

# Museum Report

By Kay Nishimura

## A SUPER BATTLESHIP'S HOMETOWN MUSEUM

The city of Kure, with a population approaching 250,000, has a beautiful natural harbor on Japan's Seto Inland Sea, about 25 minutes southeast of Hiroshima by train. Well known as a naval center, the city is also famous throughout Japan as the home of Sempuku sake. While artifacts suggest the Kure area has been continuously inhabited since the Jomon period—13,000 to 300 BC—it didn't become a population center until 1886 when Japan's Meiji government established a naval base there.

One can never get too far from Kure's marine history, and this is evident in the city's main attraction, the Kure Maritime Museum, also known as the *Yamato* Museum. Large seems to be synonymous with Kure maritime productions. Today the city manufactures some of the world's largest ships, and during World War II Kure Kaigun Kosho—the naval shipyard's dry dock—was birthplace to the *Yamato*, the lead ship of a planned class of four super battleships. When she and her sisters were under construction in 1941, contemporary battleships displaced between 38,000 and 52,600 tons. The *Yamato* class, however, displaced between 69,100 and 72,800 tons. The ships' massive 18-inch main armament exceeded those mounted by any other navy's battleships throughout the war. Of contemporary World War II warships, only the United States' *Lexington*-class aircraft carriers and the slightly later-built *Iowa*-class battleships exceeded their length.

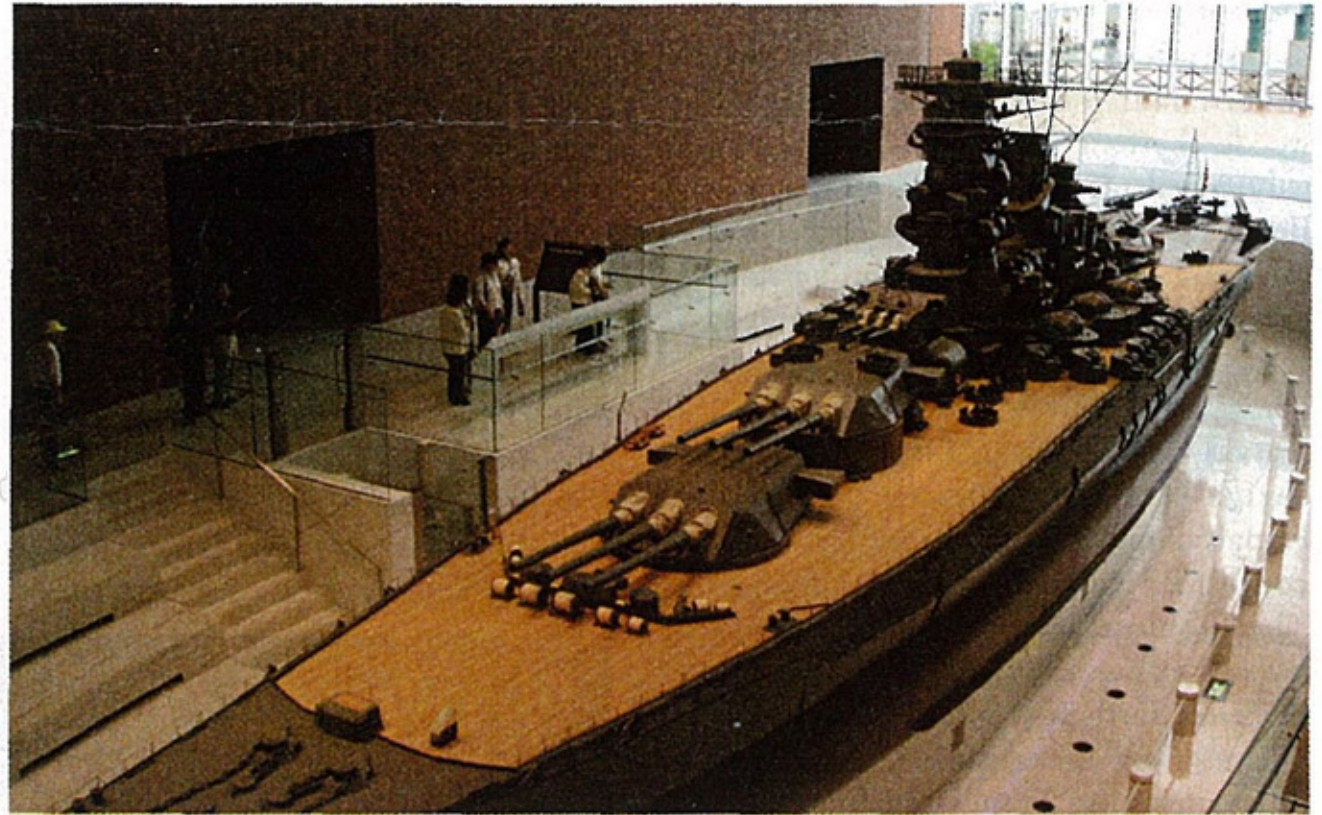
Opened in 2005, the \$65 million *Yamato* Museum is focused on a symbol of Japan's imperialist past and has been fairly successful despite the nation's pacifist predilection. The museum succeeds at this in part by conveying the history of Kure, although the port was centered on the construction of the battleship, and by imparting the "importance of peace and the splendor of science and technology to the future."

Visitors enter the four-story museum into an atrium featuring a one-tenth-scale model of the the *Yamato* that is 85.5 feet long. It is as accurate as possible, based on extant drawings, photographs,

and underwater surveys of the sunken ship. While the model is the focal point of the exhibition, perhaps a more powerful counterpoint is the display of handwritten wills by some of the 2,475 sailors who died on board the warship.

An adjacent room on the lower floor features large World War II relics.

them a hydrofoil ship and research submarine. The most historic, however, is an anchor from the battleship *Mutsu*, which accompanied the *Yamato* as part of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto's Main Body during the Battle of Midway in June 1942. The *Mutsu* was sunk by a mysterious internal explosion one year




YAMATO MUSEUM

The focal point of Kure's \$65 million museum is the one-tenth-scale model of the Imperial Japanese Navy's *Yamato*. The 85.5-foot-long "miniature" is as accurate as possible, incorporating details taken from underwater surveys of the sunken original.

Among them are a carrier-based Zero Type 62 fighter, a Special Attack—kamikaze—midget submarine (*Kairyu*), and a prototype *Kaiten* Special Attack weapon. Also on display are a periscope, a 20-cm gun barrel from the cruiser *Aoba*, and 18-inch shells manufactured for the *Yamato*'s guns. Another gallery features the history of Kure, the development of Japan's marine technology, and additional artifacts retrieved from the *Yamato*. The third floor is focused on current shipbuilding technology, with a ship-handling simulator, a hydrodynamic test tank, and hands-on exhibits. Unfortunately for English-speaking visitors, little information about the artifacts is provided in their language. Introductions to the various museum sections are also poorly translated.

The museum grounds feature some interesting artifacts and exhibits, among

later. The *Yamato* Wharf, adjacent to the waterfront, is a full-size depiction of the great ship's port-side main deck, done in wood decking with stone accents.

The museum, five minutes by taxi from the Kure Railroad Station, is open from 0900-1800 Wednesday through Monday for most of the year, and every day from 21 July to 31 August. Admission is 500 yen (about \$4.70). For more information, visit the museum's Web site at [www.yamato-museum.com/en/](http://www.yamato-museum.com/en/). 

Mr. Nishimura was born in Seattle, Washington, and moved to Japan to live with his grandparents in Hiroshima when he was nine years old. In 1943 he was drafted into the Imperial Japanese Navy while holding dual Japanese and American citizenship. He was assigned as an ensign to the *Kamikaze Tokko Kai* for the defense of Okinawa when the war ended. After the war he established an import/export business.