

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 114.

Last time, our heroes accepted amnesty, went to the capital for a stylish welcome, and promptly got reminded of the reasons they had turned brigand in the first place. They got screwed out of official positions by the crooked Bureau of Military Affairs. Instead, they were told that they would be rewarded based on their performance in the coming campaign against the encroaching Liao Kingdom of the Khitans to the North. And they had barely gotten underway on said campaign when one of the former-bandit-lackeys-turned-government-soldiers came to blows with a corrupt government representative who was shortchanging the soldiers when distributing the meat and wine that the emperor had bestowed on them. One thing led to another, and before you know it, the soldier had cut down the government envoy. To make things worse, he did it at Chen Bridge Station, a place with loads of historical sensitivities for the Song court.

When Song Jiang got word of this, he went ah crap and immediately huddled with the strategist Wu Yong, who said, “The Chancellor of Administration doesn’t like us, and they pulled this stunt. And now we have given them the opportunity they were looking for. We have no choice but to execute that soldier first, and then inform the Council of Administration while we halt our march and await their verdict. We must send Dai Zong and Yan Qing to the capital immediately and in secret to see Marshal Su and trouble him to inform his majesty first, so that the Council cannot slander us.”

Song Jiang agreed and personally rode to Chen Bridge Station. There, he found the offending soldier standing next to the corpse of the envoy he killed, not making any attempt to flee. Song Jiang ordered his men to distribute the meat and wine from the emperor and distribute them to all the soldiers, and then told them to resume marching. Meanwhile, he summoned the offending soldier into the hostel and questioned him about what happened.

The soldier replied, “He was badmouthing us left and right, calling us rebels and saying we deserve worse than death. I got pissed and killed him in the heat of the moment. I await your sentence.”

Song Jiang told him, "He is a government official. Even I am afraid of him. How can you kill him? This will surely cause trouble for all of us. Right now we are attacking the Liao kingdom on his majesty's decree. We haven't rendered the slightest service, and yet we have committed such an offense. What would we do?"

The soldier kneeled, kowtowed, and asked Song Jiang to grant him his death. That brought Song Jiang to tears.

"Ever since I went to Liangshan, I have not lost a single brother. But now we are under the control of government officials, and I have no say in anything. Your aggressive spirit is still strong, but you should not have acted out as you did."

"I await my death," the soldier said.

So Song Jiang let the soldier drink to his heart's content. Then, he had him hung from a tree. After the execution, he ordered that the soldier's head be cut off and put on display as a warning, while the slain envoy's body was placed in a coffin. Then, he wrote a letter to the Council to inform them of what happened.

Meanwhile, Dai Zong the Magic Traveler and Yan Qing the Prodigy slipped into the capital and went to see Marshal Su. Upon learning the details, Marshal Su went to the palace that night and told the emperor what happened. The next day, the emperor held court, and the Chancellor of Administration stepped forth and reported, "A soldier under the newly surrendered Song Jiang killed an envoy sent by the Council of Administration to distribute wine and meat to the troops. Please issue a decree to arrest and interrogate him."

"This is all your fault!" the emperor said. "You all appointed someone who was not up to the task and caused this trouble. He withheld wine and meat from the army, thus causing this trouble."

When the Chancellor of Administration tried to deny that anyone had skimped on the wine and meat, the emperor flew into a rage and fumed, "I have already sent someone to investigate this matter secretly, and I know all the details. How dare you try to deny it with your deceit! I know that instead of a bottle, they only gave each soldier half a bottle. And instead of one catty of meat, they only gave each soldier two-thirds of a catty. That's why a soldier got angry and drew blood!"

The emperor then asked where the offending soldier was. The chancellor of administration replied truthfully that Song Jiang had already executed him and had informed the council while halting his army to await punishment.

"Since he has executed the offending soldier, we will temporarily put aside Song Jiang's offense of lax discipline. When he returns after defeating the Liao kingdom, we will measure his offense against his service."

That shut up the chancellor of administration, and the emperor now dispatched a decree, ordering Song Jiang to resume his march, and that the head of the executed soldier was to be hung up on public display at Chen Bridge Station.

When Song Jiang received the decree, he thanked the envoy and hung up the executed soldier's head. But he also buried the man's body and cried bitterly in front of his grave. Then, he got back on his horse and led his army north.

The army marched 20 miles a day and did not cause any more trouble along the way. Soon, they were nearing the border with the Liao, and Song Jiang consulted with Wu Yong on how to counter the four-pronged assault that the Khitans were launching on Song territory.

"If we divide our forces to meet them, we will not be able to come to each other's aid given how vast and sparsely populated this territory is," Wu Yong said. "Let's conquer a few of their cities first, and then figure out how to proceed. When they are pressed by our attacks, they will naturally recall their troops."

Song Jiang agreed and summoned Duan (4) Jingzhu (3,4) the Golden-Haired Hound, who spent a lot of time in these parts when he was a horse thief, and asked him what city laid ahead.

“Ahead of us is Tanzhou (2,1) Prefecture,” Duan Jingzhu said. “That is a key entryway into Liao territory. There is a deep waterway called the Lu (4) River that winds around the city. This Lu (4) River connects to the Wei (4) River. You will need warships to attack the city. You should urge the naval chieftains to get here quickly, and then advance on the city on both land and water.”

So Song Jiang dispatched Dai Zong the Magic Traveler to bring word to Li Jun the River Dragon and the other naval chieftains, telling them to advance with all due haste to the Lu (4) River. And then they set out for Tanzhou Prefecture on land and water.

The commander of that city was a vice-minister of the Liao kingdom, and he had in his service four ferocious generals, all with the valor of 10,000 men. When this vice-minister got word that Song Jiang’s forces were advancing on his city, he sent word to the Liao king while dispatching requests for aid from four nearby prefectures. At the same time, he sent two of his generals at the head of 30,000 men to go meet the enemy.

Leading Song Jiang’s vanguard was Guan Sheng the Great Saber, and he was marching on a county within the borders of Tanzhou Prefecture. The county’s magistrate quickly sent word to the two Liao generals in the field, telling them that the Song army coming this way was none other than the former bandits of Liangshan.

One of the generals, however, just chuckled at the report and said, “What’s there to be worry about with these two-bit thieves?!” He then ordered his army to make camp and prepare for battle the next day outside the county seat.

The next morning, Song Jiang got word that a Liao army was coming to meet his forces, so he sent out word to all his troops, telling them that they must look good in this, their opening battle. All the

former chieftains-turned-officers donned their armor and rode out, while Song Jiang and Lu Junyi supervised from the front lines.

In the distance, they saw a large enemy force descending, seeming to block out the sky and earth with their black banners. The two sides lined up, with bows drawn to keep each other at bay. Then, the black banners on the Liao side parted, and one of the Liao generals galloped out on a magnificent prancing horse. He had a fair complexion, red lips, golden hair, and green eyes, and was tall and powerful. The banner behind him read, "Aliqi, General of the Great Liao Kingdom."

Song Jiang turned to his officers and said, "That general is not to be underestimated."

But before he finished speaking, Xu Ning the Golden Lancer had already darted out, hoisting his barbed spear. When the two warriors met each other between the lines, Aliqi shouted, "The Song must be destined to fall if it's using lowly thieves as generals!"

"You are a disgrace to your state!" Xu Ning shot back. "How dare you spew such nonsense?!"

The two immediately got down to it and traded blows. Before they reached 30 bouts, however, Xu Ning was faltering, and he quickly turned and rode back toward his own lines. Aliqi gave chase and was closing in. Seeing this, Hua Rong the Archer reached for his bow and arrow. But before he managed to get a shot off, a stone had flown out from Song Jiang's lines and struck Aliqi in his left eye, sending him tumbling off his horse. This was the doing of Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow.

In the blink of an eye, four generals darted out from Song Jiang's lines. These were Hua Rong, Lin Chong the Panther Head, Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt, and Suo Chao the Impatient Vanguard. They captured Aliqi alive and took his horse as well. The other Liao general tried to come to his comrade's aid, but Song Jiang directed his army to sweep forward and attack, forcing the Liao army to abandon the county seat and fall back to the prefectural seat of Tanzhou (2,1).

Song Jiang did not give chase and instead just pitched camp at the county seat that he had just captured. As for the Liao general Aliqi, the stone had shattered his eyebrow and destroyed his left eye,

and he soon died an agonizing death. Song Jiang had his body cremated and credited Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow with the first merit in the record book. He also gave Zhang Qing the armor, spear, belt, boots, robe, bow and arrow, and horse that had belonged to his slain foe. They then celebrated inside the county seat.

The next day, Song Jiang moved his army to the foot of the prefectural seat. The vice-minister, having lost one of his four top generals, shut the gates and refused to come out to fight. When he heard that the enemy's navy had also arrived on the Lu (4) River, he went to the top of the city walls with his officers to check out the situation. When he saw how impressive Song Jiang's officers looked, the vice-minister couldn't help but lament, "No wonder General Aliqi met his end."

But the general who was with Aliqi yesterday spoke up, "Aliqi didn't lose to them! One of those barbarians' generals lost to him, and he gave chase. But then a barbarian in green hit him with a flying stone and knocked him off his horse. Then four other barbarians from their side charged out to capture him, and we were caught off guard. That's why we lost."

"What does that stone-throwing savage look like?"

Someone who was at the battle yesterday pointed and said, "It's that guy, the one wearing a green headscarf and our general's armor, and riding our general's horse."

The vice-minister leaned out over the ramparts to have a closer look, but in that very moment, Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow saw him, rode forward, and let fly a stone. Everyone atop the wall shouted for their boss to look out, and before the vice-minister could duck, the stone went screaming past his ear, scraping off some of the skin.

"That savage is really something!" the vice minister said, holding his ear in pain. He quickly got off the wall and dispatched a message to the Liao king, as well as letters to nearby cities to tell them to be on guard.

Despite their initial victory and putting a scare in the vice-minister, Song Jiang's troops tried unsuccessfully to lay siege to the prefectural seat for the next five days. So Song Jiang led his army back to Miyun (4,2) County, set up camp, and assembled his officers to discuss how to capture the city. Word came that the naval chieftains had arrived, so Song Jiang summoned them to his tent.

When Li Jun the River Dragon and the other naval commanders showed up, Song Jiang told them, "This fight is not like when we were on Liangshan. We must first check the depth of the river before advancing. That Lu (4) River has swift currents. If anything goes wrong, we wouldn't be able to help you. You all must proceed carefully; don't get careless. Cover your ships and pretend that they are grain boats. All the naval commanders should stash weapons and lie in wait. Just have a few people row and steer the ships, and have two people on land to pull the ships along with ropes all the way to the foot of the city. Park the ships along the shore and wait for my land forces to advance. When the enemy sees this, they will no doubt open their water gate to come raid the grain on the ships. Then you can spring your ambush and capture their water gate. That will be a big accomplishment."

Once the naval commanders left, scouts reported that an army bearing black banners was storming this way from the northwest, totaling about 10,000 men.

"That must be the Liao kingdom's reinforcements," Wu Yong the strategist said. "We should send a few officers to attack them on the way and scatter them, so that they cannot reinforce the enemy inside the city."

So Song Jiang dispatched Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow, Dong Ping the General of Double Spears, Guan Sheng the Great Saber, and Lin Chong the Panther Head, each leading a dozen or so other chieftains, and a total of 5,000 troops, to go give this new enemy force a rude welcome.

So this reinforcement was being led by two imperial nephews of the Liao king. They were both among the Liao kingdom's top warriors. When they saw the Song forces coming toward them, they lined up and prepared for battle. Both nephews were dressed in the same way, and both wielded spears.

Once the Song army lined up, Dong Ping the General of Double Spears rode out and demanded to know his foes' names. But he was greeted with an insult about being a two-bit crook from some podunk swamp, so he immediately made for one of the nephews. The two were evenly matched, and neither had the upper hand after 50 some bouts.

Watching this fierce fight from the Liao lines, the other imperial nephew was worried that his brother might be getting tired, so he ordered his men to sound the gong as a signal for his brother to fall back. But he really should've just left well enough alone, because when his brother heard the gong, he tried to disengage. Of course, Dong Ping refused to give him that window, and that made him panic and his spear slowed for just a second. That was all the time Dong Ping needed. In the blink of an eye, Dong Ping pinned down his foe's spear with the spear in his right hand, and in the same second, raised the spear in his left hand and skewered his enemy in the throat, sending him off his saddle.

The other imperial nephew saw this and galloped out to save his brother. But from the other side darted out Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow. As the two approached each other, Zhang Qing shouted, "Bullseye!" Before his foe could figure out what that meant, a stone was on its way to his face, sending him off his horse as well. The Song forces now charged forward and scattered the now leaderless Liao army. They then cut off the heads of the two slain imperial nephews, took their armor and horses, along with another 1,000 or so captured war horses, and returned to camp victorious. Song Jiang was delighted. He rewarded the troops, recorded Dong Ping and Zhang's victories, which would be reported to the court altogether once they sacked the prefectural seat.



The remnants of the Liao relief force scampered into the prefectural seat and told the vice-minister that one imperial nephew got skewered by a guy wielding twin spears, and the other got beamed by the rock-throwing guy. The vice-minister stamped his foot and cursed, "That savage again?! With the two imperial nephews dead, how can I go face my lord? When I catch that savage with the green bandana, I'm going to chop him to smithereens!"

Later that day, his men reported that in the Lu (4) River outside the city, there were about 700 enemy grain ships docked along the shores, and enemy land forces were also approaching from the distance.

"Those savages don't know our waterways," the vice-minister said. "They must have steered their grain ships here by mistake, and the forces on land must be coming to look for their ships."

So he summoned his three remaining generals and told one of them to lead 1,000 troops to charge out of the city to repel the enemy on land, while the other two were to lead a fleet out and seize the enemy grain boats.

Around dusk, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind and Fan (2) Rui (4) the Demon King of Hell arrived outside the city with a squad of infantry, and they started cursing the defenders inside and challenging for battle. One of the vice minister's generals promptly charged out as planned, and immediately ran into a hiccup. The 1,000 Song foot soldiers were all stout shield-bearers, and they had the end of the drawbridge locked down, making it impossible for the Liao forces to actually charge out of the city. Meanwhile, Ling (2) Zhen (4) the Sky-Shaking Thunder was setting up his cannons within the Song army, inviting the enemy to try their luck. The Liao soldiers fired arrows from the top of the walls, but they all bounced off the Song soldiers' shields. Meanwhile, the back of the Song lines was making lots of noise, so even though they were only about 1,000 men, they had the appearance of 10,000.

Seeing that his troops could not break out on land, the Liao vice-minister ordered his other two generals to charge out from the water gate and seize the grain ships. Piece by piece, the planks of the water gate lifted up, and the Liao fleet sailed out. But they were in for a rude welcome. A blast rang out from one of Ling Zhen's cannons, and immediately, six naval chieftains sprang out of hiding on the grain ships. These were Li Jun the River Dragon, the brothers Zhang Heng the Boat Flame and Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves, and the three Ruan brothers. They now led their ships and dashed into the enemy fleet.

The Liao fleet saw them coming on strong and tried to turn back, but it was too late. The Song sailors had already leaped across to their ships, so the Liao sailors all abandoned ship, jumped onto land, and ran. The naval chieftains captured the water gate, killed or scattered the defenders, and started a fire. That was accompanied by another blast from Ling Zhen's cannons, this time, firing high into the sky.

Inside the city, the vice-minister was scared out of his wits when he heard the string of cannon shots. Meanwhile, the Song infantry had breached the front gate and were pouring into the city. Seeing that all was lost, the vice-minister and one of his generals fled, riding out through the north gate. But they had not gone a mile when they ran smack dab into an army led by Lin Chong the Panther Head and Guan Sheng the Great Saber. The vice-minister and his general fought their way through, and the Song forces let them go and instead focused on besieging the city.

By the time the dust settled, Song Jiang and his main army had occupied the city and ejected the Liao forces. They posted notices to reassure the civilians that they were ok, and ordered their soldiers to be on their best behavior. As for the Liao officials who ran the city's administration, those who had some prestige were kept on, while all the rest were sent packing. While Song Jiang rewarded his troops, he also sent word to the imperial court to inform them of his capture of Tanzhou Prefecture. He also sent

all the contents of the city's storehouses to the capital, along with a letter to Marshal Su to let him know the good news.

The emperor was delighted to hear this report. He immediately sent 20,000 imperial cavalry troops to the front, under the command of a commissioner from the Council of Military Affairs, to supervise the war effort. When Song Jiang and company heard that he was coming, they all came far out of the prefectural seat to welcome him, and the commissioner set up his headquarters in the city's administrative compound.

This commissioner's name was Zhao (4) Anfu (1,3), and he belonged to a branch of the royal family. He was a kind, virtuous man and very fair in his conduct. He had been given this assignment on the recommendation of Marshal Su, and he, too, was impressed by Song Jiang's compassion and virtue.

"His majesty knows that you and your officers have been very diligent and that your soldiers have fought hard," Commissioner Zhao told Song Jiang. "So he sent me here to supervise the campaign and bring you 25 carts of gold, silver, and bolts of fabric. I will report any outstanding service to the court so that they may reward you with rank. General, I shall report to the court again that you have conquered Tanzhou Prefecture. I hope all your officers will do their utmost to achieve victory soon. Upon your return to the capital, his majesty will surely appoint you to key posts."

Song Jiang and company bowed and thanked him, and then said, "Commissioner, please defend Tanzhou Prefecture, while we divide our forces and take other key enemy cities so that they cannot come to each other's aid."

As the Song forces prepared for their next move, the chieftain Yang Xiong went to see Song Jiang and told him, "Up head is Jizhou Prefecture." Now, I should note that this is not the Jizhou Prefecture that Liangshan was located in, but another prefecture to the north that has a similar sounding name. And Yang Xiong, if you remember, actually came from there. So this was familiar territory for him.

“That is a big city,” Yang Xiong said. “It has lots of money and grain, and is a key treasury for the Liao. If we can sack that city, then other enemy holdings in the region would be vulnerable.”

Hearing that, Song Jiang and his strategist Wu Yong set to work planning a siege on Jizhou Prefecture.

Meanwhile, the defeated Liao vice-minister and his three generals managed to scrape together some remnants of their troops and scampered off to Jizhou Prefecture. This prefectural seat was overseen by Prince Yelü (1,4), a younger brother of the Liao king.

“The Song forces are immense,” the vice-minister informed Prince Yelü (1,4). “And among them is a savage who knows how to throw stones. He never misses. The two imperial nephews, plus one of my generals, all fell victim to his stones.”

“Well in that case, you stay here and help me kill that barbarian,” Prince Yelü said.

Just then, word came that Song Jiang had divided his troops into two forces and were coming to attack the prefectural seat along two routes. One was coming toward Flat Canyon County, while the other was coming toward Jade Field County.

Prince Yelü told the vice minister, “Lead your troops and hold the passage at Flat Canyon County. Do not engage the enemy. I will lead my army and defeat the savages at Jade Field County, and then sweep up on the other enemy detachment from the rear. Then where can they go? Also, send word to Bazhou (4,1) and Youzhou (1,1) Prefectures and tell them to send backup.”

So this Prince Yelü had four sons who were capable warriors, along with more than a dozen generals, led by a commander and a vice commander. So he had plenty of talent at his disposal. He now left his commander to watch over the city, while he personally led his four sons and the vice commander toward Jade Field County.

To see how this next battle will turn out, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, the Featherless Arrow meets a feathered arrow. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!