

## History of the Crusades. Episode 302. The Baltic Crusades. The Lithuanian Conflict Part VII. The Battle of Tannenberg, Part 1.

Hello again. Last week we examined the peace treaty, which was brokered by King Wenceslas of Bohemia in February of the year 1410, following the Teutonic Order's invasion of the Kingdom of Poland. The Teutonic Order had thrown a significant amount of money in Wenceslas' direction, and in the direction of Wenceslas' brother, Sigismund of Hungary, and their investment had paid off. The King of Bohemia managed to create an agreement which was heavily weighted in the Order's favor. When the Polish delegates attempted to lobby King Wenceslas to reassess the terms of the peace agreement, he lost patience with them and sent them packing, threatening to use the armies of Bohemia to invade Poland if they didn't sit back down and take their medicine.

King Jogaila of Poland, however, wasn't the sort of man to be intimidated into taking bad medicine, by either Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen or by King Wenceslas of Bohemia. He ignored the terms of the peace treaty and instead began gathering his forces. A suddenly nervous King Wenceslas sent a couple of messages to Jogaila, implying that perhaps the terms of the treaty could be re-negotiated, but Jogaila rejected all proposals to reopen the talks. When King Wenceslas sent Jogaila a formal summons in May of 1410, ordering his attendance at a conference in Breslau, Jogaila announced that no Polish delegates would be attending. King Wenceslas traveled to Breslau, as did delegates from the Teutonic Order, but they were forced to abandon the conference when no one from Poland showed up.

Instead of attending the conference, Jogaila spent his time gathering his armies, and he sent word to Vytautas that he should do likewise. Both Jogaila and Vytautas agreed that the combined Polish and Lithuanian forces should meet in Mazovia in the middle of June, with the aim of invading Prussia and marching on Marienberg.

Now, Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen was, at this time, also busy making preparations for war. He had re-intensified his bid to hire mercenaries to complement the Teutonic forces, and had actually formulated a plan to invade the Kingdom of Poland on the 1st of June. When it became clear back in February that Jogaila wouldn't be complying with the new peace treaty, the Grand Master decided that he would get the jump on Poland and Lithuania by invading Poland at the beginning of summer. Confident of the support of both the Kingdom of Bohemia and the Kingdom of Hungary, and also sure that he could hire large numbers of skilled mercenaries from both the Kingdom of Bohemia and the Kingdom of Hungary, Ulrich chuckled to himself and went to work.

However, his plans came crashing down around him in April of 1410 when, in a shock move, Vytautas met with Sigismund of Hungary on the Polish-Hungarian border. Sigismund attempted to break up the alliance between Lithuania and Poland, offering to recognize Vytautas as a King, and therefore as Jogaila's equal, if he agreed not to provide military support to Jogaila. Vytautas rejected this offer, but the talks between the two men seemed to be genuine and productive. Sigismund proposed that Jogaila and Vytautas meet with him again in June to see whether some sort of peace agreement could be reached. The men agreed to meet on the 17th of June in Thorn, and Sigismund promised to reach out to Grand Master Ulrich to ensure that he would attend as well.

Now, as soon as Grand Master Ulrich was advised that everyone would be meeting for renewed peace talks in the middle of June, he immediately placed a hold on his plans to

invade Poland at the beginning of June, and he also stopped actively recruiting mercenaries. However, both Jogaila and Vytautas did the opposite. They continued with their plan to gather their armies in Mazovia with a view to then invading Prussia, and importantly, they continued actively recruiting mercenaries. In his book "The Last Years of the Teutonic Knights", William Urban reports that many mercenaries who had travelled to Prague after hearing that the Teutonic Order was hiring fighting men ended up being instead recruited by Polish representatives. As a result, many talented Bohemian fighters ended up fighting for Poland instead of the Teutonic Order. William Urban describes this as a critical mistake on the part of the Grand Master, who it seemed had pinned all of his hopes on reaching a successful settlement at the upcoming peace conference at Thorn, and had decided not to waste money recruiting fighters for a war which may not happen.

When the date for the conference rolled around, the Grand Master made a grand entrance into Thorn, accompanied by 600 fighting men and a number of German lords. However, Vytautas and Jogaila didn't show up at all. The Kingdom of Hungary sent a delegation of 200 horsemen, but significantly, Sigismund himself also stayed away. The whole event was a humiliating spectacle for the Teutonic Order. The Grand Master realized he had been played for a fool by Jogaila and Vytautas, and he immediately resumed his preparations for war, only to find that many of the mercenaries he had been expecting to recruit had already been signed up to fight for Poland.

But don't worry, there's no need for the Grand Master to panic just yet. He will still be able to muster a sizable army of around 20,000 men. William Urban reports that around half of the fighters on the Teutonic side were Prussian cavalry fighters, experienced Teutonic warriors on war-horses, as well as some lighter-armed Prussian horseman. The rest of the Teutonic fighters were comprised of mercenaries which the Order had managed to recruit despite Jogaila's recent efforts, and a group described as "pilgrims". These pilgrims were volunteer fighters from the Holy Roman Empire who had traveled to Prussia to fight with the Teutonic Order. If you think that these pilgrims sound a little bit like crusaders, that's because they were crusaders, but the Grand Master couldn't call them crusaders because he was intending to use them to fight the Latin Christian Polish and Lithuanian forces, so to solve the problem, he called them pilgrims.

Sigismund from Hungary also sent a contingent of men to Prussia, around 200 Knights under the command of two Hungarian noblemen. This may have been an attempt to patch up the relationship between Hungary and the Order following Sigismund's no-show at the peace conference at Thorn, but it was a bit of a token effort. Grand Master Ulrich had been hoping that a separate Hungarian force would invade southern Poland, but this didn't happen. Instead, Sigismund sent the Hungarian fighters to Prussia to join forces with the Order's army.

Now, as William Urban points out, the Teutonic army would have been much larger had the Livonian Chapter of the Order dispatched its forces to Prussia, but the Livonian forces stayed where they were. William Urban points out that there were logistical difficulties transporting the Livonian troops to Prussia. They would have either needed to sail to Prussia or have been marched overland through Samogitia. Well, you might ask, couldn't the Livonian forces invade Lithuania via Dunaburg Castle, as they had countless times before? Well, no they couldn't, because, inconveniently, Vytautas had managed to negotiate a truce with the Livonian Chapter of the Order, meaning that Lithuania didn't have to concern itself with being invaded by Livonia while Vytautas' attentions were focused on Prussia.

So despite some hiccups, the Grand Master has managed together an impressive force of around 20,000 fighters in anticipation of a looming battle between the Teutonic forces and their neighbors, Poland and Lithuania. How do the Polish and Lithuanian armies stack up against these numbers? Well, by mid-June, when both the Polish and Lithuanian forces gathered in western Mazovia, they numbered around 30,000 strong. The 30,000 men consisted of around 18,000 fighters on the Polish side comprising Polish knights and squires, a few thousand foot soldiers, and some Bohemian and Moravian mercenaries, and around 11,000 on the Lithuanian side, mostly Russian, Tartar, Samogitian, and Lithuanian cavalry men. There was also a contingent of men from Moldavia led by the Prince of Moldavia, who happened to be married to one of Jogaila's sisters.

Incidentally, here is a piece of trivia for you. This particular Prince of Moldavia is actually the uncle of Vlad the Impaler, who will be born in around 18 years time and whose legendary cruelty will inspire Bram Stoker to write his masterpiece Dracula in the late 19th century.

Anyway, where were we? Oh yes, a massive battle is about to kick off between the Teutonic Order, Poland and Lithuania.

Now, as we know, the 30,000 or so Polish and Lithuanian forces are currently gathered in Mazovia and are intending to invade Prussia. So what are the 20,000 strong Teutonic fighters up to? Well, Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen has decided to split his army into two parts. One will be stationed in East Prussia and the other in West Prussia. Once stationed in the two sections of Prussia, the Teutonic forces were split further, as Grand Master Ulrich sent contingents of fighters to various strategic locations near the border, to await the Polish-Lithuanian attack. Grand Master knew that Jogaila was intending to invade Prussia, but he had no idea exactly where the invasion would occur, so the idea was to man all the obvious places where the invading armies may enter Prussia, using scouts to try to narrow down the possibilities, with the idea that once the attack actually took place, the scattered forces would race to the invasion point to push back against the incursion.

Now, clearly, the advantage here is with Jogaila. If Jogaila can keep the exact place where he intends to invade Prussia a secret for as long as possible, then he will be in the happy situation of facing only a few scattered Teutonic forces when he enters Prussia. So at the moment, it is Jogaila's priority to disguise his intentions for as long as possible, while it is the Grand Master's priority to discover or guess Jogaila's strategy as quickly as possible, so that his forces have ample opportunity to come together from across west and east Prussia to push back against the invaders.

From the outset, Grand Master Ulrich von Ungingen suspected that Jogaila would run some sort of diversion, to make it appear that he was headed to Prussia from one particular direction while ensuring that the actual invasion occurred in another direction. So when the Grand Master was advised that Jogaila's army was crossing the Vistula River, he jumped up, laughed in a long, knowing, and slightly disturbing way, then examined his map to see where the real Polish attack may be coming from, now that he had spotted the obvious decoy.

Trouble was, this wasn't a decoy at all. It was actually the invasion. Contrary to the Grand Master's belief, the Polish-Lithuanian army hadn't been divided at all. It was one huge

30,000 strong force, and it was in the process of crossing the Vistula River. Once it had done this, it simply had to march due north and eventually it would reach its destination. Marienberg.

Now, it's understandable that the Grand Master made this mistake. There were no bridges across this section of the Vistula, so the Grand Master figured that Jogaila would simply cross a small force of men across the river as a diversion, then move the rest of his army elsewhere. But the Grand Master hadn't considered the fact that Jogaila would order a rather impressive temporary bridge to be constructed over the Vistula. A 500 yard (or nearly half a kilometer) long pontoon bridge, to be exact. A bridge sturdy enough to enable 30,000 men and their horses to use it to cross a rather formidable river, but also of such an impressive design that it could be dismantled, packed up and taken with them once the army had finished crossing, meaning that no evidence was left behind to reveal the fact that a rather large army had just crossed a rather large river.

In fact, this move by Jogaila was so unexpected and so unlikely, that when Imperial peace envoys later told the Grand Master what had taken place, the Grand Master refused to believe them. It just seemed so unlikely that Jogaila could conjure a bridge out of thin air, cross the Vistula, then magic his bridge away again. So when the Grand Master was initially provided with this vital piece of intelligence, he dismissed it out of hand and went back to consulting his maps to try and find where the actual Polish forces might be. It wasn't until the Grand Master received independent confirmation that yes, the entire Polish army had just crossed the Vistula and was marching northwards, that he realized what was going on.

Now, the word marching here is probably a little incorrect. Jogaila was very keen not to give the Grand Master any advantages in his estimation as to where the invaders were heading, so despite the fact that the invading force was massive, Jogaila made sure that the forces traveled along the most unexpected routes possible. He avoided all roads, bridges, and cleared areas. Instead, the army tramped through the forests, along barely visible tracks, and traveled everywhere but in straight, predictable lines. In his book "The Last Years of the Teutonic Knights", William Urban speculates that perhaps even Jogaila's top commanders had no idea where they were going. In the words of William Urban, and I quote, "Each night they would camp in the dense forest, often unsure where they were and unclear as to where they were going. Traveling on tracks rather than roads with paths that wandered around obstacles and towards unseen fords." End quote.

While the invading army was wandering around, apparently directionless, through thick forests and swamps, it made it almost impossible for scouts from the Teutonic Order to work out what was going on. And that's not surprising. If the battle-hardened and wilderness-savvy fighters in the Polish-Lithuanian army had no idea where they were or where they were going, then the scouts watching from the opposing force would be unlikely to make any sense of the situation either.

So the invading army is laboriously making its way northwards in a haphazard, scattered, wilderness-y sort of way. Join me next week as the Grand Master gathers his forces to oppose the invasion. Until next week, bye for now.

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