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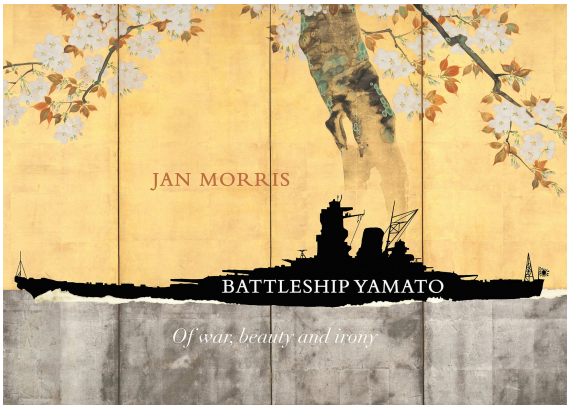


Battleship Yamato

Of War, Beauty and Irony

Jan Morris

ISBN	9781843682691
Publisher	Pallas Athene
Binding	Hardback
Territory	World
Size	135 mm x 195 mm
Pages	112 Pages
Illustrations	55 color
Name of series	Jan Morris
Price	£14.99

- 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

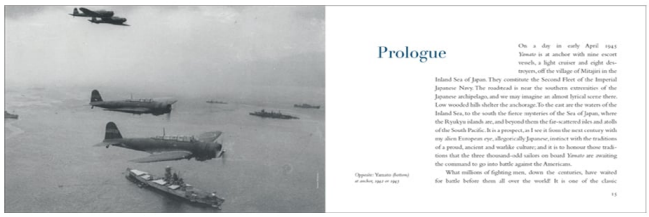
The Battleship Yamato, of the Imperial Japanese Navy, was the most powerful warship of World War II and represented the climax, as it were, of the Japanese warrior traditions of the samurai – the ideals of honour, discipline and self-sacrifice that had immemorially ennobled the Japanese national consciousness. 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 April 1945 *Yamato* is at anchor with nine escort vessels, a light cruiser and eight destroyers, off the village of Mitajiri in the Inland Sea of Japan. They constitute the Second Fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy. The roadstead is near the southern extremities of the Japanese archipelago, and we may imagine an almost lyrical scene there. Low wooded hills shelter the anchorage. To the east are the waters of the Inland Sea, to the south the fierce mysteries of the Sea of Japan, where the Ryukyu islands are, and beyond them the far-scattered isles and atolls of the South Pacific. It is a prospect, as I see it from the next century with my alien European eye, allegorically Japanese, instinct with the traditions of a proud, ancient and warlike culture; and it is to honour those traditions that the three thousand-odd sailors on board *Yamato* are awaiting the command to go into battle against the Americans.

What millions of fighting men, down the centuries, have waited for battle before them all over the world! It is one of the classic

(Opposite: Yamato (bottom) at anchor, 1941 or 1945

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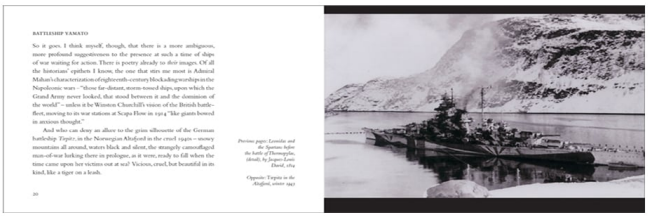
BATTLESHIP YAMATO

So it goes. I think myself, though, that there is a more ambiguous, more profound suggestiveness to the presence at such a time of ships of war waiting for action. There is poetry already to their images. Of all the historians' epithets I know, the one that stes me most is Admiral Mahan's characterization of eighteenth-century blockading warships in the Napoleonic wars – "those far-distant, storm-tossed ships, upon which the Grand Army never looked, that stood between it and the dominion of the world" – unless it be Winston Churchill's vision of the British battle-fleet, moving to its war stations at Scapa Flow in 1914 "like giants bowed in anxious thought."

And who can deny an allure to the grim silhouette of the German battleship *Tirpitz*, in the Norwegian Altafjord in the cruel 1940s – snowy mountains all around, waters black and silent, the strangely camouflaged man-of-war lurking there in prologue, as it were, ready to fall when the time came upon her victims out at sea? Vicious, cruel, but beautiful in its kind, like a tiger on a leash.

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Previous pages: Leonidas and his Spartans at Thermopylae, the battle of Thermopylae, (detail), by Jacques-Louis David, 1814

Opposite: Tirpitz in the Altafjord, winter 1943

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