemy troops from inside the city, they were now also under attack by the forces under Cao Ren and Cao Hong, which had pretended to flee in defeat but now came back on the offensive on two sides. This three-pronged attack crushed the Dongwu forces, as countless men trampled each other or fell into pits. The only thing that kept Cao Ren from overrunning them completely was the fact that the general Ling Tong arrived with some backup. Still, it was a good day for Cao Ren as he returned to Nanjun in victory. Thanks to Cao Cao's secret strategy, he had trounced the enemy and wounded their commander.

Speaking of which, after the Dongwu forces limped back to camp, the officers helped Zhou Yu back to the main tent and summoned the army surgeon to tend to him. The surgeon removed the arrow head and put ointment on the wound. However, the pain was intolerable and Zhou Yu could not eat or drink anything.

"This arrow was poisoned," the surgeon said. "It will take a long time to heal completely. If the commander gets too worked up, the wound will open up again."

With Zhou Yu laid up in bed, Cheng Pu, the second-in-command, ordered the army to keep a tight watch and not to leave camp. Three days later, Cao Ren sent his general Niu (2) Jin (1) to lead a detachment of troops to outside Dongwu's camp to challenge for combat. Cheng Pu ignored them, even though Niu Jin shouted insults from morning till dusk. The next day, Niu Jin returned, armed with a fresh slew of yo mama jokes, but Cheng Pu ignored him again and did not even let Zhou Yu know so as not to get him all worked up. On the third day, Niu Jin came back again with more insults and declared that he was there to capture Zhou Yu.

While Cheng Pu and the other officers were talking amongst themselves about how maybe they should retreat for now, Zhou Yu was of a different mind. Despite his painful wound, he was well aware that the enemy had been coming to pick a fight the last few days, and yet none of his officers reported this to him.

One day, Cao Ren personally led an army to Dongwu's camp, where they beat drums and chanted battle cries, daring Dongwu to come out to meet them. Still, Cheng Pu told the men to stand down.

At this point, though, Zhou Yu summoned his officers and asked what all the ruckus was about.

"Our troops are running drills," they told him.

"Why do you lie to me?" Zhou Yu said angrily. "I already know that Cao Ren's troops have been coming to our camp to insult us. General Cheng, since you are helping me to command the army, why have you not done anything?"

"Commander, the surgeon has said that you must not get too worked up because of your wound. That is why I have not told you about the enemy challenging us to battle," Cheng Pu answered.

"Gentlemen, if you do not want to fight, then WHAT do you intend to do?" Zhou Yu asked.

"We were thinking that we should return to the Southlands for now and wait for your injury to heal before trying again," Cheng Pu told him.

When he heard this, Zhou Yu sprang to his feet and stood up on his bed.

"A man who has been paid by his lord should rejoice at the prospect of dying on the battlefield and being carried back wrapped in the hide of his horse! How can important state matters be put aside because of me?!"

At that, Zhou Yu donned his armor and hopped on his horse, which stunned all of his officers. Zhou Yu then led a few hundred riders out of the camp. Across the way, Cao Ren's troops were already lined up in battle formation.

Sitting on a horse under his banner, Cao Ren waved his whip and cursed Zhou Yu, not knowing that Zhou Yu was heading his way.

“Zhou Yu, you baby! You must have died in your cradle, never daring to set your sight on my soldiers again!”

Before the last of these words had left Cao Ren’s lips, though, Zhou Yu rode out from among his entourage and answered, “Cao Ren you scum! Do you see Zhou Yu?!”

The sight of Zhou Yu startled Cao Ren’s troops, but Cao Ren quickly recovered and told his men to hurl insults at Zhou Yu as fast as they could and as loud as they could. They did as he commanded, and Zhou Yu was fuming. He sent the general Pan (1) Zhang (1) out to give battle, but before a single blow was exchanged, Zhou Yu suddenly let out a loud cry, spat up blood, and fell off his horse.

Seeing the enemy commander fall off his horse, Cao Ren’s troops charged forward. The Dongwu forces met them head on and the two sides scrummed. Zhou Yu’s officers managed to drag him back to his tent, and Cheng Pu went to see how he was doing. Apparently, he was not doing well, because soon loud wails could be heard from his tent, and word quickly spread through the Dongwu camp that Zhou Yu’s wound had reopened, and that he had died. The entire camp went into mourning.

Inside the city of Nanjun, Cao Ren was just talking with his staff about their next step when his men reported that a dozen or so soldiers from the Dongwu camp had come to surrender. Two of these guys used to be soldiers in Cao Cao’s army who were taken prisoner by Dongwu in previous battles. Cao Ren immediately summoned them to ask why they had come.

“Zhou Yu’s wound reopened today on the battlefield,” the defectors told him. “He died upon returning to camp. All his officers are in mourning. That Cheng Pu has often treated us with contempt, so we are defecting and reporting this news to you.”

Cao Ren could not have been happier. He and his staff immediately decided that they would raid the Dongwu camp that night, take Zhou Yu's body, cut off his head and send it to the capital, just to rub it in. The general Niu Jin was to lead the vanguard, while Cao Ren headed up the middle of the army and Cao Hong brought up the rear. They took most of their men on the raid, leaving just a token force to hold down the city.

This raiding party set out shortly after 7 o'clock that night and headed straight toward Dongwu's camp. When they arrived, however, they did not see a single person. There were only flags and spears that had been put up for appearance.

Uh oh, this doesn't look good. And indeed, it was not. Before Cao Ren's troops could turn around, explosives went off on every side, followed by Dongwu forces swarming in. Cao Ren's soldiers were routed and scattered, and the front and rear of his army could not help each other. Cao Ren himself managed to escape the swarm with a dozen riders, and they soon ran into Cao Hong, who was also running away. So they joined forces and ran away together.

They ran and ran until about 5 a.m. They were almost back to Nanjun, but suddenly, a drum sounded, and another detachment of troops stormed out. They were led by the Dongwu general Ling (2) Tong (3), and they took another chunk out of Cao Ren's troops. Cao Ren and what remained of his forces ran again. Along the way, they came across another ambush, this one led by the general Gan Ning. After this, Cao Ren did not dare to try to return to Nanjun. Instead, he turned toward the main road to the city of Xiangyang (1,2). The Dongwu troops gave chase for a while before calling it a night.

So as you may have figured out, Zhou Yu was not so dead after all. The whole blood-spitting and falling-off-his-horse spiel was just an act, and he had his men spread rumors that he had died and sent the fake defectors to lure Cao Ren into his trap. Quite satisfied at how well his scheme turned out,



Zhou Yu now led his victorious troops to Nanjun, a city that was now basically undefended and ready for the taking.

But wait! What the heck is this?! When they got to the foot of the city, they saw that the walls were now lined with banners, but they were not banners that belonged to Cao Ren or Dongwu. From the defense tower, a general called down to Zhou Yu.

“Commander, my apologies! On our director general’s command, I have already taken this city. I am Zhao Yun of Changshan (2,1).”

Well, so it seems that Zhuge Liang and Liu Bei had been watching and waiting the whole time, and when the opportunity presented itself, or should we say when Zhou Yu’s hard work had created the opportunity, they pounced and stole Nanjun right out from under him.

Not surprisingly, Zhou Yu was pretty ticked off. He ordered his men to lay siege to the city, but they were greeted with a torrent of arrows and had to fall back. So Zhou Yu decided to go back to camp to contemplate his next move.

Once back at camp, he decided that he’ll worry about Nanjun later. Right now, with the main enemy force in the region obliterated, Jing Province and the city of Xiangyang were vulnerable and ripe for the plucking. So Zhou Yu figured he would send the generals Gan Ning and Ling Tong to go take those two places. Once those cities were in hand, he could come back and put a proper siege on Nanjun.

But before his troops could set out for their new targets, a scout rushed in and brought even more aggravating news: Zhuge Liang had taken Jing Province!

Before Zhou Yu could even process this, another scout rushed in and told him that, oh yeah, Zhuge Liang had also taken Xiangyang.

So how did this happen, so quickly no less? That's what Zhou Yu was wondering, too. Well, when Zhuge Liang captured Nanjun, he also captured the tally of command that belonged to Cao Ren. This tally was basically the symbol of a commander's authority. Wherever that symbol went, the authority followed. So Zhuge Liang sent a messenger with the tally to Jing Province and told the enemy forces there that, hey, our comrades in Nanjun are under attack. Come help, quick! As soon as the troops at Jing Province set out, however, Zhuge Liang sent Zhang Fei to swoop in and sack the city.

Xiangyang, which was defended by Cao Cao's general Xiahou Dun, fell in likewise fashion. The tally of command arrived, along with an urgent plea for help. Xiahou Dun's forces set out, and Liu Bei's forces, led by Guan Yu, moved in. So both Xiangyang and Jing Province now belonged to Liu Bei, with virtually no effort at all.

When Zhou Yu heard the news, he let out a loud cry of anguish and passed out. This time, it was not a charade. His arrow wound reopened for real. When he eventually came to, his officers tried to calm him down, but Zhou Yu was like, "I AM PERFECTLY CALM!"

"If I do not kill that country bumpkin Zhuge Liang, I will never be able to quell the anger in my heart!" he declared. He then turned to Cheng Pu and said, "Help me attack Nanjun. We must take it back for Dongwu!"

Just then, though, Zhou Yu's friend Lu Su arrived.

"I was just about to mobilize our troops to settle things with Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang and retake Nanjun," Zhou Yu told him. "My friend, I am glad you are here to help me."

But Lu Su was being a total wet blanket.

"You must not," he said. "Right now we are in a faceoff against Cao Cao, and the outcome is uncertain. Our lord has not been able to sack the city of Hefei (2,2). If we start squabbling with Liu Bei, and Cao Cao takes advantage and attacks us, our situation would be dire. Besides, Liu Bei used to be

on good terms with Cao Cao. If we push him too hard, he might just surrender the city to Cao Cao and join him in attacking Dongwu. What would we do then?”

“We were the ones who devised strategy and lost troops, money, and grain for this city,” Zhou Yu said. “And yet those opportunists have stolen it from us. Is that not despicable?!”

“My friend, be patient for now,” Lu Su said. “Let me go see Liu Bei and reason with him. If I cannot convince him, then we can resort to arms.”

All the other officers chimed in in agreement, so Zhou Yu relented and sent Lu Su to go reason with Liu Bei. Lu Su and an attendant went to the foot of Nanjun and asked to be let in. Zhao Yun came out to see what he wanted. Lu Su said he was there to see Liu Bei, but Zhao Yun told him that Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang were both in Jing Province at the moment, so Lu Su headed straight there.

When he arrived at Jing Province, Lu Su noticed how orderly the flags and troops along the city walls were and could not help but silently admire Zhuge Liang. When word went into the city that Lu Su was waiting outside, the gates soon swung open, and Zhuge Liang welcomed Lu Su in. They greeted each other, sat down, and tea was served.

After these pleasantries, Lu Su got down to business.

“My lord, as well as Commander Zhou, sent me here to convey the following to the imperial uncle: Previously, when Cao Cao marched his massive army this way, although he said he was coming for the Southlands, he was really coming for the imperial uncle. Fortunately, Dongwu defeated Cao Cao and saved Lord Liu. Therefore, the territories of Jing Province should belong to Dongwu. And yet, the imperial uncle has used an underhanded move to steal these territories, causing the Southlands to lose money, grains, and troops for nothing while he reaps the benefits. How can that be justified?”

It sounds like Lu Su had a pretty good case, but Zhuge Liang did not think so.

“My friend, you are an enlightened scholar, so why do you speak such words?” Zhuge Liang said. “As the saying goes, all things eventually return to their rightful owners. Jing Province has never belonged to Dongwu. It was Liu Biao’s territory. My lord is Liu Biao’s kinsman. Even though Liu Biao is dead, his son Liu Qi is still alive. What is unjustified about an uncle helping his nephew to recapture his father’s territory?”

“Well, it’s one thing if Jing Province is really being held by Liu Qi,” Lu Su retorted. “But right now, Liu Qi is at Jiangxia, not here!”

“Do you wish to see Liu Qi?” Zhuge Liang asked. He then turned to the attendants and said, “Please ask the young master to join us.”

Momentarily, Liu Qi came out from behind a screen, propped up by two servants.

“I am too sick to welcome you properly; please forgive me,” Liu Qi said to Lu Su, weakly.

Lu Su was taken aback by what he saw, and remained speechless for a good while after Liu Qi took his leave. Eventually, though, Lu Su spoke up.

“What happens if Liu Qi is no longer around?”

“As long as the young master is around, we will help him defend Jing Province,” Zhuge Liang answered. “If that changes, then we will talk about it.”

Lu Su, though, wanted a little more than that.

“If he is not around, then the territory must be returned to Dongwu,” he pressed.

“You are quite right,” Zhuge Liang said.

With this point sort of settled, Zhuge Liang threw a banquet to welcome Lu Su. After that, Lu Su took his leave.

When Lu Su returned to camp and told Zhou Yu what happened, Zhou Yu said, "Liu Qi is still young. How can we wait for him to die? When would we ever get Jing Province back?"

"Commander, do not worry," Lu Su assured him. "I personally guarantee that I will get Jing Province back for Dongwu."

"What do you mean?"

"From what I can tell, that Liu Qi must have overindulged in wine and women. He is gravely ill. He looks frail, struggles for breath, and coughs up blood. He will be dead within half a year. Then Liu Bei will have no more excuses when we go demand the return of Jing Province."

This play-the-long-game idea was not particularly satisfying for Zhou Yu, as he was still fuming over being tricked and preferred the let-me-plunge-a-sword-into-Zhuge-Liang's-chest approach. But just then, a messenger from Sun Quan arrived.

"Our lord has been laying siege to Hefei (2,2) but has not made progress despite many battles," the messenger said. "He is ordering you, commander, to recall your army and send reinforcements to Hefei."

So Zhou Yu had no choice but to lead his army back to his base at Chaisang (2,1). He remained there to recover from his wound. In the meantime, he dispatched Cheng Pu to lead warships and troops to Hefei to help Sun Quan.

However, Zhou Yu was far from done with Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang, and those two were far from done trying to grab more land in the region. To see how this will play out, tune in the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.