

History of the Crusades.
Episode 160.
The Crusade Against the Cathars.
The Rebel Invasion.

Hello again. Last week we saw Simon de Montfort make some uncharacteristically rash decisions. Seemingly rattled by his defeat at Beaucaire, Simon first took his rage and frustration out on the city of Toulouse, ordering four hundred of its citizens to be taken as hostages, burning the southeastern quarter of the city, and ordering the town to pay thirty thousand silver marks in compensation. He then vented more of his rage over in the County of Bigorre in the Kingdom of Aragon, invading the County shortly after attending the wedding joining one of his sons to the ruler of the County, Countess Petronilla.

Next in Simon's cross-hairs was the Count of Foix. Now, ever since the Ecumenical Council, the Count of Foix has been keeping his head down and doing his best to stay out of trouble. Why? Well, because he was being investigated for war crimes by the Church, and the Count of Foix was determined to show not only his innocence of the charges, but that he was no enemy of the Church. Back in April 1214, after swearing an oath of loyalty to Peter Benevento in Narbonne, the Count of Foix had handed the Castle of Foix to the Church as a sign of his good faith. Perhaps wanting to ensure that he could adequately defend his County despite the fact that its main castle was under Papal control, in late 1216 the Count of Foix ordered work to begin on the construction of a new stronghold at Montgrenier in the mountains, less than five kilometers from his castle at Foix.

According to Jonathan Sumption in his book "The Albigensian Crusade", throughout the later months of 1216, when the Church was deliberating on the Count of Foix's fate, Simon repeatedly attacked and harassed castles within the County of Foix, hoping to goad the Count into retaliating and incurring the wrath of the Church. But the Count of Foix didn't rise to the bait. He remained well-behaved in Foix, while his son prepared to lead the garrison in the fortress being constructed at Montgrenier.

In December 1216 the decision of the new Pope Honorius III concerning the Count of Foix reached Languedoc. The Count was declared to be an Orthodox Catholic now, free from the taint of heresy, the castle of Foix was returned to its Count and the Count of Foix was left free to govern his County without oversight by the Church. To Simon de Montfort, this decision was utterly unacceptable. In complete defiance of Pope Honorius, Simon invaded Foix in February 1217 and occupied the Castle of Foix, replacing the Church's garrison with his own.

He then decided that he'd better also attack the new castle at Montgrenier. Conducting a winter campaign high in the Pyrenees seems like a foolhardy idea, but it didn't seem to bother Simon and his Crusaders. He had enough men to completely block all the pathways and lines of supply coming out of Montgrenier, and the Count of Foix's son and his garrison were forced to bunker down and wait for help. However, in the dead of winter and with his father occupied back at his capital, no help was forthcoming. By late March 1217 the garrison were close to running out of both food and water, and they asked for terms of surrender. The Count of Foix's son and his garrison were allowed to walk out of the castle in exchange for a guarantee that they would not attack Simon de Montfort for the period of a year. Once the garrison had left the castle, Simon replaced them with his own men.

As the weather warmed and as Crusader volunteers began once again arriving from northern France, it was time for Simon to begin campaigning. Where would Simon choose to focus his attack? Well, that was easy. Way over to the east in the Rhone Valley, where the rebellion started by young Raymond was in full swing.

Now, Pope Honorius had recently appointed a new Legate for the Languedoc region, a cardinal named Bertrand. Bertrand had been dispatched to southern France with a specific aim of healing the rift between Arnold Amaury and Simon de Montfort. The two men were no longer speaking to each other, and Arnold Amaury had gone so far as to excommunicate Simon. However, Bertrand never actually made it to Narbonne. On his way from Rome to Narbonne, he had to journey through the Rhone Valley, and he found himself right in the middle of young Raymond's rebellion. The cities of Saint-Gilles and Tarascon were firmly in Raymond's hands, as was the castle and town of Beaucaire. A number of castles in the Viscounty of Nimes had joined the rebellion, so Raymond not only held his designated lands to the east of the Rhone, he was spreading his influence gradually through Simon's territory to the west of the Rhone.

Bertrand, as Papal Legate, decided that the authority of the Church needed to be felt more forcefully in these rebellious lands, so he stayed in the Rhone Valley, instead of continuing his journey to Narbonne, trying to convince the people of the area to return to the fold of the Church rather than to support young Raymond. It's safe to say that Bertrand's mission has not been going well. Not only has he been openly defied, with towns refusing to recognize his authority, he's been verbally abused and harassed while traveling and has even been fired upon by a rebel crossbowman. Bertrand responded by excommunicating the defiant towns, but still he must have been very relieved to see Simon de Montfort arrive in the region in June 1217.

On his way through the region, Simon had attempted to enter the town of Saint-Gilles, stating that he wished to pay his respects at the monastery in the town. However, the townsfolk had refused to open the gates to him. Deciding not to invade Saint-Gilles, and not to tackle his old foe Beaucaire, Simon instead went on a slash-and-burn mission through the region, focusing on smaller fortifications and towns which had joined the rebellion.

Again, Simon let his anger and his frustrations boil over. At the small fortification of Bernis, which he took following a short siege, he ordered many of the townsfolk and defenders to be publicly executed. This, of course, had the effect of spreading fear of the Crusaders throughout the region, and after a relatively short time much of the area was loosely back under his control, save for Beaucaire and Saint-Gilles. Following this successful expedition, Simon met up with Bertrand, who urged him to cross the Rhone and attack young Raymond's possessions in Provence. Simon thought this was a good idea, although first he took a short side trip in which he journeyed to the castle held by Dragonet of Mondragon, who had assisted young Raymond's siege at Beaucaire. Dragonet of Mondragon's castle was also called "Dragonet". Simon besieged Dragonet the castle and ultimately defeated it, imprisoning its garrison.

He then travelled to the town of Viviers on the Rhone, where the Bishop of Viviers had managed to rustle up a small fleet of boats which could be used to ferry the Crusaders across the river into young Raymond's territory. The Crusaders boarded the boats, and after a few setbacks, when a group of boatman from Avignon on briefly opposed them, they all managed to land safely on the opposite shore, safely in land which was no longer

technically in Languedoc and which harbored no heretics. Technicalities aside, the Crusader army marched eastwards and spent a couple of months slashing and burning their way through Raymond's lands, destroying vineyards, setting fire to things, and generally doing their best to make their presence known. Many townsfolk fled before the arrival of the Crusaders, and many fortifications which resisted were seemingly easily taken by Simon. Simon's army had been bolstered at this stage by a force of one hundred or so northern French knights sent by King Philip of France to assist his new vassal for a period of six months.

Simon then moved to a castle in the diocese of Valence known as Crest, which was the seat of a powerful lord in the area, Adhemar of Poitiers. Adhemar of Poitiers was definitely not a heretic and had, in fact joined the Crusade briefly himself some years ago. However, Simon now considered him his enemy, and accused him of interfering with Crusaders from northern France, who were traveling down the Rhone Valley on their way to Languedoc.

The castle at Crest was large and well fortified, and while Simon threw himself into attacking the fortification with his usual vigour, it seemed that he was more interested in forming an alliance with Adhemar than defeating him outright, so to that end negotiations were carried out throughout the duration of the siege. In late September 1217 negotiations were finally being concluded. As an indication of the high regard in which he held Adhemar of Poitiers, Simon agreed on a marriage alliance between his daughter Amicia, who you might recall had once been promised to James of Aragon when she was a few years old, and Adhemar's son William of Poitiers. In return, Adhemar agreed to hand over a bunch of castles to Simon as a sign of his loyalty.

It was while these negotiations were being completed that an exhausted messenger approached Simon with a sealed letter. Simon broke the seal and received the letter's dire message. While he had been busy besieging Crest and negotiating with its Lord, Count Raymond VI of Toulouse had invaded Languedoc with a small army and had made his way to the city of Toulouse, which had welcomed him with open arms and risen up in full rebellion. Clearly it was time for Simon to make the long journey back to the west.

As Simon is making the by now familiar dash from one side of Languedoc to the other, let's backtrack a little and see how Raymond senior managed to make it to Toulouse without being opposed by the Crusaders.

In the end, it took Raymond senior eighteen months to raise his Aragonese army, and it wasn't even really an army, and it wasn't even really Aragonese. The army of Aragon had, of course, been all but annihilated at Muret. That was only four years ago, and with a boy King on the throne, the Kingdom of Aragon wasn't really in a position to hand over the fighting force which it was painstakingly rebuilding. But Raymond's cause was a popular one, and there was still a lot of ill-feeling in Aragon against the Crusaders, so in the end Raymond was able to gather a small force of Aragonese knights.

These knights weren't ordered by their boy-King or his Regent to go and fight Simon de Montfort. No these men were all volunteers. Perhaps they were survivors of Muret who were aching for revenge. Perhaps they had family members killed at Muret and found themselves with a score to settle. We don't know. What we do know is that there weren't many men in Raymond's volunteer fighting force. It was only when they joined up with the Toulousans who had been exiled from their city, routiers, and rebel fighters from Languedoc itself that they had enough men to go into battle.

Now, as we all know, Raymond senior detests military confrontations of any kind. So Raymond's plan was to tip-toe across the Pyrenees with his small force, creep through Languedoc without being noticed, and enter the city of Toulouse without being confronted by any northern Frenchmen. And he pretty much achieved his goal. By using the back roads, keeping well out of sight of any northern Frenchmen in the region, and by fording rivers they needed to cross instead of using bridges. Count Raymond's army made it to within twenty five miles of the city of Toulouse before they were spotted. It helped, of course, that the rebel Counts of Foix and Comminges and their men were part of this small force, as they possessed local knowledge of how to move through the mountains using little-known routes and passes. This, of course, meant that the Count of Foix had breached the terms of surrender agreed between Simon de Montfort and his son following the siege of Montgrenier, but I imagine that wouldn't have lost him much sleep.

The Crusader who spotted the rebel army was a man called Joris, a nobleman from southern France who was loyal to Simon de Montfort. Joris, of course, had less men with him than the rebel Counts, but the two forces clashed as the rebels were trying to cross the River Garonne, the rebels managed to drive off Joris and his men, killing some and wounding others. Having successfully forded the river, the rebel force decided to enter the city of Toulouse from its western side, which they hoped would mean they wouldn't be spotted by the garrison stationed in the Narbonnais Castle, which was located in the southeastern section of the city walls. Their entry into the city was assisted by the weather. As they approached the city, they found it cloaked in fog, the chilly autumn weather having produced a thick veil of mist over the river Garonne.

So it was that on the 13th of September 1217, the rebel Counts and their small army entered the city of Toulouse without opposition, to the rapturous welcome of its citizens. Before anyone could work out a plan of attack, it seems that some over-excited Toulousans decided to seize the moment and began to chase and attack any northern Frenchmen they came across. It was only when some northern Frenchman, with a bunch of Toulousans hot on their tails, raced into the safety of the Narbonnais Castle that the garrison of the castle were finally alerted to the invasion.

Now, in a stroke of good luck for the rebels, the Narbonnais Castle at this point in time was not filled with northern French military commanders, but with their wives. Simon de Montfort, of course, was two hundred fifty miles away in the Rhone Valley, but his wife, Alice, was in the Narbonnais Castle. Likewise Simon's brother Guy was in Carcassonne, but his wife was staying in the Narbonnais Castle with Alice, as were the wives of Simon's sons Amaury and Guy. Deciding to take charge, Alice ordered the garrison to find out what was going on. A group of northern French knights then rode out into the streets of Toulouse, saw the gathering crowd, spotted some rebel knights and, realizing the danger they were in, rode back into the safety of the castle without having made contact with any of the rebels.

The commander of the garrison, accompanied by Alice, then did his best to assess the situation from inside the castle. Scanning the streets from the safety of the castle battlements, he recognized the banner of the Count of Comminges. Realizing that the Count of Comminges would be unlikely to invade the city alone, he correctly surmised that Count Raymond and the Count of Foix were most likely also somewhere amongst the crowds, and he reported this to Alice. Alice then sat down and wrote two urgent letters, one to her husband Simon in the Rhone valley, and one to Guy de Montfort in

Carcassonne, letting them know what had just happened and asking them to send help as quickly as possible. It was this letter that Simon received when he was wrapping up the negotiations following the siege of Crest.

Join me next week as the Crusaders and the rebels come together in the epic siege of Toulouse. Now, before you start yawning and thinking that you might give the next few episodes a miss because the siege of Toulouse sounds a little bit dull, don't even think about it, because this siege will change everything. Until next week, bye for now.

End