CHAPTER FIVE

CONQUEST OF THE NORTH
201–207

The fall of the Yuan clan 201–204
Settlement of the North 204–206
White Wolf Mountain 207

Chronology

201  Liu Bei flees to Liu Biao in Jing province
202  Yuan Shao dies, succeeded by his youngest son Yuan Shang
203  Cao Cao attacks the Yuan brothers, then withdraws
     Yuan Tan asks Cao Cao for help against Yuan Shang
204  Cao Cao defeats Yuan Shang and captures Ye city
     Cao Cao attacks Yuan Tan
205  Cao Cao destroys Yuan Tan
     Yuan Shang and Yuan Xi flee to the Wuhuan in Liaoxi
     Cao Cao drives the Wuhuan across the frontier
206  Cao Cao defeats Gao Gan and settles Bing province
207  Cao Cao defeats the Wuhuan at White Wolf Mountain
     Yuan Shang and Yuan Xi flee to Gongsun Kang, who kills them

The fall of the Yuan clan 201–204

The defeat of Yuan Shao at Guandu was decisive, inasmuch as it
ensured that he would not threaten Cao Cao for the foreseeable future,
but it had been a near-run thing and both sides were exhausted. Cao
Cao sent a raiding party across the Yellow River in Dongping com-
mandery, and he also attacked Yuan Shao’s positions at the Cangting

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1 Major sources for Cao Cao’s activities from 201 to 204 are SGZ 1:22–26 and the
biographies of Yuan Shao and his sons at HHS 74/64A:2403, 74/64B:2409–16 and SGZ
6:201–06. They are presented in chronicle order by ZZTJ 64:2041–56; deC, Establish
crossing in Dong commandery, but he held his main force at the line of the River and made no major attempt to take advantage of his victory. For his part, it appears that Yuan Shao was able to recover much of his army, and though a few cities rebelled against him they were soon recaptured. After the excitements of 200, the year which followed was comparatively peaceful, and both sides regrouped.

In the autumn Cao Cao returned to Xu city, and soon afterwards he dealt with the minor irritation represented by Liu Bei in Runan. It does not appear that Liu Bei had achieved any substantial success in his operations behind Cao Cao’s lines, and he had been held at bay by quite small contingents of Cao Cao’s men. As Cao Cao turned against him, Liu Bei fled across the hills to refuge with Liu Biao in Jing province. His former allies, notably a group of bandits under the local chieftain Gong Du, swiftly surrendered, and Cao Cao had now no major concerns in the prosperous territories of Runan and Yingchuan.

Further to the east about the same time, Cao Cao’s commanders Xiahou Yuan and Zhang Liao settled Donghai commandery in Xu province. The local warlord Chang Xi had allied with Lü Bu and then with Liu Bei, and although he had previously been defeated he had maintained himself in Tan city, former capital of Tao Qian. Xiahou Yuan’s army surrounded the place, but as supplies ran short he considered withdrawal. At this point, however, Zhang Liao engaged in some diplomacy:

Zhang Liao said to Xiahou Yuan, “Over the past few days, whenever I walk about the camp Chang Xi has looked at me very carefully, and there have not been many shots fired. This surely means that he is undecided and has no heart for the fight. I shall try to talk with him, and I may be able to win him over.”

He sent a messenger to Chang Xi to say that, “His Excellency [Cao Cao] has sent a letter for me to hand to you.”

Then Chang Xi came down and spoke with Zhang Liao, and Zhang Liao told of Cao Cao’s miraculous ability in war, how he embraced all the world with his virtue, and how those who joined him early would receive great rewards. So Chang Xi promised to surrender.

Then Zhang Liao, alone and without escort, went to Chang Xi’s house and paid respects to his wife and children. Chang Xi was pleased and accompanied Zhang Liao to Cao Cao. Cao Cao sent him back [to Donghai].

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2 Cao Cao still held title as Excellency of Works: Chapter Two at 89.
3 SGZ 17:517, from the biography of Zhang Liao; deC, Establish Peace, 304–305.