

Skipton-on-Swale Air Station, Yorkshire, England.



In late 1940 the RAF acquired an area of farmland just west of the city of Thirsk, Yorkshire, to construct a 'satellite' airfield for Leeming Air Station.

Work was carried out during 1941 to construct three paved runways. Runway 04/22 eventually became 4,700 feet long, and runways 09/27 – 16/34 were both 4,200 feet in length. A perimeter track road included 24 pan type hard stands for aircraft.

The very close presence of the Swale River (on the left of the diagram) caused challenges for the layout of the runways and perimeter track on the airfield.

Skipton-on-Swale Air Station functioned as part of No. 4 Group RAF Bomber Command, from late 1941 to August, 1942 as a Satellite aerodrome for Leeming.

In August of 1942 Skipton-on-Swale Air Station was allocated to No. 6 (RCAF) Group as an Operational airfield. The first RCAF Squadron to arrive was No. 420 'Snowy Owl', on August 7th, 1942 – with 'Wellington' B.Mk.III aircraft; although still under command of No. 4 Group. Because the airfield and facilities were not yet fully completed, No. 420 Squadron moved to Middleton St. George in October, 1942.

After the formation of No. 6 (RCAF) Group, in October, 1942 there were no further Operational units at Skipton-on-Swale until May 1st, 1943 when No. 432 'Cougar' Squadron RCAF was formed at that Air Station. No. 432 was transferred in September, 1943 – and was replaced at Skipton-on-Swale by a newly formed No. 433 'Porcupine' Squadron RCAF, that was Operational from the Air Station until the end of the War.

In November 1942, No. 424 'Tiger' Squadron returned from a five month tour of duty in Tunisia, with No. 331 (RCAF) Wing, and converted at Skipton-on-Swale to Halifax B.Mk.III aircraft.

No. 333 and No. 424 Squadrons both converted to Lancaster B.Mk.III aircraft in January, 1945, and at the end of hostilities in Europe remained at Skipton-on-Swale as part of No. 1 Group – participating in the airlift of British and Canadian troops from Italy back to England, until both were disbanded in October, 1945.

RCAF Squadrons based at Skipton-on-Swale

No. 420 'Snowy Owl' - No. 4 Group - August 7th, 1942 to October 15th, 1942
No. 432 'Cougar' - No. 6 Group - May 1st, 1943 to September 18th, 1943
No. 433 'Porcupine' - No. 6 Group - September 25th, 1943 to August 30th, 1945
No. 424 'Tiger' - No. 6 Group - November 1943 to August 29th, 1945
No. 424 'Tiger' - No. 1 Group - August 30th 1945 to October 15th, 1945



Skipton-on-Swale airfield – 2010 – (note: Swale River running north to south on left quadrant of the photo) Google Earth Photo.

At the end of the War in 1945, the Royal Air Force had no further use for the aerodrome at Skipton-on-Swale, and most of the buildings were sold and moved away. The airfield has returned to agricultural use. The runways are no longer serviceable, and for the past forty years sections of the runway have been used as foundations for a poultry operation.

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