

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 34.  
The Second Crusade VI.

Hello again. Last week we followed the French and German armies as they traveled to Constantinople. This week, we will see what happens when they cross the Bosphorus into hostile territory.

As we saw last week, King Conrad and the German army crossed into Anatolia much earlier than the French, despite having previously agreed to wait for the French contingent in Constantinople. Now there's two things you need to keep in mind before we go any further. The first one is, although much of Anatolia is part of the Byzantine Empire, many parts of it are only loosely controlled by Constantinople. The Seljuk Turks who control central Anatolia and the Danishmend Turks to the northeast are doing a pretty good job of ensuring that much of Anatolia is hostile, and Christian interests are often under threat. Secondly, the peace accord signed by Emperor Manuel and the Seljuk Turks doesn't extend to the Latin Christians, so while the Seljuk Turks have agreed not to attack Byzantine territory in Anatolia, they are free to fight the invading Latin Christian armies.

Right, so here we are, King Conrad and tens of thousands of German knights, foot soldiers, attendants, clerics, pilgrims, and hangers-on are all camped at Chalcedon, waiting to march across Anatolia towards the Principality of Antioch. King Conrad requested the Emperor to provide him with guides for the journey and Manuel acceded to this request. The Emperor then gave the German King two sound pieces of advice. The first piece of advice was to avoid the route through the middle of Anatolia taken by the First Crusade and instead take the longer road via the coast. The coastal areas were more securely under Imperial control and the German army was less likely to be attacked if they took the coast road. Secondly, the Emperor advised the German King to remove all the non-combatants from his army before proceeding further. These were both excellent pieces of advice. Did King Conrad take heed of these wise words? No. He ignored both of them and set out, complete with a large contingent of non combatants, to Nicaea, intending to follow the route of the First Crusade across the middle of Anatolia.

However, once the army arrived in Nicaea, King Conrad seems to have had second thoughts. Perhaps on reflection, the Emperor's advice was worth taking, after all, so he settled on a compromise. He divided the German forces into two parts. His half-brother, Bishop Otto of Freising, was to lead one part of the army, which included most of the non-combatants, down the safer coast road, while King Conrad himself led the remainder of the army along the quicker, but more hostile, route taken by the First Crusade.

By King Conrad's estimation, his section of the army would take around twenty days to reach Iconium once they departed from Nicaea. This was a pretty optimistic estimation, but by King Conrad's reckoning the army would march faster now that the pilgrims and non-combatants have been removed. And unlike the army of the First Crusade, he wasn't intending to take any territory from the Turks during the march, so he wouldn't need to stop and do battle, as had occurred in the First Crusade.

King Conrad needed to get to Iconium as quickly as possible. He was intending to restock his supplies at Iconium, and he knew from the experiences of the First Crusade, and probably also from the advice given by his Byzantine guides, that once the army left

Dorylaeum, there would be precious little to eat. Dorylaeum was a sort of a frontier town. It was the last town on the road to Iconium which was more or less under Byzantine control, and the land itself after Dorylaeum became increasingly arid and hostile. King Conrad knew that his army would need to carry all the food and water it required for the journey between Dorylaeum and Iconium. This would be easier said than done. An army consisting of tens of thousands of men needs a lot of food and drinks a lot of water. The horses, too, needed to eat and drink if they were to survive the journey, so this was why King Conrad needed to move his army along at a cracking pace. Each day spent on the road meant a loss of provisions. It was vital that the army get to Iconium, as quickly as possible, and hopefully they could purchase or pillage food once they arrived at the Seljuk Turk capital.

So, off we go. King Conrad waved goodbye to Bishop Otto and the largely non-combatant army at Nicaea and led his men down the old Roman road towards Dorylaeum. Now, remember that King Conrad estimated that it would take the army twenty days to reach Iconium, and he had provisioned the army accordingly. Well, it seems that the army ate more food and drank more water than he had predicted. After only eight days the food started to run out and the supply of water was dangerously low. And the army hadn't even reached Dorylaeum. They had only traveled around one third of the distance to Iconium.

On the 25th of October 1147, ten days after setting out, the army reached Dorylaeum. If you cast your minds back to Episode 8, you will recall that the members of the First Crusade fought a battle with the Turkish forces led by Kilij Arslan near Dorylaeum, and emerged victorious. Perhaps this victory fifty years ago was in the minds of the thirsty, hungry, tired German knights and foot soldiers as they approached Dorylaeum. It was most probably in the mind of the current Seljuk Turk soldier, Mas'ud. He was Kilij Arslan's son, and he now had the chance to avenge the defeats suffered by his father at the hands of the Franj.

The journey to Dorylaeum had not been easy for the Germans. As well as problems with the provision of food and water, the army had been harassed by the Seljuk Turks. Like the members of the First Crusade, the Latin Christians were surprised by the speed and agility of the Turkish horsemen, and had no real answer for the Turks ability to wheel in close to the German ranks and let fly a volley of arrows before turning swiftly and disappearing. Neither the experiences of the First Crusade, carefully recorded in chronicles, nor the advice of the Byzantine guides, who would have been well versed in Turkish tactics, seem to have assisted King Conrad. The Germans were powerless to stop the Muslim archers on their speedy horses, and time after time, the archers attacked the German columns, exacting an increasing number of casualties, particularly amongst the foot soldiers.

And the German cavalry fell for the classic Turkish tactic of feigned retreat. Yes, we've seen it time and time again. A small band of Turkish horsemen would attack a much larger contingent of Latin Christian cavalry, then, apparently overwhelmed, they would retreat, enticing the Latin Christians to follow. The Christians would then be led into a trap, straight into the waiting, much larger Turkish force, and would be defeated. It seemed to get them every time.

So, by the time the Germans reached Dorylaeum, things were looking grim. The food had run out and water was low. They were behind schedule. They were getting picked off by the Seljuk Turks, and ahead of them was at least ten days, most likely much more, of marching as quickly as they could through an arid, waterless landscape whilst being

attacked by Turkish troops, before they reached the Turkish capital, where they would need to purchase food and water from their enemy with what little money they had left, or take it by force. Yes, you guessed it. It was time to turn back. King Conrad held a council with his noblemen, and they all agreed to head back to Nicaea and regroup.

But the retreat itself was no easy task. The journey back along the road was much slower, with the troops stopping to forage regularly in an attempt to find food. The Seljuk Turks took full advantage of the hungry, less disciplined German lines and attacked them mercilessly. The retreat became a rout. The rear guard of the German army was cut off and was soon overwhelmed by the Turkish forces. The main body of the army struggled back towards Nicaea, under continual barrages of Turkish arrows. German horses and German soldiers fell victim to the archers, and the tired, hungry, and depleted troops were in no position to mount a counterattack. This was a complete disaster for the once mighty German Imperial army. King Conrad himself was hit by two arrows, receiving a serious head wound.

The remnants of the army limped into Nicaea, utterly defeated. Nine tenths of the army had been lost, as well as all the contents of the German camp. Of those who survived, some succumbed to starvation. Others abandoned the expedition entirely, using what remained of their resources to travel back to Constantinople and then on to Europe. The remainder of the defeated German troops threw themselves at the mercy of the French forces, who had just arrived at Nicaea.

To say the French army was surprised to see the defeated Germans is an understatement. Rumors had been circulating that the Germans had taken the Seljuk Turk capital Iconium, and had cleared the way to Jerusalem. It's quite possible that these rumors were initiated, or at least encouraged, by Emperor Manuel, who was very keen to get the French army moving. So the sight of the starving, beaten, and depleted German army came as a bit of a shock. Despite his head wound and his massive military defeat, King Conrad was determined to press on with whatever was left of the German army. The remaining Germans, who hadn't starved to death or abandoned their mission, were rounded up and we're told that they would be joining the French army.

The two Kings now had to decide which route to take. Clearly, they were no longer going to follow the route taken by the First Crusade. That left two options. The long, winding road along the coastline or a more direct route, turning inland towards the town of Philadelphia across to Loadicea, and then heading south, back down to the coast at Adalia. On paper, this looked like the best option; the route was much shorter, and it avoided the many river crossings which would need to be taken along the much longer coastal route.

In fact, this was the route chosen by Bishop Otto and the German non-combatants. Unfortunately, no chroniclers accompanied Bishop Otto's forces, and little is known about what exactly happened to this part of the German army. We do know that their journey was very difficult. The fully armed and experienced military forces under King Conrad had been thoroughly defeated by the tactics of the Seljuk Turks. Bishop Otto's forces would have fared much worse. As well as being sitting ducks for any attack by the Turks, the army also suffered badly from lack of food and water. It's quite possible that word filtered back to King Conrad and King Louis about the dreadful conditions faced by Bishop Otto on this inland route.

Regardless, the Kings made their decision. They would take the coast road, then head inland along the road taken by the German non-combatants, before meeting up with whatever remained of Bishop Otto's forces in Adalia.

So off we go. The army headed out of Nicaea and turned westwards, hugging the coastline. Now, before the army set out, Louis agreed not to take any Byzantine towns or fortifications on his march to Antioch. In return, Emperor Manuel sent noblemen to accompany the army, to act as guides and to negotiate trade between the army and local food sellers. Commentators have frequently admonished the Byzantine Emperor for failing to do more to assist the Crusaders, but when you examine the Emperor's position, it's easy to see why he held back. Firstly, he couldn't provide military assistance - that would breach the terms of his peace treaty with the Seljuk Turk Sultan. Secondly, people have said that he could have shipped supplies to the French army as it marched along the coast, but again, the Emperor hadn't asked to have this massive army march through his territory, and Imperial interests would be best served if the French and Germans didn't actually reach Antioch. To Manuel, the main threat facing his Empire at this time was coming from King Roger of Sicily, and the Byzantine focus was in repelling the Sicilians in Greece. The Latin Christians would just have to look after themselves.

So the army started its long march. The German contingent were exhausted and in no shape to take on active military duty in either the vanguard or the rear guard. King Louis agreed that the Germans could march in the middle of the column, surrounded and protected on all sides by the French troops. While this worked well in theory, the Germans were frequently on the receiving end of taunts by their French counterparts, and the formation didn't do much to ease the tensions between the two forces.

The army's progress along the coast road was nothing less than tortuous. It was now late November. The weather was cold, and they frequently marched through freezing showers of rain. Many rivers were swollen and required difficult, cold, and wet crossings. Food was scarce. Discipline slipped as the members of the army left to forage food. Most of the locals kept well away from the Latin Christians, taking their food, animals, and supplies, and getting as far away from the army as they could. This meant that trade was restricted. Any food that the locals were willing to trade was often sold at hugely inflated prices. The terrain in many places was steep, with the army having to traverse mountains and valleys. Many of the pack animals died, and desertion rates began to climb, with many Latin Christians abandoning their journey and seeking ships to carry them home. But the majority of the forces slogged on, traveling through the ancient Roman cities of Smyrna and Pergamon and eventually reaching the beautiful city of Ephesus in mid-December.

Here, King Conrad decided he could go no further. He had soldiered on this far with his head wound, but now his health had deteriorated to the extent that he decided to leave the army. Upon hearing this news, Emperor Manuel sent him gifts and persuaded him to return to Constantinople. The Emperor had a keen interest in the growing science of medicine, and he personally oversaw King Conrad's treatment and eventual recovery. King Conrad was clearly grateful, and while he was in Constantinople, he ensured that relations between Germany and Byzantium were strengthened, by arranging a marriage between his brother, Henry Duke of Austria, and the Emperor's niece Theodora.

Anyway, back to the army. While resting up in Ephesus, King Louis received word from Emperor Manuel that the Turks were massing and getting ready to engage with the Latin Christian forces. Manuel urged Louis to remain within Byzantine territory and to avoid

conflict with the Turks if possible. Mindful of this advice, King Louis and the army left Ephesus after a four day rest and headed up the valley of the Meander. On Christmas Eve, the Turks mounted their first attack. Thankfully, for the Latin Christians, it was only a minor one, more in the nature of a skirmish than a battle. The Latin Christians repelled the Turkish raid and pressed on.

The weather over the Christmas period was foul. Heavy rain fell, with the occasional bout of sleet and snow. The terrain was becoming increasingly difficult to traverse with mountain crags, steep valleys and swollen rivers, all testing the army's endurance. To make matters worse, the Turks now decided to make their move, harassing and attacking the Latin Christians as they marched. The Turks were using their favorite tactic of moving swiftly towards the enemy, letting loose a volley of arrows and quickly retreating. They were effective at using the terrain to their advantage, utilizing rocky crags to take cover, and attacking the army at points when they were most vulnerable, such as river crossings. The small, agile Turkish horses were also much more suited to the mountainous terrain than the Crusader horses.

But you would have to say that King Louis managed to counter these assaults pretty effectively. The army had become unwieldy and undisciplined during its march along the coast, but now that it was heading inland and faced with its first real enemy threat, King Louis managed to hold it all together. He made his army march in tight formation, with the well-armed knights to the front, rear and sides of the formation, and the baggage train and the vulnerable wounded and non-combatants in the center.

He even managed a minor victory against the Turks, who had tried to catch the French in a pincer movement during a river crossing. Henry of Champagne, Thierry of Flanders and William of Macron launched a counter-charge, catching the Turks by surprise, causing some Turkish casualties and gaining some booty. The Turkish forces then went into retreat. The Crusaders forced their way across the bridge, and the Turks took refuge inside the nearby town of Antioch in Pisidia.

Now, don't get Antioch in Pisidia, confused with a much larger city of Antioch, which is further to the east. Antioch in Pisidia is a similar age to Antioch. They were both founded in the third century BC, but Antioch in Pisidia was by far the smaller of the two. Studies done of the town during the 1920's suggested that even in its heyday it would have had a maximum population of between 3000 and 4000 people. It had been a small but important Roman outpost in times of antiquity that had been largely abandoned for the past 500 years by the time the Crusaders showed up, although, according to the chroniclers of the Second Crusade, there were a scattering of Byzantine residents living at Antioch in Pisidia, and to the Crusaders' anger and dismay, the residents allowed the retreating Turks entry into the town, then closed the gates on the Latin Christians. Protected behind the town walls, the Turks took refuge while the Crusaders decided to move on.

The Crusaders would do well to savor this minor victory. It will be one of the few highlights of the campaign. Join me next week as we continue our look at the military disaster, which is the Second Crusade. Until next week, bye for now.

End