

History of the Crusades. Episode 248. The Baltic Crusades. The Prussian Crusade Part 16. Samland Surrenders.

Hello again. Last week we saw the Second Prussian Insurrection go from bad to worse for the Latin Christians. The whole of Prussia was now in rebellion, with numerous attacks even occurring in the Latin Christian heartland inside Prussia: the city of Kulm. In a major victory for the pagans, the leader of the Natangian forces, Herkus Monte, managed to kill both the Master of the Teutonic Order in Prussia, Master Helmrich, and the Marshall of the Teutonic forces, as the Teutonic Order moved in to oppose the Prussians as they marched towards Kulm. We left last week's episode in the year 1265, with a victory by another Prussian commander, the leader of the Sudovians, a warrior named Scumand.

Now, both Grand Master Anno and Pope Urban IV are doing their best to drum up crusaders in the Holy Roman Empire and send them to Prussia and Livonia, but really most of the influential noblemen had commitments close to home, and the chaotic and ever-changing politics of the Empire made them reluctant to take up the Cross. As a result most noblemen either made vague promises to embark on a Crusade at some stage in the future, or embarked on a lightening fast crusade, which enabled them to tick the "Go on a crusade to Prussia" box, but didn't result on them achieving much on the ground for the Latin Christians in Prussia. But never fear, because despite all these setbacks, things are about to take a turn for the better for the Teutonic Order in Samland.

Now, as we all know, the Second Prussian Insurrection had its genesis in Samland, and Samland had always been only loosely under Latin Christian control. It's ironic then that the place where the Teutonic Order had its first successes on the long road to getting Prussia back under control was in Samland. As we all know, the castle at Konigsberg is now back in Latin Christian hands, and the Teutonic Order was effective in using the castle at Konigsberg, and the nearby castle at Wehlau, to subdue the region. Both of these castles lie on the Pregel River, which runs inland from the Baltic Sea, and acted as a natural boundary between the regions of Samland and the neighboring region of Natangia. Or more accurately, since Samland was the most northern of the Prussian regions, the river effectively divided Samland from the rest of Prussia, which lay to the south of the river.

The Teutonic Order decided to use the castles to control the river, and then to push northwards into Samland, gradually subduing the Samlanders while preventing any pagan assistance from coming from other parts of Prussia over the river. The strategy was a good one. Supplies and men could be shipped to the castles via the river, ensuring that almost unceasing raids could be conducted right across Samland.

The last stand for the pagans of Samland came in 1265. The Teutonic Order in Livonia had promised to send some men to Königsberg to join up with the Knights from the Prussian Order, and the pagans knew that if this happened their rebellion would be over. So they decided that their only chance would be to attack and defeat the Livonian army before it reached Königsberg. However the Samlanders found themselves having to face a disciplined force of Livonian knights in the worst possible scenario for the pagans: on the battlefield. The heavy horses of the knights were no match for the Samlanders, many of whom were fighting on foot. When the Samlanders broke and tried to flee, the Livonian knights cut off their line of retreat, and the army of Samlanders suffered a massive defeat. A few weeks later they formally surrendered to the Teutonic Order.

Perhaps starting to learn about ways to effectively administer potentially hostile lands, the Teutonic Order went out of its way to appease the leaders of the rebel Samlanders. Not only did they decide not to confiscate the lands of the rebel leaders, they issued documents confirming that the leaders were entitled to continue ownership of their land, and that all the privileges they enjoyed before the uprising would continue. The Order then consolidated its control of the Pregel River, likely realizing that whoever held the river effectively held Samland. The Bishop of Samland ordered a castle to be built at the mouth of the river where it emptied into the Baltic Sea, at a place called Lochstedt, and the Order then built a castle at Tapiau, halfway between the two key castles already on the river: Königsberg and Wehlau.

The Lithuanians did their best to try and assist the pagan Samlanders to reclaim Samland. They launched an attack on the Order's castle at Wehlau, and for eight days they pummeled the castle walls with a bunch of catapult machines. The Lithuanians had only just started using catapult machines, and they were pretty pleased with the ones they constructed at Wehlau. Unfortunately for the Lithuanians though, the catapult machines used by the defenders of the castle were much more up to date and much more accurate than the pagan machines, and the Lithuanian forces suffered heavy losses from the machines manned by the Teutonic Order. The biggest blow to the Lithuanian attackers, however, came at the hands of a single archer who was stationed on the ramparts of the castle. He managed to kill the leader of the Lithuanian forces with a bolt fired from his crossbow, and just to prove that that wasn't a fluke, he then hit the chief Lithuanian engineer, who was in charge of their catapult machines, managing to nail his hand to one of the machines, again using a bolt fired from his crossbow. The Teutonic Order was so impressed by the sharp shooting of this archer that they immediately bestowed a knighthood upon him, and accepted him into the ranks of the Teutonic Order. Following the two arrow attacks the Lithuanians withdrew, and that was about it for the rebellion in Samland. The Samlanders submitted to Latin Christian control and no pagan outsiders attempted any more to intervene. The Prussians from Natangia and other parts of Prussia were of course unable to come to their aid, as the Order remained in control

of the border between Samland and the rest of Prussia, the border being of course the Pregel river.

Following the defeat of the pagans in Samland the Latin Christians slowly began subduing the Insurrection in the other parts of Prussia. In the year 1266, Grand Master Anno managed to finally bring some crusaders to Prussia under the leadership of the Dukes of Brandenburg. Two of the Dukes of Brandenburg, Otto and Johann, and Otto's son, arrived in Natangia and set about building a castle on the shores of the Baltic Sea in Natangia, around halfway between the castle at Konigsberg and an already established Natangian castle further down the coast at Balga. In a nice gesture, the Teutonic Order decided to name the castle "Brandenburg", after the crusading Dukes who had arranged for the castle to be built.

Brandenburg Castle was, however, lost to the pagans soon after the Dukes of Brandenburg departed. How was it lost? Well, it happened a little something like this. The Marshall of the Teutonic Order, who was stationed in the castle, decided to take the garrison out to go raiding for the day. A Prussian woman who was working in the castle decided to inform a local Prussian warlord that the castle was sitting virtually undefended, and the warlord, unsurprisingly, mounted an attack on the castle and took it. The Marshall decided against trying to retake the castle, instead withdrawing to Konigsberg. When word reached the Holy Roman Empire about the loss of the castle, Duke Otto decided to try and take it back. In the year 1267 he once again took the Cross and journeyed to Prussia. On arriving in Natangia, he found that the pagans had burned the castle to the ground, and then abandoned it. He set to work rebuilding the castle, and the castle ended up becoming a key strategic stronghold for the Teutonic Order. You can see the ruins of Brandenburg Castle today. Unfortunately though, it suffered a lot of damage in World War Two, but you'll have to travel to the Kaliningrad region of Russia to do so. Like Konigsberg, which is now of course called Kaliningrad, Brandenburg fell under Russian control following World War Two, and remains in Russian territory today.

Now, while we've been talking about the Second Prussian Insurrection, you might be casting your minds back to the protagonist of the First Prussian Insurrection, Duke Swietopelk of Pomerelia, and you might be wondering whether he is watching the Insurrection from the sidelines, waiting for an opportunity to invade Prussia once again. Well, Duke Swietopelk has been watching the events unfold, but he has decided not to play any role in it, much to the relief, I imagine, of the Teutonic Order. In fact, since the end of the First Prussian Insurrection, Duke Swietopelk has become somewhat of a peacemaker, telling anyone who will listen that taking on the Teutonic Order was a massive mistake on his part, and that the regions surrounding Prussia, Pomerelia in particular, should make peace with the Order and that really, having the Order as your ally, was much more preferable than having the Order as

your enemy. Duke Swietopelk died in 1266, and reportedly gave both his sons a lecture on the advantages of peace, while he was on his deathbed. His eldest son however, a man called Mestwin, to whom the Duke had left the bulk of his lands, including the city of Gdansk (or Danzig), decided not to take his father's dying words on board. Almost immediately after being sworn in as the new Duke of Pomerelia, Mestwin declared war on neighboring Pomerania.

Now, Grand Master Anno was viewing this development with interest. While the new Duke hadn't yet made sword-waving gestures in the direction of Prussia, Grand Master Anno wasn't about to take any chances, so he ordered a castle to be built on the border between the Bishopric of Kulm and Pomesania, most likely in order to guard against the possibility of the Duke of Pomerelia seizing Pomesania, then using it as a base to invade Prussia. The castle, which was named Starkenburg, which incidentally is the German version of the name Montfort, was no sooner nearing completion when it was attacked by a bunch of Pomesanians, who killed the men who were building the castle. Master Ludwig was forced to divert some fighting men to the castle to protect it, and to protect and assist the new team of builders who were sent to complete it.

The castle had just been completed when the Pomesanians attacked it once again, possibly with the backing of Duke Mestwin of Pomerelia. The fighting was fierce, and although the Knights from the Order inside the castle defended it valiantly, the attackers eventually got the upper hand. They stormed the castle, killed the garrison and any Teutonic Knights they could find, then set fire to the building, which burned to the ground. Proving the theory that bad news comes in a bunch, soon after finding out that the castle he had built had just been destroyed, Grand Master Anno received news that Kulm and Marienwerder had both been attacked by the Prussians once again, then he received the news that he had been half expecting but also dreading. Duke Mestwin, the Duke of Pomerelia, had decided to join the Second Prussian Insurrection.

Now, Duke Mestwin was no doubt hoping that he could go one step better than his father, and defeat the Teutonic Order in Prussia by entering the conflict on the side of the native Prussians, and, on paper at least, it didn't look like such a bad idea. Most of the heavy lifting had already been done by the Prussians, and if you left Samland out of the equation, the Order was struggling to maintain the defenses of all of its main trading centers inside Prussia. But Duke Mestwin hadn't taken into account two crucial factors: the first being that the Order knew how to defeat Pomerelia in the field, as they had done in the First Insurrection; and secondly that Duke Mestwin didn't have nearly as many defensive and offensive assets as his father Duke Swietopelk had enjoyed in the First Insurrection. In fact, the only castle of significance he could use to control shipping on the Vistula, and as a base

to attack the Order, was the castle at Neuenburg. Yes, that's right, Duke Mestwin only had one castle on the Vistula. This didn't seem to bother Duke Mestwin, though. His plan was to base himself in the castle and blockade the Vistula, while his brother looked after things back in Pomerelia. Duke Mestwin traveled to Neuenburg and did manage to intercept a fleet of fifteen merchant ships which were traveling upriver to Kulm. However most of the ships managed to escape, and Duke Mestwin soon discovered that even if he were able to prevent all shipping from reaching Kulm, the effects of the blockade would take many months to be felt.

Meanwhile, back in Pomerelia, the Teutonic Order had enacted the tried and true method which they had used against Duke Swietopelk. Poor Duke Mestwin's brother was trying desperately, and it turns out unsuccessfully, to protect Pomerelia from the invading Knights, who were burning, pillaging, killing and doing everything they could to turn the local Pomerelians against their Duke and his brother. So, Duke Mestwin's brother took a leaf out of his father's book and decided to sue for peace, signing a treaty between himself and the Teutonic Order in the year 1267.

So, poor Duke Mestwin is now stuck inside his castle, blockading the Vistula, while he learns that his brother has made peace with the Teutonic Order. Then he learns that two of his uncles are using the unrest and general unhappiness felt by the Pomerelians, who have borne the brunt of the Teutonic invasions, to make noises about ousting the Duke from power. Then he gets the really bad news. What was the really bad news? That King Ottokar of Bohemia, whom the Papacy and the Teutonic Order had been urging to come to the assistance of Prussia since the Insurrection started, has finally decided to come to the rescue. In King Ottokar's sights were not just the revolting pagan Prussians, but Duke Mestwin of Pomerelia. Join me next week as we follow King Ottokar on crusade to Prussia. Until next week, bye for now.

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