



Diary of a U-boat Commander

Sir Stephen King-Hall

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Diary of a U-boat Commander, by Sir Stephen King-Hall, reads like non-fiction, but it is in fact the fictional love story about the commander's infatuation with a very mysterious and beautiful lady, with the escalating World War I in the background. The primary focus of the Diary is the love affair, but the plot is masterfully crafted and includes great, realistic scenes that inform the reader about what submarine war was like. The protagonist is Karl von Schenk, a young German navy officer coming from a wealthy family. In the beginning, he serves on land, commission that allows him to see battles only from afar. He soon becomes anxious to take a more active role, therefore he joins the U-boat service and after some training, he is sent to the English coast as second-in-command on a mine-laying submarine. He proves his qualities by sinking a number of British ships and he is promoted, being given a submarine of his own. While on a land leave, he becomes infatuated with Zoe, a colonel's wife, but even though the woman seems to return Karl's feelings, she refuses to marry him even after her husband is killed. Karl continues to participate in dangerous missions, but he loses interest in his career and starts regarding the war as futile as well. He suffers a nervous breakdown and is nursed by Zoe. He returns to active service, but he decides to surrender to the British Navy and hand over his U-boat as well. The end of the novel puts the puzzle pieces of the love affair into place - the reader learns why Zoe kept refusing Karl, despite his feelings for the young officer. Stephen King-Hall does much more in his Diary than simply present a love affair in the middle of the Great War - he provides a credible account of undersea warfare, with technical details, information about the historical background and very realistic battle descriptions, all wrapped up in a complex and beautiful love story.

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