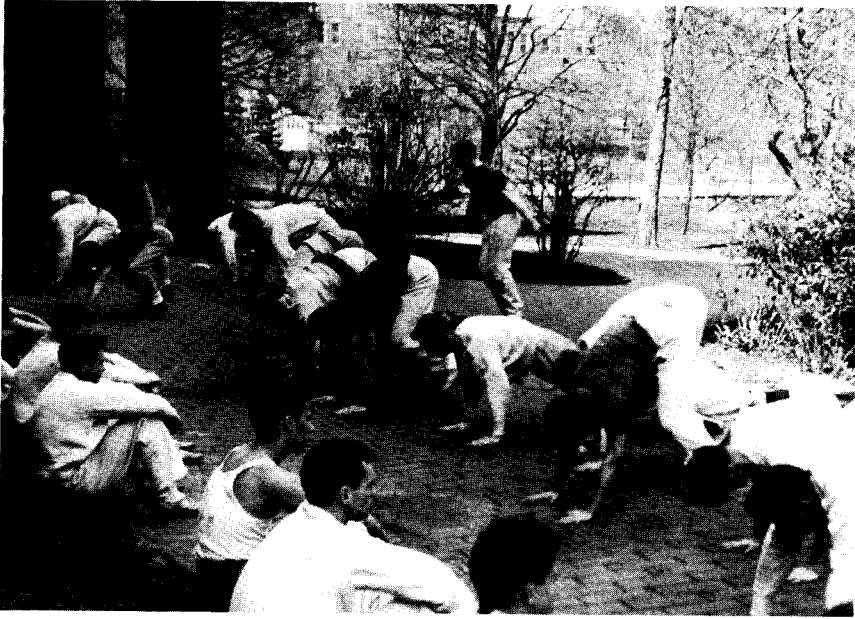


PHYSICAL TRAINING



Webb Institute of Naval Architecture Archives

The hated strength test was especially difficult at Webb Institute, where the trainees doing squat thrusts had to perform them on a brick pavement. Other trainees counted how many were completed in one minute.

1943 and the sixteen-week tests were administered near the end of October.

V-12 Bulletin No. 51, issued July 23, 1943, set the standard that apprentice seamen with the lowest 30 percent of all the scores for the unit were to be considered as "falling below the established standards" and were to be "reassigned to the basic training program until they meet requirements." Thus, no matter how well they performed in those tests, the lowest 30 percent were destined to return to the basic program. The possibility of escaping from basic was a powerful incentive to all of the V-12s to try harder on the next round of tests. A later V-12 Bulletin set the standard for avoiding a repeat of the basic program at a score of fifty. This permitted 95 percent or more to move into the maintenance program.

Sharp improvements in V-12 strength test scores are indicated by those reported from St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa. The entering July 1943 average score was forty-seven points, which by the September test had risen to fifty-five points. By the end of October St. Ambrose's average had climbed to fifty-seven.

The St. Ambrose *Sea Breeze* reported that a memorandum from Ninth

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Naval District headquarters stated that the district average in July was 45.7, which by October had risen to 59.3. The highest V-12 score in the Ninth Naval District was 71.4 (Peru State Teachers) and the lowest 52.2. The *Sea Breez* noted with chagrin that "Of 48 schools in this District, only eight schools had a lower October average than St. Ambrose!"

By the summer of 1944 the *Sea Breez* announced that Company Three had placed first in the most recent strength test "with a staggering average of 70.1. Second Company gained second place with 68.4 and Company One trailed with 67.8."

St. Ambrose trainee Johnny Longsdorf was generally the leader of his unit, scoring 81.8 in September and 95.0 in June. In the June 1944 test second and third places scored 89.0 and 88.0, respectively. It was noted that of the St. Ambrose trainees "only ten men could top 80.0, but a large number went over the 70.0 mark."

School newspapers took great pride in the strength test feats of their trainees. At the University of California, for instance, *The Spyglass* of May 13, 1944, proudly noted that Marine Private Philip H. Skarin had racked up a 93.2 score in the strength test. He scored 100 percent in sit-ups (205 sit-ups), push-ups (89), and squat jumps (127), while scoring forty-three out of a possible forty-eight squat thrusts for an 87 percent score and twenty-two out of a possible thirty-seven chin-ups for a 79 percent score in that category. Lt.(jg) C. L. Hepler, the athletic officer, said he believed that Skarin had set a national record. As noted earlier, a St. Ambrose trainee scored a 95.0 a month later, in June.

Often the leading company in strength tests was given a special liberty as a reward for its achievement, which was probably the best incentive that could be made available to the V-12s.

The athletic officer in a unit kept a card file recording the scores of each man in successive strength tests. Most trainees felt it behooved them to show continual improvement, so once a man had achieved enough in a test to remain out of the basic course, he tended not to overdo it so that it would be easier to improve the next time the test was given.

That kind of foresight was also used in other phases of the physical training program, especially in the boxing classes. Usually a trainee was paired off with someone about the same size. Most partners reached a mutual understanding: "You don't hurt me and I don't hurt you." But the chiefs understood this and were always ordering the men to "mix it up" and "throw some real punches!"¹¹

The toughness of the physical training leadership varied a great deal from campus to campus and depended upon both the orders of the

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athletic officer and the zeal of the individual chiefs. At some schools the program was exceedingly tough.

Especially in the Southern climes where the humidity and temperature remained high for months at a time in the summer, cases of heat exhaustion were fairly common. Dr. Rufus C. Harris, president of Tulane University, received a number of complaints from parents and others, so he enlisted the medical officer's support to curb the excesses of the program during summer months.¹²

Many other complaints also reached BuPers, and finally, on September 14, 1943, V-12 Bulletin No. 86 made it clear that the physical conditioning program was planned to be one of gradual achievement and not a crash program. Commanding officers were instructed to make it less rigorous, but few V-12s remember that happening. Perhaps the cooler weather of the fall and the improving condition of the men coincided with the appearance of the Bulletin, so that any possible slackening of the standards went unnoticed.

One curious aspect of the program pertained to the issue of physical training uniforms, including shorts, swimsuits, and sweat suits. Instead of furnishing them along with the rest of the uniforms, the Navy decided to charge each trainee for this clothing. The total cost was just over three dollars. But for that money the trainees got superb quality. The sweat suits lasted some V-12s for up to ten years.

The Navy had a standard list of physical training equipment for each V-12 unit, the quantities depending upon the number of trainees. For Carroll College, in Montana, with 270 V-12s, the list was as follows:¹³

Boxing gloves	45 sets
Footballs	12
Medicine balls	12
Basketballs	30
Softballs	72
Softball bats	36
Softball masks	12
Catcher's mitts (softball)	12
Fielder's gloves (softball)	36
Pairs punching bag gloves	36
Volleyballs	18
Volleyball nets	9
Soccer balls	9
Skipping ropes	30
Fast inflated punching bags	6
Handballs	18
Punching bag platforms	6
Swivels	8
Electric pencils (a wood-burning type of tool)	3