

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 149.

Last time, the armies of Wei were closing in on the Shu capital Chengdu. The Shu commander Jiang Wei was mounting a stiff defense against the forces led by Zhong Hui at the Saber Pass, the main road leading to Chengdu. But unbeknownst to Jiang Wei, the other Wei commander, Deng Ai, had led a small detachment of troops on a daring trek across treacherous mountain terrain to sneak around him. Now, Deng Ai was on his way to attack Chengdu.

The Shu emperor Liu Shan asked his courtiers what he should do. Most of the officials had no ideas. One official, Xi (4) Zheng (4), stepped forward and said, “With the situation so dire, your highness should summon the son of the Marquis of Wu (3) to discuss how to repel the enemy.”

The Marquis of Wu (3), of course, was Zhuge Liang, and his son was named Zhuge Zhan (1). Zhuge Zhan was known for his intelligence even as a child, but really, how could he not? I mean, the guy is the child of Zhuge Liang, and as we discussed in the supplemental episode on Zhuge Liang, his mother was also known for her talent and might’ve been even smarter than Zhuge Liang. Later, Zhuge Zhan was married to Liu Shan’s daughter, making him the emperor’s son-in-law, and he assumed his father’s marquiship. In the year 261, he was promoted to acting supervisory general, but when Huang Hao began to control the affairs of the court, Zhuge Zhan decided to just stay home on the pretext of illness.

But now, there was nowhere for him to hide. Liu Shan sent three decrees back to back, summoning him to court, so Zhuge Zhan went. Liu Shan wept and said to him, “Deng Ai has already taken the city of Fucheng (2,2). Chengdu is in danger. On account of your father, please save me!”

Zhuce Zhan also wept and replied, “My father and I have received tremendous kindness from your majesty. Even if my innards were scattered across the ground, I would not be able to repay you. Please mobilize all the troops in the city, so that I may take them to go fight it out.”

So Liu Shan called up 70,000 troops and put them under Zhuge Zhan's command. Zhuge Zhan then asked his officers who dared to be the vanguard. Before he finished speaking, a young man stepped forward and said, "Father, since you hold such immense responsibility, I am willing to be the vanguard."

This was Zhuge Zhan's eldest son, Zhuge Shang (4), and he was only 19 years old. But he had taken after his father and grandfather and was already well-versed in military texts and skilled in combat. So Zhuge Zhan appointed him as the vanguard and set out immediately.

Meanwhile, Deng Ai had received a map from the newly surrendered general Ma (2) Miao (3). It laid out the roads covering the 100-some miles between his present location of Fucheng (2,2) and Chengdu. When he finished studying the map, Deng Ai said with alarm, "If we just stay here and the enemy occupies the hills ahead, how can we succeed? If things drag on for too long and Jiang Wei arrives, our army would be in danger."

So he summoned his son Deng Zhong and a lieutenant named Shi (1) Zuan (3) and told them, "Lead an army and rush to the city of Mianzhu (2,2) to take on the enemy. I will be right behind you. Do not delay. If you allow the enemy to occupy that strategic position, I will have your heads!"

So Deng Zhong and Shi (1) Zuan (3) rushed to Mianzhu (2,2), and waiting for them was the Shu army. As the two of them watched from under their banner, the Shu forces lined up. After three rounds of drums, the main banners parted, and a few dozen officers rode out, accompanying a four-wheel chariot. Atop the chariot was a man wearing a headscarf, holding a feather fan, and donning a crane-pattern robe. The yellow banner next to the chariot said, "Zhuge Liang, the prime minister of the Han and the Marquis of Wu (3)."

Huh? What the heck? When Deng Zhong and Shi (1) Zuan (3) saw this, they were covered with cold sweat. They turned and said to their troops, "Turns out Zhuge Liang is still alive! We're all done for!"

As they were falling back, the Shu army charged and set them to flight. The Shu forces gave chase for about six or seven miles before running into the Wei reinforcement led by Deng Ai, and both sides called it a day.

After regrouping his troops, Deng Ai summoned Deng Zhong and Shi Zuan (3) and scolded them. “Why did you retreat without a fight?”

Deng Zhong replied, “We saw Zhuge Liang leading the enemy forces, so we ran.”

At this, Deng Ai flew into a rage. “Even if Zhuge Liang has come back to life, I am not afraid of him! You two retreated for no reason and caused our defeat. You should be executed at once!”

After much pleading from the other officers, Deng Ai allowed his anger to subside and spared the two. He then sent out some scouts, and they reported back that the Shu army was being commanded by Zhuge Liang’s son Zhuge Zhan (1), and Zhuge Zhan’s son Zhang Shang (4) was the vanguard. And as for that guy in the chariot earlier today? Well, that was a wooden sculpture of Zhuge Liang. Yeah, they pulled out that old trick again, and it worked just as well as it did against Sima Yi all those years ago.

After receiving this intel, Deng Ai told his son and lieutenant, “Victory or defeat rests on this battle. If you two fail to win again, I WILL cut off your heads!”

So Deng Zhong and Shi Zuan (3) led 10,000 men and returned to the city of Mianzhu (2,2) to challenge for battle. The Shu vanguard Zhuge Shang rode out and single-handedly defeated both of them. Zhuge Zhan (1) then directed his forces to charge out, crashing into the enemy formation dozens of times. The Wei forces were routed and countless were killed. Deng Zhong and Shi Zuan both escaped but were wounded. Zhuge Zhan gave chase for another six or seven miles before stopping and setting up camp.

When Deng Zhong and Shi Zuan limped back to camp, Deng Ai saw that both were wounded, so he decided to go easy on them instead of making good on his earlier threat to chop off their heads. Now,

he assembled his officers and said, “Zhuge Zhan has taken up his father’s work and has killed more than 10,000 of our troops in two battles. If we do not defeat him quickly, it will be a disaster.”

Deng Ai’s army supervisor, Qiu (1) Ben (3), now suggested trying to induce Zhuge Zhan to defect. So Deng Ai sent a messenger to take a letter to Zhuge Zhan. The letter said,

“From Deng Ai, the General who Conquers the West, to Acting Supervisory General Zhuge Zhan: No talent in recent times has been the equal of your honorable father. Years ago he left his thatched hut, he predicted the division into the three kingdoms, pacified the lands of Jing and Yi (4) Provinces, and established a great enterprise. Such accomplishment is rarely found in history. Later, his six Northern campaigns turned out the way they did not because he wasn’t smart or capable enough, but because of the will of heaven. Now, Liu Shan is muddleheaded, and his reign is at an end. On my emperor’s command, I am leading a large army to invade Shu and have already conquered most of its territories. Chengdu is teetering. Sir, why not obey the will of heaven and men and come join us in the name of honor? I will recommend you for a lordship so as to honor your ancestors. ON that I swear. I hope you will consider it.”

When Zhuge Zhan finished reading the letter, he began to fume. He ripped the letter to smithereens and ordered the guards to execute the messenger at once and then told the messenger’s attendant to bring his head back to Deng Ai. That obviously did not go over well with Deng Ai, and he wanted to go fight, but Qiu (1) Ben (3) told him, “General, do not go out lightly. You should use the element of surprise.”

Taking this advice, Deng Ai set up an ambush and then led an army to go meet Zhuge Zhan. Zhuge Zhan was just preparing to go pick a fight, so when he saw Deng Ai come knocking on his door, he immediately led his army out and charged into the midst of the enemy formation. Deng Ai turned and fled, and Zhuge Zhan gave chase.

But just then, two Wei armies charged out from hiding and crushed Zhuge Zhan's troops, forcing them back inside Mianzhu. Deng Ai now surrounded the city as his troops formed an air-tight circle around it.

Seeing that the situation was dire, Zhuge Zhan ordered an officer to charge through the lines to go seek help from their ally kingdom of Wu. When the Wu emperor Sun Xiu (1) read the urgent message, he said to his court, "Since Shu is in danger, we must not sit by idly." He then appointed the old general Ding Feng as commander of 50,000 men to go save Shu. Ding Feng divided his army into three forces and set out immediately.

But back at Mianzhu, Zhuge Zhan was running out of time. Not knowing how long it would take for reinforcements to arrive, he decided to go fight his way out. He left his son and several officers in charge of the city, while he led the main army and charged out through three gates.

When Deng Ai saw them come out, he ordered his troops to fall back. Zhuge Zhan kept up a hot pursuit, but suddenly, an explosive sounded, and Wei forces appeared from everywhere, trapping Zhuge Zhan in the center. Zhuge Zhan and his men charged to and fro, killing hundreds of enemies. But Deng Ai now ordered his men to blitz them with arrows. The Shu forces scattered, and Zhuge Zhan was struck by an arrow and fell off his horse.

"I have no strength left," Zhuge Zhan shouted. "So I will die to repay my country!" And with that, he pulled out his sword and slit his throat.

Watching from the city walls, the young general Zhuge Shang saw his father fall and became enraged. He immediately donned his armor and prepared to go out to fight. One of the officers tried to check him, but Zhuge Shang said, "My family has received immense kindness from the state for generations. Since my father has died in battle, what is the point of me living on?!"

So he charged out into the chaos and died fighting. A poet later commended both Zhuge Zhan and his son thus:

Think not Shu's vassals failed in policy!
Heaven ended the Liu's reign, fire-signed,
Though Zhuge Liang left worthy heirs to Shu
To carry on the Martial Lord's design.

Taking pity on their loyalty, Deng Ai had father and son buried together, and then he turned his attention to laying siege on the city of Mianzhu. The three remaining Shu officers each charged out with an army, but they were severely outnumbered and all died fighting. So now Mianzhu, another stronghold, belonged to Deng Ai. After rewarding his troops, he set out again for the Shu capital Chengdu.

Word of the outcome of the battle soon trickled into Chengdu, and Liu Shan was shocked. So now, Zhuge Zhan is dead. His son Zhuge Shang is also dead. And Zhuge Liang still hasn't come back from the dead. So ... now what? Liu Shan assembled his officials to ask them that question. One of them informed him, "All the civilians outside the city are fleeing for their lives, and the earth shakes with the sound of their cries."

Umm, that's not helping! Liu Shan grew ever more panicked, and then scouts arrived, telling him that the Wei army was approaching the city. A bunch of officials now said, "We are outnumbered. It would be difficult to fight the enemy. Let's abandon Chengdu and flee to the districts in the south. The terrain there is difficult, so we can mount a defense, borrow troops from the barbarians, and try to reclaim our territory."

But the veteran official Qiao (2) Zhou (1) disagreed. "We must not," he said. "The Nanman (2,2) barbarians have long been rebels who have never shown us any kindness. If we seek refuge with them, it would spell disaster."

Ok, so now the other officials said, "The kingdoms of Wu and Shu are allies. Since our situation is dire, we can go seek refuge with Wu."

But Qiao Zhou was like, no, that won't work either. "Ever since antiquity, there is no such thing as an emperor who resides in another kingdom," he said. "IN my estimation, the kingdom of Wei can gobble up Wu, but Wu cannot gobble up Wei. So if you declare yourself a vassal of Wu now, that would be one humiliation. And then, if Wu gets swallowed up by Wei and you declare yourself a vassal of Wei, that will be a second humiliation. So instead of Wu, you should surrender to Wei. They will no doubt give you a fiefdom. That way, you can preserve your ancestral shrine while protecting the civilians. Please consider it."

Faced with so many choices -- none of them good -- Liu Shan could not make up his mind, so he retired for the day. The next day, the discussion resumed, and Qiao Zhou once again pressed the idea of surrendering to Wei. Liu Shan was just about to go along with it when suddenly, a man walked out from behind the screen and cursed Qiao Zhou.

"Miserable pedant! How dare you suggest we abandon our sacred altars?! Since when has an emperor surrendered?!"

Liu Shan looked and saw that this was his fifth son, Liu Chen (2). So Liu Shan had seven sons, and most of them took after him, meaning they were all feeble and useless. The lone exception was this Liu Chen (2), who had been smart even as a child and displayed aptitude that no one could match.

Liu Shan now said to his son, "All the court officials are advocating surrender. You alone are trying to hold out on nothing more than your valor. Do you want to see blood in the streets?"

Liu Chen retorted, "When the First Emperor was alive, Qiao Zhou never got to consult in the affairs of the state. And now, he has the audacity to speak about important matters and suggest nonsense. In my estimation, Chengdu still has tens of thousands of troops, and Jiang Wei's entire army is still at the Saber Pass. When he hears that the enemy is encroaching on the capital, he will come help us. Then we attack the enemy from two sides and claim total victory. Do not listen to the words of pedants and abandon the First Emperor's enterprise so lightly!"

But Liu Shan would not hear of it. "You are a child, ignorant of the will of heaven!" he chided his son.

Liu Chen now kowtowed and wept. "Even if we have exhausted our strengths and defeat is imminent, then you and I should go out fighting so that we may see the First Emperor again! How can we surrender?!"

But Liu Shan just ignored his son. Liu Chen now wept bitterly and shouted, "It was not easy for the First Emperor to establish his enterprise, and now we're going to abandon it just like that. I would rather die than to suffer such shame!"

Yeah yeah whatever. Liu Shan ordered his attendants to escort his son out of the palace and told Qiao Zhou to prepare the letter of surrender. He then sent Qiao Zhou, along with two other officials, to go deliver the letter to Deng Ai. The other two officials, by the way, were Zhang Shao (4), the son of Zhang Fei, and Deng (4) Liang (2), the son of Deng Zhi (1). So both of their houses had been instrumental in the establishment of the kingdom. You can only imagine how it felt for the sons to now have to deliver the letter that hands all that their fathers had built over to the enemy.

At this time, Deng Ai was sending hundreds of armored cavalry on reconnaissance missions to Chengdu every day. One day, they saw the flag of surrender erected atop the city wall, and Deng Ai was delighted. Momentarily, Qiao Zhou, Zhang Shao (4), and Deng Liang (2) arrived and prostrated in front of him. They offered up Liu Shan's imperial seal and the letter of surrender. After reading the letter, Deng

Ai was ecstatic. He accepted the seal and treated the three envoys well. He then sent them back to Chengdu with a letter of his own so as to put the people's hearts at ease.

The envoys returned to Chengdu, showed Liu Shan the letter from Deng Ai, and recounted how well he had treated them. After reading the letter, Liu Shan was delighted and immediately dispatched a messenger to order Jiang Wei to stand down and surrender as well. He then had the official documents delivered to Deng Ai. These documents showed that the Riverlands had 280,000 households, 940,000 people, 102,000 armed soldiers, 40,000 government officials, more than 400,000 measures of stored grain, 2,000 pounds each of gold and silver, 200,000 bolts each of silk and dyed silk, along with countless other treasures in the storehouses.

It was agreed that Liu Shan and his officials would leave the city and surrender on the first day of the 12th month of the year 263. When his son Liu Chen (2) heard this, he was fuming. He stomped into his palace with a sword, and his wife asked him, "My lord, why the unusual expression on your face?"

"The enemy is near, and my father has decided to surrender. Tomorrow, the lord and his officials will go surrender, and our enterprise will be reduced to ashes. I intend to die before then to go meet the First Emperor in the underworld and never bend the knee to another!"

"You are noble indeed!" his wife said. "This is a good death! Please allow me to die before you."

"But why should you die?" Liu Chen asked.

"Your highness will die for your father, and I will die for you," she answered. "When the husband dies, the wife follows. What is there to wonder about?"

And as she finished speaking those words, she ran headfirst into a column and killed herself. Liu Chen then proceeded to kill his own three sons. He cut off the heads of his family and brought them to the ancestral temple. In what must have been a grisly scene, he prostrated on the ground and wept.

“Your servant is too ashamed to watch our enterprise fall into someone else’s hands, so I have killed my wife and children first, so as to remove any lingering worries. And now, I will repay my ancestors with my life. May your spirits see my heart!”

Liu Chen cried so hard that his eyes bled. And then, he slit his own throat. When word of his actions reached the people of Shu, everyone was saddened and pained. A later poet wrote these lines:

Liege and men were glad to bend the knee;
For him alone the anguish was too keen.
Remote in time -- that kingdom in the west --
But what a hero, the prince Liu Chen!
He gave his life in tribute to Liu Bei,
Fortune-vexed, weeping at the arched blue sky.
His awesome presence seems among us still,
Who can say the Han has gone for aye?

When Liu Shan heard what his son had done, he ordered his men to tend to the funeral. The next day, the Wei army arrived en masse. Liu Shan led his sons and 60-some court officials out of the city. Liu Shan had his hands bound behind his back and walked alongside a coffin -- both gestures of submission. They went about three miles outside the north gate and kneeled. Deng Ai helped Liu Shan to his feet, untied him, and ordered that his coffin be burned as a gesture of forgiveness. They then entered the city together, and with that, the kingdom of Shu was no more.

A poet later lamented thus:

The Northern host came marching into Shu;

The king held life too dear to sacrifice.
How willfully Huang Hao betrayed his liege;
For what did Jiang Wei strive to save the land?
Inspiring, that great captain loyal and true!
How sad for the prince who did not fail his trust.
Though Liu Bei led the realm through many trials,
His proud estate turned instantly to dust.

As Deng Ai entered the city, he was greeted by the people of Chengdu with fragrant flowers. Deng Ai now appointed Liu Shan as the General of the Flying Cavalry, while the other officials all received appointments as well. He then asked Liu Shan to return to his palace, send out decrees to reassure the people, and to hand over the granaries. He also sent out two Shu officials to go to all corners of the kingdom to call on the people and soldiers in those places to submit to the new regime.

Then, Deng Ai sent a messenger to see Jiang Wei to try to convince him to surrender. He also dispatched a message to the Wei capital Luoyang to inform Sima Zhao of his success. Now, as the eunuch Huang Hao (4), Deng Ai heard about his wicked ways, so he wanted to have the villain executed. But Huang Hao spread some bribes around and managed to keep his head once again. Like I said before, these eunuchs are like cockroaches. You just can't kill them.

While Deng Ai was busy overseeing the transfer of power in Chengdu, the Shu official sent to tell Jiang Wei to stand down arrived at the Saber Pass. He met Jiang Wei and passed along Liu Shan's order to surrender. Jiang Wei fell into a stunned silence, and all his officers were so enraged that they gnashed their teeth and their hair stood up on end. They pulled out their swords, hacked at rocks, and shouted,

“We were fighting to the death. Why did they surrender first?!” The sound of weeping warriors could be heard for miles.

Seeing that his troops’ loyalty still laid with their now nonexistent kingdom, Jiang Wei consoled them and said, “Do not worry. I have a plan that can revitalize the Han.” When the other asked him what this plan was, he whispered it into their ears.

Moments later, the banner of surrender went up atop the wall of the Saber Pass. Word soon arrived in the camp of the Wei commander Zhong Hui that Jiang Wei and his generals were coming to surrender. Zhong Hui was delighted and welcomed Jiang Wei in.

“General, why have you come so late?” Zhong Hui said as Jiang Wei entered.

Looking stern with tears on his face, Jiang Wei replied, “I am responsible for my kingdom’s entire army. I think I have come too soon.”

That reply impressed Zhong Hui, and he stood up to exchange greetings and treated Jiang Wei as an honored guest. Jiang Wei then told him, “I have heard that ever since your campaigns in the East, every one of your strategies has worked. It is all thanks to you that the Sima clan has prospered. That is why I was willing to surrender. If it were Deng Ai, then I would have fought him to the last and never would have surrendered.”

Zhong Hui was quite impressed with Jiang Wei, so he now snapped an arrow to swear an oath and became sworn brothers with Jiang Wei, and took him into his confidence. Zhong Hui ordered Jiang Wei to continue leading his troops, which made Jiang Wei secretly rejoice.

Back in Chengdu, Deng Ai had appointed several of his officers to oversee various districts in Shu. He then erected a grand dais in the city of Mianzhu to commemorate his victories. On this dais, he invited all the former officials of Shu to a feast. After drinking for a while, a buzzing Deng Ai pointed at the

officials and said, “You’re lucky you ran into me. That’s why you’re here today. If it were some other commander, you would all be dead now.”

At that, all the officials rose and bowed to express their gratitude. Just then, the envoy returned and said that Jiang Wei had surrendered to Zhong Hui. Well, that did not please Deng Ai at all, and his grudge against Zhong Hui grew ever stronger.

Meanwhile, Deng Ai’s report arrived in the Wei capital, and Sima Zhao read his letter. The letter basically said that even though this might seem like a good time to turn around and invade the kingdom of Wu, the army is too exhausted after its recent victory. So he advised Sima Zhao to have 40,000 men to start building ships for an eventual invasion of Wu. But for the time being, they should try to induce Sun Xiu, the emperor of Wu, to come surrender on his own. To that end, Deng Ai recommended that instead of relocating Liu Shan to the Wei capital immediately, that they leave him in Chengdu until next winter and shower him and his sons with titles and wealth so as to show the people of Wu that this is what happens to those who surrender.

Well, that may sound like good advice, but Sima Zhao saw something he did not like. Here was one of his top generals, having just conquered an enemy kingdom, currently stationed far away from home with a large army. And he was trying to keep the vanquished lord in place. It sure as heck looked to Sima Zhao like Deng Ai was trying to set himself up to be something more than just a general, if you know what I mean.

To see what Sima Zhao will do about this potential brewing insurrection, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!