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Outmaneuvered by Ducos's treachery and abandoned by his own navy, Sharpe has only two choices: to escape with the aid of the charming, unscrupulous American mercenary, Cornelius Killick, or die.

Sharpe's Siege Details

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From Reader Review Sharpe's Siege for online ebook

David says

For my money, one of the weaker of Bernard Cornwell's Sharpe books, with this one providing only the bare outline for the episode of the 90s TV series of the same name.

It's early 1814, and Wellington is just beginning to invade France. before he does so, however, Sharpe, Harper, Frederickson and a small contingent of men are sent to aid the Royal Navy in the capture of an enemy fort that is behind enemy lines.

However (being a typical Sharpe novel), things go awry and Sharpe and co soon find themselves having to defend that very fort against a vastly numerically superior foe when they are abandoned by the Navy, who believe that they have been captured...

Robert says

A bit more introspection and morose inner monologing than I like from a normally stoic Sharpe, but all in all a fine continuation of the series, although the absence of Wellington and Hogan as characters is noticeable, and unless the next volume starts with some repercussions for Sharpe's actions in the coda I might downgrade my rating.

Jeff Yoak says

This was a mind-blowing addition to the series. It seems that it just keeps getting better and better toward the end.

We're well-accustomed to Sharpe's ingenuity, bravery and skill saving him and his men from difficult situations. This time, I really thought Cornwell had oversold it. In the siege from which the novel takes its name, Sharpe is outnumbered 2000 to 200. He's in a destroyed fort trying to save himself. His small group is desperately short of ammunition -- enough to fight for about 18 minutes, while the enemy have virtually unlimited supplies and even artillery. They're behind enemy lines and over a hundred miles from help.

Sharpe starts innovating and coming up with creative ways to improve the situation, but the gap is too wide to balance the fight. All of his brilliant tricks can only really serve to forestall defeat briefly. You can't believe that Cornwell will kill Sharpe or allow him to be captured in this context, and I found myself gritting my teeth that a "typical" victory would come. The fierceness of Sharpe and his men would panic and drive back his foes -- completely implausible. Or one of his last ditch efforts such as sending someone to sneak through the line and travel a hundred miles to tell the army he was there and to come rescue him would work out implausibly. Such things have made sense in other novels and contexts, but here it would have been a let down.

I wasn't let down! Sharpe comes up with a staggeringly brilliant solution to the problem that had been sitting available to the reader and the vaguest notion of which hadn't even crossed my mind. It's a turn that left me

hopping up and down in my seat wanting to cheer for Sharpe. What a novel!

Honza Prchal says

A clear case of, and explanation of PTSD in one slim volume.

Brian V says

1814 on SW coast of France, gateway to Bordeaux. Establish a clever bridge composed of joined boats over a tidal river allowing troops to go north. Role of navy in providing support. Much is fictional, including the fort that Sharpe defends, but the treatment of the civilians by the British is respectful and they pay for all they take, thus not rousing the civilian population into guerrillas, as what happened in Spain and Portugal in response to the pillage and rape of the French. British turn east to attack Toulouse rather than head north.

Sharpe's mission has seemed simple: capture a small unguarded French coastal fort, cripple Napoleon's supply lines, and retreat across the sea. But behind the lines, Sharpe's old enemy, Pierre Ducos, awaits Sharpe's arrival with a battalion of French soldiers and a vicious commanding general who keeps the scalps of his dead enemies as trophies.

Outmaneuvered by Ducos's treachery and abandoned by his own navy, Sharpe has only two choices: to escape with the aid of the charming, unscrupulous American mercenary, Cornelius Killick, or die. (less)

Charlene says

I have become a big fan of this series on audiobooks -- they are fast moving, good strongly drawn characters, lots of action, and an excellent narrator. And I like the historical settings, too, of course.

This one has Sharpe leading a small group of Riflemen and British Marines on a reconnaissance mission in southern France. Liked the American character & his ship that turned out to play a pivotal role in Sharpe's victory.

Ed says

I'm sad that I am reaching the end of the Richard Sharpe series - three volumes to go. Next to the Patrick O'Brian authored Aubrey/Maturin series this is the best set of stories covering the Napoleonic wars that I have read. It is also one of the best historical fiction series I've run across.

This story, taking place in 1814, details an incursion into France near Bordeaux, a joint venture between the British Army and the Royal Navy. After investing a fort guarding the approaches to the Bassin d'Arachon on the Bay of Biscay, Sharpe heads inland to harass any French troops he might happen upon. He successfully ambushes a brigade of conscripts but when he arrives back at the fort he discovers that he and his troops

have been betrayed by a French double agent, deserted by the Navy and left to perish at the hands of the soon to arrive French in the destroyed fort.

The architect of all of this is the arch-villain Pierre Ducos, who Sharpe keeps bumping up against and who wants nothing more than to see Sharpe destroyed. The usual supporting cast is present, Patrick Harper, Sharpe's loyal side-kick, William Fredrickson, a fellow officer, Jane, Sharpe's new wife, Michael Hogan, his mentor and sometimes protector, and in the background Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington and Commander-in-chief of the combined British and Portuguese forces. Other characters, drawn with Cornwell's usual skill, are Captain Bampfylde, an arrogant, self-serving Post Captain, Colonel Wigram a clueless engineer, Cornelius Killick, an American Privateer, Comte de Maquerre, a spy working for the British, Andre Lassan, French Commandant of the fort, and General Calvet, bloodthirsty French commander and survivor of the Russian campaign.

The story unfolds quickly and is hard to put down. Once I got halfway through, I had to finish it even though it was after midnight. The battle scenes are, as always, compelling and exciting. The book is well-plotted and straightforward. Sometimes Sharpe's survival skills and luck strain credulity to the limit and this time is no exception. Nevertheless, this book like most of the others in the series is a delight to read.

Michael says

Once again Cornwell achieves a wonderful adventure focused on military action. This for me was perhaps the best of the six I've read from the 22 that feature Richard Sharpe, the brilliant and sardonic hero of a rifle brigade in Wellington's forces during the Napoleonic Wars. In this, the 18th, it is 1814, and Wellington's forces are bogged down in southeastern France. Sharpe, now a major, is tasked to accompany a naval captain and a peer officer with less than 200 army riflemen and marines to capture a fortress further north on the Bay of Arachon. The risky action is to serve as a feint to make the French believe the English intend to invade there by sea and take Bordeaux, thereby diverting French forces from Wellington's strategy to bridge a river near Bayonne with a raft of merchant ships.

Cornwell is masterful in portraying all the human and inhuman details of combat at the level of the common soldier. He does cover the big picture, but from Sharpe's jaundiced eye:

God only knows why politicians resorted to soldiers as a final instrument of policy; it was like wagering on a cockfight to decide the fate of empires.

As usual, Sharpe, now a major, succeeds with impossible tasks due to his ability to lead his men and to outsmart the enemy with his verve and unpredictable craft. So why read more than one? The glory of his loyal compadres in action is one recurring pleasure. Such as his gentle, giant Irish master sergeant Harper. So congenial and sweet most of the time, but when his righteous, volcanic anger is released, he becomes an unstoppable killing machine. The other pleasure is in the personalities of his foes. Some he respects, like a dashing American privateer captain captured with the fort. The French spymaster Ducos returns as a nemesis, but the featured opponent here is corpulent General Calvet, fresh from the Russian campaign where he brags he engaged in cannibalism and scalp collecting. Another joy is Cornwell's variation on the theme of the greed and perfidy among the aristocratic British officers. Here this role falls to pompous Captain Bampfylde, whose lust for glory leads him to repeatedly endanger Sharpe's men over attractive enemy ruses and to hog all the credit for any of his successes. We know he will ultimately get outfoxed by Sharpe and meet his just desserts, but that doesn't diminish the satisfaction of waiting for fulfillment of this destiny.

The main focus of action in this tale is not Sharpe's taking of a fortress, but a defense of it when he returns from an inland foray to find Bampfylde and his ships have abandoned him with minimal food and ammunition and with the fort's cannons all spiked. Calvet's division of 2,000 men is headed their way. Sharpe's mind is having trouble focusing because of his worry that his wife, ill when he left, is dying from a fever. Pretty compelling fix he's gotten into this time. Everyone deserves to read at least one from the Sharpe series, and there is no reason not to start with this. And if you get addicted, I recommend getting much the same pleasures by varying your fix with books from his Saxon Chronicles (set in 10th century Britain) or his Grail Quest series (set in 14th century France).

Andrew says

The newly-married Major Richard Sharpe, RSM Harper, a unit of Marines, and "Sweet" William Frederickson with his riflemen find themselves under siege in a French fortress. I love all of Cornwell's characters, but Frederickson is a particularly good one, and I love any appearance by Sharpe's sworn enemy, French spymaster Pierre Ducos. Both feature in Sharpe's Siege, and it's a fantastic read.

Brent Ecenbarger says

Sharpe's Siege picks up with the English army working their way into France, Sharpe's happily married to Jane and Harper the proud father of a two month old. Sharpe's soldierly duties always come first however, and here he is drafted into helping the Royal Navy on a mission to possibly assist in Bordeaux turning against the French Empire in a stroke that could end the Napoleonic War. Anyone who knows Sharpe (or European history) will know this doesn't happen, and instead Sharpe will end up being caught in a trap left by the French intelligence officer Ducot, who is making yet another appearance, rivaling Obadiah Hakeswill's run as a villain.

The title of the book gives away that there will be a siege, though Cornwell pulls out all the stops in making it more intense and creative than similar battles in earlier books. ****Spoilers follow**** For starters, Sharpe, Harper and Sweet William Frederickson are all on the inside the the structure under siege, and they are vastly outnumbered and outgunned. The limited bullets in particular is unusual in this series, and the tricks that Sharpe and friends pull to even the odds were more similar to those found in the various Sharpe short stories that I've reviewed on here.

While Sharpe is worrying about the enemy, he is equally distracted by the possibility of losing his wife Jane to fever, as she has come down with symptoms immediately before he was deployed. Also sick is Major Michael Hogan, who is (along with Harper) as long tenured as an ally to Sharpe as we've seen in the series. This installment also introduces the character of Cornelius Killick, an American naval officer or pirate, depending on the moment. Killick provides for many of the surprises in this novel, as both Sharpe and the French are at times forced to depend on him or go after him.

Kenneth says

200 vs 2000

Stephen says

Napoleon may not realize it, but his wars are lost. The English have achieved total naval supremacy, and are free to raid the coasts of the imperial hexagon at their leisure. Richard Sharpe, whose sturdy Riflemen are in part responsible for l'Empereur's imminent job loss, has been dispatched on one such raid. His orders are to capture a small but potentially bothersome fort, and possibly wander over to Bordeaux, where it is said the people are clamoring for the restoration of the Bourbons. Alas for Sharpe, he is a pawn twice over; he has been invited to join the raid only so the bumbling generals in charge of it will have hope of victory, or at the very least a good scapegoat – and the generals themselves are operating on suspect intelligence fed to them by French counterintelligence mastermind, Pierre Ducos. When Ducos learns that the redcoats are up for a little raiding and Sharpe is with him, he takes a personal interest in not only rendering their plans moot, but condemning Sharpe to die. In short order, the good rifleman is trapped in France with no hope of escape but an American pirate who was to have hung for crimes against the Crown. Sharpe's Siege distinguishes itself from many other Sharpe novels in that the military action is wholly fabricated; the raid he participates in never took place. Although the military scenes are full of excitement and explosions and the like, they take second place to Ducos' scheming; there's no doubt that Sharpe will capture the fort and then defend it against a host of embarrassed Frenchmen, but getting out of the greater trap is an altogether different feat. What I appreciated most about it was the mixing-in of naval action. Alas for me, there are only two more Sharpe books waiting – Sharpe's Revenge, which is next, and then Sharpe's Waterloo.

Mike Gunderloy says

Sharpe gets stranded behind enemy lines by a combination of traitorous perfidy, bad weather, and French scheming. Being Sharpe of course he doesn't just give up. Instead he defends a broken-down castle against all odds, using means both fair and foul, and ultimately escapes with the unlikely aid of the American Navy. This one I think drifts pretty far from the actual Napoleonic Wars history, but it was still rollicking good fun.

Jason King says

A fun (well, except for the parts about Napoleonic surgery or dying of easily cured illnesses), well-written adventure story. My first Sharpe novel so I can't comment on whether or not it's better or worse than the others, but for being what it is the writing is very good.

Jason says

Another great Sharpe book! Lots of action, very little romance.

Dawn says

I have now completed eleven of the 21 books in this series.

This adventure has Sharpe off to help the Navy capture a French fort. It's supposedly lightly defended ramparts hold more trouble than Sharpe can possibly imagine (even if the reader knows) and with the help of Harper and some handy Americans, Share just may be able to outwit Ducos again.

Predictable, enjoyable and entertaining.

Rumfuddle says

Sharp's trapped behind enemy lines, betrayed by the British navy and with arch nemesis Ducos out for revenge.

How will he survive!!!!

Rob Trans says

Where Sharpe worries about his wife, is betrayed, is nearly defeated by an old enemy, and aids and is aided by an honorable foe.

I would have given Sharpe's Siege a 4 if it had not been for the effects of his impetuous marriage. In this and the last book I read, several characters have commented that marriage weakens a soldier and this appears to be true in Sharpe's case. While his wife seems intelligent and should be an asset, Sharpe is distracted by her and given to maudlin introspection. This distraction has impaired his judgement and caused him to miss some precautions or tasks he should have undertaken to protect his mission, his men, and himself. Sharpe also is showing more impetuosity (such as publicly accusing a fast-tracked, well-born superior with cowardice) when surrounded by equal and superior officers (as he did in Sharpe's Regiment). Given his low-born status, his actions should be expected to be punished, but they have not been.

Overall the book is a quick, interesting read. Much of the combat described in the book is engaging. Worth reading for Sharpe fans.

Trina says

Highly enjoyable. Love all the books in this series. Even read out of order, they always deliver a stirring account of Sharpe's heroics in battle or under siege, in this case, by a French general who's been duped into thinking Sharpe's marooned men are worth attacking to take a coastal fort back from British.

Mick says

In a diversion from the main invasion of France, *Sharpe's Siege* has the protagonist Richard Sharpe taken from his beloved South Essex regiment and sent on a dangerous mission, to assist the navy in capturing a fortress on the French coast and weakening the enemy's supply lines by raiding their highways. A secondary mission, which he's having none of, is to march on Bordeaux and incite a monarchist rebellion against Bonaparte.

The mission is compromised from the very beginning, not only by the incompetance of the operation's naval component but also the presence of the Comte de Maquerre, by all appearances a trusted monarchist ally of Britain but in reality an agent for the villainous French spymaster Pierre Docus.

Abandoned by his allies, and with the fortresses defences stripped away, Sharpe and a rifle company are forced to endure the onslaught of an entire French army. The action scenes are bloody and vivid, but this is where the book lost me. This series is characterised by the fact that Sharpe will always win, against incredible odds, though a combination of great skill, tactical inequity, luck and stubbornness but *Sharpe's Siege* stretches the reader's suspension of disbelief beyond breaking point in a way that none of the other books I've read yet has.

The odds here are simply unbelievable. He's outnumbered ten to one, in enemy territory and with dwindling supplies of food, water, and ammunition. No matter how often Cornwell stresses the competence of the seasoned riflemen versus the raw inexperience of the French conscripts, the numbers don't add up. I did, however, enjoy the ultimate solution to Sharpe's predicament, which was an inspired bit of trickery. The ending, as well as the subplot involving an American privateer named Killick, stopped the book from being a writeoff for me, although it's definitely one of my least favourite entries in the series.
