

Gamzon, Robert

(1905--1961), Founder of the Jewish scout movement in France and Partisan commander.

Gamzon established the French Jewish Scouts in 1923; his organization brought in young Jews from all sorts of backgrounds. During 1939 and 1940, Gamzon served as a communications officer in the French army. After Germany vanquished France in June 1940, Gamzon moved his movement's institutions to southern France, which was not yet occupied by the Germans, and to French-governed Algeria. He began setting up children's homes, workshops, welfare centers, and training farms, and organized Jewish tradition and culture courses for youth leaders. In January 1942 Gamzon joined the executive board of the Union of French Jews (UGIF), which was a consolidation of all the Jewish organizations in France. In that capacity, Gamzon went to Paris in May 1943 to help organize underground actions there.

In the summer of 1942 Gamzon instituted a secret rescue network called "The Sixth," whose purpose was to help Jews escape the *Gestapo*. The Sixth provided Jews with false identity papers, hid young people in non-Jewish institutions and homes, and smuggled Jews of any age into Spain and Switzerland.

In December 1943 Gamzon set up a Jewish partisan unit in the Tarn district of southwestern France. Those who joined the unit were mainly young people who had been part of the Jewish scout movement or had participated in Gamzon's workshops. Gamzon attached his partisan unit to the Jewish Army, which was a major French Jewish resistance and fighting organization. By joining the Jewish Army, Gamzon helped unite all of France's Jewish underground militias.

By June 1944 Gamzon's partisan unit, named for the leader of "The Sixth" (Marc Haguenau) who had taken his own life after being captured by the *Gestapo*, was a serious and disciplined group of 120 fighters. On August 19 of that year Gamzon and his unit captured an armored German train, and two days later they liberated the cities of Castres and Mazamet.

In 1949 Gamzon moved to Israel along with a group of 50 alumni of the French Jewish scouts. (see also Jewish Army, France.)