For those who may be unaware, the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum keeps multitudes of artifacts, documents, and photos of Destroyer Escorts in our Special Collections. Many of those items are photos, kept in binders, and can be viewed by request. Often, when we know there is a DE veteran visiting, we will pull the binder of their ship and have it available for them when they arrive. So, when Carl Dize came for a visit in the summer of 2015, I made sure to pull his binder, the USS MENGES, and have it ready for him to view.

Now the USS MENGES (DE-320), for those of you who may have forgotten, is pretty fascinating. She has a mighty story of getting torpedoed, limping back to dock, being welded to another half of a different DE, the USS HOLDER (DE-401), and going back to sea. The damage she survived is iconic; photos of her stern are everywhere, on many websites, in magazines, books, and in our museum files.

So you can imagine my surprise when I handed Mr. Dize the MENGES binder, and he told me, with just a glance, that the first picture in the binder was not the MENGES. I checked the binder label and the caption below the picture and both said MENGES. It certainly looked like the ship that so famously had its stern blown up. Mr. Dize insisted that it was not his ship. So, I suggested we move on. I’m certainly not going to argue with a 90-year old man about whether or not the photo is the ship that he poured his blood, sweat, and tears into for years.

We made our way through the binder of photos, and he told us stories about his time on the MENGES. He also continued to point out to us the pictures that are not the MENGES. Carl Dize was the first to point out to us that the images that we, (and the rest of the world), had assumed to be the MENGES were, in fact, not. The hull numbers were not visible, but he knew it by just a glance. Dize informed us that the MENGES, just days before it had been torpedoed, had cut loose all of her life rafts, in efforts to save the crew from USS LANSDALE (DD-426). The photo in question did indeed have its life rafts after it had been torpedoed. The damage that the ships both had did

The first of the U.S. Destroyer Escorts turned over to France was the FNV SENEGLALAIIS. She was to have a long and eventful career. NARA photo courtesy Chris Wright.
look similar, but when you are looking for them you certainly can see differences.

The ship in question was a mystery to us for about a week. We spent hours each day looking through pictures, tracking each U.S. ship that was damaged in the war, and contacting our “ship experts” in attempts to identify this mystery ship. Online, most websites had made the same mistake we had, so there was little outside help. We searched through reference books and our library; eventually coming to the conclusion it was not a U.S. ship after all.

The ship in question was, in fact, the French Destroyer Escort SENEGALAIS (SEN-E-GAL-AY). Adding to the confusion, she was in the same convoy as the MENGES (UGS-38), damaged one day after, torpedoed by the same U-boat (U-371), and hit in the same place with similar damage.

Originally named CORBESIER (DE-106), the DE was laid down by The Dravo Corporation, in Wilmington, Delaware on 24 April 1943. By 24 September, the name was cancelled in preparation for the ship’s transfer to France. DE-106 was launched on 11 November 1943 as SENEGALAIS; it was the first ship to be transferred from the U.S. to the Free French fleet.

While fitting the ship for French sailors, there were some alterations that needed to be made. Wine, being extremely important to French sailors, was given its own tank. The tank was located in the First Lieutenant’s Stores (A-310-AC), and could hold up to 1,350 gallons of wine. There was also a 35-gallon service tank for mealtime, placed adjacent to the serving line. The main tanks would be filled from barrels located on the upper deck, through flexible pipes. Another difference between the two navies was the bread consumption. According to Captain R. E. Blanchard, the Chief of Staff for the French Naval Mission,
French sailors eat three times as much bread as American sailors. He asked that all the Destroyer Escorts be fitted with a bread mixer, capable of mixing fifty pounds of bread dough at a time. The French ships were fitted with 30-quart mixers, an upgrade from the 20 quart mixers most DEs had. Blanchard also suggested installing a kneading trough. The troughs were denied, because they were heavy and cumbersome and they could not be secured in the galley. Relocating the troughs diminishes their usefulness, as proximity to the galley and an interior location was important. With DEs being so compact there was not open space to place large dough troughs.

Vice-Admiral Raymond Fenard accepted the vessel for France from Rear Admiral Charles L. Brand. At the launch there were 16,000 spectators, and the shipyard was decked with flags of the Allied Nations. In his speech Brand attested:

"I can assure you that the United States Navy has the determination to teach those who need it the lesson that bestiality cannot overcome civilization; that violence cannot substitute for Christian virtues."

After shakedown, at the commissioning ceremony on 12 February 1944, President Franklin Roosevelt served as the dignitary “giving” the ship to France. He gave a speech at the Washington Navy Yard, in Washington D.C., that commissioned the ship to the Free French Navy. He recalled that, while France may be on hard times right now, with Nazis occupying Paris and many Frenchman fleeing, they once gave a ship to the United States with which to fight their own war, the War for Independence.

To you, we turn over this ship – the SENEGALAIS. We recall with pleasure that it was a French ship which fired the first salute over rendered to the Stars and Stripes flying from a United States Man-of-War. We remember that salute today—and symbolically we return it. Good luck, SENEGALAIS – and good hunting.

Six U.S. Navy Cannon Class Destroyer Escorts were transferred to the Free French Navy through the Lend-Lease Act. The Lend-Lease Act that gave FDR unlimited authority to direct aid to the war effort in Europe without violating the neutrality of the United States, was approved by Congress in March 1941. The act would set a precedent that the President of the United States could provide military support to nations threatened by anti-democratic forces. JFK would go on to utilize this in Vietnam, as well as Ronald Reagan in Iraq.

The Free French Navy was the government-in-exile, led by Charles de Gaulle, after France fell to Nazi forces in 1940. The Destroyer Escorts that were transferred to France were: SENEGALAIS (DE-106) followed by ALGERIEN (DE-107), TUNISIEN (DE-108), MAROCAIN (DE-109), HOVA (DE-110), and SOMALI (DE-111).

The first captain of the SENEGALAIS was Lieutenant Commander Pierre Poncet. He was born in 1906, in Lyon,
France, a city just 85 miles west of Geneva, Switzerland. He joined the French Navy and attended the Naval Academy, ECOLE NAVALE, in Brest in 1923. In January of 1944, he was promoted to Lieutenant Commander, and the ship SENEGALAIS went under his command. It was under Commander Poncet that the SENEGALAIS made her mark in history.

Under Poncet’s command on 3 April, 1944 the SENEGALAIS set off from Hampton Roads, with the convoy UGS-38. The DE was manned with a full crew of 15 officers and 201 sailors. UGS-38 was exceptionally large and contained 107 merchant ships, in 16 columns, including twelve Destroyer Escorts. While the convoy was on its way to Tunisia, the SENEGALAIS left the convoy for Algiers, and arrived on 23 April. She then made for Corsica, to prepare for troops landing on their shores, and returned to Algiers on 2 May.

In early May, Convoy GUS-38 was on its return trip to the States. They were steaming through the narrow neck of the Mediterranean Sea, which was notoriously littered with Nazi U-boats, just waiting to pounce. Late in the night of 2 May 1944, a German U-boat was spotted surfaced off the coast of Algeria. This area was loaded with Allied power, including six Destroyer Escorts from Convoy GUS-38 and three aircraft squadrons. Making the wise decision for their survival, U-371 dove down 300 feet after being spotted. The sub stayed down for over an hour, before deciding to surface again to charge its batteries. The U-boat’s batteries, being a diesel electric propulsion system, were used for their underwater navigation. With WWII technology, the batteries could last 80 hours if they were traveling at 4 knots but only 1 hour at 16 knots. This limitation resulted in U-boats having to surface to charge their batteries with their diesel engines.

The surfaced U-boat followed the convoy at low speed. The commander of this U-boat, Oberleutnant Zur See Horst Arno Fenski, had achieved the highest Lieutenant grade in the Kriegsmarine (German Navy). Fenski assumed that by the time he was close to the convoy, his batteries would be charged and they would be ready for attack. Just before midnight on the night of 2 May, the MENGES reported a surface target 10,000 yards away, just off the southeast coast of Spain. Soon MENGES lost contact with the target and closed the gap to perform a sound search. Within a few minutes the U-boat fired a torpedo from its stern and immediately dove over 300 feet. The GNAT (German Navy Acoustic Torpedo) struck the MENGES’ stern, blowing the fantail clear off the ship. Five minutes later, the U-371 crew heard an explosion and assumed the ship had sunk. Fortunately for the Allies, only a part of the ship went down. She made it back to dry dock, and had her forward half welded to the stern of the HOLDER. Then she went back to work.

Shortly after the MENGES was hit, the SENEGALAIS was notified in Algiers to aid in the search for the enemy sub. The USS PRIDE (DE-323), USS JOSEPH E. CAMPBELL (DE-70), USS SUSTAIN (AM-119), and HMS BLANKNEY (L-30) were soon joined by French destroyer ALCYON, and SENEGALAIS. Together they combed the waters in search of the elusive U-371, in hopes of avenging the MENGES. The ships made wide zigzags in a circle around the MENGES, dropping depth charges at 100-foot intervals. Fenski gave order for the U-boat to return to the surface. When they rose to 200 feet the crew heard faint screw noises and distant depth charge explosions. PRIDE picked up a radar pip within 700 yards, and then it disappeared. The DEs rolled off depth charges set for 100 feet as a defensive measure just in case any GNATs were heading their way. PRIDE regained contact with the sub and set her speed for 10 knots on collision course for a hedgehog attack, however the hedgehogs failed to operate! It wouldn't be discovered until after the chase was over, that a fuse in the AC circuit was blown. There was a backup DC circuit, but the gun captain did not have the presence of mind in the heat of battle to shift over. Instead PRIDE rolled a 5 charge-pattern set at medium depth. The depth charges were exploding closer and closer to the sub. They were so close that the explosions took out all the lights, damaged the hydroplanes, and ruptured the trim tanks inside the sub. The glands were leaking badly at this depth, and the boat was filling with water, even still the depth charges were becoming more and more accurate. Soon the screw noises grew louder, so U-371 dove down again this time to 560 feet and headed for the coast. At 0403, the JOSEPH E. CAMPBELL and SENEGALAIS

A French sailor paints a submarine kill symbol on the ship’s smokestack. NHHC photo.
commenced another depth charge attack; both launched a full 13 pattern set for 600 feet. Fenski was forced to blow the #3 diving tank to level off the U-boat at 650 feet.

As the attack continued from the ships above, the U-boat’s starboard propeller was thrown out of line causing the starboard motor to run excessively hot. The generator supplying current to the gyrocompass then became noisy and had to be turned off to prevent detection. By 0600 with depth charges raining down, Fenski decided to bottom the sub on the seabed to make sonar detection almost impossible and to save his batteries, which were dangerously low at this point. 790 feet below the surface of the Mediterranean Sea U-371 sat in the sand, desperately hiding from the tireless ships above. There she sat throughout the day undisturbed, and hoped that the ensuing ships above would give up. The sub hunters continued to drop depth charges through 0700. At this time, the sub was so close to shore that echoes of the underwater peaks were intermingled with the sub’s, so sonar detection was impossible. It was soon apparent that the sub was going to stay there until dark. The allied ships decided to stop, and drifted over the vicinity where the U-boat was last heard. The

SENEGALAI5 was assigned the duty of searching close inshore, near the point of last contact. Every sailor was on high alert, never knowing for sure when the menace might surface again.

Late on the night of 3 May, U-371 heard surface ships in her vicinity, but she was far from fully operational. The emergency lighting was out, 15 tons of water was filling
the boat, the air was beginning to stale, and toilets were overflowing because they could not run the expulsion pumps for fear of being detected. Some crewmembers were experiencing claustrophobia, not to mention the looming death that awaited them from above. Fenski decides that their only chance of survival was to surface and escape on diesel engines under the cover of darkness. The submarine crew attempted to blow their tanks, but 88 pounds of air pressure did not budge the heavier than normal U-boat. The PRIDE at this time heard a throb and clicking sound, they attempted to fire their hedgehogs again, but to no avail, they still didn’t fire. In attempting to escape, the U-Boat was sighted by the surface ships, including SENEGALAIS and her friends, who dropped additional depth charges.

By nightfall, the crews of the surface ships were fatigued and filled with anxiety. They had been at general quarters for 9 hours, at a constant high alert. However, they saw what happened to the MENGES and they were not about to let it happen again.

In their last ditch effort, the entire U-371 crew was ordered aft and the electric motors were run full speed ahead but, the sub did not budge. So the crew was ordered forward and the motors set astern full. The crew repeated this several times, running back and forth, attempting to rock the sub free like one would with a car stuck in the mud. Finally, the sub freed itself from the sea floor and began to rise to the surface. As she surfaced, she made her getaway toward open waters. A sigh of relief came from the sub crew when they did not see another vessel for 15 minutes. However, at 0120 on 4 May, SENEGALAIS had made radar contact with the surfaced sub two miles off her stern. The crew could make out the silhouette of the U-boat and began a barrage of heavy gunfire. JOSEPH E. CAMPELL and PRIDE closed in at flank speed as they attempted to block the sub’s escape routes to the north. BLANKNEY and SUSTAIN blocked all routes to the west. The SENEGALAIS pounded the sub with relentless fire from their 3 inch and 40mm guns. It was only a matter of time before the U-boat was cornered. Many of the U-boat’s crew began to jump overboard, but Commander Fenski still had a plan. Fenski ordered the remaining crew to fire their torpedoes and jump overboard. Two officers would remain onboard the submarine to flood tanks 1, 3, and 5 to send the sub to the bottom of the Mediterranean. It looked as if U-371 had met its match, and SENEGALAIS would be celebrating her first submarine kill, but sadly, that celebration was not to be.

At 0200 on 4 May 1944, the SENEGALAIS was struck in her stern by a GNAT fired by U-371 at a depth of 8 feet, from a distance of two miles. The blast severely damaged her fantail, but she remained afloat. Both propellers were lost along with steering gear and rudders. Many 3-inch shells were broken open and scattered about the deck. One depth charge was thrown from the track, hit the stack, and landed on the superstructure deck. Several depth charges were blown overboard and exploded; luckily they were far enough from the ship to do any further damage. Flooding was not an immediate danger to the SENEGALAIS, because damage was localized to the very aft end of the ship. The watertight doors leading into C-203L (Crew’s Aft Berthing) were still in good condition, so the crew used bedding and lumber to plug the holes that leaked water inside. Two portable submersible electric pumps were used to limit the amount of water to a height of only a few inches inside the compartment. No circuit breakers were blown; lighting, power distribution was normal, the sound gear, radio, radar, gyrocompass, and communication equipment all worked fine. She lay dead in the water for an hour, waiting for a tow to shore for further inspection. Still, she proved more durable than her enemy. The U-boat chase lasted more than 30 hours, and the crews involved were at the brink of exhaustion.

The SENEGALAIS lost fourteen men, many on the ship in the explosion and a few who died in a hospital it Algiers the next day. She put her whaleboat into the water to search for survivors. By 0220 SENEGALAIS and the other members of the hunter group found men in the water including members of the German U-boat’s crew. You can imagine the surprise of the U-boat crew when they were rescued from the water by French sailors, whom they thought to be out of the war. The Allies picked up 44 men and 7 officers. This was the entire crew, excluding the two officers in charge of blowing the tanks; they went down with the sub. The French destroyer ALCYON towed the SENEGALAIS into the nearby port of Djidjelli, where the whaleboat rejoined them. She spent May 4-10 at Djidjelli making temporary repairs.

The prisoners were transported to the JOSEPH E. CAMPELL as POWs and taken to Algiers for interrogation. It was during these interrogations that the U.S. Navy officials realized the importance of the prisoners they had captured. The German crew, proven through their resisters was higher than the average caliber. U-371 sunk 11 ship and caused damage to eight more from July 1941 to May 1944.

On 10 May, with a tug lashed to her starboard side SENEGALAIS got underway for Algiers. However, heavy weather and damage that the tug did to the shell plating c
the starboard side forced them to put into Boujie to wait for calm seas. They got underway again on the 12th and arrived at Algiers on 14 May. There, she was drydocked and surveyed. Only minor repairs were undertaken at Algiers. On 28 May Admiral H.K. Hewitt, commander of the U.S. Naval forces in the Mediterranean, came aboard and decorated the crew of SENEGALAIS for their success in sinking a German U-boat. She was then moved to the American Naval Base at Oran where she arrived on 14 June. There, everything aft of frame 121 was removed and a false transom built. A temporary rudder was installed that was operated by cables fairlead forward to the capstan. She left Oran on 2 August under tow by the American fleet tug ABNAKI ATF-96, which had recently towed the captured U-505 to Bermuda. After a smooth crossing SENEGALAIS arrived at Charleston on 19 August.

Once the decision was made to repair SENEGALAIS in Charleston, a flurry of correspondence was generated between the shipyard and Washington as the people in Charleston tried to determine the extent of the repairs needed on SENEGALAIS. As the yard had been building RUDDEROW class DEs, they planned to fabricate a stern section to RUDDEROW specifications to replace SENEGALAIS' missing fantail, that would cover the distance from frame 125 to the transom. However, the damage extended forward through compartment C-201L, necessitating a reconstruction of the area between frames 113 to 125. The fact that there were some construction differences between the RUDDEROW and CANNON class hulls coupled with the fact that the RUDDEROW hull was 7” wider at the transition point, meant that the hull had to be faired between frames 113 and 117 to accommodate this difference.

Based on the information available, construction of the new stern beginning at frame 125 was started while the SENEGALAIS was still in Oran. Replacement depth charge racks and the aft three-inch gun were not considered a problem. However, the twin 40mm gun had been left in Oran to improve stability for the tow over. The Navy agreed to provide a replacement 40mm, contingent that the original 40mm be shipped back to the States from Oran for overhaul, repaired and put back in inventory. There was
also discussion about adding four single forties in place of the
two single 20mms that occupied the space that had
original been allocated for the torpedo tubes. This was
common practice for US DEs operating in the
Mediterranean, but the Navy held firm that the French ship
would not receive this modification, and retained the two
single 20mm amidships.

SENEGALAIS arrived at Charleston on 18 August
1944. On 19 August 1944 the SENEGALAIS reported to
the Ammunition Depot in Charleston to remove all ammo
from the ship before going into the Navy yard. She was
docked the next day and repairs started. The ship was cut
at frame 100. Following removal of the damaged sections,
the new stern was lowered into the dock, and the dock
flooded to facilitate installation of the new stern. An article
from the Charleston newspaper, The Evening Independent
stated that the “engineers worked out the intricate details
of how to fit the two halves together when the forward half
arrived.” They had to consider dilemmas like lining up the
bulkheads while still being able to utilize hatch openings
and framing and vent duct openings. The estimated cost
for repairs was set at $300,000 including the repairs and
alterations for the hull and machinery.

At the same time, sensing the opportunity for a com-
plete overhaul, the French Naval Mission prepared a list
of repair items in addition to the work on the fantail. The list
included 24 hull items, 22 machinery items, 16 electrical
items, 5 radio and sound items, and overhaul of all ord-
nance. There was also a request for 15 shipalts and modi-
ications. Their requests for new machinery included: SA-
2 Radar with BL and BM identification, TCS Radio
Emergency equipment, and a Bathymetograph; all of
which were approved. The U.S. Navy also replaced one
3”50 caliber gun, two depth charge tracks, and two 20mm
guns that were lost in action. The four 40mm single assem-
bly guns were not approved; it was explained that the guns
could not be replaced until the 40mm guns that were
removed in Oran were returned to the United States. The
French Navy also asked for a coating to be painted over the
wine hold to keep the wine from going sour. Wine, being
extremely important to French sailors was given its own
hold on the made-for-French SENEGALAIS. The hold
was located in the First Lieutenant’s Stores (A-310-AC).

“With Tricolor flying and her stack bearing the emblem
designated a submarine sunk. The new stern was launched
and both halves floated into a big dry dock, and welded
together,” The Evening Independent would go on to say.
By November 1944, just six months after being torpedoed,
she served a brief stint at the training center in Portland,
Maine and was operational again. She departed from th
U.S. as part of UGS-61 (comprised of 82 merchant ship
and 11 escort ships) and arrived in Gibraltar 6 December
1944. She would soon return to France in 1945. SEN-
GALAIS departed from Toulon, France en route to
Indochina (Vietnam) and arrived in Saigon 31 October
1945. Originally, the SENEGALAIS was supposed to be
involved in the war against Japan after the war in Europe
was over, but the French involvement quickly veered focu
away from Japan and over to Indochina. On 11 November
1945, SENEGALAIS arrived in Ha Long Bay to suppo
troops that invaded via land. On 14 November she was
involved in a battle at Sha Pak Wan. The DE assisted in
sinking several ships, killing 15 sailors and leading to the
capture of 26 Viet Minh soldiers. From 16 January to
February 1946 she was in Cam Ranh Bay, a deep water ba
on the southeast coast of Vietnam along the South Chin
Sea serving on a surveillance mission.

On 6 March 1946 a French armada of 35 ships, includ-
ing SENEGALAIS and 21,000 men, attempted to invad
Haiphong, Tonkin, but their landing was stopped by
Chinese soldiers. The Chinese urged France and Vietnam
to come to an agreement. That afternoon Ho Chi Minh an
Jean Sainteny signed a provisional agreement. Th
Republic of Vietnam was a free state within the French
Union. The agreement stated that 25,000 French troop
would be stationed in Tonkin for the next five years. Man
members of the communist-led Viet Minh were not happy
with the results of the treaty. They were determined to gai
complete independence from France and have their gov-
ernment set up in any way they should choose. By Jun
the two countries were at war once more. This war woul
continue until 1954, when Vietnam would eventually suc-
cceed. The country would be split into North and South.
France was forced to leave, and Vietnam, Laos, an
Cambodia would gain their independence. Because Nort
Vietnam was a communist government, the U.S. took
firm stand on not letting the two halves of the country unti
one government by refusing to sign the Geneva Accord
Eventually this conflict would lead to the U.S. an
Vietnam War through April 1975.

By April 1946 three of the six Cannon Class Destroy
Escorts that were built by the United States were place
into reserve, SENEGALAIS with ALGERIEN an
SOMALI. In June 1947 Etienne Schlumberger took com-
mand of the SENEGALAIS. In September 1953 SENE-
GALAIS sailed with the aircraft carrier ARROMANCHE
to Saigon. She took part in missions along with the
ARROMANCHES until 1 March 1954, after which she
returned to Toulon.
The Algerian War for Independence began 1 November 1954. SENEGALAIS was sent there on five different occasions from December 1954 to November 1955. The French Navy's role in this war was to cut off Algerian nationalists from outside support. They did this with a strict coastal blockade and maritime surveillance in the Mediterranean. Warships sealed routes to which weapons and trained guerrilla fighters from Tunisia and Morocco were being shipped. Algeria would go on to win their independence but France retained the right to have military bases in Algeria. In the spring of 1956 the SENEGALAIS joined another Anti-Submarine Action Group that made three more trips to Algeria through 1957, before she was placed back into reserves and disarmed.

The SENEGALAIS was rearmed and renamed YSER in 1963. Yser is a river in France and Belgium that flows through the historic battlefields from World War I, Flanders Fields. Traveling with students from ECOLE NAVALE, the YSER sailed from Brest to Spain and back multiple times in 1963 and 1964 to teach the students hands-on skills before they were placed into the crews of active naval ships. The ship was then transferred to the U.S. Navy and sold to Walter Ritscher in Hamburg, Germany and scrapped in 1965.

The SENEGALAIS should be remembered as a hunter, a fighter, and a symbol of friendship. Her perseverance, nationalism, and dedication in war were no match to her Nazi counter-parts. She may have been wounded, she may have needed repairs, but she did not stay down. Like any hero she rose to the occasion once again. She fostered learning, comradery, and the strength of many sailors. She truly was trim, but deadly.

My extreme gratitude goes to: Emmanuel Maillet for some much needed translation. Ed Zajkowski and Chris Wright for their excellent and invaluable research, Jean-Marie Kowalski at Ecole Navale in Brest and Claire Fauveau at the Musee National de la Marine in Paris for their great insights; as well as Tim, Rosehn, and Michael for their advice, thoughts, assistance, and patience. May this article help clear up any confusion or mislabeling of the SENEGALAIS, as she deserves to have her story heard, known and remembered.