

**Trim and Deadly, but not Forgotten:
The Story of DE-106
By Shanna Hopson**

For those who may be unaware, the U.S.S. SLATER museum keeps multitudes of artifacts, documents and photos of Destroyer Escorts in our special collections space. Many of those pictures, kept in binders, can be viewed by request. It is not out of the ordinary then, that 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 MENGES, and have it ready for him to look at.

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 ship, 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 hand Mr. Dize the MENGES binder and he tells me with just a glance that the first picture in the binder is not the MENGES. I checked the front of the binder and I checked the caption below the picture, they both said MENGES and it certainly looked like the ship that so famously had its stern blown up. Mr. Dize insisted that it is not his ship. So, I suggest we move on, I'm certainly not going to argue with a 90 year old man whether or not that is the ship that he poured his blood, sweat, and tears into for years.

We make our way through the binder of photos and he tells us stories about his time on the MENGES, and 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 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 do 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 Dravo, in Wilmington, Delaware on 24 April, 1943. By 24 September the name was cancelled in preparation to transfer the ship to France. The name CORBESIER would be reassigned to DE-438. DE-106 was launched 11 November 1943 as SENEGALAIS; it was the first ship to be transferred from the U.S. to the Free French fleet. 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 United 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, in a specific transferring ceremony on 12 February, 1944 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt served as the dignitary “giving” the ship to France. He gave a speech at the Washington Navy Yard, in Washington DC that ceremonially transferred the ship to the Free France Navy, recalling 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 ever 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. Throughout his career he would captain ships such as the destroyer KLEBER and the light cruiser GUICHEN. By 1945 he was assigned the role of Assistant Naval Attaché to Great Britain, an essential link between defense authorities. He would go on to serve as Navy Attaché to Egypt, and Navy Attaché to the French Embassy in Washington D.C. He retired as a Squadron Vice Admiral, a four star rank in February 1966. At his retirement ceremony General de Gaulle reminded him that his ties with the American Navy were very old and very deep. He passed away in 29 September 1983. 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 23 April. She then made for Corsica to prepare for troops landing on their shores, and returned to Algiers 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.

While the surfaced U-boat was following the convoy at low speed, the commander of this U-boat was Oberleutnant Zur See Horst - Arno Fenski. Oberleutnant Zur See is the highest Lieutenant grade in the Kriegsmarine (German Navy). Fenski assumed that by the time they were 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 and 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 U.S.S. PRIDE (DE-323), U.S.S. JOSEPH E. CAMPBELL (DE-70), U.S.S. SUSTAIN (AM-119), and H.M.S. BLANKNEY (L-30), were soon joined by French

ships ALCYON a destroyer, and SENEGALAIS. Together they combed the waters in search of the elusive U-371 to avenge the MENGES. The ships made wide zig zags 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 DE's 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. So close, that the explosions took out all the lights, damaged the hydroplanes and ruptured the trim tanks inside the sub. The glans 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. 0403 the CAMPBELL and SENEGALAIS 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 gyro-compass 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 drift over the vicinity where the U-boat was last heard. The SENEGALAIS was assigned 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, the toilets were overflowing because they could not run the expulsion pumps for fear of being detected. Some crew members 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. The U-boat in attempting this escape only accomplished getting the attention of the surface ships and additional depth charges being dropped from SENEGALAIS and her friends.

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 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 gun fire. CAMPBELL and PRIDE closed in at flank speed as they attempted to block the sub's escape routes to the north. BLANKEY 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, gyro compass, 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 in Algiers the next day. By 0220 the members of the hunter group, including the damaged SENEGALAIS, found men in the water, they were members of the German U-boat's crew. They 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 prisoners were transported to the CAMPBELL 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 record was higher than the average caliber. U-371 sunk 11 ships and caused damage to eight more from July 1941 to May 1944. The commander, Oberleutnant Zue See Horst-Arno Fenski was pleasant and rated as one of the better U-boat commanders by interrogators. Fenski was held as a POW by the United States for two years. He was released from captivity on 4 May 1946, after the conclusion of the war. He would go back to Germany and live there until he died in 1965 in Hamburg.

Meanwhile, the ALCYON towed the SENEGALAIS to Djidjelli, Algeria. After further inspection she was towed to Oran, Algeria by tugs USS NARRAGANSETT (AFT-88) and HMS HENGIST to dry dock on 14 June. There, what remained of the stern was cut and reinforced. A provisional rudder was installed by French shipyard workers. On 2 August SENEGALAIS departed under the tow of ABNAKI (AFT-96), for Charleston, South Carolina where a brand new stern awaited.

The repairs for the ship were quite the logistical nightmare. 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. There was a new stern constructed for the project, but the stern was built as a Rudderow class destroyer escort whereas the SENEGALAIS was built as Cannon class. 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.

This time back in the shipyard proved to be a convenient time for the French to request for some upgraded equipment that was not available when the ship was built. Their requests for new machinery included: SA-2 Radar with BL and BM identification, TCS Radio Emergency equipment, and a Bathythermograph; 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 40 mm single assembly 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 the U.S. as part of UGS-61 (comprised of 82 merchant ships and 11 escort ships) and arrived in Gibraltar 6 December, 1944. She would soon return to France in 1945.

SENEGALAIS departed from Toulon, France en route for 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 focus away from Japan and over to Indochina. On 11 November, 1945 SENEGALAIS arrived in Ha Long Bay to support 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 Vietminh soldiers. From 16 January to 2 February 1946 she was in Cam Ranh Bay, a deep water bay on the southeast coast of Vietnam along the South China Sea serving on a surveillance mission.

On 6 March 1946 a French armada of 35 ships, including SENEGALAIS and 21,000 men, attempted to invade 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 and

Jean Sainteny signed a provisional agreement. The Republic of Vietnam was a free state within the French Union. The agreement stated that 25,000 French troops would be stationed in Tonkin for the next five years. Ho Chi Minh then traveled to France, where he continued negotiations for independence. While he was away many members of the communist-led Viet Minh were not happy with the results of the treaty. They were determined to get complete independence from France and have their government set up in any way they choose. By June the two countries were at war once more. This war would continue until 1954, when Vietnam would eventually succeed. The country would be split into North and South; France was forced to leave, and Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia would gain their independence. Because North Vietnam was a communist government, the U.S. took a firm stand on not letting the two halves of the country unite to one government by refusing to sign the Geneva Accords. Eventually this conflict would lead to the U.S. and Vietnam War through April 1975.

By April 1946 three of the six Cannon Class Destroyer Escorts that were built by the United States were placed into reserve, SENEGALAIS with ALGERIEN and SOMALI. In June 1947 Etienne Schlumberger took command of the SENEGALAIS. Born 20 March 1915 in Paris, Etienne was a legend in the making. In 1936 he was admitted to *Ecole Polytechnique*, one of the most prestigious engineering schools in Paris. After graduation he worked at the arsenal in Cherbourg repairing submarines. With the Germans at the gates of the city in 1940, he organized the towing of four subs to England. Once they landed in Liverpool he worked with Charles De Gaulle to convince French sailors to rejoin the fight and take back their country. Aboard the frigate COMMANDANT DUBOC he participated in many missions across the Atlantic, fought against the Eritrea and Italians, and most notably, the Battle of Dakar in September of 1940. In this battle he fought alongside Great Britain as they invaded France to take control of the French

Warships before Germany did. After the battle he was promoted to Lieutenant in the Free France Navy.

With this promotion he took command of the submarine JUNO, ironically one of the four subs he had arranged to be towed out of France in 1940. In April 1943 Schlumberger was charged with treason and desertion. He was sentenced to hard labor for life, military degradation and confiscation of all his property by the maritime court of Toulon. These charges were based on his actions in 1940 of stealing submarines and attacking French Warships. During the trial he said "I was brought in to disobey my adult life, when obeying orders and discipline were against my ethics. Others have condemned me for treason, but I didn't disobey my conscience." He was acquitted in December 1944 by the court of appeals. Furthermore, he was made a Companion of Liberation in November 1945. This exclusive organization is made up of heroes of the Liberation of France during WWII, and is revered by France with the same integrity as the United States' Founding Fathers. By 1945 he became the Head of the Federal Documentation in Indochina (Vietnam). When he returned to France he became the Director of Studies at *ECOLE NAVALE* and held positions on both land and sea in 1947, but by 1949 he left the naval academy and became Commander of the *SENEGALAIS*. He led the ship through a new crew being trained in Bizerte in July and September 1949. By October they had joined a GASM (Anti-Submarine Action Group) that searched for submarines in the Mediterranean Sea. On 21 April 1952 the *SENEGALAIS* was reclassified as a frigate, and the ship was no longer under lease to France.

The Mutual Defense Assistance Program was an act of congress signed by President Truman 6 October 1949. This act gave surplus materials to countries after the flush of manufacturing left

the U.S. overstocked, and much of Europe in shambles. It is under this act that the SENEGALAIS was given to France, just as the SLATER was given to Greece.

Schlumberger retired from the navy in 1953 as a Commander. He worked as an engineer for Shell through 1975. He was responsible for inventing a method to ship liquid gas, played a huge role in the invention of the Super Tanker, as well as an integral part of the formation of GEOSTOCK. In April 1975 he again retired and spent the next years of his life sailing across the globe with his wife on their yacht. At 99 years old Schlumberger died on 9 September 2014.

In September 1953 SENEGALAIS sailed with the aircraft carrier ARROMANCHES 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 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 *ECONLE NAVALE* the YSER sailed from Brest to Spain and back

multiple times in 1963-64 to teach the students hands on skills before they were placed into the crews of active naval ships. The ship was then returned 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.

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