

History of the Crusades. Episode 245. The Baltic Crusades. The Prussian Crusade Part XIV. The Siege Of Konigsberg.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Prussians rise up against the Teutonic Order in a campaign known as the Second Prussian Insurrection. We left last week's episode with Samland and Natangia in full rebellion. A number of castles in the region, including the castle at Konigsberg, are currently under siege, and the Teutonic Order is struggling to get things under control, a struggle made more difficult by the fact that the Master of the Order in Prussia, Master Hartmann, has just been removed from office and punished for burning alive two Teutonic Knights.

A new Master, Master Helmrich von Rechenberg, was appointed to Prussia in the year 1262. He was faced with a dire situation. It was pretty clear that, with the number of knights he had at his disposal in Prussia, he could not put down the rebellion. A Papal Bull issued by Pope Urban IV at this time mentions the fact that 500 Teutonic Knights had died in Prussia as a result of the Insurrection. If that figure was accurate, it's no wonder that the Order was struggling to make a dent in the rebellion. Of course the Order in Livonia had its own problems to deal with, so no assistance would be forthcoming from there. Without an influx of manpower, all Master Helmrich could do was to shore up the Order's alliances inside Prussia, by awarding land grants to members of the Prussian nobility who had stayed loyal to the Order, but really this move was like applying a single band-aid to a person covered in major stab wounds. To stem the bleeding and save the patient, something more than a band-aid solution was going to be required.

In fact, what was needed was a crusade. Pope Urban issued a number of Crusading Bulls, calling on the Latin Christians of Europe to take up the Cross and travel to Livonia and Prussia to rescue their fellow Christians from the revolting pagans. Then Grand Master Anno traveled around the Holy Roman Empire on a recruitment drive. Trouble was, most of the fighting men inside the Holy Roman Empire had conflicts closer to home to deal with. The Empire was still leaderless, and it was hard to keep track of the intrigue, power-plays and shifting alliances amongst the influential leaders inside the empire. Because of this, William Urban points out in his book "The Prussian Crusade", while there were a number of individual knights who would have been happy to go on crusade to Prussia, the Order struggled to find a nobleman to lead them.

King Ottokar of Bohemia was arguably the most prestigious person inside the Empire at this time, and Konigsberg, a city which was named after him, was under siege. So, could King Ottokar be convinced to go on a crusade to Prussia? No, he could not. He had just defeated King Bela of Hungary in a war over some disputed land in Steierland, and as part of the

settlement of the dispute, King Ottokar had agreed to marry King Bela's granddaughter. King Ottokar was currently enjoying an extended honeymoon with his young, attractive new wife, and was in no mood whatsoever to take up his sword and go barging into another war in Prussia. As for the other influential noblemen of the Empire, William Urban reports that Albrecht Duke of Braunschweig was busy in Holstein fighting the Counts who had taken the Queen mother of the King of Denmark prisoner along with her son. The Dukes of Brandenburg, who may have leapt at the chance of crusading in Prussia when they were younger, were nearing retirement and not at all interested in taking up the sword, and everyone else was busy untangling the various disputes which seemed to be popping up everywhere inside the Emperor-less Empire.

So, Grand Master Anno was forced to focus his recruitment drive on parts of Germany which hadn't really been involved in Prussian or Livonian affairs to date. He traveled down to the Rhineland, and found a man who was willing to travel to Prussia on crusade, Count Wilhelm of Julich. Count Wilhelm managed to convince one of his relatives, Count Engelbert of Mark, to accompany him, and they gathered an army and set off for Prussia in January in the year 1262, with Grand Master Anno ordering them to travel to Konigsberg to go to the relief of the besieged castle.

Now, you might remember from last week's episode that the native Prussians had besieged Konigsberg in a unique manner. They hadn't surrounded it and made a camp outside its walls in the Latin Christian way, but had instead built a number of forts at various positions around the city, so their fighters could be lodged in relative comfort, while preventing supplies from coming into the castle. When Count Wilhelm and his crusaders arrived at Konigsberg it was late in the afternoon. He was keen to attack the forts right away, but the Teutonic Knights who were accompanying the crusaders convinced him to set up camp and let his men rest, so they could strike the forts the following morning when they were fresh and fully rested. Count Wilhelm followed the Knights advice, but when dawn broke the following day, the crusaders discovered that all of the forts had been abandoned during the night. The Teutonic Knights urged caution, but Count Wilhelm, sensing an easy victory, decided to head straight towards the city gates, without taking any precautions such as sending scouts ahead. I guess you won't be surprised to hear what happened next.

The Count was ambushed by the Prussians, who were lying concealed on the path being taken by the Count and his men. One of his men, who was fortunate enough to be in possession of an unusually fast horse, managed to get away and raced back to the crusader camp to report the encounter. Count Engelbert positioned his men ready for battle and they rode to the relief of Count Wilhelm. A battle several hours long resulted, hard-fought in the snow and the forested terrain. The crusaders managed to drive some of the Prussians into a

village and attacked the others in the field. The garrison from Königsberg, realizing that the forts were now empty and that a battle was raging nearby, joined in the fight, and the crusaders ended up winning the day. Contemporary reports described the crusaders counting 3,000 dead Prussians at the end of the day's battle. The crusaders high-fived each other, thumped themselves on the back, and headed back to the Holy Roman Empire, tales of crusader glory already forming in their heads, ready to tell eager listeners back home.

As soon as the crusaders departed, the Prussians moved back into their forts and resumed the siege. The good news was that the crusaders had resupplied the castle with food, so the people of Königsberg at least weren't hungry, for the moment. But the bad news was: the siege of Königsberg was back on, with the victory by the crusaders only providing a short respite for the city. As the months passed and winter turned into summer, the besieged people of Königsberg once again found themselves out of supplies, and facing the threat of starvation. An attempt was made to resupply the city via ships on the nearby river, but the Prussians countered this move by blockading the river. They sent a number of their own small boats into the river, so many boats in fact that they stretched from one side of the river to the other, forming both a blockade and a sort of a bridge. The garrison of the castle, deciding death in battle may be a better option than death by starvation, managed to get hold of a ship, and they used it to ram the line of Prussian vessels. The men from Königsberg climbed out of their ship onto the tightly packed Prussian boats, quite a few of which were filled with Prussian fighters. Amazingly the desperate men from Königsberg managed to defeat the Prussians in what must have been a weird and unique battle on the water. They destroyed the boats, then proceeded to destroy the forts that had been used to besiege the city. So the siege has been lifted. Woohoo!

Unfortunately though, their celebrations were short lived. News of the lifting of the siege made its way out of Samland to nearby Natangia, and the Prussian who had been chosen to lead the Natangians, a man called Herkus Monte, decided to take an army to Königsberg, to besiege it once again. The Natangians arrived at the city and the garrison immediately rode out to confront them. A desperate pitched battle followed, and the garrison were eventually driven back inside the walls of the town. With the forts having been destroyed the Natangians decided to launch an attack on the town itself. They managed to successfully scale the city walls, despite coming under bombardment from missiles sent in their direction, and the garrison were forced to withdraw to the castle, taking with them as many of the townsfolk as they could. Luckily for the garrison the Prussian decided that attacking the castle was something they could not take on without incurring significant losses. Herkus Monte himself had already been injured by a Latin Christian spear, so they ended up withdrawing from Königsberg entirely. So, the siege of Königsberg has now officially come to an end.

Now, the drama, the desperation, and the differing successes and failures of the warring parties as exhibited at Konigsberg was reflected across Prussia. Castles right across the region were being besieged by native Prussians, who would then construct forts around the castle. The Prussians would then use the forts to restrict supplies going into the castle, and the garrison would either be trapped inside, or would manage to venture out and attack the forts. Some castles near the coast were fortunate enough to receive outside assistance to lift their sieges, but virtually all the castles in the interior of the country were left to their own devices.

Now this of course was not good news for the Teutonic Order. By the end of the year 1263 times were truly difficult for the Order in Prussia, in every sense of the word. The Insurrection had by now spread from Samland and Natangia across the entire region of Prussia. Castles were under siege, knights were being killed, and Prussians were taking control. Kulm and Thorn had come under attack but were holding their own, with the defenses at Thorn being extended and improved. However many castles, particularly those in Samland and Natangia, were not so lucky, and each castle which fell to the Prussians then freed up the Prussians who had been besieging it, meaning they were free to venture further afield to find another castle to besiege, or to join small fighting units of Prussians who were roaming the countryside, conducting raids and ambushes against Latin Christian interests.

During these dark times a hero for the Teutonic Order emerged, and tales of his exploits kept hopes alive around Latin Christian firesides, and word of his deeds, which were no doubt embellished by storytellers, were passed down to later generations. The name of this hero was Martin von Golin. His sister had been murdered by a Prussian, and to seek his revenge he had joined the Teutonic Order for a short period of time as a half-brother. Upon leaving the Order however he became a one-man anti-Prussian fighting unit, answering to no-one but himself, and if the stories are to be believed, acting as a pretty effective pagan-fighting machine. Here's one story of his exploits around this time.

Martin was riding through the wilderness with a companion and they became lost. Three Prussians then came towards them. Martin and his companion killed two of the Prussians but spared the third so that he could show them the way back to the road. However, instead of leading them back to safety the Prussian led the two men straight into a Prussian camp. When they realized what was happening Martin and his companion killed the Prussian, but then were immediately set upon by the five Prussians who were in the camp, who wounded them, captured them and tied them up. Two of the Prussians were ordered to guard the men while the other three set off to capture the horses ridden by the two men, which had become spooked and had run off. The two Prussians standing guard decided to behead Martin and

his companion, and drew a sword ready to kill them both. However, Martin spoke up, telling them that his fine clothes would be ruined by blood if that occurred. He stated, and I quote, "You are not acting wisely, because you will ruin my good clothes by spilling blood on them. You will ruin them, if you think about it. The color will run into them and you will never get it out." End quote. Martin then generously offered to remove his clothes and then submit himself for beheading, to save the pagans the trouble of trying to wash the blood out of his clothes. The Prussians agreed, and untied Martin so that he could remove his garments. And wouldn't you know it, as soon as Martin's hands were untied, he attacked the pagan holding the sword, striking him on his throat with his fist, so that he dropped his weapon. Martin seized the dropped sword and killed both pagans, then released his companion just as the other three Prussians were returning with the horses. A lengthy fight ensued, with Martin eventually emerging victorious, having killed all the pagans. Ah, such a great fireside story.

The reality of Prussia though, by the end of 1263, was much more grim. The Martin von Golins of Prussia were few and far between, and the pagans definitely had the upper hand. The fight by the Latin Christians to reclaim Christian Prussia will be long and hard-fought.

Ah, look at this, now we are at the year 1263, and both crusades are once again at the same point on their timelines. Join me next week as we rejoin the Crusade in Livonia. Until next week, bye for now.

This podcast is powered by Patreon. If you can spare \$1 per month and would like to support this podcast, go to patreon.com and search for "History of the Crusades". Or go to our website crusadespod.com and click on the Patreon link. Your \$1 contribution will mean you get access to an extra episode every fortnight on topics related to the Crusades, and it means that you are powering the History of the Crusades podcast. Thank you to all who have signed up so far.

End