

Tenenbaum, Mordechai

(1916-1943), A leader of the Vilna, Warsaw, and Bialystok undergrounds. A member of the *Dror* Zionist Youth Movement, Tenenbaum joined the staff of the *He-Halutz* head office in Warsaw in 1938. Soon after the war broke out in September 1939, Tenenbaum and some comrades fled Warsaw for Vilna, hoping to reach Palestine. However, Jewish immigration to Palestine was restricted. Tenenbaum gave his friends forged documents, but decided himself to stay behind in Vilna.

The Germans occupied Vilna in June 1941. Tenenbaum provided comrades with forged work papers, saving some from the Nazis. He then moved comrades who had survived the Vilna *aktionen* to Bialystok, which was still pretty quiet. In January 1942 Tenenbaum himself left for Bialystok. In March he returned to Warsaw. At a meeting of all the Jewish political parties, Tenenbaum declared that the events in Vilna prove that the Germans intend to kill all Jews in their domain.

Tenenbaum often left Warsaw for nearby ghettos to gather information and organize underground activities. In July 1942 he helped found the Jewish Fighting Organization (*Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa, ZOB*), Warsaw's major underground alliance. In November he again left Warsaw for Bialystok to organize a resistance movement there. Upon arrival, he found the ghetto surrounded. Tenenbaum was shot in the leg when the Germans realized his papers were forged. He escaped, and after recovering, returned to Bialystok to unite the ghetto's underground movements and prepare them for rebellion.

In early February 1943 the Germans began deporting the Jews of Bialystok. Tenenbaum sent messengers to obtain arms from the Partisans, and had his soldiers steal weapons and hoard food. They decided that when the Germans would begin liquidating the ghetto, they would first fight in the ghetto and then escape to the forest. On August 16, 1943 Tenenbaum saw that the ghetto's liquidation was imminent, so he launched an uprising. His soldiers were not able to break out of the ghetto for the forest, but some fighters held out for a month. It is unclear what happened to Tenenbaum himself- he may have died



in battle or committed suicide. (see also Resistance, Jewish and Jewish Fighting Organization, Warsaw.)