

PLAYSHIPS OF THE WORLD

The Naval Diaries of Admiral Dan Gallery, 1920–1924

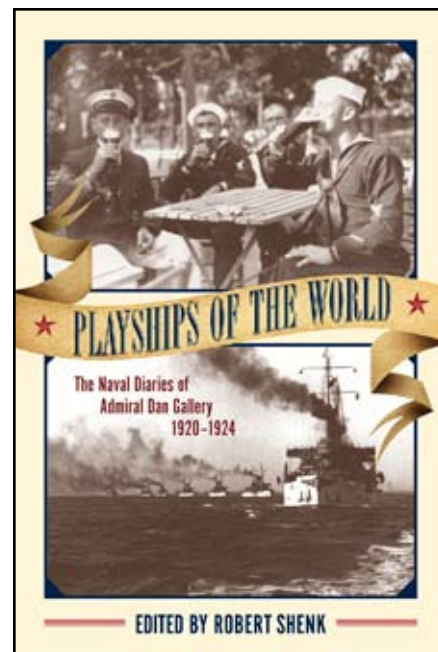
Edited by Robert Shenk

After touring the USS *Pittsburgh* off the French Riviera in 1926, James Thurber described it as the “Playship of the World,” where the daily lives of officers were akin to “living in the sort of Utopia in which old romantic plays used to drop their curtain and old romantic books close their final page.” Indicative of this adventurous, carefree, and relatively risk-free period between the world wars was the early career of Dan Gallery, a young naval officer who would eventually achieve the rank of admiral and garner international fame for capturing a German submarine during World War II. Edited by Robert Shenk, these recently discovered diaries chronicle Gallery’s shipboard tours on the *Pittsburgh* and four other vessels during the early 1920s, following his graduation from the Naval Academy.

The diaries record Gallery’s experiences aboard battleships, cruisers, and a destroyer as these ships steamed to exotic ports in South America, northern Europe, and the Mediterranean during an era when the U.S. Navy’s mission was to be highly visible and when an officer might expect, as the recruitment motto promised, to see the world. Gallery’s diaries serve as a travelogue through foreign ports, bars, and nightclubs and record a variety of sports competitions—ranging from Gallery’s participation as a wrestler in the 1920 Antwerp Olympic Games, to baseball games with a ship’s crew in ports from Cairo to Constantinople, to fleetwide athletic contests sponsored by the navy in Panama and Guantanamo Bay.

Gallery describes grappling with shipboard difficulties and contemplates the various directions his career might lead. He also recalls romances with young women in ports across the globe and attempts to maintain his moral and religious principles in the face of temptations of lust and liquor abroad. Throughout the episodes recorded here, Gallery’s spirits and hopes are high, his friendships numerous, and his outlook both clear and unpretentious. Peppered with companionable wit and burgeoning literary talent, the diaries illustrate the humble beginnings of a fledgling officer who would become an inspirational figure in military lore.

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Robert Shenk is a professor of English at the University of New Orleans and a retired captain in the U.S. Naval Reserve. His previous books include *Admiral Dan Gallery: The Life and Wit of a Navy Original* (with C. Herbert Gilliland), *The Naval Institute Guide to Naval Writing*, and *Authors at Sea: Modern American Writers Remember Their Naval Service*—a selection of the History Book Club.

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