Sitka Naval Air Station construction began in 1939, by civilian contractors - the consortium Siems Drake Puget Sound. U.S. Army Harbor Defenses, which would protect the Naval Air Station from attack, were begun by the same contractor.

The Naval Air Station was part of War Plan Orange, with bases at Sitka, Kodiak and Dutch Harbor, the first defenses on the North Pacific.

The first Army personnel arrived in 1941, among them Walter Dangel, with the 250th Coast Artillery. The Harbor Defenses were planned in three batteries each with searchlights and “Base End Stations” for aiming the big guns, giving comprehensive coverage against enemy vessels entering the Sound.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, Sitka was a potential target. The Japanese attacked and occupied islands in the Aleutians, an intended diversion from their attack at Midway Island, in June 1942. Instead the U.S. won that battle, ending Japanese naval superiority in the Pacific.

Sitka was an important waypoint for U.S. military going west for the Aleutian battles, in the summer of 1943.

The Naval Air Station, later a Naval Operating Base, was built for the PBY “Flying Boats.”

The Japonski Island Boathouse was used for repairs to smaller Navy and Army craft. A larger one was planned but never built.