

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 110.

Last time, Zhuge Liang's deft combination of military deployments and diplomatic maneuvering had brought about peace for the kingdom of Shu on its northern borders with Wei and eastern borders with Wu. But around the same time, trouble was stirring on Shu's southwestern borders. Meng Huo, the king of the Nan Man, or Southern Barbarians, had convinced the governors of three borderland districts to rebel against the authority of the Shu, and barbarian forces were staging raids in the area. The three rebellious governors were also laying siege to another district on the border, whose governor was the lone holdout.

Alerted of this crisis, Zhuge Liang went to court and told his emperor Liu Shan (4), "In my view, the recalcitrance of the Nan Man (2) tribes is a major concern for our kingdom. I shall personally command a large army to pacify them."

"But Sun Quan lurks in the East and Cao Pi looms in the North," Liu Shan said. "Minister father, if you abandon me and our rivals come to attack, what would we do?"

"Dongwu just made peace with us and so should not be harboring ill intent," Zhuge Liang said. "But even if they do, Li (3) Yan (2) is overseeing the key city of Baidi (2,4), and he is a match for the Dongwu commander Lu Xun. As for Cao Pi, he just suffered a defeat and is licking his wounds, so he is unable to mount a distant campaign. With Ma Chao defending the various passes in Hanzhong, there is no need for worry. I will also leave the generals Guan Xing and Zhang Bao to each lead an army as backup, just in case. I will first go pacify the barbarian territories and then march north to conquer the Heartlands so as to repay the kindness that the First Emperor bestowed on me when he paid me three visits and when he entrusted your highness to me."

While Zhuge Liang was talking military deployments and grand visions, Liu Shan's eyes were probably glazing over, and he just said, "I am young and ignorant. Minister father, you may proceed as you see fit."

But just then, an official stepped forth and vehemently protested. This was the court counselor Wang (2) Lian (2).

"The South is a far-off wilderness of rampant pestilence, not the kind of place for someone as important as the prime minister to go campaigning. The likes of the renegade governor Yong (1) Kai (3) are no great concern. His excellency should only send a general, and success will still be assured."

"The Southern barbarians' territory lies too far from our kingdom for the civilizing influence of our court to reach them," Zhuge Liang said. "To win their allegiance, I must first subdue them. It will take a delicate balance of lenient and harsh measures, and it's not a task that can be easily entrusted to someone else."

So try as he might, Wang Lian (2) had no luck in convincing Zhuge Liang to delegate this mission to somebody else. That very day, Zhuge Liang took his leave of Liu Shan and marched out with 500,000 men and a few dozen officers. He appointed the veterans Zhao Yun and Wei Yan as his chief generals, putting them in overall command of the army. Wang Ping (2) and Zhang Yi (4) served as their lieutenants. Jiang (2) Wan (3) was appointed Zhuge Liang's adjutant, while Fei (4) Yi (1) served as his senior officer. Dong (3) Jue (2) and Fan (2) Jian (4) were his staff officers. Now I know I'm throwing some new names at you, but in case you can't tell, the old host of familiar names that have followed us through much of the novel have been dying off, so we're going to start meeting some new faces, so I figured I should introduce them here, as you will hear these names off and on going forward.

Just as they were about to head out, Zhuge Liang received a surprise visitor: Guan Suo (4), the third son of Guan Yu. So yeah, Guan Yu had a third son. Who knew? Guan Suo came to see Zhuge Liang and

told him, "After Jing Province was lost, I fled to a hamlet and have been there recuperating from an illness. I had wanted to come see the First Emperor and seek revenge, but I had not fully recovered, so I could not travel. But recently I recovered and found out that all those who had wronged my father were dead. So I came to see the emperor. On my way, I ran into your army, so I came to pay my respects."

Touched by Guan Suo's travails -- which, as far as I can tell, involved lying in bed while lying low for the last few years -- Zhuge Liang sent a messenger back to the capital Chengdu to relay his account to the emperor. He then appointed Guan Suo to head up the vanguard of his southern expedition army. The troops marched south in an organized fashion and without incident, which was a feat in itself in this era of constant warfare wreaking havoc on the local populations.

Word of this army's progress soon reached the three renegade governors -- Yong (1) Kai (3), Zhu (1) Bao (1), and Gao (1) Ding (4). They split their forces into three battalions, each consisting of about 60,000 men, to go meet the enemy. Gao Ding headed up the battalion in the center, while Yong (1) Kai (3) led the left and Zhu Bao (1) the right. Gao Ding appointed an officer named E (4) Huan (4) to lead his vanguard. This E (4) Huan (4) stood about 6 foot 8. His face was ferocious and ugly. He wielded a halberd and had the valor of 10,000 men. When he got the order, E (4) Huan (4) set out with the troops under his command to meet the oncoming Shu army.

On the other side, Zhuge Liang's army had just arrived at the border of Yi (4) Province. The vanguard general Wei Yan, along with his lieutenants Zhang Yi (4) and Wang Ping (2), had barely crossed over the border when they ran into E (4) Huan (4). So the two sides lined up, and Wei Yan rode out and gave the typical "Rebel scum, surrender now!" talk. Shockingly, the rebels did not surrender. Instead E (4) Huan (4) rode forth to trade blows with Wei Yan.

After a few bouts, Wei Yan turned and fled, and E Huan gave chase. But they had not gone far when suddenly, amid earth-shattering cries, troops led by Wei Yan's two lieutenants charged out from the

flanks and cut off E Huan's path of retreat. Wei Yan now turned around, and the combined might of him and his two lieutenants proved too much as they captured E Huan alive. Well, that was easy.

The victorious generals brought their prisoner to see Zhuge Liang. Zhuge Liang ordered that E Huan be untied and treated to wine and food. He then asked him who his commander was. When E Huan told him that it was the governor Gao Ding, Zhuge Liang said, "I know Gao Ding is a loyal and honorable man. He must have been deceived by Yong (1) Kai (3) into betraying us. I will let you go. When you get back, tell Governor Gao to surrender immediately so that he may avoid calamity."

Granted this unexpected leniency, E Huan thanked Zhuge Liang and left. When he returned to camp, he sang Zhuge Liang's praise to Gao Ding, and Gao Ding was also touched. And with that, a seed was sown.

The next day, one of the other turncoat governors, Yong Kai, came to see Gao Ding and asked him how was it that E Huan managed to come back alive after being captured. When Gao Ding told him that Zhuge Liang had spared his officer for the sake of honor, Yong Kai scoffed.

"This is Zhuge Liang's trick to pit us against each other," he told Gao Ding. But Gao Ding was not convinced and could not make up his mind about his next move. Just then, word came that the Shu general Wei Yan was outside challenging for combat. Yong Kai personally went out to meet him. After a few bouts, Yong Kai was no match for Wei Yan, so he turned and fled, and Wei Yan advanced his army, giving chase for a few miles.

The next day, Yong Kai returned with his troops, ready for another battle, but now, Zhuge Liang refused to give him a fight. In fact, Zhuge Liang ordered his troops to stay in their camp for three straight days. On the fourth day, Yong Kai and Gao Ding mounted a two-prong assault on the Shu camp, but this was exactly what Zhuge Liang had been expecting. He had already ordered Wei Yan to set up two ambushes, and Yong Kai and Gao Ding walked straight into the traps. While the two governors managed

to escape, more than half of their men were killed, while countless others were taken prisoner. So again, that was easy.

The victorious Shu forces brought their prisoners back to camp. There, they split up the captives. All of Yong Kai's men were kept on one side, while all of Gao Ding's men were kept on another side. As these prisoners awaited their fate, which they all expected to be execution, they overheard some Shu soldiers talking. They were saying that all of Gao Ding's men were to be spared, while all of Yong Kai's men were to be executed.

Momentarily, Zhuge Liang ordered that Yong Kai's soldiers be brought before him.

"Who is your commander?" he asked them.

Now, all these guys had heard just a couple minutes earlier that Gao Ding's men were going to be spared while they, Yong Kai's men, were going to get the axe. So predictably, they all lied and said they were from Gao Ding's unit. Zhuge Liang didn't press them on this and instead ordered that they all be spared. In fact, not only spared, but also treated to wine and food before being sent on their way.

Next, Zhuge Liang summoned the remaining prisoners and asked them who their commander was. Now these guys saw what just happened and were probably not too happy with their comrades. They pleaded with Zhuge Liang and said, "We really ARE from Gao Ding's unit." Now, obviously anyone could tell that something wasn't adding up here, but Zhuge Liang didn't care. He also took their word for it and set them free with parting gifts of wine and food. BUT, he also gave them one more thing -- a message, which said, "Yong Kai has sent a messenger to me to offer his surrender. He intends to do me a favor by bringing me the heads of your master and the other rebel governor, Zhu Bao (1). But I cannot bear to see your commander killed. Since you are from Gao Ding's unit, I will spare you. Do not rebel again. If I capture you again, there will be no mercy."

So Gao Ding's men offered their thanks and scampered back to their own camp, where they relayed to their commander what Zhuge Liang had told them. Gao Ding then sent some spies to Yong Kai's camp to see what's going on there. They came back and said that all of Yong Kai's men that Zhuge Liang had let go were praising Zhuge Liang's virtue and many were thinking about defecting to Gao Ding's unit instead, since it seemed like Gao Ding had some special connection to Zhuge Liang and everyone wanted to hop on the winning team's bandwagon.

Despite this intel, Gao Ding was still not sure if what his men told him was true, so he sent a spy to see what's going on in Zhuge Liang's camp. But this spy was captured en route by Zhuge Liang's men, and they brought him to see Zhuge Liang. And this was the opportunity Zhuge Liang was waiting for to make his next move.

Pretending that he had mistaken the spy as someone from Yong Kai's unit rather than Gao Ding's, Zhuge Liang said to him, "Your commander had promised to deliver the heads of Gao Ding and Zhu Bao. Why is he late? And you, so careless! How can someone like you be a spy?"

The spy mumbled his way through the exchange without giving away which rebel governor he really served, and then Zhuge Liang gave him a meal and a secret letter, telling him, "Bring this letter back to Yong Kai. Tell him to make his move soon so that he doesn't screw things up."

Happy to escape with his life and some unexpected intel, the spy hurried back to camp to tell Gao Ding and showed him Zhuge Liang's letter to Yong Kai. Upon reading the letter, Gao Ding was furious at Yong Kai.

"I have been sincere with you, and yet you are planning to kill me! How can I let this go?!" Gao Ding said angrily.

So Gao Ding quickly summoned his officer E (4) Huan (4) to discuss what to do. Now, remember that E Huan himself was spared by Zhuge Liang, so it should be no surprise what he suggested.

“Zhuge Liang is humane; it would be bad luck to turn our back on him,” E Huan said. “Yong Kai is the reason we all became rebels. Why don’t we kill him and surrender to Zhuge Liang?”

“How do we do it?” Gao Ding asked.

“Invite Yong Kai to come to a feast. If he is not harboring any ill intent, then he would surely come without hesitation. But if he refuses, then he must be up to no good. You can then attack his camp from the front, while I lie in wait behind his camp to capture him.”

Gao Ding went along with that and sent an invitation to Yong Kai to come party at his camp. Well, Yong Kai was mindful of what his men had told him -- that Zhuge Liang was holding the door open for Gao Ding to switch sides, so Yong Kai was understandably suspicious of this invitation and declined it. That, in turn, gave Gao Ding all the evidence he needed to conclude that Yong Kai was indeed plotting against him. So that night, Gao Ding led his army and launched an attack on Yong Kai’s camp.

Inside Yong Kai’s camp, all those men that Zhuge Liang had spared were already feeling indebted to Gao Ding, whose apparent connection with Zhuge Liang had saved their lives. So when Gao Ding came to attack, they were all too eager to switch sides. Yong Kai’s army quickly fell into disarray without much of a fight. Seeing that things were going south, Yong Kai hopped his horse and fled along a mountain path.

He had not even gone a mile when suddenly, a squad of soldiers charged out at the sound of drums. At their head was Gao Ding’s officer E Huan. Yong Kai was caught off guard, and E Huan needed just one thrust of his halberd to stab him off his horse. E Huan then cut off Yong Kai’s head, and Yong Kai’s men all surrendered to Gao Ding.

The coup complete, Gao Ding now led his new combined army to go surrender to Zhuge Liang. Upon entering Zhuge Liang’s tent, he offered up Yong Kai’s head. But much to his surprise, he was not greeted with welcoming words, but rather, an order from Zhuge Liang for the executioners to drag him outside and behead him.

“I was touched by your excellency’s kindness, so I brought Yong Kai’s head and came to surrender! Why do you want to execute me?!” Gao Ding asked.

Zhugé Liang let out a big laugh and replied, “You are pretending to surrender. How dare you try to deceive me?!”

“Why does your excellency think I am trying to deceive you?” Gao Ding asked.

At that, Zhugé Liang produced a letter and said, “The other governor, Zhu Bao (1), has already sent me this message, informing me that you and Yong Kai are sworn brothers. So how could you have killed Yong Kai? That is how I know you’re trying to trick me.”

“Zhu Bao is lying! You must not believe him!” Gao Ding protested.

“It’s hard to know whose word to trust,” Zhugé Liang said. “If you can capture Zhu Bao, that would prove your sincerity.”

“There is no need for your excellency to doubt me. I will go capture Zhu Bao right now.”

“If you can do that, then I will have no more doubts.”

So Gao Ding immediately set out with E Huan and his troops, marching toward Zhu Bao’s camp. When they were a few miles away from the camp, they came across another army, led by none other than Zhu Bao. Now, Zhu Bao was in the dark about everything that had transpired, so when he saw Gao Ding, he rode up to talk to him. But boy was he in for a surprise.

“Why did you write to the prime minister to try to do me in?!” Gao Ding cursed aloud.

Having absolutely no idea what Gao Ding was talking about, Zhu Bao was taken aback and could not answer. Just then, E Huan flashed behind him and stabbed him off his horse, while Gao Ding shouted to Zhu Bao’s men, “Surrender now, or die!”

Well, the men were not very particular which rebel governor they followed, or even if that governor was a rebel, as long as it meant keeping their own heads, so they all surrendered at once. Gao Ding now

returned to Zhuge Liang's camp and offered up Zhu Bao's head. Now, Zhuge Liang greeted him with a big smile.

"I intentionally had you kill these two traitors to prove your loyalty," he told Gao Ding. He then appointed Gao Ding as the governor of Yi (4) Province, with authority over the three districts that he and his now headless former comrades once commanded. Zhuge Liang also rewarded E Huan with an appointment as the governor's garrison commander. And just like that, Zhuge Liang had put down the three traitors' rebellion while barely breaking a sweat.

With the siege on the holdout district of Yongchang (3,1) lifted, that district's governor, Wang (2) Kang (4), came out of the city to welcome Zhuge Liang. Zhuge Liang asked him who had helped him keep the city out of enemy hands, and Wang Kang sang the praises of his deputy.

"It was all thanks to a local man, Lü (2) Kai (3)," he told Zhuge Liang.

So Zhuge Liang asked Lü (2) Kai (3) to join them and said, "I have long heard that you are a talent in this district, and that it was all thanks to you that the city held. What great insights can you offer about pacifying the barbarian territories?"

Lü Kai apparently was just itching for somebody to ask him this question, because he immediately produced a map and showed it to Zhuge Liang.

"Ever since I took office, I knew the southern tribes were going to rebel," he said. "So I secretly sent people into their territory to scout out areas where you may garrison armies and stage battles. I have put it all on a map, which I have named, 'A Handy Guide for Pacifying the Man (2).' I would like to offer this for your eyes."

Zhuce Liang was thrilled to have this handy dandy guide to suppressing the local indigenous push for independence, so he appointed Lü Kai (3) as military instructor and official guide for his army. They then headed out for the heart of the Nan Man nation's territory.

Just as they were about to set out, an envoy arrived from Chengdu, bearing a message from the young emperor Liu Shan (4). When Zhuge Liang summoned the envoy, a man clad in white entered. This was Ma (3) Su (4), who had served Zhuge Liang before as an adviser. He was wearing white because he was in mourning after the recent off-screen death of his brother, Ma Liang, who had also been a valuable adviser.

“His highness has commanded me to bring wine and silk as rewards for the troops,” Ma Su told Zhuge Liang.

So Zhuge Liang ordered the gifts be distributed among the men. He then kept Ma Su in his tent to catch up.

“I am here by his highness’s decree to pacify the barbarians,” Zhuge Liang said. “I have long heard that you possess great insights. I hope you will instruct me.”

Now, this was no small praise, coming from Zhuge Liang, and Ma Su did not hesitate to offer his opinion.

“I have one piece of unworthy advice that I hope your excellency will consider. Because they reside in a distant and treacherous territory, the Nan Man have long been recalcitrant. Even if we defeat them today, they will rebel again tomorrow. While your excellency’s army is here, they will no doubt be brought to heel. But when you leave, your next move will be to attack Cao Pi in the North. As soon as the Nan Man know that you are away, they will rebel again. So we should follow the law of warfare: Besieging hearts is superior to besieging cities; psychological warfare is better than physical warfare. I hope you will find it sufficient to win their hearts.”

Upon hearing this, Zhuge Liang sighed and said, “I am an open book to you!”

Quite impressed with Ma Su, Zhuge Liang kept him on as military adviser and resumed his march.

While Zhuge Liang's army marched on, word of their early success had reached Meng Huo, the king of the Nan Man people. So he summoned three tribal leaders loyal to him. Now, in the novel, these guys were referred to as cave leaders. Hey look, savages living in caves, how predictably demeaning. Anyway, the three commanders were Jinhuan (1,2) Sanjie (1,2), Dong (2) Tuna (2,4), and A (1) Huinan (4,2). So the first guy, Jinhuan (1,2) Sanjie (1,2), his name is a mouthful, so I'm gonna call him Goldie, because the first character of his name means gold.

So, Goldie, Dong (2) Tuna (2,4), and A (1) Huinan (4,2) all showed up, and Meng Huo said to them, "The prime minister Zhuge Liang is encroaching on our territory with a large army. We must resist. You will lead three armies to meet him. Whoever wins shall be the lord of all the caves."

So the three commanders headed off with 50,000 troops each, with Goldie leading the army in the center, Dong (2) Tuna (2,4) on the left, and A (1) Huinan (4,2) on the right.

Word of their movements soon reached Zhuge Liang, who was sitting in his tent planning his next move. When he heard the intel, Zhuge Liang summoned his top generals, Zhao Yun and Wei Yan. But, when they arrived, he simply ignored them. Instead, Zhuge Liang turned to Wang (2) Ping (2) and Ma (3) Zhong (1), two subordinate officers, and said, "The barbarians are coming with three armies. I was going to send General Zhao and General Wei to face them, but the two of them are not familiar with the terrain, so I dare not use them. Wang Ping, you will go meet the enemy on the left. Ma Zhong, you will go take on the enemy on the right. I will send Zhao Yun and Wei Yan to back you up. Get the troops ready today and set out at first light tomorrow."

So Wang Ping and Ma Zhong accepted their orders and went off. And by the way, this Ma Zhong is obviously not the same Ma Zhong as the Dongwu officer who captured Guan Yu and was later killed. He just happens to have a similar sounding name. So after the two of them left, Zhuge Liang handed out another set of orders, but again he snubbed Zhao Yun and Wei Yan. This time, he called for the generals

Zhang Yi (2) and Zhang Yi (4), and no, these guys are not related, despite their similar names. The novel just likes to pair them together to make it more confusing.

“You two will lead an army to take on the enemy’s center,” Zhuge Liang told them. “Get the troops ready today, and tomorrow advance with Wang Ping and Ma Zhong. I was going to send Zhao Yun and Wei Yan, but alas, they are not familiar with the geography, so I dare not use them yet.”

So Zhang Yi (2) and Zhang Yi (4) took their orders and went off. By now, Zhao Yun and Wei Yan had heard every word that Zhuge Liang said, especially the part about how he did not dare to use them. As you can imagine, they were just a bit disgruntled. Noting their displeasure, Zhuge Liang told them, “It’s not that I don’t want to use the two of you, but you are past your prime, and I worry that if I send you into unknown dangers, you might fall victim to the barbarians’ trap and lose your mettle.”

Oh, so now not only are we too ignorant of the geography, but we’re too old as well? This shall not stand.

“What if we do know the geography? What then?” Zhao Yun asked.

But Zhuge Liang merely told them, “The two of you need to be cautious. Do not act rashly.”

Disappointed, Zhao Yun and Wei Yan took their leave. So Zhuge Liang summoned his top two generals, but then snubbed them, made them stand there and listen to him tell their subordinates why their commanders were not up to the task, and then told said commanders to their face that they were past their prime. What kind of talent management is that? Did he really expect Zhao Yun and Wei Yan would listen to him when he told them to not get any funny ideas? I mean, after enduring all that, it seems like they would go do exactly that ... oh, I see.

To find out what kind of funny ideas Zhao Yun and Wei Yan will come up with, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.