

Zhang Liao (Wenyuan)

張遼 (文遠)

(AD 169-222)

Sanguozhi Officer Biography
Pei Songzhi in Blue, Translator Notes in Green
Translated by Jonathan Wu

Zhang Liao, styled Wenyuan, hailed from Mayi county in Yanmen Commandery. He was a descendant of Shen Nie [of the Western Han], but his family changed their surname to avoid enemies (I). In his youth he served as a minor official in the commandery. In the later days of the Han [Dynasty], the Inspector of Bing Province, Ding Yuan, noticed that Zhang Liao was a skilled warrior and persuaded him to enter his service. Ding Yuan had Zhang Liao lead an army to go to the Imperial Capital. He Jin then sent him to Hebei to recruit soldiers, and Zhang Liao recruited more than a thousand men. Upon Zhang Liao's return, He Jin was killed and Zhang Liao and his men were now under the control of Dong Zhuo. When Dong Zhuo was overthrown, Zhang Liao and his troops were then controlled by Lu Bu, and he was promoted to Chief Commandant of the Cavalry. Lu Bu was subsequently defeated by Li Jue. He followed Lu Bu and fled eastward to Xu Province, and was appointed Chancellor of Lu State, at this time, Zhang Liao was twenty-eight years old. (II)

When the Grand Progenitor [Cao Cao] routed Lu Bu's forces at Xiapi, Zhang Liao led his men and surrendered. The rank of General of the Interior was conferred upon Zhang Liao, and he was given the title of Marquis of the Imperial Domain. Due to his frequent merits in battle, [Zhang Liao] was promoted to be Major-General. After Yuan Shao was defeated, Cao Cao sent Zhang Liao with a separate force, and Liao was sent to conquer the various prefectures of Lu State. Together with Xiahou Yuan, [Zhang Liao] laid siege on Chang Xi at Donghai . Several months later provisions were exhausted, and some men argued in favor of withdrawal. [Zhang] Liao said to [Xiahou] Yuan: "For the past few days, everytime I go inspect the siege, Xi always stared at me. Also, their arrows are firing less thickly now. Thus it must be because Xi cannot decide on a plan of action, and therefore he does not fight with all his strength. I wish to trick him out to talk to him, and perhaps entice them to surrender." Thus he sent a messenger to [Chang Xi] and spoke: "My honourable Master sent me here with his message." [Chang] Xi came down to talk, [Zhang] Liao said: "My Lord's military power is divine, his virtue spans the four corners of the world, those who submit first will be given great rewards."

I: Shen Nie was a spy for Han Wu-di who infiltrated the Xiongnu tribe in the North.

II: During the later Han, Provinces were divided into Commanderies and States. The former was led by a Grand Administrator (just like how Sun Jian was Grand Administrator of Chang Sha), and the latter was governed by a Chancellor. In practice, a state was distinguished only by the fact that a member of the imperial Liu family had been granted nominal enfeoffment over a commandery territory, and that the title of the senior administrator and some other officials varied from those of the commandery. (From Generals of the South, De Crespigny, Chapter 1, the Enforcement of Authority)

[Chang] Xi therefore surrendered. Forthwith, [Zhang] Liao climbed Sangong Mountain on his own, entered [Chang] Xi's house, once there, Chang Xi's wife and kids paid respect to Liao. [Chang] Xi joyfully went to serve Cao Cao. After [Chang] Xi was sent off, Cao Cao reproached [Zhang] Liao and said: "Your actions were not in accordance of those of an senior General." [Zhang] Liao said: "My Honourable Lord's prestige is known across the four seas, I was following the Imperial decrees, [Chang] Xi would not have dared to harm me."

Following the expedition against Yuan Tan and Yuan Shang at Liyang, [Zhang Liao] earned a lot of merit, and was temporarily made General of Central Firmness. He followed Cao Cao to attack Ye, but it was well defended. When Cao Cao returned to Xu [Chang] he had [Zhang] Liao and Yue Jin take Yin'an Prefecture and they moved the citizens to Henan. The attack on Ye was resumed, and after the battle was won, [Zhang] Liao left to conquer Zhao state and Changshan, persuading the bandits along the mountains and Sun Qing of Heishan to surrender. He then accepted the surrender of many bandits from Chang Mountain and Hei Mountain. Zhang Liao followed Cao Cao to attack Yuan Tan and [Yuan] Tan was defeated, and Liao led a separate force to occupy Haibin and to defeat Liu Yi and the bandits at Liaodong . Returning to Ye, Cao Cao went out to greet [Zhang] Liao, and rode a carriage with him. Afterwards, [Zhang] Liao was appointed as General who Terrifies Criminals. Zhang Liao then seperated to strike Jing Province, took Jiangxia and all its prefectures, and stationed his troops at Linying. For this he was conferred the title of Marquis of a Chief Commune. Zhang Liao then followed Cao Cao to attack Yuan Shang at Liucheng, but then suddenly encountered the enemy. [Zhang] Liao advised Cao Cao to continue fighting, because of his high spirit, Cao Cao considered him very brave and he personally gave his own banner to Zhang Liao. Thus they attacked, and it was a major victory, after the battle, the leader of the Wuhan tribe, Ta Dun, was beheaded.

(1) Fu Zi says: When Cao Cao prepared to attack Liucheng, [Zhang] Liao admonished him and said: , "Now, Xu, that's the centre of the world. Now that the Son of Heaven is in Xu, if you, lord, go on a campaign to the remote north--and if Liu Biao send Liu Bei to attack Shu, and they take over it in order to command the world [to their wishes], then my lord, your establishment will be gone." Cao Cao was certain that Liu Biao wouldn't employ Liu Bei, and thus he went.

At this time, Jing Province was not pacified, so [Cao Cao] again sent [Zhang] Liao to garrison at Changshe. Before he started off, there was someone in the camp who schemed a revolt, and at night they started a commotion and a fire. Therefore the entire camp was disrupted. [Zhang] Liao said to those around him: "Do not move, it can't be that the entire is in rebellion, there must be ones who revolting who planned to use this to upset everyone." Thus he sent an order around the camp, that those who are not in revolt should sit quietly. [Zhang] Liao prepared ten of his men, and they then stood in the centre of the camp formation. Not long after, the camps were calmed down, he determined who initiated this scheme, and killed them. Chen Lan and Mei Cheng incited six prefectures of the Di tribe to revolt. Cao Cao dispatched Yu Jin and Zang Ba to deal with Mei Cheng. [Zhang] Liao supervised Zhang He and Niu Ge, and campaigned against [Chen] Lan. [Mei] Cheng faked surrender, so [Yu] Jin returned. Forthwith, [Mei] Cheng took his troops to join [Chen] Lan, and then they turned to go to Qian mountain. In the center of the mountain there was one Heavenly Pillar Peak, about 20 li tall, the path going up it is dangerous and narrow and could only pass one man at a time, [Chen] Lan fortified on that peak. [Zhang] Liao wanted to advance, but his generals said: "Our soldiers are few and the path is dangerous. It will be difficult to get through." [Zhang] Liao said: "So we speak of one-on-one [combat]: those who are brave will have advantage. " Forthwith, he went with [Yu] Jin and arrived at the foot of the mountain where they set up camp. When they attacked, Chen Lan and the chief Mei Cheng were beheaded, and all of their men were captured. When the Grand Progenitor addressed their merits, he said: "Climbing heaven's mountains, overcoming its dangers, taking [Chen] Lan, and [Mei] Cheng - that is the accomplishment of the General who Vanquishes Bandits [Zhang Liao]. " Thus he increased Zhang Liao's fief and granted him temporarily the power of the Jie staff.

After the Grand Progenitor returned from attacking Sun Quan, he left [Zhang] Liao, Yue Jin and Li Dian in charge with 7000 men at Hefei. The Grand Progenitor now attacked Zhang Lu, and right before he left, he gave written instructions to Xie Ti, an army commissioner. At the edge of the envelop he wrote: "To be used when the bandits arrive. " At this time, [Sun] Quan attacked and surrounded Hefei with 100,000 troops, therefore the package was opened. It said: "Should Sun Quan attack, Zhang [Liao] and Li [Dian] will go forth and attack; General Yue should guard the city and the army commissioner is not to engage in fighting." The generals were not certain about this plan, [Zhang] Liao said: "Our honourable lord is out on a faraway expedition, and by the time help comes, they would certainly have defeated us. That's why he instructed us to attack them before their forces are centralized, and if we can crush their morale and calm our men's hearts, we can then take up defense. Success or failure depends on this battle, why should you generals be doubting? " Li Dian agreed with Zhang Liao. Thus that night Zhang Liao recruited men that dared to follow him, and got 800 altogether. An ox was slaughtered and prepared for a feast for the generals and warriors; the next day the big battle began. Early next morning, [Zhang] Liao fastened his armour and readied his halberd. He charged first into the enemy

formation, slaughtered scores of men, beheaded two generals, and then he shouted his name and dashed forward when he saw Sun Quan's banner. [Sun] Quan was greatly frightened and did not know what to do, and so he retreated to higher ground, while he had his guards raise their halberds in defence. [Zhang] Liao shouted at [Sun] Quan to fight, but [Sun] Quan did not dare to make a move. He noticed that Zhang Liao had only a few men, and so he gathered his men to surround Zhang Liao in many layers. [Zhang] Liao made hand signals as if to charge left and right, but immediately charged forward himself. The siege was broken and some scores of men under Zhang Liao's banner managed to exit. The rest cried out: "Our general has abandoned us!" [Zhang] Liao again charged through the encirclement, safely pulling back the remainder of the troops. [Sun] Quan's officers all scattered, and nobody dared to resist. The battle continued through the morning, and the men of [Wu] had been robbed of their spirit. Thereupon, [Zhang Liao] prepared for defense. His men's fears were allayed and all acknowledged that Zhang Liao was right. [Sun] Quan besieged Hefei for ten days, but the city would not fall, thus they retreated. [Zhang] Liao led a unit to pursue, and almost captured [Sun] Quan. The Grand Progenitor recognized Zhang Liao's great strength, and promoted him to General Who Conquers the East. In the 21st year of Jian An, The Grand Progenitor again launched an expedition against Sun Quan at Hefei, and when he arrived at Hefei, he took a walk around where Zhang Liao did battle, and stood sighing in thought for a long time. Thus [Zhang] Liao's troops were increased, and Cao Cao left many troops to stay there, and transferred Zhang Liao to be stationed at Juchao.

(2) Sun Cheng says: "As for the defence of Hefei, the prefecture is weak and not close to help. If only daring men were employed [to guard the city] then they'd create trouble from their desires to do battle, but if only timid men were used then their fearfulness will not keep the city safe. Furthermore, the enemy is numerous and we are few, and thus they would definitely be greedy and lazy. To use men who are fighting for survival to attack greedy and lazy soldiers, by natural reasoning our side would definitely win. Only after winning is defending possible, and only by defending is the safe-guarding of the city guaranteed."

Guan Yu was besieging Cao Ren at Fan, and since it happened right then that Sun Quan pledged to be a subject, [Zhang] Liao and others were assembled to rescue [Cao] Ren. Before [Zhang] Liao had arrived, Xu Huang had already routed Guan Yu and the siege on Cao Ren was lifted. [Zhang] Liao then joined up with the Great Progenitor at Mopo. [Zhang] Liao's army arrived and the Great Progenitor rode out in the Imperial Carriage to greet him. Zhang Liao then returned to guard Chen commandery. When Cao Pi became Prince, [Zhang Liao] was given the rank of General of the Van. His older brother Zhang Fan and one son were given the rank of Marquis. When Sun Quan rebelled, and [Zhang] Liao was dispatched and stationed troops at Hefei, his status as Marquis was then changed to Marquis of a Village. His mother was given a carriage by the Emperor, who sent troops to escort the family to the camp. Cao Pi ordered that when Zhang Liao's mother would arrive, Zhang Liao was to bring his soldiers out to greet her. All the captains and officers under Zhang Liao's command came out and knelt down by the roadside, paying homage to her. Those who witnessed this considered this supremely prestigious. When Emperor Wen ascended the throne, he granted him the Marquisate of Jinyang, increasing it with a thousand households, which was 2600 including that from before. In the second year of Huangchu, [Zhang] Liao went to pay homage to the Emperor at the palace at Luoyang. The Literary Emperor then personally escorted him to Jianshi palace, and asked him the details about when he defeated Wu. The Emperor sighed as he considered, and said: "Truly this is Shao Hu of old!" (III) A special palace was then built for Zhang Liao's mother, and those who volunteered to follow Zhang Liao and defeat Wu became the Emperor's Tiger Guard. Sun Quan renewed his bond. [Zhang] Liao went to station his troops at Yongqiu and became ill. The Emperor dispatched Palace Attendant Liu Ye and an Imperial physician to treat the illness, and the Tiger Guards whom he sent out to ask for news about Zhang Liao filled the road. Before he had recovered, the Emperor went to greet him personally, and would grasp Liao's hand, and give him Imperial clothes and share his imperial meals with him. When he got a bit better, he returned to his station. Sun Quan rebelled again so the Emperor sent [Zhang] Liao and Cao Xiu to sail downstream to Hailing, and arrived by the Yangtze. Sun Quan was very fearful of this, and he gave the order to his generals: "Though Zhang Liao is still sick, nothing stops him, be cautious!" That year Zhang Liao and other generals managed to defeat Lu Fan. [Zhang] Liao's illness became more serious, and he died at Jiangdu. The Emperor wept and conferred upon Zhang Liao the posthumous title of Resolute Marquis.

(III) Shao Hu was a great commander during the Zhou Dynasty. He was known for his merits in vanquishing the barbarians in the south, during the time of King Xuan of Zhou.

(3) Wei Shu says: "The King bestowed [Zhang] Liao a thousand rolls of silk, and 50,000 hu of grain."

His son [Zhang] Hu inherited his title. In year six of Huangchu, Cao Pi, remembering [Zhang] Liao and [Li] Dian's merits at Hefei, spoke: "During their service at Hefei, [Zhang] Liao and [Li] Dian, with only 800 men, routed 100,000 soldiers, such accomplishments have not occurred since ancient times. Up until now the enemy has not recovered their spirits, it is to be said that these two men were the claws and teeth of this country. A hundred households are to be separated out from [Li] Dian's and [Zhang] Liao's domains to support one of each man's sons as Marquis of the Imperial Domain." [Zhang] Hu served as Lieutenant-General, and his son [Zhang] Tong inherited his titles.

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