

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 120.

Last time, Song Jiang was beating his head against the Zodiac battle formation laid out by the Liao kingdom's Commander Wuyan, and getting repeatedly beaten down. But then, he had another one of his trippy dreams where he met up with the goddess known as the Mystic Queen, who gave him the cheat code for defeating the formation. Once he woke up from that dream, Song Jiang started handing out orders to his men, and they prepared for an assault.

On the other side of the lines, Commander Wuyan had not seen Song Jiang come try his luck against the Zodiac formation in a few days, so he sent a detachment of troops all the way to the front of Song Jiang's camp to see if he could induce the enemy to come out. By now, Song Jiang was ready, so he led his army out that evening to come meet the Liao forces. The two sides lined up across from each other, keeping the other at bay with their archers, and then just engaged in a staredown.

As dusk descended, a chilly wind started to blow and dark clouds gathered, bringing on the darkness before the sun had even set. Song Jiang now left a unit of yellow-robed soldiers on the front line to keep up appearances, while four other units snuck around the enemy lines in silence, and rushed toward the Zodiac formation to the north.

Around 7 p.m., a string of cannon shots rang out from Song Jiang's lines. The five units, led by the chieftains Huyan Zhuo the Twin Staffs, Guan Sheng the Great Saber, Lin Chong the Panther Head, Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt, and Dong Ping the General of Double Spears, now all charged into their respective targets. The priest Gongsun Sheng started working his magic from the heart of the main army, releasing five thunderbolts. A wild wind blew from the South with such force that trees bent so low that their tops touched the ground, while pebbles and sand swirled. Now, the 24 gun carriages that Song Jiang had built were pushed into the Zodiac formation and started to wreak havoc. Meanwhile, three other units, led by Hu Sanniang the Ten Feet of Steel, Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk, and Lu Junyi the Jade Qilin all charged into the enemy. The night shook with the quake of thunder and tremor of cannon

blasts. Under the moonless sky and amid what sounded the wailings of demons and gods, a mass of humanity tore at each other.

In the Zodiac formation, Commander Wuyan was directing his troops when he heard loud cries rise up from every direction, followed by the sound of battle. By the time he mounted his horse, Song Jiang's gun carriages had already charged into his part of the formation, setting the place ablaze with their thunderous shots.

Meanwhile, Guan Sheng the Great Saber and his unit also charged onto the scene. As Commander Wuyan raised his halberd to take on Guan Sheng, Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow, one of the seven chieftains supporting Guan Sheng's flanks, started pelting Commander Wuyan's lieutenants with his flying stones. Before long, most of the lieutenants had either been wounded or fled. Meanwhile, four other chieftains charged in and started mopping up the remnants of the Liao forces.

Seeing that most of his support had been decimated, Commander Wuyan quit the fight against Guan Sheng and fled toward the north. Guan Sheng kept up a hot pursuit. Meanwhile, Hua Rong the archer also joined the chase and let fly an arrow toward Commander Wuyan's back. The shots struck him right in his protector plate, sending sparks flying with a loud clang.

Before Hua Rong could let fly another shot, Guan Sheng had caught up to Commander Wuyan and brought his green dragon saber down on the commander's back. Commander Wuyan was wearing three layers of heavy armor. The innermost layer was steel chain-linked mail, the middle layer was made from the hide of some kind of sea animal, and the outermost layer was golden chain mail. Guan Sheng's saber tore through the two outer layers but did not penetrate the third. As Guan Sheng took another swing, Commander Wuyan dodged his blade and turned around to fight.

After just three bouts, Hua Rong the archer had caught up to them and let fly another shot, aimed right at Commander Wuyan's face. The commander quickly ducked, and the arrow scraped past his ear.

That took the fight out of Commander Wuyan, and he turned and fled again. But now, Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow arrived and chucked a stone toward his face, and Commander Wuyan was left lying on his saddle, dragging his halberd behind him as he fled.

And now, Guan Sheng caught up to him from behind and brought his saber down once more. This time, it not only cut through the last layer of armor, but also through skin, flesh, and bone, slicing upward through Commander Wuyan from his waist to his head. As the commander's body fell to the ground, Hua Rong seized his fine horse, while Zhang Qing finished him off with a thrust of the spear. And that was all she wrote for the Liao kingdom's top military officer.

Meanwhile, Lu Zhishen the Flower Monk, Wu Song the Pilgrim, and four other infantry chieftains stormed into the Sun position in the Zodiac formation. That part of the formation was commanded by Prince Yelü (1,4), the brother of the Liao king who had lost two of his sons in prior battles against Song Jiang. This time, the prince was losing more than that. Before he could flee, Wu Song cut off his horse's head with one swing of the saber, sending him tumbling to the ground. Wu Song then grabbed hold of his hair and sliced off his head. The prince's remaining two sons did manage to flee, but that part of the formation had collapsed.

"Let's storm into the center of the formation and capture the Liao king," Lu Zhishen said. "That will end this once and for all."

On the other flank, in the Moon portion of the formation, the Liao forces were being commanded by Princess Tianshou (1,4), one of the Liao king's daughters. When she saw the enemy charging into her midst, she quickly gathered her troupe of female soldiers and rode out to fight. She ran into the unit led by Hu Sanniang the Ten Feet of Steel, because you know, you've gotta pit the few women warriors in this novel against each other even when they're fighting in the midst of half a million soldiers. After a few exchanges, Hu Sanniang let go of her twin blades and just grabbed hold of the princess. The two of

the tangled atop their horses until Hu Sanniang's husband, Wang Ying (1) the Stumpy Tiger, showed up and helped apprehend the princess alive. The princess' female bodyguards were scattered, and with them went the Moon portion of the formation.

As for the center of the formation, Lu Junyi and his forces stormed in and wreaked havoc. The hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao quickly cut down the Liao's main command banner and started slaughtering the Liao officials and officers en masse. The Liao king fled, protected by some of his officials and a gaggle of lieutenants. They managed to get away and scampered inside the Youzhou (1,1) prefectural seat. Two of the king's nephews, however, were killed in the fighting, another was captured, and a fourth vanished amid the chaos.

By the time 3 a.m. rolled around, the fighting had been going on for about 8 hours, and the Liao army of more than 200,000 had been wiped out. As the first light of morning began to creep in, the various officers from Song Jiang's ranks returned with news of their victories, and Song Jiang ordered his army to return to camp. One after another, his chieftains offered up eight high-ranking prisoners and innumerable heads. Song Jiang sent the prisoners to the camp of Commissioner Zhao, and distributed the captured war horses among his officers.

Inside the Youzhou prefectural seat, the Liao king was catching his breath and sending out word for his men to lock the gates, keep up a stiff defense, and not go out to fight. Meanwhile, Song Jiang had learned the king's whereabouts, so he ordered his army to encircle the city and invited Commissioner Zhao onto the scene so he could supervise the siege.

As the Liao king watched the enemy prepare their siege equipment, he panicked and assembled his remaining officials. Everyone told him, "The situation is dire. The best course of action now is to submit to the Song."

The king agreed, and soon, a white banner of surrender was flying atop the city walls, and an envoy was on his way to the Song camp, relaying the king's willingness to offer annual tribute and a promise to never again encroach upon the Song's territory.

Song Jiang brought the envoy to see Commissioner Zhao. Upon hearing the Liao's offer of surrender, the commissioner said, "This is an important matter. You must bring this directly to the emperor himself. I do not dare to decide this matter myself. Since your kingdom wants to submit, you should send a top official to the capital to see his majesty. Only if he accepts your surrender and pardons your crime will I call off my forces."

When the envoy brought this message back to the Liao king, he asked his officials how to proceed. The right prime minister said, "My lord, right now we have few officers and even fewer troops. We cannot fight. In such a precarious state, my foolish opinion is that we should use money to buy some allies. I will personally go to Song Jiang's camp and offer them lots of gifts so as to persuade them to pause their siege on the city. Meanwhile, we should send gifts to the capital to bribe the Song officials there and ask them to persuade the emperor on our behalf. Right now, the Song court is run by four corrupt officials — Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu, and Yang Jian (3). That childish emperor listens to the four of them. So let's give those four lots of valuables so that they will advocate for a truce. Then, the emperor will no doubt accept our offer and call off his army."

The Liao king agreed, so the next day, the right prime minister went to Song Jiang's camp. When Song Jiang asked what he was doing there, the prime minister mentioned the king's desire to submit and then offered Song Jiang lots of swag. But Song Jiang said sternly, "If I keep up my siege, your city will fall for sure, and we will pull out this weed roots and all, so that trouble will not sprout again. But because you have raised the banner of surrender, we have kept our forces at bay. It is in accordance with the ancient rules of war to allow surrender, and that is why we have not resumed our attack while we allow

you to go to our court to beg forgiveness. But what kind of man do you take me for, to come here offering me bribes?! Never speak of this again!”

That rebuke put the prime minister on edge, and Song Jiang now added, “Prime minister, I will allow you to go to the capital and offer up your petition in person. Meanwhile, I will refrain from attacking your city. Hurry back; no delays!”

The prime minister brought that message back to his king, and the next day, the Liao court prepared cartloads of swag and sent an entourage led by the right prime minister and 15 other officials, totaling 30-some riders in all. They left the city and went to Song Jiang’s camp. Song Jiang led the prime minister to see Commissioner Zhao and relayed the reason for their arrival. While they treated the prime minister as a guest, Commissioner Zhao huddled with Song Jiang and decided to send along their own letter to the court, carried by the chieftains Chai Jin the Little Whirlwind and Xiao Rang the Sacred-Handed Scholar. Those two were to accompany the Liao envoys to the capital.

After traveling for a number of days, the Liao delegation arrived in the Song capital of Kaifeng with their 10 cartloads of gifts. While the envoys settled in at the guest quarters, Chai Jin and Xiao Rang went on ahead to the Council of Military Affairs and reported the situation. They were then told to stay with the Liao delegation while the council deliberated the matter.

Meanwhile, the Liao right prime minister got to work sussing out connections and backdoors to the four corrupt officials who ran the Song court. Before long, many an official had gotten his cut of the bribes. So the next morning, when the emperor held court, Tong Guan, the Chancellor of Military Affairs, stepped forth and said, “The vanguard general Song Jiang has defeated the Liao forces and has encircled Youzhou Prefecture. The city is on the brink of falling. Now, the Liao king has raised the flag of surrender and is willing to submit. He has sent his prime minister here to present their petition and to declare themselves your subjects, ask for your forgiveness, and to beg for a truce and an end to the fighting.

They are willing to offer annual tributes and will not dare to disobey your command. The Council of Military Affairs dares not to decide on our response without asking your majesty first.”

The emperor said to his officials, “If we agree to a truce and call back our forces, the Liao will continue to exist as its own kingdom. What do you all think?”

The premier Cai Jing now stepped up and said, “We have discussed every aspect of this issue. From ancient times to now, barbarians on our borders have never ceased harassing us. In our foolish opinion, we should allow the Liao to continue to exist, so that they can serve as a buffer to the north, and we will support each other like lips and teeth. Their annual tributes will also benefit our state. We should accept their offer of surrender, end the fighting, and call back our forces to defend the capital. But we dare not take these actions without your decree.”

The emperor consented and summoned the Liao envoys. The Liao delegation entered, kneeled, and declared their allegiance to the emperor. They then presented the message from the Liao king, which a court official read aloud. It said:

“Yelü (1,4) Hui (1), ruling lord of the Kingdom of Great Liao, kowtows 100 times and states to your majesty: I was born in the desert and raised in a barbarian land, and thus unacquainted with the great laws of your majesty and the major social duties of civilized man. Deficient in culture and military talents, I was surrounded by vicious sycophants, men greedy and corrupt, short-sighted as rats and crafty as roebucks. I was ignorant, and they rapacious. We invaded your borders, provoking your army’s reprisal. Mere ants cannot stir Mount Tai (4), and rivers cannot be halted in their flow to the sea. Although we still possess a few desolate cities, we have not enough provisions for even half a year.

Today, I dispatch my emissary to venture into your awesome presence and surrender our lands and request punishment. If your majesty will pity us and spare our poor lives and not destroy our ancestral inheritance, your name shall be engraved on our bones. With the utmost exertion we shall serve forever as a guard of your borders and a buffer for your imperial reign. You will give new life to our young and

old, and all our descendants will be eternally grateful. We will pay tribute each year and vow to never fail.

Trembling, we wait with bated breath! In sincerity and fear, we bow our heads and kowtow!
Respectfully submitted.”

Once the letter was read aloud, all the officials expressed their pleasure. Satisfied that the barbarians had been put in their proper place, the emperor now bestowed upon the envoys some of his imperial wine, while the envoys presented him with gifts, which the emperor ordered stored away. He then laid down the terms of the annual tributes, wrote an official reply, and ordered a banquet be held for the envoys. He told the envoys to return to their kingdom first, and that he would send along an emissary to announce the official end of hostilities.

The Liao delegation offered their thanks and returned to their guest quarters. They then sent around even more bribes, just to make sure the deal goes down smoothly. Word came back from Premiere Cai, telling the envoys that he and his fellow Gang of Four members will hold up their end of the deal. Thus reassured, the Liao delegation embarked on their return trip.

The next day, Premiere Cai and the other officials went to court and asked the emperor to issue a decree accepting the surrender. The emperor consented, and the Hanlin (4,2) Academy, his personal team of secretaries, quickly wrote the decree, and Marshal Su (4) was tasked with taking the decree to the Liao and ordering the Song forces to return to the capital. All prisoners of war were to be returned, along with all the captured territory and other property that had been seized.

Marshal Su set out at once with the chieftains Chai Jin and Xiao Rang. It was now the height of winter, and they traveled under a cloudy sky as heavy snow fell, covering the landscape. After some days, they approached the front lines. Chai Jin and Xiao Rang sent word on ahead to Commissioner Zhao, who

then alerted Song Jiang. Song Jiang and company then went 20 miles outside of their camp to welcome Marshal Su with wine. Remember that Marshal Su was one of their key allies at court, so this was a happy reunion. Once they got the prefatory courtesies out of the way, they went inside Song Jiang's camp and discussed matters at court.

"The Council of Military Affairs, along with Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu, and Yang Jian (3) all received bribes from the Liao," Marshal Su told Song Jiang. "So they advocated forcefully with the emperor to accept a truce and recall the army."

Song Jiang sighed and said, "It's not that I begrudge the court, but we were on the brink of success, and now it's all for naught again!"

But Marshal Su consoled him, saying, "Don't worry. When I return to court, I will definitely sing your praises to the emperor."

Commissioner Zhao also said, "And I will bear witness. There is no way I will allow your great contributions to go unrecognized!"

Song Jiang said, "The 108 of us have no motive other than repaying the country with we have, so we are not clinging to hopes of rewards. As long as we can be together, we consider ourselves lucky. But if you, commissioner, will speak on our behalf, we will be immensely grateful for your kindness."

And so, they feasted that day until nightfall, while they sent word to the Liao king, telling him to prepare to receive the imperial decree.

The next morning, Song Jiang sent 10 of his top chieftains to escort Marshal Su into the Youzhou prefectural seat. All 10 chieftains were clad in brocade robes and golden armor. They led 3,000 infantry and cavalry and escorted the marshal into the city. Once inside, they were greeted by civilians lining the streets with candles and incense. The Liao king and his court came out to the south gate to receive the decree and led the envoy to the palace in the city.

Flanked by the 10 chieftains, Marshal Su stood to the left of the dragon pavilion, while the Liao king and his officials kneeled. An official then called for them to kowtow, which they did. A Liao official then received the imperial decree and read it aloud. It said:

“The emperor of the Great Song proclaims: Since the days of our earliest kings and emperors, there never was a sovereign who did not govern his subjects, nor subjects who did not sustain their sovereign. The Middle Kingdom has its ruler. Surely you barbarians have one too!

In violation of celestial laws, you of the Liao have repeatedly invaded our borders. For this, you deserve to be instantly extinguished. But your petition has moved me to pity. I have not the heart to destroy you, and shall permit you to remain as a nation.

Effective for the day you receive this edict, all captured commanders shall be returned to the Liao, and your cities will be restored to you as well.

But annual tribute must be delivered without fail. Respect our great country, venerate heaven and earth. This is the duty of you barbarians. Never forget!

We issue this decree so that all may know.”

Once the decree was read, the Liao king and his officials again kowtowed and declared their gratitude. Once the ceremony was concluded, the Liao king received the decree and exchanged courtesies with Marshal Su. They then threw a huge feast to celebrate the occasion. Once the party was over, the marshal and his entourage were put up in guest quarters, and everyone in the delegation received handsome rewards.

The next day, the Liao king sent his prime minister out of the city to invite Commissioner Zhao and Song Jiang to come join the party. Song Jiang declined after discussing it with Wu Yong, so only Commissioner Zhao went, and he and Marshal Su attended the feast. The banquet featured jug upon jug of grape wine, which, remember, was something of an uncommon treat for the Song at this time. There

were also platter upon platter of mutton, along with piles of exotic fruits and flowers. The party went deep into the night, and at the end, the Liao king personally presented a golden platter of curios to Marshal Su and Commissioner Zhao.

On the third day, the Liao king and his officials gave their guests a grand sendoff out of the city and also sent the prime minister to Song Jiang's camp with cattle, horses, gold, silver, fabrics, and other valuables to reward his troops.

Song Jiang now gave the order to release all the captured Liao prisoners and return control of the four captured prefectures back to the Liao. While Marshal Su went on ahead back to the capital, the army packed up and prepared to disembark. The main army escorted Commissioner Zhao and headed out first. Song Jiang, meanwhile, threw a feast to reward his naval chieftains. He would then travel by ship back to the capital.

But before he left, he sent word into Youzhou Prefecture and asked to meet the Liao king's two prime ministers. The two ministers came to his camp as requested. Song Jiang invited them to sit down as guests, and then said, "Our army was knocking on your city's doorstep and about to achieve total victory. I would have been within reason to deny your surrender, sacked your city, and exterminated all of you. But you made your case to the court and his majesty took pity on you and could not bear to wipe you all out. So he permitted your surrender and pardoned your crime. Now, all is concluded, and I am about to return to the capital. But don't go thinking that we can't defeat you. Do not harbor thoughts of rebellion again. Send your tribute every year without fail. Once I return to my kingdom, you all must be on your best behavior; do not act up again! If our heavenly troops have to come back, we will not spare you!"

The two prime ministers kowtowed and offered up a mixture of apologies and thank-yous, and Song Jiang then consoled them with a few kind words and sent them on their way.

Next, Song Jiang ordered Hu Sanniang the Ten Feet of Steel to lead a unit and head out first. He then had the craftsmen who accompanied the army make a stone tablet, on which Xiao Rang the Sacred-Handed Scholar wrote four lines commemorating the victory, and which Jin (1) Dajian (4,1) the Jade-Armed Craftsman then carved into the stone. The tablet was then erected at the foot of a mountain five miles outside Everclear County, where it remained long enough to become a relic by the time the novel was written.

Ok, so while Song Jiang and company were erecting historical monuments to make sure the barbarians knew what the score was, I'm afraid I'll have to douse their enthusiasm with a bucket of cold water. This whole campaign against the Liao is pretty much just historical fiction, not even remotely close to what actually happened.

See, in actual history, around the year 1120, there were actually some military conflicts between the Song and the Liao, but it did NOT happen anything like what the novel described. What happened was that by this time, the Liao kingdom was already weakened due to the growing strength of the Jin (1) kingdom of the Jurchens to its north. The Song emperor, advised by Premier Cai Jing and Chancellor Tong Guan, decided that this was a golden opportunity to take out the Liao. So the Song and the Jin actually struck a deal. The Jin would attack the Liao from the North, while the Song would attack from the South, and when the deed was done, they would split the territories of the Liao. So far from keeping the Liao around as a northern buffer, the Song was actually doing the exact opposite — eliminating a weakened but still existing buffer kingdom and emboldening a much stronger potential adversary to the north. Not exactly a smart move.

Oh and the campaign didn't exactly go as the Song had envisioned or as the novel had described either. First, it took a couple years for the Song to even get its act together to launch its invasion, because it first had to deal with some internal revolts. Then, when the fighting did begin, the Song kind of lucked

into a couple prefectures that were betrayed into their hands. But then, they were repelled by the Liao forces. So definitely no trash-talking decrees being sent or anything like that. Meanwhile, the Jin kingdom was doing much better holding up their end of the bargain, and they eventually wiped out the Liao in the year 1124.

But none of that is relevant to our story. In our particular corner of the multiverse, Song Jiang and company had just led a huge, though incomplete, victory against the northern barbarians. To see how they would be rewarded, tune into the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, what will Song Jiang and company do now with all that peace reigning through the land? Join us next time. Thanks for listening!