



Held to a Higher Standard: The Downfall of Admiral Kimmel (World War II)

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In the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Admiral Husband Kimmel was relieved of command of the United States Pacific Fleet and forced into retirement. Eight official investigations were conducted to determine his accountability for the attack. These investigations produced mixed and often contradictory findings. Though he was never brought to court-martial, accusations of dereliction of duty damaged his reputation considerably. Ultimately, he was one of only two World War Two flag officers not to be retired at the highest rank held during the war; the other was Lieutenant General Walter Short, the Army's Hawaiian commander at the time of the attack. In contrast, only nine hours after the Pearl Harbor attack, General Douglas MacArthur suffered a similar crushing surprise defeat in the Philippines despite his knowledge that the Japanese had initiated hostilities. Yet, he became a national war hero. The differing treatment accorded Admiral Kimmel compared to General MacArthur stands as a lesson on biased judgement. Today, military commanders in the Global War on Terrorism may find themselves in circumstances similar to either of these two commanders. Knowledge of their situations may help today's commanders avoid similar pitfalls, or may prevent comparable unbalanced treatment.

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