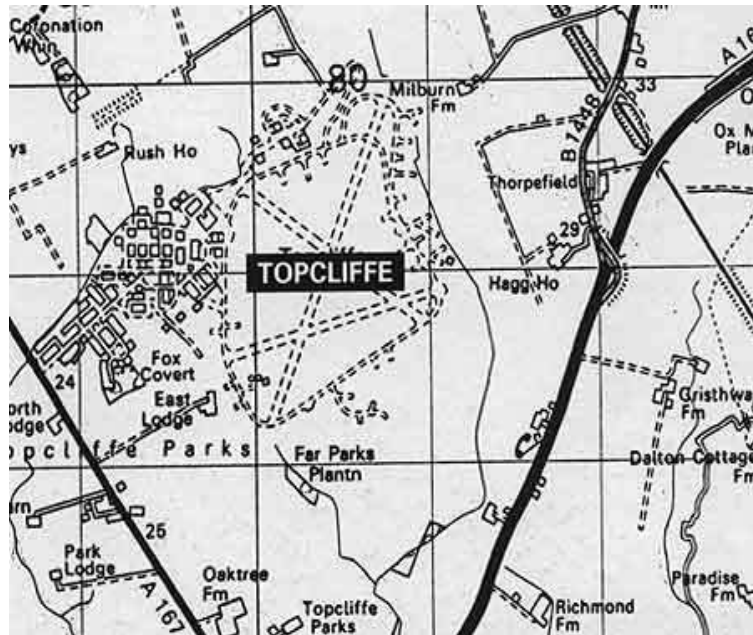# Topcliffe Air Station, Yorkshire, England - No. 61 (Training) Base RCAF



RAF *Topcliffe* was created in 1940, as a turf airfield. Two RAF Squadrons operated from the airfield with 'Armstrong-Whitworth 'Whitley' bomber aircraft, from September 1940 to late 1941. Hard surface runways were built during the winter of 1941-42; the main runway 03-21 of 6,000 feet, and secondary runways 09-27 and 13-31 of just over 4,000 feet in length. A perimeter track was created, with 37 pan 'hardstands'.

For several months in early 1942 RAF Squadron No. 102 flew on Operations out of the improved facilities at Topcliffe, but in August of 1942, RCAF Squadron No. 405 was transferred to the Air Station – although still under No.4 Group RAF Bomber Command. For a very short time RCAF Squadron No. 419 also occupied the Topcliffe airfield before being transferred to Leeming Air Station. No. 405 Squadron was moved out in October 1943, and a new RCAF Squadron, No. 424, with 'Wellington' Mk.III aircraft was formed at Topcliffe late in October 1942, just as No. 6 (RCAF) Group, Bomber Command was formed.

Designated an *Operational Base, No. 6 (RCAF) Group* on March 1st, 1943 - controlling RCAF Topcliffe, and sub-stations at Dishforth and Dalton, Yorks. RCAF Squadrons No. 419 and No. 424 were based at Topcliffe from August 1942 to March 1943 on Operations.

In early 1943 the Operational Squadrons of the RCAF were moved out of Topcliffe in order to create No. 61 (Training Base), with the inclusion of Air Stations Dalton and Dishforth – both of which were only five or six miles from the Topcliffe airfield.

The first RCAF Unit at Topcliffe was No. 1659 Heavy Conversion Unit, in April and May of 1943. The HCU functioned with No. 6 (RCAF) Group from April 1943 until November 1944, when control of RCAF Training Units was transferred to RAF No. 7 (Training) Group. At that same time, HCU No. 1659 was exchanging 'Halifax' aircraft for 'Lancasters.'

Since the end of the Second World war in Europe, in April 1945 – the Royal Air Force has continued to utilize the airfield at Topcliffe; first as No. 1 Air Navigation School; and later for Transport Command, with 'Hasting's aircraft.

Taken over by Coastal Command, with Lancaster and Neptune aircraft in 1952, Topcliffe again became a Training Command Station in 1957, and No. 1 Air Navigation School



*Topcliffe airfield 2009 (Google Earth photo)*

From 1962 until 1993 the British Army occupied the airfield, renamed "Alanbrooke Barracks", and there were many new buildings and improvements to the flying field. In 1993 the RAF returned to Topcliffe, with the 'Joint Elementary Flying Training School'. The buildings and flying surfaces all remain in serviceable condition.

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**RCAF Operational Squadrons based at Topcliffe Air Station  1942-1943**
No. 419 'Moose' Squadron -  No. 4 Group - August 18th, 1942  to  September 30th, 1942
No. 424 'Tiger' Squadron - No. 4 Group - October 15th, 1942 to December 31st, 1942
No. 424 'Tiger' Squadron - No. 6 Group – January 1st, 1943 to April 7th, 1943
No. 405 'Eagle' Squadron – No. 6 Group – March 1st, 1943 to March 5th, `1943.

**No. 61 (Training) Base - Organization as of June 6th, 1944 – 'D' Day**
Topcliffe, Yorks.       No. 1659 HCU        - Handley-Page 'Halifax' B.Mk.II/V
Dishforth, Yorks.       No. 1664 HCU        - Handley-Page 'Halifax' B.Mk.II/III
Wombleton, Yorks.  No. 1666 HCU        - Handley-Page 'Halifax' B.Mk.III/VII
Dalton, Yorks.         No. 1695 Bomber Defence Flight.

**RCAF Base Commanders: Topcliffe, No. 61 (T) Base**
April 5th, 1943 to June 25th, 1943            - A/C McEwen, C.M. – MC, DFC
June 26th, 1943 to February 16th, 1943  - A/C Johnson, B.F
February 17th, 1943 to May 15th, 1944   - A/C McBurney, R.E – AFC
May 16th, 1943 to August 7th, 1944        - A/C Wait, F.G.
September 1st, 1944 to September 18th 1944 – A/C Hurley, J.L.

The *Google Earth* photo below shows the location of 'Topcliffe' airfield at the top of the photo; with sub-station Dalton airfield to the middle-right of the photo, and sub-station Dishforth airfield at the lower left edge of the photo. All three airfields within several miles of each other.