Zorin, Shalom

(1902--1974), Jewish Partisan commander in Minsk.

The Germans invaded Minsk in late June 1941 and transferred the city's Jews, Zorin included, to a ghetto. Zorin worked in a local Prisoner of War camp, where he met a captured Soviet officer named Semyon Ganzenko. In late 1941 Zorin and Ganzenko escaped to the forests in the Staroe Selo region, about 19 miles southwest of Minsk. While hiding in the forest, the two established a partisan unit called Parkhomenko. The unit consisted of 150 members, including many Jews.

As more and more Jews joined Parkhomenko, many conflicts arose between the Jewish and non-Jewish fighters. Zorin defended his fellow Jews, leading Ganzenko to recommend that he establish a new Jewish partisan unit to take in Jews who had escaped the ghetto, called "Unit 106" (later the unit was referred to as the "Zorin Unit"). The Zorin Unit began with 60 men and 15 guns, but over time, it grew to 800 people. After the Zorin Unit was attacked by the Belorussian police and the Nazis situated in the Staroe Selo area, it moved its headquarters to the Naliboki Forest. The unit stayed in contact with the Minsk Ghetto through teenage boys who helped Jews who had escaped the ghetto reach the forest.

The Zorin Unit also had a camp for Jewish artisans who set up workshops in the forest, and thus served partisan units all over the area (see also family camps in the forests). There was a sewing workshop, a shoemaker's workshop, a flourmill, a bakery, a sausage factory, a weapons repair and bomb production shop, and a big hospital with doctors from Minsk. They also created a school that served 70 students. The camp members celebrated both Soviet and Jewish holidays. Zorin had about 100 fighters in his combat unit whom he treated with fatherly care. He believed that saving Jewish lives was his most important goal.

In July 1944 Zorin was wounded in his leg during a battle with a retreating German unit; seven of his men were killed. In 1971, about 25 years after the war, Zorin immigrated to Israel.