

A Defense of Admiral Kimmel: A Critical Inquiry of Responsibility

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Photo # NH 82800 Admiral Husband E. Kimmel in 1941



Source: history.navy.mil

Background

- December 7, 1941
- Responsibly
 - Who's to blame?
- Nine Investigations
 - No conclusions
- Magic
- Major Players



Source: history.navy.mil

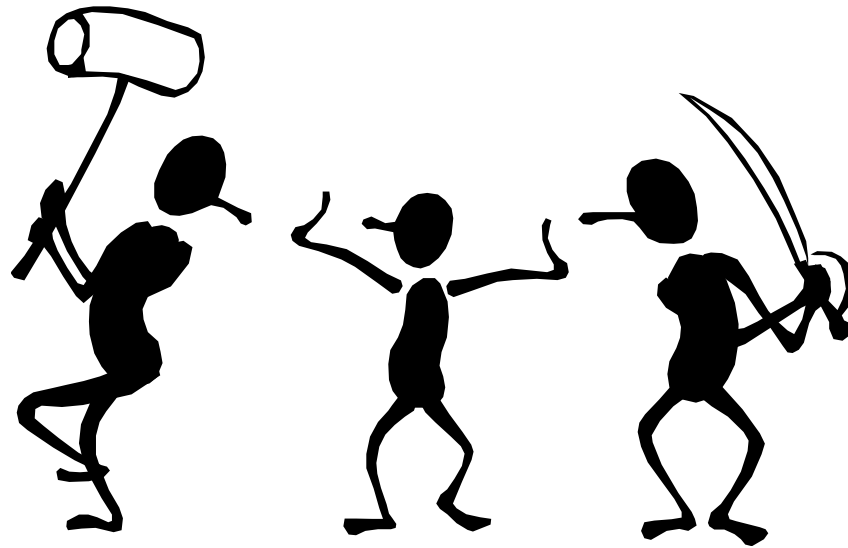
Magic

- **1941**
- **War Warnings**
- **Limited Knowledge**
- **December 6, 1941**
 - “Pilot”
- **December 7, 1941**
 - “Delivery”



Three Major Players

- Admiral Kimmel
- Admiral Stark
- General Marshall



Thesis

- Studying the discussions of the intercepted messages and their appearance in the reports within the various investigations provides valuable insights into the question of responsibility, namely the dissolution of responsibility on the part of Admiral Kimmel.

Investigations

- Knox
- Roberts Commission
- Hart
- Naval Court of Inquiry and Army Pearl Harbor Board
- Clarke and Clausen
- Hewitt
- Joint Congressional Committee

Photo # 80-G-19940 USS Nevada beached at Pearl Harbor, 7 Dec. 1941



Source: history.navy.mil

Roberts Commission



- **Stark** – “The Chief of Naval Operations fulfilled his command responsibility by issuing a warning and by giving a direct order to the commander in chief, Pacific Fleet.” Report of the Roberts Commission, Joint Congressional Committee on Pearl Harbor Attack, Part 39, 19.
- Placed responsibility for the surprise squarely on the shoulders of Kimmel and Short.
- Gave the Japanese no credit for the attack

Naval Court of Inquiry

- Gave Japanese Credit
- Placed no responsibility
- Exonerated Kimmel
- Blamed Stark for a failure of keeping Kimmel informed:

It is a prime obligation of Command to keep subordinate commanders, particularly those in distant areas, constantly supplied with information. To fail to meet this obligation is to commit a military error.

It is a fact that Admiral Stark, as Chief of Naval Operations and responsible for the operation of the Fleet, and having important information in his possession during this critical period, especially on the morning of 7 December, failed to transmit this information to Admiral Kimmel, thus depriving the latter of a clear picture of the existing Japanese situation as seen in Washington. Report of the Naval Court of Inquiry, 318.



Source: history.navy.mil

Joint Congressional Committee

- **Majority Opinion**
 - Blamed Kimmel – failed to prepare adequately
 - Small blame rested in the War and Navy Departments.
- **Minority Opinion**
 - Exonerated Kimmel
 - Failure to inform caused the success of the attack.

Conclusions

- Stark and Marshall could have warned Kimmel of an imminent attack.
- The difference it could make
 - Kimmel wrote in his book, “had we had as much as two hours warning a full alert of plans and guns would have greatly reduced the damage...The great intangible, the element of surprise, would have been denied.”

Conclusions Continued

- Skill of the Japanese
- The U.S. had a small chance of being prepared, and it is here that responsibility must lie.
- Therefore, the officials in Washington who knew of the delivery and pilot messages failed to quickly inform Kimmel and thus are responsible.

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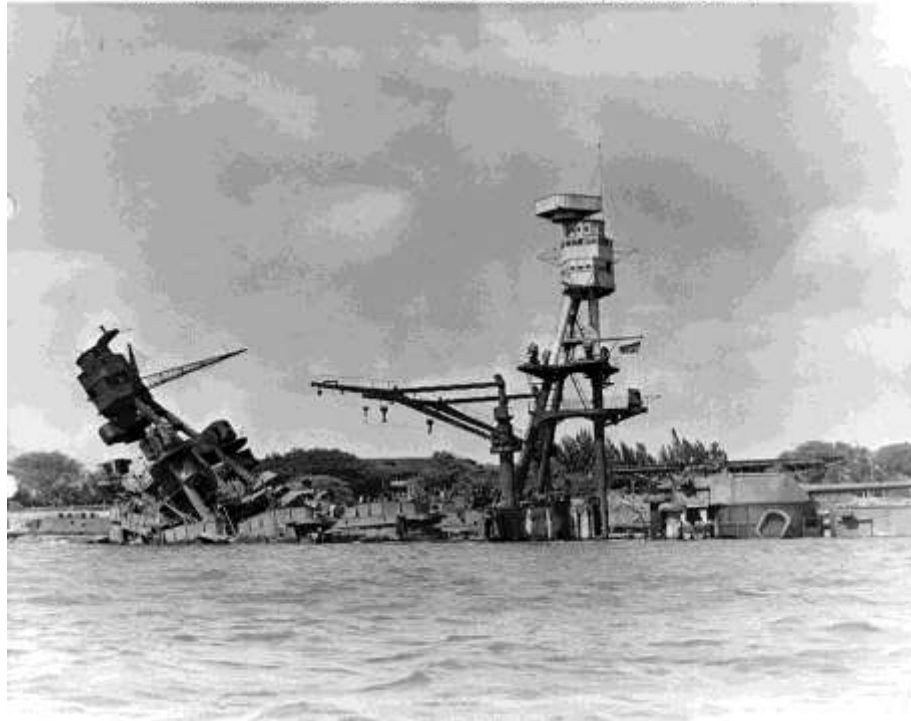
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Photographs

Naval History & Heritage, www.hitsory.navy.mil

Questions?

Photo # NH 64473 Wreck of USS Arizona, at Pearl Harbor, 12 December 1941



Source: history.navy.mil

Thank you!

- Dr. Messenger
- Duncan Harris
- Julianne Gern