

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 130.  
The Crusade Against The Cathars.  
To Toulouse.

Hello again. Last week we saw another round of victories scored by Simon de Montfort and his Crusaders in the form of the surrender of the rebel stronghold of Cabaret and the taking of the town of Lavaur.

Now, it turns out that the town of Lavaur was rather wealthy, and following the victory, there was a goodly pile of armor and weaponry, warhorses, fine clothes, wine, and wheat to be divided up as spoils of victory. Well, sort of divided up as spoils of victory. You see, Simon had partly financed his military expedition to date by borrowing money from a banker from the financial center of France, the city of Cahors. This banker, yet another Raymond, Raymond de Salvagnac, managed the finances of the Crusade and also looked after the taxes raised by Simon in Languedoc, forwarding them on to Rome via a network of Templars in Paris, the Templars of course, operating as the international bankers of the medieval era. By this stage in the proceedings, Simon owed Raymond the banker quite a large sum of money, and it seemed to like the spoils of victory at Lavaur presented a fabulous opportunity to repay some of the debt. Some sources have Simon turning the entirety of the plunder at Lavaur over to his banker, but in his book "The Occitan War", Laurence Marvin states that this does not seem likely. Instead, he suggests that Simon transferred the entirety of his share of the spoils, usually one third of the booty, over to the banker, leaving the remainder to be divided amongst his men and the volunteer Crusaders.

Now, as well as providing a means by which Simon could pay off some of his debts, the success of the Crusaders at Lavaur had other consequences. When Simon's men stormed the citadel at Lavaur, among the garrison they found some of the Count of Toulouse's men. To Simon, this reinforced his view that Count Raymond of Toulouse was now irredeemably an enemy of the Church. Not only had he been excommunicated by the Legates, and his lands placed under interdict, but now Simon had discovered some of Count Raymond's men actively assisting the heretic-harboring town of Lavaur in its defense against the Crusaders. In Simon's mind this act gave him the green light to invade the County of Toulouse with a clear conscience.

The success of the Crusaders at Lavaur also provided Simon with an opportunity to avenge the slaughter of the German Crusaders by the Count of Foix at the Battle of Montgey, which occurred during the siege of Lavaur. Now I only gave this battle a passing mention in last week's episode, but as it's one of only two military defeats suffered by Simon during the year 1211, and as it's the first field battle of this Crusade, it's probably worth discussing in a bit more detail. The trouble is, almost all the sources disagree on what happened, how it happened, and even exactly when it happened.

What we can be relatively certain about is this. The Count of Foix and his men, while raiding and ambushing in the region around Lavaur, most likely surprised an army of Crusaders traveling to Lavaur from Germany. The sources describe the German forces as numbering between 1,500 and 5,000 men, although the lower number is probably the more likely. In his book "The Occitan War", Laurence Marvin states that the village of Montgey stands on a hill overlooking the open countryside. It's possible that the Count of

Foix and his men concealed themselves in the fortifications of the town and watched the approaching column of marching Germans. One chronicler, William of Tudela, describes the Germans as being armoured and ready to fight when they were set upon, whereas Peter the Monk states that they were un-armoured. Peter Laurence suggests that the fact that so many Germans were killed gives force to the view that they were camping or resting without their armor on when they were set upon by the Count of Foix and his men. All the sources agree that the vast majority of the Germans were killed in the following battle, with a little if any loss to the Count of Foix. Sensibly, the Count of Foix left the scene of the battle immediately after his victory and led his men to the relative safety of the town of Montgiscard, around thirty kilometres away.

A survivor from the Crusader side of the battle managed to travel the twenty four kilometers to Lavaur to bring news of the defeat to Simon. Simon immediately dispatched some men to the scene. Peter the Monk describes what they found as a miracle. He states that the bodies of the German Crusaders were lying face upwards on the battlefield with their arms extended to form a cross. Mark Pegg in his book "A Most Holy War" states that this was unlikely to be an actual miracle, and the more likely explanation was that the bodies were arranged that way by the Count of Foix, for a bit of a laugh. In revenge for the killings, Simon de Montfort ordered the village of Montgey to be burned to the ground.

So Simon de Montfort had captured Lavaur, and destroyed Montgey. Before him now, around thirty miles away, lies Count Raymond's capital city Toulouse. Lavaur itself lay in the borderlands, and there was some dispute as to whether it belonged in the County of Toulouse, or to lands previously held by the Trencavels, so it's not absolutely clear at the moment whether Simon has been crusading against possessions held by the Count of Toulouse. Simon decided to clear things up once and for all. Instead of retreating back into traditional Trencavel lands he pushed forward. He was now definitely within the County of Toulouse, and he was definitely here to wage war. Count Raymond of Toulouse was now officially an enemy of the Church.

Simon turned his men southwards, marching towards the main road heading from Carcassonne to Toulouse. They attacked the castle of Les Casses, a well known Cathar stronghold. The castle was garrisoned by men loyal to Count Raymond and was harboring 94 Cathars, 50 of whom were Perfect. The overwhelmed garrison quickly surrendered, and Bishops from Simon's army were sent to convert the heretics. Unsurprisingly, they failed to restore most of the Cathars to the Catholic faith, and 60 of them were subsequently burnt alive.

Simon and his army continued moving southwards until, finally, in May 1211, they came across the old Roman road connecting Carcassonne to Toulouse, and attacked the first town they came across on that road, a town called Montferrand, held by Count Raymond of Toulouse's little brother, Baldwin.

Now, we haven't yet mentioned the fact that Raymond had a little brother Baldwin, basically due to the fact that he hasn't had any role to play in the events. In fact, not only has Baldwin not really featured in the events in southern France to date, he hasn't even really featured significantly in the life of Count Raymond VI of Toulouse to date. Let me explain. Baldwin was the third and youngest son of the marriage between Constance, sister of King Philip of France, and Count Raymond V of Toulouse. The marriage was not a happy one, and, while pregnant with her third son, Constance decided that she had had enough of Count Raymond V and of southern France in general, so she packed up and

moved back to northern France. As a consequence, young Baldwin was born and raised in the north. It wasn't until he was aged in his forties that Baldwin made the journey to Languedoc to meet with his brother, who was now Count Raymond VI, and to claim his inheritance. Far from convinced that this penniless, middle-aged Frenchman was actually his brother, Raymond failed to welcome him with open arms. Instead, he was sent back to northern France to obtain evidence to prove his paternity.

Managing to produce letters from a variety of churchmen and noblemen attesting to the fact that he was in fact the son of Count Raymond V, Baldwin returned to southern France, waving the letters and demanding a share in the wealth of Toulouse. Still far from convinced, Raymond sent Baldwin off to Provence to wage war on his behalf against some unruly nobles. Contrary to everyone's expectations, Baldwin was pretty successful in this endeavour, although it came at a considerable cost to his health. Still not quite convinced that this middle aged man was actually his brother, it wasn't until four years later, in the year 1209, after considerable service and self-sacrifice on Baldwin's part, that Count Raymond begrudgingly gave him an income and partial wardship over the future Raymond VII, and some land to call his own.

But, his income being small and his landholdings minimal, Baldwin was ill-equipped to defend his territory against the Crusaders. Montferrand was poorly fortified and Baldwin only had fourteen knights and a small group of men with which to defend it. Simon's men laid siege to Montferrand. Baldwin and his men did their best to try and defend it, but a few days later they agreed to surrender. In his book "A Most Holy War", Mark Pegg writes that, following three days of bombarding Montferrand with missiles from their siege engines, a Count fighting with Simon's forces was given the task of approaching Baldwin with terms of surrender. This in itself is interesting. The siege has only been underway for three days. There was no indication that Simon and his Crusaders were in any sort of a rush, and there was no indication that Baldwin and his men were running short of supplies, or that the defenses of the town were about to be breached. It may be that Simon knew of Baldwin's strange relationship with his brother, and that he may be amenable to giving up the town without too much of a fight. Anyway, the Count from the Crusading army shouted up to the town's walls, and I quote "Lord Count Baldwin come out in safety. All the barons favor compromising with you", end quote. Baldwin then appeared, apparently spitting up blood from an old war wound, and agreed to surrender on the condition that all his men be able to retain their weapons and their armour and their lives. The terms were accepted. Baldwin handed over Montferrand and its plentiful supplies of wine, bread and grain, and his men were pardoned.

Baldwin himself mounted his horse and, despite feeling decidedly unwell, headed off to Toulouse to break the news to his brother, Count Raymond. This meeting did not go well. In fact, to say it did not go well is an understatement. We don't know exactly what occurred between the two brothers, but we do know that two days later Baldwin left Toulouse and returned to Simon de Montfort. He requested Simon to accept him as a vassal. Simon did so, and Baldwin became a sworn member of the Crusader army.

Now, really, we shouldn't be too surprised by this move. Putting aside the personal difficulties which existed between the two brothers, some sources report that Baldwin was an ambitious man. Not only was he ambitious, he was also very pious. Having been raised in the quiet, scholarly, and religious court of the French King, it's no surprise that Baldwin didn't really fit into the heretic-harboring, troubadour-loving, rowdy, and volatile household of his brother the Count of Toulouse. The northern French were, really, Baldwin's people,

and being a staunch Catholic only served to reinforce his view that his brother was on the wrong side of the conflict. The fact that, if Count Raymond were defeated, Baldwin may be favored by Simon de Montfort to take over the County of Toulouse may well also have been a factor in Baldwin's decision to switch sides.

However, despite the fact that he may well have seen it coming, the event must have come as a shock to Raymond. In an era where blood ties prevailed over all else, having your brother swear a feudal oath of loyalty to your greatest enemy was not something you could forgive or easily forget, whatever the circumstances.

Having secured for himself a town on the road between Carcassonne and Toulouse, Simon now unexpectedly turned back down the road, away from Toulouse towards Carcassonne. He was headed for the town of Castelnaudary. Castelnaudary was the biggest town on this road. Earlier, during the siege of Les Casses, Count Raymond had taken twenty or so men and had traveled to Castelnaudary. The fortified town was the most important stronghold on the old Roman road, but Raymond just didn't have enough men to properly garrison it. Realizing that Simon de Montfort had turned his sights on the County of Toulouse, and that securing the road between Carcassonne and Toulouse would be one of his priorities, Raymond ordered the town to be evacuated. He then torched the town and did his best to destroy the stronghold, preferring to leave Simon a blackened ruin than a defensible castle.

When Simon arrived at Castelnaudary it was still smoldering. Deciding that the damage wasn't as bad as it looked, Simon ordered the fires to be fully extinguished, then ordered his men to start rebuilding the walls that Raymond's men had so recently torn down. He then garrisoned the town and made it his own.

Now, at this stage, Simon would, of course, have liked to have turned around, marched straight down the road to the city of Toulouse, attacked it, and seized it in the name of the Church. Simon, however, was a realist. While he would have liked nothing more than to have added the city of Toulouse to his growing list of conquests, he really didn't have enough men to take such a large city. Instead, he had to content himself with securing lands and towns deep inside the County of Toulouse to the north of the city. He left the Roman road and headed north, back up to Lavaur, conquering strongholds and towns across the County with apparent ease, and even going as far as the region around Albi, taking more and more territory from Count Raymond.

The shocked Count Raymond could do little more than watch on in horror. Some of the land in the border region between the County of Toulouse and the Viscounty of Albi had been in dispute, with the Trencavels claiming much of it, but with the Count of Toulouse having recently conquered it. The uncle of Raymond Roger Trencavel - you'll never guess what his name is; OK, it's Raymond; so Raymond Trencavel - had grimly held onto some towns in this region. But deciding his men were no match for Simon's forces, he formally relinquished them to Simon.

At this stage, it seems that Count Raymond was at a total loss about what to do. He raced northwards ahead of Simon's army and went as far as the town of Saint-Antonin in the southern Quercy region. Nearby was the cliff-top stronghold of Brunquiel. Raymond retreated to the stronghold, and had just decided to destroy it, to prevent it falling to Simon, when his brother arrived. In his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Jonathan Sumption speculates that at this stage Raymond had no idea that Baldwin had switched sides and

had pledged his allegiance to Simon. According to Jonathan Sumption, Baldwin and his men decided that Simon would prefer the fortress intact instead of as a smoldering ruin, so he approached Raymond, asking that Raymond transfer the stronghold to Baldwin instead of destroying it. Baldwin's men joined in this piece of subterfuge, stating that they would be willing to hold Bruniquel for the County of Toulouse. Raymond agreed and handed the castle over.

Baldwin didn't reveal his hand immediately. He travelled back to Toulouse with Raymond and tried to convince him to rid his lands of heretics and turn himself over to the Church. Unsurprisingly, Raymond wasn't persuaded by Baldwin's argument, and Baldwin returned north with a clear conscience, satisfied that his brother had defied the Church and didn't deserve his support. He declared Bruniquel for Simon de Montfort, and a year later, Simon rewarded him by granting him over-lordship of the nearby town of Saint-Antonin.

With huge swathes of territory to the north of the city of Toulouse now under his control, you could say that Simon was on a roll. Everything seemed to be going in his favor. All he needed now was more men. In June 1211 he received word from his wife Alice, that Theobald, the Count of Bar and Luxembourg, was heading his way with a large contingent of Crusaders from northern France, eager to commence their forty days' service. They rendezvoused at Montgiscard on the 15th of June. Montgiscard was on the now-familiar Roman road between Carcassonne and Toulouse, less than fifteen miles from the city of Toulouse.

With his apparently unstoppable small army having secured considerable territory to the north, and with his forces now bolstered by Crusaders from northern France, and with less than fifteen miles between the army and the primary city of the Count of Toulouse, I guess it's pretty obvious what is going to happen next. Yes, that's right. Simon is going to attack Count Raymond's hometown. Join me next week as Simon de Montfort besieges the city of Toulouse. Until next week, bye for now.

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