

The Need for Physical Fitness

Large numbers of pupils now enrolled in high schools will enter into service in the armed forces and wartime industry in the immediate future. In addition to the boys who will be called to some form of service, it has been estimated that by the end of 1943, 6,000,000 women will be employed in war production, many of whom will be drawn from the high school age group. These youth must be fit in order to render effective service. They must be fit not only from the standpoint of technical skill and morale, but also physically fit, which means that they must have the strength, skill, stamina and endurance required for active service and hard work.

Army and Navy officers have stated that large numbers of the young men inducted into military service whose physical examinations reveal no serious physical defects, lack development, skills, strength and endurance to such a degree that the program of military training is retarded for several months while the recruits are being built up physically.

It is common knowledge among physical education instructors in high schools and colleges that large numbers of their male students are weak, have poor coordination, cannot climb a rope, carry a burden equal to their own weight, or vault out of a trench the height of their chests. The poor physical condition of the majority of American young people is a serious handicap in training soldiers, sailors and airmen, and interferes with the maximum industrial and agricultural production.

The Nature of Physical Fitness

A person who is physically fit for military or naval service must be capable of maintaining sustained effort with a maximum of speed and skill. This means that one must have strength, stamina, endurance, and good coordination. Speed, agility and flexibility in movement are important factors in skill.

There are several conditions that affect the development and maintenance of a desirable level of physical fitness. Participating regularly in a rational program of physical education has been demonstrated to be one of the most important elements that contributes to physical fitness. Other significant factors that influence physical fitness are physical defects, communicable disease, accidents, nutrition, personal health habits, and environmental conditions.

The development of physical fitness through the use of physical education activities demands vigorous participation over protracted periods of time. An individual must press his effort until it hurts. This means that he must not stop at the first sign of fatigue, but continue his exertions until he is tired.

Preparation for service during war times demands that boys must learn to swim long distances while fully clothed and carrying equipment; they must be able to keep themselves afloat for many hours. Arm and shoulder strength must be developed so that they can climb down ropes or scale walls while carrying heavy loads. The ability to take hard falls without serious injury must be developed. In combative activities it is necessary to stress delivering their energy in a quick explosive effort rather than feinting, parrying and maneuvering. Games and sports must develop a spirit of aggressive attack and ability to take physical punishment without flinching. For industrial groups, which are far greater numerically than the armed forces, physical strength and stamina are needed to speed up work for longer hours without absences which would slow production.