

The Boys Who Challenged Hitler: Knud Pedersen and the Churchill Club

By Phillip Hoose

Knud Pedersen:

Our occupiers were crazy about the local taverns and restaurants. Danes are famous for their pastries, and German officers soon discovered the *konditori* (pastry shop) Kristine, regarded as the finest in Aalborg. Kristine was famous throughout the city for light, delicious whipped cream cakes. Men of the Third Reich removed their hats, hung up their coats and weapons in the cloakroom, and settled into red padded sofas until they were called to their tables. The officers then slid into high-backed upholstered wooden chairs, placed their orders, and smoothed fresh linen napkins over their laps. This surely beat the eastern front.

One night four of us slipped past the receptionist at the front door and found our way into Kristine's unguarded coatroom at the top of a staircase. Hanging on the racks was a jungle of fine woolen coats, sleeves sticking out. Hats rested on the shelf above. Some commanders had draped their holstered belts over the hooks as well. It was our great hope that some holsters would still contain German pistols, called Lugers. Two of us took one side of the closet, two the other, thrashing through the heavy wool waistcoats as fast as we could. Every now and then someone would find a gun belt with an empty holster, but success was elusive. The others had already gone back outside when my fingers came to rest around a gleaming black pistol: I was turning it over and over in my hands when I felt someone pushing through the coat sleeves in my direction. I slipped the gun into my

pocket and backed out past a German officer with a polite smile and a little bow. I was gone before he could react.

Moments later I was surrounded by the other three Churchill Clubbers out in the street.

“What happened?”

“Only this,” I said.

One by one they thrust their hands into my pocket and felt the grand prize. When we got back to the monastery, I tossed the shiny black Luger and two full magazines onto the table.