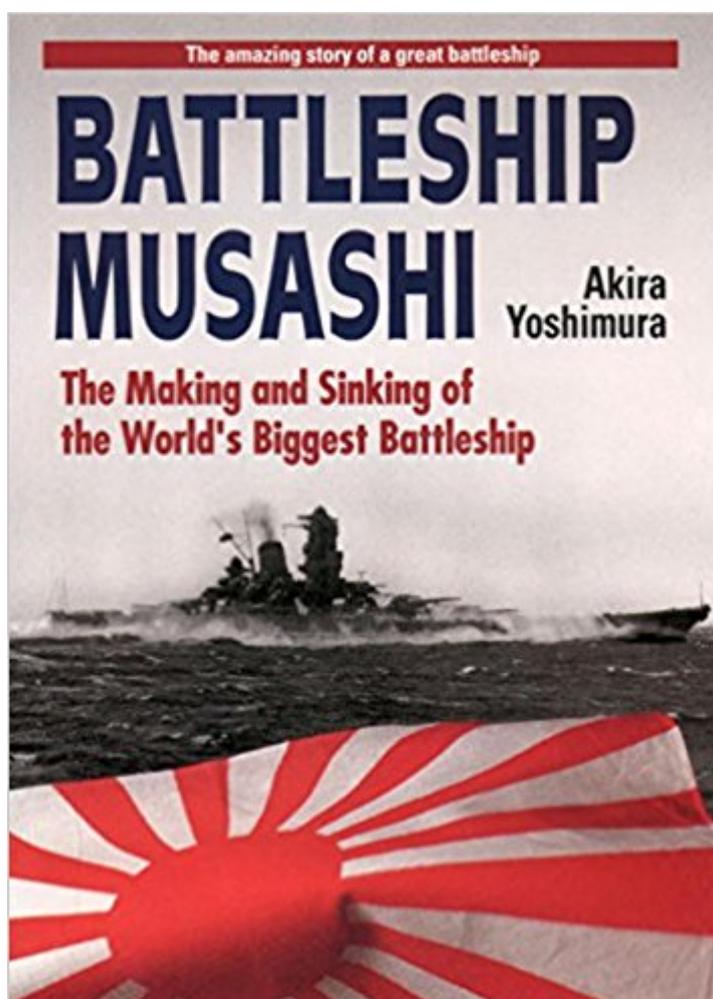


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Battleship Musashi: The Making And Sinking Of The Worlds Biggest Battleship



Synopsis

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, the man who planned the attack on Pearl Harbor, said that the three great follies of the world were the Great Wall of China, the Pyramids, and the battleship Musashi. Yamamoto understood that sheer size and firepower would not be decisive factors in the battle for naval supremacy in the Pacific. The Musashi was massive-upright it would have approached the size of the Chrysler Building. Outfitted with eighteen-inch armor plating and nine eighteen-inch guns, the largest ever mounted on a warship, the Musashi was considered by its creators to be invincible and unsinkable. Yet during its two years of active duty with the Combined Fleet, it never fired a single shot against another ship. It was sunk, as Yamamoto had predicted, by torpedoes and bombs. Akira Yoshimura's dramatic reconstruction of the birth of the Musashi portrays a nation preparing for total war. Under these extreme conditions, courage, genius, and integrity coexisted with brutality, folly, and paranoia. During the more than four years it took to build and outfit it, shipyard engineers and their Navy mentors were faced with seemingly insurmountable technical problems and plagued by natural calamities and the constant fear of espionage. The solutions they found to each successive crisis were sometimes brilliant, sometimes absurd. Battleship Musashi is a tribute to the men who achieved this engineering marvel and a testament to the excesses of bureaucratic militarism.

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Customer Reviews

Japan's leading non-fiction writer on military and naval subjects, AKIRA YOSHIMURA was born in Tokyo in 1927. His published works in Japanese include a best-selling account of the construction

and wartime role of the Zero fighter. The ship shown on the jacket is the battleship Yamato, which was identical in size and design to the Musashi. Such was the secrecy of the Musashi project that no clear photograph of the ship survived the war. (Courtesy of Shizuo Fukui)

I really enjoyed reading about the technical details involved in building this ship. It was all quite fascinating and I consumed this book over three jet-lagged nights. The Yamato class battleships were obsolete the moment they were laid down. The amount of materials and energy devoted to building these vessels would have been far better spent on 4-6 Soryu-type air craft carriers and their airwings. Fortunately for the U.S. Japan squandered a great deal of her precious resources on these dreadnoughts, even while the Japanese navy (unlike our own) was convinced that air craft carriers would be the key ships in Naval warfare. Moreover, the sinking of the HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse by land based bombers shortly after Pearl Harbor should have sent shivers down the spine of any Admiral envisioning battleships as stand alone fighting ships. The idea behind these battleships was to use their longer range fire power to fight American battlehips before our ships could get in range, but this was a highly suspect strategy. 1)It's very hard to get accurate targeting of ballistic projectiles at extreme ranges even if targeting is provided by airplane (Yamato and Musashi carried 9 each for this purpose) 2)Though heavily armored- more so than our Iowa class and South Dakota and Washington-classes- the guns were 46 cm whereas the smaller bore (40cm versus Yamato and Musashi's 46 cm guns) were 70 caliber and the penetrating power of the guns on US battleships would have been about the same as the larger bore lower caliber Japanese guns. 3)Guns on our ships were radar directed and more accurate. We could have "picked up" the Yamato's long before their aircraft spotted our ships. The "tragic" aspect for me is that her final and really only battle was futile. There was zero chance of accomplishing her mission in the face of overwhelming US Naval aviation. The ship was lost for no reason whatsoever. I have to wonder what would have happened in the Pacific if Japan had built more aircraft carriers instead of these obsolete thugs. I am glad that a good book on the Musashi has been written. In Japan, the Yamato is still famous, but almost no one has ever heard of the Musashi. The writing itself is very engaging but there are some typos and mistranslations. For example the commanding officers of the Musashi are designated Lieutenant Commanders but this is highly unlikely. Destroyers would have been commanded by officers of this rank but even Light Cruisers would have been commanded by a Commander and a capital ship- battlehips and air craft carriers- were surely all commanded by Captains. In one of the final chapters of the book the Cruiser Maya is misclassified as a destroyer (even though she was properly classed as a cruiser pages earlier). Destroyers generally had names

ending in... "Kaze" (wind)- as in Hayakaze (Fast Wind or Early Wind, depending on the character for "hayai") or ... "Shio" (current)- as in Tsuyoshio (Strong Current). These error or typos are of course minor.

this was a fascinating account of the IJN Musashi, the sister ship to the Imperial Japanese Navy Yamato. She and the Yamato were by far the largest battleships ever built, a behemoth built in complete secrecy, designed to dominate naval warfare in the pacific ocean. The Japanese knew they could not numerically outbuild the US in arms race so they built these ships with bigger/longer range guns and heavier armor to destroy enemy vessels before they could fire back, and outrun they enemy when they could not outshoot them. It's quite a story, fascinating for WWII navy buffs like me. Besides the incredible tehcnical challenges, these ships were built in total secrecy, the US had no idea of how big they really were. I enjoyed reading this book and found its factual accounting to be believable as it fit with the facts that I felt I already knew. The story told was from the Japanese perspective since it was mostly unknown to the Americans; half the book covers its design and construction. The last half of it covers the operational history and the eventual sinking by the US as time was running out for the Japanese after they lost the naval air war and had no cover in this new age of aircraft carriers. There's some B&W photos, not many of them exist as all the Japanese navy records including the plans and blueprints were destroyed by the Japanese before they surrendered. I enjoyed reading this book.

This is a short book that chronicles the amazing construction and the practically useless battle experience of the 2nd Yamato class battleship, the HIJMS Musashi. It is basically split up into two quite distinct sections. The first two thirds or so of the book is concerned with the construction of the Musashi in the Nagasaki shipyards and is told from the point of view of the senior engineers and shipyard leadership, and their Navy overseers. The story of the Musashi's construction and launch is rather amazing, especially because of the security paranoia of the Japanese during the late '30's. What struck me as an engineer in industry was just how familiar the organization and methods of the Nagasaki shipyard design offices were back then, with the notable exception that workers who made mistakes or gossiped about their job simply "disappeared" of course. How the engineers and the Japanese Navy managed to upgrade the Nagasaki facilities to build and launch the Musashi, to prevent it from careening across Nagasaki bay and beaching itself on the nearby opposite shore, and keep the construction and launching a complete secret even though it took place in the heart of major city made for some pretty absorbing reading at times. It's also filled with interesting little facts,

such as the explanation of how the caliber of a battleship's main gun determines its necessary width. Based on this the Japanese planned to beat American battleships by mounting 9 x 18.1 inch guns on the Musashi and Yamato, while the need to traverse the Panama Canal limited their American counterparts to 9 x 16 inch guns. The last third of the book was a little less strong, following the Musashi along its completely undistinguished operational career and told from the viewpoint of no one in particular. Nonetheless you get a clear picture of the highly paradoxical and at times anachronistic thinking of the Imperial Japanese Navy during WWII, a fighting force that is normally cited for being extremely efficient, effective, and innovative. Yet the nation that showed the world how to fight with aircraft carriers in the first part of the war showed none of these qualities when it came to using their giant super-battleships, ships made useless by their own early operational innovations. For the majority of the war the Yamato and Musashi sat in Truk Lagoon and then Palau doing not much of anything. Officially they were waiting for a giant decisive gun battle with the U.S. Navy, but other than occasionally running away from air raids or briefly chasing false leads about the location of the U.S. Fleet they pretty much sat around, trying not to waste fuel. At one point the Musashi was even used as a freighter with bombs, fuel and equipment lashed to the deck, making it surely their worst designed freighter in history. This unsurprisingly came to nothing however as heavy seas started moving the cargo and it had to be thrown overboard. Nearing a couple years of service in the midst of the largest theater in the largest war of human history, the largest battleship in human history had basically consumed some fuel and thrown equipment over the sides. Finally during the battle of the Philippine Seas the Yamato and Musashi get to at least try to take part in the long awaited massive gun to gun battle with the U.S. Navy. Unfortunately the Musashi gets picked off by American carrier aircraft. The ordeal of the survivors, like any group of men on a warship battered and sunk, is indeed truly harrowing. Their treatment at the hands of the Japanese government which wanted to hide the loss of the ship from the public was particularly shameful. A quick and interesting read for people who want to know about the Japanese Yamato class battleships. Due to the extreme secrecy surrounding these vessels only limited information exists and you'll have to be satisfied with mere glimpses of what the full story must have been. Expectations should also be tempered by the fact that this book is a translation from a language with zero root connection to English, so don't expect Ernest Hemingway caliber prose either. Nonetheless highly enjoyable if taken for what it is.

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