



Soldier X by Don Wulffson

Subject: World War, 1939–1945—Campaigns—Soviet Union

Awards: The Christopher Award, Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People

Book List: Europe

Props: Mustache



(Wear Hitler mustache, snap heels, hand raised) Hiel Hitler! On September 2, 1939 Hitler invaded Poland and World War II began. By 1945, when the war ended, more than fifty-two million men, women, and children had lost their lives. World War II killed more people, destroyed more lives, and probably had more far-reaching consequences than any other war in history. But it was into this conflict that the German soldiers marched. Soldiers who were growing younger and younger as the war raged on. In April of 1944, Hitler declared that males sixteen years of age were eligible to fight. As so many men had been killed, there were too few left to fight. So now, boys were marching into Hitler's War. *(Take mustache off)*

Sixteen-year-old Erik Brandt, was one of those boys. He sat on a train traveling east. He was one of the hundreds of thousands of German boys being sent to the killing fields of the Eastern Front. But Erik hoped to stay out of the battlefields because he could speak fluent Russian and he had been told he would be an army interpreter. But, after only a few weeks of basic training, he was sent to the front where he fought in his first and last battle.

It was horrifying, terrifying and ended for Erik as iron smashed into his head. He blacked out. When he awoke, he found himself lying on his back, his entire skull pulsating with pain and feeling nauseous and dizzy. All around him were the ugly leftovers of the battle: shell casings, wooden boxes, helmets, weapons, empty canisters—and dead soldiers, both Russian and German. Then he heard a gunshot. He belly-crawled a half meter and peered out of the trench. He could see a Russian officer methodically seeking out the German wounded and shooting them. Another Russian foot soldier, using a bayonet, was dispatching other Germans. The foot

soldier seemed to be enjoying what he was doing and many of those he was bayoneting looked already dead: he was just making sure.

Erik's stomach knotted with fear as he realized that he was trapped behind enemy lines. If discovered, he too would be killed. He had only one chance to save himself. He looked at one of the young dead Russian soldiers. His eyes seemed to be watching Erik. He closed the lids. Strange though it seemed, Erik did not want him looking at him. Then Erik removed his own clothes—even his socks and underwear—and exchanged his clothes for the dead soldier's clothes. The task was very difficult and very painful. But Erik finally crawled out of the trench as a Russian soldier, as a boy named Aleksandr, or X for short. Using a Russian rifle for support, he wandered along, not knowing where he was going or what he was doing. He passed a blockhouse and saw a hand in claw shape; fingertips dug into loose soil. A man, a German soldier dragged himself along the ground like some sort of fire-blackened, badly injured alligator. He looked at Erik and at first Erik didn't realize that the man was seeing the enemy. The man's arm raised and he fired. Erik flew backward as something hot hit him in the side. A different rifle shot rang out. The man slumped and stopped moving. A Russian soldier rushed toward Erik, a smoking rifle in hand. He spoke in Russian. "Are you hit bad?" He pressed a pad of gauze to the wound in Erik's side. "Just take it easy, son. You're going to make it."

Erik seemed safe at the moment. But could he really fool the Russians? Would they help him or kill him? Find out what happens to this boy who became *(Hold up book)* *Soldier X* by Don Wulffson. Based on a true story.