

History of the Crusades.
Episode 159.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
Toulouse, 1216.

Hello again. Last week we saw young Raymond, the disinherited son of the former Count of Toulouse, take up the rebel banner and besiege one of Simon de Montfort's castles, the castle of Beaucaire. Simon and his brother Guy arrived to lift the siege, however, after four failed attacks on the castle and with the northern French garrison inside the citadel unable to hold out much longer, Guy of Montfort is having a gentle word to Simon, suggesting he should perhaps surrender and leave the castle to young Raymond.

This is a situation Simon de Montfort is totally unfamiliar with. In the six years since he has been fighting the Crusade, he has never once considered surrendering or admitting defeat, until now. Seemingly unable to defeat the nineteen year old first-time military commander and his rag-tag army, Simon now has to consider the unthinkable. In the end, two factors convinced him to seek terms.

The first came sometime between the 15th and 24th of August, when a member of the besieged garrison from the citadel managed to somehow make it out of the citadel into Simon's camp. Telling Simon that the men inside the citadel had run out of water, wine, and food three weeks ago, and were close to perishing from hunger, the man made it clear that if the garrison were to survive, Simon needed to either break the siege or surrender, and he needed to do it quickly. With his previous efforts to break the siege having failed spectacularly, Simon knew he needed to seriously consider seeking terms if he were to save face and prevent his garrison from dying.

The second and most pressing factor was the state of the rebellion. With young Raymond's first military campaign succeeding beyond anyone's wildest expectations, and with Raymond VI away drumming up support in Aragon, rebel resistance was rising. Simon had received some troubling reports from the city of Toulouse. It seemed that an air of defiance was developing in Toulouse, and the city was close to breaking into a full blown rebellion. According to Peter the Monk, Simon may have even received a report that Raymond VI had left Aragon and was heading to Toulouse. Realizing that staying and fighting to regain Beaucaire may in fact lose him the city of Toulouse, Simon knew he had to wrap things up quickly in Beaucaire, and make the 250 kilometre journey back to Toulouse as quickly as possible, to quell the rebellion.

Gritting his teeth, Simon sent word to young Raymond that he was prepared to surrender. Negotiations for the terms of surrender were mediated by a southern French nobleman, the wonderfully named Dragonet of Mondragon, and in the end, Simon agreed to abandon the counter-siege and leave Beaucaire to young Raymond, in exchange for the lives of the men inside the citadel. The men were handed over to Simon on the 24th of August, and it became official. In his first confrontation with Simon de Montfort, young Raymond had emerged victorious. Troubadours across Languedoc burst into song, singing their way around the countryside, informing everyone of young Raymond's unexpected victory.

Now, just before we move on to consider the events following the rebel success at Beaucaire, we need to backtrack a month or so to the 16th of July 1216. What happened on the 16th of July 1216? Well Pope Innocent died. The instigator of the Crusade against

the Cathars, and the Fourth Crusade, which resulted in one of history's great crimes, the sack of Constantinople, died in Italy and a new Pope, Honorius III, was quickly elected.

Now, you might remember from the Middle Eastern Crusades that Pope Innocent was quickly forgotten following his death, as all his supporters now turned their attention towards his successor. Jacques De Vitry, a cleric who had preached the Crusade against the Cathars in northern France, happened to pass through Perugia, the town in which Pope Innocent had passed away on the day following his death. He found the Pope's body unattended in one of the churches of the town, stripped naked and robbed of his clothes and vestments, the body was already starting to putrefy in the summer heat.

Honorius III had been Pope Innocent's chancellor and immediately adopted all of Pope Innocent's policies. He was however, also an elderly man, without the energy and the sharp intellect of his predecessor. Pope Honorius' focus was on the Middle Eastern Crusades. The Crusade in southern France was to him an irritating distraction, and something he would rather not have to worry himself about.

Right, now where were we? Ah, yes, Simon de Montfort had just surrendered Beaucaire to young Raymond. As soon as the garrison had been handed over, Simon wasted no time. His priority now was to race back to the city of Toulouse as fast as he could, to stop the city erupting into a full blown rebellion. Simon completed the 250 kilometre journey to Toulouse in an astonishing three days. When he arrived back in Toulouse, it's safe to say that Simon was not in a good mood. No doubt exhausted from his rapid journey across Languedoc, although probably less exhausted than his unfortunate horses, Simon stopped at Montgiscard, some eighteen kilometers away from the city of Toulouse, and ordered a delegation of his knights to ride to Toulouse to check out the situation, and tell the city that Simon was back in town. According to Peter the Monk, the citizens of Toulouse received the Crusader knights, listened to what they had to say, and then locked them up inside a house inside the city.

Now, before proceeding further, we should take a short moment to consider the current mood of the people of Toulouse. The people of Toulouse had been overjoyed to hear that young Raymond had besieged Beaucaire, and apparently they are expecting Raymond VI to arrive from the Kingdom of Aragon with an army at any time. They had been hoping that he would arrive before Simon made it back from the Rhone Valley, but to their intense disappointment, Raymond senior was actually still on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees. Itching to rise up in full rebellion against Simon, but without the men needed to do so, they were now in a bit of a bind. A clearly angry Simon was heading their way, and the Toulousans had to quickly come up with a plan. Their plan was to try and talk Simon down.

As Simon received word that his group of knights had been detained inside Toulouse, he placed his army into battle formation and started down the road towards the troublesome city. At the same time, a delegation of citizens from Toulouse left the city, aiming to meet Simon on the road. Then things started going off the rails. The Toulousans tried to convince Simon that the entire city of Toulouse was totally innocent of even a whiff of rebellious intentions. Did Simon then say "Oh, okay, it must have all been a misunderstanding", shake everyone's hands and then go joyfully ahead into his city? No, of course he didn't. Furious at having been taken for a fool, he flew into a rage, telling the Toulousans that twenty separate messengers had reached him at Beaucaire with news that Toulouse was planning a full scale rebellion.

Deciding that the city needed punishing, and needed punishing severely and immediately, he told the shocked delegation that they were all under arrest. He then relayed to them his intention to extract enough money from the city to pay for his campaign at Beaucaire, and to pay his newly acquired northern French knights. As the increasingly furious Simon rode down the road towards Toulouse, the anonymous troubadour has a couple of Crusaders trying to get Simon to calm down and not make any rash decisions that he would later regret. But Simon was beyond calming down.

Probably with Simon's blessing, a few of the more rowdy members of the Crusader army, mostly a bunch of hot-headed youngsters, galloped ahead of the army intent on softening the city up before Simon's arrival. In his book "The Occitan War", Laurence Marvin notes that Simon's brother Guy rode with these young Crusaders, adding credence to the view that their foray into Toulouse was ordered by Simon. The young Crusaders went on a rampage through the town, breaking into houses and pillaging or destroying anything of value they could find.

The citizens of the city, who had been eagerly awaiting the return of their embassy, hoping they had managed to convince Simon of the city's innocence and obedience, were suddenly confronted by armed Crusaders charging through the streets, breaking into houses and generally going on an uncontrolled rampage. Instead of being cowed into submission, the men of Toulouse armed themselves with whatever weapons they could find, constructed barricades in the streets, and set upon the Crusaders themselves. Apparently startled by this resistance, the young Crusaders retreated rapidly and raced out of the city, bumping into Simon de Montfort as they fled for their lives.

Simon's reaction to this? Well, he gave the order to burn part of the city. Entering into Toulouse, he found his way blocked by barricades and groups of Toulousans armed with axes, pieces of wood, knives, and other makeshift weapons. Street-fighting commenced and continued until nightfall. Simon achieved his aim of destroying part of the city by fire. The wooden houses in a section of Toulouse were set alight, and much of the southeastern quarter of the town was destroyed.

As night fell, the Toulousans seemed to have the upper hand. Far from being subdued by the Crusaders, they had managed to trap a group of Crusaders inside the city's bell tower, while additional Crusaders had sought refuge inside the Bishop's Palace and the Hotel de Comminges.

Simon ordered the remainder of his men to retreat to the Narbonnais Castle, the traditional home of the Counts of Toulouse, which you might remember was located over one of the city gates. Once safely inside the castle, he threatened to execute the delegation of citizens he had arrested on the road earlier in the day, while outside the citizens of Toulouse did their best to put out the fires.

By the following day, both sides were forming the view that some sort of compromise needed to be reached. The Toulousans realized that even if they managed to expel the Crusaders from their city, the city's defenses, which had been partially demolished during Prince Louis' Crusade, would not be able to hold out against any serious Crusader assault. For Simon's part, he realized that taking the town by way of street-to-street fighting was likely to be a time-consuming event, resulting in many casualties on both sides. Bishop Folquet, the Bishop of Toulouse, met with a delegation of citizens from Toulouse in the

Town Hall. He urged them to meet with Simon to negotiate a peaceful settlement, and he gave his word that Simon would be merciful. The reality, though, was quite different.

The parties arranged to meet in neutral territory, the suburb of Villeneuve just outside the city gates. According to Jonathan Sumption in his book "The Albigensian Crusade", Simon promised that a general amnesty will be extended to all the citizens of Toulouse, save for the ringleaders of the conflict who would be exiled from the city. In exchange for the amnesty Simon asked that all the captured Crusaders inside Toulouse be released.

However, as soon as the Crusaders were freed, some 400 citizens were arrested and thrown into the dungeon of the Narbonnais Castle, filling it to capacity. Simon ordered groups of these 400 men to be taken to various towns across Languedoc as hostages, to ensure the city remained free of rebellion. Next to fall victim to Simon's wrath were the noble families of Toulouse. He ordered most of them to be expelled from the city, minus their property, which was to be transferred to the Crusaders, a move which no doubt swelled the ranks of the local routiers. A demolition team was sent into the city to destroy its remaining defenses, and while they were at it, the demolition team extended their brief by pulling down a variety of houses, shop fronts, doorways, and pillars which looked like they could possibly be used in a defensive manner at some stage in the future. And just to top off the punishment, Simon ordered the citizens of Toulouse to pay the eye-watering sum of 30,000 silver marks to Simon for his trouble. Simon gave the citizens until All Saints Day, the 1st of November, the following year to pay, but some Crusaders took it upon themselves to extract some of the payment immediately, ordering the more wealthy citizens to hand over their possessions here and now.

Believing the city to be now firmly back in his hands and believing that he had eliminated any chance of rebellion, Simon spent the next couple of months in Toulouse, leaving in November 1216, to marry his second son, Guy, to a Countess in the Gascony region.

Now, just before we discuss this marriage, before he left Toulouse, Simon received a bit of bad news. Far from being content with taking a castle from Simon, young Raymond it appeared, was making rather a nuisance of himself in the Rhone Valley. The citizens of Saint-Gilles, the traditional ancestral seat of the Counts of Toulouse, had followed the example of the people of Beaucaire and had invited young Raymond into their city, despite the loud protestations of the Abbott and monks of the large monastery there. When the local clerics were overruled and Saint-Gilles decided to declare for young Raymond, the clerics left the town in disgust, taking the holy sacraments with them. As a final parting gesture, the Abbott pronounced an interdict over the town, which did nothing to change its citizens' minds. Oh dear. The rebellion in the far southeast of Simon's territory seems to be spreading.

Simon may have been tempted to leave Toulouse and make the 250 kilometre journey back to Saint-Gilles, but he can't because he has a wedding to attend. Now the wedding, the build-up to it, and its aftermath serves as an excellent indication of just how heavy-handed Simon's tactics had become by 1216. Here is what happened. Apparently, Simon had long wanted to extend his territory into the Pyrenees, and it just so happened that the County of Bigorre, a possession of the Kingdom of Aragon, was at the moment being ruled by a woman, the Countess Petronilla, who was aged in her early thirties. Inconveniently for Simon, in 1214 Petronilla married a cousin of King Peter II of Aragon, a man who also happened to be the son of the Regent who was currently governing the Kingdom of Aragon on behalf of young King James. Simon decided that Petronilla would

be much better off if she were instead married to his son Guy, who in 1214 was only thirteen or fourteen years of age. It took Simon two years to convince the local clergy to annul Petronilla's marriage, but eventually his persuasive personality prevailed, and the clergy duly declared Petronilla's marriage null and void. Free now to marry the now fifteen or sixteen year old Guy, Simon traveled to Gascony for the wedding, which took place in early November.

As soon as the marriage celebrations were complete, Simon ordered the Crusader army to invade the county and take it by force. Not surprisingly, the citizens of the county were quite upset by this move. Petronilla's former husband, of her now-annulled marriage, who of course enjoyed strong ties with the overlord of the County, young King James of Aragon, issued a general call to arms. He set up his base at Lourdes and was able to maintain control of the southern highlands of the County from his stronghold.

Did this move make the citizens of Bigorre warm to their new Count, young Guy of Montfort? No, it didn't. Did this move increase the likelihood that the Kingdom of Aragon would accede to Raymond VI's request that they lend arms and support to the rebellion against Simon. Yes, it did.

Join me next week as we move into the year 1217, and see Raymond VI come charging over the Pyrenees to launch his long-awaited invasion of Languedoc. Until next week, bye for now.

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