

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 143.

Last time, Sima Zhao was secretly entertaining thoughts of usurping the throne, but that stirred up a rebellion in the southeastern corner of the kingdom of Wei, led by the general Zhuge Dan (4). Zhuge Dan (4) also asked for and received help from the kingdom of Wu, so now he set himself to preparing for a showdown against Sima Zhao.

Meanwhile, a memorial that Zhuge Dan had sent to the emperor arrived in the Wei capital. This memorial was a justification for Zhuge Dan's rebellion, and it included a long laundry list of Sima Zhao's offenses. Sima Zhao was naturally ticked off and wanted to go put down this upstart himself. But his adviser Jia Chong (1) said, "My lord, you have inherited your father and brother's work, but your own virtue and kindness have yet to be felt throughout the realm. If you leave the capital and the emperor now, something might happen at court, and it will be too late for regrets. Why don't you have the empress dowager and the emperor accompany you on your campaign. That will ensure nothing goes wrong."

Now, it made sense to take the emperor along since, after all, he was the symbol of authority. But the empress dowager? Really? Well, remember how Sima Zhao's own father seized power at court. While the then emperor was out of the capital, Sima Yi went to the empress dowager and basically forced her to give his coup her blessings. So Sima Zhao was not going to take any chances. He went and told the empress dowager, "Zhuge Dan is rebelling. Your servant and the other officials have discussed the matter and decided that we must ask you and his majesty to personally lead a campaign against the rebels."

The empress dowager was of course afraid of Sima Zhao, so she had no choice but to tag along. The next day, Sima Zhao told the emperor Cao Mao (2) that he needed to come along for the campaign. Cao Mao said, "Regent-marshal, you command all of our troops and you may deploy them as you see fit. What need is there for me to go in person?"

“Not so,” Sima Zhao replied. “Our kingdom’s founding emperor Cao Cao marched across the realm. His successors Cao Pi and Cao Rui also possessed the will to defend the state and the ambition to conquer the entire realm. Whenever there was a strong enemy, they always personally led the campaign. Your majesty should follow their example and sweep clean the rebels instead of worrying about your own safety.”

Well, Cao Mao was very much worried about his own safety, not so much from rebels in the provinces but from his own regent-marshal. So he acquiesced. Sima Zhao now gave the order to mobilize 260,000 men. He appointed the general Wang Ji (1) as the vanguard and began marching south.

As Sima Zhao’s vanguard approached, he ran into the vanguard of the army that the kingdom of Wu had sent to help Zhuge Dan. The Wu vanguard general Zhu Yi (4) came out to take on the Wei vanguard general Wang Ji (1). After just three bouts, Zhu Yi (4) fell back in defeat. His lieutenant then tried his luck, and he also fell back in defeat after three bouts. Wang Ji now directed his troops to charge, and they sent the Wu army scurrying for almost 20 miles.

After regrouping, the Wu army sent word of its defeat to Zhuge Dan (4) in the city of Shouchun. Zhuge Dan said fine, I guess I’ll have to do this myself. So he called up the crack troops under his command and joined up with Wen (2) Qin (1), the former Wei rebel turned Wu general who was now back with his sons to help Zhuge Dan’s rebellion. This combined army of several tens of thousands now marched out to take on Sima Zhao.

When Sima Zhao heard about this, he huddled with his advisers. The officer Zhong Hui (4) said, “Dongwu is only helping Zhuge Dan for its own benefit. If we dangle a carrot in front of them, we will beat them for sure.”

Sima Zhao followed this advice and set up an ambush. He then sent a second-tier officer to go lure the enemy in.

Later that day, Zhuge Dan approached with the general Zhu Yi (4) on his left flank and Wen Qin on his right. They saw that the enemy's lines were disorganized, so they decided to advance en masse. The Wei army fell back, and Zhuge Dan directed his men to give chase. Along the way, though, they saw countless cattle and horses grazing all over the fields. The rebel soldiers immediately became distracted, focusing on claiming their share of livestock than fighting.

Suddenly, an explosive sounded, and two Wei battalions charged out. Zhuge Dan immediately ordered retreat, but from behind came two other enemy battalions. This combined assault routed Zhuge Dan's army, and Sima Zhao also showed up with reinforcements, just to pile on. Zhuge Dan and his defeated troops scrambled back inside the city of Shouchun, and Sima Zhao surrounded the city and began a siege.

While this was going on, the Wu army had fallen back to the city of Anfeng (1,1), while the Wei army was based at the city of Xiangcheng (4,2). Sima Zhao's adviser Zhong Hui (4) now suggested to him, "Zhuge Dan may have been defeated, but the city of Shouchun has ample provisions, and the Wu army is positioned in a way that it can provide backup. Right now, we have the city surrounded and under siege. If the enemy's situation is manageable, they will stay on the defensive. If their situation becomes dire, then they will put up a dogged fight. If the Wu army takes this opportunity to attack us from behind, it would not be good for us. So why don't we only attack three sides of the city and leave the main road by the south gate open for the rebels to flee. Once they are on the run, we can strike them and achieve total victory. As for the Wu forces, they have come from far away, so they must have trouble resupplying. I can lead our light cavalry to sweep in behind them, and they will be defeated without a fight."

Hearing this plan, Sima Zhao put his hand on Zhong Hui's back and said, "Sir, you are truly my Zhang Liang (2)."

So this Zhang Liang that Sima Zhao just referenced was one of the most famous military strategists in Chinese history. For more about his exploits, refer back to Supplemental Episode 5: Legendary Advisers.

Anyway, while Sima Zhao was busy implementing Zhong Hui's plan, the Dongwu vanguard general Zhu Yi (4) was busy getting chewed out. His boss, the Wu prime minister Sun Chen (1), summoned him and gave him an earful about his defeat.

"If we can't even save a mere city like Shouchun, then how can we gobble up the Heartlands?!" Sun Chen scolded Zhu Yi. "If you fail to win again, you will be executed!"

When Zhu Yi returned to camp to discuss what to do next, one of his officers, Yu (1) Quan (2), said, "The south gate of Shouchun is not currently under siege. I am willing to lead a force in through there to help Zhuge Dan defend the city. General, when you engage the enemy, I will charge out from inside the city, and we will sandwich the enemy and crush them."

Zhu Yi agreed, so Yu (1) Quan (2), accompanied by the generals Quan (2) Yi (4), Quan Duan (1), and Wen Qin (1), entered the city with 10,000 men. The Wei troops on that side of the city did not have any orders as to what to do about this, so they did nothing and simply allowed the Wu forces into the city and reported this to Sima Zhao.

When Sima Zhao got the news, he immediately recognized what the Wu forces were trying to do. So he sent two officers at the head of 5,000 men each to attack Zhu Yi from behind. Zhu Yi was busy advancing on the Wei army laying siege to the city when he was surprised from behind by these two forces, and instead of sandwiching the Wei troops, he found himself sandwiched and crushed.

When Zhu Yi limped back to see Sun Chen (1), Sun Chen (1) was enraged. "All you do is lose!" Sun Chen said. "What's the point of keeping you around?!"

So Sun Chen had Zhu Yi executed and also reprimanded the son of Quan Duan (1), one of the generals commanding his forces. He told the young man, "If you guys can't defeat the Wei forces, then neither you nor your father should bother to come see me!"

And with that, Sun Chen patted himself on the back for a job well done and headed back to the Wu capital with the rest of his army. Hmm, I'm sure that inspirational speech will do the trick.

Meanwhile, Zhong Hui and Sima Zhao were huddling again. Zhong Hui said, "Now that Sun Chen and the Wu army have left, there is no outside help for the city of Shouchun, so we can surround it again."

So the full-on siege resumed. The son of the Wu commander Quan Duan tried to lead his army and break through into the city to help with its defense, but then he got a nice look at the might of the Wei forces. And with Sun Chen's parting words still ringing in his ear, he decided to surrender to Sima Zhao instead. Sima Zhao treated him well and gave him a rank as a lieutenant general, and in gratitude, the son wrote to his father and uncle, who were presently inside the city, telling them how uncompassionate Sun Chen was and hey why don't you guys come over to this side of the fence. The grass is much greener over here. That letter was shot into the city on an arrow, and Quan Duan (1) and his brother Quan Yi (4) promptly came out with several thousand men and surrendered.

With things going downhill in a hurry, Zhuge Dan was getting concerned. Two of his advisers now suggested that given the dwindling provisions, he should lead what remained of his men and go fight it out with the enemy. But Zhuge Dan was enraged by this suggestion.

"I want to defend, and yet you want to fight. Are you harboring ulterior motives?! Another word about this from you, and I will have your heads!"

Well, that overreaction prompted the two advisers to defect to the enemy that very night, and Sima Zhao again treated them well and gave them high ranks in order to show the people inside the city that

there was much to be gained from surrendering. By now, even though the city still had plenty of people who were not afraid of a fight, everyone inside was afraid of suggesting to Zhuge Dan that they fight.

Meanwhile, Zhuge Dan saw that the Wei troops were building dirt walls to guard against flooding from the Huai (2) River. So he now pinned his hopes on that, hoping that the river would flood like it usually did and knock down the enemy's dirt walls. He would then charge out and attack. But when autumn turned to winter, not a single drop of rain fell, and the river remained within its banks. So much for that.

And now, the provisions inside the city were running out. The general Wen Qin and his two sons saw how their troops were starving, so Wen Qin went to see Zhuge Dan and said, "Our provisions are almost gone and our men are starving. Why don't we let your soldiers, who are men of the North, go out and surrender so that we may conserve our provisions?"

But Zhuge Dan again became enraged. "Why are you telling me to send away my own men? Are you trying to make a move against me?!"

So Zhuge Dan had Wen Qin executed at once. Well, when Wen Qin's two sons, Wen Yang (1) and Wen Hu (3), found out what happened to their father, they did not mess around. They pulled out their short blades, cut down a few dozen men, and leaped over the city wall to go surrender to the enemy.

Now, remember that Wen Yang had once single-handedly dealt Sima Zhao's troops a severe beating, and Sima Zhao had not forgotten about that. Now that Wen Yang was at his mercy, he was contemplating on granting none. But Zhong Hui said, "The previous offense rested on Wen Qin's shoulders, and he's dead now. His two sons have nowhere to turn, so they have come here. If we kill officers who surrender to us, it would harden the resolve of those inside the city."

Sima Zhao agreed, so he dropped his old grudge, summoned the two Wen brothers, consoled them with kind words, gave them gifts of horses and clothing, and heaped upon them generalships and

marquiships. That did the trick, and the two brothers now rode around the outside of the city, shouting, "The regent-marshal not only pardoned our offense, but also rewarded us. You all should surrender at once!"

When people inside the city heard those words, they began to talk among themselves. Hey, that Wen Yang was a nemesis of the Sima clan, and even he got a plush position, so what the heck are we waiting for? So more and more hearts inside the city were now leaning toward surrender. When Zhuge Dan heard about this, he was ... you guessed it ... enraged. He personally patrolled the city day and night, executing anyone he suspected of plotting defection so as to scare everyone else into line.

But alas, the tide of battle had turned, and it was not turning back. Zhong Hui recognized that people in the city were all thinking about surrender, so he advised Sima Zhao to attack the city at once. As soon as the siege began, the officer guarding the north gate surrendered and let the Wei army in. When Zhuge Dan heard the news, he hurriedly led the few hundred men remaining in his unit and fled the city through its back alleys. But just as he approached the drawbridge, he ran into the Wei general Hu (2) Zun (1). With the flash of a saber, Zhuge Dan fell dead off his horse, while his entourage was all rounded up.

Meanwhile, the Wei vanguard general Wang Ji had breached the west gate, where he ran into the Wu general Yu (1) Quan (2), just about the only Wu officer left in the city who had not defected to Wei. Wang Ji called for Yu Quan to surrender, but Yu Quan replied angrily, "I came with orders to save another. I have failed to save him, and if I surrender to someone else now, it would be dishonorable!"

With that, Yu Quan tossed his helmet to the ground and shouted, "Fortunate is he who gets to die on the battlefield!" He then put up a stiff fight for about 30 bouts, but exhaustion caught up to him, and he was killed in the melee. A poet later praised him thus:

The year Sima Zhao kept Shouchun under siege,
Its defenders gave up in the wagons' dust.
Which Southland hero justly stands beside
Yu Quan, who fought for honor to the last?

The answer, of course, was "not many." With Zhuge Dan dead, the battle soon ended, and Sima Zhao entered the city. He immediately did the usual purge, exterminating Zhuge Dan's entire clan. He then turned his attention to the few hundred men who were captured while accompanying Zhuge Dan on his ill-fated attempt to escape.

"Will you surrender?" Sima Zhao asked these men.

But as one, they all shouted, "We are willing to die with General Zhuge! We will never surrender!"

Well, fine then. Sima Zhao had his soldiers take these prisoners outside the city. There, they asked each person whether they would surrender, telling them that they would be spared if they did. But to a man, no one in the group surrendered, even as their comrades were executed one by one. This loyalty touched Sima Zhao, and he gave these men the dignity of a burial.

Now, as for the Wu soldiers inside the city, most of them surrendered, but an adviser now told Sima Zhao, "These men's families are all in the Southlands. If we keep them around, they will be trouble in the long run. Why don't we bury them alive instead?"

And in case you're wondering, this bury-alive thing was not an uncommon practice, usually used when one needed to dispose of a large number of captured enemy combatants quickly. But Zhong Hui disagreed with this suggestion.

"The master strategists of old considered it essential that you take an enemy kingdom whole -- both its land and its people -- and only execute the principal villains," Zhong Hui said. "It would be cruel to

bury these men. Why don't we just let them go back home to the Southlands to demonstrate the generosity of our kingdom?"

Sima Zhao decided Zhong Hui's plan sounded a lot better, so he let all the Wu soldiers go back to the Southlands. One of the Wu vanguard officers, Tang (2) Zi (1), was afraid of what the Wu prime minister Sun Chen (1) would do to him if he went home, so he defected to Sima Zhao, and Sima Zhao gave him a nice post as well.

We're now in the year 257, and the southeastern region of the kingdom of Wei was once again pacified. Sima Zhao was just about to go back to the capital when he received word that the Shu commander Jiang Wei was at it once again, trying to capture the western borderland town of Changcheng (2,2) and intercepting grain shipments.

While Sima Zhao huddles with his advisers on a response, let's go check in on Jiang Wei to see what's up with his latest incursion into Wei territory. Since his last defeat, Jiang Wei had been rebuilding his army in Hanzhong. He found two valiant warriors that he was very fond of, one named Jiang (3) Shu (1) and the other named Fu (4) Qian (1).

When Jiang Wei got word that Sima Zhao was leading a campaign to put down a rebellion in the southeastern part of his kingdom, he sensed an opportunity. So he wrote to the emperor Liu Shan, expressing his intention to march North once again.

When the Shu court official Qiao (2) Zhou (1) caught wind of this, he sighed and said, "Recently, his majesty has been indulging in wine and women and places his trust in the eunuch Huang (2) Hao (4). He ignores the affairs of the state and only pursues pleasure. Meanwhile, Jiang Wei is waging war nonstop, with no concern for the soldiers. Our kingdom is in peril!"

So Qiao Zhou wrote a piece called "On Enemy Kingdoms," and sent it to Jiang Wei. This piece was basically an academic rumination on how a small kingdom should go about fighting a large rival

kingdom. In it, Qiao Zhou draws on famous precedents and concludes that the answer was to bide your time and nurture the people while waiting for the right opportunity. In case you couldn't tell, there's a real subtle message tucked away in there for Jiang Wei.

But when Jiang Wei finished reading this, he said angrily, "This is the view of a pedant!" He threw the letter to the ground and pressed ahead with his plans for another invasion. He asked Fu (4) Qian (1), one of his new favorite officers, where they should attack first. Fu Qian said, "The Wei army's provisions are all stored at the town of Changcheng (2,2). We should go through the Luo (4) Valley and cross over the Chen (2) Mountain Range to reach Changcheng. First, we'll burn the enemy's provisions, and then we will march on the Qin (2) Mountains. That will put the Heartlands within our reach."

"Sir, your thoughts match mine exactly," Jiang Wei said, so they mobilized their army and headed for Changcheng.

And by the way, while we're on the subject, let me give a shout out to listener Phil from New Zealand. A while back, Phil sent me a file of some published maps of the Three Kingdoms era that were extremely detailed. That has come in handy a few times with identifying some of the lesser towns and locations mentioned in the novel. In this case, the name of the town of Changcheng bore the exact same characters as the Chinese word for the Great Wall. Now, I knew it was most likely not referring to THE Great Wall, considering that the location would be all wrong. But then, more confusion arose from the English translation of the novel that I was using as reference, because at one point in the novel, it referred to this location as Chang'an, which was the old name for the present-day city of Xi'an and a key western stronghold for the kingdom of Wei. It seemed unlikely that Jiang Wei would have been able to set his sights on Chang'an as the first target on his campaign, since that was Zhuge Liang's big goal for all of his campaigns, and he could never come close to sniffing Chang'an. So I pulled up the maps from Phil, and sure enough, there it was, a location called Changcheng. Not the wall, and not Chang'an. Just a borderland town. So, thanks Phil!

Anyway, word of the latest Shu incursion soon reached the town of Changcheng. The general overseeing this location was Sima Wang (4), a cousin of Sima Zhao's. This town had plenty of provisions, but not many troops. When Sima Wang found out that he was in Jiang Wei's crosshairs, he immediately led an army about six or seven miles outside of the town to set up camp and prepare to face the enemy. The next day, Jiang Wei arrived, and Sima Wang lined up to meet him.

Pointing at Sima Wang, Jiang Wei said, "Sima Zhao has the Wei emperor in his army; he must have intentions to emulate Li (3) Jue (2) and Guo (1) Si (4)." And by the way, if you don't remember, those two guys were lieutenants under the tyrannical warlord Dong Zhuo, and after Dong Zhuo was killed, they rose to power in the Han court, but then they turned on each other and ended up abducting the emperor as they fought each other for power.

Anyway, Jiang Wei continued, "I have come with a mandate from my emperor to make you answer for your crimes. Surrender now. If you continue on your misguided path, your whole family will die!"

So, just like his last invasion, Jiang Wei's official justification for encroaching on Wei's borders is rather ludicrous. Why was it any of his business what the prime minister of his rival kingdom was doing? Sima Wang certainly paid it no mind, as he replied, "Enough of your impudence! You have encroached on our superior kingdom time and again. If you don't retreat immediately, I will make sure none of you goes home alive!"

Before Sima Wang was done talking, one of his lieutenants rode out with spear in hand. From the Shu lines, the general Fu (4) Qian (1) rode forth to meet him. Within 10 bouts, Fu Qian dodged his opponent's blow and captured the guy alive, tucking the Wei lieutenant across the back of his horse as he rode back toward his own lines. Sima Wang's other lieutenant now galloped forth with saber in hand to rescue his comrade. Well, Fu Qian could sense him closing and intentionally slowed down. When the second lieutenant drew near, Fu Qian tossed the first guy onto the ground and pulled out a short iron

staff that he had tucked away. When the second lieutenant raised his saber, Fu Qian swiftly turned around and smacked the guy so hard across his face with the staff that the poor man's eyes popped out and he fell dead to the ground. Meanwhile, the first lieutenant, the one that Fu Qian had just thrown to the ground, was stabbed to death by the Shu soldiers.

Riding the momentum of this victory, Jiang Wei directed his troops forward, sending Sima Wang scurrying back inside his town. Jiang Wei now told his men to rest overnight to build up their strength, and that they must sack the town the next day.

At dawn the next morning, the Shu forces advanced en masse and swarmed the foot of the city. They launched fire arrows and explosives into the city, setting the thatched huts on fire and sending the Wei soldiers into a panic. Jiang Wei now also had his men pile up firewood at the foot of the city and start a fire. The flames roared toward the sky, and the city looked to be on the brink of falling, as the soldiers inside wailed in misery.

But just then, Jiang Wei heard loud cries from behind him. He turned and saw a Wei army marching this way with its banners flaring and its drums rolling. Jiang Wei ordered his army to flip so that the rear became the front, and he waited by his banner for the oncoming enemy.

To see who was coming to stop Jiang Wei and how Jiang Wei will deal with them, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!