

42. Tama Air Field

42.1 Air field construction

Bordering the present Yokota Air Base runs Route 16, formerly called the Nikko Highway which ran 60 meters east of the present road, within the present air field zone. The thick woods grew on the present road site.

On July 3, 1939 (Showa 14), Fussa and Kumagawa villages Union Office issued a call for relevant landlords to appear for consultation regarding a proposed airfield construction site. The next day, 43 village landlords and out-of-village 43 landlords appeared at Fussa Jinjo Koto Shogakko with their official seals. Land ownership was immediately transferred to the army with their consenting to the army request. On July 7, the army began their land survey and began to clear the site. Obayashi-gumi and Asanuma-gumi were contracted for airfield construction. After two years the 200 ha (600,000 *tsubo*) airfield was completed with broad cooperation. Before its January 1941 (Showa 16) completion, on April 1, 1940 (Showa 15), the Army Air Experimental Department was based at the site.

The Army Air Experimental Department, an independent arm of the Army Air Technologies Research Laboratory, used the 1,200 meters by 50 meters runway for flight tests, inspections and operational purposes. The airfield's opening ceremony took place four months and a half after the transfer. The 97 type fighter was demonstrated as an attraction. This, the largest airfield in the East at that time, was named Tama Air Field. The Air Inspection Department, the Meteorology Department and the Service School shared this airfield.



Fig.269 Commemorative picture to popularize aviation, taken before an aircraft boarding (Army Air Service School, 1944 (Showa 19)).

42.2 The Imperial Army's Air Inspection Department

After the Japanese Navy defeat at the Battle of Midway, the US forces mounted an aggressive counterattack and the Japanese Army restructured its surface and air weapons administrative organizations on October 15, 1942 (Showa 17). The Air Technologies Research Laboratory was assigned narrower air related projects while the army's Air Inspection Department took over broader tests and inspections on the machinery and materials of planes from the aforesaid Laboratory. As the scope of the Air Experimentation Department greatly expanded, new organization became actually.

The role of the Air Experimentation Department of the Inspection Department after reorganization was the trial manufacturing, performance testing and practicability testing of newly introduced aircraft air weapons and other hardware. Performance tests on foreign aircraft were also run. Imported or captured German Messerschmitt, Douglas DC and Seversky, Curtiss P-40, Buffalo, Hawker Hurricane, etc. were tested.



Fig.270 Former Japanese Army barracks.



Fig.271 Former Japanese Army hangar.

The Air Inspection Department was a military organization while at the same time a governmental department, so many civilians worked at the facility. About 3,500 service and non-service personnel worked at the facility. Only male employees worked in the Inspection Department's air experimentation sections because of those sections' close linkage to the military system. However many females worked in the airframe, engine, and materials sections. On the day of capitulation, August 15, 1945 (Showa 20), all inspection activity ceased and postwar management began. On August 29, the Inspection Department was dissolved by the order of the Air Headquarters.



Fig. 272 Former Japanese Army control tower.



Fig. 273 Former Japanese Army Air Inspection Department .



Fig. 274 Kofuiwa (Rock named Kofu). On April 10, 1944, Emperor Hirohito visited the Army Air Inspection Department to inspect new combat aircraft and to raise force morale. The Kofuiwa (Rock named Kofu) commemorates the Emperor's visit.