

History of the Crusades. Episode 249. The Baltic Crusades. The Prussian Crusade Part XVII. The End Of The Second Insurrection.

Hello again. Last week we saw Samland surrender to Latin Christian control, but we also saw Duke Swietopelk's son, Duke Mestwin, decide to join the Second Prussian Insurrection. Hoping to succeed where his father failed, Duke Mestwin took up a position inside the only castle in his possession on the Vistula and attempted a blockade of the river. However things didn't go the Duke's way. The Teutonic Order invaded Pomerelia and the Duke's brother signed a peace treaty with the Order. However Duke Mestwin's troubles are only just beginning, as King Ottokar has decided to go on crusade to Prussia.

Now, everyone from the Pope downwards had been trying to get King Ottokar to go to Prussia on crusade since the start of the Second Prussian Insurrection, but things kept coming up. King Ottokar married an attractive young woman whom he wished to spend time with, then he had rebellions in Austria to deal with. But finally, by the year 1267, with the promise of land in Sudovia being dangled in front of him, King Ottokar decided it was time to go and bring the Prussians and the Duke of Pomerelia into line, and score himself parts of Prussia into the bargain. Now, King Ottokar was able to command a sizable army. He was, after all, arguably the most powerful man in the Holy Roman Empire, and he actually had his eye on the still-vacant Imperial throne, an ambition which could only be enhanced by a successful Prussian Crusade. In fact, the army commanded by King Ottokar was so impressive that the Teutonic Order began to get a little nervous, and they made King Ottokar sign an agreement that he would limit his conquest of Prussia to lands in Sudovia and Galindia, and would not take any further land belonging to the Order.

With the formalities all in place, King Ottokar set off in December, gathering more crusaders as he passed through Poland on his way to the battle field. After traveling through Poland he marched his forces to Pomerelia and decided to pop in and visit Duke Mestwin. King Ottokar had a proposal to put to Duke Mestwin: Duke Mestwin was to stop threatening the Teutonic Order and was actually to do a total about face, and start serving the Order's interests by assisting the Knights to subdue the Prussians, and by punishing any Pomerelians who opposed the Order's interests. What was the Duke of Pomerelia going to get in return for this embarrassing deal? Absolutely nothing. Yes, that's right. It was pretty clear to everyone that King Ottokar could take over Pomerelia without batting an eyelid if Duke Mestwin didn't do exactly what he was told. So Duke Mestwin did exactly what he was told.

It was a harsh lesson for the Duke, who had way underestimated the power of the Teutonic Order, and had way underestimated the advantages of having allies you could call upon. In fact, the main lesson Duke Mestwin took away from this humiliating incident, was that it would

be a good idea to get himself some allies. As William Urban put it in his book "The Prussian Crusade", and I quote "Duke Mestwin, having learned from this what it meant to have no friends, set about to acquire some." End quote. The friends which the Duke primarily sought to acquire were the Dukes of Brandenburg. He pledged them his loyalty and promised his daughter in marriage to the Brandenburgs, accompanied by a hefty annual dowry. With his new friends successfully in his corner, Duke Mestwin then happily went about acquiring his brother's lands and his uncle's lands, until Pomerelia was effectively united under his rule. By the time he had all of Pomerelia under his control, though, the Second Prussian Insurrection was over, so if Duke Mestwin had any residual ambitions in Prussia, they came to nothing. But we digress, back to King Ottokar. Having successfully laid Duke Mestwin over his lap and whipped him soundly, King Ottokar and his crusaders made their way to Kulm and Thorn, arriving there in early January. Then disaster struck, not in the form of the Prussians but in the form of the weather. The temperature began to rise and an unseasonable warmth started to spread across the region. It was left to Master Ludwig to deliver the bad news to King Ottokar. The warming weather had begun to thaw the ice, so the local rivers, which the crusaders had intended to travel along, were beginning to become dangerous to cross. The snow was also beginning to melt, meaning that if the crusaders proceeded, their journey would be wet, slushy, miserable and cold. Master Ludwig recommended that King Ottokar return home and perhaps return in the summer. King Ottokar was forced to make a quick decision. Already the Vistula was thinning, with the ice only safe to ride upon during the coldest hours of the night.

Reluctantly King Ottokar delivered the bad news to his military commanders: they were going home, with no pagans having killed or converted, no lands having been won, and no booty having been scored. King Ottokar made his decision just in time, as it turned out. A local chronicler reported that King Ottokar and the Bohemians crossed the Vistula at night as instructed, with no difficulties. However, by the time the Austrians and Steierlanders made the crossing, which they were ordered to do before midnight, the ice covering the river had developed a number of holes and weak points, and squires were forced to walk holding lanterns in front of their lords' horses, to ensure that they didn't step on a weak point and go plunging into the river. In the end, many who made the crossing, especially those without lanterns, ended up taking unexpected and unwanted plunges into the icy river. Understandably, the mood of the army on the way home was sour. The Steierlanders were so put out about the abandoned crusade that they became undisciplined and unruly, and King Ottokar arrested a bunch of their leaders as soon as he entered his kingdom.

So King Ottokar's crusade was a total flop. While he did manage to keep the Duke of Pomerelia out of the Insurrection, he didn't make any dent whatsoever in the rebellious Prussians, and didn't score any land in Sudovia, and didn't convert anyone to Christianity.

And to top it all off, King Ottokar didn't become the next Holy Roman Emperor. William Urban sums up King Ottokar's crusade nicely in the following paragraph, and I quote: "King Ottokar's expedition could have shortened the rebellion by several years. He had brought sufficient warriors to crush the resistance that remained. The pagans were already exhausted; their leaders had not learned to coordinate their efforts, and the Lithuanians were unable to render them any aid. Only the relative weakness of the Teutonic Knights made it possible for them to continue the fight for several more years. They were like a staggering boxer who, unable to flail his arms any longer, can only cover his face and body against the blows that fall upon him. Courage and hope for a miracle keep him upright, even when he can see that the fight is lost." End quote.

So the Second Prussian Insurrection staggered on. The situation around the year 1270 was as follows. Samland was of course back under Latin Christian control, and most of the other regions of Prussia were contained, in part by a strong line of Teutonic castles. By now these castles, which included Königsberg, Brandenburg, Balga and Wehlau, had been strongly fortified and improved, and so were easily defended by the Order, so much so that the Prussians had given up even attempting to take them.

However the Order didn't have enough men to do anything more than just contain the rebels. Over in the Holy Land, the situation was rapidly deteriorating, with Sultan Baybars proving to be a major threat to the Latin Christian presence. Grand Master Anno was currently in the Holy Land, and any crusaders who wished to volunteer, and any spare Teutonic Knights, were dispatched straight to the Holy Land. The next priority for the Order, after its presence in the Middle East, was Livonia, so people who wished to crusade closer to home, generally found themselves in Livonia. The upshot of all this for Prussia was that the Order was struggling with a severe manpower problem.

As a result, the Latin Christians took a leaf out of the pagan warfare handbook. Unable to field enough men to engage in any large battles, small groups of knights would instead venture out of one of the castles and go raiding against the pagans, before retreating back into the safety of the castle. By using these guerrilla warfare type tactics, while the Prussians couldn't be defeated, they could be contained, and by the end of the year 1270 the only Prussian region to have enough surplus manpower to be able to send men to the assistance of the other regions was Sudovia. In every other region the Prussians found themselves not conquered, but contained.

In the year 1271 the leader of the Sudovians, Scumand, led a large force of Sudovians and Lithuanians in an attack on Kulm. However, Kulm was by now so strongly fortified that the only way to take it was by means of a lengthy siege. Scumand didn't have the resources to

attempt a major siege, so he was forced to content himself with taking and destroying two minor castles within the Bishopric of Kulm. After a short campaign, of only nine days' duration, he led his forces back into Sudovia. Another Prussian military leader, Diwan, who was the head of the Bartian forces, had similar plans, leading an army of 800 men to besiege a small outpost in the Bishopric of Kulm. The outnumbered Latin Christian garrison defended the outpost with great success, using crossbows to shoot many of the prominent pagan fighters. When Diwan himself was shot and killed, the Bartian army fled, without even attempting to recover their dead, a sign that their morale was totally shattered. With the vast majority of the rebels contained, and with these two setbacks, the Prussians began to suspect that the Insurrection might be coming to an end.

The final blow which drove the Insurrection to its knees started in the winter of 1271-1272. The new Master of the Order in Prussia, Master Theodoric, was thrilled to welcome a new crusade to Prussia, the first one for several years, led by Count Dietrich of Meissen-Lansberg, and the Count of Regenstein. Master Theodoric directed the crusaders to focus their attentions on Natangia, where Herkus Monte was still resisting every attempt by the Order to bring the Natangians into line. The crusaders rode straight to Herkus Monte's main fortress, and threw everything they had at the stronghold, using siege towers, catapult machines, and archers to great effect. The crusaders eventually managed to breach the walls of the fortress. The attack cost 150 crusader lives, but once the stronghold was successfully stormed the Latin Christians were able to kill a number of noblemen and warriors from the upper echelons of Natangian society. However, in his book "The Prussian Crusade", William Urban reports that a handful of prominent Natangians escaped the disaster, one of them being Herkus Monte. Herkus Monte, however, now had no army to draw upon, and he was forced to watch on helplessly as the Latin Christians built themselves a base in the Natangian forests, and used it to raid across the region, laying waste to villages, farms and stores.

The following summer Count Dietrich and the Teutonic Order moved in and occupied Natangia, and a year later, in 1273, Herkus Monte himself was killed. He was camping deep in the forest, and all his men had gone hunting for food. A Latin Christian castellan on a scouting expedition stumbled upon Herkus Monte totally by accident and, finding him all alone, the Latin Christians attacked and captured him. They hung him from a tree, then ran him through with a sword.

As William Urban reports, with the death of Herkus Monte the heart was gone from the Insurrection. The Teutonic Order finally began to gain the upper hand. They rebuilt, or built from scratch, a number of castles specifically designed to contain the Sudovians and the Lithuanians. Headquarters used by the rebels were attacked and burned. Prussian men were killed while women and children were resettled in areas close to Teutonic castles, where they could be watched over and monitored. Gradually Prussian leaders and noblemen saw the

writing on the wall, and either went into exile, mostly to Lithuania, or came to terms with the Latin Christians, pledging their loyalty to either the Order or the Bishops. The Second Prussian Insurrection had lasted a total of fifteen years, and had exhausted the resources and the manpower of Prussians and Latin Christians alike.

While Prussia is now officially back in Latin Christian hands, the Prussian Crusade isn't over. Danger still lurks on the Prussian forests, and many Prussians still harbor dreams of throwing off their Latin Christian overlords and living in a pagan land, like their neighbors the Lithuanians. But with the Second Insurrection officially at an end, we will leave the exhausted people of Prussia to lick their collective wounds for the time being, as next week, you guessed it, we return to Livonia. Until next week, bye for now.

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