

# Unusual museum opens in northern Galilee

By Edgar Asher, Ashernet

In January of this year a most unusual museum opened in the northern Galilee, high above the Hula Valley. The 'Ha Reut' museum, which means 'The Friendship' museum, is unlike almost any other museum in Israel. It is dedicated entirely to a battle – a battle that took place in April 1948 during the War of Independence, alongside where the museum is situated.

The museum is called 'friendship' because it is telling the story of a battle that was fought

by young men from the Palmach and Haganah who managed, after three attempts, to capture the fort that was situated also just a few meters from the location of the present museum. It was however captured at a heavy price as the battle cost the lives of twenty-eight soldiers. Metzudat Koach has a dual meaning in Hebrew – 'fortress of the twenty-eight' and 'fortress of power'. A fort in Hebrew is 'metzuda' and after the battle the fort became known as 'Metzudat Koach'. 'Koach' means 'strength' in Hebrew, and also the two letters making up the word for 'strength' also corresponds to the Hebrew letters Kaf and Het – the number '28'.

1948 Yehuda Dekel was a member of the 'Scouts Training Group' of the nearby Kibbutz Dafna. Twelve of its members and three of its commanders, who all came from Dafna, were killed during the second battle to capture the fort. All of the fifteen were friends of Yehuda Dekel and it was his inspiration to memorialize them that the 'Ha Reut' museum was built. The funding for the project came from several sources including the Ministry of Culture and Sport, the Jewish National Fund and several benefactors including the industrialist Stef Wertheimer, the Dekel family and members of Kibbutz Dafna. The design concept and construction was carried out by the Society for Preservation of Israel Heritage Sites.

It is clear to every visitor to the museum why the capture of the fort was so important for the security of the renewed State of Israel. The 'Ha Reut' museum uses the latest computer technology to explain the background to the battle, as well as the battle itself. This is the first museum in Israel to use a system called 'augmented reality' which enables visitors to feel that they themselves are participating in the struggle to free the fort. In one section of the museum is a special memorial wall that displays a portrait of every one of the twenty-eight soldiers who were killed in the battle. Below the portraits are twenty-eight drawers that each holds personal papers and stories about each individual hero.

The museum also details the Palmach training system and illustrates and explains the perilous situation that existed at the time for the new State. There is also a cinema

in the museum that shows a realistic reconstruction of the battle that led to the loss of life and the subsequent taking of the fort.

The fort is still there, just meters from the museum's entrance. Today it is still in use but now it is a base for local border police. Just below the fort, surrounded by trees are the graves of nineteen of the twenty eight young soldiers who were killed in the battle of Nabi Yusha.

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Entrance of the museum.

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The fort, which the British had handed over to the Arabs before they left Palestine in 1948, was at one of the highest points of elevation along the Lebanese border. It dominated the landscape and anybody who controlled the fort virtually controlled the immediate area. The British had built several 'Tegart' forts of similar design in strategic areas in the north of the country during the period of the British mandate. The Arabs knew the fort as the 'Nabi Yusha'.

The museum was established by the late Yehuda Dekel, who passed away six years ago. In



The fort opposite the entrance to the museum.



A group of visitors using the 'state of the art' augmented reality system that allows visitors to feel that they are participating in the attempt to capture the fort held by the Arabs.



Portraits of each of the twenty-eight young men who died in the three attempts to take over the strategic fort. Below the portraits are twenty-eight drawers that contain copies and reproductions that relate to each of the individual Palmach fighters.



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