



Sharpe's Rifles

Bernard Cornwell

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Bernard Cornwell's action-packed series that captures the gritty texture of Napoleonic warfare--now beautifully repackagedIt's 1809, and Napoleon's army is sweeping across Spain. Lieutenant Richard Sharpe is newly in command of the demoralized, distrustful men of the 95th Rifles. He must lead them to safety--and the only way of escape is a treacherous trek through the enemy-infested mountains of Spain.

Sharpe's Rifles Details

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From Reader Review Sharpe's Rifles for online ebook

Inese Okonova says

Šai Š?rpa gr?matai ir pi??er?ga hronolo?ija: P?c kop?j?s s?rijas hronolo?ijas š? ir sest?. Š?rps p?c dienesta Indij?, nejaušas dal?bas Trafalgaras kauj? un Kopenh?genas aplenkšanas beidzot non?k Sp?nij? (un Portug?l?), kur notiek liel?k? da?a no t?l?k?s s?rijas notikumiem. P?c sarakst?šanas gada (1988.g.) š? savuk?rt ir krietni agr?ka gr?mata, bet, sal?dzinot ar citiem Sp?nijas rom?niem, ne pavisam agr?na. :) Subjekt?vi man šis darbs neiepatik?s tik labi k? citi, jo: pirmk?rt, sal?dzinot ar v?l?k rakst?tajiem Indijas u.c. darbiem, Š?rpa t?ls v?l nav izstr?d?ts tik spilgts un ar? notikumu izkl?sts ir mazliet fragment?rs un br?žiem aprauts.

Un tad v?l liel? b?da par to, ka rom?ns iepaliek, ja to sal?dzina ar filmu. TV s?rij?s šis darbs atbilst pašam s?kumam, un filma savuk?rt ir ?oti spilgta un ieraujoša. Ar? galvenais sievietes -sp??u partiz?nu vad?t?jas t?ls film? ir par k?rtu spilgt?ks nek? gr?mat? atrodam? d?ma no ang?u metodistu ?imenes.

Vair?k gan ne?inkst?šu, jo nebija jau ar? tik slikti. Šaj? rom?n? Š?rps beidzot satiek savus str?lniekus un neaizvietojamu ?ru seržantu H?rperu. Sp?nijas partiz?nu kara epizodes t?lotas, k? vienm?r, ?oti spilgti, un kopum? las?j?s pat ?oti raiti.

Kate Sherrod says

"He might not be a born officer, but by God he was a born soldier. He was the son of a whore, bereft of God, but a God-damned soldier."

I've decided that the best way to approach the Sharpe series -- in which the publication order differs so radically from the publication order as to seem all but an exercise in randomization -- the way one does when reading stories about Conan the Cimmerian. There might be some narrative carry-over from novel to novel, but it's best to just regard them as discrete stories that happen to be about a guy with the same name and more or less the same character.

I say this because Sharpe's Rifles is the point where a lot of people who have chosen to read these books in chronological order start complaining about inconsistencies. The book was written some half a dozen years after those of the original core series, but cast as a prequel to them -- and the books I've read so far were written many, many years after this one, but take place earlier in Sharpe's career.

So in a lot of ways, the Richard Sharpe in Sharpe's Rifles bears little resemblance to the character I've grown to love through his adventures in India, at sea, and in Denmark, except in the ways described in the ur-Cornwellian sentence I quoted at the beginning of this post. He's still pretty uncouth and brutal, still an all but conscience-less and cold-blooded killer, but he seems only to have honed those qualities from his prior adventures* but not to have experienced the character building that came with them. To wit: he is unsure in his authority (though it could be argued that the years he has spent as a downtrodden Quartermaster for the 95th Rifles might have eroded the confidence he gained in India and Denmark), a complete sucker for anything in a skirt (see my asterisk below) and taking lessons in leadership from the Spanish major Bias Vivar that he really ought already to have absorbed from the good examples of his protectors in India like McCandless.

But these are small quibbles, and become meaningless once one has agreed to treat the novels as things outside of time and narrative continuity. Especially when the material at hand is so good, as it is here. For

Sharpe's Rifles has everything I've come to expect from a Sharpe story: over-the-top adventure (here a ragtag band of survivors of a famous retreat across Spain is teaming up with a small-but-elite cadre of the Spanish army commanded by the aforementioned Don Bias on a mission to bring a Holy McGuffin to the Cathedral at Santiago de Compostella and thus create a new legend to inspire the Spanish peasantry to rise up against the hated French invaders), internecine bickering, inspired combat tactics, cold chivalry among enemies, and all the fighting, drinking and swearing (if not, this time, the whoring) one might expect from a good piece of military fiction.

Here, too, is an origin story of sorts, though its significance is lost to chronological readers who have not osmotically absorbed a certain level of meta-knowledge about the series -- for it is here that Sharpe and his gonna-be best friend, Sergeant Harper, meet for the first time. And it's a pretty good meet as those go -- Harper almost stages a mutiny against Sharpe! -- but it's still not as good as Aubrey and Maturin and the concert at Port Mahon. But that's maybe not a fair comparison, right? I'm sure back in the 1980s when only the original core Peninsular War books existed, fans of Sharpe/Harper were delighted to observe this meeting, but for us chronological readers starting in the 21st century, it will never have the same power.

Still, cracking good stuff. Again, lots of explorations of how the rifle changed warfare, and how swords still matter, even if one sword is in the hand of a guy astride a big horse and the other in the hand of a guy on foot who ran out of ammo or out of time to reload his weapon, lots of amusing ruses de guerre... and then there's the attack on Santiago itself, which doesn't hold a candle to the big set-piece battles we saw in India, but is still very satisfying indeed.

Truly, Sharpe never disappoints.

*At least, thank goodness, his prior adventures don't involve a lot of ret-conning; the allusions to his deeds in India, at Seringapatam and Gawalghur, etc. match up with the stories I've read. Well, except for Lady Grace, his lover from Sharpe's Waterloo who died after giving him a son before Sharpe's Prey. I'm pretty sure that once you've bedded a gorgeous noblewoman you're not going to be so terribly overawed by a mere member of the impecunious country gentry, however mischievous and cute.

Algernon says

One of the best books so far in the series. The superhero excesses from the Indian campaigns have been tempered and Richard Sharpe is caught in a more convincing posture as a freshman officer recently promoted from the ranks and struggling to impose his authority on a band of recalcitrant soldiers. His encounter with Harper is memorable and I look forward to further interaction between the two personalities. As usual, there is a romance element in the novel, and this too has been treated in a more convincing manner than previous conquests of our gallant swashbuckler.

The historical background of this Spanish adventure is probably the less accurate so far, with much of the action around Santiago de Compostella coming from Cornwell imagination, but the plot is well paced and reserves some surprises.

Nate says

Sharpe's Rifles starts in 1809 with the Peninsular War in Spain already raging. For those who aren't familiar, the Peninsular War was one of the big conflicts of the Napoleonic Wars, with basically Britain, Spain, and

Portugal duking it out with the French on the Iberian Peninsula. When we join our hero, the Spanish armies are destroyed and the British are already outnumbered and on the retreat from the French hordes. Due to some typical snobbish officer dumbassery, Sharpe and a small group of Riflemen are cut off after an attack on the British rearguard by French cavalry, and must ally with a charismatic Spanish major with his own dangerous mission.

Chronologically speaking, this is a new kind of story in the series; it's one where Sharpe is in a significant position of command. He's ultimately the one making the decisions, whether or not the Rifles like it. Cornwell presents the trials and tribulations of having command of a group of people in a wartime setting very well, and it's great to watch Sharpe deal with them. This book really feels like we're getting into the meat and potatoes of the series now: Sharpe's experiences in the Napoleonic Wars. The naval voyage, espionage, and small military engagements of the previous books are great stories for the character to shine in but at his heart Sharpe is a soldier above all things, as Cornwell is fond of reminding us.

This entry was definitely one of the most entertaining of the series so far, things start out explosive and disorienting and Sharpe and his men struggle violently to survive in war-torn Spain. I loved Blas Vivar, the Spanish Major that Sharpe falls in with early in the book. He's charismatic, stubborn, funny, brave and I enjoyed his stories about his ancestors and the Reconquista. Together they predictably wreak havoc on the French in a series of gripping encounters. When you think Napoleon you usually think big-scale set piece battles but a lot of fighting in the Peninsular War was just mean and nasty guerrilla warfare; really, the perfect setting for Sharpe.

All of that good stuff makes this one of my favorite *Sharpe* books so far. Then the other shoe drops...some of my friends on this site will be completely aware of how irritating I find the love stories in these books. This one was just utterly vapid and pointless. If I remember correctly there was even a scene where Sharpe first meets this girl and the chapter ended with something like "And Richard Sharpe was in love." and I just wanted to fucking hurl the book in disgust.

Please understand this is not some macho knee-jerk reaction to the concept of love stories. When well done, they can either add a wonderful level of dimension and emotional reaction from the reader or even stand as fully-formed and satisfying stories in their own stead. The love stories in these books will NEVER accomplish either of those things. I don't get why Cornwell keeps insisting on doing this shit. It literally adds nothing at this point. I liked some of the stuff with Grace but this needs to stop. It would even be more tolerable if Cornwell handled it in a James Bond-type manner, where Sharpe is just basically trying to get laid but he's not. It's almost insulting at this point how Cornwell demands on putting these subplots in every book and it's also a testament to how much I like these books that I'm willing to put up with this bullshit.

So yeah...a very fun but clearly flawed entry in the series. I'm obviously gonna read another one of these in like a week or two and see what happens when the war heats up and how Sharpe continues to grow as a commander. It's so hard to describe what makes him such a compelling character; he just utterly lacks pretense and has this vicious, scary desire to live and fight while also managing to somehow be likable and approachable, but can also be cold as ice and has straight up committed murder at this point in the series to further his own goals. It's that kind of uncomfortable but compelling complexity that makes him my favorite Cornwell character.

Linda Banche says

Set during the Napoleonic Wars, *Sharpe's Rifles* is the story of soldier Richard Sharpe. War stories, full as they are of blood and guts, are not exactly my cup of tea. But *Sharpe's Rifles* is also a rousing adventure

story, with plot twists that take you straight to the end, loads of descriptions, and even a bit of romance. Highly researched, the book is chock-full of historical detail, which I love, since it puts you right into the period.

But the best part is the self-doubting Sharpe, soldier extraordinaire, and a man who's pulled himself up by his bootstraps at a time it was almost impossible to do so. Although a hardened soldier, Sharpe is also very appealing. Promoted from the ranks, he questions his ability to function as an officer, but he never lets his doubts interfere with his job, although he is tempted to let them.

Sharpe's Rifles is part of a series, so I have a lot more books to read to find out what happens to him.

Marc Haddock says

I first met Richard Cornwell's books when I read his Arthurian series, and I've yet to read one of his books I didn't enjoy. I am working my way through the Sharpe series in chronological order and have enjoyed every one.

This book was written late in the series to provide an introduction to Sharpe and his Rifles, mainly to explain the relationship Sharpe forges here with his men and his brilliant Irish sergeant. It is great fun. The battle scenes are written with clarity and a great feel for action. Cornwell writes the best battle scenes from a variety of time periods -- from the shield wall of medieval England to the Napoleonic wars.

I look forward to reading Sharpe's Havoc, the next in the series.

Deanne says

More swashbuckling derring do from Lieutenant Richard Sharpe, do like a man in uniform though Sharpe's sounds like it should be thrown in the rag bag.

The action has moved to Spain and the peninsular war, read books which mention the Napoleonic wars but this is a chance to get to grips with who fought where and when. Already got the next in the series on the shelf to read.

Jim says

More of a 2.5, but definitely my least favorite of the series so far. I didn't care for the reader, Fredrick Davidson, which didn't help. While he was tolerable, his Spanish voices were very low, gravelly, & almost unintelligible at times, while all his Irish voices were very high & lilting. Since one of the Irishmen was a really big, tough sergeant, the high voice didn't fit my image of a red haired Lee Marvin well.

Sharpe wasn't shown in a very good light for most of the book & the historical afterword basically said that "it didn't happen that way". One of the things that I like about the Sharpe books is that they usually DID happen that way, with a few minor changes to put Sharpe into the action. The sinking feeling in my stomach when I heard the news told me just how much I like that & have come to rely on Cornwall's historical accuracy. It's kind of the point for me.

There were quite a few editorial goofs, too. For example, an officer was herding his men by hitting them with the **edge** of his saber. It was pretty obvious from the context & the results that it was the **flat**. Caltrop don't just stick into the soft frog of a horse's hoof, but also into the sole, yet several times it was put that way. Irritating.

I listened to book #3, Sharpe's Fortress, just before this. My library doesn't have books #4 & #5 in audio format, but I read the 5th, Sharpe's Prey some years ago. The next audio book I have is #9, Sharpe's Gold. I think I'll take a break for a while & maybe come up with book 7 or 8 in the meantime.

Mike says

I've read many of his other series (Grail Quest, Saxon, Warlord, etc) but have not read any of the Sharpe's Rifles until now. Typically great fighting scenes, good characters, strong story. Brings the period to life. Now to find a bunch to acquire and read...eventually. **3 Stars**

Robin Webster says

'Sharpe's Rifles' is centred on the mainly fictional account of events in 1809 after a small expeditionary army sent to Spain in 1809 to support the Spanish and to cut off the invading French Army's supply lines. The story opens when the British army is forced to retreat and Lieutenant Sharpe finds himself for the first time in charge of a unit of his Rifle regiment. They find themselves cut off from the main army and the soldiers are reluctant to take orders from someone of their own class. This was the first 'prequel in the Sharpe series, and in a sense it does show, as there is no reference to his relationships he had in the previous book. Also, the book does lean more to fiction than many other books in the series. However, this is a fine entertaining novel, that easily captures the atmosphere of the previous books and I'm sure it won't be long before I'll be tucking in to the next book in the series.

William says

I have really enjoyed this fantastic series by Bernard Cornwell, but this novel is, if not the most intricately plotted, saturated with battle after battle between Sharpe and his Rifles and the pursuing French hordes invading Spain in 1809. Right from the get go, the gore of the skirmishes leaves the reader feeling a bit queasy, and Cornwell rarely lets up. In fact I would say that every second chapter has some form of fight, conflict or attack that leaves the haggard main character, Richard Sharpe, just a little more haggard each time. Now, as I said, once the smoke of the last musket blast clears, the plot isn't terribly complex, but war and the period in which this novel takes place wasn't always either; it was governed by the simple concept of "kill or be killed", and Richard Sharpe is one hell of a good soldier.

Chris says

My first introduction to Richard Sharpe, soldier & reluctant officer. This is the book that tells how Sharpe ended up as the Leader of his Rifle contingent. I know little of the battles in this era (1809) between Britain & France or Spain & France, so always interesting to me to learn something new. Cornwell definitely paints

the gritty picture of difficult marches & bloody battles with the weaponry of the day. I found myself invested in the lives of the main characters, although the character of Louisa was somewhat unbelievable and was she there just to show a different side of Sharpe. The relationship between Sharpe & Don Blas Vivar was particularly good and helps to evolve Sharpe's character & growth as an officer/leader. The mythos of a sacred & potentially miraculous object gave the story a sense of old fashioned adventure at times amidst the blood & violence.

Chris C says

I liked the historical perspective on the Peninsular War as it is a time that I have little to no knowledge of however the writing itself was fairly lackluster. The characters did have some actual development but the seeming need of the author to always include a female character in a war setting makes other interactions less likely.

Lani says

Sharpe. He's brought up from the ranks. Here's where he forms his posse. Also, attends a battle in Santiago de Compostela.

Damage: Severe beating by one of his own men

Ladies Banged: 1, minister's niece who ends up snubbing him (if you know the series, this is no spoiler)

Proper Officer Yet?: No.

Bill says

Cornwell owns the Peninsular War from a fictional standpoint. I am reading Esdaile's history of this campaign and Sharpe's Rifles rings true from start to finish. While this is not in the same league as the Aubrey/Maturin novels (but then no other books are), Sharpe's Rifles is a quick, gripping read.

Katy says

I watched the mini series first, and the book is way more intense and I wasn't even sure I liked Sharpe at all 1/2 way through the book. But that's character development for you. The author is a serious history buff and it's clear he knows what he's talking about. Some of it you kind of gloss over (which battalion was flanking which... come on!) but mostly he manages to sneak in interesting little facts like the English didn't smoke cigarettes, they only had little clay pipes. There's plenty of swashbuckling just like the mini series, but the books are a little more swash and a little less buckle if you get my drift.

Merged review:

Yikes! The tv series begins with this story, and the differences couldn't be more striking. The tv series really softened up the characters and the situation. That being said, the book (predicatably) was richer and more complex.

Rob says

Number 6 in the Sharpe series.

This story takes place just after the French defeated the British at the battle of Corunna in 1809.

The British are in disarray trying to get to safety via the coast where the British fleet is waiting to evacuate the defeated army.

The 95th Rifles are separated from the main army and are being harassed by French dragoons. There are constant rearguard skirmishes which are taking a toll on the troops of the 95th. In one skirmish the last, but one, officer is killed. The last officer standing is Lt Richard Sharpe. Up to this point Lt Sharpe was the company quartermaster. Look down on by his fellow officer because he was promoted from the ranks. He is also ignored by the rank and file because he's nothing but a jumped up soldier, just like themselves. They bitterly resent being told what to do by a pretend officer.

If these men are to survive, Sharpe has to gain the respect of these men and soon.

Whilst struggling with the bitter cold in the Spanish mountains Sharpe and his men fall in with a group of Spanish soldiers. The Spanish troops are on a mission to plant the flag of Santiago in the French garrisoned town of Santiago de Compostela. Although he feels that this is nothing more than a pipe dream, Sharpe feels he has no choice but to fall in with the Spaniards.

As usual, there is a young attractive woman, but for once, she is immune to Richard's masculine appeal.

Falling instead for the dashing commander of the Spanish troops.

This, once again, is a fast paced, rollicking adventure.

Comes with a 4 star recommendation.

Brad says

I am reading the Sharpe books in chronological order and have just reached Sharpe's Rifles, the first meeting of Lt. Richard Sharpe and his best friend, Sgt. Harper, and I have to admit that the moment doesn't mean all that much to me.

It's crafted to be one of those great moments in fiction, and I suppose it could have been if I had approached Sharpe's Rifles from a different direction. Had I been reading the books in order of publication or even seen the occasional installment of the BBC's Sharpe movies, I think I would have been delighted to see the meeting of these men. But reading the books in order gives me no stake in their relationship. I have come to appreciate Sharpe, but I don't know Harper at all and just don't care about how they met yet.

That could change as the series goes on, but I am still not sure it would make a difference as far as their initial meeting is concerned because, as I said, it is "crafted" to be one of those great moments. And I don't know that the series has what it takes to be a "great" series, let alone be important enough for the meeting of its principles to be of serious interest to the literary world at large. Moreover, the crafting of the meeting feels forced in a way that truly great meetings of characters do not. Aubrey and Maturin meeting (a fine example considering their place in the Napoleonic oeuvre), coming as it does in the opening pages of the first book with no need for a prequel, is an organic growth of the story, and its impact is given a chance to grow over the course of Master and Commander with a feeling that anything could happen. And none of that is the

case with Sharpe and Harper.

Regardless, Sharpe's Rifles is a decent read, but not one of the best in the series. There are too many inconsistencies with the books that come before, and Sharpe's tendency to fall for every pretty girl above his station (which he has done in ever preceding book, yet this is never mentioned in Sharpe's Rifles) is already becoming tedious.

The battles are rousing, though, and Cornwell always includes something fun and inventive -- like Sharpe's use of caltrops against the French Cavalry -- and Sharpe's brutal efficiency consistently sates the potential bloodlust of Cornwell's readers.

Bernard Cornwell also make sure there are interesting supporting characters. Despite the weakness of Sharpe's meeting with Harper, the Irish Sergeant is a promising partner for Sharpe, and the fiery Blas Vivar, the Spanish Major trying to work a miracle against the French, succeeds in overshadowing everyone in the story. The only complaint in the supporting cast is that every Frenchman is turning into a Napoleonic era Nazi -- too cruel, too dishonourable, too clever and just a little too evil. It will become downright annoying if it continues for the rest of the books, but for now it is merely noteworthy.

Sharpe's Rifles is only worth reading if you're committed to the series, if not you can probably get away with watching this installment on BBC. I have a feeling you won't miss anything of importance.

Samuel David says

I have actually read several of Bernard Cornwell's Sharpe series before, but it had been some time ago. I was glad to re-immense myself in a Napoleonic campaign of long ago. Sharpe is a hero that comes across as a real person. He responds authentically to the challenges he faces. I am not sure how much of the book is historically accurate, but it rings true to me.

Clearly, the campaign in Spain was a bloody one, and much of the book is devoted to military strategy and the nuances of battle. Some might find all that a bit much, but it is certainly my cup of tea.

I gotta go back and re-read some of these, and find some new ones besides.

Sam Taylor says

This book is a very fast read that you could finish in a day or two. The story is action packed and takes a turn when you are least expecting it. Sharpe and Harper's relationship development throughout the story is full of bumps along the road. Yet it flowers into a solid friendship that they both benefit from. This story follows how sharp being thrown into a uncomfortable position manages to make it work and earn the respect from his fellow soldiers.
