

# **Sharpe's Battle: Richard Sharpe and the Battle of Fuentes de Onoro, May 1811 Study Guide**

**Sharpe's Battle: Richard Sharpe and the Battle of Fuentes de Onoro, May 1811 by Bernard Cornwell**

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# Plot Summary

Sharpe's Battle is a detailed description of Richard Sharpe's life for a few days in May 1811. Sharpe is a rifleman officer in the British army fighting Napoleon's forces. Sharpe manages to enrage a French general who vows to get him and gets caught in politics that could ruin his career. Sharpe is given charge of the Real Compañía Irlandesa, the guard for the Spanish king, and he is determined to turn them into soldiers against his superiors' desires. As thousands of French converge on a tiny village, Sharpe's hope for stopping the court of inquiry and restoring his honor depends on leading these men to special glory on the battlefield.

Richard Sharpe and a group of his riflemen stumble onto a village that the French brigade under the command of General Guy Loup has ransacked, murdering all but one woman. The pile of dead children, stacked like animals, and catching two of the French in the act of raping a young woman enrage Sharpe. He takes the two French prisoner, determined to execute them for their crimes. Loup, their commander, rides up under a flag of truce and asks for the two men. Sharpe sets up a firing squad and kills them in front of Loup. Loup leaves vowing he will find and kill Sharpe.

At the British base, Major Michael Hogan informs Wellington that the King of Spain has sent his guard, the Real Compañía Irlandesa to join the British in the fight against the French. Both men see it as a set-up and believe that the Real Compañía Irlandesa's real mission is to sabotage the British efforts. They place Sharpe in charge of the guard and send them off to San Isidor, a deserted crumbling fortress of no tactical value.

Pierre Ducos, a French intelligence officer, and Juanita de Elia wait for Guy Loup at the Ciudad Rodrigo. He and de Elia will be working to undermine British troops by attempting to incite the Irish to rebellion. Their means will be false newspaper articles delineating British atrocities against the Irish people at home.

Wellington also sends a Portuguese battalion to San Isidoro to keep an eye on the Real Compañía Irlandesa. Though Sharpe warns the Portuguese commander that he believes Loup will attack them, the commander does not heed his words as well as he should. The night the Portuguese arrive, Loup attacks and though most of the Real Compañía Irlandesa men survive three quarters of the Portuguese are slaughtered.

Hogan appears at San Isidoro and informs Sharpe that Runciman, the liaison between the Real Compañía Irlandesa and the British will be sacrificed to a court of inquiry to satisfy the Spanish and the Portuguese. Later, Sharpe is also called to task for shooting the two prisoners and inciting Loup to a personal vendetta. He too will be sacrificed for political expediency.

Sharpe is put on administrative duties with the ammunition depot and he spends much time trying to get into the fighting in order to save himself from the court of inquiry. As the French are within a short distance of overrunning the British position and thoroughly annihilating them, Sharpe receives permission via Runciman, to take the Real



Compañía Irlandesa and counterattack the French. They are able to push the French back and Sharpe wins a hand to hand combat with Loup resulting in Loup's death. The court of inquiry is cancelled and Sharpe and Runciman's careers are saved, as is the British position in Spain.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Richard Sharpe is assigned to the Real Compañía Irlandesa of His Most Catholic Majesty's household guard allegedly to train them to be better soldiers. His real purpose is to make life so miserable for them that they desert and return to the king of Spain. He is assigned to a crumbling, barely usable fortress, San Isidro. Though a number of men desert the first two nights, the situation which is hoped for by Wellington and Hogan, Sharpe's natural stubbornness kicks in and he decides he will turn the for show troops into true fighting soldiers. At the start of the book, Sharpe enrages a French general and that begins a feud between the two which threatens Sharpe's career and reputation.

Richard Sharpe is lost and crumbles the map given him by Major Hogan into a small ball. Sergeant Harper, his good friend and best soldier in the company, is little help. He launches into a story of his grand-da being lost and a bullock going over a cliff. Sharpe tells Harper to shut up and calls for Lieutenant Harry Price to help him. Price, unfortunately, can read maps no better than Sharpe. As he debates what to do, a lookout calls softly for Sharpe to check out a soldier on the road below them. The man dismounts, urinates, and rides away when done. Sharpe and Price climb a hill and peer over. Two hundred feet below them a small detachment of French soldiers sit in an abandoned settlement. Sharpe, being out-numbered and needing to move on, decides to ignore them until a woman's scream breaks the silence.

Sharpe orders his men in, leaving sharpshooters on the ridge. Most of the French are gone when they arrive except for two men who are raping a young Spanish girl in one of the cottages. One Frenchman runs out with no trousers and surrenders. Sharpe enters the cottage and kicks the other one in the genitals and hands the girl her dress. Sharpe and Harper enter the rest of the cottages and find a number of Spanish civilians have been slaughtered, some tortured and raped and many of them children. Sharpe gathers his men and prepares to execute the two Frenchmen who are left.

At the sound of hoof beats on the dusty road, Sharpe turns and sees four French soldiers bearing a white truce flag coming towards them. The leader introduces himself as General Guy Loup and demands his men be handed over to him. Sharpe accuses the man of murder and tells him he plans to execute the two prisoners. The General demands he not and cites rules of war. Sharpe tells him he doesn't need lessons in the rules of war from a murderer. He has the two prisoners put up against a wall and shot. Loup, enraged by the act, swears to Sharpe he will get him no matter what. Sharpe gives him the two fingered salute the English bowmen at Agincourt invented when the French had threatened to cut off their bowstring fingers and walks away.

Elsewhere, Major Hogan approaches General Wellington with a letter. His face shows that he is not pleased with the contents and the General grimaces as he reaches for the correspondence. It seems the King of Spain has sent his Royal Guard to Wellington as



a good will gesture that he is doing in part to free his country. Not only is the guard poorly trained and most likely not sympathetic to fighting with the British, but the king has sent no funds for their upkeep and pay.

Wellington and Hogan decide the best way to handle the situation diplomatically is to make it so miserable for the guard that the men desert in droves and thus the problem disappears. They both agree the best man for the job is Richard Sharpe and decide to assign him to babysitting those troops while pretending to drill them into a fighting unit. Unknown to them, the commanding officer, Lord Kiely, is a French sympathizer and plans to use the unit to undermine the British troops. Helping him will be Doña Juanita de Elia, another Spaniard who is working with the French, and Pierre Ducos a French Intelligence Officer. That Elia begins an affair with General Loup also complicates the situation.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

Sharpe, one of the best British tacticians, can't seem to read the map and has become hopelessly lost. This is a good example of a hero having strengths and weaknesses and that no man can do everything well. His friend, Sergeant Harper, makes matters worse by telling stories about his grand-da and it is a good indication of Sharpe's character that he mostly takes the jesting in good humor. The fact that there is a friendship between an officer and an enlisted man also says something about Sharpe's character - that a man's worth is not based on his rank or position in life.

Doña Elia is said to sleep with any soldier who appeals to her and when she meets Loup she is immediately attracted to him. The fact that she wears men's clothing, most often a uniform, is interesting since one would think a woman who acts like she'd rather be a man would not be so promiscuous with men.

General Loup is an arrogant, cruel man who kills and tortures not only soldiers but women and children. He not only allows his men to rape but encourages it. In modern day warfare, he would most likely be convicted of war crimes. As Sharpe is leaving the village where he meets Loup, a lone wolf howls in the distance and Sharpe feels chills running down his back. This is a good example of foreshadow that Sharpe and Loup will meet again.

The symbolism of Loup's name, meaning wolf in French, is convenient for the story. However, technically speaking it is a poor metaphor because wolves do not kill for pleasure as does General Loup.

The political manipulation that occurs throughout the book begins immediately with the arrival of the Real Compañía Irlandesa of His Most Catholic Majesty's household guard, the useless and poorly prepared royal guard of the Spanish King. The British cannot refuse the gesture since they need the treaty between Spain and England to stand, yet they know that the Real Compañía Irlandesa will not only be a nuisance but also could be detrimental to the British battle readiness.



It is ironic that men who participate in the rape of enemy women and consider it nothing would be outraged if the enemy came to their country and raped their women. Sharpe alludes to this when General Loup says all is fair in war and rape is just another weapon. Sharpe tells him he will remember this when he arrives in France when the British beat Napoleon.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

At the Ciudad Rodrigo, Pierre Ducos, a French Intelligence agent and Napoleon's man in Spain, and Juanita de Elia wait, him patiently and her with a tense restlessness for General Guy Loop. As men ride into the courtyard, Ducos points out Loup and de Elia stares, appreciating the way he sits his horse. She will be working with Loup to undermine the British army in Spain. Though her feminine weapons do not work on Ducos she hopes, as Loup enters the room, they will work on him for she is immediately attracted. As Loup looks her over, it is obvious the attraction is mutual.

Loup talks about his encounter with Sharpe and tells Ducos he wants the man dead. Ducos disapproves of private rivalries since he feels they interfere with the mission, but he knows Loup is one of the best soldiers and leaders in Spain. If he is to hand the country to Napoleon, he will need Loup on his side and working for him.

Badajoz and Ciudad Rodrigo were the two most important fortresses in Spain, called the Keys to Spain by the French and they were both now in the hands of the French. However, there was a third fortress, the Almeida which provided a guard by being behind the lines of any British attempting to take the two Keys.

Juanita's job was to join the Real Compañía Irlandesa, pretending to be the commanding officer, Lord Kiely's betrothed and follow Ducos's plan to split the British forces along national lines. She and Loup leave together to spend the night planning and enjoying each other's company in bed.

Sharpe meets Colonel Claud Runciman, the liaison officer between the British forces and the Real Compañía Irlandesa. He is a large man who would rather be eating than fighting and he talks with Sharpe about the army and the time he spent in Ireland. He considers his appointment as liaison as an honor bestowed and is secretly pleased that someone has taken some notice of him. He currently holds the post of Wagon Master General and has hinted at Sharpe that General would be a good title for him. Though he does the same to Hogan, Hogan pretends to misunderstand and keeps calling him Wagon Master.

Sharpe meets the Real Compañía Irlandesa and is dismayed at their lack of discipline, weapons that are for the most part useless and their assertion that they are excellent soldiers. Their commanding officer, Lord Kiely, takes offense at Sharpe's telling his soldiers to close ranks and be ready for inspection. Sharpe manages to insult him with a comment about officers being the first to be killed in battle. Hogan is not pleased by Sharpe's interaction with Kiely either. Father Sarsfield the chaplain, however, is quite impressed and pleased to meet someone who has captured a French eagle.





The Real Compañía Irlandesa arrive at San Isidoro and the men grumble at the crumbling fort and the conditions of the barracks. They complain about being stuck in the middle of nowhere and about having to drill and practice battle formations. To make matters worse, Loup has learned that Sharpe is there with the Real Compañía Irlandesa and he makes future plans to attack and kill Sharpe.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

It is unclear at this point, and indeed at any point, what Dona Juanita de Elia's motivations are for working with the French against her own country. She does display a fanaticism that one would associate more often with strong nationalistic feelings. It is never known why her fanaticism is focused on a country not of her birth or upbringing.

When General Loup speaks of Sharpe with much rage, we find out that it is not the death of the two men that enrages him, although he believes it was no death for a soldier, but that someone had defied him and gotten the better of him. It seems to be more of a testosterone contest than actual grief at the deaths.

The sexual innuendo between Juanita and Loup uses a common metaphor of riding a horse. Though the meaning is clear, it is lackluster writing to use such a common metaphor.

When Sharpe meets the commandeering officers of the Real Compañía Irlandesa he is dismayed by their attitude. He is against their philosophy that soldiers do not need to know how to fight, but they need to know how to die. Sharpe assures them if they know how to fight, they might not need to know how to die. He finishes the conversation by telling the officers that the best way to win a battle is to kill the officers first. When he claims that all bad officers, no matter whose side the man is on, need to die so that soldiers don't have to, he insults every officer there. The implied threat is that he will not tolerate poor officers whose men are slaughtered due to incompetency. This, of course, gets him in trouble with Michael Hogan who is playing a political game more than a military one.

When the Real Compañía Irlandesa arrives at San Isidoro, the men are angry and feel betrayed. The first two nights, a number of them desert which is what Hogan had intended. Though it is Hogan and Wellington's plan that the men all desert and get the Real Compañía Irlandesa out of the British army, Sharpe digs in with stubbornness and decides he is actually going to teach the men to fight.

Sharpe's primary mistake in the first two chapters had been antagonizing Loup to the degree that the General would come after the Real Compañía Irlandesa just to get to Sharpe. These men, whom Sharpe intends to keep alive, will face overwhelming odds against battle hardened veterans because Sharpe has lost his temper with Loup. On the other hand, the fact that the two men Sharpe executed had not only been raping women but had been part of a group that slaughtered children and babies, seems to be solid enough mitigation for him to execute prisoners.



# Summary for Chapter 3

## Summary for Chapter 3 Summary

On the first night, 11 men from the Real Compañía Irlandesa desert and 8 desert on the second night. Sharpe is worried about how to stop the desertions. He has a conversation with Captain Donaju, the one officer whom Sharpe respects. Sharpe finds out that Kiely is commander of the Real Compañía Irlandesa by virtue of his birth, although Donaju concedes that Kiely is an excellent swordsman and detests the French. Donaju also shrewdly suggests that the British want the men to desert.

Kiely barely speaks in the morning until he has taken in enough alcohol to be moderately drunk and is of little use in training the men. Sharpe is surprised, when speaking with Kiely, to find that Kiely actually wants to fight the French. He claims the men are deserting because they are bored, under-valued and feel betrayed and that they are not poor soldiers but out of practice. Sharpe tells him it is no wonder the men are deserting when he hears Kiely's philosophy about fighting, that it is not to survive but to live on in history in glory.

Dona Juanita de Elia arrives galloping across the plains with some of Loup's men supposedly chasing her. As she gallops towards San Isidore, Kiely and some others run towards her to save her from the French. No one at that moment realizes that her flight is staged. Kiely challenges one of the men chasing her to a duel and he loses his sword momentarily in the fight. Juanita shoots the man and ends the duel without honor.

Sharpe meets with El Castrador, a partisan who castrates any French prisoners he takes. He is well known in the area by both the French and the Spanish. Sharpe is able to see him due to his wife Teresa's name. He asks El Castrador to capture two deserters that night, mutilate and kill them and leave them where they can be found. The next morning the bodies of the two men are found and Sharpe makes the men stand in formation and tells them that Loup is doing this and this is the likely outcome for any deserters, so they should desert only if they wish to end up like those two men.

Sharpe has a meeting with Runciman and convinces the Wagon Master to appropriate some muskets for the troops, because his request to British headquarters has been turned down. The British have no wish to supply guns to troops they do not trust and who they wish to have desert.

## Summary for Chapter 3 Analysis

Sharpe's goals and his superiors' goals are in direct conflict. Wellington and Hogan wish to see the Spanish guard members desert en masse and they have little concern as to where the men might go or what happens to them. As we saw in Chapter 2, any deserters found by Loup who are unwilling to fight for the French are killed. The problem, which occurs often in the Sharpe books, is in actuality a conflict between



politics and morals. To Sharpe, it is the right and moral action to train these men to fight well enough that they might survive combat. Politically, to his superiors, these men cannot be trusted not to be agents of the French. Sharpe's retort is, of course, that it is not to the common soldiers, but to the officers one should look for treachery. Although an officer himself, Sharpe, having come up through the ranks, has a unique understanding of the motivations of the enlisted soldier and not altogether positive experiences with officers and nobility. It is the experience of having been both enlisted and officer that gives Sharpe this rare insight. It is rare because, in Britain during this era, an enlisted man becoming an officer was an almost unheard of event.

Dona de Elia has arrived at San Isidoro to sow her seeds of discontent and disharmony. Her goal is to split the British ranks so that the Irish, a nationality which comprises a large part of the army, and the British are distrustful of each other. Her morals are dubious at best and when she shoots the French soldier who is fighting with Kiely, it is obvious she does not care whether she is right or wrong or even if anyone believes her explanation that the dragoon had been reaching for his gun. As a woman who is attractive and dynamic, she has little cause to worry about being questioned by the majority of the men, including the officers. Sharpe, although a man who appreciates women and pursues them industriously, is not so taken with her face and form that he trusts her. He finds it incredulous that she has been able to escape the French if they do not want her to be in San Isidoro. He also understands immediately that she has hostile feelings towards him though he does not know the basis for them.

General Runciman, when first introduced, seems to be a simple man with below average intelligence and little to recommend him. Sharpe is able to manipulate him into ordering muskets and doing other favors that are negligible but, to Sharpe, vital to the mission since he wants the mission to be successful. Later, as more of Runciman's personality and honor is seen, he becomes a more complex character who truly wants to do his duty and is willing to lose his honor and position rather than lie.

Sharpe's cure for desertion is harsh. He has two deserters caught and mutilated in order to frighten the rest of the unit into staying. This certainly borders on murder and can be seen as either one of Sharpe's weaknesses that he is willing to sacrifice two for the others or it can be seen in view of collateral damage for the greater good. Certainly, such an action as setting up two deserters to suffer in the extreme shows Sharpe as a complex character with both good and bad qualities.



# Summary for Chapter 4

## Summary for Chapter 4 Summary

Father Sarsfield and Captain Donaju come to speak to Sharpe about a morale problem. It seems newspapers from America are circulating news of atrocities done to the Irish by the British. Since the Real Compañía Irlandesa is composed of Irish, the men are feeling uneasy and angry towards the British. Sharpe suggests that the accounts are false. He reasons that given the number of Irish recruits who arrive regularly, the fact that none of them have mentioned rape, murder and riots in Ireland means that the American paper has printed a false story. He suggests that Captain Donaju go to the British base and interview some recent Irish arrivals to verify the story. Father Sarsfield volunteers to go also. Harper is happy to believe the newspaper accounts are false but he isn't entirely convinced. Sharpe tells him they have worse things to worry about than Ireland, because Loup is going to attack.

The Portuguese battalion arrives without any advance notice and Sharpe meets with their commander, Colonel Oliveira, a thin-faced man who seems competent. Sharpe talks to Oliveira about Loup and about why the battalion has come to San Isidora. He finds out that they are there mainly to watch the Real Compañía Irlandesa but will fight if the fort is attacked. Sharpe stresses to Oliveira that Loup is coming and to get his men to the barracks if an attack does occur.

Much to Sharpe's delight, an old friend of his, Thomas Garrard, is a captain with the battalion and they speak of old times together.

That night, as Thompson is leaving the barracks to go to the latrine, he is shot in the head. Loup is there and the French have the way to the barracks blocked. Sharpe, Harper and the others fight their way to the barracks in which most of the women and children are lodged and bar the door. The barracks has been prepared with loopholes for shooting and the soldiers begin to take a toll on the French. The French block the holes and climb to the roof. Harper is able to get through a vent hole and begins to slaughter the French on the roof. Even with a fierce defense, it is obvious to Sharpe the battle will be lost. Suddenly a loud explosion rocks the barracks and screams of pain are heard outside. The two wagons of ammunition the Portuguese brought have been blown up and it is nearly sunrise. The French leave before reinforcements for the British arrive.

Colonel Oliveira is dead. General Loup had killed him when he tried to surrender his men, but the Portuguese colors were not taken. Those who have survived the night begin to gradually return to the fort.



## Summary for Chapter 4 Analysis

Pierre Ducos's scheme is now becoming evident - to distribute fake newspapers which report unrest and atrocities in Ireland. It is an ingenious way to push the history of distrust between the British and the Irish into full blown civil war and fighting within the British army.

The arrival of the Portuguese battalion is a political statement by the British. They don't trust the Spanish troops and they want a larger group of troops to watch them. Sharpe warns the commanding officer that he feels Loup is going to attack and though Oliveira agrees to take his troops to a fortified area, Sharpe feels the man isn't taking his warning to heart. The only way he feels he can stress the importance of being on the alert is to confess to Oliveira his confrontation with Loup. Unfortunately, Oliveira isn't the only one who hears Sharpe relay the incident and thus Sharpe is set up for military justice problems later.

The fight within the barracks is typical Cornwell, intense, detailed, graphic and exciting. Cornwell's use of military terminology from that time period brings the battle scenes to life with realistic detail. Sharpe is upset with himself that he had been so focused on the French coming from the north that he did not arrange suitable guards at the south end of the complex. This would prove to be a costly mistake in terms of the terrible battering the Portuguese battalion takes and the death of Colonel Oliveira. As with most mistakes, someone has to take responsibility. Later in the book, a scapegoat is set up in the innocent person of Claud Runciman. Politics more than remorse for the loss of life makes the laying of blame necessary.

Sharpe knows that the blowing up of the ammunition wagons is the only thing that saved those who lived and as he comments to Harper, they did not win the battle, they merely survived. The distinction between survival and winning will prove later to be a motivating factor in some of Sharpe's actions when the British are facing the full force of the French at Fuentes de Oñoro.



# Summary Chapter 5

## Summary Chapter 5 Summary

Out of the 400 Portuguese skirmishers who arrive at San Isidoro, only about a quarter of them survive. None of the officers of the Real Compañía Irlandesa are killed or even injured. The gatehouse where they are cowering is not attacked - even their horses are left though all of the other horses are taken. Kiely is offended when Sharpe suggests there is something puzzling about Loup not attacking the gatehouse. He suggests to Kiely, following the man as he retreats, that they fight it out at that moment. He tells Kiely that he is a coward and had skulked inside the gatehouse while men had been fighting and dying outside. The truth finally comes out that it had been Juanita de Elia who commanded the gatehouse not be opened.

Runciman survives by hiding behind a pile of ammunition and Sharpe is genuinely happy that he did. Sharpe is chastising himself for not seeing how dangerous a trap the barracks could become. They find Tom Garrard's body near the ammunition dump, or what is left of it. Sharpe knows it is Tom from the metal tinderbox who has not survived the explosion. It is obvious Tom had lit the wagons and sacrificed himself to save the others.

Colonel Hogan comes to San Isidoro to let Sharpe know they will be putting the blame on Colonel Runciman. Sharpe is upset since he knows it is his fault, but Hogan points out that Sharpe doesn't have a high enough rank to qualify as a sacrifice that will satisfy politics. Sharpe asks that they at least don't execute the poor bloke.

The false American newspaper article is enough of an excuse to finally rid the British of the Real Compañía Irlandesa and Sharpe is ordered to march them to headquarters to turn in their muskets after which they will be sent to Cadiz.

El Castrador arrives to let Sharpe know that General Loup is in a small village that is not heavily fortified. He asks Sharpe if it is true that in London they sell dead soldiers' teeth for gold to use in false teeth and Sharpe affirms that rumor. Sharpe asks El Castrador if he wants to go to the village of San Cristobal with him and some men that night, not to fight but to observe. El Castrador agrees as long as there will be no fighting. Captain Donaju asks to go along and fifty volunteers from the Real Compañía Irlandesa also go with him.

When they arrive at the village, the place appears deserted though there is smoke coming from a chimney. Sharpe decides to get closer and as he moves in no one seems to be taking any notice of him. He crawls the last yards on his belly and enters the town. He breathes a sigh of relief and lowers his rifle. That's when the howling begins.



## Summary Chapter 5 Analysis

With only about a quarter of the Portuguese surviving the attack, Oliveira's men have paid a high price for his mistake. Sharpe, being the honorable man that he is, feels it is his fault. He thinks he should have been even more strenuous in telling Oliveira about Loup.

It is obvious to Sharpe and others that a traitor had opened the gate to the fortress. It is also obvious that the traitor is one or more of those who hid in the gatehouse that was not attacked. Sharpe feels strongly Juanita de Elia is one of the culprits. That he accuses Kiely of cowardice is another political error, yet Sharpe feels a great deal of guilt for the number of people killed.

Hogan seems to be unfeeling when he is delighted for an excuse to send the Real Compañía Irlandesa to Cadiz. Sharpe is upset with Hogan's attitude. When Sharpe finds out the Real Compañía Irlandesa is basically under arrest and will be sent to the French, he is angry.

An interesting historical piece is thrown in as El Castrador and Sharpe talk about the teeth of dead soldiers being sold in London. This type of dialogue is one of the ways in which Cornwell brings the events, ideas, technology and beliefs of that era into the book.

Sharpe again displays a dichotomy in his honor by lying to El Castrador about his reason for going to San Cristobal. Often Sharpe seems to balance a fine line between honorable and lying in order to accomplish what he considers to be his mission. That Donaju and fifty of his men volunteer to go with Sharpe to San Cristobal indicates that Sharpe's evaluation of the majority of Real Compañía Irlandesa as being good men and good soldiers is correct. Sharpe demonstrates his courage yet again by entering the village alone not knowing if there are soldiers waiting behind the walls who will seize him and take him before Loup.



# Summary Chapter 6

## Summary Chapter 6 Summary

Wellington and Hogan talk about Sir William Erskine, the commander in charge of the troops who are holding the siege at Almeida. Erskine, according to all reports, is insane but Wellington has hopes he can at least maintain the encapsulating of Almeida. They talk about insane asylums where, at that time in history, people would pay money for the entertainment of watching the insane people. Wellington is convinced Erskine could draw a good fee from people to listen to him.

Hogan informs Wellington that several French forces have joined together and it is both of their opinions that the French will head to Almeida to break the siege and bring relief supplies to the 1500 French soldiers within the fortress. Pierre Ducos also knows that Wellington will never march on Badajoz or Cadiz as long as the French hold Almeida since it would put an enemy at his back. Thus, Wellington is concerned to have a madman holding this important location.

The tactical problem for Wellington is that if he meets the French at Almeida and loses he will be forced to withdraw across a narrow bridge over a non-fordable river. He could lose his entire force and Britain would be forced out of Spain. Wellington complains that the politicians in England don't understand he could win this war if they would supply him enough troops and equipment. Hogan and Wellington also discuss the problem of Sharpe and that the Spanish are saying Loup would not have attacked Isidoro if Loup had not been after Sharpe. Sharpe will have to be sacrificed along with Runciman.

Meanwhile, at San Cristobal, Sharpe enters the house where the smoke comes from the chimney and finds Juanita de Elia. She attempts to get away but is unsuccessful. He finds newspapers in her horse's panniers that have yet another false story about the British and the Irish.

Hogan arrives at San Cristobal, curses Sharpe for allowing Juanita to go free, and tells Sharpe he already knew about her. He had wanted to follow her to the person who had been distributing the papers. He also informs Sharpe he is on administrative duties until the court of inquiry.

Kiely learns that his dreams of Juanita being his wife and his position in Spanish society are over because she is a traitor. Kiely gets drunk and kills himself in the church.

## Summary Chapter 6 Analysis

The conversation between Wellington and Hogan about William Erskine is enlightening as to the attitude of that era towards the mentally ill. Not only were the insane asylums horrible places - called snake pits in some countries - but people with more money than sense or compassion would visit those places and pay to watch and listen to the





mentally ill. It was considered good entertainment and compassion and patient rights were not issues. The fact that a commander of a position which would prove critical in Spain was considered insane enough to be in one of those places speaks to the illogical manner in which men obtained rank and were promoted in the military of that era - for the most part through money and position. One did not obtain a "rank" of captain by competency; except for very rare individuals such as Sharpe, one bought his commission. Obviously with commissions for sale the officers' corps was not necessarily the best soldiers or tacticians.

Sharpe allowing Juanita de Elia to return to the French instead of holding her for the British shows again his particular brand of honor and morals. When he told her she would be killed by the Spanish if she was held, he could not bring himself to keep her prisoner and be a party to warring on women.

Lord Kiely had an overbearing, dominating mother whom he could never please. Though he tried all of his life for her respect and love, he did not obtain it. The symbolism of talking to the Madonna in the church as if she was his mother and/or Juanita, both symbols of his own perception that he could not satisfy or please the women in his life, is pitiful. Killing himself and the blood splattered on the statue are also symbolic of Lord Kiely continually living his life for his mother and his girlfriend. In the end, he "shed his blood" as in "gave his life" to women who scorned him.



# Summary Chapter 7

## Summary Chapter 7 Summary

As Chapter 7 opens, Sharpe is cutting his hair with dull scissors and Donaju comes to speak with him. He asks if Sharpe has heard about Kiely's suicide and Sharpe says the Real Compañía Irlandesa is better off without him. Donaju complains about having to guard the ammunition and Sharpe gives him a short lecture about what a soldier is supposed to do. Sharpe tells Donaju the Real Compañía Irlandesa will be going to Cadiz and Donaju is happy they will be joining the rest of the Spanish army.

Major Alexander Tarrant, the person on the Quartermaster Staff in charge of ammunition distribution, enters with two injured soldiers. They are the Hughes brothers whom Tarrant calls Magog and Gog, one with an injured arm and one with an injured leg. The three of them comprise the entire guard and staff for ammunition supplies. Tarrant says he only hopes the French do as poor a job as they do. Tarrant is funny and sarcastic but obviously willing to do the job as well as possible although he is normally an artillery officer. He is happy that Sharpe's greencoats will be available to guard the ammunition wagons.

Sharpe persuades Harper to go with him to take a look at the village under the guise of finding out if the troops there need ammunition. He does what he can to stretch his assignment to administration duties pending his hearing. They meet with Colonel Williams in charge of the village defense who comments it's a waste to have a man of Sharpe's talents ferrying ammunition.

Suddenly, just what Sharpe is hoping for happens - the French attack. Sharpe and Harper load their rifles and prepare to join the fight. As they are leaving, Harper sees a small rag doll laying in the dirt. He sets it into a small cove and decides, with superstition, that if the doll survives the fight today he will survive all the battles. He places a small rock over the hole to ensure her safety.

Sharpe and Harper join the battle where a young lieutenant, maybe eighteen, is attempting to keep his line steady and the men focused. He's doing a good job until he is shot. Sharpe sends Harper to the surgeons with the boy slung over his shoulder. After the British finally drive the French out, with the help of the Highlander and Warwick reinforcements, Sharpe and Harper return to the room where Harper had stashed the doll.

Sharpe is feeling tired, defeated and a little bitter because he faces the inquiry and there is nothing he can do about it. Harper looks down for the doll. It lies in a puddle of blood next to a young British soldier's body. The soldier had stuffed the doll in his mouth to keep from crying out with his wounds. Sharpe and Harper go and get drunk.



## Summary Chapter 7 Analysis

There seems to be a running motif started about dull blades. Sharpe's scissors are dull as he tries to cut his hair. Later, in the village when he and Harper are accidentally stuck in a fight, he realizes his sword is dull and he has to bludgeon with it more than use it as a sword.

Donaju complains about having to guard the ammunition and that it isn't a job for real soldiers. He says no one cares about the Real Compañía Irlandesa. Sharpe asks him why he wants someone to care that he is a soldier and is given a gun and a sword so he can take care of himself. Soldiers don't need someone to take care of them. This shows several of Sharpe's character traits. First, a pragmatism that accepts what is and works with it. Second, a pride that he doesn't need looking after and can take care of himself. That he expects those around him to feel the same way shows a type of naiveté about human emotions.

Major Tarrant is a mixture of a competent person who cares about his job and is funny. His remark that he is assistant assistant assistant quartermaster, which makes Sharpe assistant assistant assistant assistant, is good comic relief in the midst of so much violence and death.

He continues his humor with comments on how Magog and Gog, two injured brothers, will attack anyone trying to harm the ammunition depot.

Sharpe, not one to disobey orders but wanting to be anyone but an ammunition wagon guard, acts as if he is doing his job, scouting the territory through which the wagons will go. In truth, he is hoping to be wherever the fighting starts or is the thickest.

The superstition with which Harper protects the little ragdoll is common for soldiers and sailors of that era, and probably even now, that some small act or talisman can bring a person safely through a battle. It is difficult at this point in the book to see if the doll being in a puddle of blood when Harper revisits it will have any significance or if it is a foreshadow of Harper's fate.

Harper is deeply touched by the death of the young lieutenant. Sharpe, on the other hand, is pragmatic as usual saying the boy did his job and did it well. One has to wonder if Sharpe's less than emotional response is because of his own bitter feelings about the impending court of inquiry. Also interesting about the court of inquiry is that no where is it mentioned about the piles of dead children Sharpe had seen shortly before he executed the two French soldiers. Perhaps had Sharpe not seen those children he would not have executed the soldiers for the lesser crime of rape. This is certainly a mitigating circumstance in his trouble and that he doesn't mention it to anyone is puzzling.



# Summary Chapter 8

## Summary Chapter 8 Summary

The village quiets down while soldiers rest and tend to the wounded. Others prowl through the bodies searching for valuables. Tarrant approaches Sharpe and tells him he has heard about the court of inquiry. He doesn't understand why it is happening because Sharpe killed two French soldiers. Sharpe explains it is about politics. General Valverde wants to become Generalissimo of Spain but as long as Wellington is appointed head of both the English and the Spanish armies he will not have that post. Valverde has to prove that it is not in the best interest of the Spanish army to have a British leader.

His argument is that Sharpe killed two of Loup's men in front of him and thus provoked Loup's attack on San Cristobal resulting in the deaths of so many Portuguese. This, he claims, is proof that the British do not care about any troops but their own. The British are stuck with calling Sharpe and Runciman to task to satisfy the Spanish that they do care about foreign troops.

The French have called an unofficial truce in order to gather their dead and wounded. On the bridge at the village, a French major and a British officer play chess.

Hogan pulls Sharpe aside on the way to Kiely's burial and talks to him. After Kiely is in the grave, Hogan has all the others leave. It is time for him to confront "Father Sarsfield." Hogan tells Sarsfield he knows that he is actually Father Mallon, an Irish rebel whom the British have been trying to find for a year. Mallon had fought with Tone, an Irishman who had led an armed rebellion against the British and had taken his own life in prison. Sarsfield/Mallon is the contact insider who distributed the newspapers de Elia brought. Sarsfield pulls a loaded pistol on him and Sharpe shoots him from a hidden location.

Sharpe comments that he had liked Sarsfield and it had not been easy to shoot him. Hogan nods and agrees as he pushes the body on top of Kiely and drops some Irish soil from a box on top of them. The chapter ends as Sharpe is gazing through his telescope at the French forces and sees the grey uniforms of the Loup brigade.

## Summary Chapter 8 Analysis

One of the means soldiers have of making money is to rob the dead. They are equally enthusiastic whether the dead are allies or enemies. The clothes are cut apart looking for coins sewn into seams and boots are taken and any item that may be of value. Officers' belongings are auctioned off if an officer is found before the scavengers get to him. Often, if a badly wounded person is found by someone less than scrupulous, the man is killed so the robbery can proceed.



Sharpe is learning more about politics than he ever wanted to know. A good soldier has to be sacrificed to General Valverde's charges in order for Wellington to remain head of the allied forces. Valverde, the one time he was in charge of a force, did poorly, losing three battalions. Some rumored that he himself proved to be a coward. The fact that he is obviously incapable of leading the allied forces against Napoleon in France has little bearing on what has to be given up in order to keep Wellington at the head. Throughout the Sharpe books, leadership by wealth or family position is proven over and over again to be a bad way to run an army.

There is a truce and it is ironic that a French and a British officer sit on a bridge between the two forces playing chess. On the morrow, when the fighting begins anew, the two men, if they meet, will try to kill each other. This subtle reminder of the absurdity of war is reminiscent of *All is Quiet on the Western Front* and *Catch-22*.

Hogan has Sharpe watch his confrontation with Sarsfield and, unfortunately, his information is correct. Sarsfield had been the man distributing the newspaper. He does not do it, however, because he is such a fan of Napoleon, but because he is an Irish patriot who wishes to undermine the British in any way possible. It is interesting that Hogan can separate the man he and Sharpe both like from the traitor and order Sharpe to kill him if necessary despite how he feels about the man personally. The fact that Hogan himself is Irish makes the death more poignant. He tells Sharpe that though the Bible tells them to love their enemies, it doesn't say that loving them makes them less an enemy. This demonstrates Hogan's understanding of human character, a talent and knowledge one needs to survive in the world of military intelligence.



# Summary Chapter 9

## Summary Chapter 9 Summary

The Spanish partisans have been set up in the village of Nave de Haver to keep watch on the southern flank of the British army. Early on the morning following the truce, the French dragoons on their huge horses pound through the village slaughtering the unprepared and unmounted partisans. Several officers try to organize the defenders but the attack is too swift and too overwhelming. As half the French dragoons track down survivors who have run to the west, the rest of them go house by house and kill anyone found alive. At a church, a mass is just beginning and the French smash into the church, slaughter all the people, including the priest and ransack the building for all its valuables. A message is sent to Massena that the village is dead and Poco Velha, the next village in line is already under attack.

Wellington sits on his horse above Fuentes de Onoro which is in a smoking shambles from the French artillery and gazes to the south. He has sent his seventh division to the south out of range of the protection of the British artillery. He has made a mistake. His army is divided and the French are pushing against the smaller half. If they break, it would be all over.

Sharpe and his riflemen are escorting ammunition to the south when the French cavalry appear. The British are caught in the open plain, the perfect terrain for utter annihilation by any cavalry. In an amazing display of English discipline, the divisions in the south march north at a pace no army in the known world could match, forming into squares that bristle with bayonets and are impossible for cavalry to attack. Sharpe and his men pace the northbound battalions taking out cavalry men, especially officers, and killing horses whenever it looks like a group of British soldiers would not get into a square in time.

Massena, who is at first gloating over the split in the British army, becomes frustrated and then enraged that the entire part of the army isolated in the south makes it north to join the main force. Wellington, in an act of bravery or stupidity, abandons the roads for withdrawal to the French as soon as the southern army joins the others. With the only retreat being a narrow bridge, the choice now, for the British, is to prevail or die.

## Summary Chapter 9 Analysis

While the French are running down the partisans in Nave de Haver they whoop in hunting calls as if they are chasing wild animals. This kind of behavior is only possible when soldiers do not see the enemy as human. The French call the English the goddam and the English call the French frogs. It is a technique that almost all armies use. In World War I and II the Germans were called krauts and in Viet Nam the enemy was

called gooks. It is a statement on human character that only by depersonalizing the enemy can soldiers stomach the killing.

It is also interesting to note that although in much of history a church is considered a sanctuary, in this war even priests are targets and church property is considered fair loot. That the author details many incidences of these two principles, the dehumanizing of the enemy and the disregard for "holy ground" seems to indicate that these books may be considered anti-war even though war is the main event in the books.

Again, many lives are saved from the two villages by the officers forming squares of the men and marching them in orderly fashion towards the British lines. The men know that only by staying together and following orders do they have a chance at survival. Occasionally a man runs towards the enemy alone and that man always dies. The famous phrase said when the American Declaration of Independence is delivered comes to mind: "We must all stick together or surely we will hang separately." This discipline known throughout the British empire had given England countless victories in conquering other countries. It is a principle of good military strategy and was first used by the Romans in their units called turtles.

Massena has a conversation with Ducos and in it he tells Ducos that soon he will have Wellington's whores. Ducos replies that Wellington has no whores for he controls his passions. This is a prime characteristic of Ducos, that he control his emotions and passions and focus only on his mission. He is scornful of those like Massena who do not.



# Summary Chapter 10 and 11

## Summary Chapter 10 and 11 Summary

On a Sunday in May 1811, the same French who had attacked Fuentes de Onoro two days before come again with no sound or preamble. They rush over the walls and through the gardens catching the Scottish unaware. The combat is close and thick. The Warwicks come down from the heights and join the Scottish. Together they push the French back to the stream.

The French throw more and more men into the line and finally the French grenadiers, the biggest and most fierce fighters come into the fray and push the British all the way through the village. The French now hold Fuentes de Onoro and the village is crowded with them shoulder to shoulder. The attack stalls but the French need only one more push to take the heights and victory will be theirs.

The Light Division heads north in hopes of joining the rest of the defense of the village. They have to travel as the 7th Division had traveled the other day - march, form squares when the French cavalry charge, then march when the cavalry fall back. Sharpe and his rifles keep the French guns from decimating the squares.

Massena sends in ten fresh battalions of men knowing that the only way Wellington can defend is to pull men from other parts of the ridge. When he does that, Massena plans to hit the weakened section. The battle is now for the last few feet of the slope behind Fuentes de Onoro.

When Massena sees his blue coats begin to clear the skyline, he sends a messenger to Loup telling Loup to clear the village of the dead so it would not clog the last push of the French artillery.

Two battalions, the 74th Highlanders and the 88th Irish await the surge of the French. On command, they run down the slopes and sling themselves upon the French with no stop for the customary volley usually done before engaging the enemy. The counterattack is fierce and appears to be working until the French hit again.

Loup has his dragoons dismount at the village and tells Juanita to stay with the horses. He instructs his men to clear the streets and not to worry about being gentle with the wounded. Suddenly, he glances up and sees that a fresh influx of British redcoats has hit the French and is thrusting their lines back towards the village.

Loup draws his sword and screams at his men to fix bayonets and runs towards the new British threat. He is determined his brigade will find glory in spite of Massena's attempts to keep them out of the fight.

As Sharpe watches the battle from a height near Wellington, he gasps as he sees the grey wolf banner enter the fight. He calls to Captain Donaju and tells him to order the





Real Compañía Irlandesa into column because they would be going down. He turns to Runciman and asks him if he wants to beat the court of inquiry. When the big man replies yes, Sharpe tells him to go ask Wellington's permission for the Real Compañía Irlandesa to go to the village. Wellington gives Runciman and Sharpe permission to go. As they are leaving, Wellington tells Sharpe the reason they do not shoot prisoners is so that the French won't do it either.

In Chapter 11, Sharpe leads the Real Compañía Irlandesa at a run into the village and towards the wolf brigade. They crash into a wall of French that had crowded an alley, with Sharpe screaming at the top of his lungs to kill the bastards. The Real Compañía Irlandesa, finally let off their leashes fight like demons and follow Sharpe's lead. Their attack is so focused and intense the French begin to retreat. Bodies are piled in the streets and the stench of hot, bloated dead bodies and blood is everywhere. As they push forward, the French retreat farther and farther. Sharpe knows if they can make the French believe they are surrounded they will bolt. They charge a group of French who are barricaded behind a wall of dead bodies and Sharpe is thinking about how tired his sword arm feels. They pass the body of a French major and a makeshift chess set lays next to him. It is the major who had played chess with the British captain on the bridge a few days before.

As Sharpe and Harper come charging around a house, they hear a voice bellowing commands trying to rally the French. It is Loup. Sharpe runs for him screaming his name. Loup is half-way across the stream when he sees Sharpe, blood covering the front of his uniform, running towards him. He swings around and the two men begin to fight in the middle of the stream. It is an even match. Loup is the better swordsman but Sharpe has reach and weight. All the other soldiers, both French and English, seem to realize it is a personal battle and no one interferes. French watch the fight from one bank and British from the other.

Suddenly Harper yells to Sharpe to watch himself. Sharpe has driven Loup to his knees and is pushing his sword across his neck to hold him under water. Sharpe looks up and sees a French dragoon in a grey wolf outfit level a carbine at him. It is Juanita and he calls to her hoping she would remember their meeting at San Cristobal. She smiles and fires. Sharpe feels the impact of the bullet and knows he has been hit, but he holds on to Loup until the general's struggles end and he dies by drowning. Harper's seven barrel gun fires. The bullets whip through Juanita and she screams as her body falls to the ground. She is dead before she hits.

Sharpe sits still and curses the surgeon who is removing the bullet from his shoulder with, Sharpe thinks, two left hands. The surgeon asks Sharpe if he wants the bullet for impressing women and Sharpe declines the offer. Runciman comes in to see him and says he is being sent back to England to head the militia. He is happy to be heading home as a hero and not in disgrace. Sharpe offers him his hand and good luck. Sharpe and Harper leave the surgeon's tent and go looking for something to drink. As they wander through the camp, Sharpe is pleased with himself. He has faced the best soldier France had to offer and he has won. He has drowned the man like the rat he was.



Wellington, however, is enraged because Erkins, the insane commander of the troops around Almeida, let the French slip out of the fort and leave without a single shot fired.

## Summary Chapter 10 and 11 Analysis

The French start their last great push. They change their tactics in that there are no pounding of drums or yells of 'long live the emperor.' They come in deadly silence so quickly they surprise the British.

In this last battle, Cornwell pulls out all stops and describes the pure agony of hand to hand combat. His descriptions of the sights, sounds, and smells brings the battlefield alive in excruciating detail. His imagery is detailed and intense. There is nice contrast between the passion of close, face to face fighting, one could almost say brawling, in the village to the precise, cool headed movement of the squares of the Light Division coming north. It's an interesting look at the difference between the two types of fighting. One can imagine the soldiers snarling like animals in the village and the quiet, imperturbable comments such as good job there, lads, in the retreat of the Light Division.

Within the two armies there are also different types of fights taking place. Massena tries to make certain Loup receives no glory and cannot advance to marshal while Valverde fights to undermine Wellington enough so that he can take control of the allied forces. These fights - political maneuverings - run a subplot line along the main plot of the battle between the French and the British.

Massena chooses the most disdainful job he can find for Loup - clearing the dead bodies and wounded from the village. There is a parallel here between Loup and Sharpe, both of them assigned to mundane tasks when they both wish to be in the thick of the fight. However Loup and Sharpe, as proficient at maneuvering in their own way, manage to find a means to join the fight and ensure they meet on the field of combat.

It is a demonstration of Sharpe's character that he thinks of Runciman even in the frustration of wanting to be fighting. He has the colonel go to Wellington and ask permission to lead the Real Compañía Irlandesa to battle at the village to offset the addition of the wolf brigade. This action assures Runciman of sharing in whatever glory and honor Sharpe and the Real Compañía Irlandesa win that day and gives him the possibility of saving his career and honor by winning the right to have his court of inquiry dismissed. We don't see what Runciman does in the battle, whether he finds a safe place to stake out or whether he actually participates in the combat but, when asked, Sharpe tells Harper he's sure the man will survive because he has a knack for that. A knack for survival is not a bad talent, considering that it is the only talent Runciman has except a sense of honor that will not let him lie about Sharpe in order to save himself.

Wellington tells Sharpe they don't shoot prisoners because it gives other enemies pause when thinking about shooting British prisoners. This thinking is still reflected in modern day. During the Iraq War, it was found that prisoners were being mistreated and many



soldiers and veterans were vocal about their concerns. The thought is that we must treat prisoners the way we want ours to be treated because to do otherwise gives the enemy an excuse to do as it wants.

When the Real Compañía Irlandesa finally hits combat, all the pent up frustration and indignities they have suffered are taken out on the French. Certainly, this theme of letting repressed emotions blast out has occurred often in this series of novels. It is a reflection of reality. Unfortunately, frustration and being in constant danger and not having any control over a situation tends to bring out the worst in soldiers. Many of the rapes and war crimes that have occurred in modern warfare are the result of soldiers being unleashed after having gone through a period of frustrating and/or dangerous circumstances. Most of the war crimes, for example, in Viet Nam were carried out by angry, frustrated troops who had watched as their friends were killed by unseen enemies.

There is a sadness and irony that the French major who had played chess with an enemy just days before lays in the street with his makeshift chess set spread around him. The symbolism of waste of war is once again brought up.

Sharpe's fight with Loup is an even match. Each man hate the other, but for very different reasons. Sharpe hates the disdain Loup feels for humans and his behaviors in killing women and children. Loup hates Sharpe because he had bested him in the village that day. There is symbolism in the way that Sharpe brings about Loup's death - no short, quick sword stab but drowning like an animal. Juanita's death after she shoots Sharpe ties up the loose ends in that story line too. One is not certain until a minute before she shoots Sharpe whether he had sex with her in San Cristobal, and the certainty is not absolute even then, but it would appear that they did. This is an interesting weakness in Sharpe; he knows she is a spy, he knows at least two men with whom she is sleeping, and he stills couples with her. One has to wonder if he could be charged with dereliction of duty by letting her go and if letting her go had been influenced by having had sex with her.

Finally, as so many of the Sharpe books end, Harper and Sharpe set out to find a source for alcoholic drinks. Getting drunk is both men's response to the aftermath of war and one could wonder if they are functional alcoholics. It is interesting that in the village during the heaviest fighting many of the men are drinking rum between bouts and some are completely drunk. Sharpe's only thought is that this is all right since the drunks make better fighters. Considering the effects of alcohol, lowering inhibitions and numbing pain, there may be something scientific to that thought.



# Characters

## Richard Sharpe

Richard Sharpe is the principle protagonist of the novel and is present in most—but not all—of the scenes in the narrative. Sharpe is described as a large man, six feet tall, with dark hair and a face disfigured by scarring. A combat veteran of numerous campaigns, Sharpe is in excellent physical condition, possesses superior tactical and strategic reasoning, and rarely makes substantial battlefield mistakes. Outside the sphere of infantry warfare, Sharpe is fairly normal in most respects.

Throughout the military phases of the novel, Sharpe demonstrates flawless command instincts, decisive leadership, and a solid grasp of the tactical situation. Possessed of an exceptional intuition regarding his opponent's tactics, Sharpe is always one step ahead in military matters. Sharpe also takes advantages of extant situations and is more of a pragmatist than an idealist.

Sharpe is the son of a prostitute, conceived during her course of business by an unknown father. Raised as a self-proclaimed guttersnipe, Sharpe joins the army at an early age, initially serving with Obadiah Hakeswill, and rises through the ranks due solely to merit. In conjunction with his military service Sharpe travels widely. At the time of the novel's opening, Sharpe is promoted to army rank of Major, though he retains the regimental rank of Captain; after his promotion he functions as a Major because he does not serve with his regiment.

## General Guy Loup

Called El Lobo by the Spanish partisans, General Guy Loup is a cold and cruel man who encourages his troops to rape Spanish women and kill the children he says are vermin. He wears grey clothes with wolf pelt trim and plays on the name, 'the wolf', to strike terror in his enemies. His carbine and sword sheath are both wolf skin and his eagle has a wolf tail hanging from it. He wears a short, trimmed gray beard and his face is extremely scarred and weather beaten. He has only one eye, one being covered with milky white and his visage is altogether wild and chilling. He speaks in a deceptively mild voice with a slight Scottish accent.

Guy Loup hates Sharpe, because Sharpe killed two of his men by firing squad in front of him. He is bent on revenge for the entire novel and Ducos is scornful of his personal vendetta. Ducos proves to be correct, that having personal feelings interferes with the mission, and it is Loup's hatred for Sharpe that ultimately is his downfall. Sharpe kills him near the end of the book. Loup is, however, the best general and soldier France has in Spain but his desire for the position of marshal is blocked by Massena. Loup's men revere him and follow his commands without question. Loup is the primary antagonist in Sharpe's Battle.



## Lord Kiely

The commander of the Real Compañía Irlandesa, Lord Kiely has his position by virtue of his birth. He is thin, tanned and wears a mustache trained and greased to fine points. He is arrogant and petty probably due to the feelings of being a failure. He is haunted by the scorn his mother had for him and lives to prove his worth in battle. When battle finally comes, he does not participate in it but is locked inside a gatehouse. Sharpe and Kiely take an intense dislike to each other immediately. Kiely is an alcoholic who begins drinking when he rises in the morning and remains mildly drunk most of the day. He has his lover, Juanita de Elia, join him at San Cristobal not knowing that he is playing into the French's hands and she is a French spy. He has daydreams of marrying Juanita and introducing her in Spanish society to restore his social honor. He is an excellent swordsman but, when he challenges a French dragoon to a duel, he is almost killed until Juanita shoots the dragoon. He refuses to believe he had been losing but claims she is not lying when she says she had seen the dragoon going for his pistol. After it is found that Juanita is a French spy and General Guy Loop's lover, Kiely goes into a church, screams at the statue of the Madonna as if it was his mother and Juanita, and finally kills himself by putting his gun under his chin and pulling the trigger. He is buried in non-consecrated ground by Father Sarsfield.

## Dona Juanita de Elia

Juanita de Elia is a Spanish noble who is aligned with the French cause. She is a spy and the source of the false newspapers circulating through the British troops. Juanita is a tall, thin woman with a face that is not beautiful but striking and memorable. She has full lips, deep-set eyes and often wears a scornful expression. She looks clever, a fox to Loup's wolf and thinks highly of herself. She does not care for fashionable clothes or keeping her skin light and smooth like most women. Her passion is hunting and she keeps a pack of hounds with her at all times. She rides and dresses like a man, wearing pants and boots and spurs. She often wears military uniforms, jackets which she would take from any man with whom she sleeps. She is attracted to General Loup the moment she sees him and begins an intense affair with him within hours of meeting him. Her job for the French is to take Lord Kiely as a lover to help undermine the British army and to get false newspapers to Father Sarsfield for distribution to the British troops. She is killed by Harper with his seven barrel gun moments after she shoots Sharpe.

## Major Michael Hogan

Major Hogan is a British intelligence officer and very good at his job. He is a friend of Sharpe's although their relationship is often stormy because sometimes, to Sharpe, Hogan appears to have no scruples and makes jokes on inappropriate subjects. His primary mission in Sharpe's Battle is to find out how the newspapers are coming into the British territory, information he finds out rather quickly, and how they are being distributed. It is not until Sharpe captures Juanita at San Cristobal that he realizes it is Father Sarsfield who is distributing the papers. Hogan likes the priest and feels regret



that the man had chosen to aid the French. Hogan is also close to Wellington and the two of them are friends.

## **Sir Arthur Wellesley (Viscount Wellington)**

Wellington is the commander of the allied forces in Spain. He is dedicated and brilliant although he makes a couple of bad decisions during the battles. Wellington is patient with Sharpe's lack of political acumen but does not hesitate to give Sharpe up as a scapegoat to satisfy the Spanish.

## **Major Pierre Ducos**

Pierre Ducos is Napoleon's man in Spain and as such has a great deal of power — enough power that he can make suggestions to Messena. Ducos is a small, almost fragile looking man with a deep voice that does not seem it should come from such a frame. He has a thin face with intelligent eyes and marks on his face from childhood smallpox. He wears simple clothes, a blue suit with no embellishments or rank. He feels no need to announce his presence or to display his power. He is also the head of French intelligence in France. Ducos is a no nonsense man who does not allow any passions or frivolous behaviors interfere with his mission. He has never had the need to marry or have a woman permanently in his life and the few times he wants female company he obtains it at a high class brothel. He is scornful of men who are ruled by their passions and has respect for both Loup and Wellington. He disapproves of the private rivalry Loup has set up with Sharpe. He conceives of and runs the operation for putting false newspapers into the hands of the British common soldier, especially the Irish ones.

## **Father Sarsfield (Father Mallon)**

Father Sarsfield is the priest who travels with the Real Compañía Irlandesa. He is enthusiastic about life and takes an instant liking to Sharpe. He is an Irish patriot, however, who believes Ireland should be freed of British rule. He fights with the Irish patriot Tone and has to go underground when that man is caught. He is a likable character with a good sense of humor and a kind manner with most men. Sharpe, Harper and Hogan all enjoy the priest's company and Hogan and Sharpe feel regret at his death by Sharpe, shot before he could shoot Hogan. His reasoning is clouded by his fanaticism about Ireland and he does not seem to believe that working for the French against the British is not the same as working directly against England.

## **Colonel Claud Runciman**

Claud Runciman is a bumbling soldier who would much rather eat than fight. He is quite overweight and does nothing quickly. When he does exert himself, he generally has to stop for food or drink in the middle of such exertion in order to sustain his energy. He is



the Wagon Master General for the British army who is appointed as liaison between the British and the Real Compañía Irlandesa. He is honored by the job not understanding he is given it because they need someone in that position who can be manipulated. When the British need a scapegoat for the San Isidoro catastrophe, Runciman is chosen. Sharpe attempts to get him to lie and blame it all on Sharpe but Runciman refuses. He is not extremely intelligent but he is honorable and Sharpe likes the man. Ultimately Sharpe is able to pull him into the battle at Fuentes de Orono and make it look like Runciman is a hero. This, coupled with the fact that all of the witnesses are dead, pulls him and Sharpe out of the way of the court of inquiry. At the end of the book, he is sent back to England to run a local militia, a posting with which he is delighted.

## **Major Alexander Tarrant**

Major Tarrant is an artillery officer posted to the quartermasters. He is competent and diligent but has a wicked sense of humor and charms Sharpe immediately.

## **Marshall Andre Massena**

Massena is the overall French commander in Spain. He was born in the streets and was what was called a wharf rat as a child. Napoleon put out one of Massena's eyes in a hunting accident but also elevated him to the high position he holds because of his ability as a tactician. He had smashed his way through many campaigns with Napoleon and the emperor had sent him to Spain to try and straighten out the disaster which had become the French campaign in Spain. He is arrogant but has an underlying fear of failure and watches the battles with some confidence, at least on the outside, but with fear of failure on the inside.

## **Sergeant Patrick Harper**

Sergeant Patrick Harper is Sharpe's long-time friend and fellow soldier, and the two men have fought together in many previous campaigns. Harper is described as a huge man, 6' 4, and heavily muscled. He is Irish and his battle cry is usually, 'God Save Ireland'; nevertheless he is a loyal, if conflicted, British subject. During the novel, Harper is entirely dedicated to Sharpe. Harper is possessed of great bravery and owns a curious firearm described as a seven-barreled gun; it is discharged through a single trigger-pull, acting like a miniature artillery piece. Slow to load and cumbersome, the weapon is wielded with much precision by Harper and is devastating in close quarters. Aside from obvious combat prowess, Harper is otherwise resourceful

## **General Valverde**

General Valverde is the commander of the Spanish army and wishes to be the generalissimo of the entire allied forces in Spain. He is fanatically patriotic and sees all those who are not Spanish to be inferior. He is an incompetent general and some



rumors even say he is a coward. It is his political maneuverings that put Sharpe's and Runciman's careers in danger.

## **Tom Garrard**

A friend of Sharpe's, Garrard had joined the Portuguese army when he was mustered out of the British army at his end time of service. He and Sharpe are friends and have shared a number of campaigns together. Garrard is killed at San Isidoro when he sets two wagons of ammunition on fire to blow up Loup's force who are attacking the fortress.

## **Colonel Oliveira**

The commanding officer of the Portuguese battalion sent to San Isidoro to watch the Real Compañía Irlandesa is a thin-faced man. He is competent and likable but he fails to heed Sharpe's warning about Loup and he and three quarters of his men are killed the night Loup attacks. His colors, however, are not taken in spite of Loup's torture to try and find out the location of them.

## **Captain Donaju**

One of the officers of the Real Compañía Irlandesa, Donaju is competent and unassuming. He agrees with most of what Sharpe does and he has a desire to fight the French and free his country. He and Sharpe come to respect each other.





# Objects/Places

## Fuentes de Onoro

This is the scene of most of the battles in this book and the scene of the final battle. Though a small and minor village, it is strategically placed at a crossroads going to Ciudad Rodrigo, Almeida, and the fords of the river Coa. It is a village the British must hold in order to keep the siege at Almeida vested.

## San Cristobol

San Cristobol is the village where Loup and his troops often hide out and the place where Sharpe finds out for certain Juanita is a traitor. No battle takes place here since it is empty of everyone except Juanita when Sharpe enters it.

## San Isidoro

The crumbling fortress where the Real Compañía Irlandesa is sent to get them out of the way of the British army is called San Isidoro. Loup attacks Sharpe here and three quarters of the Portuguese battalion are killed. Sharpe's good friend Tom Garrard gives up his life to blow up two munitions wagons to stop Loup.

## Ciudad de Rodrigo

Ciudad de Rodrigo is the fortress where Ducos is staying and where Juanita meets Loup. It is a Spanish fortress captured by the French and no action besides Ducos's meeting with Juanita and Loup takes place here.

## Artillery

Various types of artillery—excepting Congreve's rockets—are mentioned in the novel. The French use both direct-fire field pieces and high-trajectory howitzers in the attack. The British and the French use what is called horse artillery, field pieces that move with the infantry to protect the men in columns. Larger field pieces are used against the villages by the French and against the French massed troops by the British.

## Rifles and Muskets

Several types of small arms are discussed in the novel; indeed, the novel's accurate portrayal of small arms and their use is one of its most enjoyable elements. During the historic period discussed in the narrative, small arms are nearly all smoothbore, muzzle-



loading, single-shot weapons capable of receiving a bayonet. Most of the small arms described in the book are probably ignited by a flintlock. Some troops, such as the riflemen in Frederickson's company, are armed with rifled weapons, giving them great accuracy and the capability of effective fire at great distances—all at the expense of slower loading. A few individuals in the novel carry single-shot, muzzle-loading, pistols.

## **Skirmishers**

Skirmishers are elite riflemen of the British army armed with Baker rifles. They would be considered the sharpshooters of today's army.

## **Guidon**

A guidon is a small, swallow tailed banner carried on a lance as a rally mark.



# Themes

## The ravages of war and war crimes.

Throughout the book, Richard Sharpe encounters behaviors which are not sanctioned by the rules of war. These behaviors include the killing of civilians, raping of women and torture and mutilation of soldiers. Sharpe is stringently against such behavior and punishes it when he can. War is demonstrated as being brutal, and it is not only soldiers who are hurt in war. The ravages of war are also shown over and over. Starvation of both soldiers and civilians and the destruction of non-military targets such as homes and farms are also portrayed graphically. In this era of war, soldiers were often underpaid or not paid at all and supplies were difficult to obtain. Men would pour water around civilian homes and villages in an effort to find food that was buried to conceal it from looting soldiers. The book also shows that those with the might of arms, e.g. soldiers, would always be able to eat if food was to be found if the soldiers had no compunction about stealing from the civilians. So, most soldiers have no compunction about stealing all the food the civilians have even if that means the civilians starve.

The author is able to show his negative attitude towards war crimes in the persona of Richard Sharpe who disagrees with any behavior of soldiers that includes more than killing other soldiers and criminals. Sharpe does not allow his men to rape or steal except to loot the bodies of the dead. This theme is also shown in the behavior of frustrated, angry men who are fighting the partisans — an enemy who blends in with the civilian population and is thus difficult to kill. The war crimes committed by Loup's brigade are similar to those committed by soldiers in all of history who are fighting against guerrillas hidden within civilian populations.

## Politics and the Military

There is a well-known saying that the highest ranked leaders in the military are all politicians. This is true in Sharpe's time as much as in our own time. Wellington must satisfy the Spanish politicians in order to maintain his command of the allied forces in Spain. It does not matter whether he is the best man for the job, it only matters that the powers who have the authority to appoint him or remove him are made to believe he is the best one for the job. General Valverde claims Wellington is not the best man and he goes to the politicians to prove his claim and have Wellington removed. Often a decision in the military is not made because it is the best choice for tactical reasons or personnel reasons but because it is politically expedient. In the French army, Loup wants the position of marshal and Massena keeps him from it. He has Loup do work that is not the best use of Loup's skills simply to keep Loup out of the eye of the politicians who could advance Loup's career. As is true today, in that era, often someone has to be sacrificed for political reasons. Wellington is planning to throw Runciman and later Sharpe to the 'wolves' with a court of inquiry in order to show the Spanish leaders that the British army cares about foreign troops fighting under them. Runciman is innocent and, although



Sharpe has committed the crime for which he is accused, he did so for honorable and just reasons. In politics, however, guilt or innocence is not at issue but rather the manipulation of people to obtain a goal.

## Honorable and moral behavior

Honorable and moral behavior is a time worn theme in much of literature. In Sharpe's Battle, we follow the theme through the book by contrasting Sharpe's behavior and morals with those of his antagonist, General Loup. Sharpe is shown as an honorable and moral man who does not steal, rape or kill civilians. He treats his men with respect and dignity and he will not make war on women. Sharpe had endured a severe flogging in India and remained honorable and moral. When he sees a way out of the court of inquiry, he pulls Runciman into the situation so that Runciman too can enjoy the fruits of Sharpe's actions. Although some of Sharpe's morals are too cut and dry, black and white, he still carries that theme throughout the book.

Loup, on the other hand, is everything Sharpe is not. He is amoral, cruel and will kill or torture for the sake of killing. He encourages his men to rape, allows them to slaughter even children and babies and shoots soldiers who surrender. He tortures Oliveira to obtain the location of Oliveira's colors and then kills him, even though Oliveira had surrendered to Loup and handed his sword to him. Sharpe, on the other hand, allows Juanita to go free even after finding out she is a French spy, because he will not turn her over to be killed by the Spanish.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of the novel is third person omniscient. The point of view is considered reliable, meaning that not only does the reader see the actions of the characters but the thoughts and the emotions of the characters are also known. In a book such as Sharpe's Battle, third person omniscient is necessary in order for the reader to be able to see all of the different actions and plot lines and to understand the characters' motivation by being privy to their thoughts and emotions.

The point of view remains consistent throughout the novel.

## Setting

Sharpe's Battle opens in May of 1811. It is the time of the Napoleonic War. Sharpe and his men are lost somewhere in Spain possibly behind enemy lines. The setting then switches to outside Almeida, a Spanish fortress held by the French. Wellington, commander of the allied forces which include the British, Portuguese and Spanish is dismayed that an insane commander is head of the British forces which lays in siege around the fortress.

There is a brief scene at the Ciudad Rodrigo, another Spanish fort held by the French. Pierre Ducos, Juanita de Elia and General Guy Loup meet there to plan their undermining of the British army.

San Isidoro is a small, deserted, crumbling fort near Almeida. Sharpe and the Real Compañía Irlandesa, the royal guard of the Spanish king, are sent there by the British to keep the guard out of the British army.

San Cristobal is a small fortified village where Loup occasionally hides with his brigade. It is here where Sharpe finds Juanita de Elia and the evidence of her treachery as a French spy.

Nave de Haver and Poco Velha are two small villages that are overrun by the French on the way to attacking the British at Fuentes de Orono.

Fuentes de Orono is the site of three battles between the British and the French and where the French are finally defeated in that area.

## Language and Meaning

The language in Sharpe's Battle is informal with more narrative than dialogue although there is enough dialogue to lend authenticity to the characters and to break up the flow



of the narrative. Some of the language borders on archaic since the novel is set in the early 1800's and the language reflects that setting just enough so that the characters seem authentic. There is a great deal of military terminology and battle scenes that might be mildly confusing to a reader who knows nothing about the military or the weaponry of that era. Not knowing the military terminology is not a hindrance to the comprehension of Sharpe's Battle, but the reader would probably enjoy the book more with some knowledge of it.

There are a number of different nationalities in the novel: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Irish, Scottish and Welsh. The author has a few words of each language sprinkled throughout the text to also lend authenticity. The meanings of the words are all obvious from context.

## Structure

The novel is divided into 11 Chapters in two parts of approximately 35 pages each. Part One consists of the first six chapters and the last five are in Part Two. Part One involves all the the events leading up to and fought in different places than the final battles at Fuentes de Orono, which is detailed in the second part. Each chapter has an average of about six to seven scenes.

The main plot line is the fight between the British and the French at Fuentes de Orono. There are several subplots which run alongside the main plot line. The private vendetta between Sharpe and Loup is one such subplot. Another is the politics involved in the maneuvering for generalissimo of the allied forces in Spain. These maneuverings include the minor subplot of Sharpe and Runciman going up before a court of inquiry.

There is a minor subplot about Pierre Ducos and his plans to undermine the British army using a French spy, Juanita de Elia and an Irish priest, Father Sarsfield (Mallon).



## Quotes

"He had seen more than his share of horror. He had been born to a poorhouse whore in a London gutter and he had followed Britain's drum from Flanders to Madras and through the Indian wars and now from the beaches of Portugal to the frontiers of Spain, but never, not even in the Sultan Tippoo's torture chambers in Seringapatam, had he seen children tossed into a dead pile like so many slaughtered animals." Chapter 1, Sharpe's Battle, p. 23

"'You're squeamish about rape, Captain Sharpe?'  
'Funny in a man, isn't it? Yes, I am.'" Chapter 1, Sharpe's Battle, page 30.

"...when suddenly a wolf had howled its melancholy cry in the darkening hills. Its howl was long and desolate, and the echo lingered. And Sharpe shivered." Chapter 1, Sharpe's Battle, p. 42

"'I don't care if he came up from the jakes, Ducos. I want his scalp and I want his balls.' Ducos disapproved of such private rivalries, fearing that they interfered with more important duties." Chapter 2, Sharpe's Battle, p. 47

"'A fair number of my fellows are Catholics themselves, sir', Sharpe said. 'And Irish.' 'They would be. A third of this army is Irish! If there was ever a mutiny, Sharpe...'  
Colonel Runciman shuddered at the prospect of the papist redcoats running wild." Chapter 2, Sharpe's Battle, p. 56

"'These men don't need lessons in killing,' he said in his accented English. 'They're soldiers of Spain and they know how to kill. They need lessons in dying.'" Chapter 2, Sharpe's Battle, p. 64

"'How in hell,' Sharpe asked Kiely's second-in-command, Captain Donaju, 'did he get command of the guard?' 'Birth,' Donaju said." Chapter 3, Sharpe's Battle, p. 77

"'I had eight boys, only three survived and that, believe me, is two too many.' 'No girls?' 'Four.' El Castrador fell silent for a second or two, then sighed. 'That French bastard Loup took them. You know of Loup?'" Chapter 3, Sharpe's Battle, p. 93

"'My name is Colonel Oliveira, and I must protest, monsieur! My men are surrendering and your men are killing still! We are your prisoners!'...'Good soldiers don't surrender,' he said to Oliveira, 'they just die.'" Chapter 4, Sharpe's Battle, p. 129

"Sharpe caught Kiely by the shoulder and turned him round so violently that Kiely was forced to stagger to keep his balance. 'But you didn't even fight, you bastard,' Sharpe went on. 'You skulked inside while your men did the fighting for you.'" Chapter 5, Sharpe's Battle, p. 141

"'Don't teach me my job,' Hogan interrupted tartly. 'I can't act against Kiely and his whore because they're not in the British army. Valverde could get rid of them, but he



won't, so the easy thing to do , the politic thing, is to get rid of the whole damned pack of them. And tomorrow morning, Richard, you do just that." Chapter 5, Sharpe's Battle, p. 147 - 148.

"Hogan smiled wolfishly. 'Exactly. Our Wagon Master will be sacrificed to make the Portuguese happy and to persuade the Spanish that Wellington can be trusted not to massacre their precious soldiers. I can't sacrifice Kiely, though I'd love to, because that will upset the Spaniards and I can't sacrifice you because you're too junior and, besides, I need you for the next time I've got a fool's errand, but Colonel Runciman was born for this moment, Richard..." Chapter 5, Sharpe's Battle, p. 149.

"They should lock Erskine up,' Wellington said grimly, 'and charge the populace tuppence apiece to view him. Still, even Erskine should manage this job, eh?'" Chapter 6, Sharpe's Battle, p. 165

"Sharpe stared at the Irish major. 'Me?' 'Of course! For Christ's sake, Richard! Don't you have the first inkling of politics? The Spanish don't want Wellington as Generalissimo!'" Chapter 6, Sharpe's Battle, p. 182.

"Alexander Tarrant,' he introduced himself. 'Major in the artillery but seconded to the Quartermaster General's staff. I think of myself as the Assistant-Assistant-Assistant Quartermaster General, and you, I suspect are the new Assistant-Assistant-Assistant-Assistant Quartermaster General? Which means that Gog and Magog are now Assistant-Assistant-Assistant-Assistant-Assistant-Assistant Quartermaster Generals. Demoted, by God! Will their careers ever recover?..." Chapter 7, Sharpe's Battle, p. 198.

"A French major sat drinking wine and playing chess with a greenjacket captain in the inn's garden. Outside the inn a work party loaded an ox-drawn wagon with the dead who would be carried up to the ridge and buried in a common grave." Chapter 8, Sharpe's Battle, p. 227.

"To the north and south of the cuirassiers, troops of lightly mounted chasseurs a cheval raced like steeplechasers to cut off the Spaniards. They whooped hunting calls." Chapter 9, Sharpe's Battle, p. 240.

"Massena snapped his telescope shut. He disliked Loup. He recognized his ambitions and knew that Loup would trample over any man to gain those ambitions....But Massena would not help Loup secure those ambitions." Chapter 9, Sharpe's Battle, p. 255.

"Green-jacketed riflemen ran out of the woods to pillage the dead and wounded cavalymen. The deeply bellied breastplates worn by the cuirassiers were valued as shaving bowls or skillets and even a bullet-holed breastplate could be patched up by a friendly blacksmith." Chapter 9, Sharpe's Battle, p. 258.





"But it ain't about soldiering, Sharpe, it's about politics, all about damned politics, and the one thing every soldier should know is not to get tangled up in politics. Slimy bastards, politicians, should all be killed." Chapter 10, Sharpe's Battle, p. 273.

"For Sharpe's last battle had been against the best soldier France had and Sharpe had drowned the bastard like a rat. Sharpe had won, Loup was dead, and it was over at last: Sharpe's battle." Chapter 11, Sharpe's Battle, p. 302



## Topics for Discussion

Do you think Richard Sharpe was wrong or right for executing the two French soldiers for war crimes in Chapter 1 without giving them a fair trial? Why or why not?

Discuss what you can glean of General Loup's character from Sharpe's first encounter with him.

Dona Juanita de Elia has decided to work with the French even though she is Spanish and the French are taking over her country. Do you think she is a traitor and should be killed or do you think a person should be allowed to decide what country they want to support in a war? Why or why not?

If you were head of a court of inquiry concerning war crimes in this book, what would you consider crimes and what would you do about them?

Father Sarsfield is helping the French, not because he likes the French necessarily but because they are fighting the British. His hatred for the British has caused him to work with a country that is killing the Irish in the British army as much as it is killing the British. Discuss why Sarsfield's behavior is illogical.

Sharpe is blunt and honest and cares nothing for politics. Although this may be admirable, discuss why it is unwise for an army officer.

Sharpe asks El Castrador to kill and castrate three deserters from San Isidoro in order to keep the rest of the men from deserting. Discuss your opinion of this behavior and how it shows that Sharpe is human and not perfect.

How would you feel if you were Runciman and were being sacrificed for the sake of politics? What would you do about it?

How would you feel if you were Sharpe and had to shoot Father Sarsfield whom you liked and thought was a good man?

Why would Tom Garrard be considered as much a hero as Sharpe?