

# THE LONE WOLF



Historical \* Fiction \* Thriller

by Michel Poulin

# **THE LONE WOLF**

**Historical fiction novel**

**By Michel Poulin**

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## **WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS**

**THIS FICTION NOVEL CONTAINS GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF WAR, VIOLENCE AND DEATH, AS WELL AS COARSE LANGUAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS THAT ARE UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN. WHILE THIS NOVEL DEPICTS MANY HISTORICAL PERSONS AND EVENTS FROM THE PAST, THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION AND WORDS OR DEEDS ATTRIBUTED IN IT TO PERSONS WHO EXISTED DO NOT REFLECT HISTORICAL REALITY.**

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## **CHAPTER 1 – A NEW ASSIGNMENT**

**19:12 (Paris Time)**

**Saturday, February 1, 1941**

**Les Folies Bergère Cabaret**

**32 Rue Richer, 9th District**

**Paris, Occupied France**

One of the French doormen at the entrance of the famous Folies Bergère Cabaret politely interposed himself as a young German officer was about to storm inside, obviously in a hurry. While his job was to prevent people from going inside the cabaret without paying the entrance fee, one had to be careful and diplomatic with German customers, in order to avoid some nasty backlash with the German occupation authorities.

“I am sorry, sir, but you will have to go first at the ticket counter.” Said the man in German. Thankfully, the German officer replied in an equally polite tone.

“I came here to find a German officer, to give him an urgent message, not to watch the show, mister.”

“In that case, I will escort you to the show room, sir. Follow me!”

Before leaving his post, the doorman signaled to one of his backups in French.

“Marcel, watch the door for a moment while I escort this officer in.”

Letting the big, Marseilles ex-gangster in charge of the entrance, the doorman then led the young German naval officer inside the cabaret, bypassing the coatroom and walking inside the big, high-ceiling show room where dozens of customers were having supper while watching the female dancers on the large stage. The doorman smiled in amusement as the young Kriegsmarine officer, who was in his early twenties, slowed down his step and nearly stopped as his eyes fixed on the nude young woman presently parading on the stage: the dancers of the Folies Bergère never failed to get a reaction from male customers, be they French or German. He however politely reminded the German that he was not here for the show.

“You may now look for the officer you are seeking, sir.”

“Uh, yes, indeed.” Said the young man, taking with difficulty his eyes from the nude dancer and starting to scan the room. He saw quickly enough his target, a tall,

medium-built man in his late twenties wearing the going out uniform of a Kriegsmarine kapitänleutnant, sitting at a table with a pretty redhead woman. Going in quick steps to that table, he stopped at attention beside it and gave a military salute to the officer.

"Kapitänleutnant Otto Kretschmer?"

"Yes?" Replied the officer, whose face would pass as that of a quiet university student if not for his uniform, while returning the salute. "What is it, Leutnant?"

In response, the newcomer took a sealed envelope from an inside pocket of his uniform vest and handed it to Kretschmer.

"Leutnant Hugo Schmelling, from the staff of Admiral Dönitz. The Admiral has tasked me to find you and to give you this as quickly as possible."

Now both curious and a little annoyed at being hounded like this on one of his precious days off between war patrols at sea, Kretschmer took the envelope and, opening it, extracted from it a single sheet of paper folded in three. Reading quickly what turned out to be an official order, the submarine commander looked up sharply at the messenger.

"Admiral Dönitz wishes to see me at his office in the Paris headquarters of the Kriegsmarine, first thing tomorrow morning? Do you know what this is about, Leutnant Schmelling?"

"No, Kapitänleutnant! I only know that it concerns an urgent and confidential matter."

"Very well! You can tell Admiral Dönitz that I will be at his office tomorrow morning at eight. Dismissed!"

Schmelling saluted again, with Kretschmer saluting back before the young lieutenant pivoted on his heels and walked away, escorted by the French doorman. The redhead woman sitting at the table then cautiously asked a question to her dining companion. Having been arrested last year by the French Police on behalf of the German authorities, to then be released thanks to the intervention of the Irish Chargé d'Affaires in Paris, Margaret Kelly Leibovici was anxious not to appear too inquisitive about the affairs of a German officer, however gallant and decent he was.

"They are recalling you already, Otto? But, you told me just one hour ago that you still had over a week of leave left."

Otto Kretschmer gave a wry smile to the most pretty Irish woman and famous dancer nicknamed 'Miss Bluebell', who directed the no less famous dancing troupe of 'Les Bluebell Girls', which performed nightly at the Folies Bergère.

"I thought so as well, Margaret, but it seems that something has happened to cause the good admiral to send for me. I suppose that I could blame that on my present title of 'submarine Ace of aces'. However, don't worry about our supper together: I fully intend to take the time to finish it and then watch your girls dance."

Margaret smiled warmly at that: Otto knew that she was married, to a Jewish man no less, with one toddler son and another child on the way, and had not tried once to profit from his fame or standing as a highly decorated German officer to try enticing her into a date. From all that she knew of him, Margaret considered Otto Kretschmer to be both a decent, humane man as well as a brave and competent naval officer. It also helped that Otto was in no way what you would call a Nazi fanatic. He was also a cultured man who spoke fluent English, thanks to past university studies in England before the war, on top of a quite passable French.

"That will please me most, Otto."

**07:53 (Paris Time)**

**Sunday, February 2, 1941**

**Headquarters of the Kriegsmarine in France**

**Château de la Muette, 16<sup>th</sup> District**

**Paris**

Having been introduced by an aide into Admiral Dönitz' office in the opulent Salle Roger Ockrent of the Château de la Muette, an 18<sup>th</sup> Century style palace built in the 1920s and presently occupied by the Kriegsmarine, Otto Kretschmer stepped forward and stopped at attention in front of Dönitz' work desk. He then saluted him in a military manner while announcing himself in a strong voice.

"Kapitänleutnant Otto Kretschmer, reporting as ordered, Admiral!"

Dönitz, a tall and thin man with a severe expression, returned his salute and showed him a nearby, comfortable looking chair.

"Please, make yourself comfortable, my dear Kretschmer."

The commander of the U-Boote arm of the Kriegsmarine waited until Kretschmer was seated before speaking again, looking at him thoughtfully.

"You must be wondering what caused me to fetch for you when you still had over ten more days of shore leave left, so I will go straight to the point. Simply put, I need the best submarine commander I have in order to fulfill a highly classified task that has the

potential to heavily impact this war in our favor. For that, however, you will have to leave your faithful U-99 and take command of a new submarine.”

Not a little shocked by that announcement, which sounded pretty much like an order rather than like an offer, Otto gave a confused look to his commander.

“But, what kind of mission could it be that my U-99 could not do?”

“Actually, taking command of our newest submarine and shaping it and its crew for war patrols is what has the potential to impact the war, my dear Kretschmer.”

“Uh, I’m afraid that you lost me there, Herr Admiral.”

Dönitz, his expression most serious, then bent forward, resting his forearms on top of his desk while staring at Kretschmer.

“What I am saying is that your new command, the U-800, is the prototype of a new class of submarine with vastly improved capabilities compared to our present Type VII and Type IX submarines. It is a truly revolutionary design with performances you could only dream of right now. Because it is so revolutionary, it will need a commander able to exercise maximum initiative and tactical flexibility, in order to get the most out of it. You are such a commander, Kretschmer. You also have a lot of experience of combat operations at sea, experience that I expect you to use to analyze the true capabilities of that prototype submarine.”

“And...where is that wonder prototype submarine, Admiral? When do you expect me to sail in it?”

“It is presently being completed at the Germaniawerft Shipyards in Kiel and will be ready for launch in about three weeks. That will give you the time to assemble your crew and starts its theoretical training in Kiel, before the sea trials of the U-800 in the Baltic and the pre-patrol training at sea of your crew. Then, when you will deem both your boat and crew ready for combat, you will leave on a long-distance combat patrol in the coastal waters of Newfoundland and Canada, in the Western Atlantic.”

That made Kretschmer think furiously as he measured the risks of such a mission. The enemy had plenty of aircraft stationed on Newfoundland and along the Canadian East Coast, something that made submarine patrols in those waters quite a risky affair. There was also the question of the distances involved, which would mean cruising ranges well in excess of the autonomy of a Type VII submarine like his old U-99. Presently, only Type IX submarines had the kind of range that allowed them to deploy to the Canadian coastline without using refueling at sea.

“What can you tell me about that new submarine, Admiral?”

In response, Dönitz picked up a file on his desk and presented it to Otto, who briefly got up to grab it before sitting back down and opening it. It was stamped 'Top Secret' on its cover and contained a few pages of texts and drawings, along with a few photos. As Otto's eyes widened on reading the content of the file, Dönitz spoke again, his tone grave.

"Kretschmer, I had to fight hard to convince the Führer to let me build this prototype. I also burned a lot of political favors in order to overcome the opposition of many big industrialists and Party officials who wanted to protect their pet contracts and projects. If you don't prove the worth of this prototype at sea, in combat, then the U-800 will probably end up being the sole boat of this new class. The future of the U-Boote arm and possibly the outcome of this war are thus in your hands."

Otto looked up briefly from the file at those last words, understanding that his admiral meant what he had just said.

"You can count on me, Admiral. Uh, may I ask who designed this new boat? This is totally revolutionary."

"It definitely is, my dear Kretschmer. The man who designed this submarine is actually a naval engineer who approached me personally about a year ago with the complete plans for the U-800 already in hand. Basically, that engineer, who could easily be called a true genius, had been tinkering about future concepts for submarines and also about some remedies of his own for the various problems we had been encountering with our submarines and torpedoes. He had however been a bit too forceful while exposing his ideas to his earlier employers at the Blohm und Voss Shipyards in Hamburg and had been fired as a result. He then had worked on his own time to produce the plans for the U-800 and for a few other things before approaching me. He was actually able to convince me of the worth of his ideas and I thus hired him as a civilian technical consultant for the U-Boote arm, so that he could have access to the Kriegsmarine's resources. He is now supervising the completion of the U-800 in Kiel."

"I see! He must be a truly exceptional designer, if I can go with what I see here."

"He is, but he is also a bit difficult to work with, something not uncommon with top geniuses. He has by the way helped us recently to correct the design faults that were causing our torpedoes to misfire or miss their targets so often in the recent past. I however kept that in-house and had our torpedo mechanisms modified under the table, so that those damn idiots at the Ministry of Armaments' Torpedo Department, who had

been refusing to acknowledge that our torpedoes were mostly duds, wouldn't interfere and prevent us from modifying our torpedoes."

Otto rolled his eyes as he remembered those frustrating months at the start of the war, when nearly half of fired torpedoes would either refuse to detonate on impact, explode prematurely or simply miss their target by passing too deep under them.

"Thank God for that man! Those defective torpedoes cost the lives of too many of our submariners."

"Amen to that! Now, thanks to him, we will have reliable torpedoes for our submarines. That is in fact one major reason why I gave him my support for producing the U-800."

Otto nodded in understanding, then resumed his reading. After a couple of minutes, he looked back at Dönitz, convinced by what he had just seen.

"Admiral, if this new design fulfills even half of its promises, then I promise you the most successful war patrol you will have ever seen. Could I in turn ask you a favor? Would I be allowed to pick men from my U-99 to help form the crew of the U-800?"

"Hmm, I would be harsh to refuse you that, Kretschmer, in view of what I am asking of you. However, don't go overboard: poor Kapitänleutnant Bremmer will need some crewmembers with experience if he is to have any success with the U-99."

Otto grinned at that.

"I will try not to be too greedy, Admiral. When should I be going to Kiel?"

Dönitz then gave him a large envelope in response.

"Here are your new orders, along with a directive from me that will facilitate your dealings with the personnel department, so that you could select your new crew. You will also find in this envelope your travel and requisitions authorizations, plus a detailed list of the crew requirements for the U-800. Once you will have selected and assembled your crewmembers, you will go as a group to Kiel to start studying the U-800 and train on it. Be in Kiel in no later than two weeks from now. We will decide later on when you will be ready to go to sea for the first war patrol of the U-800. I expect great things from you, Kretschmer."

As Otto was getting up from his chair, most satisfied and eager, Dönitz gave him another envelope, a smile on his face.

"Oh, I nearly forgot. You will be commanding the U-800 with a rank commensurate with what I am expecting of you, Korvettenkapitän Kretschmer. Your

new rank is effective from yesterday. Make sure that you report to Kiel with the proper uniform.”

Caught by surprise by this, Otto froze for a short moment before saluting, a grin on his face.

“Thank you, Herr Admiral! I will not disappoint you.”

“I know that you won’t, Kretschmer. And, please: do try to report on the radio from time to time when you will be on your next war patrol.”

Chuckling at that, Otto pivoted on his heels without replying to Dönitz, then walked out of his office.

## **CHAPTER 2 – U-800**

**17:16 (Berlin Time)**

**Wednesday, February 13, 1941**

**Construction Slip Number 5, Krupp's Germaniawerft Shipyard**

**Kiel, Baltic coast, Germany**

Ulrich Von Wittgenstein, Otto's second in command, looked around with bewildered eyes as his new commander guided him and the 64 other designated crewmembers of the U-800 into the covered slip sheltering their new boat.

"Uh, were are all the shipyard workers, Kapitän? Shouldn't the evening shift be taking over now from the day shift?"

Otto gave the tall, aristocratic officer a resigned look.

"Believe it or not but there is no evening shift. There is also no night shift or weekend shift, just a day shift. I was also shocked on learning this the first time I came here, but it seems that our industries are still on peacetime production routine."

"Peacetime production routine, Kapitän?" Nearly exploded Franz Streib, the designated third watch officer. "The British sure aren't on peacetime routine these days. This is nonsense!"

"I certainly agree with you on that, Franz. However, decisions concerning that matter are way over our pay grades. The good side of this is that we will be able to visit our new boat in relative quietness. Thankfully, Doctor Gustav Premingen, the designer of the U-800, seems to have a higher sense of work ethics than his colleagues in Kiel: he will be the one giving us the tour of our new boat."

"I can't wait to meet that man, Kapitän." Said Von Wittgenstein. "He must be a true genius and visionary, judging from what you told us about the U-800."

"And I am sure that he will be happy to meet you, Ulrich." Replied Otto Kretschmer with a malicious smirk. When the face of his first watch officer reflected confusion at that reply, Otto got closer to him and whispered in his ear.

"I can't swear about this, but I believe that he is gay."

Otto then laughed briefly at the reaction of his subaltern, who recoiled in disgust.

"You can't be serious, Kapitän!"

“I am, Ulrich. However, that man, gay or not, has designed a revolutionary submarine that could just help us crush the British Navy and starve the British into submission, thus winning the war for us. So, please be polite to Doctor Premingen and do your best to ignore any advances he may make towards you. I’m serious about this, Ulrich.”

“Uh, very well, Kapitän. I will do my best to be open-minded during this visit.”

“Excellent! Aah, I believe that the good doctor is waiting for us at the entrance of the construction slip.”

Ulrich Von Wittgenstein, like the rest of the crew, focused his attention at once on the thin, nearly ascetic man in his fifties with balding salt and pepper hair standing besides the two Kriegsmarine armed sailors guarding the entrance to the slip containing the U-800. Doctor Premingen was of medium height, wore thick glasses and was the perfect image of the scientist with no social life, something that was going to be called a ‘nerd’ decades in the future. Getting to him first, Otto Kretschmer shook hands with him after returning the salute of the two sentries.

“Doctor Premingen, it is nice to be able to meet you again. As promised, I have brought my whole crew with me, so that they could visit their new boat.”

“And I will be happy to guide them around, Korvettenkapitän Kretschmer. If you will all follow me inside.”

Premingen then opened wide the door guarded by the sentries and walked inside a cavernous space hidden from the outside world by large canvas tarps laid on its sides and ceiling. The 64 men of Otto’s crew stopped nearly at once at the sight of the big shape filling the construction ship. Herman Spielberger, the second watch officer, let out an exclamation as he stared at the hull of the submarine.

“Mein Gott! I have never seen anything like this before! It is shaped nearly like a sperm whale, except for that big topside kiosk, which looks like a truncated dolphin fin.”

“That shape, which is admittedly very different from that of our other submarines, is meant to offer the least hydrodynamic drag possible in the water. In this, I indeed inspired myself from the shape of marine mammals and fish.” Replied Premingen, sounding like a schoolmaster teaching a class of new students. “The whole premise of my design was to produce a true submarine that would operate mostly under water, rather than a submersible that would only dive to hide or attack.”

“But, once submerged, its battery capacity would severely limit its endurance under water, no?”

“True, and that still applies with my U-800. I however mostly got over that problem by using two things. Firstly, I adapted to the U-800 an invention from Dutch naval designers: the schnorchel. A schnorchel is basically a vertical tube sticking up from a submerged submarine and through which the diesel engines of that submarine can get their needed air, with a second tube used to evacuate the exhaust gases from the diesels. Now, the Dutch had not developed that concept in a manner I considered satisfactory, so I tinkered with it in depth while adapting it to my U-800. Instead of folding down on top of the upper deck of the submarine, something that made the schnorchel tube rather fragile and both slowed down the submarine and created much extra hydrodynamic drag, I designed a telescopic model of it. That model, which incorporates separate tubes for diesel intake, diesel exhaust and crew air ventilation, telescopes out of the top fin structure and is surrounded by an hydro-dynamically shaped sleeve that both reduces greatly the drag when deployed and also masks the schnorchel head from enemy radar via a special rubber coating. The main problem associated with schnorchels, mainly the tendency of the diesels to suddenly suck in the air inside the submarine when their intake heads are temporarily covered by high waves, was eliminated by the use of a two-stage diesel air intake system where the incoming air is first compressed inside a large tank, from which the diesels then extract the volume of air they need, and this without impacting on the ventilation air for the crew. The U-800 will thus be able to navigate at periscope depth most of the time, using its schnorchel to either run on diesel power or to recharge its batteries out of sight of enemy planes and ships.”

As the officers and men of Kretschmer’s crew looked at each other on hearing that, Premingen went on.

“Secondly, about the limit imposed by batteries, my solution was simpler and was one of brute force: I simply packed as much batteries as I could inside the U-800, in order to boost the endurance on batteries while deeply submerged. While your old Type VII submarine packed 108 battery cells inside its hull, the U-800 contains a total of 906 battery cells. Despite its displacement being four times that of a Type VII and being longer and beamier, the battery capacity of the U-800, allied with a much more streamlined and hydro-dynamically efficient shape and more efficient propeller, will allow it to attain top speeds under water of at least twenty knots and to have a submerged endurance undreamed of in other types of submarines.”

“TWENTY KNOTS SUBMERGED?!” Exclaimed Von Wittgenstein. “But, with that kind of speed, we could outrun many of the British convoy escort ships. And what kind of endurance are we talking exactly, Doctor Premingen?”

“My calculations showed that the U-800 should have a deeply submerged range of at least 400 nautical miles at a speed of five knots on batteries, enough to safely pass a danger zone like the Bay of Biscay undetected. That figure is however purely theoretical and I was very conservative in my estimates. It will actually be your job to find out the true performances of the U-800, gentlemen. With this said, let’s go inside and see what this beast is made of.”

As Premingen turned around and started walking towards a wooden staircase built beside the hull of the U-800, Von Wittgenstein noted the closed outer doors for eight torpedo tubes, visible under the chin of the bulbous bow of the submarine. That was twice the amount of bow torpedo tubes in his old Type IX submarine! The U-800 was already promising to be a formidable war machine.

With Otto Kretschmer and his crewmembers following him closely, Premingen climbed the staircase at a measured pace, then crossed the wooden bridge linking the top of the staircase to the upper deck casing of the U-800. Still followed by the crowd of submariners, he went to what appeared to be a large empty well on the forward part of the hull and pointed at the bottom of the well.

“What you see here at the bottom of this well is the pressure hull of the U-800, made of forty millimeter-thick steel plates. That will give it an operational depth capability of 350 meters and a calculated crush depth of 500 meters.”

Otto Kretschmer couldn’t help exclaim himself then, most favorably impressed by those numbers.

“Mein Gott! This means that we could safely dive to a depth that enemy depth charges can’t reach. If we get the time to dive deep, then we will basically be invulnerable to enemy weapons.”

“That is correct, Kapitän. As for the well itself, it will house the main 10.5 centimeter deck gun when retracted for submerged navigation, with a hydraulically-powered deck cover plate then preserving the smooth profile of the hull. The gun platform itself, which will also support an armored, waterproof box containing ready-to-fire shells, will rise in seconds and emerge in the open air when needed for surface combat. A similar but smaller well on the stern upper deck will house a quadruple 20mm

anti-aircraft cannon gun mount, while one vertical silo atop the kiosk will contain and protect a single 20mm cannon mount. With its eight bow and four stern torpedo tubes, plus 44 lateral launch tubes for TM Series sea mines, the U-800 will be about the most powerfully armed submarine in existence, gentlemen.”

The designated chief gunner of the U-800, Fritz Lent, gave a surprised look at Premingen.

“This submarine will carry sea mines as well as torpedoes?”

“It will! My goal when designing the U-800 was to produce a long range submarine able to bring war to the enemy’s coasts, including North America. With it, you will be able to attack and harass enemy convoys right from the start, when they emerge from Canadian ports or from Newfoundland’s ports.”

While impressing the crewmen of the U-800, that declaration also somewhat threw a cold shower over them: operating close to the Canadian coast would put them well within the range of all the patrol aircraft based on Canadian soil or in Newfoundland, making such missions quite risky.

After showing to the submariners the forward hatch hidden under the deck casing and used to load fresh torpedoes aboard the submarine, Premingen then walked to the central fin, rising over six meters above the upper deck, and opened a large, heavy steel hatch cut in its frontal surface. Otto Kretschmer saw the designer hesitate for a moment before going through the hatch, prompting him to ask a question in a worried tone.

“Are you alright, Doctor Premingen?”

“Er, yes, Herr Kapitän. To be honest, I suffer from a mild case of claustrophobia. This may sound ludicrous for someone designing submarines but I can’t help it.”

“That is nothing to be ashamed of, Doctor. Many people I know suffer from claustrophobia.”

Seemingly arming himself with courage first, Premingen then stepped through the heavy hatch, followed closely by Kretschmer and his men. They found themselves nearly cramming to capacity what appeared to be a circulation space, with one large deck hatch, an access ladder and what looked like a lift cage visible to them.

“Immediately aft of this compartment is the control room, which is presently empty. If you and your crewmembers could proceed downstairs, Kapitän, I will show to you and your officers the officers’ mess and cabins, situated one deck below.”

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