

Janeece Brunson & Abigail Leon

Period 1

Veteran name: Archie Aitcheson

Branch of service: Air Force

Time in service: 39 months

Year interviewed: 2017

Archie Aitcheson

Archie Aitcheson was born in Waterbury, Connecticut on February 29, 1924. He joined the Air Force when he was eighteen years old and served for a total of thirty-nine months. While in the service he fought in World War II and was a Prisoner of War. During his time in the service he traveled to multiple locations such as Illinois, Arizona, Nebraska, Virginia, Italy, Germany, and Poland. After his time in the service he returned to Connecticut. He now lives in Temecula, California and is a part of a Prisoner of War organization.

Aitcheson was born to Scottish immigrants and grew up during the Great Depression, but his father was able to work a couple days a week so they got by. During his senior year of high school Pearl Harbor was bombed. He was at the movie theatre and came out to a lot of commotion. He found out that America had declared war on Japan and Germany. He wanted to join the service right after Pearl Harbor, but his parents talked him out of joining right away. A few months later when he decided to join the service his family was for it and knew that his help was needed in order to defeat Hitler. His father served in the Scottish Army during World War I and served for the entire war.

In February of 1942, he took the exam for aviation. He failed the test, but would be able to retake it six months later. In September 1942, he enlisted in the Air Force. He was sent to Massachusetts where he stayed for a couple of weeks. Next they sent him to Atlantic City for bootcamp. While he was in Atlantic City, he stayed in hotels such as the Ritz Carlton and most of his training occurred on the beach. He applied for different branches of the Air Force and was given the job of radio operator. He went to Illinois for four months to receive training to be a radio operator and mechanic. After his training in Illinois, he was sent to Fort Myers, Florida to train to become an aerial gunner. During his time in Florida he retook the aviation test and he passed. He was sent to Boise, Idaho for training and was assigned to a B-24 bomber crew which had ten members. Weeks later he was transferred back to boot camp and he became a sergeant. He was later sent back to boot camp at Arizona State College where he spent four months completing basic training and cadet pilot training. After his training was completed and his four months were up he was transferred once again but this time to Santa Ana, California to learn even more about aviation. In order to finish flight training he went to Oxnard, California and was later moved to Taft, California for basic flying but was there for a short time due to an overflow of pilots who wanted to attend as well.

Aitcheson qualified as a machine gunner and a radio operator which was highly needed, so he was sent to the boonies for training. There he was assigned to a B-17 crew in Pyote, Texas where they travelled to Italy together and were assigned to the 31st bomb squad. On their second mission as a crew they were shot down while attempting to bomb Germany. Having lost one engine the pilot gave the alert to bail, however Aitcheson and his crew hung tight while their

mechanic kept the other engine running. They crash landed on the small island of Vis, barely flying on 2 wings. The whole crew was reported Missing In Action, but luckily got help from the U.S. Army a little while later. Aitcheson and his crew flew fifteen more missions after that until being shot down in Yugoslavia where they weren't as lucky as last time. Aitcheson and the 31st bomb squad were on their 16th mission when they were shot down in Marbo, Yugoslavia. Marbo was a small target and nearly half the planes didn't drop their bombs the first time over including Aitchesons'. In total the Germans shot down seven out of twenty-eight U.S. planes. When they were shot down, he jumped from the plane and watched as it blew up in mid-air. Unfortunately his parachute did not open immediately and he was knocked out on impact. When he was brought back to his senses he ran off not knowing where to go. He was soon spotted and captured by a German sergeant. He was then taken to a small city, searched, and put into a small cell by himself until a familiar face showed up. He later found out that the familiar face was his engineer. Together, they were sent to Austria which they had bombed nearly ten days prior. At the camps, he was not treated too badly and had some freedom. Being in Austria only short time, he and his engineer were then transferred to Luf to get interrogated. The interrogation was very personal, the interrogator knew almost everything about him. Shortly after Aitcheson was released back to his cell. With four other prisoners, he was shipped by train to a camp which held nearly 10,000 prisoners from the Air Force some of which were British. There he got separated from his engineer and was placed in a room that was made for sixteen men and was fed watery soup and potatoes. New prisoners had to sleep on the floor, but in order to avoid this, he shared a bunk with a thirty year old man who was also from Connecticut. In February the camp was evacuated due to a Russian attack. 45,000 prisoners marched for nearly 86 days. It was the dead

of winter and in total the prisoners marched 600 miles. On April 26th the prisoners were finally liberated. Once liberated he was taken to a hospital in France where he was treated for weighing ninety-eight pounds and having severe urinary problems. Soon after treatment he was sent back to the states where he went to Virginia and was able to get medication and a sixty day furlough. During his sixty days he returned home to Connecticut and in August he was notified that the war with Japan had ended. Once his sixty days were up, he was sent to Atlantic City for more medical attention. By this time, he had acquired all the points required to leave the military, however the government had not kept track of his points. From there he was transferred to a base in Long Island and became a chief without experience. Once he gained enough points to get out, he was sent to Massachusetts where the military tried to convince him to stay but got released in November of 1945.

At age twenty-one, he had served thirty-nine months in the Air Force and had planned to marry his fiance who he'd met in Connecticut during a three day pass he received from his Long Island base. Aitcheson discovered how hard it would be to get a job, but persevered and landed a job as a tool maker making eighty-one cents an hour. He continued with this job until he had 3 kids and decided he needed to make more money. He switched to a flooring company where he made fifty-eight dollars a month. When he was fifty years old he took a job as a custodian at a high school and worked for nearly ten years on the board of education. At the age of sixty-five he retired and moved to Sun City. There he attended church and played on a softball team. He now lives in Temecula, California and is an active member in a Prisoner of War organization.

