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A corrupt political plot threatens to put an end to the South Essex regiment and the life of Major Richard Sharpe when he investigates and discovers an illegal recruiting ring selling soldiers like cattle to other divisions.

Sharpe's Regiment Details

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David says

Now entry number 17 in Bernard Cornwell's long-running Sharpe series, this was originally the 7th book in that series when it was first released in the mid 1980s.

At that point, it was also the first time that Sharpe had left the Peninsular, with the bulk of this novel actually taking place back home in England: an England that Sharpe and Harper have travelled back to in order to find their missing reinforcements. While there have since being other books that have portions of their settings back in England (I'm thinking, largely, of 'Sharpe's Prey') this, I believe, is still unique in that respect.

Being a Sharpe novel, it (of course) transpires that those men are being illegally sold to other regiments, with Sharpe and Harper having to go (effectively) undercover and re-enlist to find out just what is going on.

If I was to find a complaint with the novel, it would be in the character of the Dowager Countess Anne Camoyne: a character who seems, for me, to be a particularly egregious example of Cornwell throwing in a character for Sharpe to, umm, shall we say, get rather cosy with for little-to-no reason: her purpose in the plot could easily have been fulfilled by others.

Jason Koivu says

This is not exactly a prototypical *Sharpe* novel in that there is no pitched battle to be had against Napoleon's forces. Instead, Major Richard Sharpe is back on English soil and his enemy is the British army itself. The wheres and the whos matter little in a Bernard Cornwell book, because you're going to get pretty much the same thing every time, and if you like/love it once, you'll like/love it again and again. Cornwell knows his winning formula inside and out. He excels at action sequences. He knows how to pile the pain on his main character. He can draw up a super bad baddy with the best of them. And, he can construct an improbable-victory-against-impossible-odds scenario like nobody's business. You're in good hands with Bernard Cornwell, provided these are the hands you want to place yourself in.

Why wouldn't you? Well, once you've read one Sharpe book you've read them all. Yes, the scenery changes occasionally, Sharpe's allies and enemies vary somewhat now and then, and the path Sharpe has to take to win the day isn't always exactly the same. However, Cornwell's formula is quite transparent to even the most careless reader. Sharpe will always be wronged by someone, often someone within his own army and most usually a higher up officer. He'll have to prove himself, time and again. If there's an alluring woman to be had, Sharpe will have her, and there are *always* alluring women to be had. Sharpe is a tall, dark, ruggedly handsome soldier, so regardless of the woman's background, each and every one of them goes squishy on him.

Geez, listen to me whine, whine whine! By now you're probably looking around, thinking you meant to read a book review and accidentally stepped into a vineyard. Look, the bottom line is, Bernard Cornwell's got a good thing going and he's riding it for all its worth. Either you like it or don't. If you do, check your critical eye at the door and hope on board for an enjoyable trip back to war-torn, early 1800s Europe. There you will find a lovable, right bastard to root for. He'll do some dirty deeds for dirt cheap and in some way, shape or

form he'll get his due in a satisfying end.

Brent Ecenbarger says

Sharpe's Regiment could be subtitled Sharpe versus the London Bureaucracy. Most Sharpe books follow a familiar formula, where Sharpe must overcome a plot by the French or French supporters that will involve a battle or two. Along the way Sharpe will best a superior officer who underestimates him because he's not a gentlemen and have sex with a woman that all the other officers lust after and would otherwise seem out of Sharpe's social strata. Up until this point, the most that formula has diverged has been in *Sharpe's Trafalgar* (where the action took place via a naval battle), and *Sharpe's Prey* (which featured Sharpe operating as an intelligence officer in Denmark). In *Sharpe's Regiment* there are echoes of the familiar tropes, but for most of the book it is a very nice departure from the standard Sharpe setting that still feels true to the characters.

After Wellington's successful campaign in Spain, the French forces have been driven out of the country and it appears there will be some downtime in the action. With no need for Richard Sharpe's expertise on the battlefield, Sharpe is dispatched back to England to find the missing reinforcements owed to the South Essex. From my memory, this is only the third return to his homeland through 17 books in the series (once to get married, another trip was to his old boy's home that he grew up in), but those were both minor scenes in their respective stories. Aside from a prologue and epilogue, the rest of the story is spent in England in a very different setting than the usual battlefield. Sharpe gets to have dinner with a prince, be honored at a theater, and receive countless other accolades as a hero returning to his native land.

The tension in the book comes from the question of where the South Essex reinforcements are located? According to some in the military, they are merely a "paper army," existing only as a theoretical allotment in bookkeeping. Sharpe doesn't buy it, and to investigate he, Harper and one other officer go and enlist under fake names and see where the trail leads. The cast of characters in this book is mostly new faces, with several inexperienced recruits falling into fun archetypes (the educated one, the one with the dog, the complainer, etc.) and evil officers in the British ranks.

Some of the best moments in the book come from the unique position of Sharpe and Harper needing to be deserters, or needing to shoot back in a situation where they don't want to kill British soldiers. It's easy to predict the comeuppance that will occur once their true identities are revealed but it doesn't diminish the fun of seeing Sharpe and Harper gloat over those that wronged them. Less successful are Sharpe's romantic exploits, which include a woman seemingly created solely to facilitate the drama, and the return of one of Sharpe's dream girls (Jane) who was not particularly memorable in her first appearance. Cornwell struggles to make her interesting, even writing how Sharpe senses the repartee that will be forthcoming between Jane and Harper, while not delivering any actual memorable moments. Also, it feels as though Cornwell felt obligated to deliver one large battle which seemed out of place with the rest of story. Overall though, this was not only the most unique book in the series thus far, but a fun adventure that felt true to the characters.

Rebecca says

I liked the drama of this. It was fun and full of pompous arses and a little bit foolish. It worked in the end and Sharpe got away with it. After following Sharpe through Spain, it's odd to find him here, in England, amongst 'normal' people. I have enjoyed the friendship between Sharpe and Harper and how much they

depend on one another. No matter which women Sharpe throws himself at, Harper is there to pick up the pieces and his slight despair at seeing Sharpe fall for another woman is humorous.

Michael Pryor says

Raw, intense, illuminating.

Tanzil says

Great to see Sharpe in a different sort of environment compared to the battlefields we are used to seeing him in. It was very well paced with minimal exposition; the crux of the story (him being in England to find the battalion) did not take long to delve into. As always, it had its humorous moments but never felt goofy. Despite Sharpe's tendency to always come out on top, Cornwell still maintained the element of suspense which makes the reader fear for the hero and particularly in the case of this book, Patrick Harper. My only gripe, which I find to be an issue among all the books in the series, is the weakness of the romantic element (the ease by which Sharpe falls in love with new a woman). Overall, an excellent read and among my top 5 in the series.

Jane says

A nice plot change-up in the series with Sharpe battling corrupt British aristocrats rather than the French. Of course there's a woman or two and a few other predictable elements, but we're getting close to Waterloo and I will keep reading.

Graham says

I've been reading the Sharpe series for around seven years now (starting at the very beginning) and I'm finally getting towards the end - only four more books to go after this one! Not that I'm planning to rush the final few, in fact I'll draw them out and savour them as I have always done.

SHARPE'S REGIMENT offers something a bit different to the usual Peninsular action. This one's more of a conspiracy book (a la SHARPE'S PREY or GALLOWS THIEF), with Sharpe returning to England to investigate a whole battalion of missing soldiers.

What follows is typically enthralling and much enlivened by the prospect of Sharpe and Harper turning back the clock and finding themselves where it all began years before. I won't spoil it, but I had a ball with the action in Essex, which even includes a little MOST DANGEROUS GAME-type scenario.

I found the ending to be very slightly disappointing but that's to do with the nature of the story - it couldn't have been written any other way. Harper gets a lot of characterisation this time around, while we see Sharpe become obsessed with passion. The very beginning and very end are involved with Wellington's Invasion of France, and while they're unnecessary to the plot as a whole, they add a little tradition for the fans.

SHARPE'S SIEGE is the next.

I read and finished this book (in on-and-off instalments) in around 30 hours.

Mike Gunderloy says

In this installment of Richard Sharpe's adventures, Cornwell tackles the practice of "crimping" -- a now-obsolete word for conning young men into the army and making a profit on the practice. As a result, Sharpe ends up back in England for the first time in decades, and in the end he navigates the political winds as well as he does battles. Not to worry, though, because he does get his regiment and the book ends with a battle, leaving us plenty of room to get Sharpe on to the end of the war in France.

R.D. LeCoeur says

I've read quite a bit of Mr Cornwell's stuff, although I've avoided the Sharpe series as I watched the tv series which was very enjoyable. However, as this book was on offer at Asda(wallmart) for only £1.00 I decided to give it a go!

First up I never realized how miscast Sean Bean was. He's a northerner with a pronounced northern accent and it appears from this book that Sharpe was from the slums of London and should've sounded more like an early Michael Caine.

Anyhow back to the book.

I thoroughly enjoyed this regency romp and probably more so because I have read a lot of Drek lately. The plot is preposterous, you know whats coming, its handled superbly and what can I say? I enjoyed it immensely.

Kathy Davie says

On April 10, 2009, I did a VERY short review: "Love the battle, tactics, camaraderie, and the history. "

This time, I got into it a bit more, LOL:

Seventeenth in the Richard Sharpe fictional military history series and revolving around Major Richard Sharpe and the South Essex. This one takes place in England. *Funny place to do battle with the regiment...*

My Take

Heart-stopping as always! Richard is so terrifyingly naive. He scares me to death.

I love Cornwell's descriptions, and the way in which he describes the "...plump...ripening orchards, grain fields bright with poppies, and pigs running free that could have fed an army corps for a week" that make England seem indeed a green and pleasant land. It's certainly a change from the scrubby fields of Spain!

Poor Sharpe. Presented to the Prince of Wales, admired and honored, but pushed aside when there's money to be made. And the prince is a nutjob. How can anyone like being surrounded by yes-men? Although, I suppose when you're as nutty as George...

The truly horrible part is the greed of the army and its officers, how they steal the shillings from their own soldiers. We thought our soldiers today were poorly paid. They're rich compared to these men.

You can't help but laugh even as you hold your breath when Harper is being hunted and when they turn the depot at Chelmsford upside down. Treasure those moments for there is much too much of the anger this story will raise, for you know that this sort of disrespect and theft went on then, and still does.

The Story

Sharpe is temporarily in charge of the regiment since Lieutenant Colonel Leroy died a few weeks back at Vitoria. Only to find that the War Office wants the South Essex broken up, its colors sent home, and the brutal reputation the South Essex has achieved tossed in a heap.

But not if Sharpe can find the so-called non-existent Second Battalion in his race against the devils.

The Characters

Major Richard Sharpe has fought his way up from the ranks and is a brilliant tactician and rifleman.

Sergeant Patrick Harper, an Ulsterman who has been with Sharpe through thick and thin, gets MacLaird's job; his wife, **Isabella**, is pregnant. **Captain Peter d'Alembord** and **Lieutenant Harry Price** (he'll replace Captain Thomas) come along with Sharpe to London.

Privates Daniel Hagman and **Clayton** are still here along with **Angel** (*Sharpe's Honour* , 16). There's also **Regimental Sergeant Major MacLaird** (d) and **Lieutenant Andrews**. **Privates O'Grady, Kelleher, Rourke, Callaghan, Joyce, Donnell**, the **Pearce brothers**, **O'Toole**, **Fitzpatrick**, and **Halloran** will do for Lynch.

Major General Nairn sends Sharpe to London to get his regiment.

Lord Simon Fenner, a politician and the Secretary of State at War, doesn't want the South Essex to get its replacements. **Anne Camoyne**, the dowager Countess of Camoyne, refused Fenner's offer of marriage so he's destroyed her. The former Lieutenant Colonel Lawford is now the one-armed **Sir William Lawford** who catches up with Richard at the Horse Guards (*Sharpe's Company* , 13).

Chelmsford Depot

Captain Carline, **Lieutenant Merrill**, and **Lieutenant Pierce** have no clue. **Ted Carew** is the armoury sergeant with a tale to tell.

Foulness

Lieutenant Colonel Bartholomew Girdwood of the tarred and shaped mustache is currently in command of the Second Battalion, South Essex. He's one of those with a fantasy of battle and war. **Briggs** is his batman. **Sir Henry Simmerson** is his patron, and he's promised his niece, **Jane Gifford**, in marriage to Girdwood. Don't know what will happen to her dog, **Rascal**! (She's **Christian Gifford**'s sister; see *Sharpe's Eagle* , 8). **Cross** is Sir Henry's London butler. **Sergeant Horatio Havercamp** is one of the best recruiters in the battalion. **Captain Finch** will be Girdwood's partner in the hunt, **Captain Hamish Smith**, the barbaric, bullying **Sergeant John Lynch**, **Sergeant Major Brightwell**, **Corporal Mason**, **Lieutenant Mattingley**, and **Captain Prior** stick, while **Lieutenant Ryker** legs it.

The new recruits include **Charlie Weller** and his dog, **Buttons**; **Tom** is a half-wit; **Giles Marriott** enlisted for all the wrong reasons; **Jenkinson** is one of the convicts; and, Sharpe and Harper enlist as **Vaughn** and **O'Keefe**.

Horse Guards

Lord John Rossendale delivers the Prince of Wales' invitation. **Prince George**, the Prince of Wales, is acting Regent for the king, and he greatly admires Sharpe. **Prince Frederick**, the Duke of York, and in charge of the army, does not. **General Sir Barstan Maxwell** is appalled, sir, appalled. **Captain Mellors** is in charge of the eagles.

St. Giles Rookery

Maggie Joyce rescued Sharpe when he ran away as a child, and she'll rescue him again. She's a gin goddess, a midwife, a procuress, and eight times a widow, for even Tom is gone. **Cross-Eyed Moses** will do the selling of Richard and Harper's fortune. **Messrs. Hopkinson** are Sharpe's army agents. **Jem Lippett** is one of the men after Sharpe. **Belle** works for Maggie.

The Cover

The cover looks like a pen-and-ink sketch with some red and blue coloring against a white background. A black band across the top announces the author's name while a graphic image below is of an exhausted man on horseback, carrying a rifle, and Richard Sharpe in a fine red coat urging the horse on with both the horse and Richard neck deep in water.

The title is what Sharpe seeks, for *Sharpe's Regiment* is in danger and must be rescued from the greedy paper pushers.

Gerald Matzke says

This was a very unusual story in the Sharpe series. Fighting in Spain had wound down and the South Essex leaders were wondering why no reinforcements were being sent to replace the casualties. Major Sharpe is sent to Britain to find out the reason for the delay and finds himself and Sergeant Harper faced with a complicated case of military and political swindling. Instead of the usual military might and skill that fans would expect, Sharpe uses his wit to trick the scoundrels into exposing their scandalous operation. With the help of some unlikely allies, Sharpe is once again the hero. Most Cornwell novels are filled with battle narratives that are so well-written that the reader can almost smell the gunpowder. In this story the only real battle comes in the epilogue but is a very significant one. In spite of that, this was a real page-turner.

Redsteve says

This one is a bit different from many of the Sharpe novels as the majority of the book takes place outside the theater of war. There's plenty of fighting and Regency-era militaria, but also intrigue and politics as Sharpe investigates the disappearance of his 2nd Battalion in England. Cornwell takes you from the battlefields of Spain, to the Royal Court and St. Giles rookery in London, from the Chelmsford Army Depot to a secret training camp in Essex, from Hyde Park to the French fortifications in the Pyrenees. Fast-paced and entertaining.

Deanne says

Getting toward the end of the Sharpe series of books, not far from Waterloo and the end of the Napoleonic wars. Sharpe has waged war across India, Portugal and Spain and is now about to enter France, but first a trip back to Blighty to pick up some men. Don't seem to be getting any recruits from home, but that's because there's someone up to some shenanigans. Sharpe also manages to work his way through the female population of any country he's in. Wonder if he's an ancestor of James Bond, only without Q branch and the gadgets.

Andrew says

Outstanding - sits nicely in my Top 5 Sharpe novels. It's 1813, and Richard Sharpe finds himself fighting a different battle against a different and dangerous enemy. As Wellington's forces start the invasion of France, the South Essex are woefully under strength after the brutal Spanish campaign and unless Sharpe can find their reinforcements, missing somewhere in the English countryside, the regiment will be split up. So, Sharpe and Harper travel back to England.

Robert says

Bookended with scenes on the continent, but the bulk of the story is a change of pace for the series with its focus on domestic political intrigue in England. Both informative and entertaining, it establishes new characters who hopefully will continue in the series and seamlessly re-introduces old ones as well.

Sue says

I took a break from this series, and when I went back to this one, I realized how much I love Richard Sharpe. Not the battle action heavy book of past ones, but thick with intrigue and history. I enjoyed.

Ben says

Another solid Sharpe novel, this time taking place almost entirely in England instead of Spain as with most of the series. The story is par for the course as far as Sharpe goes, an entertaining adventure that follows the tropes that have become familiar to longtime readers of the series. Sharpe and Harper go on a dangerous mission, Sharpe meets a beautiful woman, he is looked down upon by upper-class officers who are powerful but incompetent, and Sharpe ends up on top through cleverness and his bulldog tenacity. It's a familiar formula but still an effective one. While this story doesn't particularly stand out in the series, it's still an entertaining read.

Brian V says

A fictional account of the real venality, greed and political double-dealing occurring in England among the high placed elite who make profits at the expense of the military. The plump English country, rich with farms, fields & food, that are sorely lacking in Spain and Portugal. The contrast between the high-life of the aristocrats, who pompously assume the trappings of warriors and the troops in their desperate conditions and deep trust and camaraderie.

1813, fall, when it was supposed that the french had retreated from Spain and would be braced in a defensive position actually attacked back into Spain. Last battle in book is the final clearing for french troops from the Pyrenees, opening the way to invasion of France.

A corrupt political plot threatens to put an end to the South Essex regiment and the life of Major Richard Sharpe when he investigates and discovers an illegal recruiting ring selling soldiers like cattle to other divisions.

Rob Trans says

Sharpe's Regiment where Sharpe must save the South Essex from dissolution, encounters an old adversary, is aided by an old friend, fights on an unexpected battlefield, rendezvouses with aristocratic women, and is betrayed by a friend.

This is a mediocre entry into the Sharpe library. Cornwell is to be commended for trying a different form of challenge for Sharpe. However, there is a lot of meandering around the countryside and soul searching about a love interest. The things Sharpe gets away with are preposterous. I was surprised he wasn't hanged. The old Sharpe luck (which he had no hand in making this time) saves him at the last minute.

I think the book would have been better if Sharpe had actually engaged on the battlefield of politics on which he found himself and found that he had the skills to succeed there. It would have shown his character growing and that he was more worthy of promotion than just as a soldier highly skilled at tactics, leading troops, and fighting.

At least the book concludes with a combat scene.

The book is a very quick read and is still worth reading for any Sharpe fan.
