

## = Battle of Yanshi =

The Battle of Yanshi ( 618 ) was fought on 5 - 6 October 618 between the armies of Wang Shichong and Li Mi , rival contenders for the succession of the Sui Dynasty . Wang , who was still ostensibly a Sui loyalist and had been blockaded in Luoyang for months by Li Mi , gambled on a decisive battle and led his troops out to attack the besieging army . Li assembled his forces on a naturally defensible position north of Yanshi town , but Wang managed to surprise Li 's forces and approach their camp before they could react . Aided by a secondary cavalry attack from the rear , Wang secured a decisive victory over Li 's forces . Although Li managed to escape with part of his army , his authority was shattered , and his followers joined Wang . While Li Mi sought refuge in the rival Tang court , Wang consolidated his control over Henan and eventually deposed the Sui puppet ruler Yang Tong and declared himself as Emperor of the new Zheng dynasty . Wang 's power lasted until his surrender to the Tang prince Li Shimin in 621 .

## = Background =

During the later reign of the second emperor of the Sui Dynasty , Yang ( reigned 604 - 618 ) , the dynasty 's authority began to wane : the immense material and human cost of the protracted and fruitless attempts to conquer the Korean kingdom of Goguryeo , coupled with natural disasters , caused unrest in the provinces , while the successive military failures eroded the emperor 's prestige and legitimacy ( " Mandate of Heaven " ) among the provincial governors . Yang nevertheless continued to be fixated on the Korean campaigns , and by the time he realized the gravity of the situation , it was too late : as revolts spread , in 616 , he abandoned the north and withdrew to Jiangdu , where he remained until his assassination in 618 . Local governors and magnates rose to claim power in the wake of Yang 's withdrawal . By the summer of 618 , nine major contenders emerged , some claiming the imperial title , others contenting themselves , for the time being , with more modest titles . The three most powerful were Li Yuan , who seized the Sui capital of Daxingcheng ( Chang 'an ) and on 16 June 618 proclaimed himself the first emperor of the Tang Dynasty ; Dou Jiande , a one @-@ time bandit leader who had risen in revolt against the Sui already in 611 , and came to control most of Hebei as the " King of Changle " and then as the " King of Xia " ; and Li Mi in Henan , who led a mixture of rebelled peasants and Sui soldiers .

Li Mi 's main antagonist was the Sui general Wang Shichong , who controlled the eastern capital , Luoyang , and the remnants of the Sui administration there . Emperor Yang had sent him to the city in mid @-@ 617 . In May 618 , following Yang 's murder by the general Yuwen Huaji , the Sui officials in Luoyang elevated Yang 's grandson Yang Tong to the throne . In the meantime , Li Mi had managed to gain control over most of the surrounding area . When Yuwen Huaji moved north against Li Mi , Wang seized the opportunity to play both rebels against each other : Li Mi was offered an amnesty and a high court position if he would march against Emperor Yang 's assassin . Li Mi , whose own base , the great granary at Liyang , was threatened , agreed , hoping in turn to profit from his legitimization and gain control of Luoyang . In the event , Li Mi heavily defeated Yuwen in a series of battles and forced him to withdraw to northern Hubei . Feeling threatened by Li Mi 's growing power , and facing plots against him in Luoyang , Wang launched a coup d'état on 11 August 618 and seized power for himself , removing his opponents and barring the city to Li Mi . The two men now moved to a confrontation that , as the historian David Graff comments , could prove decisive for the outcome of the civil war . Wang " was fighting for survival " , while Li had to capture Luoyang to " cement his hold over Henan " . More importantly , however , " the victor would be left in possession of the most populous region of the Sui empire and could expect to receive the allegiance of many of the smaller armed factions " .

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Facing starvation and surrender , Wang Shichong decided to risk an open confrontation with Li Mi , in an attempt to push him back and break the siege . Wang selected 20 @, @ 000 " elite " troops ?

of which only 1 @, @ 000 were cavalry ? from Luoyang 's garrison , apparently troops who had already participated in several expeditions against rebels and bandits under his command and were especially trustworthy . In order to embolden his men Wang ? who according to Graff " had a keen interest in divination and was fond of invoking unseen powers " ? now invoked the semi @-@ mythical figure of the founder of Luoyang , the Duke of Zhou : he had a shrine erected in the Duke of Zhou 's honour , and shamans declared that the Duke promised that if they marched to confront Li Mi , they would win , whereas if they remained in Luoyang , they were doomed to die of pestilence . Apparently this had the desired effect , for on 4 October 618 Wang led his army out of Luoyang and , following the course of the Luo River , marched eastward , bypassing Li Mi 's forward positions . On the afternoon of the next day , Wang 's army had reached the walled town of Yanshi , some 20 miles from Luoyang and located between the Luo River to the south and an irrigation canal to the north . There , deep inside enemy territory , Wang made camp . Li Mi had been at Jinyong Fortress some 6 miles east of Luoyang when he learned of Wang 's sortie . He too selected the best men among his own troops , numbering around 40 @, @ 000 , left one of his generals in charge of Jinyong , and followed Wang eastward . Li Mi encamped on the Mang hills north of Yanshi .

Once there , Li Mi convened a council of war to determine his army 's course of action . Li Mi himself advocated a passive and cautious stance , arguing that Wang 's troops were not only experienced veterans , but that , as they were virtually cut off from retreat due to the Luo river , the canals , and the presence of his own army , they would fight with desperate courage ? a situation already described and recommended as a strategy to galvanize one 's troops by no lesser authority than Sun Tzu , and doubtlessly familiar to both opposing commanders . In addition , while lack of supplies constrained Wang to seek an early and decisive engagement , Li Mi 's own forces had time on their side and could afford to sit out and wait until Wang 's provisions were utterly exhausted . Most of Li 's generals , however , vehemently disagreed , regarding Wang 's army as an exhausted and demoralized force , and pointing to their own considerable numerical superiority . At this juncture , the heterogeneous nature of Li 's army , cobbled together from bandit chieftains and Sui defectors , came into play : Li was well aware that his commanders were " potentially autonomous warlords who commanded the personal loyalty of their own subordinates " , and that he could not afford to antagonize them . Therefore , against his better judgement , he was forced to agree to an immediate confrontation . Nevertheless , Li Mi decided to await Wang 's attack instead of attacking himself . The main host , under Li Mi , remained on the Mang hills , while a detachment under Shan Xiongxin moved down to the plain just north of Yanshi and established a camp there . The two camps , in the description of David Graff , formed " an inverted letter ' L ' running east along the mountain and then turning sharply south across the plain to Yanshi " . Li Mi felt confident in his superior position , which gave him ample time to descend the hills and move against Wang , should he try to cross the canal for an attack . If Wang attacked either of his camps , the troops of the other would come to aid , flanking Wang 's forces . Confident in the naturally defensive layout of his hilltop camp , however , he neglected fortifying it .

The first clash between the two armies occurred on the same evening of 5 October , when Wang sent several hundred of his cavalry to attack Shan Xionxin 's camp on the plain . Li sent forces from the hills to his general 's aid , but the battle ended quickly with the arrival of night . This attack was nothing more than a diversion , drawing Li 's attention to the east while , under cover of night , Wang sent 200 of his cavalry around and behind Li 's forces . Concealing themselves in a ravine behind Li 's camp , they waited . During the night Wang laid bridges across the canal , and before dawn his army crossed over and deployed in battle formation close to Li Mi 's camps . At daybreak , Li Mi 's troops were caught entirely by surprise at the sight of the battle @-@ ready enemy advancing onto them . As the camps were unfortified , the rebel troops tried to hastily form a battle line themselves , but they were unable to prevent Wang 's forces from entering their encampments . At the same time , Wang signalled his hidden cavalry to attack . Charging down from the north into Li Mi 's camp , the 200 horsemen began setting fire to it . At the sight of the camp to their rear going up in flames , Li Mi 's army broke and fled . While Li Mi was able to escape with some 10 @, @ 000 of his men , many of the rest surrendered to Wang . According to one account , Wang 's victory was secured by a stratagem : one of his soldiers , who greatly resembled Li Mi , was bound and displayed to the rebel

troops at the height of the battle , whereupon the latter collapsed .

= = Aftermath = =

While Li Mi survived , his authority suffered a devastating blow from which it could not recover . His followers started flocking to Wang Shichong , who quickly became the master of all territories " east to the sea and south as far as the River Yangzi " . With the remnants of his army , Li Mi was forced to seek refuge with the Tang court in Chang 'an . Wang Shichong , on the other hand , now stood at the apex of his power . He appointed new senior officials and finally , in May 619 he deposed the puppet Sui emperor Yang Tong and declared himself as the first emperor of the Zheng dynasty . Soon , however , Wang 's rule became cruel and repressive , costing him support . He was also unable to effectively confront the advancing Tang armies under Li Shimin , who in early 621 laid siege to Luoyang . Wang allied himself with Dou Jiande , who came to his aid ; but Li Shimin scored a decisive victory at the Battle of Hulao on 28 May 621 , taking Dou Jiande captive . Without hope of succour , Wang finally surrendered four days after the battle , and was killed on the way to his exile .