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The University of Dayton

News Release

Nov. 12, 1991
Contact: Dick Kubik

WAR WITH JAPAN WAS NO SURPRISE TO ALERT NEWS MAGAZINE READERS IN 1941

DAYTON, Ohio -- If some American military leaders had read the major news magazines carefully during the summer and autumn of 1941--and paid attention to the publications' warnings--they would have been better prepared when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, says Leroy V. Eid, professor of history at the University of Dayton.

Eid read issues of Time, Life, Newsweek, and U.S. News for the months before Dec. 7, 1941, and he found they contained many articles outlining Japanese unhappiness with American actions. The news weeklies pictured President Franklin D. Roosevelt preparing for war with Germany but meeting resistance from American isolationists, Eid explains.

"They showed, at the same time, FDR moving to a complete embargo of oil against Japan, and they portrayed that embargo as an explosive element," says Eid.

In July, U.S. News warned that a complete oil embargo was likely to force "an unwanted conflict," and Time declared that Japan "was ready for adventure."

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Speculation about an upcoming war and how American forces would cope with such a war intensified that fall. In its Nov. 28 issue, U.S. News devoted two pages to "Preparation of Navy for Trouble in Pacific."

In its Nov. 17 issue, Newsweek stated that "a high official of our government makes this stark analysis of the situation in the Far East: 'The chances of our having trouble with the Japanese are nine in 10.' By trouble he meant war."

As Dec. 7 drew nearer, the news magazines judged war to be at least a 50-50 possibility, but more generally they quoted 10-1 odds for war soon, according to Eid.

"As agenda setters to John Q. Public, the time frame of the news weeklies should have allowed the average reader in late 1941 to conclude that war indeed could very well break out within days," he says. "Pearl Harbor was unexpected, but war with Japan should have been no great surprise."

For interviews, call Leroy Eid at (513) 229-2825.