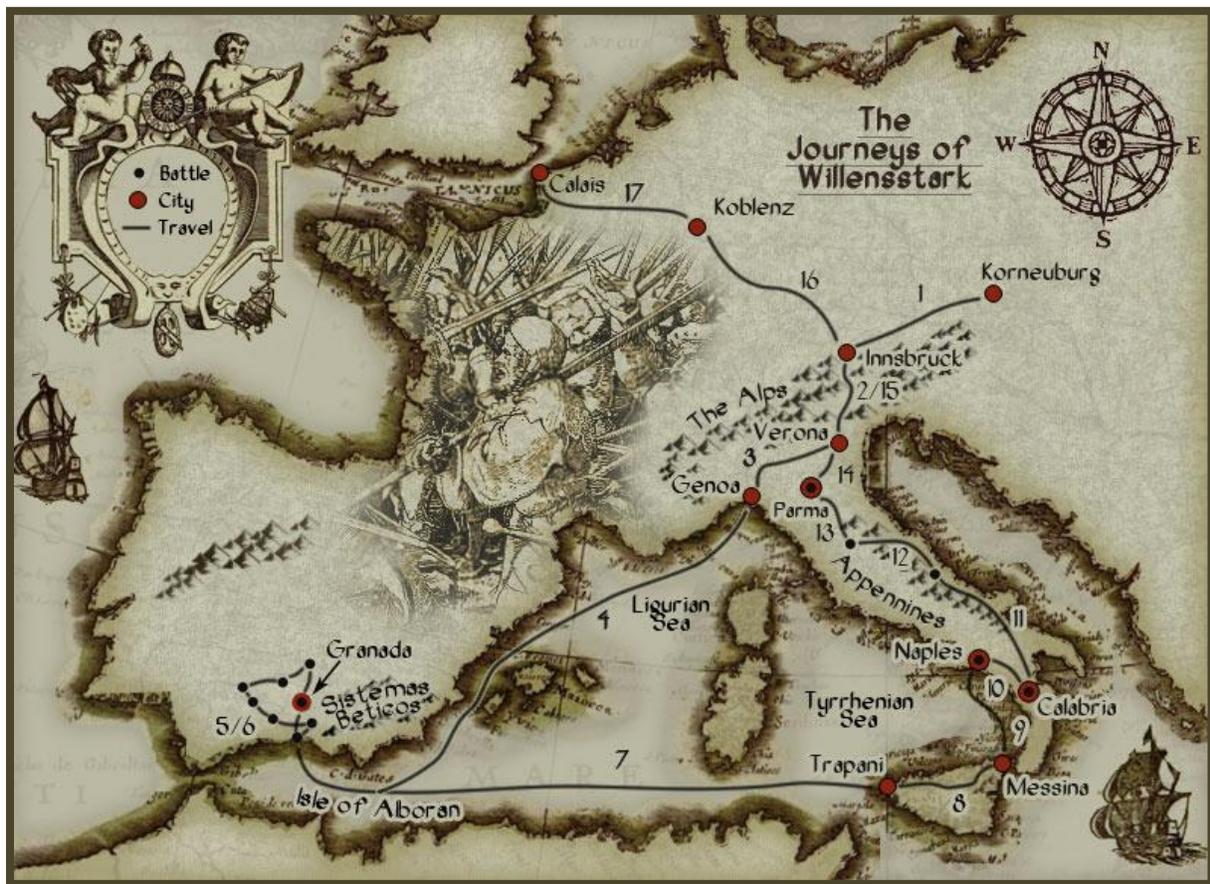


The Journeys of Willensstark

February 1490 - August 1495

By Captain Lothar von Degen

Korneuburg - Willensstark was officially started at a camp by the Danube River 5 miles west of Korneuburg in February of 1490. It consisted of 50 loyal artillery soldiers of German and Austrian heritage who had fought with Sir Degen during his prior 6 years of knighthood in the Austro-Hungarian War.



1. - We followed the southern shore of the Danube River towards the west for about 90 miles, and then turned south-west. Another 153 miles took us to the prosperous trade city of Innsbruck at the foot of the Alps. The journey had taken about 13 days, averaging almost 20 miles per day.

Innsbruck - Nestled in the Inn Valley, situated between the Nordkette, Patscherkofel, and Serles Mountains, we re-supplied in Innsbruck. As residence to The Emperor Frederick III {and later to his son Maxmillian}, we enjoyed a couple nights of good accommodations and celebrative atmosphere.

2. - Departing Innsbruck towards the south, we then took a short ferry ride down the Wipptal River to the Brenner Pass. Following the Brenner Pass for about 130 miles {a journey of 8 days at about 15 miles per day} we crossed the Alps into Italy. Fair weather and a decent road made travel relatively easy.

Verona - Our stay in Verona was short as signs of foul weather behind us hastened our departure.

3. - Heading west to utilize good roads, then turning south towards Genoa, we traveled 120 miles. The trip would have taken only 6 days, but an encounter with a small band of Swiss mercenaries delayed us an additional day. There was no actual combat, rather only verbal conflict, however we heightened our guard and kept ready as a precaution.

Genoa - Reaching the port at Genoa by the Ligurian Sea, we stop for several days to procure rations for the long ship voyage ahead of us. Our scheduled departure was further delayed by a day due to rumors that the notorious "Corsair of Genoa", a pirate of dangerous reputation, was recently seen in the area.

4. - Boarding the ship "Barlemew", we spent the next 19 days skirting the northern coast of the Mediterranean Sea past France and towards southern Spain. Weather conditions and the state of the sea were harsh causing delays and illness with many of the soldiery. Time was made-up once we neared and entered the Isle of Alboran and conditions improved. The voyage crossed about 950 miles, averaging out to about 50 miles per day.

Motril - We landed on the southern coast of Spain at the small port of Motril. Battling our way in, we established a southern foothold on the Emirate of Granada. Less than a typical siege, fighting proceeded in a mostly street-by-street fashion with foot soldiers doing the brunt of the work. We made a base camp here for most of our operations in Granada to help defend against possible Moorish reinforcements coming from across the Isle. The date is April in the year 1490.

5. - During the following year, temporarily ceasing during the winter months of November through January, we participated in a series of 6 other town sieges. Enroute to the siege sites we continued our ferma with King Ferdinand's policy of "area destruction" which was intended to cut Moorish resources and make their resistance less sustainable. Clearing fields of food crops and felling all trees in the territory was however interrupted by consistent skirmishes with King Boabdil's light cavalry forces. The tactic was to encircle Granada and isolate it before the primary siege, which would come one year later. Our path was as follows: First we headed northeast along the western edge of the Sistemas Beticos for 12 miles to Orgiva. Second, we cut eastward 47 miles to assault Alhama. Next was Loja about 30 miles northwest, then Iznajar 14 miles northwest of there. Turning east, we traveled 52 miles to hit Moclin. Finally, we went a further 40 miles northeast to Iznalloz. All incidents ended in victory and we suffered few losses. Each siege progressed much in the same way by starting with a bombardment of artillery, then routing the site with foot soldiers once defenses were weakened.

Granada - Stationing ourselves outside Granada in the company of many thousands of allied combatants, we prepared ourselves for the final grand siege of Granada itself. The siege was to last 8 months until, broken by our incessant attacks and their own internal conflicts amongst commanders, Granada finally fell. Due to our pride in what was believed to be participation in a righteous war, as well

as our relatively low casualties, Captain von Degen adopted the common phrase of "do right and fear no man" as the Willensstark company motto. The date at the beginning of the siege was April of the year 1491.

6. - Taking a direct southerly route 60 miles back to Motril, we resupplied, collected our payments, and chartered the ship "la Katerine" to take us out of Spain. Captain von Degen delayed little more than a month to give the company a well-deserved rest period and to obtain the supplies for the following risky sea voyage. Officers he knew had spoken of good opportunities of employment in Sicily.

7. - The voyage aboard "la Katerine" crossed approximately 855 miles along the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea through waters frequented by Moorish traders of gold, ivory, and slaves. Fair winds and moderate weather made travel easier however, and we were able to make the trip in just 15 days. Enemy ships were sighted on numerous occasions, but no conflicts arose. Unanticipated deterioration of food stocks cut meals to minimal. Once the Tyrrhenian Sea was reached, we found our nearest port.

Trapani - Contrary to the wishes of some within the company, Captain von Degen did not delay at Trapani and chose instead to move the company eastward where employment was more promising.

8. - The eastward journey across Sicily to the large and famous port of Messina took 6 days to travel 176 miles, an average of almost 30 miles per day.

Messina - We secured a ferma of 20 months as city guards at Messina. Pay was generous and there was little danger so profits were high. In May of 1492 King Ferdinand announced the compulsory leave of all Jews from the island of Sicily by August of the same year. As most Jews were leaving via Messina by boat to Naples where they were welcome, we witnessed much confusion and criminality during this time as fervent loyalists attempted everything they could, including theft, ransom, trickery, and piracy to glean whatever wealth they could from Jewish immigrants. Minimal activity led to apathy among some of the company, which caused several incidents of ill-discipline.

9. - The company, then in good shape from comparatively light duties, prepared to move on. News had arrived that the French King Charles VIII was invading Italy from the north and so there was a call for able mercenaries to help in the defense of the peninsula. We caught a ship in September of 1493, the "Cog Thomas", that took us 200 miles to Naples in less than 4 days.

Naples - We had arrived in Naples about 17 months before the French. During that time, we worked as city guards and prepared for the inevitable siege to come. The French armies, consisting of some 25,000 troops, moved fast and furiously through Italy causing uncommonly brutal destruction along the way. When they arrived at Naples in February of the year 1495 the city, much to Captain von Degen's displeasure, they surrendered after minimal conflict. Before the surrender was made official, Willensstark Company evacuated rather than submit. The city was there shortly after sacked. Massive outbreaks of the "French Disease" {syphilis} hastened our departure.

10. - Leaving the French behind us, we took the roads southeast for 164 miles to Calabria, a trip of 8 days. Upon arriving, we learned that the French had somehow already conquered it. Surrounded by

enemy forces and short on supplies, we had little choice but to set camp and hold as long as we could until reinforcements could hopefully arrive. We held 4 months on minimal rations amidst constant skirmishes. It was the truest test of our endurance and wills that we ever had. No less than half the company was lost.

Calabria - In late June of 1495 Spanish forces came from Messina and attacked Calabria. We participated only long enough to take advantage of fresh supplies, then hastily withdrew, later learning that the French had gained another victory in the battle they called Seminara.

11. - With the French temporarily distracted, we fled north along the eastern coast for 294 miles to Teramo in a scant 9 days, averaging a little more than 30 miles per day. Spotting our approach the French garrison reacted quickly by sending 16 lances of mixed cavalry against us. Although outnumbered and in weakened condition we withheld, then pushed our way through while pillaging the town for much needed supplies.

12. - To maintain our dwindling endurance we took the next 141 miles to Florence at an easier pace of 15 miles per day. Even crossing the Appennino we still made it in about 9 days and joined with militia from the League of Venice to drive out remaining French forces in the area. The offensive lasted 3 days during which we were able to improve our condition. We surprisingly suffered no losses of soldiers, but the baggage train was dishonorably attacked, causing the deaths of several company members.

13. - Traveling 83 miles to Parma at an accelerated pace of 25 miles per day, we joined with League forces who were preparing to do battle near Parma. It took just over 3 days.

Parma - On the first of July we encamped with League forces on the right side of the Taro River. French forces, divided in half by Charles VIII who fled to protect his line of invasion, positioned on the left side of the river. The 6th of July 1495 was the battle called Fornovo in which our compatriots and we scored a decisive victory over the French. Combat was, however difficult due to mud and rocks made slippery by rain. This battle turned the tide of the Neapolitan War and would soon act to expel the French from the Italian peninsula. Regaining some of our lost numbers, and gaining substantial plunder from the French who were laden with booty from their conquests, we resupplied ourselves amply for our journeys ahead.

14. -Our heading was then northeast. It was 50 miles to Verona, which would be our gate back to the Brenner Pass. The trip was without incident and we made it in only 2 days.

Verona {returned} - We spent the night in Verona and occupied every room available at local inns so that each company member could be rewarded for their great labors with a bed and a roof before our trek across the Alps. The rooms were paid for out of Captain von Degen's personal funds.

15. - Our second 130 miles through the Alps progressed at a comfortable pace of 12 miles per day, 11 days of travel, to Innsbruck.

Innsbruck {returned} - Good cheer and 2 days of rest in the city where then Emperor Maximilian {since 1493} of the Holy Roman Empire was residing. Incidents of drunkenness and poor discipline cut the rest

period short from the 4 days that were originally planned. Hearing of the possibility of war breaking out in the far north, rumors that had been circulating ever since Queen Porothea of Brandenburg's visit to Innsbruck years ago, Captain von Degen decided to cease employment in the Mediterranean and try elsewhere.

16. - The 376 miles to Koblenz was through both familiar and friendly territory. Supplies could be obtained periodically from villages enroute and there was little danger of confrontations. Progression over good roads was a swift 32 miles per day. The trip to Captain von Degen's home city only took 12 days in total.

Koblenz - Reaching Captain von Degen's home city, Willensstark received confirmation that the Kalmar Union of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden was in dispute. A treaty between Russia and King Hans against Sweden had been signed less than two years prior, and so war would very soon be inevitable.

17. - Going 238 miles westward to Calais at our previous fast pace, we made the journey in about a one week despite heavy rains and unusually cool temperatures.

Calais - Now dividing our forces into two factions, one to wait at the boarder of Denmark and the other {a small contingent including Captain von Degen and minimal accompaniment} to scout for and train much needed new recruits. Captain von Degen sets camp outside of the English port and begins his plans for the future.

THE FUTURE PLANS - We will be accepting employment from Sweden against their foes before the end of the year. Travel to Vyborg, where they are asking for 500 landsknechts to strengthen their militia force, is already being planned. It is rumored that we will be leaving within a month if adequate reinforcements can be hired.