



Commander Gene Tunney

NAVY DATA SHOW

by W. Roy Breg

UNCLE SAM is being kept up to date on the drinking situation through data collected by a number of important military and federal agencies. One of these is the U. S. Navy. Another is the Federal Bureau of Investigation. And there are many others

For some time, I have been corresponding with the officer in charge of the Navy's physical fitness program. He is concerned, I find, about the amount of drinking that is being done by young people of high school age and older; and he believes that Allied Youth is approaching the problem of drinking through the channel that is most apt to get substantial, long-term results: *education of high school students.*

"When you are next in the vicinity of this building," wrote Commander Gene Tunney of the United States Naval Reserve, in charge of physical fitness, "drop in for an informal chat."

One day recently I did.

An armed guard checked me in outside the big Navy Building across the river from Washington, and gave me a badge. Then a guide escorted me through long corridors, up stairs and into an elevator, and finally into a large room filled with working men in the uniforms of the Navy. Tunney had a desk in a corner. Behind him, between the open windows, were the file cases whose thousands of records, compiled throughout the country, gave weight to his words.

"These records show that there is a

definite problem connected with the consumption of alcoholic beverages in high schools that needs the attention of all educators," Tunney tells me.

High School athletes in training rarely drink. There is a wholesome respect among them and among non-team members for the no-drinking rules of the coach. "But somehow or other," the Commander says, "the belief is becoming established among young high school athletes that it is quite appropriate to break training by getting intoxicated. This is a mighty destructive idea to go unchallenged."

It indicates that neither high school athletes themselves nor the rank and file of students understand why they should not use alcoholic beverages. It suggests, too, that many parents who drink moderately and have experienced no unfavorable reactions lack the facts about the effects of alcohol *on the adolescent.*

"I am convinced," says Commander Tunney, pointing behind him to the accumulation of Navy records, "that the consumption of alcohol in any form is

many times as destructive to the adolescent as to the adult. The nervous system has not fully developed until long past one's majority, and to ply it with alcohol in its formative stage merely means a curtailment of proper development, which in turn can bring about emotional instability in adult life. Boys and girls of high school age should be made acquainted with this fact, and with the added fact that ending training with an alcoholic spree is only shortening their effectiveness as athletes and as citizens."

Parents, educators and other leaders of youth who encourage young people to wait to decide about drinking until they have reached maturity, then, are taking the long view about future usefulness.

We require young people to wait before making up their minds and taking action about other matters that affect their future. The law requires them to wait for physical maturity before granting them a driving license or a piloting license. There is a national age limit which young people must reach before they can vote in federal, state, county and municipal elections. Regulations govern the age at which young people may marry, may go to work, may be held accountable before the courts for their behavior.

There is no inconsistency in asking them to wait until they have reached maturity of the nervous system to decide about drinking. There is a reasonableness about this attitude that young people can understand.

Many high school students are familiar with the policy of the Japanese in the last Olympic contests in which their swimming stars participated. Boys of 15 and 16 were specially trained to give excellent performance in the gruelling dashes . . . but they collapsed afterward, victims of deliberate over-development, physical derelicts for the remainder of life. Japanese athletic directors were known to be so desirous of winning coveted "firsts" in the international contests that they were willing to sacrifice individual performers in so far as their long-term physical condition was concerned. Contestants from other countries were quick to realize that the Jap performers were in no sense sportsmen.

American young people expect—and receive—a different attitude on the part of those who have their welfare in charge and at heart. They take for granted the no-drinking regulations of the coach during the training period. It is his job to know what is necessary to produce a strong, winning team. And the coach is holding the line for abstinence during the period in

An interview with Commander Gene Tunney, in charge of the physical fitness program for the Navy—and his advice to high school youth.

which the athletes are under his supervision. There is no doubt about this fact.

In a nationwide poll conducted by Allied Youth to find out what young people know and think about the use of beverage alcohol 90 percent of those polled, regardless of their own drinking habits, stated that athletes should not drink during the training period.

The challenging question is this: *Who is responsible for youth during the post-training period, and for those who do not participate in the athletic program of the school?*

If Commander Tunney is right in his belief that drinking before maturity means "curtailment of proper development"—and there is evidence from Dr. Haven Emerson* and other men of science to support his contention—then *educators* have an obligation to youth to be as insistent for abstinence during immaturity as *coaches* are for abstinence during training.

The reports on which Commander Tunney bases his opinion about youthful drinking are the confidential property of Uncle Sam's Navy Department. They are not available for our scanning and appraising. There are other reports, however, collected from comparable sources by accredited officials and representatives which give strong support to the opinion of the Navy officer.

The Uniform Crime Reports of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in the an-

*ALCOHOL: ITS EFFECTS ON MAN, by Haven Emerson M.D., page 100