

Wilner, Arie

(1917--1943), One of the founders of the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB) in Warsaw.

Before World War II, Wilner belonged to the *Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir* Zionist youth movement in Warsaw. When the war broke out in September 1939, Wilner, along with many other young Zionists, escaped from Nazi-occupied western Poland to Vilna, Lithuania. However, the Germans invaded Lithuania in June 1941, and began massacring Jews there. Wilner managed to escape; instead of running eastward, Wilner returned to Warsaw to warn the Jews there about the mass murders in Lithuania.

Back in Warsaw, Wilner became a leader of the Jewish underground. Because of his Polish looks, he was able to travel to other ghettos to encourage underground resistance activities. During the summer of 1942 the Germans launched a two-month long wave of deportations. At that point, Wilner and his comrades decided that armed resistance was the only answer. On July 28 they founded the Jewish Fighting Organization (*Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa*, ZOB), and Wilner became the ZOB's representative outside the ghetto. He soon made contact with the Home Army, the main Polish underground militia. The Home Army officially recognized the ZOB and supplied the Jews with a limited number of weapons, as did the Communist underground militia (see also Home Guard, Poland).

Although he lived outside the ghetto, Wilner still took part in the ZOB's important decision making. In January 1943 he participated in the fighting between the ZOB and the Nazis when the Nazis initiated a short wave of deportations.

In March the Germans searched Wilner's apartment on the Polish side of Warsaw. They found weapons and arrested him, assuming that he was part of the Polish underground. However, they soon found out that he was Jewish, and sent him to a concentration camp. Wilner was rescued a short time later by the Polish Catholic Scouts movement, and he returned to the Warsaw Ghetto to participate in the last stand against the Nazis---the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. When the ZOB headquarters were discovered by the Germans,

Wilner called on his comrades to commit suicide, and he himself died in the bunker. (see also Jewish Fighting Organization, Warsaw.)