

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 107.

Last time, the imperial court sent Tong Guan (4), the chancellor of the Bureau of Military Affairs, to lead an army of 100,000 to go cleanse Liangshan Marsh. But Tong Guan quite predictably met with disaster. After being put to flight in the opening battle, he then tried to march his army on Liangshan en masse, but soon found himself walking into a trap where one bandit ambush after another massacred his troops. Tong Guan was trapped on a hill before making a night-time breakout attempt with the help of his two top generals and a couple district commanders. They lost a ton of men in the effort, but managed to fight their way out.

They were just starting to breathe easy when suddenly, they were met in front and from behind by more bandit forces. From up ahead, they saw two chieftains wielding long-handle broadswords leading out a white horse, on which rode a general gripping a steel spear. The rider was none other than Lu Junyi the Jade Qilin, Liangshan's No. 2, and the two chieftains escorting him were Yang Xiong the Sick Guan Suo and Shi Xiu the Daredevil.

"Tong Guan, what are you waiting for? Surrender now!" Lu Junyi shouted at his foe.

Tong Guan turned to his officers and asked, "There is an ambush ahead and pursuers behind us. What should we do?"

One of his top generals said, "I will risk my life to repay you. Everyone else, keep a close watch on the chancellor and fight your way toward Jizhou Prefecture. I will occupy this bandit."

So this guy galloped toward Lu Junyi with saber in hand. But they had not fought but a few bouts when Lu Junyi deflected his saber, reached over, pulled the guy off his saddle and captured him alive. While this was going on, the other officers accompanied Tong Guan and broke through the bandits' lines and kept running, with Lu Junyi giving chase. Tong Guan and his men scurried like stray dogs and fish that had slipped through the net. They ran until daybreak, at which point they finally shook their pursuers.

Catching their breath, Tong Guan and company now continued on their way toward Jizhou Prefecture, where they had set up their headquarters before heading out to Liangshan. But suddenly, another bandit infantry unit rushed out from behind some hills. They were all wearing armor and red bandanas. At the front were four chieftains: Bao (4) Xu (4) the God of Death, the shield-bearers Xiang (4) Chong (1) and Li (2) Gun (3), AND Li Kui the Black Whirlwind. Uh oh.

Brandishing their weapons, this fearsome foursome rolled toward the imperial troops like a roaring fire, scattering the enemy every which way. Tong Guan and his officers fled as they fought, with nothing on their minds except to get away with their lives. But not all of them were successful. Li Kui stormed into the enemy's horses, pulled one of the district commanders off his saddle, threw him to the ground, split his skull with one swing of the axe, and severed his neck with another swing.

After more frenzied flight, Tong Guan and company got away and came upon a stream. By now, they were all exhausted, and both the men and the horses went into the stream to quench their thirst.

But just then, a cannon blast rang out from the opposite bank of the stream, and arrows flew toward the imperial troops like a flock of locusts. Tong Guan and his men hurriedly climbed ashore, just in time to meet a bandit army led by three chieftains: These were Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow and his two lieutenants, Gong (1) Wang (4) the Flowery-Necked Tiger and Ding (1) Desun (2,1) the Arrow-Struck Tiger.

The three chieftains and their men charged right at Tong Guan. One of Tong Guan's district commanders saw that the bandits didn't have a large force, so he rode out to fight them, while Tong Guan fled with his one remaining general by his side. As for the district commander who went to fight the bandits, Zhang Qing smacked him in the face with a stone before they even traded a single blow, sending him tumbling off his horse. Zhang Qing's two lieutenants then rushed in and plunged their tridents into the poor guy's throat, and that was that.

Having lost nearly every one of his officers and most of his troops, Tong Guan did not even dare to continue on to Jizhou Prefecture, lest there be more surprises along the way. So he just collected a few scraps of his army and limped back toward the capital, setting up camp along the way.

So, as bad as this night had gone for Tong Guan, it actually could have been even worse. Song Jiang, still harboring hopes of getting an amnesty from the court, did not want to push his foe off a cliff. He was worried that his chieftains would have other ideas, especially once they got their taste of blood in battle, so he quickly dispatched Dai Zong the Magic Traveler to order all the chieftains to lead their men back to Liangshan to celebrate their victory.

Amid the joyous sounds of gongs and victory songs, bandit forces streamed back to base. Song Jiang, along with the strategist Wu Yong and the priest Gongsun Sheng, were waiting for them in the Hall of Loyalty and Honor. They ordered Pei (2) Xuan (1) the Iron-Faced Scribe to record everyone's merits. Lu Junyi delivered the enemy general he captured, and Song Jiang quickly untied the guy, offered him a seat, and gave him some wine to put him at ease. Once the chieftains gathered, oxen and horses were slaughtered, and a feast commenced to reward the troops.

A couple days later, Song Jiang prepared a horse and let the captured enemy general go, which made the guy very very happy. As he saw this guy off, Song Jiang told him, "We offended you on the battlefield. Please forgive us. We had no intentions except to submit to the court and serve the country. But unjust men forced us to take such actions. I hope you will put in a good word to resolve this situation once you return to court. If one day we can be blessed by the light of his majesty again, we will never forget your great kindness."

The guy was like, sure, sure, whatever you want. Just let me ride out of here first. Song Jiang sent some men to escort him away, and the general then made his way back to the capital.

Meanwhile, Song Jiang and company returned to the Hall of Loyalty and Honor to discuss their next move after a resounding victory that scared Tong Guan out of his mind and slaughtered two-thirds of his men.

The strategist Wu Yong said, "Once Tong Guan returns to the capital and files his report, how can they not send another army? We must send someone to the capital to gather intel and report back so we can be prepared."

"You're quite right," Song Jiang said. "Which of our brothers dares to go?"

One man volunteered immediately, and everybody agreed that he was the man for the job. This was Dai Zong the Magic Traveler.

"Conducting recon is your specialty," Song Jiang said, "but you could use a helper."

Li Kui the Black Whirlwind immediately jumped up and said, "I'll go with him."

"Oh, are you the Black Whirlwind who never causes trouble?" Song Jiang chuckled.

"I won't cause any trouble on this trip," Li Kui said, again making promises that nobody expected him to keep. But unlike previous times when others allowed him to tag along against their better judgment, this time Song Jiang told him to stand aside and asked if anyone else would go instead. Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil volunteered, and Song Jiang agreed. So Liu Tang and Dai Zong set out that day.

Meanwhile, in the capital, Tong Guan slinked back with 40,000 of the 100,000 men he had set out with. He sent the various detachments of his army back to from where they came, and only entered the city with the imperial guard. He removed his armor and went at once to see one of his allies, the wicked marshal Gao Qiu.

Once they exchanged greetings, Tong Guan filled in Gao Qiu on the debacle, but Gao Qiu said, "No need to be troubled. As long as we keep this from the emperor, who would dare to bring it up in court? Let's go see the premiere and then figure out what to do next."

So they went to see Premiere Cai Jing (1). Premiere Cai had already gotten word that Tong Guan was back, and he figured things did not go smoothly, and the fact that Tong Guan had just showed up on his doorstep with Gao Qiu confirmed it. Premiere Cai summoned them both in, and Tong Guan kneeled and wept.

“Don’t trouble yourself,” Premiere Cai told him. “I already heard about your defeat.”

Gao Qiu now chimed in, “The bandits occupy the marsh and cannot be reached without boats. The chancellor attempted to attack them with only cavalry and infantry. That’s why he fell for their trap and suffered defeat.”

Tong Guan now recounted his pitiful performance in detail, and Premiere Cai said, “You have lost a lot of troops and wasted significant provisions. How dare we let his majesty know about this?”

“I hope you will help me cover this up and save my life,” Tong Guan said as he kneeled again.

“Hmm, tomorrow I will just tell his majesty that you temporarily retreated because the weather was hot and the soldiers were falling ill due to the local climate,” Premier Cai said. “But if his majesty gets mad and says, ‘If we do not rid ourselves of such a major concern, it will surely be trouble in the future,’ then how would we answer?”

Gao Qiu chimed in, “I’m not bragging, but if you will vouch for me to lead troops to attack the bandits, then I will pacify them in one fell swoop.”

“If you are willing to go yourself, then that would be great,” Premier Cai said. “I will recommend you for command tomorrow.”

“Just one thing, though,” Gao Qiu said. “If his majesty orders me to lead an army, then we must have ships, no matter if we commandeer existing government and civilian vessels or build new ones. Only by advancing on land AND water can we succeed quickly.”

“That’s no problem,” Premiere Cai reassured him.

Just then, the attendant reported that the general who got captured had come back in one piece. Tong Guan was delighted, and Premier Cai summoned him in and asked how he managed to come back alive. So the guy recounted how Song Jiang treated him and all the prisoners well. Not only did he not kill them, but he also gave them travel money and sent them all home.

But Gao Qiu scoffed. "That's the bandits' scheme to deceive us about their true nature. From now on, we must not use troops from nearby. I shall select troops from Shandong and Hebei Provinces for my campaign."

And so it was settled, and the next day at court, Premier Cai informed the emperor, "Chancellor Tong Guan (4) led a large army to attack the bandits of Liangshan. However, because the recent weather has been very hot, his troops fell ill. Also, the bandits hide in a marsh that's unpassable without ships. His infantry and cavalry could not advance quickly, so he temporarily called off the campaign and sent the troops back to their respective camps to rest and await new orders from your majesty."

"Well, if it's that hot, then let's not go back," the emperor said.

But Cai Jing told him, "While we decide on Tong Guan's punishment, we should send someone else to take command and launch another campaign. Please send another decree."

"These bandits are a huge concern and must be eliminated," the emperor said, apparently having a quick change of heart about not going back to the marsh again. "Who can help alleviate this worry?"

That was Gao Qiu's cue. He stepped forth and said, "Your humble servant may be untalented, but I am willing to do all I can to exterminate these bandits. I await your decree."

The emperor agreed and told Gao Qiu to go select his troops. Gao Qiu said, "Liangshan Marsh spans some 300 square miles. We cannot advance without boats and ships. I ask for a decree to collect lumber near the marsh, hire carpenters to build ships, or to use government funds to buy civilian ships for use in battle."

"You are in command, so proceed as you see fit," the emperor said. "Just do not harm the civilians."

“Your servant would never dare,” Gao Qiu replied. “Please give me a little time to accomplish our goal.”

The emperor then bestowed a brocade robe and a suit of golden armor on Gao Qiu and set another date to commence this second campaign against Liangshan.

Once court adjourned that day, Gao Qiu and Tong Guan went to Premier Cai’s residence, and Gao Qiu directed the Council of Administration to transmit the imperial decree for assembling a new army. He recommended 10 commandants who had distinguished themselves in previous action against neighboring kingdoms. Premier Cai consented and sent orders for those commandants to assemble at Jizhou Prefecture and await instructions.

So, aside from being veterans of war, all 10 of these commandants used to be outlaws themselves. They later accepted amnesty and eventually rose to high positions. So they had skills AND name recognition..

In addition to those 10 armies, Gao Qiu also summoned a naval unit from Jiankang (4,1) District, commanded by a man named Liu (2) Menglong (4,2). His name literally means Dream Dragon, and he got it because his mother had dreamed that a black dragon had flown into her navel before he was born. When he grew up, he became quite adept in the water and had success in campaigns against bandits in the Southwest, which led to his promotion to the rank of admiral.

This Liu Menglong commanded 15,000 naval troops and 500 rowed vessels, which defended the region south of the Yangzi River. Gao Qiu mobilized this navy, instructing them to move out at once to join the campaign. He also dispatched a confidant to scour the river for more boats and move them to Jizhou Prefecture for military use. He also called up two of his most capable generals from his own unit and drew another 15,000 crack troops from the ranks of the imperial guard. In all, he had a force of

130,000. Provisions were delivered to each unit within this huge army, while Gao Qiu oversaw the preparation of armor and banners.

All of these movements were observed by the Liangshan chieftains Dai Zong the Magic Traveler and Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil, who had gone to the capital to gather intel. They rushed back to Liangshan to report their findings, and Song Jiang was quite alarmed when he heard that Gao Qiu was coming with 130,000 troops and 10 seasoned commandants.

But Wu Yong the strategist assured him, "Brother, no worries. I have also heard about those commandants and how they had rendered service for the court. But it was because they had no equals at the time, so it made them look like heroes. But now, we have a gang of brothers who are like wolves and tigers. Those 10 commandants' time has passed, so why be afraid of them? When those 10 armies arrive, we'll put them on notice first."

"How will we do that?" Song Jiang asked.

"All 10 of those armies are heading to Jizhou Prefecture. We can send a couple quick killers to meet them on the way near Jizhou and give them a beating first. That'll send a message to Gao Qiu."

So Wu Yong dispatched the chieftains Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow and Dong Ping the General of Double Spears, each at the head of 1,000 troops. They were to patrol near Jizhou Prefecture and engage the various government armies coming that way. Wu Yong also dispatched some naval chieftains to prepare to seize government vessels that showed up in the marsh.

Meanwhile, back in the capital, it had been 20-some days since Gao Qiu first got the imperial edict to organize a second campaign, and now, the emperor was sending him a memo to nag him about getting on the way. So Gao Qiu sent his army out of the city first, and then he called up 30-some singers and

dancers. These were to accompany the army for his amusement. Just in case you thought this trip was all about business.

On the appointed date, he offered sacrifices and set out. It was a perfect autumn day, and all the court officials went to the pavilion outside the city to take their leave. Gao Qiu was dressed in his shiny armor, riding a warhorse with a golden saddle. Before him went five auxiliary mounts with carriages encrusted with jade. He was flanked by two trusted generals from the imperial guard, a pair of brothers whose last name was Dang (3). Behind them followed all the officers, arranged in perfect alignment..

Gao Qiu led this huge army out to the pavilion outside the capital, where he had a drink with the court officials who came to see him off, and then he got back on his horse and headed toward Jizhou Prefecture. Along the way, though, his soldiers plundered the villages they came across, doing much harm to the civilians, which was, you know, the exact opposite of what the emperor had asked Gao Qiu to do. But I guess that's just par for the course when it comes to large armies on campaign.

Anyway, the 10 commandants and the troops under their command were trickling into Jizhou Prefecture. One day, one of those commandants was about 15 miles from the prefectural seat. His army was passing a place called Phoenix Tail Slope. At the foot of the slope was a large forest. As the troops passed the forest, they suddenly heard the banging of drums, followed by the appearance of a bandit army from behind the slope. The chieftain at their head was none other than Dong Ping the General of Double Spears.

Reining in his horse in the middle of the road, Dong Ping shouted at the oncoming soldiers, "Who are you?! Why haven't you surrendered yet?!"

The commandant, whose name is Wang (2) Wende (2,2), also reined in his horse and laughed out loud.

"Even bottles and jars have two ears! How have you not heard about me, Wang Wende the great general, and the famous deeds of us 10 commandants?!"

“Ah, so you are the rustic lout who couldn’t kill anyone but his mother’s lover!” Dong Ping taunted back.

Wang Wende became furious at that slight, and he galloped toward Dong Ping with spear in hand. The two fought for 30 bouts without a winner, but Wang Wende got the sense that he was not going to be able to beat Dong Ping, so he shouted, “Let’s take a quick break and then fight some more!”

Once both warriors returned to their own lines, Wang Wende told his troops to just rush past Dong Ping’s army and not linger to fight. So with him leading the way, his army let out a big roar and stormed through Dong Ping’s lines and kept running. Dong Ping and his army immediately gave chase.

As Wang Wende and his men were rushing past the forest, they suddenly found their path cut off by another bandit army. This one was led by Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow, who shouted, “Stop!”

And before he even finished shouting, Zhang Qing had let fly a stone toward Wang Wende’s head. Wang Wende ducked, but the stone struck him squarely in the helmet, sending him scampering away while leaning on his saddle. Zhang Qing and Dong Ping both gave chase. They were just about to catch up with Wang Wende when suddenly, another of the 10 commandants showed up with his forces, and that compelled the two chieftains to call off their chase. The two commandants gathered their troops and headed into Jizhou Prefecture, where Prefect Zhang received them and the other government forces that were arriving.

A few days later, word came that Marshal Gao Qiu and the main army had arrived. The 10 commandants went out to greet him and escorted him into the prefectural seat, where they converted the prefectural administrative compound into their command center. Gao Qiu then ordered the 10 commandants’ forces to set up camp outside the city. Once the navy arrived, they would set out together.

So the 10 commandants took their armies outside the city to pitch camp. But to pitch camp, you needed lumber, so their soldiers went into the nearby hills, cut down all the trees and even ripped out door and window frames from civilian homes to build their camps, all of which was no doubt doing wonders for military-civilian relations. What's more, inside the city, Gao Qiu was busy doling out assignments. The officers who could not afford to slip him a bribe were all assigned to lead the charge, in essence serving as cannon fodder. Those who did grease his palm were kept back in the main army, where they could stay relatively safe while having forged merits put in their records.

After a couple days, the navy under the command of Admiral Liu Menglong (4,2) arrived. Once the admiral went to see Gao Qiu, the latter summoned the 10 commandants as well and they all gathered to discuss strategy. The scheme they settled on would send the cavalry and infantry in to scout out the roads and to lure the bandits out to fight. Then, the navy would swoop in and attack the bandits' lair, putting the outlaws under siege on both ends. So Gao Qiu handed out assignments, everybody snapped to, and after three days, everything was ready. Gao Qiu went outside the city to inspect the troops, and then the army and navy set off toward Liangshan.

Meanwhile, the chieftains Dong Ping and Zhang Qing had returned to base and reported the enemy's movements. Song Jiang and the other chieftains then led their forces down the mountain. Before long, they saw the government troops approaching. The two armies' front columns set up their battle lines. On the side of the government troops, a commandant named Wang Huan (4) rode out with a long spear in hand and shouted, "Wicked bandits! Reckless bumpkins! Do you recognize me, the great general Wang Huan (4)?!"

Across the way, the banners parted and Song Jiang rode out. He shouted back to Wang Huan, "Commandant, you are getting old, too old to go into battle for the country. If you slip up, it would ruin your reputation. Go back and send someone younger to come fight us."

Wang Huan was enraged and cursed, "You are a lowly clerk and convict. How dare you resist the divine troops?!"

"Commandant, don't you brag!" Song Jiang shot back. "My group of heroes who carry out justice on heaven's behalf will never lose to you!"

Wang Huan was done talking and galloped toward Song Jiang with spear raised. Behind Song Jiang shot out Lin Chong the Panther Head. As he and Wang Huan traded blows, both sides cheered on their champion with thunderous roars. Marshal Gao Qiu personally rode out to the front of his lines to watch the fight.

It was an intense affair between two evenly matched warriors. After 80 bouts, neither had the upper hand. Both sides now rang gongs to signal for their warrior to return to their lines. Then, on Gao Qiu's side, the commandant Jing (1) Zhong (1) asked for and received permission to go next. On Song Jiang's side, Huyan Zhuo the Twin Staffs rode out to face him. The two men traded blows for 20-some bouts, and then Huyan Zhuo feigned an opening and induced Jing Zhong into taking a hack at him with his saber. Huyan Zhuo dodged the blow and at the same moment brought one of his steel staffs down squarely on Jing Zhong's head, smacking him so hard that his brains went flying and his eyes popped out, and Jing Zhong immediately fell dead to the ground.

Seeing one of his commandants bite the dust, Gao Qiu quickly ordered another commandant, named Xiang (4) Yuanzhen (2,4), to go out and fight. Xiang Yuanzhen darted out with spear in hand and dared the bandits to take him on.

The chieftain Dong Ping the General of Double Spears answered the call. They had not fought for 10 bouts, however, when Xiang Yuanzhen turned and fled, dragging his spear behind him. Dong Ping gave chase, but instead of running back into his own lines, Xiang Yuanzhen rode along the line and seemed to be fleeing away from the field. Dong Ping kept up the pursuit, but suddenly, Xiang Yuanzhen pulled out his bow and let fly an arrow. Dong Ping heard the twang of the bowstring and raised his hand shield

himself. The arrow struck him in his right arm, forcing him to drop the spear in that hand and ride back toward his own lines.

Xiang Yuanzhen now turned around and came after Dong Ping, but the chieftains Huyan Zhuo and Lin Chong rushed out to save their comrade. Marshal Gao now commanded his army to charge forward, and the two sides engaged in a scrum. Song Jiang sent Dong Ping back to base first, and soon, the bandit army started to scatter. Marshal Gao's troops gave chase all the way to the edge of the marsh and then sent men to go back up their navy.

So things were looking pretty decent on land for Gao Qiu. To see how his navy will fare, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, the fight is just getting started. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!