

Kovner, Abba

(1918--1988), Underground leader and Partisan commander; a leader of the *Beraha* movement; and Hebrew poet and writer.

Born in Sevastopol, Russia, Kovner attended Hebrew high school in Vilna, where he became a member of the *Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir* Zionist youth movement. After Vilna was occupied by the Germans in late June 1941, Kovner decided that the only thinkable response was active resistance. He focused his efforts on creating an underground Jewish fighting force, and inspired other young Jews throughout Eastern Europe to stand up against the Nazis. On January 21, 1942 a Jewish military organization was created in Vilna, called the United Partisan Organization (Fareynegte Partizaner Organizatsye, FPO). Kovner was one of the FPO's leaders, and became its commander in July 1943. During the final deportation from Vilna in September 1943, Kovner directed the FPO's activities and the escape of the ghetto fighters to the forests. Kovner then commanded a Jewish partisan unit in the Rudninkai Forest.

After the war, Kovner helped organize the *Beraha* movement, in which hundreds of thousands of survivors made their way west in order to reach Palestine. Kovner and his wife, Vitka Kempner---also his partner in the underground movement---settled in Palestine, where Kovner became a distinguished writer. (see also United Partisan Organization, Vilna.)