

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 113.

Last time, the third attempt at amnesty finally succeeded, and Song Jiang and company submitted to the imperial court. But before they left their mountain hideout to go to the capital, they decided they would hold a 10-day closeout sale to distribute their possessions — possessions that were obtained via perfectly honorable, heaven-approved means, mind you — to the local civilians. So, Song Jiang told the chieftain Xiao Rang the Sacred-Handed Scribe to write up a notice, which was then posted in all the nearby villages, towns, counties, and prefectures. It said:

“The Liangshan heroes Song Jiang and company, in the name of honor, hereby proclaim to all: In the past we had occupied these hills and caused much disturbance to the local civilians. But today, thanks to immense kindness from his majesty, we have been pardoned of our offenses, received an amnesty, and submitted to the imperial court. We have no way to thank you, so we will hold a close-out sale of our possessions for 10 straight days. If you are interested, then come and name your price. All offers will be honored, and there is no deception. We hereby inform residents near and far. Harbor no doubts. Please honor us with your presence.”

So, if you were a farmer living in the shadow of Liangshan and you’ve been well-acquainted with the ways of these bandits, how would you react if you saw a notice that said, “Come to our fire sale. Harbor no doubts”? Also, as I mentioned last week, it just feels a little icky that you are selling your ill-gotten possessions to say “sorry for the trouble” to your neighbors. I mean, sure we’ve terrorized your village for years and probably caused innumerable harms from all the wars we’ve waged in the area, but hey, you get to come haggle over the price of a plate ... which we probably took from you once upon a time. Aren’t we just the best?

Well, apparently everybody thought this WAS in fact awesome, because folks showed up in droves. Once the notices were posted, Song Jiang ordered that all the jewelry, treasures, fabric and such in the storehouses be divided into three portions. One portion was distributed among the chieftains and the

lackeys. A second portion was reserved to be presented to the court. And the third portion was piled up at the base for the closeout extravaganza. The fire sale kicked off on the third day of the third month. The bandits slaughtered oxen and sheep and prepared wine to treat everyone who came, and people came from all over. Song Jiang sent out word that everything must go, at basement prices. In fact, not only will no offers be refused, we will even sell it to you for less than what you offered! This was basically highway robbery.

Anyway, this went on for 10 straight days, and all the yard sale patrons went away happy. Now, Song Jiang ordered everyone to pack up and prepare to leave for the capital. He wanted to also send everyone's families back to their hometowns and villages, but the strategist Wu Yong told him, "Brother, hold on. Let's leave our families here for now. Once we have paid our respects to the emperor and reaffirmed his kindness, then we can come move all the families back home."

So, this was a pretty smart move. Got to be sure this whole amnesty thing wasn't a trick first, you know. But of course it does raise a logistical question: How are your families supposed to live here for weeks now that you just sold off everything that wasn't bolted down? I mean, do they even have a plate to eat off of anymore?

But in any case, Song Jiang agreed and ordered just the chieftains and the lackeys to pack up. Once they were ready, they set out for Jizhou Prefecture, where they were welcomed by Prefect Zhang, who threw them a feast and rewarded the troops. Then, Song Jiang and company took their leave and led their forces toward the capital.

As they set out, they sent the chieftains Dai Zong and Yang Qing on ahead to inform Marshal Su as he had instructed. The marshal promptly informed the emperor, who was delighted and ordered the marshal and the imperial controller to welcome the former outlaws with pennants and banners, and the two set out at once.

As for Song Jiang and company, they marched in organized columns. At the front were two red banners, one sporting the characters “In accordance with heaven,” and the other declaring, “In defense of the country.” All the chieftains were in full armor, with the exception of Wu Yong, who was dressed like a scholar, Gongsun Sheng, who was donning his priest robes, Lu Zhishen, who was wearing a fiery red Buddhist robe, and Wu Song, who was clad in a pilgrim’s black cassock.

After traveling for many days, they arrived on the outskirts of the capital, where they were met by the imperial welcome wagon. After paying his respects to Marshal Su, Song Jiang had his forces set up camp outside the New Official Gate and await a summon from the emperor. Marshal Su and controller then returned to the capital, went to court, and told the emperor that Song Jiang was camped outside the city waiting for an audience.

The emperor said, “I have long heard that Song Jiang and the 108 chieftains of Liangshan correspond to heavenly spirits and are all bold and courageous heroes who have no equal. Now they have submitted, become law-abiding citizens, and come to the capital. Tomorrow, I will lead all the officials to the top of the Tower of Proclaiming Virtue. Have Song Jiang and his men dress in full armor and enter the city with just a few hundred infantry and cavalry, not their whole army. Have them march from the east to the west, so that I may review them. Also ask the city’s residents and officials, both civil and military, to see these heroes who are now our loyal subjects. Then, have them remove their armor, put down their weapons, and don the satin robes that I have bestowed upon them. Have them enter the palace through the East Glory Gate and meet me in the Hall of Culture and Virtue.”

So the next day, Song Jiang had the chieftain Pei Xuan the Iron-Faced Scribe select about 700 stout foot soldiers. The front column beat golden drums and hoisted colorful flags, followed by a corps of men bearing axes, swords, and spears. With them traveled the two banners that said, “In accordance with heaven” and “In defense of the country”. All the soldiers carried broadswords and bows, while everyone

was clad in full armor. Arrayed in strict formation, they entered the city through the east gate. The streets were lined with civilians and officials alike, all jostling for position to get a look at these gods on earth. Amid flapping banners and beating drums, our heroes marched.

Now, the novel goes into quite a bit of detail describing this procession. In fact, I think it names all 108 chieftains in the description. For the sake of time, I'm going to skip that bit and just reassure you that it was all indeed a very impressive display. In fact, the emperor, watching from atop the Tower of Proclaiming Virtue, was quite delighted at this sight and said to his officials, "These men truly are heroes!"

He then gave the order for the former outlaws to change into their satin robes. So Song Jiang and company headed to the East Glory Gate, where they shed their armor and donned the robes made from the red and green brocades that they were given, and hung the golden and silver plaques from their waists. They then put on the appropriate court hats and boots. The three men of ... religion — Gongsun Sheng, Lu Zhishen, and Wu Song — retained their religious attire, but even their religious attire was made from the brocade that had been bestowed by the emperor. Now that everyone was properly dressed, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi led the way, followed by Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng, and then all the other chieftains, as they entered the East Glory Gate and headed to the hall where the emperor usually held court. Once again, the novel goes into tremendous detail about the glory of the palace, which I will spare you for the sake of time.

At 7 a.m., the emperor assumed his throne, and the master of rites led Song Jiang and company into the hall. Following directions from the chief of ceremonies, they lined up, kowtowed, and shouted, "Long live the emperor!"

The emperor was very happy and asked them to come near and be seated. He then ordered a banquet be laid out, with fine wine and delightful delicacies, accompanied by music. The emperor, from his throne, joined our heroes at the table. And once again the novel offers up two pages worth of

descriptions for this feast. Suffice it to say, it was a five-star affair with all sorts of rare dishes and bottomless jugs of fine imperial brew.

The feasting went on until dusk, at which point Song Jiang and company thanked the emperor and took their leave, departing the palace with flowers in their hair. They exited the West Glory Gate, got back on their horses, and returned to camp. The next day, they returned to the palace to once again thank the emperor. He was again very excited and told them that official positions were coming their way.

And so, our 108 heroes thanked the emperor, went off to serve in their official posts, rendered great service to the state, and lived happily ever after. The. End. And this concludes the Water Margin Podcast. Thanks for listening!

Oh if only.

So, as the emperor was preparing to dole out 108 cushy government jobs, a note came from the Bureau of Military Affairs — and yes that would be the same Bureau of Military Affairs overseen by Chancellor Tong Guan, who got his butt kicked by our heroes. It said, “Newly surrendered individuals cannot be given rank so easily without having rendered any service. They ought to distinguish themselves in battle first before being rewarded with rank. Furthermore, right now, there are tens of thousands of their men camped right outside the city. That is not a good situation. Your majesty should order that those from Song Jiang’s forces who were former imperial troops that had been captured in battle should return to their former units. Other former officers and soldiers from provincial units should go back to from where they came. The rest should be divided into five units and assigned to the provinces. That is the best solution.”

Welp, the emperor took this advice and sent an envoy to Song Jiang's camp the next day to deliver a verbal decree, "Song Jiang and company should divide their forces and everyone should return to from where they came."

As you might imagine, this went over with the chieftains about as well as swamp-water wine. They all said, "We have submitted to the court, but instead of rewarding us with official positions, they want to split us up. We will stay by each other's side through life and death, and swear that we shall never part. If they insist, then we'll just go back to Liangshan!"

So ... I guess the honeymoon was over. Song Jiang hurriedly stop any such talk and begged the envoy to sugarcoat things with the emperor. But the envoy of course did not dare to conceal what the chieftains had said, and the emperor fell into a panic and immediately summoned the Chancellor of the Bureau of Military Affairs for advice. And you can imagine what kind of loyal advice Tong Guan would offer.

"These knaves may have submitted to the court, but their true nature has not changed, and they will be a huge problem eventually," he told the emperor. "In my foolish opinion, your majesty should lure them into the city with a summon and kill all 108 of them. Then you can divide up their soldiers and put an end to this thorn in the side of the country."

While the emperor was rubbing his chin and contemplating this suggestion, someone suddenly stomped out from behind a screen and shouted, "The beacon fires are burning constantly on every border, and within the country, there is danger of internal calamity. It's all the doing of treacherous ingrates like you, wrecking his majesty's domain!"

This was none other than Marshal Su, our heroes' biggest advocate at court. And a little background is needed here. Marshal Su mentioned that there was trouble both along the borders and within the realm. We'll get to the internal problems at a later time. For now, let's talk about what was happening at the borders. Way back in the introductory episode for this podcast, I mentioned that the Northern Song

was bordered in the northeast by the Liao (2), the kingdom of the Khitan people. And the two powers had been in conflict throughout the history of the Northern Song. Well, around this time, the Liao was assuming an aggressive military stance toward the Song. They had occupied nine border prefectures and sent four armies to sweep into the provinces of Shandong, Shanxi, Henan, and Hebei. They were basically pillaging in the four provinces around the capital.

Urgent requests for help were flying into the capital day after day, but they all had to go through the Bureau of Military Affairs first. Well, the head of the bureau, Tong Guan, and his fellow Gang of Four members, the premier Cai Jing and the marshals Gao Qiu and Yang Jian (3), decided to keep this development from the emperor. Instead, they just told prefectures near the hot spots to take care of it, which led to a pretty much ineffectual response. Everyone at court knew about this, except the emperor, and with the Gang of Four holding the reins of power, no one dared to bring this matter up with the emperor.

And now, Tong Guan was advising the emperor to kill Song Jiang and company by treacherous means, but Marshal Su just so happened to be there and heard him. He now came out and scolded Tong Guan and told the emperor, “Your majesty, Song Jiang and his group of 108 just submitted to you. They are like flesh-and-blood brothers and will never consent to being separated, not even in death. Why must we take their lives? Such heroes have uncommon courage and guile. If they get riled up and rebel again, what then?”

“Right now the Liao kingdom has sent 100,000 troops to occupy the nine border prefectures. Urgent requests for aid are coming in from all over. Troops have been sent numerous times to engage the invaders, but it’s been as ineffective as splashing ants with water. The enemy has the momentum, and our forces have no answer. They are losing men in every engagement. Your majesty have been kept in the dark about all this.

“In my foolish opinion, you should send Song Jiang and all his stout warriors, along with their forces, to the border to repel the Liao invaders. Letting such great heroes render service will surely benefit the country. I cannot order this myself, but I beg your majesty to consider it.”

The emperor liked that idea, and he asked some of the other court officials, and they all said yeah, that’s a great idea, much better than the lure-them-into-and-ambush-them suggestion. So the emperor now scolded Tong Guan and his lackeys from the Bureau of Military Affairs.

“You slanderous, deceitful scoundrels!” the emperor cursed. “You are jealous of capable men, block the path of the talented, and conceal the truth! You have harmed the country! I’ll forgive you this one time and let it go!”

So, that’s exactly what the emperor said the last time he called Tong Guan all sorts of names. You get the feeling that this emperor’s bark was worse than his bite when it came to dealing with these corrupt officials. Anyway, the emperor now dispatched Marshal Su to deliver a decree, appointing Song Jiang to be the vanguard general in the campaign to defeat the Liao, and Lu Junyi as the vice vanguard general . The rest of the chieftains would receive ranks once they have rendered service.

Marshal Su proceeded at once to Song Jiang’s camp and read the decree. Everyone was delighted, and Song Jiang bowed to Marshal Su and said, “We have been waiting for this opportunity to serve the country, make a name for ourselves, and become loyal officials. Thank you for your kindness in recommending us to his majesty. You are like our parents. However, we still have Chao Gai’s altar back on Liangshan that has not yet been properly taken care of, and our families have not yet been sent back to their hometowns. We also still have ramparts that have not been destroyed and warships that have not been brought here. May we trouble you to ask his majesty to give us a little time to return to Liangshan to take care of those matters and organize our weapons, armor, and horses, so that we may serve the country all the better.”

Marshal Su was happy to do that, and he relayed the request back to the emperor, who agreed. In addition, the emperor ordered that Song Jiang and his men be given 1,000 taels of gold, 5,000 taels of silver, and 5,000 bolts of colorful fabric from the imperial storehouses. All these were distributed among Song Jiang's officers. For those who had family, their share was given to the family. For those who didn't have family, the share was given to the chieftains to do as they saw fit.

Song Jiang received and distributed the gifts. As Marsh Su took his leave, he told Song Jiang, "Hurry back from Liangshan, and let the authorities know in advance when you're returning. You must not delay!"

After some discussion, Song Jiang decided to head back to Liangshan with the chieftains who had been on Liangshan the longest. So that would be the three original chieftains — Du Qian the Skyscraper, Song Wan the Giant in the Clouds, and Zhu Gui the Dryland Crocodile. And then there was Lin Chong the Panther Head. They were also accompanied by the group who went to Liangshan with Chao Gai: Wu Yong the strategist, Gongsun Sheng the Daoist priest, Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil, and the three Ruan brothers. Song Jiang also brought along his younger brother Song Qing. They took with them 10,000 men. The rest of the chieftains and lackeys all stayed in camp under the command of Lu Junyi.

Once they returned to Liangshan, Song Jiang and company packed up their families and prepared to head out. They also prepared a sacrifice to the altar of Chao Gao, and then burned his tablet. This done, they sent all the families back to from where they came, where they settled back into civilian life. The three Ruan brothers chose some of the best ships to be taken back to the capital. The rest were distributed to nearby peasants. Then, they destroyed all the buildings, the three mountain passes, and even the Hall of Loyalty and Honor. I guess they really wanted to show that there was no going back. All this done, they returned to the capital.

Once they arrived back in camp outside the capital, they sent Yan Qing into the city to inform Marshal Su that they were ready to depart for the campaign. Marshal Su informed the emperor, and the next day, he led Song Jiang into the palace. There, the emperor offered him wine and told him, "Go forth and crush the Tartars of the Liao kingdom, and return in victory soon. I will then appoint you to a key post, and your officers will all be rewarded according to their service. Please do not delay."

Song Jiang kowtowed, thanked the emperor, and replied, "I am but a lowly clerk who became a drifter after violating the law. Then I misspoke after getting drunk and was facing my execution. My brothers rescued me, and I had no place to seek refuge except the marsh. For all these crimes, I deserve 10,000 deaths. But your majesty took pity and showed me benevolence, pardoning my crimes. Even if I rend my innards, I cannot repay your kindness. Now that you have given me a command, how would I dare to do anything but my best? I would gladly die in the attempt!"

The emperor was very pleased by those words and bestowed more wine on Song Jiang. He also gave Song Jiang a fine bow, a stout horse, a saddle, and a sharp short broadsword. Song Jiang thanked the emperor again and then left the palace with his new swag. He then sent out order to his troops to prepare for departure.

Meanwhile, the emperor decreed that the Council of Administration was to dispatch two officers to Chen (2) Bridge Station, which sits on a main thoroughfare to the north of the capital. There, these two officers were to reward Song Jiang's army by giving each soldier a bottle of wine and a cattie of meat. As soon as the council received the command, they prepared the wine and meat and sent two officers to complete the mission.

Back in camp, Song Jiang and his strategist Wu Yong discussed their plan, and decided to split the army into two columns. His Five Tiger Generals and Eight Cavalry Tiger Vanguard would lead the front column and set out first, followed by 10 cavalry officers. Song Jiang, Lu Junyi, Wu Yong, and Gongsun Sheng would command the main army and be right behind them. The navy, meanwhile, would be led by

the three Ruan brothers, the two Zhang brothers, Li Jun the River Dragon, the two Tong (2) brothers, and various other naval chieftains. They would make their way north on the Yellow River. The entire force then set out toward Chen Bridge Station, taking care to not disturb the civilians on the way.

At Chen Bridge Station, the two officers from the Council of Administration arrived and began distributing the wine and meat to the troops as they marched by. But, they just couldn't leave well enough alone. These two were your typical corrupt, crooked officials, and so they made sure to take their cut of the swag. Instead of a bottle of wine, each soldier only got half a bottle. And instead of one cattie of meat, they only got about two-thirds of a cattie.

The front column of Song Jiang's army received their reduced rewards and continued on their way. Next came the rear column. Among this portion of the army was a unit that was all dressed in black armor. These were shield-bearers led by the shield-wielding chieftains Xiang (4) Chong (1) and Li (2) Gun (3). And within this unit, there was one soldier who did not take kindly to the shenanigans. When he saw that he was getting less than what he was due, he pointed at the two officers from the council and cursed, "You greedy knaves must have taken your cut!"

"How are we greedy?!" one of the officers shot back.

"The emperor gave me one bottle of wine and one cattie of meat, but you reduced them!" the soldier said. "I'm not trying to start trouble, but you have gone too far! You would even steal the gilt off a Buddha statue's face!"

"You've got some nerve!" the officer said angrily. "You damn crook! You're still a rebel at heart! You'll never change!"

Things quickly escalated from there. The soldier flew into a rage at that insult and flung his meat and wine in the officer's face, which prompted the officer to order that he be arrested. The soldier

responded by whipping out his broadsword, but the officer pointed at him and kept cursing, “You two-bit thug! Who do you think you’re gonna kill?!”

“When I was on Liangshan, I killed tens of thousands of better men than you!” the soldier retorted. “You crooked officials are nothing!”

“Oh, I dare you to kill me!” the officer taunted.

And that was the wrong move. The soldier took him up on it, stepped forward, and slashed the officer right across the face. The officer fell to the ground, and everyone scattered. That soldier, though, wasn’t done. He charged forward and added a few more slashes just to make sure the officer was dead. And with that, the entire army came to a screeching halt.

The chieftains Xiang Chong and Li Gun quickly brought word of this to Song Jiang, who was stunned. Now, it was bad enough having one of your soldiers kill a government officer before you even start your first campaign after accepting amnesty, but the location of this debacle greatly amplified the issue. As I have mentioned once or twice over the course of this podcast, the founder of the Song Dynasty was a senior general in the previous dynasty’s court. While he was leading an army on campaign on behalf of that dynasty’s last emperor, his troops, umm, spontaneously declared him their new emperor, and that was how the Song Dynasty got started. Well, that coup took place at none other than Chen Bridge Station, so this location always occupied a significant and sensitive place in the psyche of the Song court. And having a group of recently surrendered bandits kill a government official at this place while on campaign would no doubt trigger all sorts of imperial neuroses.

To see what falls out from this disaster, tune into the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, see what Song Jiang will do when all his men clamor for a return to Liangshan. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!