



# THE *Sharpe* EXPERIENCE

LANCASTER, PA, July 2009



Historicon 2009 was celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and with its 1809 theme - "Ride to the Sound of the Guns..." Napoleon's 1809 Campaign and the Spanish Ulcer, the opportunity arose for the USA – the first Road show dedicated to Bernard Cornwell's fictional Richard Sharpe. Since 1996 in the United Kingdom, the Sharpe Appreciation Society has hosted and attended many events providing fans with access to actors, writers and production staff – but to this time they have all been on the other side of the pond.

Historicon 2009 saw the bringing together of many elements related to the Sharpe Series for the very first time in the USA. A private collection of Sharpe Memorabilia including the Regimental standard of the South Essex, Rifleman Moore's uniform and personal accoutrements along with a museum quality Baker Rifle and Mr. Nock – Sergeant Harper's Nock Seven Barrel Volley Gun made their debut.

"The Sharpe Experience had many sponsors and supporters, including Bernard Cornwell himself, who although he could not be in attendance personally took the time to record a welcome to all Sharpe fans at Historicon. The marquee attendee was none other than Jason Salkey ~ Rifleman Harris who was in attendance for the entire show and provided plenty of photo and autograph opportunities, one on one conversations with fans along with providing two fascinating lectures, one on the making of Sharpe and other of the Reading of his newly released "Recollections of Rifleman Harris" audio book. The lectures and the show were well attended with a steady stream of visitors during the three 4 hour opening times on Thursday, Friday and Saturday along with a one hour finale on Sunday morning.



In attendance was the kind participation of the local 95<sup>th</sup> Rifles reenactment group, led by Captain Steve Fisher. The four rifleman came in full kit and provide a great deal of camaraderie and color to the weekend.

A particularly appreciated feature was the chance to not only look at, but to touch hold and pose with the Baker and Nock Volley gun – the weight of which surprised many. The Nock weighs in at almost 17lbs.

The Vista Café was converted for the weekend into a mini-museum which hosted a large number of photographs and posters along with display boards and cabinets featuring many of the items used in the Sharpe Movies, along with a number of original pieces, plus books, DVDs and other memorabilia related to Sharpe.

Sharpe artist Garry Cartwright kindly donated some works for display and the raffle along with giving permission to use his work during the show for promotional purposes. The Sharpe Appreciation Society authorized use of their logo as Jason was in attendance and in memory of their founder Chris Clarke who tragically passed away on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Other groups including the Sharpe Chefs – cook books with a Sharpe theme that raise money for charity, Celtic Films and BBC America who donated video gifts for the raffle, Casemate books, Age of Glory and a number of other vendors from the Dealers hall all contributed to the raffle, along with signed copies of Sharpe novels by Bernard Cornwell. This made for a rousing send off to the show on Sunday morning when over 30 prizes were raffled off to those who had purchased the \$3 admission/raffle tickets.



There was support from a number of US and international websites dedicated to Richard Sharpe, Richard Moore – the Military and Technical adviser to all 16 Sharpe films – and the Hornblower films, Daragh O'Malley (Sergeant Harper) and in particular the Sharpe Pointe – hosted by Traci Moore and Myriam Lechuga (pictured with Jason) have been working as partners on Sharpe Pointe since April of 2007, but who have never met until they both decided to make the trip to Lancaster, PA. They came from both coasts for the chance to meet Jason, each other and have the “Sharpe Experience”.

It was also perhaps a first for Historicon to have attendees who had come expressly for the Sharpe Experience and not the gaming!

One final rousing highlight came on Saturday evening – a prime gaming and ‘festive’ evening when in the outdoor pavilion by the pool the Sharpe Saturday night movie was scheduled to air at 10:00pm. By just after 9:30pm, there were over 130 people sitting and waiting for the movie to start. Popcorn was rattling in the back of the room and soon the lights went down and the room was first treated to Bernard Cornwell’s short introduction – which can now be seen on You Tube. Following this Jason gave an introduction to the movie “Sharpe’s Battle” and the credits began to roll. From the back of the room, a chorus of two voices broke out with “Over the Hills and Far Away” – Jason Salkey and Tim Harwood, the event organizer. This was quickly taken up by others in the audience and the movie got off to a cracking start. There was laughter and applause throughout and at the conclusion, Jason took a Q&A session, staying to answer all questions.

The show overall met the expectations of the organizers and it may make a return appearance in the future, perhaps with more memorabilia and more cast members from the series. Remember in early 2010, PBS is scheduled to air the newest Sharpe adventure “Sharpe’s Peril” set in India after Sharpe’s Challenge.

If you want to learn more about the making of Sharpe and many of the adventures and misadventures that went on behind the scenes, you should consider Jason’s Video Diaries of Rifleman Harris, available on Region 1 (US/Canada) DVD from his website [www.riflesmanharris.co.uk](http://www.riflesmanharris.co.uk)

Check the Historicon 2009 site for many other Sharpe related websites:

[http://www.historicon.org/HIST2009/sharpe\\_experience.asp](http://www.historicon.org/HIST2009/sharpe_experience.asp)



Paul & Anne Knight with Jason Salkey

Bernard Cornwell’s Introduction: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-4rZJVYKFE&feature=related>