

# **Sharpe's Rifles: Richard Sharpe and the French Invasion of Galicia, January 1809 Study Guide**

**Sharpe's Rifles: Richard Sharpe and the French Invasion of Galicia, January 1809 by Bernard Cornwell**

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# Plot Summary

Sharpe's Rifles is a novel in a series that tells the stories of the daring adventures of British Army soldier Richard Sharpe. This novel is set early in the British involvement in the Peninsular War of the Napoleonic Wars of the nineteenth century. The story begins in the winter of 1809.

Don Blas Vivar leads a group of Spanish cavalry called Cazadores. They are being pursued by a French colonel commanding a force of French cavalry. Also pursuing Vivar is a Spanish civilian who knows the contents of the strongbox Vivar guards and Vivar's intended destination. The French colonel has orders from Napoleon himself to capture the strongbox.

Lieutenant Richard Sharpe is a British soldier who has been promoted from the enlisted ranks to officer. This is an unusual practice in the British Army at the time, and Sharpe's promotion causes resentment from other officers and enlisted men alike. Sharpe's commanding officer dislikes him and assigns him to administrative roles, but due to the incompetence of the commanding officer, a group of infantry get cut off from the rest of the British Army, and Sharpe finds himself in command of a group of elite troops who do not respect his authority.

In an effort to rejoin the rest of the British Army, Sharpe decides to take his men on a long march to Lisbon. The troops believe this is the wrong course of action, and they mutiny. They send Patrick Harper, a large and strong Irishman, as their representative. Sharpe and Harper fight and are on the verge of killing each other when Vivar encounters the British soldiers and stops the fight.

Sharpe agrees to join forces with the Spanish under the command of Vivar, and in doing so Sharpe and his riflemen become involved in Vivar's plans to capture a Spanish city and perform what many will regard as a miracle. Vivar believes this will inspire the Spanish people to resist the invading French forces and eventually allow the Spanish military to expel the French from Spain. While cooperating with Vivar, Sharpe meets Louisa Parker a beautiful nineteen-year-old English woman, and though he tries to stay focused on leading his men, Sharpe falls in love.

Shortly after meeting Louisa's family, Sharpe discovers that Vivar has intentionally deceived him in order to get his help. The two men argue and almost fight before a priest stops the altercation. Sharpe separates his forces from Vivar's and resumes his journey to Lisbon. Louisa's family goes along, and the troops make good progress south until they are overtaken and trapped in a farmhouse by a much larger force of French cavalry.

During the time that Sharpe's men are trapped in the farmhouse, Sharpe meets Colonel de l'Eclin, a cavalry officer with a brilliant tactical mind and a record of extreme cruelty. Sharpe refuses de l'Eclin's demand for surrender, and just as it appears that the British soldiers will be annihilated, Vivar reappears and rescues the British. Once again Sharpe

joins Vivar, and the two embark on a mission to capture the city of Santiago de Compostela and perform a miracle.



# Prologue and Chapter 1

## Prologue and Chapter 1 Summary

Sharpe's Rifles is a novel in the series of novels chronicling the exploits of Richard Sharpe. After a surprise attack by the French, a detachment of British soldiers in northern Spain is separated from the rest of the British army. Sharpe becomes the officer in charge and must earn the respect of his men and defeat the enemy.

### Prologue

In the winter of 1809 in northern Spain Major Blas Vivar tries to keep a strongbox out of the possession of a group of French military under the command of a French colonel. Since the French have taken Madrid, they have repeatedly come close to capturing Vivar and his men. Vivar has taken refuge in the mountains and the men are freezing.

Among the men chasing Vivar he watches two the most, the colonel and another man in a black coat and white boots. The man in the black coat knows the contents of the box and he knows Vivar's destination. Vivar's men have two days of food left. Vivar tells Lieutenant Davila that they will separate forces. Vivar will take eighty men and Davila will wait for the French forces to depart in pursuit of Vivar's forces. Then Davila will take the rest of the men and head south. He tells Davila to go in search of more men and horses and then to go to Santiago de Compostela. If Vivar is not there, Davila should march east until he finds Vivar.

Davila asks Vivar why they do not head west in search of the British, and Vivar asks if Davila would trust the British with the contents of the box. The next morning Vivar departs, and Davila watches as the French follow in pursuit.

### Chapter 1

More than one hundred British soldiers are drunk and unconscious in a village. They are too drunk to march, so the rest of the British forces abandon them. A lieutenant in the 95th Rifles takes as much rifle ammunition as possible from some crates that have been removed from wagons to make room for wounded. The Lieutenant plans to burn what he cannot carry, but another British soldier protests. He says that it will also burn the drunken soldiers.

Major Warren Dunnet approaches the lieutenant and addresses him as quartermaster. He says to leave the crates and join the rest of the troops. Major Dunnet hates the lieutenant, and he tells Captain Murray that the lieutenant is not a real officer but rather some ramble who was promoted from the ranks. Murray suspects that Dunnet is jealous of the lieutenant's impressive record of bravery in past battles, and that is why he assigned the lieutenant the job of quartermaster.



The lieutenant abandons the crates and joins the rest of the troops. His clothes, like the rest of the riflemen, are tattered. The British forces have been marching west away from the French forces for weeks. The riflemen, as light infantry, guard the rear of the retreating forces. A cavalry officer asks Major Dunnet to command the riflemen to remain behind and give time for the British to move artillery across a bridge. While the men are waiting and guarding the rear, one of the drunken British soldiers who awakens manages to catch up to the main force and warns of approaching French cavalry.

French cavalry attacks and the riflemen open fire. The riflemen are able to stop the initial attack and, during a break in the fighting, both sides regroup and prepare for a second attack. The riflemen's sergeant, Williams, orders the troops to form and prepare for the attack. The French cavalry get off their horses and prepare to attack on foot. No British reinforcements have arrived to help the riflemen. When the order to fall back comes, one of the riflemen, Harper, sarcastically says that they are always retreating.

The French troops do not attack until reinforced by additional cavalry. When they do attack, the riflemen form a square as a defense. The French attack and the riflemen fire. The riflemen inflict casualties on the charging French cavalry, but some riflemen are also killed. In a panic, Major Dunnet orders a retreat. He orders the riflemen to break and run for cover in the hills, but the lieutenant angrily countermands the order. The lieutenant's order is too late, and the riflemen are fleeing in chaos, easy targets for the French cavalry.

The lieutenant tries to get the riflemen to reform and as the lieutenant shouts he draws the attention of the French commander. The French officer on horseback charges the lieutenant. Their swords crash together, and the lieutenant's sword breaks. The lieutenant resumes calling for the riflemen to reform. What few are left of the riflemen, including Captain Murray, join the lieutenant and look back down the hill to see the large number of riflemen who have been killed. They also see that Major Dunnet has been taken prisoner. Only fifty riflemen have survived.

Captain Murray says they will try to go east and hope to reach the rest of the British army. Shortly thereafter, a musket round hits Murray and severely wounds him. Harper picks up Murray and carries him to safety.

The Lieutenant's name is Richard Sharpe. He has been a soldier for a long time.

## **Prologue and Chapter 1 Analysis**

### Prologue

The point of view is from a third person narrator, and the narrator seems to be distant and with a lesser degree of omniscience than in later chapters. Don Blas Vivar seems to be a man capable of formulating complex strategies. The strongbox is mysterious and must be valuable if Vivar must guard it from both enemies and allies.

### Chapter 1



The third person distant narration continues. We do not learn the name of the Lieutenant until the end of the chapter.

It seems that the lieutenant has no friends or allies. Other officers resent him for being promoted from the ranks, and the enlisted soldiers of the ranks do not regard the lieutenant as a true officer. With those in positions of greater rank viewing the lieutenant with suspicion and disdain and those of lower rank refusing to respect his authority, the lieutenant is truly alone.

From the moment the fighting starts it is clear that the lieutenant is no ordinary administrative quartermaster. His actions are automatic. This is a man accustomed to mortal combat. The lieutenant knows that Major Dunnet's command to break and run is the wrong decision; he knows this will scatter the British forces and make them even more vulnerable, but he cannot make himself heard above the noise of battle and stop the already panicked and fleeing men.

The lieutenant displays formidable fighting skill. The attack by the French officer would have killed any ordinary soldier, but the lieutenant manages to save himself. The force of the collision is so severe that the metal sword breaks.

When Captain Murray is shot, the next ranking officer is the lieutenant. It will certainly be difficult for the lieutenant to command the remaining British troops, a group of survivors who have no respect for the lieutenant's authority.





# Chapters 2 and 3

## Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

### Chapter 2

While Sharpe examines the wounded, Williams speaks to Harper so Sharpe cannot hear. Williams says that Sharpe is not a real officer but merely a sergeant who has been promoted. Sharpe orders Williams to move the wounded. Williams suggests surrendering to the French so that the wounded can receive medical attention. Sharpe ignores Williams and orders Williams to have the men ready for inspection in one hour.

Sharpe speaks to Murray and says that they are hopelessly cut off. Murray, believing he is about to die, tries to offer advice to Sharpe on how to build a better relationship with the men. He says that the men are unused to seeing an officer who was once a member of their ranks. He says that the men have the notion that officers are born with special leadership skills. Murray advises Sharpe to get Harper on his side. He also says that he will leave word that his sword is supposed to be given to Sharpe, so the men will think that he liked Sharpe and hopefully give Sharpe more respect.

The following day it is cold and rainy. Sharpe encounters Harper, and Harper asks what plans Sharpe has. Sharpe tells Harper that the men will be marching to Lisbon in an attempt to rejoin the rest of the British army.

Captain Murray dies during the night and Williams delivers his sword to Sharpe. Williams also informs Sharpe that the men do not want to march south to Lisbon. They do not believe it is possible and the men are on the verge of mutiny. Sharpe speaks to Williams loud enough that all can hear. He says to dig a grave for Captain Murray and, if Williams wants to disobey Sharpe, to dig a grave for himself as well.

Sharpe uses a telescope he had received as a gift for bravery. He looks at a village for the possibility of finding food for the men. Harper arrives and informs Sharpe that the men will not go south. Sharpe says he is not interested in hearing Harper's opinion. He orders Harper to prepare to depart. Harper refuses and Sharpe says he is under arrest. Sharpe explains the consequences if he makes it alive to Lisbon without the men. Harper says that Sharpe will never make it and so Sharpe asks if Harper has come to kill him. Harper answers that Sharpe can come with the men and Sharpe agrees that he seems to have little choice.

While Harper believes he has convinced Sharpe to accept the mutiny demands, Sharpe attacks. Though Harper is a far larger man, Sharpe is a skilled fighter and they seem evenly matched. Both men inflict damage on the other until a nearby gunshot sounds. A Spanish officer named Blas Vivar intervenes.



With the fight ended, Sharpe tells Williams that Harper is under arrest. Sharpe senses that Vivar seems to be mocking him for losing control of his troops and the two have a brief and impolite exchange.

### Chapter 3

Sharpe eats with Vivar and Vivar asks if Sharpe thinks that the French have followed the larger group of retreating British. Sharpe does not know. Vivar tells of his ancestry and Sharpe says that he never knew his own father. Vivar's expression indicates that he thinks less of Sharpe and he changes the subject. He asks of Sharpe's plans. Sharpe says that he plans to go south to Lisbon. Vivar says there are no roads to the south this far east and he invites Sharpe to accompany him west where he will find a better road to the south. Vivar says they will depart in one hour and Sharpe agrees to be under Vivar's command.

Vivar addresses the riflemen and Sharpe is annoyed to see how readily they accept the word of another officer. Privately, Vivar asks about Harper. Vivar encourages Sharpe to release Harper, but Sharpe refuses.

Vivar approaches a priest and the priest gives Vivar a small object.

The weather turns increasing cold as the troops march. Vivar and Sharpe talk along the way. Vivar explains that his mounted troops are known as Cazadore, and they come from the local region of Spain, Galicia. He says the Cazadores have the reputation for being backward and rustic among the more metropolitan military leaders, but Vivar also says that the Cazadores are the finest fighters in all of Spain. When the soldiers reach a stream, Vivar halts the advance while he pours holy water in the stream from the container that the priest gave him. He explains that it is a defense against water spirits.

By dawn the soldiers have reached a location where they will camp in the mountains. Vivar and Sharpe continue to talk. Vivar says that all the land around is his family's land. He also says that his wife's mother was Irish and Vivar himself had been raised to think badly of the English. Vivar's wife died while he was away in the Americas. Vivar asks about Sharpe's plans to marry and Sharpe explains the limitations of the English class structure. Sharpe also says that his mother was a prostitute. Vivar does not believe Sharpe.

As Sharpe and Vivar discuss Vivar's plans, Vivar mentions that at some point their route will coincide with the pilgrim's route. Sharpe does not understand and Vivar asks if Sharpe has heard of Santiago de Compostela. Sharpe has not and Vivar explains that it is an important site to Catholics.

Williams approaches Sharpe to plead for Harper's release. Sharpe refuses.

In another discussion between Vivar and Sharpe, Vivar is shocked to learn that Sharpe had been promoted to an officer after serving in the ranks. Sharpe asks how Vivar is certain that the French are not ahead and, after listening to a lengthy explanation of how Vivar knows they will not encounter the French, the French open fire.



## Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

### Chapter 2

The narration continues in third person, but from this point forward the narrator shows a greater degree of omniscience, revealing Sharpe's thoughts and coming almost entirely from Sharpe's perspective.

Sharpe seems to constantly doubt himself about when to be harsh with the men. His default tactic is to constantly be harsh and dour. Captain Murray understands Sharpe's struggle to become an effective leader and he offers advice. It is unclear if Sharpe agrees with the advice but, soon after, Sharpe makes his first attempt at communication with Harper.

The men go beyond mere insubordination and resort to full blown mutiny with Harper as their representative. Sharpe exhibits guile in pretending to agree to Harper's offer and Sharpe exhibits more of his fighting skill against the much larger man. It is unclear who is saved by Don Blas Vivar's intervention. Likely both men could have been fatally wounded.

### Chapter 3

Sharpe and Vivar's contrasting backgrounds create tension between the two men. Vivar regards Sharpe as little more than a ruffian despite Sharpe's rank of officer. The men, especially Harper, continue to show scorn to Sharpe and Sharpe regards himself as a failed leader. He feels even worse seeing how easily Vivar wins over the riflemen. The more Vivar learns about Sharpe the more he is inclined to think that the man does not deserve the rank of officer. Already he has heard that Sharpe did not know his own father. When Sharpe admits that his mother was a prostitute, Vivar wonders if Sharpe is fabricating stories simply to offend. When Vivar learns that Sharpe has been promoted from the ranks, his opinion of Sharpe begins to change.

It is not yet clear if Vivar's request for Sharpe to release Harper is Vivar's attempt to help Sharpe become an effective leader or if it is a product of Vivar's fondness for the Irish and prejudice against the English.

Sharpe is surprised to see Vivar, an otherwise sophisticated man, engage in what Sharpe regards as primitive superstition.

If it were not for the possibility of fatal consequences, Vivar's bragging about his certainty they will not encounter French ahead just as the French open fire could be viewed as humorous irony.



# Chapter 4 and 5

## Chapter 4 and 5 Summary

### Chapter 4

The French ambush comes from high ground. Sharpe commands the riflemen to follow him. Sharpe directs the riflemen to fire on and advance at the ambushing French troops. Sharpe knows that marching directly into the French is risky, but he also knows he has no other option. He expects to die in the assault. Sharpe is the first to reach the French position and he immediately kills two French soldiers. The other riflemen rush past Sharpe to engage the French. Once in place, the riflemen fire to assist Vivar's forces attacking the rest of the French.

Vivar requests that the riflemen provide covering fire so his Cazadores can charge the French. Sharpe recommends against a frontal assault on the French, but Vivar insists. Despite facing overwhelming odds, Vivar's assault is successful.

After the battle, Sharpe and Vivar realize that approaching French reinforcements would have crushed all of their combined forces. However, Harper had managed to free himself during the battle and single-handedly cut off the French path. Vivar thanks Harper for saving the strongbox.

### Chapter 5

The British and Spanish troops enter a village and are horrified to discover that French soldiers have killed everyone, including women and children. Sharpe orders sentries to take positions and Williams informs Sharpe of the number of dead and wounded riflemen. Both Spanish and British troops are deeply shaken by the sight of murdered children.

Williams approaches Sharpe and tells him that part of the reason the riflemen fought so hard was in hope that Sharpe would release Harper. Williams says that while many of the riflemen might have been thugs and criminals in civilian life they make good fighters. Sharpe and Williams compliment each other on the recent battle.

While Sharpe and Vivar assess the outcome of the battle, both men compliment each other on successes. Vivar had not thought Sharpe could take the hill, and Sharpe had not believed Vivar's charge against the French would succeed. Vivar gives Sharpe some advice on leading men. He says that with his own troops he reduces military regulations to three simple rules. He suggests that Sharpe give his men simple rules.

Sharpe wonders why Vivar is going to the trouble of burying French dead. Vivar says it is not out of respect for the French. He does it because he does not want to be troubled by their ghosts. Sharpe asks why the French would kill children and Vivar says they do



it to make all Spanish fear them. Vivar says he has a favor to ask of Sharpe. He asks that Sharpe release Harper. Sharpe agrees.

Sharpe asks what the strong box contains and Vivar says it contains papers. Sharpe does not believe this and suggests that the chest is the reason the French are pursuing them. Vivar denies this. Sharpe asks again what the strongbox contains, but Vivar declines to answer.

At night the men eat meat from the dead horses. Sharpe goes around and talks with the men. When he encounters Harper, he receives a formal apology. Sharpe accepts the apology, but he is not ready to accept Harper's willingness to make light of the matter.

Sharpe enters the church and inspects the strongbox. He begins to pick the lock. Vivar enters and threatens to shoot Sharpe if he does not stop.

## Chapter 4 and 5 Analysis

### Chapter 4

Once Sharpe remembers to act like an officer and not a mere rifleman, he quickly assumes command. First Sharpe and then Vivar make what at first seemed like suicidal counterattacks to save their men. Sharpe goes up a hill on foot into certain death and Vivar leads a cavalry charge against overwhelming odds. Both men seem to share similar battle philosophies.

Vivar is moved to emotion when he sees the valiant effort that Harper has made to defend against the approaching French troops. Though Vivar is full of gratitude, Harper had never thought once about fighting to defend the strongbox.

### Chapter 5

The British troops do not understand the brutal and unconventional methods the French use by massacring an entire village. When Sharpe inquires of Vivar, Vivar tries to explain that the French do it to frighten Spanish civilians away from supporting Spanish troops and resisting French forces. From a historical perspective, it is important to note that the term "guerilla war" originated in Spain. It means irregular warfare when irregular troops, often civilians, fight invading forces in limited surprise engagements. The French commit brutal acts to try to discourage the Spanish civilians from engaging in guerilla tactics.

Sharpe and Williams seem to have earned each other's mutual respect. Sharpe and Vivar also seem to have new respect for each other.

Sharpe is convinced that the strongbox holds more than mere documents. Vivar confirms this suspicion when he threatens to kill Sharpe if he does not stop trying to open the chest.



# Chapters 6 and 7

## Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

### Chapter 6

The Spanish and British troops continue moving west, but for the first few days they stay off the main roads. After a few days they come out of the mountains to resume travel on the better roads. The riflemen are delighted to have Harper back. Williams tells Sharpe that Vivar has told Harper that the strongbox contains precious jewels and there will be a reward for all who escort it safely to its destination. Sharpe tries to tell Williams that the story is false, but Williams is convinced the jewels are priceless.

When the troops arrive at a village they see no sign of French troops and they decide to stay inside the village for the night. Vivar's forces will continue to Santiago de Compostela in the morning. From there, Sharpe's riflemen will turn south for Lisbon. That night the men eat well and Sharpe expects no trouble.

Later that night, a monk wakes Sharpe and asks him to follow. Sharpe follows the monk and meets a large English woman who immediately begins shouting orders at Sharpe. The woman commands Sharpe as if she has some sort of authority over him simply because she is English. The woman says her name is Mrs. Parker. She demands that Sharpe's men help her rescue some Spanish translations of the New Testament. She claims that French or Spanish forces will confiscate them. Mrs. Parker also has news. She says that the French have captured Santiago de Compostela and the British have escaped to the sea.

When Sharpe assembles the men, he hears them making loud enthusiastic calls. He turns to see what has gotten the riflemen excited. Sharpe sees that in Mrs. Parker's party there is also a young beautiful woman. Sharpe meets George Parker, Mrs. Parker's husband. Parker explains that they are Protestant missionaries spreading Bibles in Spain. Parker also explains that the young woman is Louisa, his nineteen year-old niece.

Parker cannot decide what to do and he asks Sharpe's advice. Sharpe advises going to Lisbon. He explains that his riflemen are stranded because now the only road to Lisbon, the one from Santiago de Compostela, is in French control. Parker says there are many roads to Lisbon, but Sharpe doubts him. Parker produces a map. Not only does Sharpe see that a road extends south from the present location, but they have also passed several roads. Sharpe realizes that Vivar has deceived him.

Sharpe confronts Vivar. The argument goes from insults to drawn swords until a priest intervenes.

### Chapter 7



The riflemen and the Parkers make good progress on the road south. George Parker prefers to walk with Sharpe rather than ride in the carriage with his wife. Williams informs Sharpe that the men are unhappy to have had to leave the Spanish troops. The riflemen still believe they would have been paid a reward for escorting the strongbox to Santiago de Compostela.

The group stops for the night at a small town. The riflemen need food, but Sharpe has no funds. He asks Parker, but Parker says that his wife controls the money. When Sharpe asks Mrs. Parker, she is rude and angry as usual. Sharpe says she will be repaid and she finally relents, but she agrees to buy only food and no wine. In order to provide wine for his men, Sharpe cuts four of the silver buttons from his trousers. Sharpe delivers the wine to his men and sees that they are still resentful at having to leave the expedition to Santiago de Compostela.

When Sharpe goes to inform the Parkers that they will depart early in the morning, Mrs. Parker insists that Sharpe stay inside the building to protect them. Sharpe thinks the request is ridiculous, but he asks only if they have a timepiece he can borrow for the night. Mrs. Parker refuses to give Sharpe a watch and offers him only an hourglass.

Sharpe is angry about the situation and he cuts off another button from his trousers to buy wine. As he sits and drinks, Louisa arrives with a watch and some brandy. She apologizes for the behavior of her aunt. Louisa remains for a time to talk with Sharpe. Louisa tells Sharpe many things, including how she is embarrassed to be spreading Protestantism in Spain and how she is unenthusiastic about being engaged to a man back in England. After Louisa leaves, Sharpe thinks he has fallen in love.

In the morning Sharpe discovers that most of the riflemen have gotten severely drunk on liquor they had hidden away. Sharpe is furious and he orders the men to march at a quick pace. Many become ill. Williams pleads with Sharpe to reduce the pace and Sharpe thinks he needs a better sergeant. Sharpe knows that Harper could control the men, but Sharpe also knows that Harper would refuse the promotion.

Sharpe orders the men to halt at a bridge over a stream. He then orders the men to remove their packs and their boots. When Sharpe commands the men to jump into the stream, they are astonished. Sharpe repeats the order and the men jump into the icy water. Sharpe then orders the men out of the stream and commands them to strip. Mrs. Parker is horrified.

Sharpe addresses the men and tells them that from now on there are three rules. He says that none of them will steal anything without his permission. None of them will get drunk without his permission. And they will all fight valiantly.

Mrs. Parker gets out of the coach and begins to walk toward Sharpe. This time Sharpe refuses to listen to her and commands her to return to the carriage. He does so in a way that makes her fear him. Sharpe allows the men time to build fires and dry their clothes.

During the march south, Sharpe talks with rifleman Hagman, the oldest among the riflemen. He learns that Hagman had been caught poaching and given a choice



between prison and the army. As Hagman is telling about his family in England, he pauses. Sharpe also sees the French cavalry soldiers.

## Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

### Chapter 6

If Vivar really told Harper that the chest contained jewels and the riflemen can expect a reward, Vivar is a manipulator that will tell any story to achieve his goals.

Mrs. Parker seems to think that the British military is composed of men who are to be used as her personal servants. Probably Sharpe tolerates her rudeness and demands initially because he is shocked to meet someone who behaves this way, or perhaps Sharpe is accustomed to being poor and abused by the wealthy. In any case, the most important aspect that Mrs. Parker's arrival introduces is her news that the French have captured Santiago de Compostela. This will have a dramatic effect on Sharpe's plans to accompany Vivar's forces.

Just as Sharpe is beginning to build respect with his men and become an effective leader, a new complication arrives in the form of a beautiful young woman. The last thing Sharpe needs at this time is any form of distraction to his men or himself.

Vivar's tactics of manipulation and lies are confirmed when George Parker shows Sharpe the map.

### Chapter 7

Having to abandon the route to Santiago de Compostela has set back any progress Sharpe has made in gaining the respect and trust of his men. To them, the decision to change course is made entirely by Sharpe who has no regard for their desire to receive the reward Vivar had promised.

Once in the village and presented with a request for a loan to feed the troops, Mrs. Parker again reveals that she thinks the British soldiers are subject to her needs and that they are mere rabble. This time, Sharpe tolerates her behavior and her demands because he needs her assistance in providing for his troops. Despite Sharpe's personal sacrifice in providing for his men, they are still full of resentment.

Louisa's character is in distinct contrast to her belligerent aunt and her subservient uncle. She is charming and intelligent, and Sharpe is immediately smitten.

In the morning, Sharpe discovers that his control over the riflemen is weaker than he previously thought and he realizes that part of the problem is that he does not have an effective sergeant. Sharpe's move to discipline the men is bold and, if not weakened by hangovers, they might resist. Sharpe's creation of three rules shows that he is starting to heed the advice of leaders with more experience.



This point in the story marks the end of Sharpe's toleration of Mrs. Parker's behavior.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Sharpe orders the Parkers' carriage to continue. He keeps a dozen riflemen behind concealed beneath a group of trees hoping to buy time for the carriage to escape. Sergeant Williams and the rest of the riflemen remain with the carriage. Sharpe sees the same French officer he had seen in a previous attack and he sees the man in the black coat and white boots.

Sharpe observes a French officer ordering only a small unit of French soldiers to advance rather than ordering a full charge. Sharpe knows that the smaller group of French soldiers will discover the riflemen and eliminate the riflemen's ability to surprise the larger force. Sharpe orders the riflemen to retreat and join the others at the carriage. Once at the carriage, Sharpe orders the Parkers to abandon it, but Mrs. Parker refuses. Sharpe violently pulls her from the carriage and allows her to fall in the mud. Harper suggests tipping the carriage to block the road and Sharpe agrees.

As everyone runs toward a farmhouse, Mrs. Parker begins to fall behind. Sharpe orders Harper to push her. Sharpe turns to fight and gain some time for the others to retreat. When the cavalry is almost upon Sharpe, Sharpe hears a rifle volley and sees the French horses fall. He turns to find that Harper has rallied a group of riflemen to provide covering fire for Sharpe. One cavalry soldier is almost upon Sharpe and Sharpe strikes the horse in the mouth with his sword. Harper continues to provide covering fire for Sharpe.

Once inside the farmhouse, Sharpe orders the riflemen to take up defensive positions and try to cover all approaches to the farmhouse. Parker asks Sharpe about his strategy and Sharpe says they will wait until night and try to sneak away. Parker does not like that plan and asks Sharpe to try to negotiate the release of the Parkers from the farmhouse.

The French assault the farmhouse and, in a violent battle in close quarters, the riflemen are able to repulse the attack; but Sergeant Williams is killed. Sharpe orders Harper to be sergeant, but Harper refuses. Again, Parker asks Sharpe to try to negotiate the release of the family. Sharpe waves a white cloth from a window. The French allow Sharpe to come outside to talk.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

The same French officer and the same man in a black coat and white boots are with the French force that has hunted Vivar before. They must think that Sharpe's unit is still involved with Vivar.



Sharpe, a man already short on social graces, has no manners at all when he goes into battle mode. Mrs. Parker tries to argue with him and finds herself tossed into the mud.

During the fighting, Harper displays incredible abilities. He also displays a determination to save his commanding officer, the same man he recently tried to beat to death. In the farmhouse, Sharpe first mentions his intention to make Harper a sergeant.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Sharpe exits the farmhouse and meets Colonel de l'Eclin. In contrast to Sharpe's tattered uniform, de l'Eclin is dressed immaculately. Sharpe manages to negotiate the release of the Parkers. De l'Eclin asks about Sharpe's plans for his troops. De l'Eclin manages to correctly guess Sharpe's plan, but Sharpe denies this and says that he plans to capture all the French troops.

De l'Eclin says that if Sharpe does not surrender now he will not permit him to do so later. De l'Eclin says that the main French army is soon to arrive, but Sharpe knows that de l'Eclin is lying. De l'Eclin believes that Vivar is with Sharpe and that Sharpe is trying to help Vivar escape with his strongbox, but Sharpe tries to explain that Vivar is not there. The man in the black coat and white boots calls Sharpe a liar. De l'Eclin addresses the man as "Count" and as Vivar's brother. Sharpe is shocked and de l'Eclin explains that the man is the Count of Mouromorto.

Sharpe and the Count argue and Sharpe says he is going back to the farmhouse. De l'Eclin says Sharpe has ten minutes to surrender. Once in the farmhouse Sharpe again tells Harper that he is sergeant and again Harper refuses. The French begin firing again and Sharpe orders Hagman to begin shooting French horses. The French continue firing through the afternoon, but no serious attempt is made to take the farmhouse until the riflemen see that the French have constructed barricades that will allow them to get close to the farmhouse.

Just as Sharpe is about to order the riflemen to flee the house, they hear the sound of a trumpet. Vivar's forces arrive with extra cavalry. The riflemen join Vivar's forces and Vivar commands them to take positions in a nearby woods. Louisa runs toward the riflemen yelling for Sharpe. Once in the woods she throws herself into his arms.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

De l'Eclin and Sharpe are two very different men. While Sharpe might appreciate de l'Eclin's intelligence and ability to predict Sharpe's plan, Sharpe surely despises de l'Eclin's cruelty when he makes jokes about having massacred an entire village. Though he knows that he is probably hopelessly outnumbered, Sharpe manages to make the joking boast that he plans to capture all of the French forces. Sharpe also demonstrates that he has a tactical mind and powers of observation when he points out that the main French army cannot be near or de l'Eclin's cavalry would not be carrying foraging bags.

The interaction with de l'Eclin further convinces Sharpe that the goal of both the French and Spanish forces center specifically on the contents of Vivar's strongbox.



Once back inside the farmhouse and involved in fighting to save the lives of the riflemen, Sharpe is also involved in a private fight with Harper over Harper's resistance to becoming a sergeant. Ever hard to predict, Vivar makes an unexpected appearance and saves the lives of the riflemen.

In an impulsive act, Louisa reveals that she has feelings for Sharpe.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

The Spanish troops and the riflemen travel through the night into the mountains. Sharpe tries to ask for explanations, but Vivar merely says later. Vivar asks about Louisa and Vivar asks if Sharpe has met his brother. He refers to his brother as a traitor to Spain. By dawn, the troops have arrived at a fortress.

Vivar's family had built the fortress nearly a thousand years ago. Vivar says the French will eventually be defeated because they will rely on the Spanish to feed them, but the Spanish will resist. The Spanish people need a miracle to help them find the strength to resist the French. Sharpe asks for clarification, but Vivar again says later. He says that some men are coming soon and he will need their permission to tell Sharpe the answers to all that he asks.

All during the day supplies arrive. The men Vivar is expecting arrive and Sharpe sees that they are priests. Sharpe goes to talk to Louisa. Sharpe worries about the upcoming fight and Louisa's safety. Louisa admits that she had joined the group partly out of dread of spending any more time with her aunt and partly out of whim. Sharpe tells Louisa about Vivar's strongbox. Louisa is curious and she invites herself to dinner.

Sharpe and Louisa dine with Lieutenant Davila, Vivar, Father Borellas, and Father Alzaga. Borellas is friendly, but Alzaga is openly hostile to Sharpe. Vivar discusses something with Alzaga in Spanish. Borellas explains that Vivar and Alzaga are arguing about the use of English troops. Vivar asks Sharpe to recount his military experience.

Vivar explains the significance of Santiago de Compostela. He then asks Sharpe to come into the chapel where the strongbox is kept.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Cooperating to win a successful battle seems to have restored Sharpe and Vivar's relationship, but Vivar still evades answering questions. However, he does offer to tell Sharpe the answers to his questions if he can get permission.

In Louisa's conversation with Sharpe, she reveals that she is not merely a beautiful young woman. She can be assertive when she wants something, as she reveals when she invites herself to dinner so she can learn the secret of the strongbox.

There is lingering distrust between former enemies, the English and the Spanish, as displayed by Alzaga's behavior toward Sharpe.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

In the chapel, Vivar tells Sharpe to open the strongbox. Sharpe opens the box and, inside, he finds another leather box. Sharpe opens this box and finds a banner, which Vivar calls a gonfalon. While Sharpe opens the boxes and examines the banner, Vivar explains that there is a legend surrounding the banner. The legend states that if ever Spain is threatened and the banner is unfurled in Santiago de Compostela, the fighter Matamoros will rise again and save Spain. Another legend states that if the banner is ever captured, Spain will be destroyed.

Sharpe asks why Vivar's brother wants to give the banner to France. Vivar explains that his brother is a traitor with little respect for older ideas. Sharpe also asks how his riflemen fit into Vivar's plans and Vivar explains that they must take the town of Santiago de Compostela. Vivar also says that he will understand if Sharpe refuses to help. Sharpe agrees to help, but he says he has a price.

The next day Sharpe spends time alone thinking. He sends for Harper. When Harper arrives, he immediately says how things are unfair. Sharpe's price for helping Vivar had been to convince Harper to become sergeant. Harper says that as soon as Santiago de Compostela is taken he will stop being sergeant, but Sharpe says, no, the position is permanent.

Sharpe and Harper discuss whether they should help Vivar. Harper says that the Spanish people need to believe in miracles even if others do not. Sharpe asks Harper if he believes the riflemen will fight well. Harper replies that a few will complain, but Sharpe need not worry. Sharpe points to a group of Spanish civilians and asks if Harper can train them within a week.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Sharpe does not know what to think of these men who believe in legends and miracles. He does know, without a doubt, that the plan to take the town of Santiago de Compostela is utterly ridiculous from a tactical and strategic point of view. He probably agrees only because Louisa is near and has been impressed by Vivar's tales of legends and bravery.

In getting Harper to become sergeant, Sharpe uses the one thing that he knows Harper cannot refuse, the request of Vivar. The conversation that follows, particularly Sharpe's admission that he once held the same views as Harper, does much to build mutual respect between the two men who recently tried to kill each other.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Sharpe is impressed with how quickly Harper is assuming the role of sergeant. Every day, the force prepares for the upcoming battle. Sharpe and Vivar discuss strategy. Sharpe believes that a surprise attack is impossible. Vivar believes that de l'Eclin is good only at offense, not defense. Sharpe says that even if they can capture the town, they will be able to hold it for only three days. Vivar says they need to hold it for only one day. Sharpe thinks about how the French force is four times the combined British and Spanish force. He asks why Vivar cannot wait until the French have left Santiago de Compostela to deliver the banner. Vivar says that a victory is crucial in Santiago de Compostela. Sharpe believes the idea is insane and doomed to failure.

Harper tells Sharpe that the Spanish volunteers will not be ready for another week. Vivar comes to see a demonstration and the volunteers fail. Vivar believes that the volunteers are good enough for the tired French forces defending Santiago de Compostela and he asks Harper's opinion. Harper says that, as soldiers, the men are worthless, but he also has an idea of how to use the volunteers effectively. He says that, as individuals, the volunteers are tough even if they have not mastered military drills. He suggests using regular troops to get inside the town and then releasing the volunteers as a mob to deal with the French defenders. Sharpe is skeptical, but Vivar is delighted with the idea.

Modest uniforms are made for the volunteers and Louisa works to repair the riflemen's uniforms. Sharpe and Louisa go for a walk. They talk about how her current activities might affect her future and particularly her engagement. Sharpe suggests that she does not have to go through with the engagement. They also talk about the upcoming plans to attack Santiago de Compostela. Louisa wonders if she might be able to go to Santiago de Compostela ahead of the attack and plant a false story to help the troops. Sharpe is horrified at the idea and says that it is out of the question.

Local bandits arrive with news. They say that Napoleon has ordered the capture of Lisbon by February. Vivar says that if the assault on Santiago de Compostela succeeds, they can stop Napoleon's plans to capture Lisbon. Vivar decides that they will depart the following day.

The following morning Sharpe awakens to discover that Louisa has already departed.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

The riflemen's nightly songs reveal that they are affected by fear of the upcoming battle and by homesickness.





In examining strategy for the upcoming battle, Sharpe displays much more caution than Vivar. To Sharpe, it must seem that Vivar actually believes in legends and miracles. When the two examine the progress of the Spanish volunteers, Harper reveals himself to be more than a mere soldier who has memorized drills. He also has the ability to develop strategy.

Louisa again reveals that she can be assertive when she wants something. Sharpe has become so enamored that he practically proposes marriage.

With news that Napoleon plans to capture Lisbon, Vivar's plan to take Santiago de Compostela has gained military practicality beyond simply inspiring villagers and farmers. A victory in Santiago de Compostela could thwart the French plans to march into Portugal and take Lisbon.

Sharpe is horrified to discover that Louisa has intentionally put herself in danger.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Sharpe is angry and questioning Vivar about sending Louisa. Vivar has given her the story that the banner is too degraded to hang in Santiago de Compostela, so he intends to attack a smaller town and put the remains of the banner in the sea. While the men talk, Sharpe prepares to shave. While Sharpe's shirt is off, Vivar is shocked to see that Sharpe has scars all across his back. Sharpe says that many years ago he was flogged while he held the rank of private. He did nothing wrong, but a sergeant did not like him.

The expedition sets off in a cold rain. Harper is enthusiastic and Sharpe is again impressed with how quickly Harper has become an effective leader. The troops march all through the night. The soldiers take precautions to make sure they do not make unnecessary noise. The riflemen will lead the attack. They will do so with unloaded weapons to prevent accidental discharges that will alert the enemy.

When the group encounters a stream, the guide wants to stop and pour holy water into the stream, but Sharpe is frustrated and forges on across the stream. The riflemen arrive late and in the wrong location. Vivar arrives to discuss the situation. He believes he can salvage the battle plan. He wants Sharpe's riflemen to charge past a guardhouse and try not to engage any troops. Sharpe takes time to think and Vivar says he will attack with or without Sharpe's support.

Sharpe orders the riflemen to prepare and to load rifles. Vivar protests, but Sharpe orders the riflemen to advance. The riflemen encounter the first sentry and when the sentry asks who approaches, Sharpe begins running into battle.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Sharpe is angry that Vivar had allowed Louisa to endanger herself, but Sharpe is also trying to deny that his anger has anything to do with personal feelings for Louisa. Sharpe is also surprised to hear that Vivar might care for Louisa. The story Vivar had given to Louisa might be ingenious, but to Sharpe the entire plan is madness.

Despite having served in the military most of his life, Vivar is shocked to see the flogging scars Sharpe bears. It seems Sharpe has faced constant battles of many kinds all his life.

Sharpe does not like Vivar's attack plan, especially the tactic of having the riflemen attack with unloaded weapons. As the attack draws near, Sharpe becomes increasingly apprehensive. When the riflemen arrive in the wrong location and Vivar's plan must be modified, Sharpe seizes the opportunity to tell his men to load their weapons.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

As the French soldier tries to question Sharpe, Sharpe repeats the French word for friend over and over and points to the rear as if he is fleeing a hostile force. More French arrive and Sharpe and the riflemen attack. The element of surprise is lost, but the riflemen defeat the first group of French. The riflemen manage to capture some French weapons. Sharpe orders the riflemen to clear obstacles for Vivar's cavalry charge. Sharpe expects a French counterattack at any moment and he wonders where Vivar's cavalry are.

A French officer in command of a group of twenty cavalry challenges the riflemen and the riflemen fire. Sharpe hears a trumpet and Vivar's cazadores enter the town with fury. They fight not just for country but also for religious reasons. The Spanish volunteers follow the Cazadores and Sharpe orders the riflemen to distribute the captured French weapons.

Harper asks what the riflemen should do and Sharpe says to follow the volunteers. The townspeople, including women and children, join in the fight and they brutally attack the French who had occupied their town. Some French begin surrendering to the riflemen, but others make a stand in the palace. The riflemen have to defend the prisoners against the vengeful townspeople.

Vivar finds Sharpe and asks if he has seen Louisa. The two men discuss how to handle the French barricaded in the palace. Sharpe says that they are unlikely to surrender after seeing what the townspeople had done to their fellow soldiers. Vivar says they might consider surrendering to a British officer. After a flag of truce is waved, Sharpe is allowed to enter the palace. As Sharpe walks away, Vivar reminds him to ask about Louisa.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

The attack on Santiago is full of some unexpected surprises. Sharpe had not expected the French defenses to fall so easily. The Spanish townspeople's behavior toward the French is less surprising, but it is shockingly brutal nonetheless.

Vivar is surprisingly concerned about Louisa's well being. Just a day before, he had said in a cavalier way that many Spanish women have died, so it makes no difference if an English woman dies. Once inside the city he seems much more interested in her welfare.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Sharpe enters the palace and encounters a group of men. The Count of Mouromorto recognizes Sharpe. A French officer tells Sharpe to follow and Sharpe assumes he is being taken to meet Colonel de l'Eclin, but Sharpe meets a different French colonel. Before Sharpe can present the demand for surrender, the French colonel says that the British and Spanish forces have one hour to leave the city. Sharpe is shocked.

The colonel says that a French army is due to arrive from the north. The colonel also mocks the idea of taking the city and performing a miracle with the banner. Sharpe says that he intends to post his best riflemen on towers surrounding the palace and have them kill the French one by one.

The colonel suggests a truce. He proposes that the French will stay inside the palace and the Spanish can have their banner ceremony. The French will not leave the palace and will not fire on the Spanish as long as they are not fired upon. Sharpe says he will have to discuss the matter with Vivar. Sharpe also asks about Louisa. The colonel says that she is in the palace and it is because of her story that Colonel de l'Eclin is away with a thousand cavalry. Louisa will be released when Sharpe returns with confirmation that Vivar agrees to the truce.

When Sharpe leaves, the colonel and the Count wonder if they have been successful in fooling Sharpe.

Vivar likes the idea of the truce and says he will deliver word of its acceptance himself. Sharpe searches the city for supplies that will tell him if a large army is truly expected. He discovers that most of the French supplies have been moved into the palace.

Sharpe is surprised to encounter Louisa. They each congratulate the other on their roles in the victory. Louisa says that Vivar is in the cathedral preparing for the banner ceremony. Louisa also speaks of how she dreads returning to a life in England. At first Sharpe thinks she is saying that she wants to remain with him and then realizes that she is saying that she intends to stay with Vivar.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

Sharpe feels relief at not having to negotiate with de l'Eclin and then feels amazed that Louisa's story had actually worked. The colonel and the Count's demeanor offend Sharpe and he immediately responds by saying he can have riflemen fire into the palace and he would much rather kill Frenchmen than talk to them.

In a rare instance of switching point of view, the narrator tells of the colonel and the Count's conversation after Sharpe leaves. This creates tension because the reader



knows that they have fooled Sharpe in some way but cannot know yet how much danger in which Sharpe has been placed.

Upon learning that Louisa intends to stay with Vivar, Sharpe feels first shock and then embarrassment before feeling pain.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Sharpe is hurt, but he knows he had been foolish to think Louisa would choose a life of poverty and wandering by being married to a low ranking officer. He finds a tavern and takes wine to a table where he is joined by a prostitute. Suddenly Vivar appears and begins discussing preparations for the town's defense in case de l'Eclin returns. Sharpe pays more attention to the woman than Vivar. Sharpe even tries to provoke Vivar, but Vivar remains calm. Vivar says Sharpe can choose to be great or to be a drunkard. He takes Sharpe's wine and pours it on the floor.

Sharpe and Harper look to the south and west of the town trying to predict de l'Eclin's approach. Sharpe points to the southwest and says that is the most likely approach. Then, Sharpe is seized by a thought and he runs back into town in search of Vivar. He finds Vivar in a crowd and shouts that the riflemen need caltrops. Vivar says that blacksmiths will begin working on them immediately. He also says that when they are ready they will be delivered to the riflemen. Vivar says the banner ceremony will occur a little after six pm.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

Vivar seems certain that Sharpe will get over his bout with self-pity. He speaks to him more as a disappointed friend than a commanding officer. Harper's conversation with Sharpe is also revealing. The two men speak comfortably with each other. Not long before, Harper would not have dared to ask about Sharpe's personal life, not to mention offer an opinion. Even more telling about the change in Harper and Sharpe's relationship is what Harper says to Hagman. In reference to Sharpe falling in love too easily, Harper says that it is a good thing that Sharpe now has Harper to look after him.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Sharpe sees French cavalry outside the city. Even though they are out of range, the Cazadores and Spanish civilians fire. Sharpe calculates the number of troops at three hundred, so he knows this is not the real attack. The French repeatedly taunt the defenders trying to get them to fire and waste ammunition. Sharpe sees an officer whom he believes to be de l'Eclin. As he watches the officer, he is startled by something and commands the riflemen to bring the caltrops and follow.

People inside the cathedral are in solemn observance of the ceremony when Sharpe bursts in. Sharpe tells Vivar that they have been tricked. De l'Eclin and his forces are inside the palace. Just then the banner unfurls, but the French forces also storm out of the palace and begin attacking the city.

Sharpe orders the riflemen into position and they spread the caltrops. The caltrops are initially effective, but then the riflemen must face French infantry. The riflemen fire volleys and inflict damage, but soon must flee. The riflemen gather at a place near the city wall and, during a lull in the fighting, they laugh that one of the legs of Sharpe's trousers has been completely stripped away. The riflemen leave the city with the rest of the refugees and they believe they are safe until they see that the cavalry force that had been to the south of the city has circled around and is now about to attack.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

When Sharpe tries to apologize, Vivar not only tells him an apology is not necessary but makes a joke in order to make Sharpe feel better. The two men have become friends.

In a moment of dark humor, Harper is shocked and offended that French troops would try to attack him in a church. Harper's solution to those who do not respect what he regards as hallowed ground is to kill them. Having been offended that French soldiers would dare fight in a church, Harper kills three of them in a church.

When the riflemen believe that their involvement in the battle is over and they can safely leave the city, they find that they are faced with a large force that will make survival impossible.



# Chapter 18 and Historical Note

## Chapter 18 and Historical Note Summary

### Chapter 18

Sharpe is certain all will die, so he takes the opportunity to tell the men that tonight they have his permission to get drunk. He also tells them they are the best soldiers with whom he has ever served. De l'Eclin and the Count of Mouromorto join the French cavalry. Just as Sharpe expects the French cavalry to charge and destroy his smaller force, Vivar and fifty Cazadores burst from the city flying the banner of Santiago Matamoros. Sharpe orders the riflemen to charge and the civilian refugees join also. The Count of Mouromorto tries to attack the banner and Vivar kills him. Sharpe pulls de l'Eclin from his horse and, as de l'Eclin is about to stab Sharpe, Harper shoots and kills the French colonel.

Sharpe takes de l'Eclin's trousers and boots to replace his own tattered garments.

Sharpe says goodbye to Louisa and Vivar and he takes his riflemen across the border into Portugal. Soon after crossing the border, the riflemen are met by a British officer named Captain Hogan. Hogan says that the British intend to stay in Portugal and attack the forces once again. Hogan has heard of the victory at Santiago de Compostela and he is delighted to meet Sharpe.

### Historical Note

This brief final section explains that actual history provides the framework for the story. This section also separates historical fact from the fictional elements of Sharpe's story.

## Chapter 18 and Historical Note Analysis

### Chapter 18

While Sharpe does not believe in miracles, all of his riflemen must regard surviving the final encounter with the French cavalry as nothing less than phenomenal. The Spanish civilians who do believe in miracles can be inspired to wondrous acts as they are when they help defeat a formidable force of cavalry.

In saying goodbye to Vivar, Sharpe knows he has made a good friend when Vivar says, "You are an insubordinate bastard, a heathen, and an Englishman. But also my friend. Remember that."

### Historical Note



After reading the novel and then encountering the historical note, many readers will be surprised at how much of the novel is an accurate retelling of history.



# Characters

## Lieutenant Richard Sharpe

Richard Sharpe is first described as tall, dark, and brooding. In fact, until the end of Chapter 1, the reader does not even know his name. We learn early on that he is no ordinary officer. Sharpe first enlisted in the army as a private. He came from an impoverished background, never knew his father, and says that his mother was a prostitute. It is possible that the British Army has given Sharpe the only security and sense of self-worth he has ever known. This drives him to succeed.

Sharpe is the veteran of several battles, particularly in India. In many of those battles, Sharpe had distinguished himself. An act of heroism had caused his promotion from the ranks to officer, but this past full of bravery and service does not shield Sharpe from the prejudice he encounters from both fellow officers and former fellow men of the ranks. Many resent his promotion from the ranks and Sharpe himself often feels lost when in the company of others.

Still somewhat new to being an officer in command of many men, Sharpe struggles with insecurity. Often he does not know when to be harsh and when to be lenient. Sharpe wants to be a good officer, but first he must convince himself that he is worthy of the position.

There is more to Sharpe than being a good soldier and fighter. He is capable of being a good friend. While Harper is initially Sharpe's mortal enemy, the two find a mutual respect and trust that will likely develop into a real friendship.

## 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 qualities about Harper are his resentment of authority and his natural leadership abilities. These two seemingly opposite qualities make Harper a charismatic figure.

Even in the most somber of situations, Harper finds humor. After he is finally released from arrest after fighting with a superior officer and ought to be showing the utmost respect, Harper cannot help himself from smiling and saying that no man ever hit him harder than Lieutenant Sharpe. After weeks of hardship when the rest of the men are fatigued, Harper is in a joyous mood at the thought of marching into battle. The only time Harper ever seems to be truly angry or offended occurs when he is attacked in a church. Somehow this offends Harper's sense of propriety. His solution is to kill three men in the same church so they will not ever again show a lack of piety.

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 is also a fierce fighter



with a quick and innovative mind. On multiple occasions, Harper's quick and unconventional thinking saves his group from certain defeat.

Another notable quality of Harper is his capacity for friendship. After spending much of the beginning of the book being Sharpe's worst enemy, Harper begins to like Sharpe so much that he tells another character that Sharpe is fortunate that Harper intends to look after his lieutenant.

## **Don Blas Vivar**

One of the most colorful and unusual characters is Don Blas Vivar. He comes from a noble aristocratic Spanish family, yet in some ways he seems most at home with his rural troops known as the Cazadores. Vivar's character and style of leadership is in direct contrast to the still insecure leadership of Lieutenant Richard Sharpe. Vivar has an easy way with the men, and he instantly inspires respect and admiration.

Perhaps the most notable quality of Vivar is his tactic of lying to achieve his goals. His lies come one after the other and he lies to almost every major character in the book. He repeatedly lies to Sharpe, he lies to Harper, and he gives Louisa a lie to take to Colonel de l'Eclin.

## **Louisa Parker**

Louisa is a bored nineteen-year-old with a longing for a more adventurous life. She has all the safety and security a young English woman could want. She is engaged to a wealthy Englishman and her aunt, though intolerable at times, has the financial means to take care of Louisa until she is married.

Louisa's boredom and curiosity about a different way of life cause her to make an impulsive act that puts her in the center of the action and forever changes her life.

## **Major Warren Dunnett**

This inept officer hates Richard Sharpe and he gives him the duties of quartermaster because he does not believe that Sharpe is capable of leading men. Dunnett resents Sharpe's rise from the ranks and he is jealous of Sharpe's record of bravery in battle. It is Dunnett's incompetence in battle that causes the group of riflemen to be separated from the rest of the British Army.

## **Captain John Murray**

Unlike some other officers, Captain Murray likes Richard Sharpe. Even as he dies, he tries to do what he can to help Sharpe become a more effective leader. He tries to give



Sharpe advice, particularly that Sharpe should make an ally of Patrick Harper, and he bequeaths his sword to Sharpe so the other riflemen will know that he likes Sharpe.

## **Sergeant Williams**

This man is in a position of leadership over the riflemen, but he is unsuitable for the position because he cares too much about being liked.

## **Rifleman Hagman**

This character is the oldest of the riflemen and the best shot. He had been convicted of poaching in England and given the choice of prison or military service.

## **Mrs. Parker**

This obese belligerent woman is offensive in every way. She is in Catholic Spain trying to spread Protestantism and she seems to think that the British Army consists of her personal servants. She is the aunt of Louisa Parker.

## **George Parker**

This likable but submissive man is the husband of Mrs. Parker. He takes an instant liking to Sharpe but does not dare stand up to his wife.

## **Colonel Pierre de l'Eclin**

Though he appears as a speaking character significantly in only one chapter, this is a frighteningly memorable character. The first quality that Sharpe notices about de l'Eclin is that his clothing cost more than Sharpe makes in a year. De l'Eclin is a brilliant strategist and he has a diabolically cruel nature. While Sharpe and Vivar respect other French officers, this is perhaps the only one they fear.

## **Count of Mouromorto**

This is Don Blas's older brother. Don Blas refers to him as a traitor to Spain because he collaborates with the French.

## **Father Borellas**

This priest is easy going and friendly to Louisa and Sharpe. He tactfully translates some of Vivar and Father Alzaga's conversation but omits parts that might offend.



## **Father Alzaga**

This high-ranking priest has a long-standing hatred of the English. He disapproves of Vivar allowing Sharpe and his riflemen to assist in the capture of Santiago de Compostela.

## **Captain Hogan**

This outgoing and friendly officer in the British Army meets Sharpe at the end of the novel and gives hope that the British will not abandon the fight for an independent Portugal and Spain.



# Objects/Places

## Galicia

This region is in the far northwest corner of Spain. All of the action in Sharpe's Rifles takes place in this area.

## 95th Rifles

These elite light infantry troops wear a green uniform instead of the usual red uniforms of British soldiers. The riflemen under the command of Richard Sharpe are part of this brigade before being stranded in Spain.

## Baker Rifle

This is the firearm used by the soldiers of the 95th Rifles. It differs from a musket in that it puts spin on the bullet to give it greater range and accuracy.

## Cazadores

These cavalry troops were from rural areas of Spain. Don Blas Vivar commands a group of Cazadores and he says they are the finest fighters in Spain.

## Chasseurs

These light cavalry units are quick and formidable. Colonel de l'Eclin commands a group of chasseurs.

## Musket

This is the firearm used by French forces facing Sharpe's riflemen. The musket is not as accurate as the rifles used by Sharpe's troops, but it can be loaded much more quickly.

## Santiago de Compostela

This is the capital of Galicia. It is regarded as a holy city by many Christians and once it received many visitors on religious pilgrimages.



## **Gonfalon**

This is a long banner or flag that hangs from a crossbar mounted on a pole. Vivar wants to capture Santiago de Compostela and display a gonfalon that will inspire the Spanish people to fight the invading French.

## **Caltrop**

These multi-pointed metal devices always rest on the ground with one sharp point facing up. They can be used to obstruct cavalry advances.

## **Quartermaster**

This officer in the British Army is in charge of supervising the supplies used by the military. Sharpe is assigned to this task after he is promoted from the ranks, but he would rather lead troops in combat.



# Themes

## Friendship From Unlikely Origins

The theme of friendship is an important element in Sharpe's Rifles. This theme is most evident in the two examples of Richard Sharpe and Patrick Harper and in Richard Sharpe and Don Blas Vivar. In both cases the friendship seems most unlikely.

Sharpe's first interaction with Harper occurs while Sharpe is still Quartermaster. Harper is a rifleman at the rank of private. He is best known for his popularity with the other men and his resentment of authority. The next significant interaction that Sharpe has with Harper occurs when Harper comes to deliver an ultimatum where the planned result of refusal of the ultimatum is the beating death of Sharpe. Sharpe proves to be a tough man to beat in any situation.

Sharpe's first interaction with Don Blas Vivar is when Vivar breaks up the fight between Sharpe and Harper. From there, Vivar makes it obvious that he at first considers Sharpe beneath him. Though Vivar does begin to acquire respect for Sharpe as a fighter, he continually lies to Sharpe in order to get Sharpe's assistance.

From these unlikely origins come friendships that are likely to be lasting and firm. These friendships are based on mutual trust and admiration. Sharpe comes to admire Harper's talents as a leader and Harper's innovative and tactical mind. Though Sharpe at first resents Vivar's easy way with subordinates, he later decides to learn from Vivar and adopt some of his methods.

And it is well that Sharpe develops friendships. On multiple occasions, Harper's quick thinking and fast action saves Sharpe's life.

## A Means to an End

Throughout the novel Sharpe's Rifles, the character Don Blas Vivar uses lying as a tactic as a means to an end. There is a saying that all is fair in war and, whether or not Vivar is aware of this adage, he certainly lives by it.

The first notable lie that Vivar tells to Sharpe is that there are no roads leading south until Santiago de Compostela. This is blatantly false in that there are many roads leading south as Sharpe learns after he is able to view a map of the region. To Vivar, this lie is justified because he has no infantry troops and he needs them for his planned assault on Santiago de Compostela. To Sharpe, this lie is an instance of unforgivable manipulation and the two men nearly fight over the incident. The next significant lie that Vivar tells Sharpe is that the strongbox contains nothing but papers. This lie might be more forgivable because Vivar does not yet know if he can trust Sharpe to keep the secret of the religious treasure, but the lie that Vivar tells the lower ranking men is unforgivable. Vivar tells Harper that the strongbox contains precious jewels and the





riflemen will be given a reward for escorting it safely to Santiago de Compostela. This lie undermines Sharpe's ability to command and it plays upon the desperate need of men who live in poverty.

The part of Don Blas Vivar's lying that is most interesting, even comical, is that much of the lying centers on his protection of a religious artifact and he needs the permission of religious leaders to tell the truth.

## Valor or Hellish Terror?

Often accounts of warfare, especially older accounts that contain notions of honor, valor, even chivalry portray war as more of a valiant quest. No such romantic vision exists in Sharpe's Rifles. War is portrayed as it really is, nasty and brutish.

Aside from the actual combat, even the environmental conditions are uncomfortable at best and painfully deadly at worst. The men are in tattered clothing during winter. Often they cannot seek even primitive shelter without giving away their position to the enemy that stalks them.

In the scenes depicting actual fighting, there is nothing glamorous. Early in the novel, Sharpe must defend himself against a charging cavalryman. His solution is to strike the horse in the mouth with his sword. The detail of the scene is vivid and gruesome. Sometimes even the aftermath of violence is more than the men can handle. Once the joint Spanish and British force enter a village to discover that the French troops have killed every man, woman, child, and animal. In such a pitiless environment, even those usually thought to be innocent during time of war become active combatants. During the fighting in Santiago de Compostela, women with knives fall upon wounded French soldiers and, in one of the more nightmarish scenes, the British soldiers are amused to see a child playing with a severed human head.

While other works of fiction might make young people want to go off in search of war as adventure, Sharpe's Rifles should make young people grateful to read of accounts of war as historical study.

# Style

## Point of View

Sharpe's Rifles is told by an omniscient third person narrator and comes primarily from the perspective of the protagonist Richard Sharpe. However, the narrator occasionally presents events from the perspective of other characters, though these instances are few and short.

The perspective of Sharpe gives the novel its predominant tone and voice. Richard Sharpe is an officer in the British army who has seen many battles. He tends to view things in pragmatic terms. He puts no value in the things he regards as superstition but instead thinks in tactical and strategic terms. Sharpe is still new to being an officer and at times he is troubled by a lack of confidence.

Because the narrator allows the reader to see the inner thoughts of Sharpe, his insecurities in assuming the role of leader are vividly portrayed and the reader can understand his resentment toward some of the characters who have been born into positions of power and privilege. Sharpe is not always quick to take valuable advice and, through seeing things from Sharpe's perspective, the reader can understand why Sharpe often disregards advice while the reader also wishes he would take that advice.

By presenting the novel primarily through the eyes of Sharpe, the narrator allows us 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 location setting of Sharpe's Rifles is the province of Galicia in Northern Spain. The majority of the action takes place in rural settings or small villages, but the climax occurs in the city of Santiago de Compostela. The season of year, winter, also has a drastic effect on the setting and characters.

Equal in importance to the location setting is the element of time. The novel is set two hundred years previous to our contemporary early twenty first century vantage point. Because of this, the setting of Sharpe's Rifles, like other historical novels that endeavor toward historical accuracy, is of vital importance. Many contemporary readers will find the aspect of time more unfamiliar than the aspect of location.

The author wastes no time in immersing the reader in the setting. We know the exact date of the opening of the novel, January 2, 1809. In the Prologue, the narrator also immediately provides descriptions of the Spanish and French troops involved in an ongoing chase. Sharpe's Rifles is a story of war and important to such a setting are the military terms, especially types of weapons. The narrator does an admirable job of



describing the artifacts of the setting, particularly the weapons. Even readers who have never seen a flintlock firearm will understand the difference between a rifle and a musket.

The physical elements of the setting are all vividly described, but in the end readers will remember these aspects within the context of time. Sharpe's Rifles in all its richly portrayed images is a novel set as much in time as in place.

## Language and Meaning

Despite being set in the early nineteenth century, Sharpe's Rifles 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. And 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 Rifles.

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 caltrop is, but the author goes into sufficient detail in describing these metal objects that can be scattered on the ground to injure horses and stop a cavalry advance. 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, especially armed conflict in an age when combatants still had to fight at relatively close range. 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 Rifles vividly describes the carnage that kills people and animals.

## Structure

The structure of Sharpe's Rifles is entirely linear and chronological. The plot, or rather the action, moves from beginning to end. The Prologue begins with the introduction of Don Blas Vivar, someone who will have a profound and positive influence on Richard Sharpe, and the final chapter ends with the friends and principle characters moving on now that enemy forces have been defeated and a battle won. There are very few instances of flashback and these are simply short memories of Richard Sharpe.

The novel is divided into eighteen chapters, a prologue, and a Historical Note section. The narrative is continuous and unbroken. Where one chapter ends, the next begins. Often the author uses the chapter endings to build suspense. It is often in the final lines of a chapter that the characters find themselves in the most difficult situations. Time and



time again it seems that Sharpe and his riflemen are facing certain death. Most often, these situations happen at the end of a chapter and the following chapter describes the resolution of the tense situation.

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. Even at the novel's conclusion, the action keeps its breakneck pace. After the final battle at Santiago de Compostela is won, we could expect an ending, but the characters say goodbye and then the narrator introduces an entirely new character in the final pages.



## Quotes

"The hunters and the hunted were moving again, inching their intricate paths across a wintry land, and the hunted were seeking the miracle that might yet save Spain and snatch a glorious victory from defeat."

Prologue, p. 11

"The stranded riflemen might call him the new Lieutenant, and they might invest the word 'new' with all the scorn of soldiers, but that was because they did not know their man. They thought of him as nothing more than a jumped-up Sergeant, and they were wrong. He was a soldier, and his name was Richard Sharpe."

Chapter 1, p. 31

"In the short time that he had been with this Battalion, Sharpe had often noticed the Irishman, and he had seen the truth for himself the truth of Captain Murray's assertion that he was a natural leader. Men crowded to Harper's campfire, partly to relish his stories, and partly because they wanted his approval."

Chapter 2, p. 36

"Harper shifted uneasily. He was a huge man, four inches taller than Sharpe's six feet, and with a broad body that betrayed massive strength. Doubtless the other Riflemen were content to let Harper do their dirty work, and perhaps only he had the guts to do it."

Chapter 2, p. 45

"The Major must do what he thought fit, and Sharpe would do as he thought best, and the strange exaltation of battle suddenly gripped him. Here, in the filthy stench of powder smoke, he felt at home. This had been his life for sixteen years."

Chapter 4, p. 69

"Hagman was carefully reloading his rifle with the best powder and shot. He eschewed the ready-made cartridges which were made with coarser powder, charging his rifle instead with the best fine powder which each Rifleman carried in a horn. He wrapped the ball in the greased leather patch which, when the weapon was fired, would grip the seven spiraling grooves and lands which imparted spin to the bullet."

Chapter 8, pp. 133-134

"The second legend is more important, Lieutenant. It says that if Spain lies endangered, if once again the barbarians are trampling our country, then the banner must be unfurled before the high altar of Santiago's shrine. Then Matamoros will arise and fight."

Chapter 11, p. 180

"He was making his peace with Sharpe, but there would be no formal declaration of hostility's end, nor any regrets about the past, but rather a new beginning that must find its halting start on this cold hillside. Both men were too proud for apology, so apologies must be forgotten."

Chapter 11, p. 186



"The volunteers came from throughout the Mouromorto domains. They bivouacked where chestnuts grew beside the stream in a sheltered nook of the hill, and they made wood and turf huts. They were peasants who obeyed the ancient call to arms, just as their ancestors had shouldered a scythe blade and marched to face the Moors."

Chapter 12, p. 189

"Harper was twisting his sword-bayonet from an enemy's ribs. More riflemen were crowding through the gap, chopping and slashing, while others came over the wagon to drive the Frenchmen back."

Chapter 14, pp. 224-225

"He told his men to hold their fire, then led them down the street where the beauty of the city's skyline was replaced by the cuddling stench of blood. One of the Riflemen laughed because a child was carrying a human head. A dog lapped at blood in a gutter and snarled when the Riflemen came too close."

Chapter 14, p. 233

"I think you could become a soldier of great repute, Lieutenant. You understand battle. You became calm when other men frightened. Your men, even when they disliked you, followed you because they understood you would give them victory."

Chapter 16, p. 259



## Topics for Discussion

Even the enlisted men of the ranks are prejudiced against Sharpe, when it would seem that they ought to be proud to have one of their own as an officer. Captain Murray offers an explanation for this. Is it a fully adequate explanation?

Don Blas Vivar is continually lying. How does he remain such a likable character despite using and manipulating everyone around him with lies?

Don Blas Vivar says he has only three rules for his Cazadores. Sharpe later develops three rules for his riflemen. What are these three rules? Why might these simple rules be both effective and welcomed by the riflemen?

As Don Blas Vivar is explaining the legend of the gonfalon, he compares it to English legends such as Drake's Drum and King Arthur's Sword. Do Americans have similar legends?

Sharpe learns much about being a respected and effective leader from Don Blas Vivar. What are some of the most important lessons Sharpe learns from Vivar?

Many novels and movies about war often glorify the setting rather than focus on the actual practice of killing and death. Discuss whether Sharpe's Rifles portrays combat as something adventuresome and glorious or something terrifying that any sane person would want to avoid by citing specific passages from the text.

Bernard Cornwell, author of Sharpe's Rifles, goes to impressive length to keep historical accounts accurate. Discuss how knowing that much of the story is taken from actual history affects your enjoyment of a story centering on a fictional character, Richard Sharpe.