

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 142.

Last time, Jiang Wei marched north once again with visions of conquering the kingdom of Wei. His first battle went exceedingly well. He routed Wang Jing (1), the imperial protector of Yong (1) Province, sending Wang Jing fleeing into the town of Didao (2,4). But as Jiang Wei prepared to advance, one of his generals, Zhang Yi (4), suggested that they should quit while they were ahead. As you can imagine, that did not sit well with Jiang Wei.

“In the past, even when we have lost, we still aimed to advance and march across the Heartlands,” he said. “Today, after our victory at the River Tao (2), the enemy has lost their nerve. In my estimation, the town of Didao (2,4) is ours for the taking. Stop discouraging yourself!”

Zhang Yi (4) tried time and again to advise against continuing the campaign, but Jiang Wei refused to listen and instead marched to Didao (2,4).

Meanwhile, the other leader of the Wei defenses in the area, the general Chen Tai (4), was just about to mobilize his troops to avenge Wang Jing’s defeat when he got a visitor. It was the general Deng Ai, the imperial protector of Yan (3) Province who had arrived with reinforcements on the orders of Sima Zhao.

Chen Tai asked Deng Ai if he had any ideas for how to do that, Deng Ai said, “After the enemy’s victory at the River Tao (2), if they had called on the Qiang tribes and contested the eastern part of the area, that would spell trouble for us. But right now, that’s not what they’re thinking. Instead, they are going after Didao (2,4). That town’s walls are strong and cannot be taken quickly. The enemy is wasting energy. I’m going to deploy my troops at Xiangling (4,2) and attack. That will defeat the enemy for sure.”

Chen Tai loved that plan, so he first sent out 20 squadrons of 50 men each. These men carried banners, drums, horns, and fire-starting materials. They traveled by the dark of the night and hid in the hills to the southeast of Didao (2,4). When the Shu forces approach, these men were to start beating

their drums, blowing their horns, and if it's at night, they were to light fires and set off explosives, all in a show designed to cause panic in the enemy. Chen Tai and Deng Ai then each set out with 20,000 men.

Meanwhile, Jiang Wei had been laying siege to Didao (2,4) for days but could not take the city. He was getting concerned but also couldn't come up with any ideas. One evening, around dusk, several urgent dispatches from his scouts reported that two armies, bearing the banners of the Wei generals Chen Tai and Deng Ai, were heading this way.

Jiang Wei was alarmed and consulted Xiahou Ba. Xiahou Ba said, "I've mentioned to you in the past that Deng Ai has been well-versed in military strategy since his youth and knows the terrain well. Now that he's coming this way, he will be a tough opponent."

Jiang Wei responded, "He has traveled a great distance to get here. I'm going to strike before he can catch his breath."

So Jiang Wei left the general Zhang Yi in charge of continuing the siege on the town and ordered Xiahou Ba to go face Chen Tai, while he himself went to take on Deng Ai. But he had not gone two miles when suddenly, an explosive sounded from the southeast, followed by earth-shattering horns and drums and fires that shot toward the heavens. Jiang Wei pulled up his horse and took a look, and he saw enemy banners everywhere.

"I have fallen for Deng Ai's trap!" Jiang Wei said with alarm. He immediately ordered Xiahou Ba and Zhang Yi to give up the siege on the town and retreat. The Shu army ended up falling all the way back to their home base in Hanzhong. Jiang Wei personally brought up the rear, and he heard nonstop drumming behind him. It wasn't until he had retreated into the Saber Pass that he learned that all that ruckus was just a decoy. So Deng Ai did not even have to fight to beat back Jiang Wei. He just had to make a bunch of noise. Nonetheless, for his victory at the River Tao (2), Jiang Wei was promoted to

regent-marshal. After thanking his emperor for the promotion, Jiang Wei once again set his sight on the North.

Turning our gaze north as well, let's go check in on the Wei forces. After lifting the siege on the town of Didao (2,4), Deng Ai also got a promotion to the General who Pacifies the West. He and Chen Tai were now ordered to garrison troops in Yong (1) and Liang (2) Provinces, the western regions that Jiang Wei had been invading in his attempts to break through into the North.

Chen Tai threw a feast to congratulate Deng Ai on his promotion. During the banquet, Chen Tai said, "Jiang Wei retreated during the night. His strength is sapped. He will not dare to come again."

But Deng Ai smiled and said, "In my estimation, there are five reasons for the Shu forces to come again. First, even though they retreated, they still have strategic advantages, while we have strategic liabilities. Second, the Shu soldiers are all veteran troops trained by Zhuge Liang, making them easy to deploy; whereas our officers are rotated off and on and our troops have not been thoroughly drilled. Third, the Riverlanders rely on ships for transport, while our troops all move on land, which is more tiring. Fourth, Didao (2,4), Longxi (3,1), Nan'an (2,1), and Qi (2) Mountain are all places that we have to defend. The Riverlanders can use misdirection so we have to split our forces to defend all four locations, while they can concentrate all their forces on one place. Finally, if the Shu forces march toward Nan'an and Longxi, they can rely on the grains of the Qiang tribes. If they advance through Qi Mountain, there is wheat there that they can eat."

Hearing this, Chen Tai could not help but sigh and say, "Sir, with your divine foresight, what need do we have to be concerned about the enemy?"

This respect between the two men soon grew into a close friendship despite the large difference in their age. Deng Ai now set to drilling the troops and setting camps at all the key locations.

Meanwhile, on the Shu side of the border, Jiang Wei invited his officers to a feast to discuss the next Northern campaign. One of his officials, Fan (2) Jian (4), said, “General, you have waged one campaign after another, all without complete success. After your victory at the River Tao (2), the enemy now recognizes and respects your prowess. So why wage another campaign? If it goes badly, you would have thrown away all previous gains.”

Jiang Wei, though, would not put up with that kind of talk. “You all just know that the kingdom of Wei has vast territory and a large population and you think that we cannot take it quickly,” he said. “But what you don’t know is that there are five strategic advantages to attacking the Wei.”

His men asked what those five advantages were, and Jiang Wei explained: “First, the enemy was demoralized by their defeat at the River Tao (2), and even though we fell back, we did not suffer any casualties. Second, we rely on ships for transporting troops, which allows our men to rest, while the enemy has to travel on land to meet us. Third, our troops are seasoned and well-trained, while the enemy’s army is a loosely gathered bunch. Fourth, when our army marches through Qi (2) Mountain, we can raid the fall harvest for provisions. And finally, the enemy’s forces are divided across all their key locations. When we focus our entire army on one spot, they will not be able to help each other. If we don’t invade now, then when?!”

But now, even Xiahou Ba, who had been a staunch advocate of attacking the Wei in hopes of avenging his family’s misfortunes at the hands of the Simas, advised against another invasion.

“Deng Ai may be young, but he possesses keen foresight and strategy. He has recently been promoted to the General who Pacifies the West. He will no doubt have made preparations everywhere. It won’t be like before.”

But Jiang Wei replied sternly, “I am not afraid of him! Stop talking up others and putting ourselves down! My mind is made up, we will take Longxi (3,1) first!”

Well, so that was the end of that discussion. Everybody shushed, and Jiang Wei decided that he would lead the front column personally while all these wet blankets could follow. So the Shu army set out and marched toward Qi Mountain again.

En route, scouts reported that the Wei forces had already built nine camps at Qi Mountain. Jiang Wei refused to believe it, so he and a few riders rode to a high vantage point to take a look, and sure enough, he saw nine camps in a winding formation like snake, looping in on itself.

“Xiahou Ba was telling the truth,” Jiang Wei said to his entourage. “This camp layout is brilliant. Only my master, Prime Minister Zhuge, could have managed it. It looks like Deng Ai’s talents are comparable to his.”

Upon returning to camp, Jiang Wei summoned his officers and said, “The enemy is prepared, so they must know that we’re coming. Deng Ai must be here. You all can use my banners and pretend to be me and set up camp at the mouth of the canyon. Each day, lead 100-some riders out to scout. Each time, put on a different set of uniforms and change the color of your banners. Meanwhile, I will lead the main army and launch a sneak attack on Nan’an (2,1).”

So Jiang Wei left an officer in charge of the decoy troops at the mouth of the canyon, while he personally led the main army toward Nan’an.

Meanwhile, as Jiang Wei suspected, Deng Ai was indeed in the Wei camps at Qi Mountain, along with his comrade Chen Tai, preparing for a showdown with the Shu army. But days passed without any challenge for battle, and all they saw were five rounds of enemy scouts leaving camp each day, going just a few miles and then returning.

Getting suspicious, Deng Ai found a high vantage point and took a look. He then immediately rushed back to his tent and told Chen Tai, “Jiang Wei is not here. He must be going to attack Nan’an. The enemy scouts that have been coming around are the same handful of men, just wearing different clothes. Their

horses are all looking tired, they must not have a capable general in charge. If you attack them, you should be able to sack their camp. Then, lead your army and go cut off Jiang Wei's path of retreat. In the meantime, I will lead an army to go reinforce Nan'an and occupy Wucheng (3,2) Mountain. If I can occupy that peak, then Jiang Wei will no doubt turn to take the city of Shanggui (4,1). There's a valley near Shanggui called Duan (4) Gorge. Its terrain is treacherous and perfect for an ambush. When the enemy comes to fight for Wucheng (3,2) Mountain, I will ambush them with two armies at Duan (4) Gorge, and Jiang Wei will be defeated for sure."

Once again, Chen Tai was thoroughly impressed. He said, "I have been defending the region of Longxi for 30 years, and I have yet to see such a clear understanding of the geography. Sir, your words are divine! You should go at once, and I will take care of the enemy camp here."

So Deng Ai set off immediately and traveled through the night to reach Wucheng (3,2) Mountain. He beat Jiang Wei's army to the punch, so he set up camp at the mountain and ordered his son Deng Zhong (1) and a lieutenant to each lead 5,000 men to lie in wait inside Duan (4) Gorge. He then told his men to stay quiet, stay out of sight and wait for the enemy.

As Jiang Wei was approaching Wucheng (3,2) Mountain, he said to Xiahou Ba, "There is a mountain near Nan'an called Wucheng Mountain. If we can occupy it first, then we would have the upperhand in taking Nan'an. But Deng Ai is crafty; he might have already taken precautions."

Just as they were talking about this, an explosive sounded from atop the mountain, followed by earth-shattering cries, drums, and horns. Numerous Wei banners now stood on the mountainside, including a yellow banner in the center, flapping in the wind, bearing the name Deng Ai. The Shu soldiers were all stunned, and when the Wei forces charged down from the mountain, the Shu soldiers could not hold their ground as the front column fell back in defeat. By the time Jiang Wei was able to send

reinforcement from the center of the column, the Wei forces had already retreated back up the mountain.

Jiang Wei now went to the foot of the mountain to challenge Deng Ai to battle, but Deng Ai refused to send down even a single pawn. Jiang Wei told his men to hurl insults, but yeah, Deng Ai was not falling for that. When night came, Jiang Wei was forced to call his men back. Just as they were falling back, horns and drums began blaring again from the mountain, but no troops came down. Jiang Wei wanted to charge up the mountain, but found its defenses impenetrable.

So Jiang Wei kept a tight watch on the mountain until midnight, at which point he decided to fall back, but then the horns and drums started up again. Jiang Wei now decided to tell his men to set up camp at the foot of the mountain, but just as they were moving lumber and rocks to build the camp, the horns and drums got going again, except this time, the ruckus was accompanied by an attack by the Wei forces. The Shu soldiers fell into disarray and stepped all over each other running back to their old camp.

The next day, Jiang Wei ordered his men to wheel his provision carts to the foot of the mountain. There, he chained the carts together in a row and tried to use them as the wall for a camp. But that was a really dumb move in hindsight. That night, Deng Ai sent 500 men to rush down the mountain with torches and set the carts on fire. The two sides then scrummed overnight, but at the end of the night, Jiang Wei still could not manage a foothold and build a camp.

So now, Jiang Wei decided to give up on the mountain and the city of Nan'an. He said to Xiahou Ba, "Since we can't take Nan'an yet, why don't we go take Shanggui (4,1) first? Shanggui is where the grain for Nan'an is stored. If we can take it, then Nan'an will naturally be in peril."

So Jiang Wei left Xiahou Ba to keep watch over Wucheng (3,2) Mountain while he led the strongest units of his army to go take Shanggui. They traveled through the night, and as first light broke, they noticed that they were traveling through some rather treacherous terrain. Jiang Wei asked the guide

what the name of this place was. The guide told him it was Duan (4) Gorge. Jiang Wei immediately became alarmed.

“That’s a terrible name,” he said. “Duan (4) sounds the same as the word for cut off. If someone cuts off the mouth of this valley, then what would we do?”

Just as he was worrying about the name of the place, an urgent report came from the front of his column, saying that they had spotted a huge dust cloud rising from behind the hills, which suggested an ambush. Jiang Wei immediately ordered his army to retreat. But it was too late. The two squads of soldiers that Deng Ai had sent here now sprang out and attacked. Jiang Wei and his troops fled while they fought, but soon, loud cries of battle rose up from in front of them as well. This was Deng Ai arriving to close the trap. Assaulted on three sides, Jiang Wei’s army was routed. But fortunately for him, Xiahou Ba arrived just in the nick of time and fought off the Wei troops and rescued him.

Jiang Wei now wanted to go back to the camp he had left at the foot of Qi Mountain, but Xiahou Ba told him, “That camp has already been sacked by Chen Tai, and the officer left in charge is dead. All the troops from that camp have fallen back to Hanzhong.”

So Jiang Wei now did not dare to go back the way he came. Instead, he opted to take the backroads through the mountains. But by now, Deng Ai had regrouped and was pressing hard on his tail. So Jiang Wei told his men to go on ahead while he himself brought up the rear.

While he was retreating, he was suddenly accosted by a battalion of enemy troops, led by the general Chen Tai. In the blink of an eye, Jiang Wei found himself trapped in the middle of this army. He was exhausted by now, and no matter how much he tried, he could not break free. But fortunately for him, one of his comrades, the veteran general Zhang Yi (2), heard about his predicament and came charging through the enemy lines with a few hundred riders. That gave Jiang Wei the opening he needed to break out. But unfortunately, Zhang Yi (2) himself fell victim to a barrage of enemy arrows.



When Jiang Wei fled back to his base in Hanzhong, he sent a memorial to the emperor asking that Zhang Yi's (2) family be rewarded for his sacrifice. Jiang Wei also assumed responsibility for the many casualties that his army suffered, which, yeah, he should. Following the example set by Zhuge Liang, Jiang Wei asked the emperor to demote him to General of the Rear and acting regent-marshal. So yeah, a mostly symbolic gesture.

On the Wei side of the border, Deng Ai and Chen Tai celebrated successfully repelling another Shu invasion. They rewarded their troops, and Chen Tai sent a memorial to the capital singing Deng Ai's praises. As a result, Sima Zhao gave Deng Ai another promotion and also gave Deng Ai's son a marquiship.

We are now in the year 256, and Sima Zhao had absolute control of the Wei court. He named himself grand commander of the military, and he was accompanied by 3,000 armed guards wherever he went. In all affairs, he didn't even bother to inform the court before handling it. He just made all the decisions from his residence. Well, with things going the way they were, Sima Zhao began entertaining thoughts of usurping the throne.

One of his confidants was a man named Jia (3) Chong (1), who was the son of Jia (3) Kui (2), a key general in the Wei army when he was alive. Jia Chong (1) said to Sima Zhao, "My lord, you hold such immense power. It's no surprise that not every corner of the realm is loyal to you yet. You should put out some feelers before making your move."

"My thoughts exactly," Sima Zhao said. "You can represent me on an eastern tour under the cover of rewarding the troops. Use the opportunity to see what people are saying."

So Jia Chong headed off. He went to Yang (2) Province in the Southeast, where he met the general Zhuge Dan (4). Now, remember that Zhuge Dan (4) was left in charge of the troops in the southeastern region of the kingdom after Sima Shi had put down a rebellion there. And in case you're wondering, yes,

Zhuge Dan is related to Zhuge Liang. He was one of Zhuge Liang's cousins, but he had always been in the service of the kingdom of Wei. But as you can imagine, having a kinsman who was the prime minister of your kingdom's nemesis did not help Zhuge Dan's career advancement. While Zhuge Liang was alive, Zhuge Dan's career went nowhere. But after Zhuge Liang died, Zhuge Dan began going places, rising to his present role overseeing the troops of a vast region.

After receiving Jia Chong, Zhuge Dan threw a banquet to welcome him. After they had been drinking for a while, Jia Chong decided to probe Zhuge Dan with some words.

"Recently, the officials in the capital all think our lord is too weak and feeble to be emperor," Jia Chong said. "They think that the regent-marshal, Sima Zhao, should receive the throne on account of the service that he, his brother, and his father have rendered to the country. What do you think?"

Well, Zhuge Dan fell for this hook, line, and sinker. He flew into a rage and said, "You are the son of General Jia Kui (2). Your family has received the benevolence of the court for generations. How dare you speak such nonsense?!"

Jia Chong replied that he was just passing along what "some people" were saying. Zhuge Dan replied, "If the court is in danger, then I shall risk death to repay the emperor."

To this, Jia Chong made no reply. The next day, he took his leave and returned to the capital. He told Sima Zhao what Zhuge Dan had said, and Sima Zhao flew into a rage.

"How dare that rat say such things?!"

Jia Chong now suggested, "Zhuge Dan has the loyalty of the people in his region. He will be a problem sooner or later. We should eliminate him quickly."

So Sima Zhao sent a secret message to the imperial protector of Yang Province, Yue (4) Chen (1). This Yue (4) Chen (1) was a veteran general and the son of Yue (4) Jin (4), one of those illustrious officers from Cao Cao's entourage. Sima Zhao then sent a decree to summon Zhuge Dan to the capital for, umm,

a promotion. Hey, congratulations. Now why don't you come on down to Luoyang and we'll take real good care of you.

Zhuge Dan was no dummy. When he got the summon, he realized that Jia Chong must have ratted him out to Sima Zhao, so he interrogated the envoy until the envoy fessed up and told him that Yue Chen (1) knew about this summon because Sima Zhao had sent him a secret message.

This infuriated Zhuge Dan. He had the envoy executed and then mobilized about 1,000 men and stormed toward Yang Province. When he approached the south gate, he saw that the gate had been shut and the drawbridge pulled up. Zhuge Dan called for the gates to be opened, but received no answer.

"Yue Chen, you scoundrel! How dare you?!" Zhuge Dan said in anger. He then laid siege to the city. Leading about a dozen cavalymen, Zhuge Dan rode into the moat and then climbed to the top of the city wall. There, he fought off the guards and opened the gates, letting his troops in. They made a big mess of the city as they fought their way to Yue Chen's residence.

Yue Chen was hiding in the top floor of his home, but Zhuge Dan stomped in with sword in hand, shouting, "Your father Yue Jin received immense kindness from the kingdom of Wei. Instead of trying to repay the state, you are siding with Sima Zhao instead!"

Before Yue Chen could answer, Zhuge Dan cut him down. So, with the point of no return a few hundred miles in the rearview mirror, Zhuge Dan now sent a memorial to the emperor, listing Sima Zhao's numerous offenses. At the same time, he rounded up more than 100,000 troops from the area, added in the 40,000 some soldiers in Yang Province who had just surrendered to him, and prepared to march on the capital. He also sent his own son to the bordering kingdom of Wu as hostage slash collateral, asking for help in exterminating Sima Zhao.

So at this point, the last prime minister of Wu that we had heard about, Sun Jun (4), had died. Remember that Sun Jun (4) came into power when he staged a coup that killed Zhuge Ke. When Sun Jun (4) died, his little brother Sun Chen (1) inherited his power. This Sun Chen (1) was a cruel, brutish sort, and he executed a number of high officials for daring to oppose him, so now, all power in the Wu court rested with him. The Wu emperor Sun Liang (4) was a bright lad, but he could do nothing about Sun Chen.

When Zhuge Dan's envoy arrived in Wu to ask for aid, offering Zhuge Dan's own son as collateral, Sun Chen agreed. He put the generals Quan (2) Yi (4) and Quan (2) Duan (1) in charge of 70,000 men. The officers Zhu (1) Yi (4) and Tang (2) Zi (1) were the vanguards. The officer Yu (1) Quan (2) headed up the rear, and as guide, he tapped the defector Wen (2) Qin (1). Remember that Wen Qin (1) was a key figure in the last rebellion that sprang up in the southeastern corner of the kingdom of Wei. His young son Wen Yang (1) even gave the Sima clan's troops a good beating. But when that rebellion was snuffed out, Wen Qin (1) and his sons found refuge in Dongwu. And now, they were going back to help a rebellion started by Zhuge Dan, the guy who, ironically, helped snuff out THEIR rebellion. Oh the tricks that the fates like to play.

To see if this rebellion fares any better than the last one, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!