Reader comments

BATTLESHIPS

Being a lifelong student of military and naval history and very familiar with naval World War II history, I read with interest the article called “Battleships.”¹ I understand the main points of the article. An error exists in the discussion of the history of the battleship. To some like me, it is glaring. Per the article:

Despite their vulnerability, battleships continued to be built. The Japanese constructed the largest: the *Yamato* class. These monsters, including *Yamato*, *Musashi*, and *Shinano*, were 839 feet long, displaced 72,000 tons, and sported 18-inch guns capable of hurling 3200-pound shells over 26 miles. By the end of the war, all three had been destroyed thanks to action by either carrier-based planes (*Yamato* and *Musashi*) or submarines (*Shinano*). Only *Yamato* succeeded in sinking opposing warships.¹

There were actually only two monster Japanese battleships, the *Yamato* and the *Musashi* (Figure 1). The *Shinano* was laid down as a battleship of this series of ships (the *Yamato* class) and then converted to an aircraft carrier during its construction phase after the Japanese’s disastrous loss of aircraft carriers in June 1942 at the Battle of Midway. (Midway is the subject of a major new motion picture. By the way, during a 5-minute span of time, the course of the battle turned in

Figure 1. *Yamato* (left) and *Musashi* (right) moored in Truk Lagoon sometime during 1943. Photo: Naval History & Heritage Command.

our favor, as did the way toward ultimate victory in the Pacific.) *Shinano* was sunk prior to its completion while transporting rocket-powered kamikaze-piloted Ohka bombs 10 days after her commissioning. Figure 2 shows the *Shinano* afloat and underway in late 1944. She was sunk shortly thereafter by the American submarine USS *Archerfish*.

Some may think trivial details like this do not matter. Maybe, but then I suppose no more than any other inaccurate facts.

Actually, the conversion of the *Shinano* from a battleship-*pref* to an aircraft carrier plays to the author’s point even more. The change in plans for what this vessel was to become was a result of the Japanese understanding that what they really needed was more critical aircraft carriers and fewer vulnerable battleships!

Figure 2. Japanese aircraft carrier *Shinano* underway during her sea trials. Photo: Public domain.

1. Michel J. Battleships. *Proc (Bayl Univ Med Cent)*. 2019;32(4): 634–635. doi:10.1080/08998280.2019.

MICHAEL OPATOWSKY, MD
Lieutenant Colonel, US Air Force (retired)
Neuroradiology, Baylor University Medical Center
Dallas, Texas
mjorad@aol.com