

Battleship Yamato

Of War, Beauty and Irony

Jan Morris

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- Published to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Yamato's sinking
- An extraordinary reflection on the meaning of war by one of the finest writers and historians of the 20th century
- Strikingly illustrated
- With useful diagrams, facts and figures

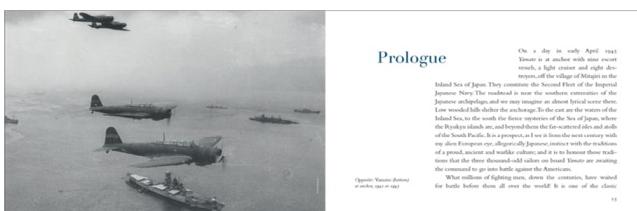
The Battleship Yamato, of the Imperial Japanese Navy, was the most powerful warship of World War II and represented the climax, as it were, of the Japanese warrior traditions of the samurai – the ideals of honour, discipline and self-sacrifice that had immemorially ennobled the Japanese national consciousness. Stoically poised for battle in the spring of 1945 – when even Japan's last desperate technique of arms, the kamikaze, was running short – Yamato arose as the last magnificent arrow in the imperial quiver of Emperor Hirohito.

Here, Jan Morris not only tells the dramatic story of the magnificent ship itself – from secret wartime launch to futile sacrifice at Okinawa – but, more fundamentally, interprets the ship as an allegorical figure of war itself, in its splendour and its squalor, its heroism and its waste. Drawing on rich naval history and rhapsodic metaphors from international music and art, **Battleship Yamato** is a work of grand ironic elegy.

"The short, illustrated book Morris has written about the Yamato is what she calls 'a reverie' on the varied emotions that war summons up...I think it's safe to say that Morris has also written a reverie on accepting the inevitability of death... This book itself signals yet another end: Certainly, it will be one of the very last books written about World War II by an author who saw active service in that war. That sobering fact only adds to the elegiac resonance of this magnificent little book." – **Maureen Corrigan**, NPR's Fresh Air.

Published to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the sinking of Yamato (7 April 2025).

Jan Morris (1926–2020) served in the 9th Queen's Royal Lancers in World War II. The author of such classics as the *Pax Britannia* trilogy and *Conundrum*, she lived in Wales and kept a replica of the Yamato on her desk. Her book *Ciao, Carpaccio! An Infatuation* is also available from Pallas Athene.



Prologue

On a day in early 1942 Yamato is at anchor with nine escort vessels in the Sasebo anchorage, off the village of Mihara in the Inland Sea of Japan. They constitute the Second Fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy. The modern battleship is the largest and most powerful Japanese warship, and we may imagine at least briefly some there. The Inland Sea is the southern arm of the Sea of Japan, where the Ryukyu islands are, and beyond them the far scattered islands and atolls of the Pacific. The Japanese have a tradition of a fierce, indomitable and warlike people, and it is to honour those traditions that the three great naval nations of the world are gathered, awaiting the command to go into battle against the Americans.

The tradition of fighting for honour, the *code of the samurai*, have waited for battle before them all over the world. It is one of the classic



BATTLESHIP YAMATO

So it goes. I think myself, though, that there is a more ambiguous, more profound suggestion to the presence of such a fleet of ships at such a time and place. There is a premonition, a sense of the imminent, perhaps I might say, that the one more is Admiral Mikawa's characteristic eighteenth-century *blockade-runner* in the *Deployment of the Yamato* (1941). The Japanese, like the British Grand Army never looked, that stood between it and the invasion of the south, the *Yamato* and the *Yamato* and the *Yamato* and the *Yamato* battleship, never looking to its war station at Scapa Flow in 1941. The *Yamato* in another thousand years.

And we are about to allude to the great alliance of the German battleship *Tirpitz* in the Norwegian Alfredsund in the cruel严寒 – snowy mountains all around, waiting and silent, the strategy of the *Yamato* and the *Tirpitz* and the *Yamato* and the *Tirpitz* and the *Yamato* to fill where the time came open her victims out at sea! Victims, cruel, but beautiful in its kind, like a tiger on a beth.

Previous page: *Landscape and the Battle of Thermopylae* (1824) by Eugène Delacroix.
Opposite: *Tirpitz* in the Norwegian winter 1941.