

## **English war veteran stood by the graves of his comrades.**

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Not an eye was dry when Royal Air Force veteran Tony Iveson DFC from the famous 617 Squadron knelt on one knee to lay a wreath before the white gravestones in Nesbyen churchyard on the 17th May (the Norwegian national day).

Around him stood school children carrying the Union Jack and bouquets of flowers. It was a gripping moment when he stood by the grave of his comrade and friend Frank Levy. Sixty-three years ago they had together attacked the German battleship Tirpitz in Atlafjord.

“When we landed we were missing one aircraft, Frank Levy’s”, Iveson told.

On the way home, Frank Levy’s aircraft had flown off course. The aircraft crashed at Saupeset near Nesbyen on the 17th September 1944. The ten white gravestones tell of the tragedy. Here lie the young men who never came home.

“These graves tell about freedom, they tell about young men fighting for their country and Europe against the Nazi tyranny”, said Iveson who held the speech by the memorial graves this year.

Iveson was the pilot who led all three attacks by the Lancaster bombers of RAF 617 Squadron on the German battleship Tirpitz in northern Norway. It was on the way home from the first attack that one aircraft strayed off course and crashed near Nesbyen. “It is still a mystery how this could have happened”, he said.

Iveson visited Nesbyen for the first time in 1984, but not on our national day. Now he stood here amongst silver birch trees in full leaf and watched the British flag planted by school children beside each grave. He stood by the gravestones of the crew that never landed.

The 87-year-old ex-pilot with medals on his breast remembers his comrade pilot Frank Levy very well. “Levy was 27 years old, tall, dark and very serious” - the youngest of the crew lying here was only 19 years old - “Frank was older than most of us. I can see him now”, said Iveson. Here they meet again, it is a moment full of memories. “On behalf of 617 squadron I thank you all”, said Iveson to those gathered for the ceremony.

Nesbyen Brass Band played the British national anthem and it is a moved war veteran who sang.

The day before a big audience had gathered together with Iveson and another member of the 617 Squadron Veteran Association, Mary Kimpton, for a showing of the film about the famous squadron “The Dam Busters” at the Nesbyen Cultural Centre.

After the ceremony by the graves there were many who wished to shake his hand or had something they wished to say to him.

“I didn’t actually realise what kind of ceremony this would be, I thought it would just be something simple. I hadn’t expected this, it has been overwhelming”, said Iveson. The leader of the veteran club has a lot to tell when he comes home. “It was a moving ceremony. I will never forget it”, he said.