

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 118.

Last time, the Shu forces had routed the Wei army led by the prince consort Xiahou Mao (4), who fled into the the city of Nanan (2,1) and was trying to hold off a siege. Meanwhile, Cui (1) Liang (4), the governor of the nearby county of Anding (1,4), received urgent pleas for help from one of Xiahou Mao's officers and set out to answer that call. But he was in for a rude surprise. On his way, he found himself trapped by the Shu generals Guan Xing and Zhang Bao. His men scattered, and Cui Liang and about 100 men managed to fight their way out and flee back to the city of Anding (1,4).

But, as he approached the foot of the city wall, he was greeted by a shower of arrows.

"I have already taken this city. Surrender now!" a man shouted from atop the wall.

This was the Shu general Wei Yan, who, on Zhuge Liang's orders, had disguised his troops as the relief force that had set out from Anding earlier and managed to trick the guards into opening the gates in the dark of the night, which allowed him to take the city without breaking a sweat.

Seeing his own city sacked, Cui (1) Liang (4) now fled toward the other neighboring county, Tianshui (1,3). But he had not gone far before his path was cut off by a line of troops. Under the main banner sat a man sporting a headband, wearing a Daoist robe with crane patterns, waving a feather fan, and seated in a carriage. Guess who.

Surrounded by enemy soldiers, Cui Liang figured surrender was his only option if he wanted to live, which he most certainly did. So he promptly surrendered, and Zhuge Liang took him back to camp and treated him like an honored guest.

"Are you good friends with the governor of Nanan (2,1)?" Zhuge Liang asked his guest slash prisoner.

"His name is Yang (2) Ling (2), and we have strong ties since our counties are neighbors," Cui Liang replied.

“Then I would like to trouble you to go into Nanan and convince Yang Ling to apprehend Xiahou Mao. Will you do it?” Zhuge Liang asked.

“If your excellency want me to go, then please have your forces fall back from the city temporarily and allow me to go inside to talk to him.”

Zhuce Liang said sure and immediately ordered the forces besieging Nanan (2,1) to fall back about seven miles and set up camp. Cui Liang then rode to the foot of the city and asked to be let in. Once inside, he went to see the governor, Yang (2) Ling (2), and told him what had transpired.

Yang Ling said, “You and I have received tremendous kindness from the Lord of Wei, so how can we turn on him? Let’s turn Zhuge Liang’s scheme against him instead.”

So Yang Ling brought Cui Liang to see Xiahou Mao and told him all the details, and Xiahou Mao asked if they had any bright ideas.

“We can pretend to surrender the city,” Yang Ling said. “We’ll lure the enemy inside and kill them.”

With their plan set, Cui Liang returned to Zhuge Liang and told him, “Yang Ling will open the gates and let your army in to capture Xiahou Mao. Yang Ling would have done it himself, but he doesn’t have many good warriors, so he dared not act rashly.”

“That’s easy enough,” Zhuge Liang said. “Right now we have the 100-some men who surrendered with you. We can have our own officers in disguise among them and accompany you into the city. They will lie in wait at Xiahou Mao’s residence. You can coordinate with Yang Ling to open the gates at midnight, and we will make our move.”

When Cui Liang heard this, he thought to himself, “If I refuse to take any Shu officers with me, Zhuge Liang might get suspicious. So I’ll bring them into the city, and then kill them and start a fire as a signal to lure Zhuge Liang in and kill him as well.”

So Cui Liang agreed to Zhuge Liang's plan, and Zhuge Liang said, "I will send my trusted officers Guan Xing and Zhang Bao to accompany you. Just pretend to be a relief army and fight your way through the lines and into the city so as to put Xiahou Mao at ease. As soon as you start a fire, I will personally enter the city to catch him."

It was now dusk, and Guan Xing and Zhang Bao set off with Cui Liang, blending in with the troops from Anding (1,4). When Cui Liang arrived at the foot of Nanan (2,1), the city's governor Yang Ling had suspended a platform over the city wall, and he leaned against the protective railing and said, "Whose army are you?"

"We are a relief force from Anding," Cui Liang replied. He then shot an arrow with a message attached onto the city wall. The letter said, "Zhuge Liang has hidden two officers inside my troops to serve as his inside men. Do not startle them and leak our plan. Wait until we lure them to the administrative compound before we make our move."

Yang Ling showed this letter to Xiahou Mao, who said, "Since Zhuge Liang has fallen for our trap, let's hide 100 armed men in the administrative compound. When the two spies follow Cui Liang to the compound, we will lock them in and kill them. Then we will start a fire atop the walls to lure Zhuge Liang into the city and spring our trap to capture him."

Momentarily, all the preparations were in order, and Yang Ling returned to the top of the wall and said, "Since you are from Anding, we can let you in."

As the gates opened, Cui Liang led the way, accompanied step for step by Guan Xing, while Zhang Bao followed right behind. Yang Ling, meanwhile, came down and welcomed them at the gates. At that very moment, Guan Xing's saber flashed, and Yang Ling laid dead on the ground. Cui Liang was shocked and tried to run for the drawbridge, but Zhang Bao shouted, "Scoundrel, stop! How can you fool the

prime minister with your wicked schemes?!” And with one thrust of his spear, Zhang Bao stabbed Cui Liang off his horse.

Guan Xing then stormed to the top of the city wall and started a fire, and now, the Shu forces flooded into the city from all sides. Xiahou Mao panicked and fought his way out through the south gate, but there, he ran smack dab into the Shu general Wang Ping. Within one bout, Wang Ping easily captured Xiahou Mao, and Xiahou Mao’s entourage were all killed.

Victorious, Zhuge Liang now strolled into Nanan, put out a notice to calm the citizenry and made sure his men did not bother the residents. All the officers now presented their merits from the battle, and Zhuge Liang ordered that Xiahou Mao be locked up in a prisoner cart for the time being.

“How did your excellency know that Cui Liang was lying?” the official Deng (4) Zhi (1) asked.

“I knew he had no intention of surrendering, so I purposely sent him into the city,” Zhuge Liang said. “I expected that he would tell Xiahou Mao the truth and that they would try to turn our plan against us. When he came back to meet me, it was plainly obvious that there was deception afoot. So I sent Guan Xing and Zhang Bao with him so as to test him. If he had been sincere, then he would have stopped them from going. Yet he agreed to let them go with him, because he was worried I would be suspicious. His intention was to let the two officers go with him, lure them into the city, kill them, and then lure my unsuspecting forces in. But I had already secretly instructed Guan Xing and Zhang Bao to make their move at the city gates. I expected the forces inside the city would be caught off guard, and my troops would arrive right on their tail, catching them unawares.”

This explanation wowed everybody, and now Zhuge Liang unveiled yet another surprise.

“The man who tricked Cui Liang was a confidant that I had sent disguised as the Wei officer Pei (2) Xu (4). I also sent him to go trick the governor of Tianshui (1,3) County. I don’t know why they haven’t shown up yet, but let’s take this opportunity to attack them.”

So Zhuge Liang left a couple officers to oversee the newly conquered counties of Nanan and Anding, and then took the general Wei Yan with him to go attack Tianshui County.

So why didn't the governor of Tianshui show up for his scheduled beatdown? Well, this governor, who was named Ma (3) Zun (1), had heard the news that Xiahou Mao was trapped in Nanan, and he had discussed the matter with his staff. A number of them told him, "Prince Consort Xiahou is a member of the royal house. If something should happen to him, it would be hard to avoid being punished for not lifting a hand to help. You should mobilize all of our forces to go save him."

Ma Zun, though, wasn't too sure. While he was going back and forth, word came that Xiahou Mao had sent his confidant, the officer Pei (2) Xu (4), to see him. Pei Xu entered, handed an official document to Ma Zun, and said, "The commander is asking the troops from Anding and Tianshui to go help him immediately." Pei Xu then hurried off. The next day, another messenger arrived, saying that a relief force from Anding had already set out and were now asking Ma Zun to hurry up and join them.

Ma Zun was just about to mobilize his troops when a man came in and said, "Governor, you have fallen for Zhuge Liang's trick!"

This guy was named Jiang (1) Wei (2). His father had once served in the administration of the county, but later died serving the kingdom during an uprising by the Qiang tribes. As Jiang Wei grew up, he became well-read, skilled in combat and warfare, and extremely filial to his mother, which earned him great respect from the locals. He was later appointed as an imperial corps commander and served as a military adviser to Ma Zun.

Jiang Wei now explained to Ma Zun, "I recently heard that Zhuge Liang had defeated Xiahou Mao and had him trapped airtight inside Nanan, so how can anyone break through the enemy lines? Besides, Pei Xu is a no-name second-tier officer that no one had ever met before. And that messenger from

Anding did not have any official documents. From the looks of things, they must be Shu soldiers masquerading as Wei officers in order to lure you out of the city. They expect that the city would then be unprepared, so they must be hiding an army nearby in order to use this opportunity to capture the city.”

When he heard this, Ma Zun came to his sense. “General Jiang, if not for your advice, I would have fallen for that wicked scheme!” he said with gratitude.

“Governor, have no worries,” Jiang Wei said with a smile. “I have a plan that can capture Zhuge Liang and relieve the siege on Nanan. Zhuge Liang must be hiding an army nearby to attack us after they tricked our troops out of the city. So watch for the fire as a signal and then attack the enemy from front and back. That would result in a huge victory. If Zhuge Liang comes here in person, he would definitely be my prisoner.”

So Ma Zun did as Jiang Wei proposed. He dispatched Jiang Wei with some crack troops, left two of his civil officials, Liang (2) Xu (4) and Yin (2) Shang (3), to defend the city, while he himself and another officer, Liang (2) Qian (2), led troops outside the city to set their trap.

As it turned out, Jiang Wei was exactly right. All this time, the Shu general Zhao Yun was lying in wait with an army in the nearby hills, with the order to attack as soon as they saw troops leave the city. Well, that day, Zhao Yun’s spies reported back that Ma Zun had led his troops out of the city and had left only civil officials in charge. Zhao Yun was delighted and sprang into action immediately. He sent word to his comrades Zhang Yi (4) and Gao (1) Xiang (2), telling them to go intercept Ma Zun on his way. Then Zhao Yun took his 5,000 men and dashed to the foot of Tianshui, where he shouted, “I am Zhao Yun! You know that you have fallen for our trick, so surrender the city now or face annihilation!”

But Zhao Yun was greeted with mocking laughter from the city walls as Liang (2) Xu (4), one of the civil officials overseeing the city's defense, told him, "You have fallen for our Jiang Wei's trick, and you're still in the dark."

Trap schmap. Zhao Yun prepared to lay siege to the city, but suddenly, loud cries and flames rose up from all around, and enemy forces appeared, led by a young general who galloped forth with spear in hand.

"Do you recognize Jiang Wei?" the young man shouted.

Zhao Yun began to tangle with Jiang Wei, and within a few bouts, Zhao Yun could tell that he was in for a fight, as Jiang Wei only became more invigorated as the duel went on. Zhao Yun was stunned and thought to himself, "Who knew that there would be such talent in this place?!"

Just then, more nasty surprises showed up, as the Wei forces led by Ma Zun and Liang (2) Qian (2) sprang out of hiding and attacked. Zhao Yun was now under attack on multiple fronts and could not hold, so he carved out a path and fled with his men. Jiang Wei was hot on his tail, but fortunately, Zhao Yun's comrades Zhang Yi (4) and Gao Xiang (2) arrived and rescued him.

When he got back to camp, Zhao Yun went to see Zhuge Liang and told him, uhh, somebody saw through your scheme. Zhuge Liang was like, NO WAY!!

"Who is this that saw through my trick?" he asked.

A local from Nanan (2,1), the city he just conquered, told Zhuge Liang, "This man is named Jiang Wei, and he is a native of Tianshui. He is very filial to his mother, well-versed in literature and martial skills, and well-stocked in both smarts and courage, a true hero of the time."

And on top of this glowing review, Zhao Yun also heaped praise on Jiang Wei for his handiness with a spear. So Zhuge Liang figured this was going to require a personal visit, so he marched the main army toward Tianshui.

Meanwhile in Tianshui, Jiang Wei went to see Ma Zun and told him, "Now that Zhao Yun has run away in defeat, Zhuge Liang will no doubt come here personally. He will expect our forces to be inside the city. We should divide our troops into four. I will lead one battalion and set an ambush to the east of the city. If the enemy comes from that direction, I will cut them off from behind. Governor, you and Liang (2) Qian (2) and Yin (2) Shang (3) should each lead a battalion and lie in wait outside the city. Have Liang (2) Xu (4) lead civilians to stand guard atop the city walls."

While Jiang Wei was busy laying a trap, Zhuge Liang was wary of traps by Jiang Wei, so he personally led the front column of his army as they marched toward Tianshui. As they approached the city, Zhuge Liang told his men: In order to sack the city, we must spur on our troops as soon as we arrive and storm over the walls. If we delay and drag this out, our momentum will be lost and it will be hard to sack the city quickly."

So the army marched to the city fully intent on dishing out a smackdown on arrival, but when they got there, they saw that the banners on the city walls looked well organized, which suggested that the defenses were prepared, so they decided to hold off on attacking that night and set up camp instead.

Around midnight, they suddenly found themselves surrounded by earth-shattering cries, but they didn't know which direction the enemy was coming from. At the same time, drums and war cries also blared from the city walls, making it seem like soldiers inside the city were getting ready to attack, too. The Shu forces fell into disarray, and it was so chaotic that even Zhuge Liang decided to get out of dodge. Eschewing his customary carriage, he hopped on a horse instead, and Guan Xing and Zhang Bao escorted him through the fighting to safety.

Once they were in the clear, Zhuge Liang looked back and saw an army in the east, its torches lighting up the night and its column looking like a long snake. Zhuge Liang dispatched Guan Xing to go check it out, and he reported back that this force was led by Jiang Wei.

“[Sigh] It’s not the size of the army, but how it’s deployed,” Zhuge Liang said with an impressed sigh. “That man is a real general.”

Once the night’s fighting was done and the Shu forces returned to their own camp, Zhuge Liang spent a long time lost in deep thought. Then, he summoned men from his ranks who were from the recently captured neighboring county of Anding (1,4) and asked them, “Where is Jiang Wei’s mother at present?”

“She resides in the city of Yicheng (4,2),” they told him.

Zhuce Liang next summoned the general Wei Yan and told him, “Take an army and make a lot of noise about going to attack Yicheng (4,2). If Jiang Wei shows up there, let him into the city.”

Next, Zhuge Liang asked what were the key strategic points in this area, and the locals told him, “All of Tianshui’s money and provisions are stored in the city of Shanggui (4,1). If you sack Shanggui (4,1), that will cut off Tianshui’s supplies.”

So naturally, Zhuge Liang immediately sent Zhao Yun to go attack Shanggui, while he himself pitched camp about 10 miles outside Tianshui.

Word soon filtered into Tianshui that the Shu army had divided its forces into three, with one force staying put outside, one going to attack Shanggui, and one going to attack Yicheng. When Jiang Wei heard that last part, he broke down in tears and said to the governor Ma Zun, “My mother lives in Yicheng. I’m concerned for her safety. I would like to beg you for an army so I can go save that city and my mother.”

Since Jiang Wei had just done him a big favor by pointing out Zhuge Liang’s trick, Ma Zun wasn’t about to say no to this request. So he gave Jiang Wei 3,000 men to go defend Yicheng. At the same time, he sent the officer Liang (2) Qian (2) with 3,000 men to go defend Shanggui.

When Jiang Wei and his relief force approached Yicheng, they were met by a waiting army, led by Wei Yan. The two generals traded a few blows before Wei Yan feigned defeat and fell back, giving Jiang Wei a clear path to the city. Jiang Wei hurried inside and shut the gates behind him. After deploying his troops to help defend the city, he went to pay his respects to his mother. The same thing happened at the city of Shanggui (4,1), where Zhao Yun allowed the relief force led by Liang (2) Qian (2) to go inside the city more or less unmolested.

With those pieces in place, Zhuge Liang now sent men to the county of Nanan (2,1) to fetch the prisoner Xiahou Mao (4). When Xiahou Mao was brought before him, Zhuge Liang asked, "Are you afraid of death?"

At that, Xiahou Mao dropped to his knees and begged for mercy, so yeah I guess he is afraid of death. But today was his lucky day.

"Jiang Wei from the county of Tianshui is defending Yicheng," Zhuge Liang continued. "He sent me a letter saying, 'If the prince consort were here, then I will surrender.' So I will spare your life if you are willing to go convince Jiang Wei to surrender. Are you willing?"

After a resounding affirmative from Xiahou Mao, Zhuge Liang gave him some fresh clothes and a horse and sent him on his mission, without sending anyone else along to, you know, make sure he went to do what he promised. So of course, as soon as Xiahou Mao left camp, he forgot about his promise and began looking for the quickest way out of dodge, but he wasn't familiar with the roads around here. As he was stumbling around, he saw a number of people running by. He stopped them and asked where they were going.

"We are residents of Yicheng," they told him. "That Jiang Wei has surrendered the city to Zhuge Liang, and Zhuge Liang's general Wei Yan is burning and pillaging, so we abandoned our homes and fled. We are on our way to Shanggui."

"Who is defending Tianshui right now?" Xiahou Mao asked them.

“Governor Ma Zun” was the answer. When Xiahou Mao heard this, he rode toward Tianshui. Along the way, he saw more civilians running past, some with kids in tow, and they all told him the same story as the first group of refugees.

When Xiahou Mao arrived at Tianshui, he called up to the city wall. The guards there recognized him and hurriedly welcomed him inside. Ma Zun, surprised to see Xiahou Mao, came to pay his respects and asked how he came to be there. Xiahou Mao told Ma Zun what Zhuge Liang had told him about Jiang Wei and then added the corroborating intel that he chanced upon from the civilian refugees.

“Who would’ve expected that Jiang Wei would rebel and surrender to Shu?” Ma Zun lamented.

But his adviser Liang (2) Xu (4) was more skeptical. “This could be a deception by Jiang Wei to try to rescue you, commander,” he said to Xiahou Mao.

But Xiahou Mao shot back, “He has already surrendered. What kind of deception is that?”

While they were going back and forth about this, it was getting to be about 7 o’clock in the evening and darkness was falling. Suddenly, word came that the Shu forces outside were laying siege to the city again. Under the flickering light of the enemy’s torches was a general at the head of the Shu army, seated atop his horse and wielding a spear, demanding to speak with Xiahou Mao. When Xiahou Mao and Ma Zun went to the top of the city walls to take a look, they saw that this was none other than Jiang Wei.

“Commander Xiahou,” Jiang Wei shouted, “I surrendered for your sake; so why have you gone back on your promise?!”

Huh? Come again? Xiahou Mao had no idea what Jiang Wei was talking about, so he shouted back, “You have received great kindness from the kingdom of Wei. Why have you surrendered to Shu? And what promise did I ever make to you?”

“You were the one who wrote to me instructing me to surrender,” Jiang Wei replied. “How can you say such a thing now? You sold me out to save yourself! Now that I have surrendered to Shu and been promoted to a top general, I have no reason to return to Wei!”

And with that, Jiang Wei instructed his men to attack the city, and it wasn't until dawn that they called off the attack.

So ... what's going on here? How come we never heard about Jiang Wei surrendering to Shu until now? Well, it's because he never did surrender. The guy leading the attack on the city was not Jiang Wei, but rather somebody in Zhuge Liang's army who looked sort of Jiang Wei. Zhuge Liang dressed him up like Jiang Wei and figured that nobody would be able to tell the difference in the dark. And what do you know? It worked. Everyone inside the city fell for the ruse.

While this little charade was happening, Zhuge Liang himself was leading an army to attack Yicheng, where the real Jiang Wei was trying to hold down the fort. The city had few provisions, so Jiang Wei's army was starting to run out of food. Looking out from the walls, Jiang Wei could see numerous carts, large and small, loaded to the hilt with grain, heading into the camp of the Shu general Wei Yan. That's when it occurred to him, “Hey, there's our next meal.”

Rounding up 3,000 troops, Jiang Wei stormed out of the city to attack the supply train. The Shu soldiers immediately abandoned the carts and scattered. Well, that was easy.

The victorious Jiang Wei was heading back to the city with his new grain when suddenly, his path was cut off by a squad of Shu soldiers led by the general Zhang Yi (4). The two traded just a few blows when another Shu general, Wang Ping, arrived with more troops. Attacked from two sides, Jiang Wei was outnumbered and could not hold his ground, so he tried to make a run to the city.

But when he took a look at the city, he was in for a surprise. The walls were already lined with the banners of the Shu forces. Turns out that while Jiang Wei was busy raiding Wei Yan's supply train, Wei Yan was busy sacking his city. Well, that was a bad trade.

With his city lost, Jiang Wei now turned and fought his way through the enemy ranks and fled back toward Tianshui. By the time he managed to escape, he only had a dozen or so riders with him. Then they were hit by another force, led by the Shu general Zhang Bao, which left Jiang Wei all by his lonesome by the time he arrived at Tianshui, desperate for help.

But of course, remember what just went down at Tianshui the night before, courtesy of the fake Jiang Wei sent by Zhuge Liang. To see what kind of reception awaited the real Jiang Wei, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!