

History of the Crusades.
Episode 134.
The Crusade Against The Cathars.
To the End of the Year 1211.

Hello again. Last week we discussed the Battle of Saint-Martin-La-Lande, in which Simon de Montfort snatched victory from the jaws of defeat, when the Count of Foix and the southern French rebels found themselves outplayed and outmaneuvered by Simon de Montfort's much smaller force.

All in all, the Battle of Saint-Martin-La-Lande proved to be an unlikely victory for Simon de Montfort and an embarrassing setback for the rebels. But the victory didn't really change the status quo at the siege of Castelnaudary. Despite defeating the southern French on the battlefield, Simon de Montfort was still holed up in the blackened fortifications of Castelnaudary. His supply train had arrived safely, so his men were adequately provisioned and his forces were bolstered by the three hundred or so extra men who had fought in the Battle of Saint-Martin-La-Lande and had arrived with the supply train.

But an extra three hundred men were not enough to enable Simon to break the siege. Count Raymond's incessant tweaking of the defenses surrounding their camp meant that it really couldn't be successfully attacked with the amount of men currently at Simon's disposal. Simon needed more men. This was going to be a problem. The campaigning season was drawing to a close. Even though the winters in southern France were mild compared to those experienced in northern Europe, snow still fell on the higher peaks, and the temperature often dipped below freezing. Winter wasn't a time for campaigning, it was a time for bunkering down inside your castle and keeping warm.

But Simon didn't want to bunker down for the winter. He wanted to break free of the siege of Castelnaudary and drive Count Raymond back to the city of Toulouse, and for that he needed more men. Having pondered on this problem for a goodly while Simon decided that his best bet would be to appeal to Narbonne for assistance. Bouchard of Marly, oh sorry, Lord Bouchard of Cabaret, had already carried out a massive recruitment drive across lands recently conquered by Simon, with little success. Simon decided that to bolster his army this late in the season, he needed to go further afield. He needed to go to Narbonne.

If you look at your map, you will see that the Viscounty of Narbonne is really not that far away from Simon's position at Castelnaudary. It's situated between the Viscounty of Carcassonne and the Mediterranean Sea. The city of Narbonne is due east from the city of Carcassonne. All Simon has to do is leave Castelnaudary, ride the Roman road back to Carcassonne, then continue eastwards to the city of Narbonne. And that's exactly what he does.

Leaving Castelnaudary safely garrisoned in the unlikely event that Count Raymond of Toulouse would go on the offensive and attack the city in his absence, Simon left the siege and headed east on his winter recruitment drive, and he was actually surprisingly successful. A small but very welcome group of northern Frenchmen, under the leadership of a vassal of the Count of Champagne, a knight with a solid military reputation called Alan de Roucy, had headed south for some light campaigning. He met up with Simon in Narbonne. Simon used the news of his unlikely victory at the Battle of

Saint-Martin-La-Lande to drum up support from the locals, and soon enough he not only had a keen but small band of northern Crusaders, but also what Peter the Monk describes as a large force of local citizens from Narbonne, enough to march back to Castelnaudary and attack Count Raymond's formidably fortified camp outside the city.

But he needn't have bothered. Before he had given the order to march, Simon received some unexpected and welcome news. Count Raymond VI of Toulouse had abandoned the siege at Castelnaudary.

Now, unsurprisingly, the Count of Foix, the Count of Toulouse, and the southern Frenchmen were more than a little demoralized after their defeat at the Battle of Saint-Martin-La-Lande. Presented with an excellent opportunity to capture Simon's supply train and Simon's wife, they had instead been defeated by the much smaller northern French force. Now Simon's wife was safe, the town of Castelnaudary was fully supplied, and the siege looked like dragging on through the winter. No one wants to spend winter in a tent. Realistically, the chances of a southern French victory at Castelnaudary were slim. Count Raymond and his men had not surrounded the city, so those within the city were free to come and go as they wished. And of course their failure to prevent the supply train from reaching Castelnaudary meant that the city was now well supplied. Count Raymond's feeble efforts at attacking the stronghold had pretty much come to nothing. The rock around Castelnaudary was of a porous, crumbly type, and when launched into the city by one of Count Raymond's catapult machines, they did nothing more than shatter harmlessly on impact. Boulders from further afield had been carted to the camp outside Castelnaudary at great inconvenience, but as Jonathan Sumption reported in his book "The Albigensian Crusade", only two direct hits had been scored by these boulders during the entire duration of the siege.

Following their unlikely defeat in the field, morale in Count Raymond's camp had plummeted. Some men had deserted the southern French army, while others had taken to sleeping in their armor, so deep was their concern that they could be attacked at any time by Simon's men. Really, abandoning the siege was the only viable option left to Count Raymond. On the second night after the Battle of Saint-Martin-La-Lande he ordered the siege engines to be set alight and destroyed, then the southerners packed up their camp and departed from Castelnaudary.

Back in Narbonne, Simon received this welcome news with much rejoicing. He told the local volunteer crusaders to go back to their homes, and taking only the northern French Crusaders under the command of Alan De Roucy with him, he rode back to Castelnaudary. Having now won both the Battle of Saint-Martin-La-Lande and the Siege of Castelnaudary, Simon now expected the rebellious regions around Castelnaudary to surrender meekly to him and accept his rule. This, however, did not happen.

Using an interesting psychological tactic of warfare, the Count of Foix had sent riders out across a wide region around Castelnaudary, carrying false reports that Simon de Montfort had not only been defeated at the siege of Castelnaudary, but had been killed. As a consequence, vast swaths of territory were rising in rebellion, slaughtering their northern French garrisons, celebrating the greatly exaggerated demise of Simon, and shaking off their northern French yokes. This clever, if slightly underhanded and un-gentlemanly tactic, proved wildly successful. Instead of being able to sit back and relax, basking in his recent victories as his territories fell into line under his command, Simon was left scrambling to extinguish spot fires of rebellion as they ignited across the County of Toulouse and the

Viscounty of Albi. Peter the Monk reports that over fifty towns and fortifications previously conquered by Simon were lost during this period. These included significant towns such as Puylaurens, Les Casses, Montferrand, Saint-Antonin, and Saverdun. Simon was learning the hard way that winning a battle doesn't necessarily take you further down the road to winning the war. Simon had scored a decisive and unlikely victory at the Battle of Saint-Martin-La-Lande, but winning the war in Languedoc seemed further away than ever.

Count Raymond moved his army into the Viscounty of Albi, to fan the flames of rebellion, and the backlash against Simon's rule spread like wildfire. With so many towns and strongholds falling from Simon's grasp at this time, there were countless tales of defiance, treachery and uprisings across southern France. We will select just one such incident to look at - an incident in the tiny town of Lagrave.

The region surrounding the town had been conquered by Simon de Montfort only four months ago, but like just about every other region in Languedoc, they were none-too-happy to be ruled by a northern Frenchman. When the region had fallen under Simon's rule, he had given Lagrave to a northern French knight. With the rebellion now in full swing, the people of Lagrave were on the lookout for ways in which they could overthrow their northern French overlord. As Peter the Monk rightly points out, the northern Frenchman currently ruling Lagrave really should have gathered his garrison together and retreated to the safety of the town's castle, but the northern Frenchman instead seemed to think that proceeding in a business-as-usual type manner was the best course of action.

So one day the northern French knight was inspecting some wine casks, which he had ordered a local carpenter to repair. The savvy carpenter suggested that the knight should look right inside one of the casks to ensure that the workmanship was satisfactory. While the Knight's head was deep inside the cask, the carpenter took full advantage of the situation, raised his axe and decapitated his northern French overlord. The inhabitants of the town overpowered the small northern French garrison, and the town joined the rebellion.

Now, the strongest northern French garrison in this region, was at Bruniquel, under the command of Count Raymond's turncoat little brother, Baldwin of Toulouse. Baldwin happened to be in a town just down the road from Lagrave when the uprising occurred. He immediately gathered some men and rode to Lagrave, just as the locals were preparing their defenses. Now, Count Raymond VI of Toulouse was also in the Viscounty of Albi at this time. From a distance Baldwin bore some family resemblance to Count Raymond, and his banners were also quite similar. I guess you can tell what's going to happen next. The over-excited group of citizens from Lagrave who had been tasked with manning the city gates mistook Baldwin for his brother. They opened the gates to Baldwin and his men, all the while babbling excitedly about how their northern French overlord had had his head chopped off, and how the citizens had seized back their town. Baldwin waited until all his men were safely inside the city gates, then the slaughter of the town's people began. As Peter the Monk succinctly puts it, and I quote "Baldwin attacked them with a crowd of armed men and slew almost all of them, from the youngest to the oldest" end quote.

After the massacre, Baldwin installed a small garrison in the town but then had to return to the north, as his own holdings were now under threat. The city of Saint-Antonin had risen in rebellion. Saint-Antonin was only a short distance away from Baldwin's castle at

Bruniquel, and Baldwin was forced to race to the north to secure Bruniquel, and ensure that it too did not fall back into the hands of the southern French.

As winter approached, the rebellion spread all the way from Saint-Antonin in the far north of the Viscounty of Albi, throughout Albi and the County of Toulouse, all the way south through the Viscounty of Carcassonne to the Pyrenees. Simon de Montfort and his exhausted northern French knights were constantly on the move, giving pep-talks to the northern French garrisons they encountered, shoring up the defenses of towns still under their control, and where practicable attacking towns and strongholds which had overthrown their northern French overlords. But really, no matter how hard he worked or how hard he pushed the knights and soldiers under his command, stopping the rebellion was like trying to turn back the tide. With so few men, the task was impossible. With the weather getting colder, it seemed that Simon de Montfort was in for a very bleak winter indeed.

In the end, his seemingly desperate situation was saved by two events. The first was the arrival in southern France of an army of one hundred very welcome Crusader knights. Back in northern France, Simon's allies had heard of his plight, and were undertaking a recruitment drive. No one wants to go on a Crusade at the beginning of winter, but many clerics of note, led by the Archdeacon of Paris, toured northern France and Germany, ordering the faithful to travel south to support Simon in his time of need. The recruitment drive produced one hundred Crusader knights, an impressive tally for a winter campaign, and they marched southwards to assist Simon in his seemingly impossible task of trying to wrestle Languedoc back into submission.

Simon de Montfort spent Christmas at Castres, where the second unexpected event occurred in the form of this surprise arrival of Simon's brother Guy. Guy had accompanied Simon on the Fourth Crusade and had travelled to the Holy Land to seek his fortune. He found a fortune in the guise of Helois Iblen, whom he married. Marrying into the royal family of the Kingdom of Jerusalem seemed like a good way to get ahead in life, but Helois had recently died, and Guy didn't like the look of the future prospects of the Kingdom of Jerusalem or the Holy Land in general. All in all, he thought his ambitions would be better served by joining his brother back in Languedoc. So he packed up his belongings and made the long journey back to Europe, arriving just in time to join Simon for Christmas. With the arrival of his brother, and the one hundred unexpected knights, Simon was in the position of being able to hit the ground running as the year 1211 clicked over into 1212.

The year 1211 had taught Simon some lessons. It had shown him that victory on the field didn't necessarily translate into victory in his ever elusive task of forcing the region of Languedoc into submission. The forty day period of Crusader service, and the ever fluctuating number of men under his command, limited his ability to make long term strategic plans, and towns that he had conquered didn't necessarily stay conquered for long.

In his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Jonathan Sumption describes the latter part of 1211 as a psychological turning point for Simon de Montfort. Jonathan Sumption states that back in October 1211, Simon was deserted by his long term ally, a southern French knight named William Cat. William was godfather to Simon's daughter and had fought loyally beside him at Castelnaudary. However, he too had been caught up in the recent wave of uprisings in southern France and had abandoned Simon's cause, switching sides to fight with the rebels. His desertion hit Simon hard, and Jonathan Sumption writes that it was at this point that Simon's view of the Crusade changed. He no longer saw it as a war

against heresy. Working with the knights and nobility of Languedoc to destroy the Cathar faith was no longer Simon's mission. Instead, William's desertion made him realize that he couldn't trust any man from southern France. He would work with the southern French no longer. This was now a national war, North versus South. Everyone from Languedoc was now the enemy, and it was up to Simon and his northern French Crusaders to crush the citizens of Languedoc and their heretics alike.

Join me next week, as the year 1212 dawns, and Simon embarks on a mission to do exactly that. Until next week, bye for now.

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