

# **Sharpe's Eagle: Richard Sharpe and the Talavera Campaign July 1809 Study Guide**

**Sharpe's Eagle: Richard Sharpe and the Talavera Campaign July 1809 by Bernard Cornwell**

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# Plot Summary

Sharpe's Eagle is a novel set during the Peninsular War, a part of the Napoleonic Wars. The novel opens in July 1809. The title refers to Richard Sharpe, a British soldier, and his quest to capture the standard of a French military unit, a gilded eagle.

The novel opens with Lieutenant Sharpe being tended by his friend and sergeant, Patrick Harper. Sharpe had been wounded by a French cavalryman in a battle in Portugal. While Sharpe's leg wound is healing, aided by Harper's treatment, which includes the use of maggots, the rest of the British forces are preparing to move into Spain. There they will ally with the Spanish army and fight the French forces that have occupied Spain.

Soon it becomes apparent to Sharpe that the dangers he faces do not all come from the French forces. First he encounters Colonel Henry Simmerson, a wealthy man who has purchased his command of the South Essex Regiment. Simmerson has no prior military training, yet Simmerson believes himself to be a military genius. Simmerson looks down on Sharpe because Sharpe had been promoted from the ranks. This idea that wealth and social standing is an indication of a person's merit is an idea that Sharpe will struggle with throughout the novel and perhaps the rest of his life.

In addition to Simmerson, Sharpe must contend with Simmerson's nephew, Lieutenant Christian Gibbons. Like Simmerson, Gibbons lacks military training or talent and views Sharpe as little more than an upstart peasant. To further complicate matters, not long after meeting Simmerson and Gibbons, Sharpe humiliates both and receives a promotion. The promotion that Sharpe receives is the one that Simmerson had wanted to grant his nephew.

As if these insults are not enough to make enemies of Simmerson and Gibbons, Sharpe also enters into a relationship with Josephina Lacoste, the woman Gibbons wants. So long before the largest battles with the French forces, Sharpe has created enemies on his own side. And these enemies are fierce indeed. Simmerson has powerful friends back in England, and Simmerson promises to use all of his power and influence to end the career of Richard Sharpe.

Sharpe knows that his only chance to save his career is in doing something heroic, something that has never been done. He decides that he must capture the standard of a French military unit, the gilded eagle. This task is so daring that it is suicidal. It is so outrageous that it seems impossible. But Sharpe's entire future depends on it.

Sharpe faces the French on one side, enemies within the British forces on the other, and in his personal life he is learning the dangers of falling in love. But Sharpe does have assets besides his incredible fighting ability. All of the men under his command admire him, and Sharpe has friends. Sharpe has many colorful friends, and throughout the novel the reader is treated to introductions and tales of Sharpe's many friends. The most notable among Sharpe's friends is, of course, Sergeant Patrick Harper, a giant



Irishman with a delightful sense of humor. Other important and entertaining friends include Captain Hogan and Lieutenant Colonel William Lawford.

From the beginning of the novel the pace accelerates through until the end, all the while covering so much accurate historical detail that the reader might forget this is a work of fiction.



# Chapter 1-3

## Chapter 1-3 Summary

Sharpe's Eagle, a novel, tells of the adventures of Richard Sharpe, a British infantry soldier who holds the rank of Lieutenant at the beginning of the novel. Sharpe is no ordinary lieutenant. He was promoted from the enlisted ranks and he has seen many battles. In fact, shortly before the opening of the novel, he had been wounded by a French cavalry soldier. While Sharpe heals from his wound, the British military prepares to move from Portugal into Spain where they will fight the French again. Sharpe will face other dangers besides the enemy soldiers. He will face incompetent officers in the British army, and he will face the dangers of falling in love. But Sharpe has more than his superior skills as a soldier. He has the friendship of people like Sergeant Patrick Harper.

In the opening of the first chapter, a military unit is moving through Abrantes, a town in Portugal. References to the British fighting the French, combined with mention of specific locales, indicate the Napoleonic Wars in the year 1809. Lieutenant Richard Sharpe is being tended by his sergeant, Patrick Harper. Harper lets maggots eat at a wound Sharpe received in battle.

Sharpe and Harper, along with thirty other men in their military unit, were separated from the rest of their regiment, the 95th Rifles. The rest of the 95th Rifles have returned to England, but Sharpe's group was left stranded in Portugal, and they serve with various other British regiments. Currently they are serving under Captain Hogan, an engineer in charge of demolishing a bridge so that the French military cannot use it to attack the British in Spain and Portugal.

Sharpe and Harper see an arriving British battalion, and Hogan tells them it is the South Essex Regiment commanded by Sir Henry Simmerson.

In Chapter 2, Sharpe and his troops reach their destination a day after the South Essex, and they see that some of the South Essex troops have been flogged. Sir Henry Simmerson rides on horseback before his assembled troops and says that he ordered four men to be flogged because four others had deserted. Later, Sharpe walks through the town looking for a water fountain and he encounters a lieutenant from the South Essex. As the young lieutenant riding a horse passes Sharpe, who is on foot, he hits Sharpe in the face with a horsewhip. The young Lieutenant believes that Sharpe is a mere private because of his tattered uniform. As the lieutenant is about to hit Sharpe again, Sharpe throws the lieutenant from his horse into a pile of horse dung. Before additional violence can occur, Captain Hogan arrives and introduces the two men. The young lieutenant is Christian Gibbons. Gibbons offers Sharpe a feeble apology.

Hogan and Sharpe go together to meet the commander of the South Essex. Sir Henry Simmerson is a wealthy man attended by a doctor who is cutting his arm so that he will



bleed. Colonel Simmerson does not like Sharpe's tattered appearance, and he insults Sharpe. During the meeting, Simmerson challenges Sharpe to teach a company of the South Essex to fire three rounds a minute from their muskets. Though Sharpe believes the task impossible, he accepts the challenge.

In Chapter 3, Harper assists Sharpe in teaching the company how to increase their rate of fire. Sharpe knows that the troops need something more than words to motivate them to try their best. He orders the company to remove their stocks, an incredibly uncomfortable leather collar portion of their uniforms. Sharpe orders the men to place all the stocks in a pile and to then use the stocks as a target. After a few hours of practice, the entire company can fire four rounds a minute. Colonel Simmerson witnesses his men fire four rounds a minute, but he is furious that Sharpe let the company destroy their stocks.

Captain Lennox introduces Sharpe to Captain Leroy, Lieutenant Knowles, and Ensign Denny. Captain Lennox also tells Sharpe that Lieutenant Gibbons is the nephew of Colonel Simmerson.

## Chapter 1-3 Analysis

In the opening chapter, the narrator reveals some important details about the character Lieutenant Richard Sharpe. Most important is that he had been promoted from the enlisted ranks to his officer's commission instead of getting it because of his family's social class. In fact, Sharpe had been a destitute orphan before joining the army. This makes Sharpe distinct from all other officers and causes some resentment he holds toward entitled but incompetent officers he serves with.

The author goes into great detail in order to give modern readers a vivid picture of the novel's setting, a time two hundred years in the past. And unlike other novels set in the period, the author doesn't shy away from depicting conditions contemporary audiences would find shocking. The mention of maggots as a medical treatment is sure to shock some people. And the description of a "Hungarian Bath" as a means to use campfire smoke to get rid of the lice in clothing is unfamiliar to most people living in the twenty-first century. The author also uses many military terms that may be unfamiliar to modern readers, and he refers the readers to the Historical Note section at the end of the book for more information on military terms.

In Chapter 2, all of Sharpe's resentment toward the wealthy and the incompetent are intensified. And all of Sharpe's unspoken grievances seem to be validated in the characters Simmerson and Gibbons. They are wealthy men with no military experience, put in charge of qualified and experienced men. Officers like Simmerson and Gibbons are a liability, likely to get good men killed. Sharpe does his best not to let the full extent of his resentment show.

In chapter 3, by accepting the Colonel's challenge, Sharpe may have accomplished more than teaching the company of soldiers to improve their rate of fire. He might have

saved some soldiers' lives when they get into battle, but he almost certainly created a rich and powerful enemy, Colonel Simmerson.



# Chapters 4 & 5

## Chapters 4 & 5 Summary

After reaching their destination for the evening, Harper recalls something that happened in an earlier military campaign, and he and Sharpe share a laugh. Harper then informs the troops that he will perform an inspection. His goal is to find out who among his troops sold ammunition for wine. Rather than submit to an inspection, the troops offer several bottles of wine. While Harper goes to the river to try to catch fish with his collection of maggots, Sharpe takes a walk. He encounters a beautiful young woman, the same woman he had seen from a window in Abrantes. She is leading a horse that has a problem with its metal horseshoe. Sharpe assists the young woman by removing the horse's shoe. In the brief discussion that follows, Sharpe learns that the woman is with Lieutenant Gibbons, but he does not learn the woman's name.

In Chapter 5, the British troops arrive at the place where they are supposed to meet the Spanish troops, but there are no Spanish forces near. The Spanish force, The Regimientia de Santa Maria, arrives two days late. The next morning the agreed upon time of departure is delayed for five hours because the Spanish regiment is not ready.

While waiting to depart, Sharpe and his men see General Wellesley riding by. Sharpe is reacquainted with an old friend and superior officer, Lieutenant Colonel William Lawford. Years earlier the two men had served together in India. Sharpe, still a sergeant, had helped the young lieutenant learn the ways of the military, and Lawford had repaid the favor by teaching Sharpe to read and write while the two were imprisoned.

The Spanish forces travel only for a couple of hours and a mere five miles before they stop for the day. The British forces continue marching.

## Chapters 4 & 5 Analysis

The point of view at the opening of Chapter 4 is unusual compared to the previous chapters because it comes from the perspective of Harper, not Sharpe. In the first couple of chapters, the reader learns some important details about Harper. One learns that Harper cares a great deal about his friend and officer Sharpe, and discovers Harper's feelings about being Irish yet serving in the British military. After the first couple of pages the point of view shifts back to Sharpe. Sharpe encounters yet another reason to resent the wealthy: they attract women like the beautiful one he meets, the one who is attached to Lieutenant Gibbons.

In Chapter 5, Sharpe's dislike of the wealthy is complicated by his friendship with Lawford. Lawford is indeed wealthy and is able to buy his promotions, something Sharpe can never do. But Lawford is also a good man and a good soldier. While Sharpe's annoyance at incompetence in the military needs no more aggravation, the ill-led Spanish forces are even more inept than Simmerson's South Essex battalion.



Sharpe has learned the name of the woman he helped: Josephina Lacoste.



# Chapters 6-9

## Chapters 6-9 Summary

With their pride hurt by the British marching ahead the day before, the Spanish commanders order their troops to march across the bridge when they are supposed to stay on the north side with the British troops. Colonel Simmerson orders the South Essex to join the Spanish troops on the land to the south of the bridge. Sharpe and his riflemen wait at the bridge while Hogan continues to prepare the bridge for demolition. In the distance ahead of both the British and Spanish regiments, French cavalry gather. Both the Spanish and the British regiments form into infantry squares, the usual defense against cavalry. Sharpe sees all of this but knows that there should be no battle. As long as the infantry troops do nothing, the French cavalry should do nothing.

Lieutenant Gibbons comes to the bridge and says that Colonel Simmerson has ordered Sharpe and his riflemen to form a line between the infantry squares and the French cavalry. Sharpe refuses, and Captain Hogan agrees with Sharpe's refusal.

The French cavalry columns move in formation, but Sharpe knows this is just for show, and there should be no fight because it would not be advantageous to either side. Some of the ill trained Spanish troops fire at the French cavalry, and the French are forced to respond. Still, if the Spanish infantry holds their position, there will be no further violence. But Sharpe watches as the Spanish troops panic, run, and get slaughtered by the cavalry. And then he watches as the inexperienced South Essex troops also panic and get overrun.

Sharpe and his thirty riflemen are still at the bridge with eighty of the South Essex troops under the command of Captain Sterritt. Sharpe and Harper have to take command of all remaining British troops and hurriedly ready them for battle with the approaching French cavalry.

In Chapter 7, Sharpe leads his men toward the dwindling group of British soldiers still guarding the regiment's colors. At first the French cavalry do not notice Sharpe's troops coming to reinforce the nearly decimated South Essex troops, but when they do, they rush to attack Sharpe's band of little more than one hundred soldiers. Sharpe manages to keep his soldiers calm, and they repel the first attack. The reinforcements are nearing the remains of the South Essex, but before they can rescue the colors, the French cavalry captures one of the flags. Sharpe himself saves the other color from being captured.

When the battle is over and Sharpe and the men under his command are taking stock of the dead and wounded, Sharpe has a thought, but he is unable to continue the line of thinking because he is interrupted by Pendleton, a young soldier, who wants reassurance that the battle was a victory. A French cavalry officer approaches Sharpe to



discuss arrangements so each side can retrieve their wounded and dead, and then the bridge explodes with Sharpe and his troops on the wrong side of the river.

In Chapter 8, the French officer and Sharpe talk. The French officer asks why the British and Spanish troops came across the river in the first place. When Sharpe politely says he does not know, the French officer says that perhaps the British were unlucky to have such a Colonel.

The French officer says that at first he was sent to arrange terms for each side collecting the wounded and the dead. But he says that the destruction of the bridge, which has left Sharpe and his men stranded, has changed that. He now says that Sharpe has one hour to tend to his wounded and then the French commanders will likely demand Sharpe's surrender or attack again.

Sharpe goes to the bridge to speak to Hogan, who is on the other side. Hogan says it was Colonel Simmerson who ordered the bridge destroyed. Colonel Simmerson has also placed Hogan and Sharpe under arrest. Lieutenant Gibbons rides to the bridge to demand that Sharpe surrender his sword. Sharpe refuses.

Sharpe talks to his friend Captain Lennox as he dies. Lennox has a dying request of Sharpe, and Sharpe promises to fulfill the request. Sharpe mentions that the dying request is the same as the idea he had in the previous chapter. The French officer returns and says that the time has expired. Sharpe refuses to surrender.

In Chapter 9, Sharpe and his troops manage to defeat the French cavalry once again. Despite dismal odds, Sharpe's complex plan succeeds and all of his remaining men survive and even capture a French cannon. Sharpe is satisfied with the victory, and he is happy to have the cannon and supplies because now his troops have the materials to span the gap in the bridge.

## Chapters 6-9 Analysis

The combination of incompetence in the Spanish commander and Colonel Simmerson has led to what Sharpe feared most: dead British soldiers killed by inept leadership. His refusal to lead his men on what would certainly be a suicide mission marks the end of his humoring Colonel Simmerson. Now Sharpe has only his riflemen and a company from the South Essex to keep the French from capturing the bridge before Hogan can detonate his explosives.

In Chapter 7, Sharpe has witnessed his fears about the poorly led troops become a reality, and he has had to act to save lives and the regiment's colors. But his quick thinking and daring seems to have gotten him in a new predicament when the bridge is destroyed while he is still on the same side of the river as the French forces.

As Sharpe's idea is developing, the narrator explains that the idea is outrageous and makes Sharpe smile. But the action resumes before the reader learns the nature of the idea.



In Chapter 8, Sharpe's fear that he had created an enemy in Simmerson has been realized. At this moment, all of Sharpe's options and possible outcomes seem hopeless. As the chapter closes he addresses his men, and the reader is left to assume that he is about to fight the French again, and this time resistance seems suicidal. Another element of suspense is present too. Lennox's dying wish and Sharpe's promise coincide with an idea Sharpe had earlier, but the narrator still hasn't revealed the nature of the promise.

Chapter 9 concludes with one of the few instances where the point of view is not from the perspective of Sharpe. Lennox watches the battle. Before he dies, he knows that Sharpe has won, and he thinks that if any man is capable of fulfilling his dying wish, Sharpe will be that man.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

In a room with other officers, Colonel Simmerson shouts threats at Sharpe. He says that he will ruin his career. Lawford enters the room and tells the men that General Wellesley will see them now. For a little while General Wellesley lets Simmerson make accusations against Sharpe. Simmerson says that because Sharpe refused to send his riflemen out to face the French cavalry, the regiment lost. He demands that Sharpe be punished. General Wellesley says that not only will he not punish Sharpe he will promote him to captain and give him command of one of Simmerson's companies. The general also says that the fault of the defeat is entirely Simmerson's. Simmerson tries to protest, but the general does not listen. Simmerson says that he will write to his powerful friends in England.

After Simmerson leaves the room General Wellesley congratulates Sharpe, but he also tells him that Simmerson has many powerful friends back in England, and Sharpe's promotion to captain might be overturned. Later, Lawford speaks to Sharpe and says that the loss of the promotion is not Sharpe's only worry. Simmerson is likely to use his powerful friends to make Sharpe the scapegoat for the regiment's defeat.

The nature of Sharpe's promise to Lennox is divulged; Sharpe has promised to replace the regiment's lost colors with a French Eagle.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Any vindication Sharpe might have felt and any satisfaction he might have felt after being promoted to captain is countered by the knowledge that he has not heard the last of Simmerson's anger. Sharpe knows that it is likely that he will lose his commission and it is possible that he will be discharged from the army.

One finally learns the nature of Sharpe's promise. He has promised to do the impossible: to capture the standard of a French regiment, a gilded eagle. While the odds of Sharpe accomplishing such a feat are little or none, if he did manage to capture a French Eagle, he would silence Simmerson's threats and preserve his army career.



# Chapter 11-13

## Chapter 11-13 Summary

After arriving at the destination with the rest of the British army, Sharpe joins the other officers in their lodgings. Sharpe enjoys a few moments of pleasant conversation before he hears a woman scream. A few moments later, he hears another scream and then sees Josephina run out of a building, being chased by Gibbons and Berry. Sharpe, Hogan, and Forrest follow. They find the men assaulting Josephina, and they try to find out what is happening.

Sharpe has to beat the two lieutenants to get to the truth. They claim Josephina stole from them, and Josephina claims they stole from her and tried to rape her. Sharpe believes Josephina, but Hogan is neutral, perhaps skeptical. Sharpe offers to let Josephina have his quarters while he stays with Hogan. Hogan bets Sharpe that he will stay with Josephina.

In Chapter 12, Sharpe is looking forward to finishing his duties for the day and then spending the evening and night with Josephina. Harper arrives with Kirby and says that they have located the deserters, the soldiers that left, and gave Simmerson reason to flog innocent soldiers. Sharpe would rather not have to attend to the situation, but he knows he must perform his duty. With a group of soldiers including Harper, Sharpe goes to arrest the deserters.

Sharpe finds the four men, two of which are nearly dead from illness. One has lost a hand. This soldier speaks up and admits that they had deserted in order to join the French. Sharpe knows the punishment for this will be death, but he has to perform his duty, and he orders the other men to arrest them.

The short Chapter 13 takes place entirely in a room Sharpe and Josephina share. The narrator reveals that Josephina is a fugitive from a bad marriage. Though Sharpe cares for her, he knows that he will never have the financial means that Josephina will demand.

## Chapter 11-13 Analysis

Sharpe's reaction to the Josephina fleeing from Gibbons and Berry and Hogan's concern for Sharpe are very telling about Sharpe's character. Hogan is not nearly so ready to believe that Josephina is an innocent damsel in distress. Hogan believes that Sharpe is perhaps the best fighter he has ever known, but he also believes that Sharpe is vulnerable to the charms of a beautiful woman, and Hogan worries about the hurt Sharpe will feel when the relationship is over.

In Chapter 12, despite his sympathy for the men who were treated so badly by Simmerson that they chose to desert, Sharpe has his duty as a British soldier. It seems



that Sharpe wishes that the deserters had not been so honest. Had they not admitted that they intended to join the French, perhaps their lives would be spared.

In Chapter 13, Sharpe can never escape his class background. Though he might hold the rank of captain, he knows that he will never have the opportunity and privilege of the wealthy. Sharpe thinks that he is aware that the affair with Josephina is for a short time and that he will not let himself expect more, but the reader is left wondering if Hogan's concern isn't warranted.



# Chapters 14-16

## Chapters 14-16 Summary

While the troops stand in formation waiting for the executions, Sharpe has time to think. He thinks about how much Gibbons must want revenge. Sharpe has gotten the promotion and command Gibbons wanted, and Sharpe has also gotten the woman Gibbons wanted.

After the executions are complete, the troops begin to make loud verbal protests. The officers and sergeants try to restore order. Once the troops are again quiet, Simmerson says that they will all pay for the outburst. He says that in the evening the troops will again assemble for punishment.

In Chapter 15, Simmerson announces that at 6 pm, sixty men from the battalion will be flogged. Sharpe tries to protest, but this just makes Simmerson angrier. He says that each of the ten captains will pick six men, and he tells Sharpe that three of the six soldiers he will pick must be Sharpe's riflemen. Sharpe realizes there is nothing he can do, so he spends the time before the floggings alone, working on administrative duties.

After Sharpe has been completing paperwork for several hours, he is interrupted by Harper. Harper says that the men of the battalion are refusing to agree to the floggings. Sharpe knows that this means mutiny, willfully disobeying orders. Sharpe also knows that if the men mutiny, instead of floggings, there will be executions. He has to take charge fast.

Sharpe tells a few officers and sergeants what to do, and Sharpe is able to get his own company, the Light Company to gather in formation. Then Sharpe goes to talk to the rest of the troops gathered in the timber yard.

In Chapter 16, Sharpe is on his way to speak to the rest of the troops in the timber yard when he is informed that Simmerson has spoken to General Hill, and the general has ordered the King's German Legion, an elite cavalry unit, to confront the mutinous troops. Sharpe knows he must act fast.

Sharpe enters the timber yard and speaks to the soldiers, many of whom are drunk. At first one soldier, Huckfield, protests, but Sharpe is able to convince the men to put on their uniforms and assemble in formation next to Sharpe's Light Company.

When Simmerson, General Hill, and the King's German Legion arrive, the men are assembled in formation. The general is surprised, and Simmerson is furious. General Hill asks to speak to Sharpe, and the general pretends to believe the tales of mutiny were all a misunderstanding. The general inspects the troops, complementing many of them to raise morale, and then he orders that there will be no floggings. Simmerson has no choice but to obey the general.





As Sharpe is leaving the formation, Huckfield approaches him and thanks him.

## Chapters 14-16 Analysis

Sharpe sees that Simmerson is once again abusing his men, and rather than learning from the men's disobedience, Simmerson administers more punishment and further angers and alienates the men.

In Chapter 15, Sharpe's belief that Simmerson is a worse enemy to the troops under his command than the French troops the British are supposed to fight is now a reality. Simmerson has finally gone too far, and he has pushed the soldiers until they no longer care about military rules. They are even willing to suffer execution rather than submit to Simmerson's commands any longer. At first Sharpe is resigned to letting Simmerson continue to abuse the troops while Sharpe tries to stay out of the way, but when Sharpe hears that the soldiers are planning to mutiny, he knows he must act. Even though Sharpe will not be held accountable for the soldiers' actions, Sharpe must do something to prevent additional violence because he cares deeply for the men and for the army.

In Chapter 16, Sharpe has once again acted fast to save the men, and once again he has humiliated Simmerson. No matter what Sharpe does, he cannot avoid further angering Simmerson. Sharpe also takes a moment to think about the humiliation he has caused Gibbons, and he worries. Sharpe knows that Gibbons cannot hurt him, but Sharpe worries that a cowardly sort like Gibbons might try to achieve his vengeance by harming Josephina.



# Chapters 17-19

## Chapters 17-19 Summary

Sharpe watches as the men prepare for the upcoming battle. He observes as the men inspect and re-inspect their equipment. And when possible, Sharpe tries to offer words of encouragement to his soldiers. Sharpe too prepares his equipment. He takes his sword to an armorer who sharpens it for him. While watching the British forces ready for battle, Sharpe thinks that this battle may be his only chance to capture a French Eagle. If Simmerson has his way, Sharpe will be sent to a post in the West Indies or kicked out of the army entirely within a few weeks.

The morning of the battle everything in the British camp goes as planned. But when the Spanish cannons should have begun firing on French positions, nothing happens. At a meeting of officers, Sharpe learns that the Spanish decided to sleep rather than rise early and fight. The one and only chance to fight the smaller group of French has passed. Now when the battle comes it will be against a much larger French force. The British officers are furious.

Chapter 18 opens with Sharpe and Josephina in their room. Josephina says she saw a man earlier in the day, and by the description she gives of the man's uniform, Sharpe is able to tell that he is part of a cavalry group composed of wealthy men. The subject of wealthy men leads to a discussion of the nature of the relationship between Sharpe and Josephina. Sharpe is adamant about wanting her, but Josephina is more practical, saying that they must acknowledge that they have but a short time together, and they should concentrate on enjoying the time.

While observing that the British forces are getting ready for the following day's battle, Sharpe encounters Hogan. The two watch both the British and the French forces, and Sharpe realizes that this is the largest gathering of military forces he has ever seen. Sharpe and Hogan encounter Gibbons and Berry and notice that they are drunk. Sharpe asks if the men have recently stopped for refreshments, and both Gibbons and Berry laugh. Sharpe and Hogan both think of Josephina's safety, and Sharpe says that he is sure she is fine because she is staying in a locked room and neither Gibbons nor Berry know the location.

During the evening Sharpe encounters Harper, and the two watch the ongoing battle preparations. The Spanish troops are at their stations behind fortifications Hogan has built. After dark, the inexperienced Spanish troops are frightened by noises they mistake for advancing French. The Spanish fire their muskets and then break into a retreat from an enemy that does not exist. Sharpe watches in disgust.

Hogan, accompanied by Agostino, Josephina's servant, rush to find Sharpe. They are both alarmed, and Hogan tells Sharpe that Josephina has been attacked.



In Chapter 19, Sharpe discovers that Josephina has been badly beaten and raped. She has lost a lot of blood and requires the care of a doctor. Hogan watches as Sharpe paces, hardly able to control his rage. Sharpe has confirmed that the culprits are Gibbons and Berry. Hogan reminds Sharpe that if he takes matters into his own hands and kills the two, Sharpe will be executed himself. Once Josephina regains consciousness, Sharpe is able to talk to her, and she asks Sharpe to kill Gibbons and Berry. Sharpe says he will.

Sharpe must hurry to get back to his troops waiting through the night before the battle starts at dawn. On his way back to his troops, he observes French troops sneaking through the darkness to assault the British positions. Sharpe cannot stop the French troops alone, and he is too far from the British to scream and alert them of the coming danger. Sharpe tricks the French into believing that they have been spotted, and the French musket fire alerts the British.

While the British scramble in confusion to repel the French, Sharpe encounters Berry. Sharpe pulls Berry into the shadows where the two cannot be seen by British or French forces.

## Chapters 17-19 Analysis

The detailed description of the preparations soldiers make for battle serves to heighten the suspense and tension for the reader. The reader is able to feel the soldiers' apprehension and fears about going into battle. And when all is ready and the Spanish forces refuse to fight, one can feel the British officers' disappointment and fury. This battle may have been Sharpe's last opportunity to save his military career.

In Chapter 18, it seems that Hogan's fears for Sharpe have come true in that he has fallen in love with Josephina despite knowing that the relationship could not last. But danger to Sharpe from a broken heart is far less threatening than the immediate danger from Sharpe's anger once he discovers that Josephina has been attacked. As the chapter closes, Hogan worries that Sharpe might let his rage out of control.

In Chapter 19, on his way to rejoin his troops after leaving Josephina, Sharpe thinks that he now has two promises he must fulfill, and the two promises are conflicting. The first promise, to capture a French Eagle, requires that Sharpe be a good soldier. The second promise, that Sharpe will commit two acts of murder, requires that Sharpe discard rules and the military code of conduct he holds so dear. Sharpe's problems are increasing daily, and his loyalty is divided and pulling him in opposite directions.

The man in a blue coat who sympathetically watches Sharpe leave Josephina's room is described in much the same way Josephina described the cavalryman she saw earlier. This could be an element of foreshadowing.



# Chapters 20-22

## Chapters 20-22 Summary

Sharpe has Berry on the ground, and Sharpe is holding his sword to Berry's neck. He tells Berry that he intends to kill him. He wants Berry to feel fear. While Berry pleads for his life, Sharpe plunges his sword into Berry's neck.

After murdering Berry, Sharpe rejoins his company, and he talks with Harper. Sharpe tells Harper everything. He tells Harper that the Gibbons and Berry have harmed Josephina, and he admits that he has killed Berry. He even says that he intends to kill Gibbons. Harper supports Sharpe and considers Sharpe's goals his own. When the two have finished talking, they order the soldiers to come forward and fire on the retreating French troops. After a short while the battle is over, and the men prepare for the following day's main battle.

Harper encourages Sharpe to get some rest so that they can fulfill the two promises. Sharpe replies that he has already fulfilled half of one of the promises by killing Berry.

In Chapter 21, early in the morning, the British forces are ready for the French attack. Sharpe spends his time counseling his own young officers, particularly Knowles and Denny. Knowles wants Sharpe to have his watch if he dies in battle. Sharpe makes Knowles feel better by saying that he wished the French would attack a different side of the British formation so that Sharpe would be more likely to inherit a watch. Knowles feels better.

The majority of the fight does not involve Sharpe's men, but he is glad that his inexperienced troops get to witness the other British soldiers fight the French. Whenever possible, Sharpe talks to his men and explains the aspects of the unfolding battle. Toward the end of the first phase of the battle, Sharpe orders his soldiers to charge after the retreating French. After a while he orders them to stop, and Harper orders the men to reload and be ready for the French to return.

In Chapter 22, the British and French troops trade wine, brandy, tobacco, and jokes while they collect their dead and wounded in preparation for more fighting. Hogan meets Sharpe to give him news of Josephina, but decides not to tell Sharpe about the visit from Captain Claud Hardy, the cavalry officer Josephina met and mentioned to Sharpe. Hogan is still concerned that Sharpe will let his anger get the best of him. Hogan cautions Sharpe that killing Gibbons and Berry will mean the end of his career, and he might be convicted of murder and executed. Sharpe promises that he will not do anything to Berry.

Sharpe learns that the first of his Riflemen, Gataker, has been killed in the fighting. The French artillery opens fire, and the battle begins again.



## Chapters 20-22 Analysis

Harper demonstrates genuine concern for his friend, and Sharpe shows the trust he places in Harper when he is honest and admits to Harper that he has just committed murder. Harper understands the implications of all of the various elements of Sharpe's difficult situation. This demonstrates that more than being captain and lieutenant the two men are real friends.

In Chapter 21, despite all of the tumultuous events in Sharpe's personal life, he is first and foremost a soldier. His first responsibility is always to his fellow soldiers. When young Lieutenant Knowles comes to tell Sharpe that he wants him to have a watch if Knowles dies in battle, Sharpe calms the young soldier with a mixture of instruction and humor.

In Chapter 22, in the conversation between Sharpe and Hogan, Hogan is concerned that Sharpe will try to get revenge against Gibbons and Berry. Hogan knows that if Sharpe is caught, Sharpe's career will be ruined. In an instance of verbal and dramatic irony, Sharpe promises that he will do nothing to Berry. Sharpe and the reader know that Sharpe has already murdered Berry.



# Chapters 23-25

## Chapters 23-25 Summary

The chapter opens from the perspective of Simmerson. He thinks that the war is already lost, and that command of the British forces should have been given to him instead of generals like Wellesley. While Simmerson is thinking about the upcoming battle and how unfair it is that his self-proclaimed military brilliance is not recognized, he concocts a plan to save his battalion and bring himself glory. He orders his battalion to march away from their formations and away from the upcoming battle. This action defies orders and leaves the rest of the British forces in a vulnerable position.

Simmerson believes that when the rest of the British forces are destroyed, his will be the only remaining force and he will get the recognition and the command he believes he deserves. Sharpe sees the rest of the South Essex moving away from their designated positions and creating a huge gap the French can use to attack other British forces, but Sharpe is busy trying to command his Light Company in their desperate fight against the French advance. Still, Sharpe races back to Simmerson and asks what he is doing. Sharpe reminds Simmerson that the Light Company is already deployed and about to face a larger French force. While Sharpe is trying to reason with Simmerson, an officer sent from General Hill comes to order Simmerson to return his troops to their previous position. Simmerson refuses, and Sharpe knows it is futile to argue. He returns to his Light Company and certain death.

The British forces fight valiantly, and for a moment it appears that the French will be driven back. But then a reserve French force enters the battle, and the French are again able to advance. Sharpe sees that another of his riflemen, Pendleton, has been killed. Without the South Essex supporting his Light Company, as they were before Simmerson ordered them to retreat, Sharpe knows that he will likely lose all of his riflemen and perhaps his own life.

A Lieutenant Colonel approaches Simmerson and tells him he is relieved of command. Simmerson tries to protest, but the Lieutenant Colonel draws his sword, and Simmerson backs down. The Lieutenant Colonel orders Gibbons to join Sharpe and the Light Company.

The chapter ends with Simmerson watching from the hilltop, seeing that not only are the British forces not being destroyed, they seem to be winning.

In Chapter 24, Sharpe and his men are still fighting a desperate battle. They cannot see much because of all of the smoke on the battlefield. Ensign Denny runs to Sharpe and tells him that the South Essex is returning to the battle. Sharpe sees that indeed the South Essex is returning to battle, but he also sees that they are so far away that they might not be able to assist in time. Sharpe also sees that Lieutenant Gibbons is approaching on horseback but stays in the rear, away from the actual fighting.



Sharpe does not know that the South Essex is no longer under the command of Simmerson, and he believes that even if the battalion reaches the Light Company's position in time they will be of no help because of Simmerson's incompetent leadership. He believes the Light Company is entirely on its own. He decides to do something daring.

Sharpe approaches his men and announces that he intends to try to capture the French Eagle in possession of the military unit the Light Company has been fighting. He tells his men that they can either come with him or go back and rejoin the South Essex battalion. Sharpe also says that any man who joins him is a fool and certain to die. But Sharpe makes one exception to his offer. He orders Ensign Denny not to join him. He says that he wants Ensign Denny to experience his seventeenth birthday.

As Sharpe marches forward toward the enemy position, Harper tells Sharpe that all of the men from the Light Company have come on the attempt to capture the eagle. Sharpe turns and sees that Ensign Denny is still among the troops. He again orders Denny to turn back. Denny protests, but Sharpe is adamant in his order. While Sharpe is telling Denny to return to safety, he sees that Lieutenant Gibbons is still sitting on his horse watching the Light Company but far from danger.

Sharpe and the Light Company are getting ever closer to the enemy, but the enemy has yet to notice. All of their attention is focused on other British regiments. First a drummer boy sees Sharpe's men, and then an officer notices the approaching Light Company. The officer is able to alert the rest of the enemy troops, and from that moment on the fight is intense.

The entire Light Company fights a fierce battle at close quarters to get at the eagle. Once the final line of troops guarding the eagle is encountered, Sharpe believes that only he and Harper have broken through. But just as Sharpe reaches down to pick up the eagle, he realizes that Ensign Denny has been fighting at his side the whole time. He realizes this just in time to witness Ensign Denny killed. As the eagle is captured and the enemy retreats, Sharpe realizes that he has never seen so many dead bodies.

The chapter concludes with Simmerson watching from a hilltop. He is already composing a letter back to England explaining how his actions have brought victory to the British forces.

When Chapter 25 opens, the fighting is nearly complete, but another event has added to the horror of the battlefield. A grass fire has been ignited, and it is spreading over the battlefield before either side of the battle can retrieve the wounded.

Sharpe learns that in the end of the struggle for the eagle, only he, Harper, and Denny had been able to break through. Sharpe also learns that Lieutenant Knowles has been shot but is still alive.

Lieutenant Colonel William Lawford, Sharpe's friend, looks on at the outcome of the battle, and the reader learns that he was the officer who relieved Simmerson and took command of the South Essex.





Sharpe and Harper are finally able to relax for a moment. They tell each other jokes about what might be the outcome of capturing a French Eagle, something that had never been done before. Harper sees a strange looking magpie fly down near the stream and wants to go investigate. Sharpe tells him to go ahead and agrees to wait for his return.

While Harper is away looking for the strange bird, Sharpe waits and looks at the captured eagle. He feels pride and satisfaction, but his reverie is interrupted when he hears hoof beats and has to roll to avoid being trampled by a horse ridden by Lieutenant Gibbons. Sharpe is unarmed, and has to dodge repeated attacks from Gibbons. Just when it seems that Gibbons has Sharpe and is about to kill him, Gibbons falls forward and Sharpe sees that a French bayonet has been thrust through Gibbon's back. Sharpe also sees Harper grinning.

Sharpe and Harper rejoin the rest of the South Essex, and Sharpe learns that his friend Lawford had taken command. All of the troops of the South Essex cheer when Sharpe hoists the eagle in the air.

From a high hilltop, Generals Wellesley and Hill watch and realize that the battle has been won and that the South Essex has captured an eagle.

## Chapters 23-25 Analysis

While the narrator has occasionally told the story from the perspective of characters other than Sharpe, usually in brief breaks from Sharpe's perspective, this is the first time the story is presented at length from Simmerson's point of view. The reader can see how deluded and narcissistic Simmerson is. In a darkly humorous bit of irony, Simmerson thinks how brilliant his nephew Gibbons is because Gibbons has always agreed with Simmerson.

The narrator does not name the Lieutenant Colonel who relieves Simmerson. And by the end of the chapter, Sharpe does not know that Simmerson has been relieved of command. This heightens the tension in the story.

In Chapter 24, Sharpe is resigned to having to fight the battle without the support of the South Essex. He and the Light Company fight to the best of their ability, despite knowing that death is almost certain. This daring is further illustrated by all of the troops of the Light Company volunteering to go with Sharpe on his quest for the eagle.

In stark contrast to the actions of Sharpe and his Light Company, Simmerson sits on a hill, trying to think of ways to take credit for the day's actions. And Gibbons, while obeying orders to join the Light Cavalry, stays far back to avoid any actual fighting.

The elation of having captured the eagle is tempered by the tragedy of Ensign Denny's death. Sharpe genuinely cared for the boy and tried hard to keep him from the unnecessary portions of the battle. While Sharpe does not currently have time to grieve, one has to wonder if Denny's death isn't something that will haunt Sharpe in the future.





Chapter 25 brings resolution to much of the plot, and what should have been a time for celebration is interrupted by Gibbons attempt to kill Sharpe. The most notable part of Sharpe's triumph over Gibbons is that it is Harper who does the actual killing. This further strengthens their bond and is additional evidence for the theme of friendship in the novel.

Sharpe knows that after capturing the eagle he won't be sent to a post in the West Indies.

# Epilogue & Historical Note

## Epilogue & Historical Note Summary

In the Epilogue, Sharpe and Harper are at a dinner attended by many important officers, including Wellesley, Hill, and General "Black Bob" Crauford. The generals congratulate Sharpe on his daring capture of the French Eagle, and they speak of the British victory in battle. But despite the victory, Wellesley announces that the British are leaving Spain. He says that the Spanish allies have failed in every way, particularly in their promise to supply the British troops with food. At the conclusion of the chapter, Wellesley tells a tale of a British sergeant who performed a heroic feat at a battle in India. Then he tells the soldiers at the dinner that the sergeant is now a captain named Richard Sharpe.

In the Historical Note section, the author of Sharpe's Eagle offers thanks to the nonfiction books and authors that enabled him to write Sharpe's Eagle with accurate historical detail. The author also tells what elements of Sharpe's Eagle were facts and which were fiction.

## Epilogue & Historical Note Analysis

In the Epilogue, while the officers are congratulating Sharpe, his mind wanders to a time not long before the dinner when he had to say goodbye to Josephina. He walked with her until she met Claud Hardy, the wealthy British cavalry officer she plans to go with to Lisbon. It is unclear which event has had the greatest impact on Sharpe emotionally, the victory on the battlefield or the loss in the romantic relationship.

The Historical Note section offers some surprising revelations. While most readers will assume that much of Sharpe's Eagle was based on historical events, many will be shocked to discover how much of the novel is a retelling of historical fact.



# Characters

## Lieutenant Richard Sharpe

Richard Sharpe is first described as tall, dark, and brooding. The reader learns early on that he is no ordinary officer. Sharpe first enlisted in the army as a private sixteen years prior. He came from an impoverished background. In fact, Sharpe is an orphan who does not even know his own birthday. While in the army, Sharpe encounters the only security and sense of self-worth he has ever known. This drives him to succeed.

Sharpe is the veteran of several battles in India. In some of them he distinguished himself and rose to the rank of sergeant. Also during his time in India, Sharpe was imprisoned with William Lawford, a young officer Sharpe had mentored. The two spent their time teaching Sharpe to read and write. This newfound literacy makes Sharpe eligible for an officer's commission.

Sharpe's identity as a "rifleman" is of utmost importance to him. He takes great pride in being a member of the 95th Rifles, an elite infantry regiment. In fact, Sharpe at times seems to take more pride in being a rifleman than in anything else.

There is more to Sharpe than being a good soldier and fighter. He is capable of being a good friend and a good mentor. Oftentimes in his relationship with Patrick Harper, he displays genuine concern beyond that normal for an officer toward his sergeant. When the young officers and men of his company show fear, Sharpe calms them. And when it comes to women, Sharpe can be charmingly naïve.

## Sergeant Patrick Harper

Patrick Harper is described as a gigantic Irishman. He is huge in stature and equally larger than life in his sense of humor. Aside from his immense size, the most notable quality about Harper is his perennial upbeat attitude. Even in the direst of situations, Harper finds humor. Once when he and Sharpe were challenged to teach an inexperienced group of soldiers to improve their rate of fire with the musket, Harper said the troops were so bad that he wished they would be sent to Ireland because then his homeland would be an independent nation within a week.

Harper offers the perfect balance to the outwardly appearing rigid Richard Sharpe. But there is more to Patrick Harper than being a jolly big fellow. He longs for his home in Ireland and struggles with his decision to join the British military, the army of the enemy. Had he followed his passions, he would have stayed home and fought against the English rulers, but he took a more practical route, one that did not involve poverty and starvation.



Another notable quality of Harper is his capacity for friendship. He truly cares about Sharpe. He considers insults against Sharpe to be insults against him, and he considers Sharpe's obstacles and goals to be his own.

## Captain Hogan

Captain Hogan is an engineer with the British army. Instead of fighting in the infantry or cavalry, Hogan is tasked with creating fortifications or destroying things. When the novel opens, Hogan is in charge of destroying a bridge so that the French army cannot use it to cross and fight the British and Spanish armies.

Hogan is an Irishman, and in some ways his jovial personality is similar to Harper's. He is fond of good jokes and alcoholic beverages. And Hogan is a true friend to Richard Sharpe. When Sharpe becomes involved with Josephina, Hogan worries about his friend who is not experienced with women, and he even lends Sharpe money. Or rather, he gives Sharpe money. Hogan knows that Sharpe will never be able to repay the money.

## Sir Henry Simmerson

Sir Henry Simmerson embodies everything Richard Sharpe hates about the English system of purchasing commissions, or military officer rank. Simmerson is a wealthy man with powerful connections. Simmerson has no military experience, but he has proclaimed himself a strategic genius. And Simmerson is so wealthy that he has purchased the rank of Colonel and a command of an entire regiment.

Simmerson is an elitist who believes that wealth and social class mean everything. He has no concept of talent or merit independent of monetary possessions and social connections. He sees the men, particularly the enlisted men, as garbage that must be punished and beaten in order to perform. Simmerson has never been in a battle and believes that the formula for winning wars is in endless drills and inspections.

In Sharpe, Simmerson sees the worst kind of upstart. To Simmerson, Sharpe is nothing but a crude peasant from the gutter pretending to be an officer. And though Sharpe tries to be respectful, his talent and experience betray him, and he makes a fool of Simmerson every time they meet.

Early on, Simmerson becomes much more of a threat to the British forces than the French. He punishes and insults his soldiers until they are ready to mutiny. And Simmerson presents a particular danger to Sharpe. Simmerson makes no secret that he intends to use all of his influence to end Sharpe's military career.



## Josephina Lacoste

This young and beautiful woman first catches Sharpe's eye as he looks through the window of a building in Portugal. Josephina is fleeing a bad marriage in Lisbon, and she is following the British army as a means to get to Madrid. She first allies herself with Lieutenant Gibbons, but after Gibbons and his friend Berry try to harm her, she flees. Sharpe comes to the rescue, and for a time she becomes his romantic interest. Josephina is absolutely honest about her goal of finding a wealthy man. She does not deny that she will use men to get the life she wants, but she hopes that her honesty will protect Sharpe, whom she does not want to hurt. Josephina can see that Sharpe is falling in love with her, and she tries repeatedly to remind him that they have only a short time together and that she is still seeking a wealthy man.

Perhaps one of the most surprising things about Josephina's character is that she repays the money Sharpe has borrowed from Hogan to support her. So she may be primarily interested in wealth and luxury, but she is not incapable of love and caring.

## Lieutenant Christian Gibbons

This wealthy and privileged young man is the nephew of Colonel Simmerson. Like his uncle, he looks on Sharpe with disdain and believes that Sharpe should not be an officer because he comes from a background of poverty. When Gibbons first meets Sharpe, he mistakes Sharpe for a private and hits him with a horsewhip. Gibbons comes to hate Sharpe when Sharpe is given the promotion Gibbons wants and again when Sharpe begins a relationship with Josephina. Gibbons is too cowardly to face Sharpe and get revenge, so he beats and rapes the woman Sharpe loves.

## Lieutenant Colonel William Lawford

This officer is an old friend of Sharpe's. When Lawford was a new lieutenant in the army, Sharpe was a sergeant, and he taught Lawford many of the things that later enabled him to succeed and become a fine soldier and officer. Lawford repaid the favor by teaching Sharpe how to read and write while the two were imprisoned in India. Sharpe's literacy made him eligible for commission. So it can be said that Lawford and Sharpe owe each other for their success.

## Captain Lennox

Captain Lennox is veteran soldier who served in India at the same time as Sharpe. Though the two did not know each other previously, they have a great deal of respect for each other. Lennox dies after Simmerson's blunder that cost the South Essex their color flag. While Lennox is dying, he makes a request of Sharpe, and Sharpe promises to honor the request. Later, one learns that Lennox's dying wish was that the loss of the South Essex's color be avenged by the capture of a French Eagle.



## Sir Arthur Wellesley

This man is a general in the British army. Some readers familiar with history might know that Wellesley will eventually become the Duke of Wellington, the man who finally defeated Napoleon. Sharpe sees Wellesley ride by when he first arrives with other British troops gathering for a battle in Spain. Sharpe meets Wellesley in person after Simmerson has tried to blame Sharpe for the defeat of the South Essex and tried to get Sharpe brought before a court martial. Wellesley is a brilliant military commander and knows who is to blame for the defeat of the South Essex Regiment and the loss of their color. He refuses Simmerson's request and instead promotes Sharpe to captain and gives him command of one of Simmerson's companies.

## Lieutenant Knowles

Lieutenant Knowles is one of a few officers in the South Essex who have potential despite being commanded by the incompetent Colonel Simmerson. Sharpe meets Lieutenant Knowles when he instructs the Light Company in firing their muskets, and he continues to mentor Lieutenant Knowles throughout the novel. By the final battle, Knowles has become a good soldier and effective leader. Knowles is shot in the final battle, but he survives.

## Ensign Denny

This young officer is only sixteen years old, and he admires Sharpe. But his bravery and failure to follow Sharpe's order to stay out of a fight cost him his life.

## Major Forrest

This man is of a timid nature who would have rather taken another occupation besides soldier. But through his association with Sharpe, he eventually becomes an effective officer and leader.

## Lieutenant John Berry

This wealthy and privileged young man is a friend of Lieutenant Gibbons. Like Lieutenant Gibbons, this man is drunken rapist who participates in the attack on Josephina.

## Kirby

This soldier from the South Essex spots some deserters and informs Sergeant Harper.



## **Huckfield**

This soldier tries to convince the other soldiers of the South Essex to defy Sharpe's order to assemble. Later, after Sharpe succeeds in saving the men from being crushed by the cavalry troops sent to quell the mutiny, Huckfield thanks Sharpe.

## **Agostino**

This man is Josephina Lacoste's servant.

## **Hagman**

This man is a former poacher and the best shot among Sharpe's riflemen.

## **Captain Sterritt**

This soldier was the original captain of the Light Company. His forces are at the bridge with Sharpe's riflemen while the rest of the South Essex joins the Spanish infantry facing the French cavalry.

## **Chasseur Captain**

This French cavalry officer negotiates with Sharpe after he and his men are left stranded after the bridge was demolished.

## **General Rowland Hill**

Known as "Daddy Hill" to his troops, this general has the reputation of being kind and caring to his troops. This general orders Simmerson not to flog the soldiers of the South Essex.

## **Captain Claud Hardy**

This officer belongs to a cavalry unit composed of wealthy men. Josephina meets this man, and later he waits with her while Sharpe is in battle and she recovers after being attacked by Gibbons and Berry.

## **Gatker**

This was the first of Sharpe's riflemen to be killed at the battle of Talevera.



## **Pendleton**

This was the second of Sharpe's riflemen to be killed in the battle at Talavera.

## **General Crauford**

Known to the troops as "Black Bob," this general has the reputation as being a strict disciplinarian that was still admired by his troops.





# Objects/Places

## Abrantes, Portugal

This is the town where the novel begins. It is also where British forces rest before moving on to Spain.

## Napoleonic Wars

These wars were fought between the French Empire under the rule of Napoleon and various other allied European countries in the early years of the nineteenth century.

## Regimentia de la Santa Maria

This regiment of Spanish infantry partners with the British South Essex Regiment. Due to incompetent leadership, this regiment is entirely wiped out by French cavalry.

## South Essex Regiment

This single-battalion regiment of British infantry is led by the incompetent Colonel Simmerson. In their first battle the majority of the regiment is killed and they lose their color flag.

## West Indies/Fever Islands

These British territories in the Caribbean Sea were notoriously known as the Fever Islands. These are considered to be the least desirable of all British military posts in the early nineteenth century because of rampant disease.

## Peninsular War

During these parts of the Napoleonic Wars, Great Britain, Portugal, and Spain were united in war against France. The battles were fought in Portugal and Spain, or the Iberian Peninsula. All of Sharpe's Eagle takes place during the Peninsular War.

## Battalion

A military unit consisting of several companies and usually composed of around a thousand soldiers.



## **Regiment**

A military unit consisting of one or more battalions. In the case of the South Essex Regiment, it is a single-battalion regiment.

## **Talavera, Spain**

This is the name of the town nearest the location of the largest and final battle in Sharpe's Eagle.

## **French Eagle**

This is the standard that the French military units carry into battle on the ends of long poles. Like how the British carry flags as standards, the French carry gold metal eagles.



# Themes

## Wealth versus Merit

A recurring theme throughout Sharpe's Eagle is that of promotion and status based on wealth and power versus promotion based on merit and performance. Richard Sharpe came from an impoverished background, but he has worked hard and used his natural talents to succeed. Sharpe has been rewarded for his performance by promotion from the enlisted ranks to an officer's commission. But other far less talented and experienced men have been given far greater rewards because of their wealth and social standing.

Sir Henry Simmerson and his nephew Christian Gibbons epitomize what Richard Sharpe sees as an unfair and harmful system. They have no military experience and seemingly little intelligence. They regard all those of lower social standing as inferior, and they treat soldiers under their command as garbage. Sharpe and others see Simmerson and Gibbons as a greater danger to the British troops than the French they have been sent to fight.

Wealth versus merit also influences Sharpe's personal life. He sees the beautiful woman Josephina Lacoste attach herself to Christian Gibbons because he has money. Though Sharpe wins Josephina for a short while, ultimately he loses her to a cavalry officer because the man has more money.

It would be fair to say that Sharpe has to work many times harder than an officer of a similar rank with money. Sharpe can hope for a commission only if his merit is recognized and only if someone with money hasn't first purchased that commission. And the trouble that Sharpe has to work so hard to get out of could easily be forgotten if only Sharpe came from a wealthy well-connected family.

## Friendship

The theme of friendship is an important element in the Sharpe's Eagle. This theme is most evident in the example of Richard Sharpe and Patrick Harper, but it is not the only example. Sharpe also has the friendship of Captain Hogan and Lieutenant Colonel William Lawford.

In each of the above examples, the friendship at one time was based on a superior/subordinate dynamic, but in the case of Sharpe and Harper, the friendship has moved well beyond this type of relationship.

It could be said that friendship is absolutely necessary to everything that happens in the novel. If all of Sharpe's impressive achievements are examined, in each and every case the success of the event depended on a friend. Sharpe is able to get an officer's commission because Lawford taught him how to read. Sharpe is able to romance



Josephina because Hogan lends him money. Sharpe captures the French Eagle because Harper is fighting beside him. And Sharpe is saved from death at the end of the novel by Harper's quick reaction with a bayonet.

Indeed, Sharpe owes his life to friendship. In the opening of the novel, Sharpe's wound is being tended by the friend who saved his life in battle.

## **Passion and Desire versus Duty**

Characters in fiction and in real life are often torn between desire and duty. This theme is especially true of Richard Sharpe.

The first time the reader sees Sharpe put aside his desires in order to perform his duty occurs when he is severely insulted by first Gibbons and then Simmerson. Sharpe has every reason to be angry, and while it would be against military regulations for Sharpe to verbally or otherwise vent his anger directly at Simmerson, it would not be difficult to understand. But Sharpe takes his duty as a British officer seriously, and he lives by its code of conduct even when insulted by other officers who do not care about codes or duty.

Later, one can see Sharpe's dedication to duty tested by an even more intense desire and greater temptation. Perhaps the best example occurs with the discovery of the deserters. When Harper and Kirby inform Sharpe that the deserters have been sighted, Sharpe could easily say he is not responsible for apprehending deserters and then go and spend his evening with Josephina. But even though it means that he will not be able to see Josephina, Sharpe must attend to his duty.

While no clear message is given, the repeated contests between duty and desire might be saying that things for which a person feels a duty are long lasting and meaningful while passions are fleeting.

# Style

## Point of View

Sharpe's Eagle is told by an omniscient third person narrator and comes primarily from the perspective of the protagonist Richard Sharpe. However, the narrator can and does access the thoughts of other characters. The perspective of Sharpe gives the novel its distinct tone and voice. Richard Sharpe is a thirty-two-year-old officer in the British army who has seen many battles. Sharpe's background as an impoverished orphan also colors his perspective. Sharpe's calm reserve in the face of danger and his understanding of the unfairness of the control by the rich and powerful governs the way Sharpe, the narrator, and the audience understands situations and events.

Because the narrator can access and relay the inner thoughts of characters other than Sharpe, the reader often feels events more intensely than if one saw them only from Sharpe's perspective. One can appreciate the friendship characters like Harper and Hogan feel for Sharpe. The reader gains a fuller understanding of the absurdity of some of the ideas of characters like Simmerson. From this character, one of Sharpe's antagonists, one can get a more vivid picture of how much danger Sharpe is in after humiliating the wealthy but inept Colonel.

By presenting the novel primarily through the eyes of Sharpe, the narrator allows the reader to see the other characters through the discerning and critical eye of a man who has had to rely on his powers of keen observation for his survival and the survival of the men under his command.

## Setting

The primary setting is determined by the time, and it is this element of the setting that all contemporary readers will find the most unfamiliar. The novel is set two hundred years previous to our contemporary early twenty first century vantage. Because of this, the setting of Sharpe's Eagle, like other historical novels that endeavor toward historical accuracy, is of vital importance.

And the author uses this element of vital importance in order to draw in the reader. In the opening of the novel the author does not immediately and explicitly state that the year is 1809. Instead he gives a barrage of clues that immediately let us know that the novel is set in the past, but unless the reader is an astute student of history, probably no specific year can be guessed. The general reader is left with increasing curiosity.

Even after the author reveals the year, the narrative remains rich with historical detail. Military items, particularly weapons, are painstakingly described down to the finest detail. The sword Richard Sharpe carries is vividly described, and the differences between a musket and rifle are catalogued at length. Readers who have never seen a



musket will know exactly how one is loaded and fired after Sharpe gives a demonstration to the Light Company.

While the time of the novel is of crucial importance, the author does not neglect to illustrate the Portuguese and Spanish countryside. The regions of Estremadura in Portugal and the fictional town of Talavera are depicted with realism. But in the end it is the aspects of time that most readers will remember. Sharpe's Eagle in all its richly portrayed images is a novel set more in time than in place.

## Language and Meaning

Despite being set in the early nineteenth century, Sharpe's Eagle is presented in contemporary language. This makes the setting and the subject, the adventures of a man two hundred years ago, more accessible to modern readers. While some may think at first consideration that the use of modern language is inadequate to present a world two hundred years gone, this is not the case with Sharpe's Eagle.

In many cases, the names of specific items and practices are kept the same, but in each instance where a modern reader will be unfamiliar with a word or phrase, the author gives an outright definition or enables the reader to understand via context. Few readers besides military historians or fans of historical fiction will know what a "Hungarian bath" is, but the author goes into sufficient detail in describing the practice of using the smoke from a grass fire to eliminate the lice that inhabit wool clothing. The author manages to provide these definitions without intrusive exposition that detracts from progression of the plot.

Perhaps the most striking use of language occurs in the scenes where battles are fought. The narrator makes no effort to conceal the brutal nature of armed conflict. On the contrary, all of the bloody and cruel horrors of violence are vivid and terrifying. Other famous fictional books about the Napoleonic Wars might speak of concepts such as glory and valor in war, but Sharpe's Eagle vividly describes a grass fire that engulfs a battlefield and overwhelms the wounded men who are unable to flee.

## Structure

The structure of Sharpe's Eagle is entirely linear and chronological. The plot, or rather the action, moves from beginning to end. The Prologue begins in Portugal and the Epilogue ends with General Wellesley saying that the British are abandoning Spain. The only elements of backflash occur in the characters' minds, and these moments are brief.

The novel is divided into twenty-five chapters, an epilogue, and a Historical Note section. But the narrative is continuous and unbroken. Where one chapter ends, the next begins.

Possibly the most notable aspect of the structure is the way the author keeps the action and tension escalating in a nearly unending race to the finish. Time and time again it



seems that Sharpe has become burdened with troubles he can never hope to escape. Little or no resolution is achieved until the very end. Even at the novel's conclusion, the action keeps its breakneck pace. Not until the very last pages, the Epilogue, does the reader receive resolution to some of the character's lives. On the contrary, many questions are left unanswered.

Also important to note in terms of structure is the fact that Sharpe's Eagle is the first work in a series of novels centering on the adventures of Richard Sharpe. Because this is the first novel of the series, no background knowledge is required to enjoy Sharpe's Eagle. The complexity and depth of the characters and the teasing reference in the Historical Note section to Sharpe and Harper being headed to Waterloo are sure to make readers of Sharpe's Eagle want to read the following books.



## Quotes

"The Lieutenant might be moody, irritable, and liable to snap at the Sergeant as a means of venting frustration, but Harper, if pressed, would have described Sharpe as a friend. It was not a word a sergeant could use of an officer, but Harper could have thought of no other. Sharpe was the best soldier the Irishman had seen on a battlefield, with a countryman's eye for ground and a hunter's instinct for using it, but Sharpe looked for advice to only one man in a battle, Sergeant Harper." Chap. 4, p. 35

"But Ireland was Ireland and hunger drove men to strange places. If Harper had followed his heart he would be fighting against the English, not for them, but like so many of his countrymen he had found a refuge from poverty and persecution in the ranks of the enemy. He never forgot home." Chap. 4, p. 36

"Sergeant Harper handed Sharpe his uniform jacket. 'Do you want a Hungarian Bath, sir.'

Sharpe shook his head. 'It's bearable.' There were not too many lice in the jacket, not enough to justify steeping it in the smoke from a grass fire and smell like a charcoal burner for the next two days." Chap. 1, p. 3

"Bugles called them from the slaughter, back up the road to where they formed ranks round their three trophies. They should feel proud of themselves, Sharpe thought; four hundred light cavalry had broken two Regiments, captured three colors, and all because of the stupidity and pride of Simmerson and the Spanish Colonel." Chap. 7, p. 82

""Saved the flag, sir. Didn't we?"

Sharpe looked at the teenager's face. After a life of thieving in the streets of Bristol the boy had a pinched, hungry face, but his eyes were shining and there was a desperate plea for reassurance in his expression. Sharpe smiled. 'We did it.'" Chap. 7, p. 84

""Go away, Gibbons.' Sharpe spoke with an equal disdain. 'Get your precious uncle to talk with me, not his lapdog. As for the color, it stays here. You deserted it, and I fought for it. My men fought for it and it stays with us until you get us back across the river. Do you understand?' His voice was rising with anger." Chap. 8, p. 92

""Don't thank me. I've probably done you no favor.' He looked up at Sharpe with a kind of wry distaste. 'You have a habit, Sharpe, of deserving gratitude by methods which deserve condemnation. Am I plain?'" Chap. 10, p. 114

""Richard, I'm afraid that he will damage you. You're a pawn in the battle of politicians. He is a fool, agreed, but his friends in London will not want him to look a fool! They will demand a scapegoat. He's their voice, do you understand that?'" Chap. 10, p. 116

""Can you hear me, Berry?"

'Yes, Sharpe. I can hear you.' There was the faintest hint of hope in Berry's voice. Sharpe dashed it.





'I'm going to kill you. I want you to know so that you are as frightened as she was. Do you understand?'" Chap. 20, p. 207

"'Get some sleep, sir. You need it.' Harper grinned briefly. 'We have a promise to keep tomorrow.'

Sharpe lifted the bottle towards the Sergeant as if in a toast. 'A promise and a half, Sergeant. A promise and a half.'" Chap. 20, p. 211

"He felt desperately tired, not just the tiredness of disturbed and little sleep, but the weariness of problems that seemed to have no end. Berry's death was like a half forgotten dream and solved nothing except half a promise, and he had little idea how to solve the other half or the promise about the Eagle." Chap. 21, p. 216

"Sharpe loved the army, it was his home, the refuge that an orphan had needed sixteen years before, but he liked it most because it gave him, in a clumsy way, the opportunity to prove again and again that he was valued." Chap. 1, p. 13



## Topics for Discussion

The author includes a quote from Samuel Johnson before the start of the novel. Why is this quote equally true in Johnson's time, the time of Sharpe's Eagle, and today? Do those men who wish to have been a soldier think of the glory and valor described in other books and movies or warfare as it is vividly described in Sharpe's Eagle?

Sharpe should not get along with officers, yet he is an officer. Harper should not like the English, yet he is a soldier in the British army. How did these two characters come to serve in a military in their respective roles?

Sharpe's Eagle shows human beings at their most violent and destructive. It also shows people behaving according to rules of civil behavior. Describe at least two situations where people behaved in a polite and friendly manner immediately after enacting extreme violence.

Sharpe's Eagle is rich in historical detail, even in describing situations that many modern readers would find surprising or even shocking. Discuss a few situations that modern readers would find surprising.

Richard Sharpe has many impressive, even incredible, accomplishments in the novel. Does he achieve any of these entirely on his own? If not, discuss how others, particularly his friends, enabled Sharpe to achieve.

Josephina Lacoste seems to embody the stereotype of a woman who wants nothing but riches. But can she be so easily categorized? Discuss some specific actions that Josephina performs that a truly greedy person would not do.

Sharpe observes that most soldiers, especially the enlisted ranks, do not know or care about larger political issues. They do not fight for "King and Country," but they will fight to the death for a cloth flag at the top of a wooden pole, their unit's colors. What does this colored flag symbolize, and why would men die to protect it?