Sharpe's Waterloo: Richard Sharpe and the Waterloo Campaign Study Guide

Sharpe's Waterloo: Richard Sharpe and the Waterloo Campaign by Bernard Cornwell

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Sharpe's Waterloo: Richard Sharpe and the Waterloo Campaign Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Plot Summary....3

The First Day, Chapters 1 thru 6....4

The Second Day, Chapters 7 thru 9....10

The Third Day, Chapters, 10 thru 12....14

The Fourth Day, Chapters 13 thru 16....17

The Fourth Day, Chapters 17 thru 20, Epilogue....21

Characters....26

Objects/Places....32

Themes....36

Style....39

Quotes....42

Topics for Discussion....45

Plot Summary

SHARPE'S WATERLOO by Bernard Cornwell is an account of the four days in June 1815 when the allied armies under the Duke of Wellington confronted the Emperor Napoleon as he and his troops marched on Brussels, the capital of Belgium. The story is told through the eyes of Richard Sharpe, a veteran British army officer who has been seconded to the staff of the young Prince of Orange.

Bloodied and disheveled from a fateful encounter with a young French cavalry officer in the vanguard of Napoleon's forces, Sharpe bursts into the Duchess of Richmond's ball in Brussels to tell the Duke of Wellington of the arrival of the French army just south of Brussels. As he leaves the ball Sharpe comes on young Lord Rossendale, who is Sharpe's estranged wife's lover. He is prevented from killing him by fellow officers and a duel is agreed upon, but it never takes place because their personal affairs are overtaken by, first the battle for Quatre Bras, and then the main battle at a place called Mont-St-Jean just south of Brussels close by the village of Waterloo.

Sharpe, in his role of a staff officer to the Prince of Orange, witnesses the fierce fighting when the British army and their allies prevent the French forces from controlling the crossroads at Quatre Bras. The next day, Sharpe follows Wellington and his troops when the Duke has to make a strategic retreat back to Mont-St-Jean because of the defeat and retreat of the Prussian armies.

During the battle of Waterloo, Sharpe, appalled at the meddling incompetence of the Prince of Orange, rejoins his old regiment, the Prince of Wale's Own Volunteers and at the climax of the battle takes control from its dysfunctional commander and leads it in the rout of the Imperial Guard. In the aftermath of the battle, Sharpe, who has been officially put in charge of his old regiment by the Duke of Wellington, learns of the death of Lord Rossendale who took part in the charge of the British Heavy cavalry under the Earl of Uxbridge.

The day after the battle, Sharpe and his long time comrade-in-arms Patrick Harper survey the destruction and carnage of the battlefield. Harper will return to his wife in Ireland and Sharpe will return to his love, Lucille, and join her on her farm in Normandy. Europe is finally freed from the threat of a new Napoleonic empire.

The First Day, Chapters 1 thru 6

The First Day, Chapters 1 thru 6 Summary

SHARPE'S WATERLOO is the account of the four days in June 1815, when the Allied armies under the command of British Duke of Wellington stand against the French Army, under the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, and ultimately defeat him at the Battle of Waterloo. The story, largely historically accurate, is told from the point of view of a fictional, veteran British army officer.

Chapter 1 starts describing the bucolic calm of a summer's day in June being broken when French Dragoons cross into Belgium without any resistance. The inhabitants of the region are sympathizers to the French cause and welcome the Dragoons. Only slight resistance is offered by Prussian infantry; the first casualties of both sides are suffered when the Dragoons are unexpectedly struck by some concealed Prussian cannon, which retreat northwards after the exchange.

The Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, in his heavy coach and accompanied by his staff officers is ten miles to the south. He is informed that the border has been crossed and only slight resistance has been given. He recalls, with satisfaction, how, in the span of only hundred and seven days since he landed in Southern France on a deserted beach with only a thousand men that he has gathered two hundred thousand veterans to his army. Bonaparte is now marching against what he considers to be English scum and their Prussian hirelings.

In Chapter 2 the action changes to forty miles to the north, in the Belgian capital of Brussels, the Duchess of Richmond is preparing to give a sumptuous ball in a large rented house. The British are of the opinion that Napoleon will not arrive in Belgium until July and may not even have left Paris. One of the Duchess's guests is Lord John Rossendale who is accompanied by his mistress. He has been posted to the army, though he is a cavalry officer of the British Life Guards, by pestering Henry Paget, Earl of Uxbridge, commander of Britain's cavalry and a personal friend of the Prince Regent. He calls on the Duchess to collect his tickets to the ball, and she explains her apprehension of his presence at the ball because Lieutenant-Colonel Sharpe, the betrayed husband of Rossendale's mistress Jane, will also attend it. Sharpe is on the staff of the Prince of Orange. Rossendale and the Duchess realize that Sharpe will kill Rossendale if he meets him, but they do not expect Sharpe to attend the ball as he eschews social functions of that nature.

To the south of Brussels the town of Charleroi, on the river Sambre, is taken by advancing French forces. The defending Prussians are unable to stop the determined French Dragoons whose forceful and impetuous General is given a bunch of violets by an old lady in the town. There are now no more rivers between the Emperor and the Belgian capital Brussels.

Chapter 3 opens with a lone horseman approaching the town of Charleroi from the West. He is dressed in a medley of different national uniforms, carries a British-made Baker Rifle and a heavy British cavalry sword. His tricorne hat, however, carries the scarlet, gold, and black cockade of the Netherlands.

This horseman is Richard Sharpe, the child of a whore, who has risen from the ranks to become an officer in the British army, one of the few such men to do so. He is a veteran of wars in Flanders, India, Portugal, Spain, and France. At this moment he is on the Prince of Orange's staff, though inwardly he still considers himself a Rifleman with the British 95th Rifles. Sharpe has detected the presence of the French Dragoons and realizes he must inform allied headquarters if indeed the French have entered Belgium in force

Chapter 4 begins with the description of the irresponsibly leisurely progress of the Prussian Major assigned to take the news to Brussels of the French advance into Belgium. Sharpe encounters men from the King's German Legion and writes a note to be delivered to General Dornberg in Mons. Dornberg is in charge of watching the border but when he gets the note, he questions the officer who brings it and decides Sharpe is a French agent spreading false information. He believes the French will advance through Mons and not Charleroi and discards the note.

The Duke of Wellington, Commander-in-Chief of the British and Dutch armies, strolls through the streets of Brussels, giving everyone an impression of confident ease but in fact he is very worried about the quality and numbers of his troops. In theory he has ninety thousand troops but only half are reliable. The reliable troops comprise thirty thousand tried and trusted veterans, including the King's German Legion. Thirty thousand of the remaining infantry are Dutch-Belgian troops who have previously fought for the Emperor. As for cavalry, his German cavalry, though first class are too few in number; his English cavalry, he considers sensitive, undisciplined and prone to moments of insanity. In his mind he considers Napoleon's forces. A hundred thousand veterans burning with desire to correct the wrongs they have experienced under Bourbon France.

The Duke's only hope is that the Prussian army under Prince Blucher will join him. If they can join together, they can win but if they are forced to fight Napoleon separately they will surely lose.

Sharpe arrives at the headquarters of Prince William of Orange, Duke and heir to the throne of Netherlands. Sharpe and the Prince have not formed a very satisfactory relationship even though Orange specifically asked for Sharpe on his staff. The Prince's chief of staff, Baron Jean de Constant Rebecque, tells Sharpe the Prince wants him to attend the ball in Brussels and that he must wear a Dutch uniform. Rebecque and Sharpe study the map of the terrain where the French are advancing. They decide Sharpe should go to check on the point where a road goes north to Brussels from the road running east to west between Nivelles and Charleroi. The nearest allied force is Saxe-Weimer's Brigade and the crossroads is called "Quatre Bras."

In Chapter 5 Sharpe and Rebecque draft an order for Prince Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar, ostensibly from the Prince of Orange and Sharpe takes it to Prince Bernhard's headquarters. Saxe-Weimar tells Sharpe that he will be at the crossroads in one hour with four thousand men and Sharpe leaves for Quatre Bras, accompanied by eighteen-year-old, Lieutenant Simon Doggett, also seconded to the staff of the Prince of Orange.

At Quatre Bras there is no sign of the French forces and Sharpe and Doggett turn south on the Charleroi road. It is as they approach the village of Frasnes that Sharpe finally detects the French forces, a battalion, six hundred strong, of dark-blue-coated light infantry is marching towards the village. Sharpe instructs Doggett to return to Quatre Bras to inform Saxe-Weimar while Sharpe tries to slow the advance of the French Voltigeuers—even a few minutes would help.

Sharpe hides behind a hazel bush and starts sniping at the advancing column, always aiming at the officers. When the column stops in confusion, Sharpe mounts his horse and fires to give the impression of an enfilading attack. When Sharpe tries to turn northwards to escape he is confronted by a mounted French Officer who engages him in single combat. After a fierce duel Sharpe overcomes the young French Lieutenant and leaves him dead on the ground as he turns to the firmer footing of the road. His right arm is soaked in the Frenchman's blood. On returning to the crossroads, Sharpe sends Doggett to inform Rebecque, at the Prince of Orange's head quarters, of the situation at Quatre Bras. He himself will go directly to Brussels to inform the Duke of Wellington, ball or no ball.

In Chapter 6 the narrative moves to the Duchess of Richmond's ball in Brussels where all is elegance and finery. Lucille, Sharpe's mistress sees Jane his estranged wife, a vision of beauty and finery, but neither woman knows or recognizes the other. Sharpe's old comrade-in-arms, Patrick Harper, has escorted Lucille to the ball, and in the sumptuous ballroom she is approached by Captain Peter d'Alembord an old family friend of Lucille and Richard Sharpe. He points out to Lucille, Jane, Sharpe's wife who is dancing with Lord John Rossendale.

The Duke of Wellington's participation in the social twirl of the ball is interrupted by the arrival of a dispatch for the Prince of Orange, who tries to ignore it but hands it over to the Duke. When he reads what Rebecque has written about the news from the Prussians and from Dornberg in Mons, he coldly orders the protesting Prince to return immediately to his headquarters. He then signals that the company should proceed to supper.

A sudden hush falls on the supper tables when a disheveled rifleman in a blood soaked uniform appears among the Highland dancers. It is Sharpe and he is looking for someone! He strides between the tables to the Duke's side who waves him to a couch and asks him what he has to say. Sharpe tells the Duke about the situation at Quatre Bras, and the Duke asks his host for a back way to a room where there is a good map. In a calm voice he instructs an aide to command all officers to their regiments and tells Sharpe to accompany him.

In the map room Wellington grudgingly admits to the Duke of Richm0nd that Napoleon has outmaneuvered him. He tells Sharpe he will meet him again at Quatre Bras and dismisses him with thanks. As Sharpe leaves the dressing room and proceeds to the main staircase, he suddenly comes face to face with Lord John Rossendale. Sharpe impulsively runs at Rossendale who flees toward a back entrance. Sharpe corners him and challenges him to draw his sword as he draws his own. The confrontation is stopped by a Life Guards Captain who offers his services as a second to Rossendale. D'Alembord likewise offers to be Sharpe's second. Sharpe repeats his insult to Rossendale; "You can keep the whore, but I want my money." Despite the witnesses to his humiliation Rossendale surrenders and tells Sharpe he will send him a note in the morning.

D'Alembord brings Lucille to Sharpe's side and she tenderly admonishes him for being a fool. A few dancers still dance among the wreckage of the ball. They now all know that the battle with the Emperor is imminent and this may be the last time they will hold their loved ones in their arms.

The First Day, Chapters 1 thru 6 Analysis

The abrupt dramatic arrival of French Dragoons invading Belgium is well described in Chapter 1 as is the attitude of the inhabitants of this part of Belgium. The contrast of the peaceful countryside and the sudden, vicious ambush by the Prussian troops and the subsequent death and mutilation of the casualties is a baptism of fire for the reader.

A cut to Napoleon in his coach receiving the news of the frontier crossing occasions a brief thumbnail sketch of the historical background to the unparalleled success of the Emperor's return to France and his rapid recruitment of one of the largest armies in Europe. The paragraph describing the peaceful countryside is reprised at the end of the last chapter as a form of closure as the battlefield reverts to its bucolic tranquility.

In Chapter 2 the story cuts to the Belgian capital where the unsuspecting British and Allied officers are completely preoccupied with social festivities. The assumption that Napoleon will take at least two months to engage the allied armies contrasts with the stark action taking place in the town of Charleroi.

The reader is introduced to Lord John Rossendale, the lover of the estranged wife of a man alluded to as a ferocious and dangerous army veteran. The detailed description of Lord John's finery as a Lifeguards officer will contrast vividly with the clothing of the book's main character, Richard Sharpe, who will enter the story in the next chapter.

In the action of the unsuccessful defense of Charleroi by the Prussians, the reader is introduced, for the first time, to the callous plunder of soldiers' corpses, often or not by their own men. This recurring theme appears time and again throughout all the accounts of action.

The description of Richard Sharpe's appearance in Chapter 3 is the opposite of that of Lord John. His dress and manner are those of a professional soldier, veteran of many

wars. The reader understands the alarm of Sir John on learning of Sharpe's presence in the Belgian capitol. As Sharpe functions as a reconnoitering scout the reader gradually learns some of the details of his personal life but not what exactly happened between him and his now estranged wife. The reconnaissance also leads to an exposition of the strategic importance of the positions of the three armies.

The background description of the weather in the region and the growing threat of rain from the North Sea coast appears as a recurring theme throughout the narrative. In Brussels the remark by the Duke of Richmond that Sharpe has let John Rossendale "cuckold" him belies the question as to what happened between Sharpe and his wife and the underlying bitterness with which he regards her.

Again, a soliloquy by the Duke of Wellington is the vehicle for an exposition of the underlying realities of the British and Allied troops. It also brings to a head the explanation of the reluctance of the Belgian troops to fight against their former comrades in arms.

The description of the headquarters of the Duke of Orange, his staff, and female companion provides details of His Royal Highness and the contre temps between Sharpe and Paulette leads to more explanation of Sharpe's current domestic arrangements. His easy gallantry towards the Prince's mistress contrasts with the boorishness of the latter and the deepening mystery of Sharpe's attitude towards the fairer sex.

In Chapter 5 Sharpe participates in trying to slow down the French vanguard as they approach the strategic crossroads of Quatre Bras. In an encounter with a young French cavalryman, Sharpe has to kill him in self-defense and becomes bloodied and disheveled. This is significant because it leads to his dramatic appearance at the ball in Brussels. The warning messages transmitted back to Wellington and the Prince of Orange are misconstrued and ignored in turn and illustrate the difficulties of communications in this era. The addition of Lieutenant Simon Doggett, an eighteen-year-old, ex-Etonian now with the First Foot Guards, as a companion and messenger to Sharpe, provides the opportunity for explanatory expositions about various aspects of the military situation.

In Chapter 6 the sudden appearance of Sharpe in his bloodstained uniform at the banquet of the Duchess of Richmond's ball is truly a dramatic moment heightened by the detailed description of the elegance and finery of the scene. Sharpe's delivery of the desperate situation at the Quatre Bras crossroad results in immediate calling of all officers to their regiments for the march south. If this was not enough to wreck the elegant scenario the confrontation between Sharpe and Lord John is the final straw. The quick transformation of what could have been a bloody hand-to-hand combat to the icy formalities of a seconded duel is an indication of the usefulness of this type of ritual.

Sharpe's appellation, witnessed by the onlookers, of his wife as a "whore" resonates with the author's similar designation of Sharpe's mother in Chapter 3. There is no development of this sub plot and the reader is left to assume that Sharpe's reaction to

infidelity is based on violent and deep-seated emotions. In this chapter, the character of Harper appears, who is a long time acquaintance and fellow veteran of Sharpe, and who has come unofficially from Ireland to stand alongside Sharpe in this historical battle at Waterloo.

The Second Day, Chapters 7 thru 9

The Second Day, Chapters 7 thru 9 Summary

Chapter 7 opens with the next day as Sharpe says good-bye to Lucille, who is more afraid of him getting killed than a British defeat. He and Patrick Harper, both wearing old riflemen jackets join the Prince of Orange at Quatre Bras where the Dutch Belgian troops are lined across the Charleroi road between the farmhouse at Gemioncourt and the village of Frasnes. The Prince is full of excitement and believes his troops will beat the French in a great victory before the Duke of Wellington's men appear on the scene. The Prince's unrealistic expectations do not survive the reality of the first French attack, which finally takes place in the early afternoon. Under a steady fire from the French skirmishers and their supporting cannon the Dutch-Belgian guns and infantry do not hold their line and eventually leave the battlefield in a blind panic. Saxe-Weimer's men also retreat but in an orderly disciplined way; they find shelter in the woods in the southwestern quadrant of the crossroads. Just as it appears the French will gain control of the strategic cross roads, contingents of Wellington's troops appear on the scene, the green-jacketed Riflemen.

Chapter 8 describes the Duke of Wellington curtly ignoring the prince of Orange's effusive welcome as it is through the Prince's fleeing troops that his own men are advancing to defend the crossroads. Wellington tells Sir Thomas Picton, leading his Fifth Division, that he has promised Blucher that he will come to his aid unless he himself is attacked at the crossroads. Battalions of Highlanders, East Essex, and the Black Watch take up positions just south of the Nivelles road.

From the east come the sounds of battle as Napoleon launches an attack on Blucher's Prussian army.

Now cavalry under the Prince of Orange arrives to drive off the French skirmishers who are pummeling the allied lines of Dutch-Belgians and black-coated Brunswickers. Initially the cavalry charge and drive off the skirmishers but are confronted by a French infantry square, which stops the cavalry's advance. The Prince of Orange excitedly leads his cavalry towards the vulnerable French cannon, but his men suddenly stop short and refuse to advance. Beside the cannons a brigade of French light cavalry has appeared, and, though outnumbered by Prince Orange's cavalry, the French lancers advance with confidence. Only a year previously the Belgian cavalry had been part of the French army, and when their old comrades lower their lances to charge, the Belgian horseman break ranks and flee despite the restraining efforts of their officers. Sharpe, Rebecque, and the Dutch prince join the rout and even the Duke of Wellington has to seek refuge in the infantry square formed by the 92nd Highlanders.

The French have come perilously close to capturing the crossroads and reform to attack again this time strengthened by eight hundred Cuirassiers, the "big brothers" of the French army, on heavy horses with steel breastplates, helmets and back plates. This

time the British infantry are ready for the attack and have formed squares, with colours hoisted and bands playing inside each square. Time and again the British muskets pierce through the armor plate of the Cuirassiers, who fall and limp from the field. The Lancers and Hussars, seeing this, do not press their charge and pull back. When the British muskets finally cease firing, the sounds of gunfire from the east gives notice that the Prussian army is still in battle.

More and more British troops arrive to reinforce both flanks of the allied lines, which are under continuous pressure from French skirmishers and infantry. Among the reinforcements Sharpe and Harper recognize their old company, the Prince of Wale's Own Volunteers. They are part of the four battalions commanded by Sir Colin Halkett. The brigade is ordered to take position in front of the wood being defended by Saxe-Weimar's men and to form a square in defense against expected cavalry attack, even though the square gives a better target for the French cannon.

Sharpe and Harper rejoin the Prince of Orange and his party. His Royal Highness is extremely agitated. He has seen his infantry collapse on the first attack and his cavalry routed by the French lancers. Now in a paroxysm of petulant rage he is questioning why Halkett's brigade is drawn up in a square. Theoretically these troops are under his command and he angrily defies reason and common sense in insisting there is no danger from cavalry. When the Prince demands that Sharpe take an order to Halkett to change from a square to a line formation, Sharpe refuses point blank and is summarily suspended from his duties. Despite the intercessions of Rebecque, someone else transmits the order and Sharpe is curtly given permission to rejoin his old regiment.

Chapter 9 describes the result of the Prince of Orange's order when, inevitably, the French officers notice Halkett's brigade in line formation and it is attacked by Cuirassiers under the redoubtable Kellerman, a veteran of innumerable charges and a hero of the battle of Marengo. Kellerman realizes that he must not let the British form defensive squares and unhesitatingly launches a full-scale cavalry charge. Unable to form a square in time the men under Sharpe's leadership retreat to the cover of the trees of the adjoining wood where they take up firing positions. In the ensuing debacle, the 69th battalion is completely destroyed and its colours captured by Hussars, who gallop off leaving mounds of British dead. Soon a bugle calls the French cavalry to withdraw as fresh British forces arrive at Quatre Bras, bringing with them cavalry and horse artillery. Eventually every inch of ground taken by the French under the command of Marshal Ney at Quatre Bras is regained by British forces. That night Sharpe and Harper have withdrawn from the devastated remains of their old regiment. They light a fire and roast horseflesh in a cuirassier's breastplate and ponder what they should do the next day. Over to the east, the Prussian battle sounds persist. In Brussels, Jane, Sharpe's estranged wife, discovers she is pregnant, Her lover, Lord John Rossendale arrives at Quatre Bras with the British Light Cavalry.

Sharpe wonders what he should do about Rossendale and the promissory note and whether or not he should go to his Highness the Prince of Orange and atone for his insubordination. Napoleon's campaign is less than forty-eight hours old.

The Second Day, Chapters 7 thru 9 Analysis

The desperate action of the allied troops to repulse the enemy from the strategic cross roads gives the reader, in Chapter 7, a chance to witness the weakness of the Dutch-Belgian infantry and their panic stricken flight from their first encounter with the French infantry. The recognition that these troops are in French uniforms, which they wore when they were recently on the French side, explains why these soldiers do not measure up to the courage and steadfastness of the men of Saxe-Weimar's brigade. The superficial replacement of the French eagle on their caps with the "W" for King William of the Netherlands is insufficient to motivate them to sacrifice their lives for their new commanders.

This engagement is also the occasion for the disastrous incompetence of the young enthusiastic Prince of Orange and also indications of the weaknesses in some of the British officers, particularly those of some of the Prince of Wale's Own Volunteers. The chapter ends with the imminent victory of the French forces.

Chapter 8 is replete with the technical details of the methods of fighting of the different types of soldiers on the field both French and English. The different types of French cavalry, for example the Cuirassiers and the Lancers, the different types of swords carried by different cavalry units and consequently their different ways of attacking with their swords are all described with the enveloping pageantry of uniforms and accouterments.

A significant and pervasive feature of this warfare is the use of music and drums by both armies, particularly the drums used by the French infantry to choreograph and synchronize the advance of infantry columns. A typical example is the silencing of the Dutch-Belgian brigade's brass band by the tremendous roar of the French battle cry "Vive l'Empereur."

Again the significance of the use of column advance, musket line, and square, specifically by the British infantry, for the different modes of attack and defense become clearer to the reader as the battle for Quatre Bras unfolds in the text.

Chapter 9 describes the increasing reinforcement of the Allied forces by Wellington's men arriving from Brussels. While this is going on, the Prince of Orange commits an incredible blunder in not ordering Halkett's brigade, whose command he retains under the allied command, to form a square and they are massacred by French cavalry. As the battalions come under cavalry attack, Sharpe, who has rejoined his old regiment after his dismissal by the Prince of Orange, simply usurps control of the men of one battalion of the Price of Wale's Volunteers and mitigates a complete disaster by his action in leading them into cover of the adjoining wood. This incident is a forerunner to Sharpe's assumption of control of his old battalion later in the closing stages of the battle at Waterloo.

This example of supreme incompetence by His Royal Highness will be repeated and also the inability to act decisively, on the part of the British officers, will be repeated in

the near future. This incompetence will become the major source of friction between the Prince of Orange and Sharpe, the veteran British officer, whom the Prince asked for on his staff.

The end of the second day of Napoleon's campaign sees the Allied troops securely in charge of the Quatre Bras crossroads and, in effect absolutely no gain in the French positions. But the French are still confident of victory the next day and over in the east the sounds of another battle show why the Prussians cannot come to the aid of the British.

The Third Day, Chapters, 10 thru 12

The Third Day, Chapters, 10 thru 12 Summary

Chapter 10 opens on the morning after the battle for Quatre Bras. While the various regiments are recovering from the previous night and going through their ablutions and breakfast, Sharpe is approached by Lieutenant Simon Bloggett who asks him to see the Baron Rebecque. Rebecque wants Sharpe to make peace with the Prince who really needs Sharpe as the whole army has heard of the disastrous order to Halkett's Brigade. Rebecque is at his diplomatic best as he gently lectures Sharpe on what he should have done in response to the imbecilic order. In the course of the conversation he tells Sharpe that Blucher's Prussian army was defeated but not destroyed the previous day and that they are retreating. The Duke of Wellington will also retreat, in an orderly and disciplined fashion, to avoid any chance of panic. To the west dark clouds foretell rain and the French hold off from attacking the British Army.

By midday the British army's orderly retreat is well underway with the Duke of Wellington ostensibly reading a newspaper as the infantry takes the road north leaving only the horse artillery and cavalry to form the rear guard. When Sharpe sees the Duke of Wellington mount his horse he knows it is time for him to leave as well. The farmland around Quatre Bras is suddenly full of thousands of French cavalry. Doggett and Sharpe catch a glimpse of the Emperor himself as the two men flee northward out of danger, but just then the impending thunderstorm erupts and the whole battlefield is transformed into a soggy muddy mess. The muddy ground seriously impedes the French cavalry from overtaking the fleeing British artillery, who gallop away along the paved surface of the road north.

North of the village of Genappe the French pursuit loses momentum and the British horse artillery, who have been periodically stopping and firing cannons at the pursuing French Cavalry are protected on each flank by the Dragoons and Life Guards of the British Cavalry.

Then, among a small group of Life Guards officers, Sharpe sees Lord John Rossendale and immediately leaves his own group to accost him. Rossendale, who has become separated from his friends when they disperse from an exploding rocket, suddenly sees Sharpe coming for him. He turns and flees, seeking shelter in a wood, only to be confronted by Sharpe who has anticipated his move and now faces him twenty paces away.

Instead of drawing his sword Rossendale raises his long barreled pistol but Sharpe, oblivious to the threat of the cocked pistol, calmly and slowly advances on Rossendale who freezes like a catatonic rabbit. Sharpe slowly takes possession of the pistol and then proceeds to dismantle and destroy it. Next he takes Rossendale's sword and breaks it in the fork of a tree, contemptuously telling his adversary that he is not worth fighting, or killing. He tells Rossendale that he must write a promissory note for

whatever money Sharpe's wife, Jane, has left from Sharpe's spoils from the Spanish campaign and then he can marry the whore for all Sharpe cares.

The retreating British army finally takes up its position on a ridge just south of the village of Waterloo near the crossroads of Mont-St-Jean. There are three large farm complexes between it and the next lower ridge to the south; behind the ridge runs a cobbled road, which can be used to move reinforcements out of sight of any enemy to the south.

In the driving wind and rain the British army waits to do battle with the army of the Emperor Napoleon.

Chapter 11 outlines the common topic in the British army bivouacs that evening. This is the expected arrival of the Prussians who now lie to the east of the British positions. Sharpe joins Peter d'Alembord at the bivouac of the Rifle Regiment. Peter is suffering from a premonition that he will die soon and nothing Sharpe can say will calm his fears.

At the Life Guards officer's mess in a house in the village of Waterloo, Lord Rossendale invents a tale to explain his broken sword and, the loss of his magnificent pistol to his fellow officers, but when he is alone with his friend and second in the affair, Christopher Manvell, he blurts out the truth of his shame and humiliation. He asks his friend to lend him a sword and resolves to regain his honor the next day, on the battlefield.

Chapter 12 describes Sharpe's return to the headquarters of his Royal Highness who, to cover his embarrassment and unease at the previous day's confrontation, makes an exaggerated analysis of the allied lines and assigns Sharpe to the right end of the line to watch for a French outflanking move. Rebecque gives up on the Prince's effort to get Sharpe to wear a Dutch uniform and gives him bread and cold lamb which he takes to share with Patrick Harper in the stables where Harper has claimed a patch of dry straw. Before he falls asleep he thinks of Lucille in Brussels and ponders on the deep-seated fears being experienced by his friend Peter d'Alembord.

The Third Day, Chapters, 10 thru 12 Analysis

The decision by Wellington to immediately undertake an orderly retreat north to near Brussels to be closer to the retreating Prussians and its disciplined execution by the British troops and their allies, is one of the critically wise actions by Wellington which ultimately leads to an Allied victory. The failure of Napoleon's forces to attack and overcome the retreating British army reinforces the success of the British maneuver. This failure eventually plays a critical role in the French defeat. However, after the various disasters and flight of the Dutch-Belgian forces and the incompetence of the Prince of Orange's leadership it is not surprising that the French forces remain confident in their eventual victory.

The role of Baron Rebecque as the chief of staff of the Prince of Orange's entourage and as diplomat and advisor to Sharpe is a good example of how to deal with incompetent senior officers. His advice also provides something of an apologia for the

young prince. The chapter ends with a thumbnail sketch of the reasons why the Duke of Wellington has chosen the particular spot to turn and face the French army.

The ongoing saga of the young Lord Rossendale unfolds, in Chapter 11, with his deceptive accounts to his fellow officers, of his retreat with the Life Guards and his final admission of the truth to his friend Christopher Manvell Peter. Each of the characters in the story are now confronted with the certainty of a major battle and the chances that they will be killed or mutilated in circumstances more controlled by luck than their own abilities as soldiers. In Rossendale's case he finds a certain redemption in finally coming to terms with his own shortcomings and the possibility of an honorable solution. D'Alembord's premonition that he will be killed and his developing fear of tomorrow's events exemplifies the true nature of courage, which includes coming to terms with fear and overcoming it. Sharpe has already tested himself and his ability to dealing with the ability to kill or be killed in his encounter with the young French lancer before the battle for Quatre Bras. There are numerous accounts in the story of how different men of different temperaments, deal with the prospect of imminent physical danger. The prelude to the forthcoming battle is a setting for depiction of these nuances.

In Chapter 11, the macabre auction of the personal possessions of the dead officers is another example of the brutally simple disposition of the fallen soldiers' belongings and also their corpses. Only the most privileged soldiers and officers will have the benefit of loved ones and servants to seek them out from the vast field of dead and dying when the battle is over.

Rebecque's role of diplomat is strained almost to the point of breaking when Sharpe returns to the Prince of Orange's headquarters, but Sharpe, uncharacteristically, controls himself and a violent confrontation is avoided, though he remains defiant over the question of his uniform. The menacing weather remains a constant backdrop to the scene of the armies confronting each other over the undulating ridges of the Belgian countryside.

The Fourth Day, Chapters 13 thru 16

The Fourth Day, Chapters 13 thru 16 Summary

Chapter 13 opens with the preparations by the British forces for the impending battle. It stops raining sometime during the night and before dawn Sharpe and Harper join the officers and staff who take the road south to the crossroads at Mont-St-Jean from the small town of Waterloo.

At the headquarters of the Prussian army Marshal Prince Blucher commands General Wilhelm von Bulow's Fourth Corp to lead an advance on Waterloo to fight side by side with Wellington; however, his chief of staff, Geisenau deliberately delays the departure of the Prussian troops.

On the northern ridge, Wellington prepares for the battle, sending the baggage to the rear, the troops being ordered to keep nothing but their weapons, ammunition and canteens. The Duke's infantry wait in columns of companies on the north ridge while to their south they see only a few horsemen on an empty ridge. Then suddenly the French army of infantry, cavalry, and cannons appears on the ridge. The men are dressed in their finest uniforms and gold; silver and plumes gleam in the weak sunshine. Regiment after regiment appears, cavalry troop after cavalry troop, battery after battery; among the multitude, the black bearskins of the elite Imperial Guard punctuate the unparalleled show of strength.

On their ridge the British redcoats sit or lie on the wet turf, many of them smoking their clay pipes. Their canteens are filled with rum or gin and their ammunition pouches are packed with dry cartridges.

Then a lone French cannon fires and the shot is followed by two others. These three shots are the Emperor's signal to start the battle. The time is a quarter to 12 noon.

Chapter 14 recounts the beginning of the battle, which starts with a cannon duel, and the British suffer their first casualties as the shells fall on the battalions sheltering beyond the crest of the ridge. Then French skirmishers mount an attack on the Chateau de Hougoumont. Sharpe, with Harper, go to a field next to the fortified farm and watch as Guards, defending the farm, take turns at the loopholes to pour their deadly fusillade on the massed Frenchmen. From the ridge the British gunners are firing howitzers with the new shrapnel shells; now British skirmishers run into the field where Sharpe and Harper are sheltering. The French are faltering and retreating into the wood to escape the bursting shrapnel.

Sharpe and Harper return to the ridge above the chateau, where men from the 2nd Guards Brigade are posted to reinforce the garrison defending Hougoumont. They are part of the Prince of Orange's dispersed corps. He sees Sharpe and tells him he wants Sharpe to go into the Chateau and tell him, the Prince, when to send in the reserves.

Sharpe is convinced that the men in the chateau are perfectly capable of holding the position but diplomatically acquiesces and enters the chateau.

The next attack by the French is climaxed by them breaking through the gate and entering the courtyard. Sharpe and Harper join in the frantic hand-to-hand fighting which breaks out and are relieved when a disciplined group of Coldstream Guards officers retrieves the broken bar at the gate and drop it in its slot to reseal the door.

The French skirmishers now trapped in the courtyard are eventually all killed. Outside the courtyard another French attack traps some Guardsmen outside the walls, and they perish in their turn. This attack is also foiled when British Guardsmen come down from the ridge to reinforce the garrison of the chateau with remorseless musket fusillades, which eventually drives off the French attack. Colonel MacDonnell asks Sharpe if he could help by getting a wagon of ammunition sent down to the chateau from the reserve area behind the ridge.

Chapter 15 begins with the description of a determined attack on the British lines by French light infantry. These infantry are skirmishers, Voltiguers, and they force the redcoats to retreat while French guns in valley engage the British cannon on the ridge. Now the main French infantry columns advance on the ridge. Their intention is deploy to from the column to a musket line thicker and heavier than the British line. While the French infantry advance on the ridge, Prince of Orange interferes again, ordering Hanoverians to advance on La Hay Sainte to recapture it, though it has not been lost. The Prince is elated by the initial success of the Hanovers and refuses to order them into a square, as he cannot see any French cavalry. But, out of the smoke of the battlefield come formations of French Cuirassiers. These armed cavalrymen fall on the Hanoverian line and massacre them almost to a man.

On the ridge British Redcoats are ordered to stand up and fire their muskets into the advancing French infantry. The musket volleys cause many casualties among the French infantry but slowly and surely British infantry are being driven back by the superior numbers. However, the concentrated British fire stops the French columns from completing their deployment into line, though they are supported by the Cuirassiers, who have just destroyed the Hanoverians and now ride west to threaten the thin British line. To counter the danger of a French breakthrough, Wellington orders the Earl of Uxbridge to attack the advancing French formations with the British Heavy cavalry. Lord John Rossendale, in attendance on the Earl, pleads to join the cavalry charge and so rides into battle with his borrowed sword bright in his hand.

The aftermath of the successful charge by the British Heavy cavalry is detailed in Chapter 16. The combined French forces of infantry and cavalry cannot withstand the momentum of the charge of the Heavy Cavalry and the French lines break. The cavalry charge has had a huge success but the undisciplined British cavalry regiments do not heed the bugle calls to rally and now, out of control, they charge recklessly on.

The British infantry regroups on the ridge and Sharpe commandeers a wagon of musket ammunition and takes it down to the Chateau de Hougoumont after which he and Harper return to the ridge only to find that there is still no news of the Prussians.

The now dispersed British Heavy Cavalry continue their charge and attack the French cannons on the southern ridge, overrunning them only to be met by French Infantry who have formed a square. The Heavies belatedly withdraw and return to their lines to the north only to be intercepted by French light cavalry whose lances overcome the British cavalry and their spent horses. Lord John Rossendale is brought down by Lancers and Hussars. They strip the mortally wounded Life Guard officer of his sabretache and the coins in his breeches and take his horse. His still alive but far from where the remnants of the British cavalry muster

The Fourth Day, Chapters 13 thru 16 Analysis

At the start of Chapter 13, Sharpe and Harper reacquaint themselves with the men of their old regiment, whose Green Jackets they still wear, and then they move along the British lines which gives the opportunity for a complete depiction of the Allied forces and also the presence of civilians who have come from Brussels to witness the battle. The disposition of the British troops is in marked contrast to the appearance en masse of the French army with every conceivable element of infantry and cavalry on display, almost as if on parade. The reader is therefore treated to a visual description of the entire French forces.

The contrast between Napoleon's rapturous acknowledgment by his men as he gallops along the face of his army is made with that of the Duke of Wellington, who trots sedately, with his entourage. There are no cheers for the Duke, only a scatter of shots from a group of nervous Dutch-Belgian troops. The contrast between the two generals vividly describes the fundamental difference in approach of the two armies. At several points British officers, including Sharpe, have demonstrated their fascination with Napoleon and the sight of him reviewing his massed army must give many of the British troops a sense of foreboding, as, presumably, is the intention of the display.

Chapter 14 deals with the fighting at the Chateau of Hougoumont. The assignation of Sharpe to the chateau, though correctly judged unnecessary by Sharpe, provides the means for an eyewitness account of the fierce battles for this most strategic position. The heroic action of the huge French lieutenant in breaking into the courtyard and the equally determined defense by Coldstream Guard officers are described in vivid detail and both sides earn the grudging respect of both Sharpe and Harper.

The technical account of the first use of high explosive shells, invented by a Major Shrapnel, is a fascinating detail among the description of the primitive hand-to-hand combat within the fortified chateau.

A large portion of Chapter 15 is taken up with the technical details of the different firearms used by the British forces. The greater range and accuracy of the Baker rifle is

offset by the quicker rate at which the musket can be fired and reloaded. The tactic of the British Riflemen is to aim at the officers. The only recourse is for the French Voltigeuers to charge the Riflemen and use their bayonets. Again, it is the greater numbers of the enemy which finally forces the British skirmishers to retreat. The superiority of the British muskets, which prevents the advancing French Infantry from deploying out of their columns and into a skirmishing line, is a key element in the beginning of the failure of the French attack.

This chapter is replete with details of the weapons and tactics of each army. The explanation of the British artillery tactic of loading "Double Shot" is described in technical detail, as is the reloading procedure employed by the musket men and the effectiveness of the huge Kligenthal swords wielded by the Cuirassiers.

His Royal Highness, the Prince of Orange, again issues orders which even the uninformed reader knows will result in the destruction of the Hanoverian troops under his command, thereby adding to the score he will eventually have to pay in atonement. In the end the inexorable advance of the superior numbers is countered by the Duke of Wellington, who plays one of the last cards in his hand - the Heavy Cavalry under the leadership of the Earl of Uxbridge.

The vivid description of the charge of the British Heavy cavalry under the Earl of Uxbridge is probably the most dramatic and powerful in the whole book. The labeling of the horses as being the best and heaviest in Europe is correct and the fact that the horses also join in the killing is symptomatic of the bond between them and their riders. As with the Cuirassiers, the main weapon of a cavalryman, apart from the hooves of his heavy mount, is in his cavalry sword, which in the case of the British cavalryman has a blade of thirty-five inches. A formidable weapon to both the wielder and the recipient.

The inevitable result of more than two thousand cavalry suddenly appearing over the ridge and charging into the flanks of the twenty-thousand infantry column results in the carnage and slaughter. The French heavy cavalry, the Cuirassiers, who are guarding the flank of the column, are simply overwhelmed. The suddenness of the charge precludes the French infantry from either forming a defensive square or completing their maneuver from column to line, but the Earl of Uxbridge now commits an elementary blunder by losing control of his cavalry who continue on with their charge and suffer the inevitable consequences of dispersion and dissipation of momentum.

The story follows the fate of young Lord Rossendale in the charge and his meteoric collapse from bloodstained hero to lance skewered and plundered casualty encapsulates the fate of the whole of Earl Uxbridge's "Heavies."

The Fourth Day, Chapters 17 thru 20, Epilogue

The Fourth Day, Chapters 17 thru 20, Epilogue Summary

Chapter 17 starts with Sharpe being shown where the Hanoverians were massacred east of La Haye Sainte as they advanced in line under orders of the Prince of Orange. The Prince, excited at the apparent success of Uxbridge's cavalry, confronts Sharpe asking him why he is not at the Chateau of Hougoumont. Sharpe tells him he is not needed there and he gestures to the fallen Hanoverians calling the Prince an incompetent murderer and raises two fingers to his face. The Prince screams at Rebecque to arrest Sharpe, but the Baron knows he has no authority to do so. Before the situation can deteriorate further a cannonball lands and kills a gunnery officer next to the Prince. Another assault is imminent and the Prince and his staff take shelter.

On the ridge, d'Alembord and his Prince of Wale's Volunteers are ordered to retreat exactly 100 yards and to then lie down. The British forces are subjected to a massive cannon bombardment, but the French officers only see the British battalions pull back leaving their dead and wounded on the ridge. It is half-past three and there is still no sign of the Prussians.

As Sharpe and Harper, back at the ridge, discuss what they each will do if the battle goes badly they are startled to see regiment after regiment of French cavalry advancing towards the newly-forming British infantry squares. The attacking French cavalry are subjected to musket and rifle fire from Hougoumont and La Hay Sainte and their columns are constricted.

The French cavalry repeatedly try to break the British infantry squares but, with few exceptions their disciplined firing, drives off the French cavalry. The great wave of French cavalry now seems to ebb away from the smoke enveloped squares, leaving behind a charnel house of dead and wounded cavalry men and horses.

Before the British could start celebrating, another wave of French Cavalry engulfs the British squares. This time the French go beyond the impenetrable squares up to the ridge only to encounter a screen of waiting cavalry. The French cavalry persist in their suicidal brave attacks on the British squares and become feebler and feebler until during the last weak attempts, the Duke of Wellington leaves the safety of a British square, and as he leaves he remarks to Sharpe that the Prussian pickets have been sighted. With the failure of his cavalry attack on the British lines and the appearance, to the east, of Prussian pickets, Chapter 18 describes Napoleon's necessity to overwhelm the British army before Wellington and Blucher can join forces. The greater part of Napoleon's infantry still remains uncommitted and among them is the vaunted Imperial Guard.

The French rain down a continuous cannon bombardment on the British lines where the redcoats have been ordered to lie down. Among the casualties is Peter d'Alembord who is wounded in the leg and taken to the surgeons' tents. When the Dutch-Belgian cavalry refuses to clear the ridge face of French skirmishers and Colonel Ford completely loses his nerve, Sharpe, now with the Prince of Wale's Own Volunteers, takes over leadership of the battalion and leads the men on a successful counter attack to clear the ridge.

His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange (the Young Frog) decides to exonerate the cowardice of his cavalry by sending two infantry battalions of the King's German Legion to relieve the defenders of La Haye Sainte. He ignores the pleading of Simon Doggett and refuses order them to form a defensive square after they successfully drive off the French infantry besieging the farm. Inevitably, French cavalry massacres the KGL infantry. Simon Doggett explodes in rage, curses the Prince to his face, and rides off into the smoke of battle.

It now appears to everyone, the British troops included, that the French are winning the battle. Chapter 19 describes the dire predicament of the Allied forces. La Haye Sainte has fallen because the German defenders ran out of ammunition and the French cannon continue to wear down the British regiments holding the ridge.

When Sharpe hears Doggett's account of the destruction of the last two battalions of the King's German Legion he goes with Harper and surreptitiously tries to kill the murderously incompetent Dutch Prince with a well-placed rifle shot. In the end he only succeeds in wounding him badly in the shoulder but His Royal Highness has to leave the field of battle and can no longer endanger the lives of his men. Sharpe and Harper join the Riflemen.

The Duke of Wellington realizes that the French are going to attack the center of his line. He forms his men into four ranks and instructs them to lie down and, at the same time, to the dismay of his officers, orders the regimental colours to be furled and taken to the rear, The exhausted British Redcoats wait on the ridge for the inevitable attack by Napoleon's most powerful weapon, the never defeated, most illustrious and distinguished troops in his army, the Imperial Guard.

Chapter 20 describes how Marshal Ney leads the Imperial Guard into battle in two columns comprising sixty huge men in each rank. They appear to be unstoppable and, though the British cannons fire as quickly as they can, the advancing French columns simply absorb the lethal barrage and continue to advance. The continuous drum beat stops only to allow the guards to roar their battle cry of "Vive l'Empereur!" They are the immortal, undefeated Guard and are certain of victory.

On the ridge, the Duke of Wellington, takes charge of his men and orders them to stand up and then to fire at the French troops, now only fifty yards away. Only a handful of men at the head of each French column can use their weapons while Wellington's veterans rake the French column with savage relentless fire. Again the French are unable to deploy out of the columns and into a musket line and suffer accordingly. Sharpe, now with the Rifle regiment, intervenes to stop the men from retreating, grabs a

horse, and, with Harper as an enforcer of discipline, rallies the men who are faltering. He orders them to wheel right and deliver a fusillade into the right flank of the Imperial Guard. He then commands the men to fix bayonets and charge into the French column, where the French troops are so closely packed that they cannot defend themselves properly. Suddenly the drums fall silent, the Eagles above the bearskins vanish, and the Imperial Guard is, unbelievably, in retreat.

The Duke thanks Sharpe for his action and gives him command of the battalion whose command he has assumed, and Sharpe leads it in the general advance of the British army as the French troops, demoralized by the spectacle of the Imperial Guard in retreat, now also flee in panic. Only the Inniskillings cannot advance. They defended, to the last man, the weakest point in Wellington's line and their bodies lie in an almost perfect square under their colours, which somehow still fly above their position.

The Epilogue describes how, as night falls on the battlefield, the dead and wounded still lie where they have fallen. Among the bodies is that of John Rossendale. He is still alive, drifting in and out of consciousness, and, when he hears a woman's voice he believes it to be that of his beloved Jane. In reality, however, it is a woman from a nearby village, intent on joining the others who are plundering the fallen soldiers. The woman is accompanied by an eight-year-old child to warn her if sentries approach. When she woman tries to remove Rossendale's coat, with its precious epaulettes, he cries out in pain and the woman, afraid he will attract a sentry, uses the knife she carries with her and with which she butchers pigs, to brutally cut the young officer's throat. Then she scurries off into the dark with her precious bundle and leaves Lord John Rossendale dead on the ground.

In the morning, Richard Sharpe, now placed in charge of a battalion, by the Duke of Wellington, issues the necessary orders for burial of the dead. He also appoints sergeants and majors to make up those missing because of death or injury. Simon Doggett, in charge of a work party, returns with salt beef, bread, and a barrel of rum, which he has purloined from the cavalry.

As the men go about their activities, Sharpe is approached by Captain Christopher Manville who tells him that Lord John Rossendale is dead and, that he died penniless, so that the promissory note is now worthless. Sharpe shows little emotion and when Manville asks him who will inform Mrs. Sharpe of Rossendale's death he again calls the woman a whore and says she can rot in hell. Later, Harper returns from Brussels where he has assured Lucille that Sharpe is well and unwounded. The two men contemplate the ruins of the battlefield and realize that they are at peace again.

The Fourth Day, Chapters 17 thru 20, Epilogue Analysis

Chapter 17 deals with the news reaching Brussels from the battlefield. This mainly comes from deserting Belgian troops and results in premature preparations for a

Napoleonic victory. This news has a different effect on the two women who are waiting for news of Richard Sharpe and Lord Rossendale.

Sharpe finally breaks with any semblance of normal relations with the Prince of Orange and rejoins his old regiment of Riflemen. On the battlefield the necessity for small talk before the coming attack appears to be inane and superfluous until the reader realizes it is simply a device to cover the fears of men about to enter the arena of death and mutilation.

The role of the defensive infantry square to repulse cavalry attacks is thoroughly and convincingly described as is the emphasis on discipline and effective firepower of the muskets discharged by the British redcoats.

In Chapter 18 there are several examples of leadership in battle and displays of great bravery on the parts of individuals. Peter d'Alembord's return to his post after his leg wound is apparently successfully treated by a surgeon, is an example of pure courage, given his premonition of death and the fact that he could now excuse himself from further combat.

The disintegration of Colonel Ford after Major Vine is killed by a skirmisher's bullet leads to Sharpe taking control, much to the relief of the men who recognize a real leader whom they can follow into battles.

Finally the spectacle of His Highness the Prince of Orange again causing the massacre of some of his troops through sheer incompetence leads the, up to now, conventionally formal and obedient young British lieutenant, Simon Doggett to accuse him of being a bloody murderer and to leave his post in the Prince's entourage.

Chapter 19 depicts the low point for the British troops. Even the most stalwart of the defenders of the British ridge are resigned to a French victory and the Iron Duke himself, in face of the inevitable, orders the regimental colours to be furled and carried to the rear. Now there are no bands playing in the British lines and the only sound on the battlefield is that of the French drummers beating out the "pas de charge" as the Imperial Guard makes ready to attack the British Ridge.

In the midst of all of this, Sharpe's attempt to assassinate the Prince of Orange is a somewhat belated attempt to remove the criminally incompetent leader of the Dutch army from doing anymore harm, if that is, indeed, Sharpe's motive. In fact the reader is aware that it is actually a deep-seated and certainly understandable, desire for revenge. At several points in previous chapters, people as disparate as Sharpe's estranged wife, and Patrick Harper, have alluded to the possibility of officers being killed on the battlefield. These references appear to foreshadow justification for Sharpe's action.

Wellington's device of ordering his men to lie down out of sight of the enemy has been used more than once. It is a simple and effective tactic, which gives his men the opportunity to rest and which, when they suddenly stand up and appear out of seemingly nowhere, has an undoubtedly shock effect on the enemy.

The Imperial Guard were undoubtedly overconfident in victory over the almost-defeated British army, but Chapter 20 recounts how these men, now facing almost certain annihilation, fight with a ferocity and savagery which is more than a match for the French Imperial Guard. The hours of training in loading and firing their muskets now pays off but it is, in the end, the leadership of their officers which holds them together when they are finally at the breaking point. The sacrifice and heroism of the Inniskillings, though only mentioned, in passing, is a graphic illustration of the fortitude of the British troops.

There is another aspect of the battle, which though not over emphasized, runs through the narrative. This is the British readiness to experiment with new technology—for example the Shrapnel howitzers and the Baker rifle, and with imaginative tactics such as Wellington's use of ordering his men to lie down. In contrast the French rely on advancing in column to and then to deploy into lines, which in the face of accurate and merciless British fire seems to be an over reliance on outmoded traditional battle tactics. This same reliance on possibly outmoded tactics is shown in the use of steel Armour for the men and horses of the Cuirassiers; this surely is an obsolete expression of medieval knights. Again the French refuse to use the new rifles, which contrasts with the British, who overcome the increased loading times of the new weapons by employing them in conjunction with traditional muskets.

In the end it is a confluence of different factors, which save the British from defeat, the bravery of their troops, the steadfastness of their leaders, the training and techniques of their army and, finally, the threat to Napoleon of the belated arrival of the Prussian army.

The final, lingering death of Lord John Rossendale, described in the Epilogue, is a realistic account of the horrific activities of both civilians and soldiers who, like vultures, scour the battlefield for loot and plunder. Presumably Sharpe, when he has disposed of the bodies of the dead of his new battalion will conduct an auction of their personal possessions and valuables.

The indomitable Harper returns from Brussels after informing Lucille of Sharpe's safe survival of the battle, to take his place beside his friend and long time companion while Manvell is left to inform Jane of the death of her lover and father of her illegitimate child. The Epilogue ends with a reprise of a sentence from Chapter 1, which describes the bucolic tranquility of the now peaceful Belgian countryside.

Characters

Richard Sharpe

Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Sharpe is a renowned veteran of the peninsular wars who has served under the Duke of Wellington and, because of his service, is known personally to the Duke. After twenty-two years of war service he has retired from the British Army on half pay and, being unemployed, he accepts a request to join the Prince of Orange's staff who offers him a promotion to the rank of colonel.

Sharpe was born the illegitimate son of a prostitute and only escaped from a life in the gutter and the inevitable gallows by enlisting in the 33rd Regiment of Foot. He rose to be a sergeant and because of his bravery in battle was promoted to the officer ranks and is one of the few men of his background to achieve this distinction in the British Army. Since his wife left him he has lived in Normandy where he lives with Lucille Castineau; together they have a three-month-old son.

Sharpe's wife Jane has left him for a young Life Guard Officer and in doing so has absconded with the five thousand pounds booty with which Sharpe came back from the Spanish campaign. Unfortunately when Sharpe joins the Prince's staff there is an immediate antipathy between them. Sharpe refuses to dress in a Dutch uniform and prefers a tattered old green Rifleman's jacket from his former regiment the Prince of Wale's Own Volunteers. The Prince assigns Sharpe to the various places on the lines when the Battle of Waterloo begins, but when Sharpe flatly refuses to deliver and order the infantry to deploy into a line formation from that of a defensive square, and Sharpe additionally thrusts two fingers in the Prince's face in a gesture of contempt, Sharpe returns to his old regiment in the lines.

At the climax of the battle the officer in charge of the Riflemen loses his nerve and Sharpe takes over leadership of his old regiment and turns them from an incipient retreat into a successful counter attack on the French Infantry. The Duke of Wellington, at the end of the battle thanks Sharpe for his action and gives Sharpe command of the battalion.

Lord John Rossendale

Lord John Rossendale is a tall, extremely handsome officer in the Life Guards. He rides a superb black horse and is a picture of elegance in the scarlet and blue finery of the guards' uniform. He is a close companion of the British Prince Regent and has come to Brussels with his regiment but makes sure he is invited to the Duchess of Richmond's ball.

He travels with his mistress, Jane Sharpe, in an elegant carriage and, in Brussels at least, he resides with her in a Brussels hotel. In fact, the young lord is madly in love with his mistress but is bereft of financial means and needs to marry her to gain his own

security. The problem is the existence of Richard Sharpe who will not give his wife a divorce and of whom Rossendale is mortally afraid, with good reason.

At the ball in Brussels, Sharpe sees Lord John Rossendale and is only prevented from killing him by the intervention of other officers who agree to act as seconds in the impended duel. Rossendale, knowing he is no match for Sharpe, swears he will give him a promissory note for the money Jane Sharpe has stolen from Sharpe. During the campaign Sharpe again accosts Rossendale in a wood on the road from Quatre Bras and contemptuously takes Rossendale's pistol and sword from him and accepts a handwritten promissory note. Seeking redemption from the humiliation that Sharpe has heaped on him Lord John Rossendale takes part in the charge of the heavy brigade under the Earl of Uxbridge. Like many more experienced cavalrymen, after the initial success he falls victim to French Lancers and after lying near death on the battlefield he is eventually murdered by a civilian looter.

Peter d'Alembord

Peter d'Alembord is Captain of the light company skirmishers in the Prince of Wale's Own Volunteers. Friend of both Richard Sharpe and Lucille, he takes the role of second to Richard Sharpe when he challenges Lord John Rossendale at the Duchess of Richmond's ball in Brussels. D'Alembord wants to return quickly to England where his newlywed wife, Anne Dickerson, waits for him.

He intends to put up his captaincy for sale so that he can retire from military life and take up a secure civilian life on one of his father-in-law's Essex farms. With so much to lose and so much to gain in successfully surviving the battle he begins to suffer from a premonition that he will die. In the end he loses his leg after bravely returning to the regiment after having a bullet wound in his leg inadequately taken care of by a field surgeon.

Patrick Harper

Patrick Harper is an Ulster man who, for six years, was a comrade in arms with Richard Sharpe, throughout the Peninsular wars. He, too, returned from Spain with valuable battlefield booty, but in contrast to Sharpe, he successfully invested it in a pub in Dublin, where he also runs a horse-trading venture. When news of the outbreak of war reached him, Harper is visited by Sharpe, his old ex officer, whom he follows to France despite the protests of his wife Isobel.

Harper comes to Brussels while Sharp is with the Prince of Orange, after which he hardly never leaves Sharpe's side. At the crucial point on the British Ridge when Sharpe rallies the British infantrymen, it is Harper with his huge six-barreled rifle who stands in the way of any retreat or indiscipline and commands the men to advance.

Baron Jean de Constant Rebecque

Baron Jean de Constant Rebecque is the chief of staff for the Prince of Orange. A superb diplomat and expert in dealing with the vagaries of his Royal master, he sympathizes with Sharpe and tries to soften the festering enmity between the veteran British officer and the headstrong vagaries of the young aristocrat. It is he who persuades Sharpe to return to the Prince of Orange's staff after the first rupture between the two. His advice to Sharpe on how to deal with imbecilic orders is a masterpiece of practical wisdom.

Lucille Castineau

Lucille Castineau is the widow of a young French officer killed in the service of Napoleon. Her real title is Madame la Vicomtesse de Seleglise but she considers herself a countrywoman and lives in the family chateau in Normandy. She met Richard Sharpe and fell in love with him when he came to Normandy from England. She and Sharpe have had a baby son and she comes to Belgium to accompany Sharpe when he enters the service of the Prince of Orange. Of Hugenot descent Lucille has not much sympathy for the Bourbon regime even though her deceased husband had been awarded the Legion d'Honneur.

Mrs. Jane Sharpe nee Miss Jane Gibbons

Jane Sharpe, now using her maiden name of Miss Jane Gibbons, is the estranged wife of Richard Sharpe. She is living openly with Lord John Rossendale having left Sharpe, taking his fortune with her. A true beauty, who glories in the opportunity to flaunt her looks in the latest fashion of low cut diaphanous gowns which are all the fashion in Europe, she badly wants to marry her impecunious young aristocratic lover but fears for his safety if he ever meets Sharpe. She tries to goad Lord John Rossendale to somehow engineer Sharpe's demise. While she waits in Brussels for the result of the battle of Waterloo, she is dismayed to discover she is pregnant with Rossendale's child. After the battle she goes to the battlefield in her carriage only to learn of the death of young Lord John Rossendale.

The Prince of Orange

His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange is also known as, The Young Frog, or Slender Billy. His father King William has insisted that his twenty-three year old son be given command of the First Corps of the Duke of Wellington's army as the price for the Netherlands joining the allied coalition against Napoleon Bonaparte. He is often drunk and has a highly inflated opinion of himself both in terms of his martial abilities and his prowess as a lover. Wellington has only agreed on his appointment on the condition that reliable British officers are recruited to the Prince's staff.

Despite the remonstrances of his chief of staff, Rebecque, and the British officers on his staff, on three separate occasions he interferes with the troops under his command, issuing orders, which lead to the massacre of infantry by French cavalry. This so inflames both Sharpe and Simon Doggett that Sharpe, surreptitiously, tries to assassinate the Prince during the heat of the battle. The attempt fails but the Prince is wounded and leaves the scene of the battle.

Lieutenant Simon Doggett

Simon Doggett, an old Etonian, is appointed to be with other British officers on the staff of the Prince of Orange. He is assigned by Baron Rebecque to accompany Sharpe when he goes to the strategic crossroads of Quatre Bras to find out how close the advancing French forces are to seizing the position. Eventually witnessing the lethal results of the Prince's inept orders resulting in the massacre of the King's German legion, this young, inexperienced and normally respectful officer explodes into an indignant outburst calling the Prince a murderer to his face, he rides off into the battle eventually joining Sharpe and the Prince of Wale's Own Volunteers. In the ensuing action he gains his spurs on the battlefield and survives to become an active member of Sharpe's battalion.

Paulette

A vivacious young Belgian woman who is acting as the Young Frog's mistress at the Prince's headquarters and who befriends Richard Sharpe when he arrives from Quatre Bras.

The Duke of Wellington

The Duke of Wellington is the supreme commander of the Allied Forces ranged, in a coalition, to contain the re-emerged French Nation, united under the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. At forty-six years of age he is the same age as his chief opponent, Napoleon. His uniform is that of a British Field marshal and, though a successful veteran and victor of the Peninsular campaign and those in India, he has never directly faced Napoleon Bonaparte. Typically laconic in both his speech and dispatches, he eschews any flamboyant gestures but is much respected by men who have served under him. Though not a tall man he has the reputation of being one of the best soldiers in Europe, never having lost a battle.

The Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte

Napoleon Bonaparte has reemerged from exile to the delirious rapture of the French people who have experienced defeat and ignominy under the European and Bourbon regimes. In only one hundred and seven days since landing in southern France, he has retaken the capital Paris and raised an army of more than two hundred thousand men,

replenished the arsenals of France, and is now advancing on the British and Prussian armies. He regards Wellington as a mere "sepoy" general and the Prussians as British hirelings. His own men regard him as something near to a god and his enemies with fear and respect.

Prince Blücher

Prince Blücher is the commander of the Prussian army, which stands against Napoleon to the East. After an initial defeat by the French he orders his army to retreat towards the Belgian capital where he will, hopefully, join up with the Allied forces under Wellington

The Earl of Uxbridge

Harry Paget is the Earl of Uxbridge, commander of all the British Cavalry and second in command to the Duke of Wellington himself.

The Duke and Duchess of Richmond

The Duke and Duchess of Richmond are the leading lights in the social scene in Brussels to where large numbers of English socialites have moved as part of the adjunct to the general staffs of the allied armies. The Richmonds have rented a large house in Brussels and are planning a ball to which more than four hundred guests are invited and whose guest of honor is the Duke of Wellington

General Ney

General Ney is Napoleon's leading general. A flamboyant red-haired man he is called "the bravest of the brave." It is he who leads the French cavalry in their unsuccessful attack on the British infantry squares and it is also he who leads the Imperial Guard in their final assault.

Prince Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar

Prince Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar is the commander of a brigade of Nassauer infantry. They are mostly German troops in Dutch service who fought for Napoleon in previous wars. In the end they fight well against their former comrades.

Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Ford

Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Ford is the commanding officer of the Prince of Wale's Own Volunteers, a post previously held by Richard Sharpe. He is a man consumed with

worries about everything and anything and in the heat of the battle completely loses his nerve so that Sharpe takes over the battalion

Captain Christopher Manvell

Captain Christopher Manvell, a fellow officer of Lord John Rossendale in the Life Guards Cavalry, serves as second to Rossendale in the incipient duel between Rossendale and Sharpe. It is he who informs Sharpe of Lord John's death and who must also inform Jane Sharpe.

Objects/Places

British Military Units

Cavalry

Sovereign' Guard

Union Brigade of the Royals

The King's Own Household Troops

The Life Guards

King's Dragoon Guards and Blues

Scots Greys

Inniskilling Horse Infantry

Prince of Wale's Own Volunteers

Kings German legion

Grenadier Guards

Coldstream Guards

French Military Units

Cavalry

Cuirassiers

Dragoons

Hussars

Lancers Infantry

Voltiguers

The Imperial Guard

Weapons

Musket (+bayonet)

Baker Rifle

Nine-pounder cannon

Eight-pounder cannon

Howitzer

Rocket artillery

Lances

British Cavalry sword (35 ins)

Cuirassier Klingenthal sword

Curassier breastplate

Sabre

Field Formations

Infantry line of battle

Infantry Square

Infantry Column

Skirmishing lines

Cavalry line of charge

British Regimental Colours and French Eagles

All army units in the battle employ large banners or standards as rallying points and visual symbols representing each regiment or corps. These are often the subjects of fierce fighting as men from opposite sides try to seize them or defend them. They are a continuous tradition from the days of the Roman Legions.

Mons

Mons is a town in southern Belgium where the Prussian Army has its headquarters and through which the Allies assume the French Forces ill pass on their way towards Brussels

Wavre

Wavre is a Belgian town to the west of Mons whose narrow bridge hinders the Prussian advance westwards.

Charleroi

Charleroi is a Belgian town on the Sambre River where the main French forces cross into Belgium quickly overcoming the Prussian defenders guarding the bridge across the Sambre River.

Frasnes

Frasnes is a village south of the strategic crossroads at Quatre Bras. The advancing French forces occupy this village as they advance towards Quatre Bras.

Quatre Bras

Quatre Bras (four arms) is a strategic crossroads on the road between Charleroi and Brussels. It is here that the Duke of Wellington's forces stop the French advance north. When Wellington hears that the Prussians have been defeated to the east and are retreating north he makes a successful strategic retreat back towards Brussels.

Brussels

Brussels is the capital of Belgium and the ultimate target for the French army. It is here that the Dutch and British headquarters are concentrated and where elements of British society have gathered.

Braine-le-Comte

Braine-le-Comte is a small town to the southwest of Brussels where the Prince of Orange has his headquarters

Waterloo

Waterloo is a small town to the south of Brussels on the main road. It is here that Wellington decides to turn and hold against the French advance while waiting for reinforcements from the Prussian allies to the east. Subsequently, the Duke named the scene of his great triumph after this small town where he had established his headquarters before the battle.

Mont-St-Jean

Mont-St-Jean is the actual scene of the battle. It is a hamlet on a ridge on a small crossroads very close to Waterloo. It overlooks a gentle valley to the south.

Chateau de Hougoumont

Hougoumont is the name of a large chateau and farm to the west of the main road between Waterloo and Quatre Bras. It is heavily defended by the British and attacked fiercely by French infantry. It serves as an outpost of the British Lines and as a deterrent to French advances towards the British Ridge.

La Haye Sainte

La Haye Sainte is another large farm, on the road from Quatre Bras much closer to the British lines. It, too, serves as an outpost to the British positions and as a deterrent to French advances. Attacked repeatedly by French infantry it finally falls in the last stages of the battle because its defenders run out of ammunition.

Papellotte

Papellotte is farm occupied and defended by the British but because of its location further east is of less importance to the Allies. It is, however, the site where the first Prussian army units appear as they belatedly advance to give support to the British.

La Belle Alliance

La Belle Alliance is a large farm on the road from Quatre Bras to Mont St-Jean. It was here the Napoleon set up his headquarters when his army engaged the Allied armies.

Themes

Leadership

From Wellington to Napoleon, from an infantry sergeant to a cavalry officer, the immense importance of leadership, especially when leading men into battle is a recurring theme in this book.

The respect and admiration of the top leaders Napoleon and Wellington, contrasts dramatically with that of the Prince of Orange. At a more subordinate level, the failure in leadership of Colonel Ford, of the Prince of Wale's Own Volunteers and the actions of Sharpe in stemming a potential retreat illustrate the desire for and recognition of, effective leadership by the ordinary soldier.

Effective leadership means taking a realistic approach to the dangers at hand. Witness Sharpe's initiative in leading his men to run to the woods in the face of a cavalry attack for which they were not prepared. In contrast, recklessness sometimes pays off; for example, at the taking of Charleroi, the French cavalry officer shows that the disregard for personal safety is a normal attribute of cavalry officers. This is also exemplified by the Earl of Uxbridge in the charge of the British Cavalry. The Duke of Wellington apparently had a more cautious approach as he characterized the British cavalry as being the best in Europe but also the worst led. In a similar vein, Marshal Ney on the French side, allows pride and the refusal to accept defeat lead to the near destruction of the French cavalry in their repeated and futile charges of the British Infantry squares.

Loyalty

Throughout the Waterloo campaign there are several example of troops being expected to change allegiances because of their leaders' political ambitions. The Dutch-Belgian troops, both cavalry and infantry, are apparently expected to switch their loyalty by the simple expedient of changing their cap badges. That this does not work is anticipated by the Duke of Wellington but not by the Prince of Orange. On the other hand, the Prussian troops, under Saxe-Weimer, do fight well for their new side, as Sharpe witnesses at Quatre Bras.

The civilians in Belgium, near the French border and in Brussels, largely are sympathetic to Napoleon but adopt a wait and see attitude on the outcome of the battle. This is exemplified by the Belgian Comtesse who considers herself French and wears her husband's Legion d'Honneur at the ball. Lucille Casteneau's situation is more complicated. As a widow of a French officer and a citizen of Normandy she is now father of a British officer's child. Sharpe, himself, continues to serve under the Prince of Orange, despite his personal antipathy to His Royal Highness because as he explains "I need the money," a realistic but not very honorable attitude. In Sharpe's case and many

other soldiers, when the chips are down, it is loyalty to one's regiment, friends, or leader, which ultimately determines where an individual's loyalty lies.

Courage and Bravery

The theme of courage and bravery is a constant strand throughout this book. Examples abound on all sides and officers are expected to show unflinching bravery in the field, especially when in sight of the men they are leading. Thus the admonition for British officers to always act nonchalantly when they have to move under fire and the deliberate use of small talk to cover up their fear and apprehension just before an attack. The role of martial music, bands, and drums, both an extension of the use of trumpets to signal orders, was, apparently, a common device to keep up the courage and resolve of the common soldier. Sometimes these factors were bolstered, in the British army at least, by the use of alcohol, gin, and rum in the men's canteens.

Sharpe's satisfaction that he has not lost his nerve after he kills the young French cavalry officer, who insists on attacking him, contrasts greatly with his friend d'Alembord. Here we see true bravery, when d'Alembord overcomes a deep-seated premonition that he will be killed and returns to his post after he has been wounded and could have been justified in leaving the fighting to others.

In a similar vein, young Lord John Rossendale's behavior, after his humiliation by Sharpe, shows courage, even if a desperate kind, when he joins the British Cavalry in their charge under the Earl of Uxbridge and eventually loses his life in a horrific manner.

The British did not have a monopoly on bravery as is shown by the French troops who break in and are then trapped inside Hougoumont. All officers were expected to lead their men into battle; this is particularly true of the cavalry formations and requires a certain physical bravery and recklessness to do this without faltering.

Perhaps the best analysis of bravery is given in the passage about Sharpe's feelings when he invites Harper, his long time comrade-in-arms to find safety before the final assault on the British lines, when even the Duke of Wellington expects them to be overrun. "Bravery was not something that was inspired by king or country or even by battalion. Bravery was what a man owed his friends. It was keeping pride and faith in front of those friends. For Sharpe and Harper it was even a habit; they had fought side by side for too long for either man to turn aside at the end."

Plunder and Booty

It is more easy to understand the actions of civilians on the battlefield when they plunder the bodies of both the living wounded and the dead, but less acceptable for what was, apparently, a common practice among all armies to plunder the bodies of their fallen comrades, particularly the officers. The first description of this is when the vanguard of French Dragoons meets a Prussian force and a French officer and his horse are killed.

The looting, by his own men, of his possessions and their triumphant marching off with portions of meat from his horse, is the first of many examples in the story.

Officers, especially those sporting fine uniforms and weapons were a special target, as is shown by the progressive despoliation of Sir John Rossendale after he is brought down by French Lancers and when he is finally murdered by an old lady for the epaulettes on his uniform.

The cold-blooded auctioning off of their comrades' personal effects by the British soldiers after arriving at their bivouac at Waterloo, shows the uniformly callous attitude towards the fallen. Not the least, of course, is the account of how Sharpe and Harper made personal fortunes from booty they gained on a final battlefield in the Spanish campaign.

Technology

The use by the British of rockets and shrapnel firing howitzers, demonstrates their willingness to try new technology, though it is not always immediately successful. As in the case of the new Baker rifles, the initial disadvantages are overcome by an imaginative use of a mixture of the old and the new, muskets and rifles. In contrast, the French insist on using the infantry column to advance towards the enemy, whose much more effective musket fire now made it dangerous to change the deployment within firearms range. Likewise, the use of steel body armor by the Cuirassier French cavalry was symptomatic of a weapon system rightly belonging to the Middle Ages. The accounts of Cuirassiers discarding their breast plates after being dismounted is a telling detail, all the more vivid, because of the use by British forces of these discarded items as cooking or washing vessels.

The British use of the infantry square as a defense against cavalry is much more effective than that of the French, when they retreat from British counterattacks after the failure of the assault by the Imperial Guard. In fact the story recounts how the remnants of the British cavalry actually break one of these, largely, impenetrable formations. Thus the reader can gauge how critical a part technology played in the battle; even if it was a minor factor, in certain key moments, it appeared to be critical.

Style

Point of View

The story is told, officially, mainly from the point of view of Richard Sharpe, a veteran British army officer, who has been seconded to the staff of the Prince of Wales because of ramifications of the Alliance between Britain and the Netherlands. Having said that, a large portion of the story is in the third person omniscient point of view. The main character Sharpe does not appear until Chapter 3 while his protagonist, Lord John Rossendale, enters the tale in Chapter 2. However, there is foreshadowing of Sharpe, his reputation, and the background to his enmity for Rossendale which makes the delayed identification of the lone horseman described in Chapter 3 all the more dramatic.

The story changes to the third person point of view of each character who appears in the story with the initial introduction of a character usually accompanied by a short summary of their background and history, presented in the third person omniscient fashion. The third person point of view of each character is often used to express their emotions in a particular scene; there are few judgmental opinions expressed in the third person omniscient perspective. As an example, the British soldiers are described as jeering at the fleeing Belgian cavalry but the third person omniscient point of view recalls that, until recently, they were fighting for Napoleon rather than against him and they are, in fact, refusing to fight their old comrades.

Using the device of Sharpe's movements and actions as a point of focus for an omniscient third person narrative, the author gives a masterful exposition of the Battle of Waterloo, studded with details of the various army corps, the different types of soldiers, their uniforms and weapons, and their methods of fighting.

Interspersed with the general descriptions are third person points of view of different individuals in the action, but, despite the frequent changes of point of view because the main thread of the accounts comprises a sequence of battle actions, the reader is effortlessly carried along with the development of each scene.

Setting

The geographic setting for the story is the countryside stretching between the Belgian border with France to the south of the capital city of Brussels. There are three excellent maps at the beginning of the book giving details of the two main battlefields and the general geography of the area. Otherwise the reader is assumed to be familiar with this part of Western Europe, for example the proximity to the English Channel and the general outline of North France and Paris.

Though a work of fiction, the story conforms closely to historical fact and the historical setting; the four days in June 1815, are part of European history. All the places in the

story, the crossroads at Quatre Bras, the farmhouses used by the troops, La Belle Alliance, Napoleon's headquarters and the village of Waterloo, still exist today and can be visited, along with the various monuments, of different nationalities, which have been raised to commemorate various army corps. There is a brief description of the modern day Waterloo in the Historical Note, at the end of the book.

Language and Meaning

The language of the story is restrained and objective. In the description of the horrors of hand-to-hand fighting the language is objective and almost unemotional but is brutally realistic in the details in depicting the wounds and mutilations inflicted on both men and animals without becoming lurid. The accounts of the cries used by combatants to conceal their own terror and by their officers to exhort their men into psychological preparation for the brutality of physical combat are described vividly but in a detached manner so the reader feels the author is merely reporting the facts and not trying to shock the reader.

The character of Sharpe is never fully developed and the subplot of his incipient duel with Lord Rossendale is always subordinate to the main theme of the book. The reader is intrigued by the implied drama of how Sharpe's marriage to Jane broke up and how she was able to purloin his hard-earned fortune. His references to her as a "whore" and the author's designation of Sharpe being the child of a "whore" implies a very deep seated puritanical antagonism towards women. This is contradicted by Sharpe's easygoing rapport with Paulette at the Prince of Orange's headquarters, where the young lady is also identified as a "whore." This aspect of the book is never amplified or explained.

When emotions of either respect or hate are invoked, it is in the context of expressions of these sentiments by characters in the story. National prejudice is a prerequisite for a soldier to sustain his emotional control during battle, but, as the author points out, rum and gin were certainly used by the British troops to sustain their courage though it does not encourage clear-headed thinking, as is demonstrated by the British cavalry after their successful charge against the French infantry.

Likewise, the indignation engendered by the reprehensible conduct of the Prince of Orange is expressed by the actions of Lieutenant Doggett and ultimately in the language and actions of Colonel Sharpe rather than by any opinion expressed or implied by the author.

However, it must be recognized, as indeed the author specifically does in the Historical Note at the end of the book, some of the important details, such as the behavior of the Prince of Orange, are what might be termed speculative fiction. In general, the account is firmly based on substantiated historical accounts, though, again, the reader should be aware that the overall point of view is that of a British army officer. There are other versions of what actually happened at Waterloo. The author's bias is plainly evident, in

the Historical Background with his disparaging dismissal of French explanations that Napoleon basically won the battle, except for a few minor details.

Throughout the story there are recurring passages, which deal with the natural world where the peaceful countryside and the ominous weather are described in almost lyrical terms. One passage, in particular, contrasting the bucolic tranquility of the countryside with the depredations of the warring armies, is used in the first chapter and then in the last paragraph of the Epilogue.

Structure

The title of the book, in full, is SHARPE'S WATERLOO, JUNE 15th to JUNE 18th, 1815. This serves as a correct description, which though based closely on historical fact, is, in fact, a work of fiction. At the beginning of the book are three excellent line maps showing the general area around Brussels and south Belgium and one each for the separate engagements of the Battle for Quatre Bras and the Battle of Waterloo. These are a useful aid for the reader following the actions of the different military actions and their movements.

There are four main sections in the book, each one dealing with each of the four days during which the Battle of Waterloo took place. Within each of the sections of days, the text is divided into twenty untitled chapters which are in numerical sequential throughout the book. The final narrative chapter is titled "Epilogue" but which could easily be a "Fifth Day" or "after the Battle" as it follows directly on the actions of the "Fourth Day."

The final section is the Historical Note. This is an extremely valuable section where the author delineates the differences between his fictional account of the battle and gives references to real historical accounts of the battle to which the interested reader can refer to augment his or her interest in the history, which this work will surely stimulate.

Quotes

"'Tell him,' he said, 'that if he points that goddamn camera at me again, he'll be auditioning for the Elephant Man on Broadway. That's how seriously I'll mess up his face.'" Chapter 4, p 45.

"It was just eighty-eight days since he had recaptured his capital of Paris, yet in those few days he had shown the world how an emperor made armies" Chapter 1, p 15.

"I don't care if she's as beautiful as Titania and as charming as Cordelia; she's still another man's wife. Doesn't her husband worry you?" Chapter 2, p 21.

"That's precisely why I think I should talk to the Prince. I'm told this Sharpe is an extremely uncouth man and is more than likely to fillet Johnny." Chapter 4 p 43.

"'Spain, Spain! All I hear about is Spain!' Dornberg slapped the table with the palm of his hand, then glared with protruding eyes at the unfortunate Blasendorf. 'To listen to some officers in this army one would think that no other war had ever been fought but in Spain! I asked you, Captain, what unit this Sharpe belonged to.'" Chapter 4, p 47.

"The British and Dutch had been worrying about Mons, but Sharpe now took a scrap of charcoal and scrawled a thick ring round the crossroads. 'That's the lock on your doors, Rebecque. Who are our closest troops?'" Chapter 4, p 61.

"' He told me that you can't tell what happens in a battle because there's too much smoke and noise. A battle, in short, is an ideal place to commit a murder.'" Chapter 5, p 66.

"'It takes our armies two days to assemble,' Wellington explained. ' They're not assembled, yet the Emperor's army is already on our doorstep. In brief he has humbugged us Sharpe.'" Chapter 6, p 99.

"'It seems the Prussians will have to fight without us today,' the Duke said dryly, then gestured towards the fields which lay to the left of Quatre Bras.' Your men to line the road there, Sir Thomas, with your right flank in front of the crossroads.'" Chapter 8, p 129.

"'You're frightened of unseen horsemen on the left? But this brigade is on the right! Here take this.' He thrust the written order at Sharpe.
'No, sir,' Sharpe said." Chapter 8, p 146.

"Rebecque nodded. 'Yes, Sharpe, that is exactly what you are. And that's why he needs

you now. He made a mistake, the whole army knows he made a mistake, but it's important that we continue to show confidence in him.' Rebecque looked up into Sharpe's face. 'So please make your peace with him.'" Chapter 10, p 174.

"'The Prussians are retreating?' Sharpe sounded disbelieving.
'They went late last night, which means we're stranded here on our own. Marshal Ney is still in front of us and at any minute the rest of the French army will attack our left flank.'" Chapter 10, p 175 - 176.

"'I'll tell you when to speak,' Sharpe said, 'and it isn't now. You listen. I don't care about Jane. She's your whore now. But I've got a farm in Normandy and it needs new apple trees and the barn needs a new roof, and the bloody Emperor took all our horses and cattle for his Goddamned army, and the taxes in France are bloody evil, and you've got my money. So where is it?'" Chapter 10, p 189.

"And still they came; regiment after regiment, troop after troop, battery after battery; the might of a resurrected Empire displayed in a massive show of incipient violence. Grecian helmets trailed plumes of horsehair, officers wore sashes thick with gold thread, and the elite of the infantry's elite wore black bearskins. Those were the men of the Imperial Guard, Napoleon's beloved 'anciens', each man with a powdered pigtail, gold earrings, and the moustache of a veteran. In front of the Emperor's guard his 'jeunes filles', his guns, stood wheel to wheel." Chapter 13, p 235.

The British jeered the running men, but the Belgians did not care. Their sympathies were with the Emperor and so they ran to the forest and there, safe under its trees, waited for a French victory to restore Belgium to its proper throne." Chapter 15, p 266.

"The big horses and their towering riders crashed home all along the column's broken flank. Cavalry drove great wedges into the very center of the French infantry. The swords slashed down, rose, then slashed again. Horses reared, lashing with their hooves to break skulls. The troopers, reveling in the slaughter, wheeled in the middle of the breaking column to break it yet further apart and thus make it easier to kill its constituent parts. They lashed the French with steel, and still more horsemen came to drive yet further lanes of death and horror into the shattered mass." Chapter 16, p 273.

"The Red Lancers led the charge. Some were Poles, still faithful to the Emperor, but most were Dutch-Belgians, fighting for the flag they loved, and now they lowered their swallow-tailed pennants and flung their fresh horses at the panicked British." Chapter 16, p 281.

"If an officer had to move under fire, then it had to be done very slowly and deliberately, with the air of a man distractedly taking a meditative stroll in the country." Chapter 17, p 291.

"'Fire!' The front face of the square volleyed again, and this time the bullets threw back four Red Lancers. The Lancers had been following the Cuirassiers and seeking the safety of the open ground between the squares, which was not safe at all, but a killing ground that led to the volley fire of yet more squares. The horsemen had been beguiled into the maze of death, yet they were brave men and they still dreamed of carrying the Emperor to victory on their lance points." Chapter 17, p 302.

"The Duke's face betrayed neither hope for his army's survival, nor despair for its defeat. He had lost most of his cavalry to a foolish charge, many of his allies had run away, and he was left with scarce half the men he had paraded at the days beginning, but he looked calm, even detached." Chapter 17, p 311.

"Neither Sharpe nor Harper spoke much. No one was speaking much in the British line any more. Sometimes a sergeant ordered the files to close, but the orders were unnecessary now. Each man was simply enduring as best he could." Chapter 19, p 335.

"The British army was reduced to a ragged line of shrunken, bleeding battalions who crouched in the mud near to the ridge's crest that was crowned with smoke and riven by the explosions of mud thrown up by the continuing cannonade. Behind the battalions the rear of the ridge was empty but for the dead and dying and the broken guns. At the edge of the forest the ammunition wagons burned to ash. There were no reserves left." Chapter 19, p 343 - 344.

"Bravery was not something that was inspired by king or country or even by battalion. Bravery was what a man owed his friends. It was keeping pride and faith in front of those friends. For Sharpe and Harper it was even a habit; they had fought side by side for too long for either man to turn aside at the end." Chapter 19, p 348.

"He heard the old sound, the blessed sound, the splintering crash of a battalion's muskets spitting bullets, and he saw the deployed wing of the column jerk as the bullets struck home." Chapter 20, p 358.

"Beneath and beside Sharpe the bayonets stabbed and twisted, but suddenly the enemy's gilded standard vanished, plucked backwards from the ridge top as the Emperor's Guard began their retreat. The drums had fallen silent and the immortal undefeated Guard were running away." Chapter 20, p 361.

"Sharpe said nothing. He was staring beyond the battlefield to where the sunlight glowed on trees unmarked by fire and where the air smelt summer sweet. The cloudless sky promised a day for haymaking, or a day for lovers to stroll through heavy-leafed woods to rest beside the green cool of a stream bank. It was a midsummer's day on the borders of France, and the world was at peace." Epilogue, p 370 - 371.

Topics for Discussion

Why did Sharpe allow his wife to abscond with his money? Surely he could assert his marital rights. He does have friends in high places and, specifically the Duke of Wellington, disapproves of his wife's liaison. Discuss.

Given Sharpe's social ineptitude, whatever did he and Jane have in common? Was Sharpe the victim of a confidence trick on the part of a beautiful woman? Give a possible scenario based on what the story tells us about these two individuals.

Taking into account Sharpe's humble beginnings, is it a massive inferiority, which makes him so vehemently antagonistic towards Lord John Rossendale? Discuss.

Lord John Rossendale has nothing to offer Jane Sharpe except his good looks. What does she see in him and why is divorce and remarriage to him so important to her? Discuss the practicality of both Sharpe, his wife and Lord John divorcing and remarrying.

Sharpe's inferiority complex about his social stature may have led him to deliberately antagonize the young and impressionable Prince of Orange. If Sharpe has befriended the young prince would he have been able to persuade the young prince not to make the disastrous battlefield decisions, which caused the loss of so many lives. Is Sharpe partly responsible for the debacle emanating from the Prince of Orange's headquarters? Discuss.

The first part of the story is concerned with the necessity of the British and allies preventing the French from controlling the strategic crossroads at Quatre Bras. Then, the Duke of Wellington strategically retreats north from Quatre Bras towards Brussels, thus abandoning the crossroad position to the French. Does this mean the battle for Quatre Bras was, in fact, completely unnecessary? Explain the Duke of Wellington's decision to defend Quatre Bras. What were his alternatives?

On the battlefield, before and after action, the British and Dutch-Belgian troops use brass bands to play music. Is this for entertainment? Contrast it with the French drums, beating the "pas de charge" and their shouts of battle cries in unison. How effective are the allied brass bands or could the bandsmen be used for other purposes on the battlefield? Discuss.

The use of the steel armored Cuirassiers and the rejection of the Baker rifle all indicate an ill-advised antipathy for new technology by the French. In contrast, the British do use the Baker rifle; they have rocket launchers and howitzers firing shrapnel shells. What is the contribution of technology in the final defeat of the French army? Discuss.

The French infantry vastly outnumbered the British on the ridge, but, twice, French infantry is repulsed by British musket fire. Is the use of a column advance and the subsequent attempt to deploy laterally into an extended line of battle within firing range

of the British lines the major cause of the failure of the French infantry assaults? Or was it overconfidence and the desperation of the outnumbered British troops? Discuss.

Wellington kept a reserve of much needed troops to guard his access to the Channel and his means to escape back to England should he be defeated. Was Blucher's chief of staff correct when he delayed the Prussian army advance to help the British because he believed the British would cut and run, leaving the Prussians to face Napoleon on their own. Discuss.

The Prussian troops never actually participated in any significant part of the battle, yet the Prince of Orange, wrote they were the major factor in the defeat of the French. How true is this and what was the contribution of the Prussians to the allied victory?

After the battle there were several suggestions as to the name to be given to the allied victory, which, in fact was the defense of the Belgian capital, Brussels, at a place called Mont St-Jean. Blucher suggested the name "La Belle Alliance," the farm on the road where Napoleon had initially set up his headquarters. Was Wellington's choice of "Waterloo" his way of indicating that the British had achieved the victory on their own, without any real help from the Allies? There was perhaps, in his opinion, no "La Belle Alliance!" Discuss.