

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 150.

Last time, this became the Romance of the Two Kingdoms Podcast, as Deng (4) Ai (4) forced the Shu emperor Liu (2) Shan (4) to surrender. Deng Ai then sent a letter back to his boss, Sima (1,3) Zhao (1), advising that they leave Liu Shan in the Riverlands for now and treat him well so as to show the emperor of Wu that hey, you should really just surrender too.

But that advice aroused Sima Zhao's suspicion that Deng Ai was trying to set himself up to rule the Riverlands. So Sima Zhao now sent two documents. One was an official decree to Deng Ai; the other was a handwritten letter to Deng Ai's army supervisor, Wei (4) Guan (4). The decree heaped praise upon Deng Ai for his accomplishments and informed him that he was to be promoted to grand commandant. He would have an extra 20,000 households added to his fiefdom, and his sons would receive titles of nobility and food from fiefdoms of a thousand households each.

After Deng Ai received that decree, the army supervisor Wei (4) Guan (4) showed him the handwritten letter from Sima Zhao. It said that regarding what to do with Liu Shan, Sima Zhao needed to first run Deng Ai's advice through the emperor, so he couldn't act on it immediately. Of course, Deng Ai did not buy that. I mean, when was the last time Sima Zhao ran anything through the emperor except a pointy weapon?

"A general in the field may disregard an order from his lord," Deng Ai said. "Since I have the authority of an imperial edict for my expedition, why should he reject my proposal?"

So Deng Ai sent another letter back to the capital. By now, everyone at court was saying that Deng Ai must be thinking about a rebellion, which only added to Sima Zhao's paranoia. And then, his envoy returned with Deng Ai's letter, which basically said that we have to act quickly to firm up the loyalty of the people of Shu and to capitalize on the opportunity to win hearts and minds in the kingdom of Wu. So I can't wait until you run this proposal through the emperor. As the Spring and Autumn Annals said, "Beyond the borders, a high official may do as he sees fit as long as his purpose is in the best interest of

the state.” I will never do anything to harm the state’s interest, so I will go ahead and put my proposal into effect.

Uhh, this was exactly the wrong time to ask for forgiveness instead of permission. Sima Zhao was shocked by the audacity expressed in the letter, so he quickly huddled with his adviser Jia (3) Chong (1).

Sima Zhao said, “Deng Ai is getting too arrogant and is acting on his own accord. His rebellious intent is showing. What should we do?”

“Why not promote Zhong (1) Hui (4) to check him?” Jia Chong suggested.

So Sima Zhao promoted Zhong Hui to minister of the interior and put Wei (4) Guan (4) in charge of both armies in Shu. He also sent another handwritten letter to Wei Guan, telling him to work with Zhong Hui to keep an eye on Deng Ai, in case Deng Ai did decide to rebel.

Upon receiving his promotion, Zhong Hui met with Jiang (1) Wei (2), the former Shu commander who had surrendered to Zhong Hui and become his sworn brother.

“Deng Ai’s accomplishments outrank mine, and he has been promoted to grand commandant,” Zhong Hui said. “Now, Lord Sima suspects Deng Ai of harboring rebellious intent, so he has appointed Wei Guan (4) to supervise the troops and ordered me to keep Deng Ai in check. What insights do you have?”

Jiang Wei replied, “I have heard that Deng Ai came from a low birth and raised cattle as a child. He got lucky in slipping through the cliffs at Yinping (1,2) and stumbled into a great accomplishment. It had nothing to do with his wit; it was all thanks to the kingdom’s great fortune. If you had not kept me occupied at the Saber Pass, how could Deng Ai have done what he did? And now, he wants to make Liu Shan a king to win over the hearts of the Riverlanders. His intentions to rebel are all too obvious. The Duke of Jin (4) is right to be wary of him.”

Zhong Hui was pleased with what he heard, and Jiang Wei now asked him to dismiss everyone else so he could share a secret. After everybody left the room, Jiang Wei pulled out a map from his sleeve and showed it to Zhong Hui.

“This was the map that Zhuge Liang presented to the First Emperor at their first meeting in the thatched hut,” Jiang Wei said. “He told the First Emperor, ‘Yi (4) Province, with its vast and fertile land, is a prosperous kingdom with a productive population. It can be the foundation for hegemony. That is why the First Emperor proceeded to take Chengdu (2,1). Now that Deng Ai is there, how could he not be tempted to do something outrageous?’”

Zhong Hui was delighted with the map, and he asked about this place and that mountain, and Jiang Wei answered him in detail. Zhong Hui then asked, “How can we get rid of Deng Ai?”

“We should capitalize on the Duke of Jin’s suspicions. Send an urgent report saying that Deng Ai is rebelling. The Duke of Jin will no doubt order you to put him down. Then, we can take him in one fell swoop.”

So Zhong Hui sent some men into the capital Luoyang to spread rumors that Deng Ai was hoarding power and buttering up the Riverlanders, and that he was going to go rogue sooner or later. This sent shockwaves through the court. What’s more, Zhong Hui had his men intercept a memorial from Deng Ai midway, and inserted a few presumptuous lines in Deng Ai’s handwriting.

When that altered memorial arrived at court, Sima Zhao was outraged. He immediately ordered Zhong Hui to go arrest Deng Ai. He then sent Jia Chong at the head of 30,000 men to march through Xie (2) Gorge, and he told the Wei emperor Cao Huan (4), “Pack your bags. We’re going on campaign.”

The court official Shao (4) Ti (4) now said to Sima Zhao, “Zhong Hui’s army is six times that of Deng Ai’s. It’s more than sufficient to order Zhong Hui to arrest Deng Ai. Why must your lordship trouble yourself?”

Sima Zhao smiled and said, "Have you forgotten our conversation? You said that Zhong Hui will rebel for sure at some point. My campaign is not aimed at Deng Ai, but at Zhong Hui."

Shao (4) Ti (4) smiled back. "I was afraid your lordship had forgotten, so I asked on purpose. Since that is your intent, you must proceed in secret and not let word leak out."

Sima Zhao took his advice to heart and set out with his army. His adviser Jia Chong was also suspicious of Zhong Hui, so he expressed his concerns to Sima Zhao in secret. But Sima Zhao dismissed those concerns and said, "If I had sent you to Shu instead of Zhong Hui, should I now have cause to suspect you as well? All will become clear when I arrive at Chang'an (2,1)."

When Zhong Hui got word that Sima Zhao was already at Chang'an, he consulted with Jiang Wei about how to arrest Deng Ai. Jiang Wei told him, "You can send the army supervisor Wei Guan to go arrest Deng Ai. If Deng Ai kills Wei Guan, then his rebellion is proven. You can then mobilize your army to attack him."

Delighted, Zhong Hui immediately ordered Wei Guan to go to Chengdu with a few dozen men to arrest Deng Ai and his son. Wait, you want me to go to Deng Ai's stronghold ... with a few dozen men ... and arrest him? Uhh

Wei Guan's men all told saw through Zhong Hui's scheme and told Wei Guan he could not go on this suicidal mission, but Wei Guan was like, nah, I've got this. Before he set out, he sent on ahead about 30 decrees that said, "On imperial orders, I am arresting Deng Ai. No one else will be implicated. If you come to surrender quickly, you will be rewarded. If you do not come, your clans will be exterminated."

That done, Wei Guan prepared two prisoner carts and rushed toward Chengdu. By cockcrow the next morning, numerous officers under Deng Ai's command had seen the decrees, and they had all come and submitted to Wei Guan. Around dawn, while Deng Ai was still in his bed, Wei Guan and a few dozen men suddenly stormed in, shouting, "We have an imperial edict to arrest Deng Ai and his son!"

A stunned Deng Ai rolled off his bed and was immediately tied up. His son Deng Zhong came out to see what was going on, and he was promptly arrested as well, and both were thrown into the prisoner carts. The guards in the house were stunned and were just about to try to save their master when they saw a huge dust cloud in the distance. Word came that this was Zhong Hui's army approaching. So all the men loyal to Deng Ai scattered.

When Zhong Hui and Jiang Wei arrived, they saw that Deng Ai and his son had both been bound. Zhong Hui struck Deng Ai on the head with his whip and cursed him, "You cattle-herding urchin! How dare you?!"

Jiang Wei also joined in. "Scoundrel, you gambled and got lucky. And now, you've got your comeuppance!"

Deng Ai also hurled some insults back at his captors, but to no avail. Zhong Hui ordered that Deng Ai and his son be taken to the Wei capital Luoyang (4,2). He then entered Chengdu and took over all of Deng Ai's troops. From that moment on, Zhong Hui's reputation grew immensely.

One day, Zhong Hui told Jiang Wei, "I have finally fulfilled my lifelong ambition!"

But Jiang Wei cautioned him. "In the past, Han (2) Xin (4) did not listen to advice and brought calamity upon himself. And Wen (2) Zhong (3) did not follow his colleague to live as hermits, instead remaining at court, which ended with him falling on his sword. Both of them had the most glorious achievements to their names, yet they failed to see the latent danger ahead. Now, my lord, your own merits have reached the pinnacle, as your sovereign is all too aware. Why not quit while you are ahead and retreat from the world?"

But Zhong Hui just laughed and said, "Sir, you're mistaken. I'm not even 40 yet, and I'm at an age for advancing and conquering, not for retiring into inactivity like the ancients."

“If you do not retire, then you must make plans for yourself, soon,” Jiang Wei said. “There are things here that you have the mind and strength to accomplish. You have no need for an old man’s advice.”

“You really know my heart,” Zhong Hui said as he laughed. So from that day forth, the two of them schemed every day about their grand enterprise. But unbeknownst to Zhong Hui, Jiang Wei was secretly passing notes to Liu Shan, telling him, “Your majesty only need to tolerate a few more days’ humiliation. I will restore the kingdom and make the sun and the moon shine again. I will not allow the House of Han to be extinguished.”

While Zhong Hui and Jiang Wei were discussing rebellion, a letter arrived from Sima Zhao. It said, “I was concerned that you could not take Deng Ai yourself, so I have garrisoned at Chang’an. We will meet soon. I wanted to give you a heads up first.”

Zhong Hui was greatly alarmed by this letter. “My troops easily outnumber Deng Ai’s,” he said. “The Duke of Jin knows that I am more than capable of arresting Deng Ai by myself. He and his army are coming for me!”

So he consulted with Jiang Wei, who told him, “When the lord suspects the vassal, the vassal is dead for sure. Did you not see what happened to Deng Ai?”

“My mind is made up!” Zhong Hui said. “If we succeed, then the whole empire is mine. If we fail, then I can retreat into the Riverlands and emulate Liu Bei.”

Jiang Wei now offered a plan. “I heard that Empress Dowager Guo (1) recently died. We can pretend that she left a decree to bring Sima Zhao to justice for killing the previous emperor. With your talent, you can take the Heartlands with no trouble at all.”

“You will be my vanguard,” Zhong Hui said. “When we succeed, we will share the spoils.”

“I am willing to do all that I can,” Jiang Wei said, “but I worry that your officers will not go along with the plan.”

“The lantern festival is tomorrow,” Zhong Hui said. “We can put on a grand lantern display at the palace and invite all the officers to a feast. If anyone dares to disobey us, we will kill them.”

Jiang Wei agreed, secretly rejoicing at the thought of pitting Zhong Hui against his own men. The next day, which was the 15th day of the first month of the year 264, they invited all the officers to a feast. After a few rounds of wine, Zhong Hui suddenly started weeping. Surprised, the officers asked him what was up.

“Before she died, Empress dowager Guo (1) left a decree, which I have here,” Zhong Hui said. “She said that Sima Zhao is a traitor who killed his emperor and will usurp the throne sooner or later. She ordered me to bring him to justice. You all must now sign your name to this decree and join me on this mission.”

Uhhhh. Ok. All the officers were stunned and looked at each other like, is he kidding? He’s kidding, right? Are you signing that? I’m not signing that.

Sensing their skepticism, Zhong Hui pulled out his sword and declared, “Whoever disobeys will be executed!”

Well, since you put it that way, sure, let’s all sign our names. After every officer had signed, Zhong Hui had them all locked inside the palace and put guards on them. But Jiang Wei told him, “I don’t think they will obey your commands. Kill them now.”

“I have ordered a giant pit to be dug in the palace and have prepared thousands of large rods,” Zhong Hui said. “Whoever disobeys will be beaten to death and thrown into the pit.”

While they were talking, one of Zhong Hui’s trusted officers was standing by and hearing every word. This guy was named Qiu (1) Jian (4). He used to serve under the general Hu (2) Lie (4), and Hu Lie

just so happened to be among those locked up inside the palace at the moment. So Qiu (1) Jian (4) sneaked into the palace and told his old boss what his new boss had said about killing everyone.

Hu Lie was shocked and said with tears in his eyes, “My son Hu (2) Yuan (1) is leading troops in the field. How could he know that Zhong Hui is up to no good? If you place any value in our old bond, please get a word out to him. I would die without regret.”

“Benefactor, do not worry,” Qiu Jian said. “I will try.”

Qiu Jian then went to see Zhong Hui and said, “My lord, you have locked the officers in the palace. They lack water and food. We should assign someone to deliver those things.”

Zhong Hui said sure, you just volunteered for the job. He also told Qiu Jian, “I am entrusting you with an important responsibility. Do not let word leak out.”

“My lord, don’t worry. I will take care of it.”

And by “take care of it”, Qiu Jian meant that he was going to secretly let one of Hu Lie’s confidants into the palace. Hu Lie gave this man a secret letter, and the confidant rushed it to Hu Lie’s son Hu Yuan (1), telling him everything. Hu Yuan (1) was shocked and immediately alerted all the officers in camp. They were all enraged by Zhong Hui’s treachery and told Hu Yuan, “We would rather die than follow a traitor!”

So they planned an assault on Zhong Hui on the 18th day of the month. Wei Guan, the army supervisor, was impressed with the plan and organized the troops for the strike. In the meantime, Qiu Jian sent word back to Hu Lie and the other officers in the palace.

On the 18th day, Zhong Hui summoned Jiang Wei and said, “Last night I dreamed I was being bitten by thousands of large snakes. What omen is this?”

“When one dreams of snakes or dragons, it’s a good omen,” Jiang Wei said.

Incredibly, Zhong Hui believed this and felt good about his dream. He then told Jiang Wei, "Everything is ready. How about we let the officers out one by one and ask if they will help us?"

But Jiang Wei said, "This lot will not obey you and will be a threat in time. Let's just kill them all now."

Zhong Hui agreed and told Jiang Wei to take some guards and go kill the detained officers. But just as they were about to head out, a sharp pain suddenly shot through Jiang Wei's chest, and he collapsed to the floor. The men helped him up and it took him a good while to come around.

Just as he was getting back on his feet, loud shouts rose up from outside the palace. Zhong Hui was about to send someone to go see what was going on when the loud cries closed in from all sides, followed by a seemingly endless stream of soldiers.

"This must be the wicked doings of those officers," Jiang Wei said. "We should execute them first."

But word came that the troops had already entered the palace. Zhong Hui ordered his guards to bar the doors to the main hall and sent his men to go up on the rooftops to throw roof tiles down on the attackers. A few dozen men were killed in the exchange.

Soon, a fire started outside the palace, and the attacking troops kicked down the doors to the main hall. Zhong Hui pulled out his sword and slayed a few men, but was soon put down by a shower of arrows, and the troops swarmed in and cut off his head.

As for Jiang Wei, he charged to and fro in the hall with sword in hand, but his chest pains returned, and he could not fight on. Looking skyward, he shouted, "It is heaven's will that my plan did not succeed!"

And with that, he turned his sword on himself and slit his own throat. He was 59 years old.

By the time the melee ended and Wei Guan ordered all the troops back to their own camps, hundreds lay dead in the palace. In an act of vengeance, the Wei troops cut open Jiang Wei's body,

whereupon they found a gall bladder as big as an egg, which, as the belief went, explained his courage. They also rounded up his family and killed them all.

Now, there were still men from Deng Ai's old outfit in the army. When they saw that Zhong Hui and Jiang Wei had both been killed, they rushed off to rescue their old commander. When Wei Guan heard about this, he said, "I was the one who arrested Deng Ai. If he lives, there would be no resting place for my bones."

Hearing this, the officer Tian (2) Xu (4) stepped forth and said, "When Deng Ai was laying siege to the city of Jiangyou (1,2), he wanted to execute me, and I was only spared because the other officers pleaded for my life. Let me have my revenge today!"

Wei Guan was delighted and sent Tian Xu with 500 men to go chase down Deng Ai. As they approached the city of Mianzhu (2,2), they saw that Deng Ai and his son had just been freed from their prisoner carts and were about to head back to Chengdu. Seeing men approach in the distance, Deng Ai thought these were his old troops, so his guard was down. Just as he was about to speak to the oncoming soldiers, Tian Xu cut him down with one swing of the saber. Deng Ai's son Deng Zhong was also killed in the melee.

So in a span of one day, we have disposed of the three major characters from this last section of the novel. You had Deng Ai, who probably did not intend to rebel; Zhong Hui, who most definitely did; and Jiang Wei, who was actively fomenting Zhong Hui's rebellion so he could start his own. Guilty or innocent. Victorious or defeated. None of it mattered, as they're all dead now. Of course, we need to have a poem for each of them to go out on. First up is Deng Ai.

From boyhood on he fashioned shrewd designs;

Inventive, he excelled in waging wars.

His steady gaze could read the lay of the land
Or tell the secrets hidden in the stars.
The hills would part to let his riders pass,
And paths would form to let his marchers by.
But, merit won, he fell to treachery;
His soul now sails the rivers in the sky.

Next, we have a poem about Zhong Hui:

In tender years a genius he was hailed;
As counselor he came to serve the throne.
His stratagems shook the Sima clan:
Another Zhang Liang they called him then.
Zhong Hui won his laurels at Shouchun (4,1);
At Saber Pass his feats of arms won fame.
He would not retire into obscurity for safety,
But now, a roaming soul, he pines for home.

And finally, a serenade for Jiang Wei:

Proud be his home district Tianshui (1,3),
From Liang (2) Province came such a man!
Born to the line of Jiang (1) Ziya (3,2),
Trained in war by Zhuge Liang.

So great in courage, what had he to fear?
His hero's heart was pledged to hold the field.
In Chengdu on the day he lost his life,
The generals of Han sat sorrow-filled.

Jiang Wei, Deng Ai, and Zhong Hui were not the only casualties of that day's fighting. Shu generals like Zhang Yi (4) were also killed in the scrum, along with the former crown prince of Shu and a descendant of Guan Yu's. Both the army and the civilians were engulfed in the chaos, and countless people were trampled to death.

Ten days later, Sima Zhao's adviser Jia Chong arrived and put out word that all was well now and that there was nothing to see here. He left Wei Guan to oversee Chengdu and then relocated the former Shu emperor Liu Shan to the Wei capital Luoyang. Only a few officials, such as Qiao (2) Zhou (1) and Xi (4) Zheng (4), accompanied their former lord on the journey. The old Shu generals Liao (4) Hua (4) and Dong (3) Jue (2) both stayed home on account of illness, and they both died from worry soon thereafter.

So we're now in the third month of the year 264. And hey, remember when the kingdom of Wu sent that relief force to go save their ally? Yeah, me neither. That seemed like so long ago, didn't it? By the time that army got going, the kingdom of Shu had already fallen, so the Wu general Ding (1) Feng (4) simply packed up and marched his men back home.

Wu now found itself all alone, facing a much more powerful foe, and the Wu emperor Sun (1) Xiu (1) knew that it was only a matter of time before Sima Zhao set his sights on the Southlands. To prepare for this inevitability, he put Lu (4) Kang (4), the son of the great general Lu (4) Xun (4), in charge of Jing Province to defend the mouth of the river. He also appointed the General of the Left, Sun Yi (4), to

oversee defenses at various key locations, while the old general Ding Feng was put in charge of hundreds of camps along the river.

So that's what was happening in the Southeast. Back in the Southwest, in the southern reaches of the kingdom formerly known as Shu, there was still one lone outpost that had not surrendered to Wei. The district of Jianning (4,2) was overseen by the governor Huo (4) Ge (1). When he heard that the court of Shu had surrendered, he donned mourning clothes and wept facing west for three straight days.

Huo Ge's officers now all told him he should follow his lord's example and surrender quickly, but he said while weeping, "Because the roads are blocked, I don't know yet whether my lord is safe. If the Lord of Wei treats him with due courtesy, then I will surrender the city. If he humiliates my lord, then I, as the vassal, must die. There would be no surrender!"

Having made that pledge, Huo Ge sent someone to the Wei capital Luoyang (4,2) to find news of Liu Shan.

So let's also go to Luoyang to check up on Liu Shan. When he first arrived, Sima Zhao had already returned from his campaign. When the two met, Sima Zhao admonished Liu Shan, saying, "You deserve public execution for your ungoverned self-indulgence, rampant immorality, maltreatment of worthy men, and mishandling of the kingdom."

Liu Shan's face turned ashen, and he knew not what to say or do. To see what Liu Shan's fate would be, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!