



We cried so much when Freddy was killed, Rivlin says of his hero

• By ANNA AHRONHEIM

Ahead of Remembrance Day commemorating the 23,741 IDF soldiers and security personnel who have died serving the pre-state yishuv and the State of Israel since 1860, President Reuven Rivlin visited the grave of Zvi Gross, who fell in the War of Independence.

Gross, a Holocaust survivor, Etzel fighter and IDF soldier "was one of the heroes of that time... an example to follow," Rivlin said at his grave at the Mount Herzl military cemetery in Jerusalem.

"For me, Freddy was one of the heroes of that time, and he lives with me as an example to follow. Thanks to him and to people like him, the State of Israel was established," Rivlin was quoted as saying.

Born in Germany, Gross moved to Israel without any family and lived on Gaza Street in Jerusalem's Rehavia neighborhood where he was adopted by the photographer Rudolph Yunes, a neighbor of Rivlin's family and became "part of the Rivlin family," read a statement released by Rivlin's office.

Gross was killed on May 17, 1948, two days after the declaration of independence, in the battle for the Police Academy in Jerusalem.



PRESIDENT REUVEN RIVLIN visits the grave yesterday of Zvi Gross, a Holocaust survivor and Etzel fighter who fell in the War of Independence. (Mark Neyman/GPO)

"I was a nine-years-old when Freddy came to the neighborhood," said the president when he visited the grave. "He was handsome and very special. He related to [me] with great seriousness. I remember him trying to chat with us, in the English we knew. When we found out about his death, we cried so much that Freddy had been killed. It hit us like a member of our own family and we feared we would not be able to bury his body."

"We were here in 1949 when they started to bury the dead of the War of Independence and Freddy's picture was on

a table in our house as if he were a member of the family," Rivlin added.

During his years as a public official, Rivlin has frequently told Gross's story at events commemorating fallen soldiers.

Gross's name was mentioned last year after a volunteer from the "Giving a Face to the Fallen" organization that identifies details of fallen IDF soldiers managed to locate his place of burial and found details about him and his family.

Searching various archives, the organization was able to

trace Gross's family and found his 97-year-old brother Rudy, who lives in New York, and Rudy's children who live in Israel.

Suddenly, Gross had a face, a history and a memory.

Among Gross's family members who came to meet Rivlin at the grave on Monday were Esther Raveh, the wife of his nephew Danny Ravinski-Raveh, their daughters Orna and Ilana, and their children.

The organization "Giving a Face to the Fallen" was established in 2013 by Uri Sagi and Dorit Peri, and is made up of 28 volunteer researchers who work to commemorate fallen soldiers whose gravestones are missing information and whose life story is unknown.

Of the 811 fallen soldiers killed before the establishment of the State of Israel and about whom information is missing, the organization has identified and found information of more than 100 stories in the records of the Ministry of Defense.

The organization is assisted by many archives around the country, and works with the assistance and cooperation of the Ministry of Defense, the IDF's soldiers' commemoration unit and Yad Labanim.