

THE MONTANA CLASS: THE IOWA CLASS'S PROPOSED SUCCESSOR

IN MAY 1942, THE US NAVY ordered construction of a new battleship class intended to overpower the largest battleships of the German and Japanese navies. The Montana class of battleships was designed to have a standard displacement of sixty-three thousand tons, with a maximum of nearly seventy-one thousand tons—thirteen thousand tons heavier than the Iowa class. Montana-class ships would have carried a complement of twelve sixteen-inch guns—up from the nine such guns carried by the Iowa class—and their hulls would have been protected by 16.1 inches of steel plate, while their turrets would have been shielded by 22.5 inches of armor. By way of comparison, the thickness of the armor on the Iowa-class ships' hulls and turrets was 12.2 inches and 18.4 inches respectively. The result would have been a ship that clearly outmatched even the so-called super-battleships of the Japanese Yamato class, each of which carried nine eighteen-inch guns. A slight tradeoff for the Montana class's heavy armor and armaments would have been a somewhat lower top speed than that of the Iowa class—a maximum of 28 knots instead of the Iowa class's 33 knots.

Although the Montana class was ordered in 1942, space at the shipyards was allocated to Iowa-class battleships, which were already under construction, and Essex-class aircraft carriers, which were considered a higher priority. In June 1942, after the Battle of Midway convinced many military analysts that battleships were no longer the capital ships of the fleet, construction of the Montana class was suspended, and in July 1943 the class was canceled.