

PHẠM NGŨ LÃO

Phạm Ngũ Lão was born in 1255 into a poor peasant family in Phù Ủng village, Đường Hào district, Hải Dương (now part of Ân Thi district, Hưng Yên).

From a young age, Phạm Ngũ Lão was known for his extraordinary spirit. In the village, when someone named Bùi Công Tiến passed the imperial examination and held a feast, the whole village attended except for Phạm Ngũ Lão. When his mother asked why he didn't attend, Ngũ Lão replied, "One must achieve great accomplishments to celebrate, but I have not yet achieved anything noteworthy. Going to celebrate would only bring shame upon me."



One day, Hưng Đạo Vương Trần Quốc Tuấn led his troops through Phù Ủng village for military exercises. The soldiers hurriedly made way, shouting and clamoring, but Phạm Ngũ Lão sat calmly weaving a basket by the roadside as if unaware of the commotion. An angered soldier jabbed him in the thigh with his spear, but Phạm Ngũ Lão didn't react.

Hearing the noise, Hưng Đạo Vương decided to send a nearby officer to investigate. However, before the officer could approach, General Nguyễn Ché

Nghĩa stepped forward and explained the situation. Trần Hưng Đạo then went up to the young man. Seeing him, approximately twenty years old, bareheaded, wearing tattered clothes, with a rugged face and a bleeding thigh from the spear jab, but still calmly weaving his basket, Hưng Đạo Vương asked, "Where are you from? Are you not in pain from being stabbed?"

Phạm Ngũ Lão looked up, seeing the imposing figure of the general but still displaying a gentle demeanor, he respectfully said, "Your Excellency, I am Phạm from the village of Phù Ủng in Thượng Hồng district. My family is poor, we have no fields, so I must weave baskets to support my elderly mother. I was lost in thought about some verses from military writings and didn't realize your troops were passing through. Please forgive me."

Impressed by Phạm Ngũ Lão's appearance and speech, Trần Hưng Đạo instructed someone to apply medicine to his wound and then inquired if he was concerned about the impending invasion of the Yuan Mongols. Phạm Ngũ Lão replied, "Although I live in a remote village, I am aware of the Mongol enemy's advance, so I have been training with other young men in martial arts, waiting for the right time to join the army."

Upon seeing a book inside a basket, Hưng Đạo Vương inquired about its contents, and Ngũ Lão respectfully presented it to him. The King asked about military strategies, and to his surprise, Ngũ Lão answered proficiently on all matters related to warfare, emphasizing the importance of strategy over numbers. Delighted, Hưng Đạo Vương exclaimed, "You have great talent, I am very pleased. Currently, I am recruiting soldiers and seeking skilled commanders. I want you to come to Vạn Kiếp to help me train the troops. What do you think?"

Phạm Ngũ Lão was overjoyed but requested permission to return home to inform his mother, which deeply moved Hưng Đạo Vương. After a period of time, Phạm Ngũ Lão arrived at Trần Hưng Đạo's military camp to train soldiers. He was also married to one of Hưng Đạo Vương's daughters.

Not only did he become a son-in-law and receive guidance from Hưng Đạo Vương, but Phạm Ngũ Lão also formed a beautiful friendship with the youngest son of King Trần Thái Tông, Prince Trần Uất, known as Minh Hiến Vương Trần Uất, who was impressed by his story of weaving baskets by the roadside.

Twice victorious against the Mongol invaders, Phạm Ngũ Lão was trained under the guidance of Hưng Đạo Vương. As he matured, he displayed his innate talents and became a distinguished and accomplished general, earning numerous military achievements.

In 1285, during the second Mongol invasion of Đại Việt, Phạm Ngũ Lão held the position of Điện tiền chỉ huy sứ, overseeing the defense of the northern frontier. He coordinated his forces with those of Trần Nhật Duật and Trần Quốc Toản, achieving a decisive victory over the enemy at Tây Kết, Hàm Tử, and Chương Dương. He also beheaded Toa Đô and struck fear into the enemy's supreme commander, Thoát Hoan. Phạm Ngũ Lão was hailed as the "tiger general of the Phạm clan" for his valor and leadership.

During the third resistance against the Mongol invasion in 1287, Phạm Ngũ Lão was tasked with blocking and attacking the enemy at Nội Bàng Pass to destroy the retreating forces led by Thoát Hoan. Knowing that Thoát Hoan was afraid of death and sought to preserve his own life, he constantly tried to push his troops to confront Phạm Ngũ Lão, while planning his own escape in another direction.

Phạm Ngũ Lão, anticipating this, divided his troops to cover all the shortcuts to the border, causing Thoát Hoan's vanguard to be unexpectedly ambushed, while the rear forces were blocked from advancing. Wherever Thoát Hoan's army went, they encountered the ambush of the Vietnamese forces and were nearly annihilated. The commander had to disguise himself among the remnants of his troops to escape back to his country and dared not set foot in Đại Việt again.

Phạm Ngũ Lão, the fearsome general whom the Mongols dreaded, was then just over 30 years old. In the years that followed, he was entrusted with commanding many battles by the court. He led several campaigns to punish the invasions of Ai Lao and Chiêm Thành. In every battle, he emerged victorious, earning him the title of a general with countless victories.

In 1320, Phạm Ngũ Lão passed away in Thăng Long. His literary legacy consists of only two poems: "Văn Hưng Đạo Đại vương" (In Honor of Grand Marshal Hưng Đạo) and "Thuật hoài" (Expressions of Longing). Among them, "Văn Hưng

Đạo Đại vương" was composed to mourn Trần Quốc Tuấn. The poem "Thuật hoài" has been translated:

*"Múa giáo non sông trải mấy thu
Ba quân như hổ nuốt trôi trâu
Công danh nam tử còn vương nợ
Luống thẹn khi nghe chuyện Vũ Hầu".*

This poem has been passed down through three military units, stirring the soldiers' determination to achieve victory and defeat the Mongol invaders.