

REPORT OF PRELIMINARY INSPECTION OF PROPOSED
USAAF AIRFIELDS AT SRIMANGAL, TILAGAON, PATHARKANDI AND LALAGHAT

The following paragraphs describe an initial investigation. of the above four new airfield sites, as ordered by the Eastern District Engineer, for the purpose of determining location and availability of Hq for engineering personnel. transportation requirements, and other necessary information with regard to future construction:

1. GENERAL:

a) Construction Agencies - At present, the proposed airfields at Srimangal and Tilagaon have been allocated to the C.R.E. No.2, Lt. Col. Chevis; with Hq at Agartala. Lt. Col. Chevis, commands an airfield construction. regiment and plans to assign one work section, under Major Talford, to the, above two airfields with. Hq. -in one of Mt. Godwin-Smith's bungalows, near Shamshernagar R.R. Station. Since this location is the only. feasible spot fit for use as Hq, it is planned to locate the Resident Engineers' S.O.S. Hq in this area with the British. No British army personnel are yet on the site, and no definite date could be given as to when actual construction would start. Shamshernager is approximately 16. miles from Tilagaon, 24 miles from Srimangal, and 40 miles from Patharkandi by automobile road. The C.R.E. No. 2 has just taken over from the C.P.W.D., and arrangements are, being made for transport, cement, bricks, R.R. wagons, etc. Surveys and site plans will have to be completed before actual construction can start.

Patharkandi and Lalaghat airfields are under the C.R.E. No.-118, Lot. Col. Carroll, R.E., with Hq at Silchar. _ However, at present, construction responsibility for Patharkandi has been delegated to the Garrison Engineer, Capt. Goymer, at Badarpur. The latter stated that if Patharkandi were to be changed to a pukka USAAF type heavy bomber field, his small staff., already over-taxed, would be unable to cope with the job. Lt. Col. Carroll also intimated that Patharkandi would probably be transferred to C.R.E. No. 2 before. Final orders for construction came through from GHQ. At any rate, a definite and stable policy should be adopted before this field is placed under construction, if possible.

b) Communications – Airfield locations, with the exception of Srimangal, with respect to railroads are good. They are all served by the Bengal and Assam Rly (meter gauge) line between Akhaura and Silchar. From Badarpur a branch line runs north into central and NE Assam, and from Akhaura a line runs NW into western Assam and south to Chittagong. A fair automobile road connects Silchar to Sylhet and Agartala, from which access roads lead to all four airfields.

Since this section of Assam is more or less isolated, as far as road traffic is concerned, from the rest of India, it is anticipated that supplies will be brought in by rail, and that heavy road traffic will be between railheads and airfields only. The extent of road traffic between airfields should be estimated so that a road reconnaissance can be made to determine the extent of road reconstruction required. Most of the connecting roads are dirt or shingle and built for one-way

traffic only; the shoulders are sandy clay and would be useless for passing during the monsoon. Tarmac or water-bound macadam will be necessary for roads to be used in the wet season. A great many small span bridges will have to be reinforced and widened.

c) Labor Supply - A difference of opinion exists between various tea garden managers; some say labor will be hard to find, and others are assured that there is an abundance.

d) Mechanical Equipment - At present, there is a scarcity of steam rollers and concrete mixers. A large portion of the new concrete runway at Sylhet was hand-mixed. The fair weather strip at Patharkandi was being compacted by two-ton concrete rollers pulled by gangs of forty coolies. Elsewhere, elephants have been employed to compact the sub-soil. Bullocks could be used to pull six or eight-ton concrete rollers, giving the same effect as a sheepfoot roller.

e) Materials - The Garrison Engineer, Badarpur, believes that there is a sufficient supply of cement available, but that transportation may be a bottle-neck, The presence of river transportation will help relieve the railroad, but an adequate supply of trucks must be maintained to haul from the river to the airfield sites. Sand is available in quantity along with river shingle. Laterite is present in the hills near Patharkandi. An abundant supply of water is also available. Burnt bricks are scarce, and hutted accommodation will probably be almost entirely of bamboo chattai construction.

2. SRIMANGAL (Fighter satellite):

a). Location - 7 Miles south of Srimangal R.R. Station, in Kajurichara Tea Garden. owned by the Consolidated Tea & Lands Co., Ltd., and managed by Mr. Innis, assisted by Mt. Dickson.

b). Elevation and Topography - Approximately 200' above sea level, on tea and meadow land, sandy clay with good bearing, level and well drained.

c). Camouflage Possibilities - Sufficient shade trees and brush growth exist for limited natural camouflage in possible dispersal and domestic areas.

d) Water Supply - Tea estate uses a tube well, but relatively high water table would permit use of open wells through most of the dry season. Available supply is ample.

e) Nearest Available Railhead - 7 Miles north of site, B & A Rly, main line, meter gauge, track Akhaura to Silchar.

f) Remarks - There are three available runway sites, two of which are in tea land now under cultivation, and which lie in a north and south direction., The tea land is cut by numerous deep drainage ditches which would require the construction of long culverts under the runway to avoid obstructing the drainage system required by adjacent cultivated tea land. In addition, a number of shade trees would have to be cut down and a vast number of tea bushes destroyed and paid for at app. Rs.5/- per bush. The third site lies in high meadow land and some tea land in a NE

by SW direction; flying gaps are clear at both ends; and drainage is adequate. The west side is bordered by shade trees and tea land under cultivation, part of which would make a good dispersion area. This latter site is recommended in preference to the other two locations. Considerable work will have to be done on access and interior roads and small span bridges to accommodate 6 x 6 and trailer trucks. Existing access roads are not serviceable during the monsoon and are all built for one-way traffic. No work, either layout or construction, has been started on this field.

3. TILAGION (Two squadron heavy bomber):

- a). Location - 2 miles north of Tilagaon R.R. Station in a tea garden now under cultivation.
- b). Elevation and Topography - Approximately 200' above sea level on high tea land, well drained.
- c). Water Supply - Adequate from all reports but may require tube wells about 200' deep.
- d). Nearest Available Railhead - 2 miles south of site, B & A Rly meter gauge, main line from Akhaura to Silchar.
- e). Remarks - Unable to make close inspection due to lack of transportation and guide. Mr. Godwin-Smith, manager. of a neighboring tea garden and who worked with the original British siting board, stated that it is one of the best sites in that region. A considerable number of tea bushes will have to be destroyed. Access roads are fair but built for one-way traffic only. A few small bridges must be widened and reinforced for heavy traffic. No work, either layout or construction, has been started on this field.

4- PATHARKANDI (Two squadron Heavy Bomber)

- a) Location - Existing RAF fair-weather strip 2000 yds. Long is 1 mile NW of Patharkandi R.R. Station. An earlier surveyed site and the one which should be used for the new USAAF airfield is ½ mile south of Patharkandi; available level ground is app. 2800 yds long NE by SW and 600 yds wide.
- b) Elevation and Topography – Both sites are approximately 200' above sea level on level clay paddy land. The existing RAF runway was partially under water during the last monsoon and, considering the fact that the rainfall was less than normal, it is considered that this location would be a poor risk for a pukka all-weather airfield. The other site is about 9' higher and above flood level. A small stream or nullah, about 8' deep and 8' wide at the bottom, winding across the runway site some 600 yds from the south end of the strip, would have to be diverted to the nearby river and the old stream bed filled. This represents no major construction problem and is perfectly feasible. _Drainage for this site can easily be effected which would be exceedingly difficult for the RAF field due to the general low elevation.

c) Camouflage Possibilities - Natural camouflage has been effectively used for the dispersal areas of the RAF field due to the proximity of thick jungle areas adjacent to the landing strip. The other site is more open and lacks nearby jungle growth. However, a line of low hills about 1 mile from the runway site could be used effectively for domestic areas and squadron Hq offices in addition to several tree covered areas which could shelter bomb and petrol dumps. A small clump of trees and several native huts on the north end of the runway site would have to be removed to clear a flying gap.

d). Water Supply - Supply is adequate and may be furnished by open wells throughout most of the dry season, supplemented by deep or tube wells. The water table is said not to drop more than fifteen feet below ground level during the dry season.

e). Nearest Available Railhead - For the RAF field, about 4 miles SW to Langaghat or 3/4 mile east to Kanaibazar; the latter would require the construction of a R.R. bridge across the Langai River, which when flooded is app. 60' wide and 18' deep. The other site is within ½ mile of the Patharkandi R.R. Station which is on the main branch line to Karimganj, B & A Rly, meter gauge.

f). Remarks - The existing RAF fair-weather field is almost completed as a satellite for fighters or medium bombers. Its location was chosen in preference to the other higher site, because it was thought that it could be built quicker. since the higher site required diversion of the mullah. In addition no regard was paid to flooded conditions during the monsoon, since the field was to be used during the dry season only. The existing field is across the river from the main road and railroad, and the timber automobile bridge was washed away last summer; so, to provide road access, a new pukka bridge would have to be constructed across the 60' gap. Mr. Kydd, manager of the Sonakhira Tea Garden, has been placed in charge of the RAF field construction by the Garrison Engineer. He stated that there was ample labor in that region (at least 12,000 coolies) to undertake airfield construction. and that there was no food shortage. It is recommended that the new USAAF heavy bomber field be constructed on the higher site ½ mile south of Patharkandi R.R. Station. A survey has been made of this area, but no other plans or construction attempted.

5. LALAGHAT (Two squadron heavy bomber):

This is an RAF field and called Rajyeswarpur; it was not inspected due to lack of transportation. The C.R.E. No. 118; Lt. Col, Carroll, had just received a copy of a letter from Air Hq to Hq SOS stating that this field would not be turned over to the USAAF. Confirmation of this has just been received in the form of a letter copy from Hq SOS, dated 22 October 1943, to Air Hq, India. It is suggested that a possible site at Dullabchara be investigated. This is at the end of a main branch line of the B & A Rly from Karimganj and is about 10 miles SE of Patharkandi. This site was suggested by Mr. Kydd as a good location for a pukka airfield.

Signed:

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