

Lure Your Enemy Onto The Roof, Then Take Away The Ladder



上屋抽梯

Shàng Wū Chōu Tī

Strategy 28
Lure Your Enemy Onto The Roof,
Then Take Away The Ladder

Avoid terrain that features cliffs and crags, narrow passes, tangled bush, and quagmires. While avoiding such places ourselves, try to lure the enemy into such areas so that when we attack the enemy will have this type of terrain at his rear.

Sun Zi, *The Art of War*

With baits and deceptions, lure your enemy into treacherous terrain. Then cut off his lines of communication and avenue of escape. To save himself he must fight both your own forces and the elements of nature.

Warring States Period China

In 341 B.C., Wei was attacking Han, which in turn appealed to Qi for assistance. The king of Qi sought the advice of Sun Bin who recommended waiting until both armies were exhausted before intervening. To insure Han would put up a good defense, Sun sent

The Thirty-Six Strategies of Ancient China - S. H. Verstappen

messengers saying that an army was being readied and would be there at the first opportunity. After several weeks, reports came in that both armies were weary of the siege and Sun again set out for the capital of Wei, an apparent repeat of his earlier strategy 'Besiege Wei to Rescue Chao'. (See Chapter 2)

When the general of Wei, Pang Juan, heard that Sun had crossed into Wei he was furious. He then sent his army to catch up with them before they reached the capital. This time Pang was not going to allow himself to be ambushed, so he sent scouting parties well ahead of the main army.

Having outfoxed Pang twice before, Sun's generals wondered how they could bait him into another trap.

Sun said, *"I know Pang Juan has a low opinion of the Qi soldiers and believes them to be cowards. We will allow him to believe this."*

Sun ordered that when his men encamped the first night they build one fire for every man, and on the next night, one fire for every two men, and on the third night, one fire for every three men.

When Pang was within a few days march of the Qi forces, he questioned his scouts who had been spying on the Qi army since it entered their territory. They reported that on the first night one hundred thousand fires were lit, on the second night only fifty thousand fires were lit, and on the third night, only thirty thousand fires had been lit. Pang concluded that the deeper the Qi army penetrated Wei territory, the more their men became frightened and deserted.

"They have heard I am here and they are fleeing in fear of my presence," declared Pang.

One of his advisors was not so convinced and warned, *"But the men of Qi are notorious for their trickery we should be careful before pursuing them recklessly."*

However, Pang did not heed his advice. Meanwhile Sun found the perfect terrain to stage an ambush: a stretch of road that was flanked by hills and woods. In these woods, he concealed his archers and, at the

Lure Your Enemy Onto The Roof, Then Take Away The Ladder

entrance of the valley, he had them build a rough defensive barrier. About seven hundred yards further along the trail there was a large oak tree. Sun peeled off the tree's bark and wrote in large characters: "*Pang Juan will die here.*"

He gave instructions that the archers should lie in wait throughout the night and, when they saw a light appear near the tree, shoot towards the light.

As expected, Pang arrived at the entrance of the valley shortly after dark and first encountered the defensive obstruction. He laughed telling his men this was but a desperate trick of a fleeing enemy. He ordered the barrier torn down and was proceeding along the road when a scout reported that something had been written on a tree up ahead. Pang went to investigate for himself. He ordered a torch brought up so that he could better read the characters.

When the light of the torch shone on the tree, Sun's hidden archers rained five thousand arrows towards it killing everyone in the vanguard and wounding Pang Juan. Knowing he was beaten, Pang cut his own throat. His last words were, "*That upstart. Now with my death I've made his reputation!*" And it did. Sun Bin went on to write a famous book on strategy called, THE ART OF WARFARE. The book was lost for almost two thousand years until recently rediscovered in a Han dynasty tomb.

Han Dynasty China

After defeating the rebel kingdom of Wei, the famous Han general *Han Xin* was sent to quell the other two kingdoms that had revolted, Qi and Chu. General Han set out towards Qi, but Chu sent its general, *Long Chu*, with a force of two hundred thousand men to intercept Han's invasion of Qi.

The two armies met on opposite sides of the Wei River. General Han ordered his men to fill over ten thousand sandbags and carry them up-river to dam the flow of water.

The Thirty-Six Strategies of Ancient China - S. H. Verstappen

The next morning General Han led his army across the lowered river and attacked Chu, but after a short engagement pretended defeat and fled back across the river.

General Long announced, "*See, I always knew Han Xin was a coward!*" and he led his army across the river in pursuit.

Through a prearranged signal, General Han had his men break the dam and free the pent-up waters. Only half of the Chu army was across the river when the flood cut the army in half, drowning those caught midstream.

General Han then wheeled around his retreating forces and attacked the advance guard of Chu, killing General Long Chu.

The remaining troops panicked and fled in all directions, but in the end were captured by the pursuing Han soldiers.

Sui Dynasty China

In A.D. 910 King *Zhuangzong* of Jin,' the future Tang emperor, set out to rescue the ally state of Zhou from the invading Liang forces. The Jin forces were outnumbered by the Liang, but they had more cavalry, while the Liang army consisted of mostly infantry and new recruits. The Liang set up defensive fortifications along the river in wooded terrain flanked by marshes and awaited the Jin.

The Jin army was far from base and supplies were thin. King Chuang needed to fight a decisive battle quickly or risk being starved into submission, but General Zhou warned against a frontal attack on the Liang.

He said, "*The people of Liang excel at fighting from fortified defense and are not adept at open field combat, while our own strength lies with our cavalry.*"

Now cavalry are adept at warfare on open plains and expansive wilds, but our army is encamped in wetlands and forest. This is hardly terrain that would be advantageous to us.

Lure Your Enemy Onto The Roof, Then Take Away The Ladder

It would be better to withdraw the army to Haoyi and thereby entice the enemy to leave their encampment."

The king agreed and they withdrew the army. Then General Zhou led a thousand cavalry to provoke skirmishes with Liang's encampment.

Enraged, the Liang came forth with all their troops and fought running battles with General Zhou that eventually stretched several dozen miles. General Zhou and King Chuang watched the battle from the top of a nearby hill.

The king said, *"The Liang have been lured onto level plains and shallow grass. Our cavalry can advance and withdraw unhindered. Truly this is terrain where we can wrest victory."*

He ordered General Zhou to attack, but the general replied, *"Without any preparation Liang's forces hastily came forth and have now traveled far. Moreover, they certainly did not have any time to prepare rations."*

Even if they did, they would not have had the leisure to eat them. By midday, their men will be hungry and thirsty, and their army will certainly withdraw. If we attack them while they are withdrawing, we will inevitably be victorious."

By late afternoon, the Liang forces were seen pulling back. General Zhou ordered the beating of the drums, and with a tumultuous clamor advanced to attack. Exhausted and cut off from supplies, the Liang forces suffered a serious defeat.

Summary

Every type of terrain can provide both an advantage for one form of warfare while a hindrance for another. A large force has the advantage in open terrain, while it is hindered by the narrow. But a small force is vulnerable in open spaces, yet protected by the narrow. Therefore, the key is to lure your enemy onto a terrain that hinders his abilities while helping your own.