

RENSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION
TROY, NEW YORK

December 12, 1944

Dr. Ray Palmer Baker
Dean of Students
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Troy, New York

Dear Dr. Baker:

You informed me in your letter of November 8 that, at a recent meeting, the American Council on Education went on record as recommending that veterans going to college, who have completed Army basic training, should be given credit for physical education. The Association of Colleges and Universities also gave its unanimous approval of this recommendation. You said that the members believe "that veterans who will be older than ordinary civilian students and who, in most cases, have exercised authority as commissioned officers, will resent the assumption that they are not competent to determine what exercise and recreation they should take. Since the transition will be difficult at best, the weight of opinion favors the removal of what appears to be a psychological obstacle that is likely to be unfortunate. It was recommended by these educational bodies that the recreation for veterans be placed on a purely voluntary basis."

The physical education staff at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute has advanced the following reasons why veterans should not be exempt from physical education:

A RECREATIONAL PROGRAM IS BEST SUITED FOR VETERANS

It is not the intention of the physical education staff at this Institute to give veterans a repetition of the army or navy basic physical training course. The nature of the course for veterans would be entirely recreational and the activities elective. At this Institute, where we have a variety of recreational facilities, the veterans could elect either handball, swimming, bag punching, basketball, volleyball, badminton, tennis or softball. The only request made would be that they attend regularly and at a specified time.

If the reaction of the few present veterans now taking physical education is a criterion of the attitude of future veterans, we feel that none will take a positive stand against an interesting, beneficial, compulsory recreational program such as we are in a position to give. The few members of the advance guard of veterans who are now here enjoy their activities.

VOLUNTARY VS COMPULSORY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

If physical education were placed on a voluntary basis, those veterans who need physical recreation most would not take advantage of it. Also, many of the physically fit would exercise only irregularly. We must safeguard this latter group from a sudden let down in physical training and a resultant physical softening-up. Dr. Bilik, a physician and physiotherapist, with thirty years experience in physical education, now in charge of rehabilitation in a large Army hospital, has this to say - "Under normal circumstances very few men voluntarily participate in physical education. It almost appears that you have to be born with some sort of a hormone in the body that compels you to exercise. I have never been successful in inducing anyone to adhere to constant physical education."

LACK OF TRAINING IN PHYSICAL SKILLS

Those veterans who were in college before going into the service had a "skills" program there. The majority of veterans,