

## BLUEBEARD BRAVE

The English along with their Anglo-Burgundian allies continued to conquer all but central and southeastern France, territory still considered the Dauphin's. De Rais along with his military compatriots tried to keep it that way. The rest of the country had been picked clean by war. Destruction and carnage prevailed and shaped the landscape. Savagery rent the kingdom asunder. The terrified populace found their lives ruined, riven as they were tortured and terrorized by the English. The stench of death poisoned the air.

Using a chevauchee or horse charge, groups of English mounted soldiers brutalized France. This cavalry of a few hundred men totally disrupted rural society, creating economic havoc. They rode through the countryside wasting enemy territory. Farmlands, crops were senselessly obliterated; peasants murdered; animals slaughtered; bridges smashed; villages scorched. Smoke blackened total regions. In some places the English impaled inhabitants on stakes and castrated the males dangling on these spikes. They smashed in the heads of toddlers, roasted people alive and forced their families to eat their flesh.

Called Godons (Goddamns) by the French, the English also pillaged unfortified towns and manors. Desperate bourgeois dropped heavy objects on the soldiers from the upper stories of their homes. Some English were killed, some injured but not enough to make a difference. The Goddamns continued to rape, flog, maim and murder citizens. They threw residents off the roofs

of their homes, dumping their mangled bodies into open sewers and ditches when they could not exhort valuables.

One English company made a living from capturing castles, then selling them back to their original owners. Another group of Goddamns controlled forty strongholds, plundering at will from Orleans to Vezelay, southeast of Paris. Chevauchee became very profitable for the English. They acquired vast amounts of booty, including a great number of valuable horses. These raids had political significance as well in that they called into question the Valois capacity to defend their land and protect their people.

Normandy, one of the first provinces occupied by the Goddamns, suffered the most. Resentment grew among peasants, laborers, monks, merchants, country gentlemen and aristocrats, including Roger de Bricqueville's father. (Roger was taken in by de Craon and de Rais after the English appropriated his family lands.) A guerilla movement arose against the English among all segments of the population. Trained dogs hunted down these Norman resistance fighters. Any male or female caught was buried alive in heaps of manure or executed. The Goddamns piled the dead on top each other, leaving their carcasses to rot in public squares.

In this Hundred Years War wasted earth, overall poverty and the constant fear of death dispersed thousands from their homes throughout France and reduced them to living scarecrows. Misery and despair were etched in their pinched faces; many were sick, tormented by rickets.<sup>1</sup> Even thieves became apprehensive of the emaciated, ragtag souls wandering over the land in

search of food.<sup>2</sup> Vast clouds of circling black crows signaled their every move. These noisy flocks with their piercing caws feasted well when they spotted the dead. So did wolves.

Hedges took over in many towns; houses were overgrown with weeds. Main thoroughfares sprouted high grasses. The only inhabitants of immense areas of France were wild boar, as vicious as the one which killed Gilles de Rais's father in the forests of Champtoce. Five residents lived in Limoges. One half the population of Lyon fled beyond France's borders into the Holy Roman Empire. Delegates from the University of Paris proclaimed that if an end to the war was not forthcoming, the French would have to leave France.<sup>3</sup>

As the Goddamns advanced into the Dauphin's lands, de Rais took part in fights to the death in the Anjou province, ruled by the Dauphin's mother-in-law. Here he received the stimulation, the thrills he constantly craved, for the battles were savage. Along with other young warriors, Gilles brazenly assaulted the strongholds secured by the English. These knights had the support of the head of the Angevin resistance, a knowledgeable, spirited powerhouse named Amboise de Lore, who brought his remarkable troop of men with him. These were skillful scouts and skirmishers. The rash fraternity of brothers at arms with de Lore's assistance brazenly retook the renowned fortresses of Rainefort, Lude and Malicorne. [Read More](#)

Two lanes lined with grand cypress led up to Rainefort Castle; a sultry June sun shone directly on the small leaves, the rounded cones of the fine trees which whispered quietly together in a summery breeze. Crickets made warm chirping sounds while they rubbed their front wings

together underneath the cypress. Suddenly de Rais's forces appeared on the pathways, luring the Goddamns out of the Rainfort fortification. To the English, they seemed to be a very small troop that could easily be destroyed. But as soon as the encounter began, the rest of de Rais's men emerged. Braying with fury, they hacked, tore, sliced and skewered their enemy with fearsome bladed halberds and piked spontoons. These weapons designed to kill in close combat, used by the English as well, brought both sides so near to each other they could look into the eyes of their opponent, smell each other's rancid breath. Injured French and English soldiers gibbering in terror and pain tried to crawl away from the battle, collectively dragging themselves through the blood soaked earth over the dead bodies.

A week before, Gilles had sent in sappers to undermine the structure at Rainefort. These men dug tunnels underneath three corners of the Castle wall strengthening their work with wood brought in surreptitiously from the surrounding countryside. As the battle for Rainefort progressed the worn-out sappers surfaced. They set the wood on fire which caused the tunnels to collapse and the heavy corner walls to become severely damaged.

Overwhelmed by the numerous French who continued to tear yard after yard of ground from them, the Goddamns stampeded to the crumbling battlements. There they observed the devastation which had already occurred, their fallen comrades' bloating bodies below, the disintegrating stronghold affording scant protection.

Lax as well as overconfident because of their Country's many victories throughout France, the English at Raineforte had made no provision for a siege, idly waiting for additional supplies. Now the terror-stricken soldiers faced a desperate predicament. If the Castle walls stabilized, they still knew the French attackers could starve them to death over a period of weeks due to a limited amount of food on hand. Worst of all Raineforte only had one well with suitable drinking water. Standing on the parapets of the towers the Goddamns had no choice. They yelled down to the French. If the French would halt their attack, the Goddamns offered to vacate the Castle in the event that their reinforcements, soldiers and rations, did not arrive the next day which they told the French they anticipated. The English even handed over some of their men as hostages to honor their pledge. Additional troops did not appear and the French, including de Rais, let the English leave Rainefort as they promised taking their injured with them.

Next Gilles de Rais achieved an astonishing personal victory at Lude. He first directed the battle from a ridge near the Castle just after sunrise as the sky filled with strong red hues, colors portending the turbulence to follow. He raised his sword in the air, the signal for the battle to begin. The silence of the early, carnelian morning was shattered as his iron culverins battered the stronghold without relief from the neighboring hills. In addition to this mad repetitiveness from the cannons, two massive catapults sent corpses of livestock, stone and burning wood over the walls into the fortification. Gilles used these old fashioned, medieval weapons, stationing them one thousand feet from the Castle. They hit the defenders with devastating accuracy, often smashing heads, scattering body pieces and setting sections of the Castle on fire. Gilles had carefully planned his attack; diverse bombardments came from all directions stunning the tense

survivors, many splattered with their colleagues' blood and severed limbs. Some of the dead, looking as though they were about to participate in a retreat, had fallen on top of each other with their eyes and mouths open.

After an hour of observing the destruction he had wrought, the enemy suffering, the turreted grey towers and walls disappearing in vast banks of smoke, an exhilarated de Rais dismounted from his chestnut destrier. He gave the horse, extremely agitated by the intense cannon fire and whizzing missiles, to his squire who led it away.

De Rais's relentless maneuvers now afforded his ground troops the opportunity to invade the fortification. Along with his men he began a charge on foot through the choking clouds of smoke. With fists pumped in the air, their fiery battle roars reverberating throughout the Castle situated above them, they bolted toward the stronghold, ready to fight, easily securing scaling ladders onto the weakened six-towered fortification. With shields and new helmets, paid for by de Rais and forged to withstand the rocks and boiling water thrown down upon them, his troop met with scant opposition as they clambered up the walls.

Gilles entered the Castle first. He immediately encountered the English commander, Blackburn, a crusty colossus. Lunging, smiting, stabbing, the two battled in furious hand-to-hand combat. Winded, gasping for breath, the mighty giant, Blackburn, still loudly roared out and vowed to fight to the death. Gilles obliged. His men at arms reported that de Rais raised his weapon above his head then brought it down with great force, thrusting his single - handed

sword through Blackburn's throat. With one thwack Gilles split Blackburn in half. Following de Rais's example, his troop began to lop off the heads and the appendages of the dazed enemy without mercy; they bruised, tore, ripped and slaughtered their foe. The frightened English left standing gave up their arms after seeing their leader as well as their comrades butchered. Quivering wrecks, they remained grief-stricken, shocked by what occurred. Some wet themselves in their nervousness.

#### Chapter Three: BLUEBEARD BRAVE

<sup>1</sup>Manchester, William Raymond. (1993) A World Lit only by Fire. The Medieval Mind and The Renaissance, Portrait of an Age. Boston, Massachusetts: Little Brown and Company, p.5.

<sup>2</sup>Vincent, A. L.and Binns, Clare. (1926) Gilles de Rais:The original Bluebeard. London, England: A.M. Philpot LTD., p.88.

<sup>3</sup>Lewis, D.B.Wyndham. (1952) The Soul of Marshall Gilles De Raiz, with some account of his life and times, his abominable crimes and his expiation. London, England: Eyre and Spottiswoode, p.30.