

A close-up photograph of a person wearing a khaki military uniform. On the left chest, there is a winged pilot's emblem and a circular medal. The person is holding a black submachine gun with both hands, pointing it towards the bottom left. The background is a blurred, grey, textured surface. The entire image is framed by a thick red border.

Operation Harvest Festival

by Robert Prins

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Jacob had worked up a sweat. He was digging air raid trenches in a prisoner of war camp. Three zig-zagged pits 100 meters long, 3 meters deep and 2 meters wide were needed. Jacob was in the first team that rotated on and off with other teams to dig. Pickaxes and shovels echoed twenty-four hours a day for three gruelling days.

The digging began on Sunday 31st of October. By mid-morning that day, Jacob's friend Zebulun whispered, "I'm exhausted already."

Suddenly Zebulun arched his back and screamed in pain.

"No talking!" shouted the guard above him as he lowered his whip.

Zebulun stumbled but managed to keep swinging his pickaxe into the hard soil. Jacob kept his head down digging. Urged on by the whips, sticks and guns held by the guards, the work progressed rapidly.

By midnight, Tuesday 2nd of November, the trenches were finished. At 5:00am, Wednesday 3rd of November 1943, Jacob was woken for early morning roll call. About 4000 prisoners, Jewish men and women including Jacob, were marched out to a prison block near the trenches. A guard grabbed Jacob and forced him into the prison

kitchen. It was crowded to capacity with about 600 others. Jacob heard the doors lock. Armed guards stood outside.

Crammed into the kitchen, Jacob could only hear what was going on outside. All day long loud dance and marching music vibrated through the walls. Truck after truck rolled into the camp. Jacob knew that this was no party. Despite the volume of the music, screams and gunshots could be heard outside from morning till night. Squeezed into a small space in the kitchen, Jacob was frustrated not knowing what was going on or able to do anything about it.

At nightfall the music and gunfire stopped. In the kitchen Jacob did his best to sleep.

At 5:00am the next day, Jacob woke to a roll call. His new task was to clean up from Operation Harvest Festival. He and the six hundred men and women from the kitchen were marched to the trenches. Naked bodies and blood overflowed from the dugouts. Bullet holes marked their heads and necks.

Over two miserable weeks Jacob dragged the decomposing bodies of people he knew from the pits. The extracting of gold-filled teeth from dead bodies and burning their remains with fire revolted him. The stench of decay and burning flesh made him vomit. Body after body. Thousands of men, women and children.

Jacob wanted to rest and grieve, but there was no chance. Stripped naked, he was forced to lie down in the same trench with 600 who had cleaned up. The last thing he knew was the sound of a gunshot and a crack in his head. The SS were determined to erase all evidence of the crimes they had committed.

Operation Harvest Festival claimed the lives of up to 43,000 Jews in one day on Wednesday 3rd November 1943. The day has since become known as Bloody Wednesday.

The background image shows a person in a military uniform, likely from the World War II era, holding a submachine gun. The uniform is olive green and features a pilot's wing badge on the left chest. The person's hands are visible, gripping the weapon. The overall tone is somber and historical.

Operation Harvest Festival

**Wednesday 3rd November 1943 saw
one of the deadliest acts of genocide
against the Jews in recent history.
43,000 Jews were killed in one day.**

**This story follows the fictitious
character of Jacob whose life is based
on the real events of that horrible day.**

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