



## Waterloo

*Bernard Cornwell*

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**Waterloo** Bernard Cornwell

**June 1815: The Duke of Wellington, the Prince of Orange, and Napoleon will meet on the battlefield--and decide the fate of Europe**

With the emperor Napoleon at its head, an enormous French army is marching toward Brussels. The British and their allies are also converging on Brussels--in preparation for a grand society ball. It is up to Richard Sharpe to convince the Prince of Orange, the inexperienced commander of Wellington's Dutch troops, to act before it is too late. But Sharpe's warning cannot stop the tide of battle, and the British suffer heavy losses on the road to Waterloo.

Wellington has few reserves of men and ammunition; the Prussian army has not arrived; and the French advance wields tremendous firepower and determination. Victory seems impossible.

## Waterloo Details

Date : Published (first published 1990)

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Author : Bernard Cornwell

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## From Reader Review Waterloo for online ebook

### Siria says

I'd advise not reading the author's note at the end of the book, because it tips the novel's John Bull-ishness right over the edge into jingoism. The body of the book is hardly great literature, but it's enjoyable--it could have been edited down, but as a dubiously-historical recounting of Waterloo from the first skirmishes at Quatre Bras to the defeat of the Imperial Guard, it rollicks along amiably enough. Its biggest flaw, however, is that Sharpe just doesn't have a much of a purpose. His movement from place to place on the line feels very forced after a while; Cornwell is clearly trying to manoeuvre him around so that he's always at the focal point of the battle, and it grows contrived. I could also have done without constant mentions of Harper and his "Gaelic war cries." Nothing needles me quicker than cod Oirishness.

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### L.M. Mountford says

Of all the Sharpe Novels, i think this is my favourite.

The story focuses entirely on the battle of Waterloo. There is limited character development and Sharpe is featured more as a viewer than a participant, but the sheer detail is incredible.

It is very close to its tv adaptation.

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### Jakub Spilka says

A?koliv je to popis nebo spíš analýza bitvy, toho, co jí p?edcházelo a jejích následk?, bez osobního p?íb?hu, je to napsáno hodn? ?tiv?. Fakta dopln?ná vzpomínkami voják? ze všech t?í armád jsou jasn? vypráv?na. Snad jen toho polopatického opakování hlavních fakt? by mohlo být mén? (pravd?podobn? pro pomalejší ?tená?e za velikou louží).

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### Moira says

All right, I'll confess it - I'm a Richard Sharpe addict. I have just started the last of the 21 novels (read in historically chronological order, not the order written) and I will miss his adventures once I'm done. One of the factors in my appreciation of the series is the image of Sean Bean's Sharpe portrayal from the movies (very appealing!), but the other is the breathtaking depiction of battle in all its glorious valor, unbelievable horror and intimate detail amid a historical setting. I can "see" the action through Cornwell's descriptions, unlike similar passages in other authors' works where I have often had to refer back to maps and occasionally have given up and skipped the details. Yes, these books are fictional crack, but what a ride!

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## Michael says

I appreciated this as a window on the famous 1815 battle, with Sharpe a Zellig-like figure at key turning points. However, I missed Sharpe's personal story as the main focus of the narrative rather than getting a sense of him being used as a tool to illustrate historical events.

If you have read any of the Sharpe series on the British army during the Napoleonic Wars, you will want to read this out for a sense of completion, with this being the penultimate volume. He still thinks of himself as a rifleman, but his capacity to lead men leads him to advance to become a competent officer. In the brief peace he has taken up the life of a country farmer with a French woman in Normandy and is now a father, leaving his wife back in England to squander his modest estate and pursue her own lovers. As the book opens, his need for money has led him to assume a post as a brevet colonel in the Dutch forces led by the young, inexperienced Prince of Orange. Along with their allies in the so-called Seventh Coalition, the Prussians and Wellington's international army are defending Dutch Belgium against a likely incursion by Bonaparte. In the three months since escaping Elba, he has won over the French army and state, and Sharpe is a witness of the advance dragoon scouts leading the invasion by an army of 125,000. His skills in combat by gun and sword are rusty, but he still has the right stuff in mano-a-mano action.

Sharpe has been dreading the fulfillment of orders from the Prince to show up at a grand ball in Brussels, so it's perfect for him to show up all grotty and bloody. The plan of Napolean to divide the forces of Wellington and the Prussians is close to being completed, and the warnings Sharpe tried to send did not reach the allied command. Rallying to the defense of a key crossroads becomes an emergency objective for the allies.

Sharpe's old sergeant, the Irishman Harper, is now a bar owner and dealer of stolen horses, but chooses to join him on location, despite lack of a commission. There they learn what a dangerous, pompous idiot the Prince is, ordering his men to deploy in lines for musketry attacks and leaving them vulnerable to decimation by the cavalry. As we learn later, the formation of battalions into squares with a wall of bayonets protecting concentrated firepower was the critical strategy to defeat cavalry charges. Harper pegs the Prince as a "silk stocking full of shit", and discussion of fragging him becomes a serious topic.

### *Illustration of a British deployment in the square formation at the battle of the Quatre Bras crossroads.*

Because his scattered forces have not had time to coalesce, Wellington is forced into a strategic retreat. His choice of a site for consolidation and defense, a ridge near Waterloo flanked by a solid farm house and a chateau, was critical to his success. Yet he counted on the Prussian army joining the fray, and they were very late in arriving after their bludgeoning at Ligny. Sharpe and Harper get to play a role in a miraculous beating off a nearly successful takeover of the farmhouse fortress. From this point on, Cornwell's version of the battle gives emphasis to mistakes made by the French. Their poor coordination between infantry, artillery, and cavalry is covered. The French sending a huge cavalry force about a dozen times alone against the allies in square formation is a big focus of the narrative. Later, when the superior numbers of the French seems to have prevailed, Napoleen sends the glorious, undefeated Imperial Guards, all dressed to the hilt in frippery, to deliver an expected final blow. But their keeping to orderly columns diminished their firepower. It was cool to get to experience Sharpe and Harper rallying the ragged and nearly officerless forces of their old regiment, the Prince of Wales' Own Volunteers, to outflank and rout the Guards. (It should be noted that this regiment is fictional with a home base in South Essex instead of South Lancashire for the historical regiment).

### *The British Recoats fighting at the gate to the strategic farmhouse redoubt at the beginning of the Waterloo*

*battle.*

*Map of action showing the French in blue dividing the Anglo-Dutch (red) and Prussians (black), defeating the latter at Ligny and the former at the crossroads of Quatre Bras, then facing Wellington near Waterloo, 10 miles south of Brussels.*

As usual, Cornwell walks the line between showing the brutal and tragic realities of war and the uncaring, blind ambitions of most commanding officers while at the same time revealing the heroism and resourcefulness of many common soldiers and lesser officers. Again, Sharpe wins our hearts with his balance of irreverent cynicism and brilliant actions on behalf of the success of his fellow soldiers. If you have not read Sharpe tales, you would do best not start to with this one. But if you want to read it for a gritty, bloody profile of this critical battle, that would work fine. Cornell's afterward makes it clear that the history of the battle suffers from very limited accounts from Wellington and likely bias from versions told from the French perspective.

When I read the excellent Wikipedia account, I learned how the engagement by the Prussians under Blücher near the end is considered another critical factor for the outcome. Cornwell takes pains to present evidence that Blücher delayed his arrival on purpose, so I don't blame him for putting the British directed actions on center stage. Regardless, this definitive defeat of Napoleonic's dream of empire was achieved though the highest butcher's bill in history at the time: about 15,000 dead or wounded for Wellington's army, 8,000 Blücher, and 25,000 for Napoleonic. It would be another 50 years for the Battle of Gettysburg to supersede that level of slaughter and another 50 years for the Battle of the Somme to supersede that.

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### **Sam Wilkinson says**

Some of my favourite Sharpe moments are in this book, and some quality comedy from when Sharpe is busy elsewhere. I don't know how accurate the battle descriptions are, but they are vivid. I do believe that this book will work as a standalone novel, there's enough background to catch you up, but when the back story is waiting to be read, why skip it? It doesn't matter how many times I reread these, it doesn't matter that I remember all of the twists, o the little surprises, it's still an excellent read.

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### **Huw Rhys says**

Firstly, my prejudices - I've been a huge fan of the TV versions of the Sharpe books; I've been an even bigger fan of the Napoleonic Wars, and Waterloo in particular - I've probably read more on and around the subject than is healthy for anyone.

Although I've never actually read a Bernard Cornwell novel before, I was really looking forward, therefore, to reading his account of Richard Sharpe's contribution to the Battle of Waterloo.

All the ingredients for a literary disaster therefore - I had set my sights so high, disappointment was the only possible outcome.

But for once in my life, reality exceeded a very high expectation.

Cornwell manages to hit the bullseye on all fronts here. This is an historical account, as well as being a rip roaring novel; he describes and develops characters superbly throughout the plot without letting the individual's persona overshadow the action he is but a small cog within; he describes the visceral, stomach churning horror of 19th Century battle whilst also introducing some delightful humour - such as the two junior officers, just falling into shellshock as the French cannons' create bloody mayhem all around them, discussing the sport of golf "I once saw a little man with a red beard playing golf at Troon".... - into the narrative. Finally, he somehow manages to capture and describe the morality of man at war, both at an individual and collective, higher level.

If there is something that he leaves out of the book, it is the political context of the Battle, and the implications for both sides of winning and losing. But as he says in the epilogue, there are people far better qualified than him to do this, and he is right.

What impressed me most of all about this book though was the quality of the writing. There is a rhythm to the author's sentences that seem to match the setting - battle scenes are described in an almost staccato style, echoing the junctures between the volleys of musket shots that are being described, whereas some of the more descriptive chapters of the novel are presented in longer, languorous stanzas. Everything is conveyed in a rich language which is actually very easy on the eye.

I was expecting much from my first Bernard Cornwell book - and my expectations were surpassed. A fantastic read. I'll be going back for more!

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### **Kevin Findley says**

I can't believe I'm giving a Sharpe novel one star. Perhaps if Sharpe had put in more than a token appearance I might feel differently.

This was an excellent, day by day, breakdown of Waterloo but Cornwell should have just made it into a history text. I was glad to see Rossendale die, but this was grisly even by my standards.

Perhaps Sharpe's Devil will take the bad taste out of my mouth.

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### **Larry Deaton says**

Waterloo: The True Story of Four Days, Three Armies and Three Battles This is the actual book that I read and reviewed here. What is shown in the header is Cornwell's 20th Sharpe novel ... This is the first non-fiction book by Bernard Cornwell, but he brings all the talent that he has honed over the years in writing his many historical novels to retelling the story of Waterloo. It's worth mentioning up front that those who have read a lot of military history may be put off by the repetitiveness of some points that he wants to drive home, e.g. the way that the Duke of Wellington would invariably position his forces on the reverse side of slopes to protect them from artillery fire. He repeats this perhaps ten times at different times in the books.

Notwithstanding the repetition, I found it a great read. Again, I think his skill in writing fiction that allows him to build suspense of this battle, even though you know the outcome.

He starts his story as Napoleon has returned from exile and sees most of the French army join him. The action really gets underway as Wellington attends a ball in Brussels, where most of his senior officers are in attendance. The next day, the Allied army is underway, heading to a fateful encounter with the French forces near the small town of Waterloo. Several engagements happen over the next few days, beginning with Quatre-Bras. Wellington, with maybe only half of forces being of the quality that he needs goes into battle, knows that if Blucher doesn't arrive with his Prussian army, he probably will lose the battle to Napoleon. And he had hoped never to fight Napoleon. The suspense continues to build.

The battlefield action is terrible, and it is well worth reading to fully comprehend what war really meant back then. You will understand how the battle was won by the British and Prussians and how it was lost by the French generals. In the end, you will come to understand why Cornwell says that Napoleon was worshiped by his men, Blucher was loved by his, but Wellington was only respected by his. One of the closing scenes has Wellington crying as he read over the casualty list of his officers.

It is a book that I will heartily recommend to anyone who wants to understand how the battle of Waterloo was fought and what it meant.

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### **Jeff Yoak says**

For the culmination of the war I've followed through all of these battles, the novel fell a little flat. I think it suffered from being such a culmination. Waterloo is such a massive historical event ending a series of events the author is so obviously interested in that I think he couldn't resist making the novel more about Waterloo than about our heroes and their time in it.

A good example is the ubiquitous battle scene present in all of the novels. Bernard Cornwell writes excellent battle scenes. His typical way of doing it is to write the local perspective of our heroes as gripping drama. We get a sense of the overall battle from that local perspective, and usually the fictional heroes get an important role in the battle that provides interesting perspectives on key events.

Waterloo is too well analyzed, understood, known and interesting to the author to allow that. Instead, we get long chapters describing troop movements and overall events in the battle. That may be better history, but it is weaker fiction. The whole novel suffered from similar problems for me.

That said... it was still Sharpe. It was still worth reading. It is oddly sad to be getting near the end. One short story remains chronologically and a final novel which I understand to be post-war and more or less a sendoff for Sharpe and Harper that I've traveled with so long. I look forward to reading them and then saying goodbye.

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### **Robert says**

An awful long buildup to a rather rapid denouement is the largest mark-able flaw, but in the grand scheme it is a minor quibble. More battle scenes than in any previous volume, which is only appropriate for such a looming historical event, and possibly more time spent away from the many character than ever before,

which again, given the scope of the backdrop is fitting, since no one man could hope to stand out against the grandeur and ghastliness of a 19th century battlefield.

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### **Joyce Lagow says**

No. 20 in the Richard Sharpe series. [return][return]This, the culmination of the series to which all previous installments have pointed, is without question Cornwell's best book. While Sharpe's personal life does enter into it, at least 3/4 of the book if not more is devoted to the complex Battle of Waterloo which took place from Thursday, June 15 with Napoleon's invasion of the Netherlands to the final, epic, and hair-raising battle near the village of Waterloo on Sunday, June 18. Cornwell does a brilliant job of depicting the speed of Napoleon's invasion and the way he caught the Allies completely flat-footed.[return][return]Sharpe is not with Wellington's army but instead is attached, as a Lieutenant Colonel, to the staff of the leader of the forces of the Netherlands, the young Prince of Orange. From this position, he watches helplessly as the French capitalize on mistake after mistake by Wellington's allied commanders, particularly the Prince of Orange; at the climax of the battle, he and Harper can not stand by any longer and thrust themselves into the fighting.[return][return]History has recorded that Wellington won, but it was a close thing. Cornwell expertly milks every drop of excitement from this battle in yet another and his best page-turning thriller. It's a marvelous accomplishment.[return][return]Highly recommended.

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### **Hazel says**

The Richard Sharpe series is a magnificent work of historical fiction. Bernard Cornwell has written an amazing series following Sharpe from a private in India to a Lt. Colonel at Waterloo and then a civilian farmer.

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### **Graham says**

I'd suspected that **SHARPE'S WATERLOO**, the penultimate Sharpe adventure and the culmination of his adventures in the Napoleonic War, could be nothing but a triumph. After all, it's a novel dedicated to one of the biggest, most-remembered battles in all of history, so how could Cornwell get it wrong? He built to it for a decade, honing his craft with more minor (but no less gripping) stories before finally sitting down to tackle it.

Needless to say, I loved everything about this story. It's a massive, epic-feeling book, one that exhausts and moves you and makes you feel like you're a spectator in the battlefield. Cornwell admits in his foreword that he tried to combine the story of the battle with a plot before giving up on the latter, which was the right decision: Waterloo is the story in itself. This is the most ferocious, bloody and terrible battle of Sharpe's entire campaign.

**SHARPE'S WATERLOO** is one of the longer Sharpe stories, clocking in at over 400 pages, but it feels like one of the shortest because the pages fly as you read. I knew very little about Waterloo itself before I started this, and I'm left feeling like, perhaps not an expert, but somebody who knows a great deal more. I'm wanting to find out more, too, which can only be a good thing.

Just one more to go now, SHARPE'S DEVIL. It's been a long old slog, but this will be the year I finally finish the series. It's going to be a bittersweet close - one of the reading joys in my life was always knowing I had a new Sharpe novel waiting for me whenever I chose to look at it!

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### **Marko says**

The 20th Sharpe novel delves into the famous battle of Waterloo and pretty much nothing else. This time around, Sharpe serves in the staff of the Prince of Orange fighting the war against Napoleon. The author goes to great lengths to justify Sharpe's presence in the lead-up engagement and then in the main battle at Waterloo and not all of these feel very natural and Sharpe really doesn't have much to do in most of those battles and serves mostly as an observer.

This is the greatest failing of the novel. Sharpe really doesn't have anything to do but observe the battles and use a small sliver of his time to miss his farm and its apple trees and only a little bit of more time wanting his money back from his wife who's stolen it and lives with another man now.

Other characters are as badly employed. The worst case is a character who's entire arc consists of him being certain that he will die in the upcoming battle. This is pretty much the entirety of the character so it is no wonder that the reader doesn't really care what the outcome is.

The final battle - the battle of Waterloo - takes a lion's share of the novel and is mostly a very dull read. There are a couple of occasions where Sharpe has a little to do, but even they seem tacked on. It seems that the author was too worried about writing a correct description of the battle and could not have Sharpe messing it up too much.

Overall, this was a surprisingly weak addition to the series especially when you consider that it is part of the "original run", before Cornwell went back to write additional (generally weaker) novels to fill in the gaps between his earlier novels.

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