

The National Museum of the Pacific War

**Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with
Mr. Raymond Mnichowicz
United States Navy
USS Pochard (AMS-375), USS Ardent (AM-340)
Date of Interview: 17 September 2004**

Interview with
Mr. Raymond Mnichowicz
(Small segment of his wife)

- Mr. Tricowski:** This is Frank Tricowski conducting an oral history interview of Mr. Raymond Mnichowicz. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War Center for War Studies to preserve historical information related to World War II. This interview is being conducted on September 17th, 2003. Mr. Mnichowicz, thank you for relating your experiences and thoughts regarding World War II to us. May I ask you where you were born?
- Mr. Mnichowicz:** Chicago, Illinois.
- Mr. Tricowski:** And when was that?
- Mr. Mnichowicz:** November 10th, 1927
- Mr. Mnichowicz:** What are your parents names, please, and where were they born?
- Mr. Tricowski:** My dad was born in Poland. He came over when he was a young boy as Alfonz Mnichowicz and my mother was born in Chicago as far as I know.
- Mr. Tricowski:** Do you remember her maiden name?
- Mr. Mnichowicz:** Her name was Lillian Procop.
- Mr. Tricowski:** Okay. Did you have any brothers and sisters?
- Mr. Mnichowicz:** Yeah, I had six sisters and one kid brother.
- Mr. Tricowski:** Can you give us their first names?
- Mr. Mnichowicz:** Let's see there was Lucille, Dolores, Geraldine, she was the youngest, Phyllis, Laverne, Alice, and my kid brother Alfrons.
- Mr. Tricowski:** Where did you get your education?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Went to school in Pauley, Wisconsin. Never went to high school and couldn't do it because we lived on a farm.

Mr. Tricowski: Okay. You were in the navy. Why did you choose that branch of the service?

Mr. Mnichowicz: I told my mother when I was four years old that I'm going into the navy and that's what she told me.

Mr. Tricowski: She was with you, huh [unclear].

Mr. Mnichowicz: Yeah.

Mr. Tricowski: When did you join?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Early part of 1944.

Mr. Tricowski: Where did you enter the service?

Mr. Mnichowicz: In Chicago. Went to Lakes. The camp at Great Lakes.

Mr. Tricowski: Great Lakes. Did you get any special training after you got out of boot camp?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Nope, went right aboard ship.

Mr. Tricowski: That ship is ...

Mr. Mnichowicz: Pochard. AMS-375.

Mr. Tricowski: What type of ship is that?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Auxiliary Minesweeper.

Mr. Tricowski: And what was its home port?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Well, when I picked it up it was in Treasure Island and I don't know what happened to it after that because I got transferred when they started getting this quota and I got transferred to another minesweeper.

Mr. Tricowski: What were your jobs on those minesweepers?

Mr. Mnichowicz: I went down to the engine room and learned my trade and the people, the engineers ... all the gentlemen that were down in the engine room.

Mr. Tricowski: And what type of engines did that have on the ...

Mr. Mnichowicz: All diesel.

Mr. Tricowski: How many diesels powered one of those ships?

Mr. Mnichowicz: They had four main diesels and three generators. They had a boiler, they had evaporators.

Mr. Tricowski: So you boarded the ship where? In ...

Mr. Mnichowicz: Treasure Island.

Mr. Tricowski: And then from there it ...

Mr. Mnichowicz: We went to Pearl Harbor and took on supplies and fuel and another convey. We escorted a convoy.

Mr. Tricowski: Do you remember what date that was?

Mr. Mnichowicz: No.

Mr. Tricowski: Do you remember what year it was?

Mr. Mnichowicz: I think it was already a part of 1945.

Mr. Tricowski: And where did that convoy head for?

Mr. Mnichowicz: I never knew because we left the convoy.

Mr. Tricowski: Oh, I see. And then where did you go after your ship left the convoy?

Mr. Mnichowicz: We gone on a minesweeping patrol and don't ask me where because you know how big the ocean was and we got involved with the minesweeping

when they invaded Okinawa. We swept out the harbor. There was what, four minesweepers involved in that deal.

Mr. Tricowski: Were there a lot of mines in that harbor?

Mr. Mnichowicz: There was quite a few of them.

Mr. Tricowski: Do you have any idea, a rough idea, how many mines your ship pulled out?

Mr. Mnichowicz: I have no idea whatsoever, because those gunboats running in back shoot ...

Mr. Tricowski: That was the main way of handling the mines ...

Mr. Mnichowicz: Yeah.

Mr. Tricowski: ... shooting them from gunboats?

Mr. Mnichowicz: From gunboats.

Mr. Tricowski: What did they use? Machine guns on them?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Usually 20mm's or rifles. You get a man who can handle a rifle hit one of those horns and it'll blow!

Mr. Tricowski: Were you married at that time?

Mr. Mnichowicz: No. I was single.

Mr. Tricowski: So you kept pretty busy doing that in the harbor?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Yeah, we were on night patrol too in the harbor. We'd run smoke screens and make sure no boats didn't come in off the beach to hit the ships because they had a beach of plywood boats with [unclear] in it and they'd put charges in front and they go out and try to hit a ship.

Mr. Tricowski: Kamikaze?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Kamikaze type of thing.

Mr. Tricowski: Yeah. So did you see much action? Did you have a means to fire big guns or anything at them?

Mr. Mnichowicz: No. We just used small arms. Fifty caliber and thirty caliber machine guns.

Mr. Tricowski: Okay, so you were with the battle or the invasion of Okinawa?

Mr. Mnichowicz: No.

Mr. Tricowski: And your job was them lay smokescreens for the bigger ships.

Mr. Mnichowicz: That's right, yeah. And then we run out of there when that big typhoon hit and we went out to sea.

Mr. Tricowski: Did they pull all of the ships or just the small ones?

Mr. Mnichowicz: No. They pulled anything out of there. That's when the guys on the beach were ... they were lucky. Oh, that was a big typhoon that hit it.

Mr. Tricowski: Because the guys that were exposed were left on the beach there for a while? You happen to remember the date on that?

Mr. Mnichowicz: No, I don't. I never did write that down.

Mr. Tricowski: Okay. Did you travel right with the other ships or did you have your own speeds?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Sometimes we traveled with other ships and sometimes we were by ourselves. When the kamikazes were hitting we were out on patrol, a screen patrol, but they didn't bother us. We could notify them that planes passing over.

Mr. Tricowski: Was it pretty hot keeping those diesels running all the time in good shape?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Uh, not necessarily. You keep your fuel clean and keep your oil purified, you know, and run your fuel through that, uh ... we never really were

running at high speed. We were what they called dieselectric. We had generators in back of the main engines and we had motors on, uh ... reduction gears and you'd switch off engines.

Mr. Tricowski: Who was your commanding officer? Do you remember?

Mr. Mnichowicz: All I remember was a mustang commander whose name was, I don't remember.

Mr. Tricowski: Yeah. So did the minesweepers move together as a group or a unit?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Usually there was four in a bunch. They'd stagger them down the line, four of them.

Mr. Tricowski: Were there any mishaps? Did any of them hit a mine?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Uh, no. Not in Okinawa.

Mr. Tricowski: Did the gunboats move along with you?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Well, they were in back. They stayed in back.

Mr. Tricowski: Okay, but the gunboats, did they bring those over on other ships?

Mr. Mnichowicz: No, they were, uh ... some of them were on ...

Mr. Tricowski: They came all the way across?

Mr. Mnichowicz: PTM's. PTM's. They were big enough to, uh ...

Mr. Tricowski: They came across the Pacific?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Yeah, by themselves. We used to call them the 'smoking cigars' because they were narrow.

Mr. Tricowski: Okay, so do you remember the rank of the commanding officer of all this, of the minesweeper?

Mr. Mnichowicz: He was a full commander, that's all I remember. I don't remember his name. He was a mustang commander.

Mr. Tricowski: Did you have any interactions with any enemy ships or anything like that?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Uh, no. Planes a few times, but no ships. We were too small, they didn't ... and like I said, most of the time we were by ourselves.

Mr. Tricowski: Did the planes strafe you at all with machine gun fire or anything like that?

Mr. Mnichowicz: A couple of times they flew over and they didn't fly over no more.

Mr. Tricowski: You shot them down?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Yeah.

Mr. Tricowski: Were those the kamikazes or the regular fighters that, uh ...

Mr. Mnichowicz: Just regular patrol planes.

Mr. Tricowski: Did you get ashore in Japan?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Yeah, after the peace treaty was signed. In fact, that was when four minesweepers entered Sagami Bay and they ... I'll tell you they could have stopped us right then and there because they had that big cannon looking down the channel, right on land. With binoculars you could see that cannon because it was that big around!

Mr. Tricowski: But they'd already surrendered ...

Mr. Mnichowicz: No, they didn't surrender yet.

Mr. Tricowski: Okay, so you went in before the surrender. That was pretty, uh ... that must have been all secret and pretty scary.

Mr. Mnichowicz: We swept out Sagami Bay and we swept out Tokyo Bay.

Mr. Tricowski: Did you have any kind of air cover or anything or did you just do it in secret?

Mr. Mnichowicz: I ain't commenting on that!

Mr. Tricowski: Uh, but I mean did you try to do it secretly or did you ...

Mr. Mnichowicz: No, it was in daylight hours.

Mr. Tricowski: Daylight.

Mr. Mnichowicz: It was in daylight hours.

Mr. Tricowski: Why do you think that they didn't shoot at you with the cannon?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Well, there was a task force out there that could have flown ...

Mr. Tricowski: Fighters out with big guns.

Mr. Mnichowicz: And big guns they could have just destroyed that, the whole thing and after, uh ... well, even before they signed the peace treaty, we went, actually went into Tokyo and I've got pictures that a papa-san gave me painted by hand on silk in exchange for a pack of cigarettes. They are beautiful.

Mr. Tricowski: How did the civilians treat you?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Well, talking to papa-san there, he says that they pulled the biggest bo-bo, I'm being polite about it, and he could speak just as good English as you and me. He had a big stove hat, you know, and we talked about painting and it was all burned. All you could see was devastation. There were no buildings or homes that were standing. Everything was completely demolished.

Mr. Tricowski: So this is interesting. Looks to me like you were among the first people into Tokyo Bay? The first US troops in there?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Right

Mr. Tricowski: Did the Marines or frogmen or someone go into shore before you?

Mr. Mnichowicz: No, there was nobody went into Tokyo! Our ship was the only one that went in and then we made some other trips. Some other people wanted to go in, because we couldn't draw that much water the bigger ships couldn't get there, see.

Mr. Tricowski: So your job was, as you said, just mainly minesweeping and then, uh ...

Mr. Mnichowicz: Well, they were on the side of there when they signed the peace treaty, because we were too small.

Mr. Tricowski: What's the name of your ship again?

Mr. Mnichowicz: The Pochard.

Mr. Tricowski: And then do you remember the names of the other three?

Mr. Mnichowicz: When the point system came into affect I got transferred to the Ardent: Auxiliary Minesweeper AM-340.

Mr. Tricowski: That was another one of the group.

Mr. Mnichowicz: Yeah, they took all the older men that had these points that was in longer, they sent them to different ships and [unclear].

Mr. Tricowski: So then you were on what ship then, the second one?

Mr. Mnichowicz: The Ardent.

Mr. Tricowski: Okay, and then when did that come back to the states?

Mr. Mnichowicz: 1946.

Mr. Tricowski: Okay, and then you stayed in the navy ...

Mr. Mnichowicz: No, I got discharged.

Mr. Tricowski: And then came back?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Yeah, I came back in.

Mr. Tricowski: And then when did you get out?

Mr. Mnichowicz: I retired in 1967.

Mr. Tricowski: By then you had been on other ships?

Mr. Mnichowicz: A lot of ships.

Mr. Tricowski: Can you name some of them?

Mr. Mnichowicz: Let's see, I was on the PC doing water patrol out of Guam in '47.

Mr. Tricowski: Would you remember the name?

Mr. Mnichowicz: It was ... didn't have a name, it had three eights. Then I went to the hospital and I couldn't go back out to sea anymore for a while they told me, so they sent me on an auxiliary rescue salvage ship to Pearl and then I flew from Pearl to the states and was on medical shore duty there and then all of a sudden I get a set of orders to the El Dorado and I stayed with the baby until '52 and when I got in trouble I said ... the captain told me, 'Don't ship over on the west coast, go to the east coast.' So I went home. Got discharged and went home.

Mr. Tricowski: Did you have some kind of problem? Do you want to talk about it?

Mr. Mnichowicz: No.

Mr. Tricowski: Okay.

Mr. Mnichowicz: No. And I re-enlisted again and I went down to Charleston, South Carolina and I caught an auxiliary minesweeper again. I don't remember the number or the name of it.

Mr. Tricowski: What year was that, roughly?

Mrs. Mnichowicz: 1953. I had some R&R in Texas and then went back to Charleston and caught that wooden hull MSO.

Mr. Tricowski: Okay, so when the war ended you were on what ship, the minesweeper?

Mr. Mnichowicz: When the Second World War ended?

Mr. Tricowski: Yes.

Mr. Mnichowicz: I was on the minesweeper.

Mr. Tricowski: Alright. Well, anything else you want to share with us?

Mr. Mnichowicz: No. That's about it.

Mr. Tricowski: Okay. Well, we really appreciate your interview. The Pacific War Museum is very grateful and so am I. Thank you very much.

Mr. Mnichowicz: You're very welcome.

Transcribed by:
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