

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 115.

Last time, Song Jiang and company set out on a campaign against the Liao Kingdom and promptly captured Tanzhou (2,1), the first prefecture they set their sights on, and then they headed toward their second target, Jizhou Prefecture, which was being defended by Prince Yelü (1,4), a younger brother of the Liao king. When he heard that the Song army was coming from two directions, Prince Yelü told the vice-minister who lost the first prefecture to lead his three generals and hold the pass at Flat Canyon County, while the prince himself led another army to meet the enemy coming toward Jade Field County.

Song Jiang was leading the army that was marching on Flat Canyon County, and when he saw that the enemy was prepared, he decided to halt his advance and pitch camp for the time being. Meanwhile, his No. 2, Lu Junyi the Jade Qilin, was leading 30,000 men and marching on Jade Field County. There, he also found the enemy waiting, so he huddled with Zhu (1) Wu (3) the Divine Strategist.

“We are near the enemy, but we are in unfamiliar territory. What should we do?” Lu Junyi asked.

Zhu Wu replied, “In my foolish opinion, we must not advance rashly without knowing the terrain. We can line up our army in the formation of a long curved snake. The two ends can help each other and form an unbroken circle. That way, we don’t have to worry about our unfamiliarity with the terrain.”

Lu Junyi agreed and deployed his troops as recommended. In the distance, they saw the Liao army approaching, kicking up huge dust clouds and blocking out the sun. Once the Liao army spread out and lined up in a formation of its own, Zhu Wu the Divine Strategist ascended a tall ladder to have a look from a high vantage point, and then climbed back down and told Lu Junyi, “The barbarians are lined up in the “Five Tiger Backed by a Mountain” formation. It’s nothing special.”

Zhu Wu then climbed back up high and waved his command banner, moving his soldiers this way and that as they morphed into a different formation. Lu Junyi did not recognize this formation and asked Zhu Wu, who told him, “This is called, ‘The Leviathan into the Roc’.”

Lu Junyi was like, the what into the what what? So Zhu Wu explained, "There is a fish in the North Sea that's called the Leviathan. It can turn into the Roc, a giant bird that can fly 30,000 miles. This formation may look small from a distance, but if the enemy tries to attack it, it will turn into a big formation, hence the name."

That explanation made Lu Junyi praise the formation nonstop. Just then, drums starting beating from the enemy line, and where the banners parted, Prince Yelü rode out, flanked by his four sons, all dressed in identical armor. Small mirrors fringed by black tassels hung from their shoulders, and each son carried a sharp sword and rode on a swift horse. And behind them were rows upon rows of Liao soldiers.

The four sons of Prince Yelü now shouted, "How dare you two-bit thieves encroach on our territory?!"

Lu Junyi asked which of his officers would go out and shut up these young punks. Guan Sheng the Great Saber promptly galloped out. One of Prince Yelü's sons rode out to meet him. They had only exchanged a few blows when another of Prince Yelü's sons rode out to join the fight. Seeing this, Huyan Zhuo the Twin Staffs darted out from the Song lines to even things up. That prompted the other two sons to charge out, only to be met by Xu Ning the Golden Lancer and Suo Chao the Impatient Vanguard. So the eight warriors, split off into four pairs, dueled between the lines.

As this scrum continued, Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow was slowly nudging his horse forward on the Song line, no doubt sizing up the next victim for his feared flying stones, which had already killed two enemy generals when the Song army captured the first prefecture they besieged.

Well, on the other side, there were some soldiers who were at those previous engagements, and they recognized Zhang Qing. They quickly informed Prince Yelü, "That savage in the green battle robe is adept at throwing stones. He must be up to his old tricks again!"

Prince Yelü's vice commander, though, promptly said, "My lord, don't worry. I'll have that savage get a taste of my arrow!"

So this guy was a famed marksman in the Liao kingdom. He used a painted crossbow and shot foot-long feathered iron bolts from horseback, and his skills earned him the nickname Drop of Oil.

So this vice commander now loaded his crossbow and had two officers ride in front of him to shield him from sight as they moved toward the front of the lines. Zhang Qing saw them and quickly hurled a stone, shouting, "Bullseye!"

The stone glanced off the helmet of one of the officers at the front, but from behind that officer, the Drop of Oil had gotten the clean look he needed, and he pulled the trigger on his crossbow. Before Zhang Qing could duck, a footlong bolt had pierced his throat and he tumbled off his horse.

Four chieftains rushed out and rescued Zhang Qing, carrying him back into his own lines. Amazingly, the shot didn't kill him, even though he started bleeding nonstop as soon as they removed the arrow. Lu Junyi hurriedly ordered his men to bandage Zhang Qing's wound, help him onto a cart, and take him back to headquarters at Tanzhou Prefecture so that the miracle healer An (1) Daoquan could tend to his injury.

No sooner had the cart bearing Zhang Qing left the scene did another wave of battle cries rise up from the front lines. Lu Junyi got word that another enemy army had charged this way from the northwest and had plunged into his formation without exchanging a word. With Zhang Qing's injury fresh on his mind, Lu Junyi had no desire for a fight, so he called back all four of his generals who were presently engaged in battle. But that prompted the four sons of Prince Yelü to charge into the Song lines. That, coupled with the Liao reinforcements from the northwest, sent the Song army into chaos. Their formation was splintered into pieces, and they couldn't come to each other's aid, much less change into a larger formation as Zhu Wu had planned. Before long, Lu Junyi found himself alone, engaged in combat.

As dusk approached, the four sons of Yelü were riding back toward their own lines when they ran into Lu Junyi. It was four against one, but Lu Junyi showed no fear. He dueled with the four sons for two hours. And then, he found an opportunity. He pretended to leave an opening, inducing one of the sons to take a hack at him. As that son was bringing his saber down, Lu Junyi let out a mighty roar and skewered him with his spear, sending him off his horse.

That stunned the other three sons, and they lost their heart for battle and rode away. Lu Junyi dismounted, cut off the head of his slain foe, hung it from his horse's neck, and then rode toward the south. Before long, he ran into another squad of enemy troops, totaling about 1,000 men. Lu Junyi dove right into their ranks, scattering them before continuing on his way.

He had not gone a couple miles when he encountered another unit of soldiers. It was dark now, so he couldn't see their colors. But from their accents, he could tell they were Song soldiers.

"Who goes there?!" Lu Junyi asked aloud.

When the answer came, it was one of his own generals, Huyan Zhuo the Twin Staffs, much to Lu Junyi's delight.

"The Liao forces scattered our troops and we could not go to each other's aid," Huyan Zhuo told him. "So I fought my way out along with my officers Han (2) Tao (1) and Peng (2) Qi (3). But I don't know about the other officers."

Lu Junyi then recounted how he fought the four sons and killed one, and then single-handedly beat 1,000 enemy soldiers. They then traveled together toward the south. After a few miles, they found their way blocked by an army.

"We can't fight in the dark," Huyan Zhuo said. "Let's wait until dawn before we have it out with them."

But just then, someone on the opposing line shouted, "Is that General Huyan?"

Huyan Zhuo recognized that voice. It was none other than Guan Sheng the Great Saber. So everybody got together and recounted their experience. Turns out, Guan Sheng had fought his way out with four other chieftains and managed to pull together about 1,000 soldiers. They didn't know the terrain, so they were waiting here until daylight before continuing on.

So they all now combined their forces and traveled south again. As they approached Jade Field County, they saw a squad of soldiers on a scouting mission. They were led by the chieftains Dong Ping the General of Double Spears and Xu Ning the Golden Lancer. They had actually chased off the enemy soldiers camped out in the county seat and set up camp here.

Dong Ping and Xu Ning told Lu Junyi that they had dispatched two chieftains, Hou (2) Jian (4) the Long-armed Ape and Bai (2) Sheng (4) the Daylight Rat, to inform Song Jiang of what happened. But they were still missing four chieftains: the hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, Yang Lin the Multicolored Leopard, and Shi (2) Yong (3) the Stone General, as well as 5,000 soldiers. Their absence greatly troubled Lu Junyi.

But around mid-morning, word came that those four missing chieftains had turned up and were coming this way with about 2,000 men in tow. When they arrived, they told Lu Junyi that they had charged into enemy territory, gotten lost, and did not dare to go back the way they came. Then, this morning, they ran into some more enemy troops and had another scrum before making their way here to the county seat.

So, after all that, things actually turned out more or less ok for Lu Junyi and company. Sure they lost some troops, but they also captured the county that they had come to take, and all the chieftains were ok despite being separated. Lu Junyi now ordered the head of the slain son of Prince Yelü be hung up on display in the county seat and set about assuring the civilians that they would not come to any harm.

Around dusk, just as Lu Junyi's troops were preparing to call it a day and get some rest, scouts rushed back to report that an enemy army of unknown size had surrounded the county seat. Lu Junyi was shocked and quickly ascended the city walls with Yan Qing the Prodigy to take a look. Amid the glow of the torches, they could see rings of enemy soldiers stretching on for about three miles.

As Lu Junyi and Yan Qing looked down, a soldier pointed out that the enemy forces were being commanded by one of the three surviving sons of Prince Yelü, who was riding around, urging his men on. Yan Qing said, "Yesterday they took a cheap shot at Zhang Qing. Let me return the favor today."

As he spoke, he took out his crossbow and let fly a shot. It struck the princeling in the nostril, sending him off his horse. His men rushed to his aid, but he was already unresponsive. This setback forced the Liao troops to fall back a couple miles, giving Lu Junyi and company a little bit of breathing room, for now.

Lu Junyi now gathered his officers to discuss how to respond when the enemy invariably came back and encircled the city again. Zhu Wu the Divine Strategist said, "When Brother Song Jiang gets word of our situation, he will no doubt come to our aid. Then, we attack the enemy from inside and out. Only then can we dodge calamity."

So they held out until morning, at which point the Liao forces indeed came back and again surrounded the city. But soon, they saw a dust cloud rising up in the southeast as tens of thousands of troops came this way.

"That must be Brother Song's army!" Zhu Wu said. "As soon as the enemy withdraws, they will head south. At that point, let's mobilize all our forces and sweep in behind them."

Sure enough, after besieging the city until around 1 p.m., the Liao forces were exhausted. And right around then, Song Jiang's relief force came pouring into them from the southeast. The Liao troops could not withstand this onslaught and quickly fell back. Lu Junyi now ordered his men to stream out of all four

gates of the city and give chase. The Liao forces were routed and scattered as they fled. Song Jiang kept up the pursuit until morning, at which point he called the troops back, entered the county seat, and met up with Lu Junyi to discuss how to attack the prefectural seat of Jizhou Prefecture.

Song Jiang decided to give the troops a little time off to recover from their recent engagements. In the meantime, he sent men to headquarters to inquire about the status of Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow. An Daoquan the Miracle Healer sent back word that it was just a flesh wound, so he was going to be ok. However, there were other medical issues. The weather was getting really hot, and a lot of soldiers were falling ill. So An Daoquan sent Xiao Rang the Sacred-handed Scribe and Song Jiang's little brother Song Qing to Daming Prefecture to buy medicine for both men and horses.

This report put Song Jiang's mind at ease, and he now huddled with Lu Junyi and told him, "Before I found out you were besieged at Jade Field County, I had already devised a plan for the attack on Jizhou Prefecture."

So here was the plan, and it relied on four guys who were no stranger to this area. Remember that Gongsun Sheng the Daoist priest was from Jizhou Prefecture. Yang Xiong the Sick Guan Suo used to be a warden there, and his bosom buddies Shi Xiu the Daredevil and Shi Qian the Flea on a Drum also spent a lot of time there. So when the Song forces put the Liao army to flight the other day, Song Jiang had Shi Xiu and Shi Qian disguise themselves as Liao soldiers and mix in with the retreating enemy troops. The plan was for the two of them to find an opportunity to slip into the prefectural seat. Then Song Jiang would lay siege from the outside, while Shi Qian the Flea on a Drum would go start a fire in the pagoda at a major Buddhist monastery inside the city, while Shi Xiu the Daredevil would go start a fire at the prefectural administration compound.

So the next day, Song Jiang recalled all his troops from Flat Canyon County, merged them with Lu Junyi's forces, and led this combined army toward the prefectural seat.

Inside the prefectural seat, Prince Yelü was stewing after losing two of his sons. He met with his top generals about how to counter the attack that they were sure was coming. One of his generals was like, "I wish they WOULD come; then I'll just go out kick their butts." But another said, "No, you have to watch out for that rock-throwing savage in their ranks." But then the vice commander, the guy nicknamed Drop of Oil, said, "Nah, I shot that guy through the throat with a foot-long arrow; he's most likely dead."

Just as they were discussing, word came that Song Jiang was indeed marching this one. So Prince Yelü sent Drop of Oil and another general 10 miles outside the city to face the enemy.

Once the two sides lined up, the other Liao general rode out to challenge for battle, and he was met by Lin Chong the Panther Head. After 30-some bouts, Lin Chong let out a loud roar and speared his foe in the throat, sending his corpse to the ground. Seeing this, General Drop of Oil charged out, but he was met by Xu Ning the Golden Lancer. They had not reached 20 bouts when Xu Ning ran his opponent through.

Song Jiang was ecstatic about killing two enemy generals in a row, and he now directed his troops to sweep forward, and they sent the Liao army fleeing back into the prefectural seat. Song Jiang gave chase for a few miles before setting up camp and rewarding his troops. The next day, they marched to the foot of the city.

Prince Yelü was quite alarmed at having lost two of his top generals and having Song Jiang on his doorstep. He now summoned the vice-minister who had sought refuge with him after losing Tanzhou Prefecture. The prince ordered the vice-minister to lead his own troops and go out to face the enemy. The vice-minister had no choice but to obey, so he and his three generals led 1,000 men out of the city and lined up to wait for Song Jiang.

When Song Jiang's army arrived, they lined up to prepare for battle. Suo Chao the Impatient Vanguard came out first, and he was met by one of the vice-minister's generals. After 20-some bouts,



the Liao general was starting to falter and tried to disengage, but Suo Chao caught up to him and brought his giant battle axe down on the poor guy's head, splitting it in half.

Seeing this, the vice-minister ordered his other two generals to go fight. Both of those guys were already scared after seeing their comrade bite the dust, but the order had been given, so they had no choice but to ride out and challenge for battle. From Song Jiang's lines rode out Shi Jin the Nine Tattooed Dragons. On his first pass, he cut down one of the generals. The other guy tried to flee, but Shi Jin caught up to him and cut him down as well. Shi Jin then stormed into the Liao formation, which prompted Song Jiang to order his army to follow suit. They routed the enemy and pushed all the way to the drawbridge. Prince Yelü ordered his men to keep the city gates tightly shut and maintain a vigilant defense on the walls, while he sent word to the Liao king and to the nearby Bazhou (1,1) and Youzhou (1,1) Prefectures to ask for help.

Song Jiang now consulted with Wu Yong on how to overcome the city's stout defenses. Wu Yong said, "Since we already have Shi Xiu and Shi Qian inside, there's no reason to worry about long-term concerns. Let's set up tall ladders on all four sides and lay siege to the city. Have Ling Zhen the Skyshaking Thunder fire his cannons into the city. If we keep up an intense assault, the city will fall."

So Song Jiang ordered his troops to besiege the city day and night. Prince Yelü countered by mobilizing civilians and sending them to the walls to help with the defense. Meanwhile, inside the city, Shi Xiu the Daredevil and Shi Qian the Flea on a Drum got together and decided that it was time to start the fires. So that night, while Song Jiang was keeping up an intense assault from the outside, the two of them got to work inside.

Shi Qian sneaked to the top of the pagoda in the monastery and set it ablaze, which could be seen from 10 miles away. He then went to the main hall of the monastery and started a fire there as well. This

stirred up fears among the civilians, who fled for their lives. Meanwhile, Shi Xiu climbed into the administrative compound and started a fire there as well.

Seeing three fires break out in the city, the civilians knew there must be spies inside the walls, and they now lost all desire to help defend the city, as they fled from their posts to rush home to make sure their families and properties were ok. Before long, another fire broke out at one of the major gates, which was the doing of Shi Qian yet again.

Amid this chaos, Prince Yelü figured that Song Jiang had infiltrated his city, and he had no desire to stick around for the aftermath. So he quickly organized some troops, gathered up his family, including his two surviving sons, and fled through the north gate. Seeing his boss take off, the vice-minister decided to follow along as well.

While the prince was busy abandoning ship, Song Jiang's forces charged into the city, engulfing it in cries of battle that shook the heavens. Before long, the city was theirs.

After bringing his troops into the city, Song Jiang put out the fires and sent out the customary "Thou will not be slaughtered" propaganda posters. He then rewarded his soldiers, recorded Shi Xiu and Shi Qian's accomplishments, and sent word back to Tanzhou Prefecture to invite Commissioner Zhao to join them in their newly captured prize. Commissioner Zhao, however, wrote back and said, "I am temporarily remaining encamped in Tanzhou Prefecture. You should stay in Jizhou Prefecture and hold it. The weather is too hot right now, so we should not advance at the moment. Once it gets a little cooler, then we can plan our next move."

Upon receiving those instructions, Song Jiang told Lu Junyi to take his portion of the army and go pitch camp at Jade Field County, while the remainder of the troops stayed at Jizhou Prefecture, waiting for the temperatures to fall.

Meanwhile, Prince Yelü, with his family and the vice-minister in tow, fled to Youzhou (1.1) Prefecture, the heart of the Liao kingdom. He went straight to the Liao capital, that barbarian outpost known as present-day Beijing, to see his king at court.

As soon as they entered the court, the prince and the vice-minister kneeled and started crying aloud. The Liao king said, “My dear brother, don’t be troubled. Whatever the matter is, tell me.”

Prince Yelü replied, “The Song emperor sent Song Jiang at the head of an army to attack us. They came in force and were impossible to stop. I lost two sons, and Tanzhou Prefecture lost four major generals. Then, the enemy swept forth and sacked Jizhou Prefecture as well. I have come to ask for my death!”

The Liao king asked his court for ideas, and also, who the heck are these guys attacking us? His vice premier, Marshal Chu (3), told him, “I have heard that Song Jiang and company used to be bandits on Liangshan, but they refused to kill good civilians and only carried out justice on heaven’s behalf by killing greedy, corrupt officials and those who harm the common people. When the court sent Tong Guan (4) and Gao Qiu to lead campaigns to apprehend them, Song Jiang needed just five battles to wipe them out. So then the Song emperor sent three rounds of amnesty offers, and eventually they submitted. But he only made Song Jiang the vanguard general and did not give them any rank. In fact, none of them have any official rank. Now they have been sent to fight us. They say that their 108 chieftains correspond to heavenly spirits. These people are quite a handful; you must not underestimate them.”

“Well then, what should we do?” the king asked.

Another official, Minister Ouyang (1,2), now stepped up and said, “My lord, I may be untalented, but I have a trifle of a scheme that will repel the enemy.”

“You’re very learned; please tell me your plan,” the king said.

Minister Ouyang replied, “Song Jiang and company are heroes and men of valor. Right now, that childish Song emperor allows the four corrupt officials Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu, and Yang Jian to

hold sway at court. They are jealous and petty and block the path of talented men. They only recommend their relatives and you cannot obtain a position without bribes. So how can they co-exist with the Liangshan heroes for long? In my foolish opinion, your lordship should bestow rank, money, and horses on Song Jiang and his men. I am willing to serve as your emissary and convince them to submit to us. If your lordship can obtain that army, then conquering the heartlands would be as easy as turning over your hand. But I dare not proceed on this matter arbitrarily, so I have informed you first.”

“You’re quite right,” the Liao king said. “You can be my emissary. Take 108 fine steeds, 108 bolts of fine satin, and an official edict from me, appointing Song Jiang as the Grand General who Uplifts the State, as well as grand commander of our forces. Give him a bounty of gold and silver as guarantee. Ask him to write down the names of all his chieftains for us, so that we may give them all official positions.”

But just then, Commander-in-chief Wuyan (4,2) stepped forth and objected. This Commander Wuyan was the Liao kingdom’s No. 1 warrior. He was skilled in all the weapons and well-versed in military tactics. He was in his mid-30s and looked quite the handsome, impressive warrior. On the field of battle, he wielded a steel spear and a steel staff, and had the valor of 10,000 men.

“Song Jiang and his gang are two-bit thieves. Why would we ask them to surrender to us?! I have plenty of stout soldiers and fearsome warriors, including 28 star-blessed generals and 11 heaven-guided officers. What do we have to fear?! If those savages don’t retreat, then your servant will personally lead an army to kill them all.”

The Liao king, however, told Commander Wuyan, “You are indeed a man of valor, like a tiger with wings. But if you can add this gang to your ranks, then you would have sprouted two more wings. Do not stand in the way.”

So that was that. No one else dared to object after that rebuke. To see if the Liao’s offer will find a receptive audience, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode,

Wu Yong tells Song Jiang, "You know, our enemies are totally right about us." So join us next time. Thanks for listening!