

The World's Biggest Battleships!



Yamato on her trials, October 1941, off Bungo Strait

The WWII Japanese battleships Yamato and Masashi were each 72,000 tons—twice the size of the biggest US (Iowa Class) battleships (35,000 tons). They fired a shell (18.1" [460 mm] in diameter, 3200 pounds)—50% heavier than anything the US had. They simply dwarfed the US warships of the day! (The German Bismarck in comparison was 50,000 tons).*

What is most remarkable about these was their relatively routine sinking by the US Navy. There were so many US Navy dive bombers over the Masashi that air-traffic control became a serious problem. The US had *hundreds* of dive-bombers waiting to dive and drop 500-1000-pound bombs on it, while US Navy torpedo planes put 19 torpedoes into it. At least four torpedoes went into its relatively lightly armored bottom because the thing had rolled and...well, we still had *lots more torpedoes*.

The Yamato met a similar fate from *386 US Navy aircraft*. Remarkably, the US lost just 12 aircraft in sinking this giant battleship.

The Yamato (also spelled Yamoto) and the Masashi (also spelled Musashi) were to have three sister ships as well. One was used for needed spare parts and never completed, one was never begun and the other, after the Japanese lost four carriers at the battle of Midway was converted into an aircraft carrier called the Shinano. Before that, the Japanese had planned to use 20" [510 mm] guns on the behemoth. Its shells would have been twice the weight of the biggest US shells. This Japanese super-carrier Shinano at 72,000 tons, would have been more than twice the size of the USN Enterprise (the biggest US carrier at the time), but was sunk by four well-placed torpedoes from the USN Archerfish submarine on 29Nov1944 while being transferred from the building slips to the outfitting docks. There was no battle; it was full of construction workers and laborers and had no watertight doors or weapons at the time, but the Shinano was, or soon would have become, the largest warship ever floated.

*Some readers have disputed these exact figures, and indeed, sources disagree. Battleships routinely falsified specifications due to treaty limits, psychological warfare, secrecy, and just plain ignorance as to the true specifications--Battleships, for example, are exceedingly hard to weigh. The Japanese super-battleships were an extremely well-guarded secret and complete documents have never been found. EMJ