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

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Review

Knud Pedersen and the nine other schoolboys of the Churchill Club are Danish national heroes. Initially frustrated by their countrymen’s acceptance of the Nazi occupation, they secretly sabotage German war efforts. Winston Churchill and the Royal Air Force are their inspiration. For more than a year they destroy property and steal weapons. The Club is eventually discovered and imprisoned for more than two years. They face this challenge just as bravely and even orchestrate several escape attempts. When they are released, they find that their sacrifices have inspired nationwide resistance that severely hampers the German occupation. The war concludes with an Allied victory, and the Club gets to meet Prime Minister Churchill.

In a field of often grim World War II literature, it is refreshing to read a true story of bravery and heroism. What further makes this book unique is the blend between Phillip Hoose’s storytelling and Knud Pedersen’s firsthand account. Their combined descriptions of the events and people of the Danish occupation are exciting, humorous, and fascinating. The blend of primary and secondary sources makes the book a valuable addition to a middle grade history classroom. The book’s themes may also make it a good fit for an English class because the humanization of heroes will make readers feel like if someone as ordinary as Knud can successfully stand up against evil, then they can too.