

Alaska Supplement

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LEGEND OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR (Continued)

The mounted men-at-arms represented the most common class, and they were called "brothers". They were usually assigned two horses each and held many positions, including guard, steward, squire or other support vocations. As the main support staff, they wore black or brown robes and were partially garbed in chain mail or plate mail. The armor was not as complete as the knights. Because of this infrastructure, the warriors were well-trained and very well armed. Even their horses were trained to fight in combat, fully armored. The combination of soldier and monk was also a powerful one, as to the Templar knights, martyrdom in battle was one of the most glorious ways to die.

The Templars were also shrewd tacticians, following the dream of Saint Bernard who had declared that a small force, under the right conditions, could defeat a much larger enemy. One of the key battles in which this was demonstrated was in 1177, at the Battle of Montgisard. The famous Muslim military leader Saladin was attempting to push toward Jerusalem from the south, with a force of 26,000 soldiers. He had pinned the forces of Jerusalem's King Baldwin IV, about 500 knights and their supporters, near the coast, at Ascalon. Eighty Templar knights and their own entourage attempted to reinforce. They met Saladin's troops at Gaza, but were considered too small a force to be worth fighting, so Saladin turned his back on them and headed with his army towards Jerusalem.



FROM THE EDITOR

I would like to encourage all Sir Knights to submit articles, letters, pictures, or comments for inclusion into this supplement. Articles need to be submitted to me by the 1st of the month for the next issue. (May25th for the June issue.)

Once Saladin and his army had moved on, the Templars were able to join King Baldwin's forces, and together they proceeded north along the coast. Saladin had made a key mistake at that point – instead of keeping his forces together, he permitted his army to temporarily spread out and pillage various villages on their way to Jerusalem. The Templars took advantage of this low state of readiness to launch a surprise ambush directly against Saladin and his bodyguard, at Montgisard near Ramla. Saladin's army was spread too thin to adequately defend themselves, and he and his forces were forced to fight a losing battle as they retreated back to the south, ending up with only a tenth of their original number. The battle was not the final one with Saladin, but it bought a year of peace for the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and the victory became a heroic legend.



Another key tactic of the Templars was that of the "squadron charge". A small group of knights and their heavily armed warhorses would gather into a tight unit which would gallop full speed at the enemy lines, with a determination and force of will that made it clear that they would rather commit suicide than fall back. This terrifying onslaught would frequently have the desired result of breaking a hole in the enemy lines, thereby giving the other Crusader forces an advantage.

They would be the force that would ram through the enemy's front lines at the beginning of a battle, or the fighters that would protect the army from the rear. They fought alongside King Louis VII of France, and King Richard I of England.

