

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 133.  
The Crusade Against The Cathars.  
The Battle of Saint-Martin-La-Lande.

Hello again. Last week we saw Count Raymond VI of Toulouse go on the offensive in the field for the first time in the conflict. Well, sort of go on the offensive. Go on the offensive in a very defensive manner. The combined army of the Count of Toulouse and the Count of Foix descended upon the town of Castelnaudary, where the much smaller army of Simon de Montfort was holed up in the damaged fortifications of the town. Instead of attacking Castelnaudary directly, Count Raymond spent his time building elaborate defenses around his camp. He then used catapult machines against the town, and built elaborate defenses around them as well. Count Raymond's men were authorized to go on the odd incursion into the fortified suburbs surrounding the town, but so far every such foray has been unsuccessful. So, primarily due to Count Raymond's appalling lack of ability as a military commander and his apparent unwillingness to order his men to go on the offensive, things are not going so well for Count Raymond and the southern Frenchmen.

Things also aren't going so well for Simon de Montfort. He's holed up inside a partially destroyed fortified town, defended by a much smaller army than that of the southern French. While he's doing nothing, twiddling his fingers, waiting for an attack that just never seems to come, the entire region of southern France seems to be turning against him. He needs more supplies from Carcassonne to sustain his army at Castelnaudary, but above all, he needs more men. With more men he could break out of Castelnaudary and attack Count Raymond's ridiculously well-fortified camp. With more men, he could slowly start winning back the southern French countryside, until not only all of the Viscounties of Carcassonne and Beziers were back under his control, but also the vast territory currently controlled by his new enemy, the Count of Toulouse. So how was Simon going to get more men? It was pointless waiting for Crusaders to arrive from the north. It was the beginning of autumn, and winter was coming; the Crusading season usually began in late spring and continued through the summer. So there was only one answer. Simon had to go on a recruitment drive. Of course, he couldn't do so personally, as he had to wait here in Castelnaudary, in case Count Raymond ever decided to launch an attack. So he sent a delegate to do the job for him. Who did he send? The ever grateful, ever loyal new lord of Cabaret, Bouchard of Marly.

Now a recruitment drive had already taken place around Carcassonne and Beziers, and it had been a disaster. Only a few hundred men had answered the call, and most of those had deserted on the way to Castelnaudary. So Bouchard decided, to look further afield. Figuring he would kill two birds with one stone, Bouchard decided to march deep into the County of Toulouse and head northwards to Lavaur. There he could collect Simon's wife Alice, who you might remember was also Bouchard's cousin, gather himself a large number of eager recruits who wish to assist the northern French cause, and march them to Castelnaudary, where he would smugly place them in Simon's hands. Easy.

But things didn't quite work out how Bouchard had imagined they would. He did manage to extract Alice from Lavaur, but was disturbed to find the local population markedly hostile towards the Crusaders. So hostile, in fact, that it was too dangerous for Bouchard and his men to use the main roads. Winding their way quietly through little-used back roads, constantly on the alert for ambushes and attacks from angry locals, the only men

Bouchard could gather were northern Frenchmen who had been garrisoned in the County of Toulouse, tasked with holding towns and fortifications taken by Simon. While this did mean that Bouchard could fulfill his mission to gather reinforcements, it weakened Simon's position inside the County of Toulouse, and meant that conquests he had made in the County of Toulouse would be harder to hold in the face of rising opposition to his expansion into Count Raymond's territory.

For the moment though, that wasn't Bouchard's concern. He had to get his recruits back to Simon. Still unable to use any of the main roads, he zigzagged his way southwards through the county until he arrived at the castle of Saissac, around fifteen miles to the northeast of Castelnaudary. From there, he marched his recruits southwards towards the Roman road joining Toulouse to Carcassonne until he reached the Carcassonne side of the causeway. There they came across a supply train, marching from Carcassonne to Castelnaudary with a load of wine, biscuits, grains and other goodies for Simon and his army. Bouchard and his recruits made a turn to the right and headed westwards towards Castelnaudary, providing a military escort for the supply train.

Now, around three miles from Castelnaudary, on the Roman road, lies the village of Saint-Martin-La-Lande. Bouchard, his men, and the supply train needed to pass through this village on their way to Castelnaudary. The southern French rebels decided that this would be a great place to confront Bouchard and his men, and prevent them and the supply train and Alice from making it to Simon de Montfort at Castelnaudary. So does this mean that Count Raymond VI of Toulouse, is going to take the initiative and lead his men in a battle against Simon's forces? No, of course not. Count Raymond is going to remain in the camp outside Castelnaudary, tweaking the defenses and making sure everything is safe and secure, just in case Simon de Montfort makes an unlikely decision to attack the camp.

It's the Count of Foix who rises to the occasion and decides to take the battle to Simon. In his book "The Occitan War", Laurence Marvin estimates that the Count of Foix rode out with around 400 knights and around 2,000 other fighters, mainly foot soldiers, but also some crossbowmen. In contrast, Bouchard of Marly, sorry Lord Bouchard of Cabaret, had only around 100 knights under his command, along with a rag tag assortment of recruits, probably no more than 700 men all up.

Simon de Montfort, peering out over the blackened battlements of Castelnaudary, had noticed the Count of Foix leaving Count Raymond's impressively fortified camp with his two thousand or so men. He had headed down the road towards Carcassonne, and Simon correctly guessed the Count's intention to confront Bouchard's men. Simon quickly gathered forty or so of his knights and instructed them to gallop ahead of the Count of Foix, warn Bouchard of the pending attack, and assist him in the upcoming battle. Forty knights doesn't seem a lot, but it left Simon with only sixty knights to guard Castelnaudary, so forty knights was all he could spare. The Count of Foix must have noticed the pack of knights circling around him and overtaking him adjacent to the road. Deciding he could use some reinforcements of his own, he headed back to Count Raymond's camp to gather more men. Then he rode to Saint-Martin-La-Lande, and arranged his men in a battle formation.

Now unfortunately, we don't know exactly where this battle took place. As it's one of the few pitched battles fought during this Crusade, historians are keen to pinpoint its exact location, but to date they haven't managed to do so. What we can safely assume is that it

took place somewhere near the village of Saint-Martin-La-Lande on the Roman road, on relatively flat and open ground. For Bouchard, the day commenced with his attending morning Mass. He then gathered his men, the supply train, and Alice, took a deep breath and headed towards Saint-Martin. The Count of Foix had arranged his most heavily armored knights in a line across the road, blocking Bouchard's passage to Castelnaudary. The remainder of his knights were gathered off the road to one side, while foot soldiers armed with lances were placed on the opposite side. This insured that Bouchard had no option but to engage the Count of Foix's men. The supply train couldn't leave the road, and there was no way around the blockade. The Bishop of Cahors was accompanying the Crusaders. He gave them a pep-talk and urged them to fight hard. Peter the Monk writes that the Bishop, and I quote, "promised them that if they were to fall in this glorious struggle on behalf of the Christian faith, they would be given remission for all of their sins, would be instantly crowned with glory and honor and with thus receive a reward for their labours", end quote.

With this in mind, Bouchard's knights charged down the road, headed directly towards the heavily armored knights the Count of Foix had placed across the road. Laurence Marvin describes the combat as being short and sharp. With a cry of "Toulouse" the Count of Foix's knights moved forward to engage the thundering bunch of oncoming knights. The momentum of Bouchard's charge broke the southern line and the Count of Foix's knights were driven back, many of them suffering injuries and losing their horses. Bouchard's knights then wheeled around and started slashing at the southern infantrymen, injuring or killing a fair few, and unnerving many more. Then everyone engaged everyone else, and the loud, messy, and a brutal business of hand to hand combat got underway. The Crusaders were heavily outnumbered. However they seem to be holding their own, until a Spanish commander, Martin Algai, lost his nerve and decided the battle was lost. He, along with twenty knights under his command, fled the field. The noncombatants, the Bishop of Cahors and the other clergy, the driver of the supply train, and perhaps Alice, came to the same decision. Abandoning the supply train on the road, they left the scene of the battle and made their way southwards towards the town of Fanjeaux, where Alice's young son was residing.

Just as an aside, the Spanish commander was later questioned about his cowardice in fleeing the field. Thinking quickly, he maintained that he wasn't fleeing at all, only chasing some errant southern Frenchmen who just happened to be heading very quickly out of harm's way. No one believed him.

Anyway, back in Castelnaudary, Simon de Montfort was chewing his fingernails, pacing up and down, and peering over the fortifications at the Roman road, waiting anxiously for the victorious Bouchard, the supply train, and his wife Alice, to make an appearance. But no matter how often he stared at the road, and no matter how strongly he willed them to appear, the road remained empty. Simon was faced with a dilemma. He didn't know what was happening, but the fact that Bouchard had failed to make it to Castelnaudary meant that it was likely that the battle was not going his way. Simon was currently defending Castelnaudary with his sixty knights, from Count Raymond of Toulouse who remained in his defensive camp. Sixty knights would likely make a big impact on the outcome of the battle, but taking them away from Castelnaudary would leave the city defenceless and open to attack by Count Raymond. Splitting the force wasn't really an option, as it would result in sending too few knights into battle while leaving too few knights behind to defend Castelnaudary. In the end, desperate to find out what was happening and worried about the safety of his wife Alice, Simon decided that without the supply train Castelnaudary was

lost anyway. He mounted his horse and galloped up the road towards the battle, along with all sixty of his knights, leaving Castelnaudary, defended by a laughably inadequate small group of infantrymen.

He arrived at the scene of the battle just in time. Many of Bouchard's men had fled, deciding that the battle was lost. Instead of pursuing them and cutting them down, most of the southern French foot soldiers, who were mercenaries and keen for booty, had stopped to plunder both the stationary supply train and the bodies of fallen Crusaders. Bouchard, seeing Simon de Montfort come galloping down the road behind the Count of Foix's men, wheeled around, gathered his men and headed back into the fray. The Count of Foix and his men were then effectively sandwiched between the two Crusading forces. Desperate, bloody, hand-to-hand fighting then ensued, with massive casualties on both sides. Simon de Montfort lost thirty of his knights. So many southern Frenchmen were being killed that some of them tried to escape by crying "Montfort", only to be cut down by men from their own side in the mistaken belief that they were Crusaders. The Count of Foix and his son, by this time both unhorsed, fought on, on foot, until their shields disintegrated and their swords became notched and blunted.

Deciding that the outcome of the battle was now assured and concerned that his men might scatter and chase the fleeing southern French, and concerned about the vulnerability of Castelnaudary, Simon de Montfort called a halt to the fighting. He reassembled his forces and directed them to march with all due haste back to Castelnaudary.

Meanwhile, back in Castelnaudary, Count Raymond of Toulouse had noticed that Simon and all of his knights had left the town to join the battle. Realizing that the town was now all but defenseless and ripe for the taking, Count Raymond still believed that his time was best spent in the camp, tweaking the defenses. He ordered one of his commanders to gather a large force and go and attack Castelnaudary. The force marched to the gates, but seemingly wished to wait for the Count of Foix to return before mounting any significant incursion into the city. A few southern Frenchmen made their way into the fortified suburb of Castelnaudary, but they were driven back by the handful of defenders inside the city.

When the southern French attackers spied the victorious army marching down the road towards Castelnaudary, and noted with horror that it was not the Count of Foix, but Simon de Montfort coming towards them, they fled back to their camp in terror, so unnerved by Simon's unlikely victory that many of them had to be prevented from gathering their belongings and racing straight back home.

Simon de Montfort, with his men victorious, with his supply train now safely inside Castelnaudary, and with his wife Alice also safe, decided to press his advantage. He gathered his exhausted men together and led them in an assault against the southern French camp. But Count Raymond's tweaking paid off. The tired Crusaders just didn't have the energy to overcome the endless array of barriers, palisades, ditches, and sharpened sticks that Count Raymond had been meticulously preparing. Happy to call it a day, Simon de Montfort let Count Raymond be, and retreated back to Castelnaudary, to feast on goodies from the supply train and bask in his unlikely victory.

The mood inside Count Raymond's camp was markedly different. The southern Frenchmen were stunned. Disbelief at the way an almost certain victory had turned into a crushing defeat gave way to an unsettling despondency and a plummeting of morale.

Join me next week as we discussed the aftermath of the Battle of Saint-Martin-La-Lande, and the remainder of the campaign season of the year 1211. Until next week, bye for now.

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