



ONWARD and UPWARD BG Charles McGee Story EDUCATION KIT

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What does it mean to go Onward and Upward?

If everything was easy, everyone would be doing it.

General Charles McGee had a challenging life. Born during the Great Depression — a time where Americans of all races, nationalities and upbringing had to endure lack of work and money — Charles had circumstances stacked against his family. His mother died when he was very young, forcing his father to raise the family on his own. Additionally, black Americans were often segregated, forced to go to school, work and live in areas that were “black only.”

However, Charles’ father, a church minister, insisted that his children do well at everything they did and see opportunity rather than limitation. When WWII began, Charles learned about the opportunity for black Americans to prove themselves as good or better than white Americans at maintaining and flying combat aircraft, he signed up to join the newly created “Tuskegee Airmen.”

After WWII, Charles decided to stay in the Air Force where he flew combat in two more conflicts: The Korean Conflict and the Vietnam War. With greater and greater success, Charles was given greater and greater responsibility.

But, Charles’ success was not easy. He had to learn how to fly new aircraft, get along with different people and live a life that would bring honor to his wife and children while he was serving in the military.

To Charles, success is the result of setting and meeting new goals.

**CHARLES MCGEE
SAYS IT BEST**
See Page 5 for
online interview

When asked about his secret to success, Charles replied, *“Sometimes I wonder ‘Why did I do so well?’ But I married a wonderful person (Frances) and I chose a career that I truly loved. Sure, I had to work hard but if you want to be good at anything, it takes continued effort and energy.”*



Charles McGee, age 18, Chicago, Illinois

Charles McGee - “Tuskegee Airman” BACKGROUND AND FACTS

Birthplace: Cleveland, Ohio

Birth date: December 7, 1919

Occupation: Military pilot, speaker, role model

FACTS:

- Born Ohio, grew up near Chicago
- Father was a pastor of a church, mother a homemaker
- Mother died when Charles was 1 years old
- 1 brother (Lewis), 1 sister (Ruth)
- Became an Eagle Scout in 1940
- Flew combat in WWII, Korean War, Vietnam War
- Role model to all Americans

PHOTO: courtesy McGee Family



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Think about...
Every pilot in this photo had a college degree
as well as a fierce determination to succeed.
When you look at each face, try to imagine
what was at-stake for each of these men's
performance and see yourself in their place.

PHOTO: USAAF, courtesy McGee Family

The Tuskegee Airman are a significant part of American History

Up until 1940, unfair prejudice and discrimination influenced military leaders to marginalize the capacity of black Americans to fly and maintain aircraft. Additionally, black Americans were kept separate (segregated) from others, compounding the challenges of training and regular flight operations. The portent of WWII created an urgent need for highly trained and expert pilots and mechanics. So in 1940, President Roosevelt announced that the Army Air Corps would allow blacks to fly and fight but their unit would still be segregated. Nevertheless, this opportunity was embraced by men such as Charles McGee (and his crew chief Nathaniel Wilson) to meet the standard of performance required of white pilots.

The pilots and ground crew of the "Tuskegee Airmen" had much to prove — and they did. In fact, the Tuskegee Airmen exceeded expectations. As an example, the 332nd Expeditionary Operations Group (the official name of the Tuskegee unit sent to combat), outscored two all-white squadrons in terms of aerial victories and when assigned to protect bombers from aerial attack delivered exceptionally low losses.

In a real way, the Tuskegee Airmen faced two enemies; prejudice and the Nazi war machine (who themselves were founded on beliefs that were wholly racist). Yet, because the Tuskegee Airmen chose to meet their challenges, their legacy is a potent reminder that people of all kinds can overcome biased limitations. Today, Americans have the Tuskegee Airmen story as a humbling and inspiring part of its history that must always be remembered, respected and celebrated.



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PHOTO: courtesy McGee Family



3 wars, 409 combat missions.

World War Two - 136 combat missions

The picture at left is Charles McGee when he was a Captain, flying P-51 Mustang fighters in Italy, 1944. He flew missions where his job was to stop Hitler's means to transport war materials as well as protecting bombers from German Air Force (Luftwaffe) fighter planes. Charles is credited with shooting one down, also. Charles named his P-51 "Kitten" after his wife Frances as well to honor his Crew Chief "Nate" Wilson because he kept the airplane's engine, "Purring like a kitten!"



The Korean Conflict - 100 combat missions

The Korean Conflict is often called, "The Forgotten War" because the world was still reeling from WWII and didn't want to be reminded of war's pain when the Korean Conflict began in 1950. Nevertheless, the newly formed United Nations (1945) believed that it must intervene against North Korean military aggression. Since Charles had decided to make the U.S. Air Force his career, he was obligated to return to combat where he helped destroy ground-targets with his F-51D Mustang.



The Vietnam War - 173 combat missions

Some of Charles' most dangerous combat missions were flying the supersonic RF-4 Phantom during the Vietnam War. The RF-4 was armed only with a camera and its job was to fly into enemy territory, take pictures of potential targets and speed home with the film. Though he was always under the threat of enemy fire (damaged on one occasion), he always succeeded in completing the mission. The photo at left is his last combat mission; he's being sprayed by a water hose to celebrate. Notice the signatures of all of his friends who were happy to see Charles "end well."

**Other aircraft flown by Charles McGee: PT-26,
T-6, P-39, P-40, P-47, F-80, F-89, F-101, F-16
and Cirrus Vision and Cessna Citation**



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Charles McGee's Favorite Airplane!

NAME:
The name P-51C Mustang has meaning. "P" stood for "Pursuit" and usually meant the airplane was a fighter plane. "51" was the model number from manufacturer, North American Aviation. The "C" was the particular variant of the P-51 and "Mustang" referred to the fast, wild horses of the American plains.

THE GREEN-ISH PAINT
On natural-metal finished aircraft, the noses were often painted black or "olive drab" to keep sun reflections from shining into the pilot's eyes.

NUMBERS:
The number "78" was a simple way to identify this particular aircraft. Interestingly, the serial number (usually in smaller numbers and near the tail) was removed from "78".

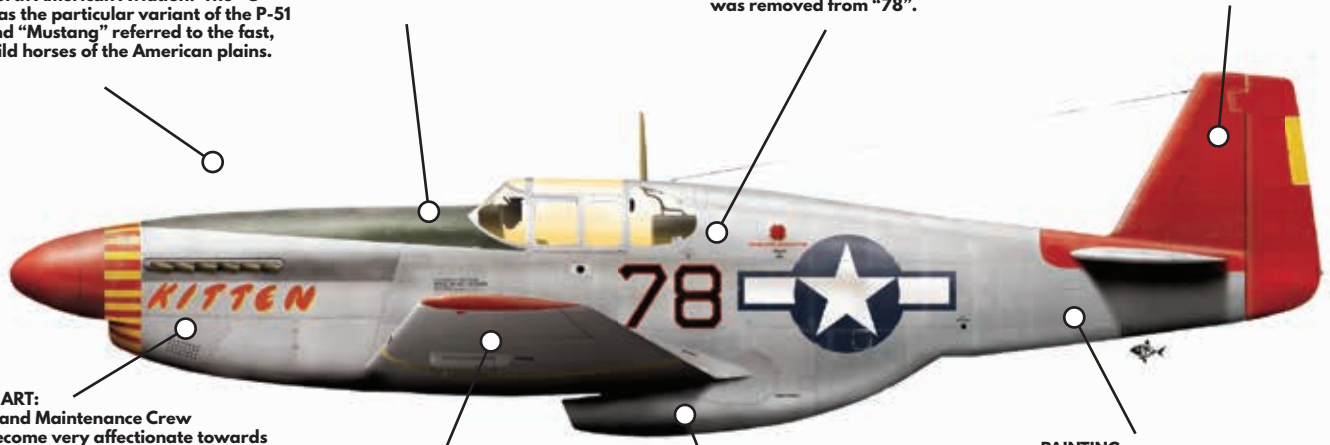
RED TAILS:
It was important that different squadrons be identifiable from a distance. The 332nd Fighter Group painted their tails red for this reason. Little did they know that their nickname, "Red Tails" would be so famous!

NOSE ART:
Pilots and Maintenance Crew can become very affectionate towards their aircraft! Charles McGee named his P-51 "Kitten" to honor his wife Frances and his Crew Chief "Nate" Wilson (because Nate kept the engine purring like a kitten)!

DIFFERENT IDEAS ONE MISSION:
The P-51 is a great story of keeping an open mind and working with different minds to achieve a goal. The airframe is American but it took an idea by the British to use one of their engines that turned the P-51 into one of the most successful combat aircraft ever deployed.

THE SCOOP:
P-51s have a 'scoop' underneath the wing and directly below the pilot to help direct air to the oil and water cooling system for the engine.

PAINTING:
By 1944, American Army Air Force fighter planes were being sent into combat mostly unpainted. This was to help save weight (paint can be heavy) and the camouflage effect of paint was not particularly necessary.



ARTWORK: John Mollison



Frances McGee - the original Kitten

Charles met his wife Frances at church in April of 1942. That October, they were married; the next day, Charles became an Aviation Cadet! Charles and Frances would have three children, Charlene, Ronald and Yvonne. However, being the spouse of an Air Force leader was challenging because Charles was often away from home for long periods of time on account of his military deployments. Charles expresses his respect for Frances by stating, "She ran the whole house and raised our wonderful children! She was a strong, magnificent person!"

PHOTO: McGee Family

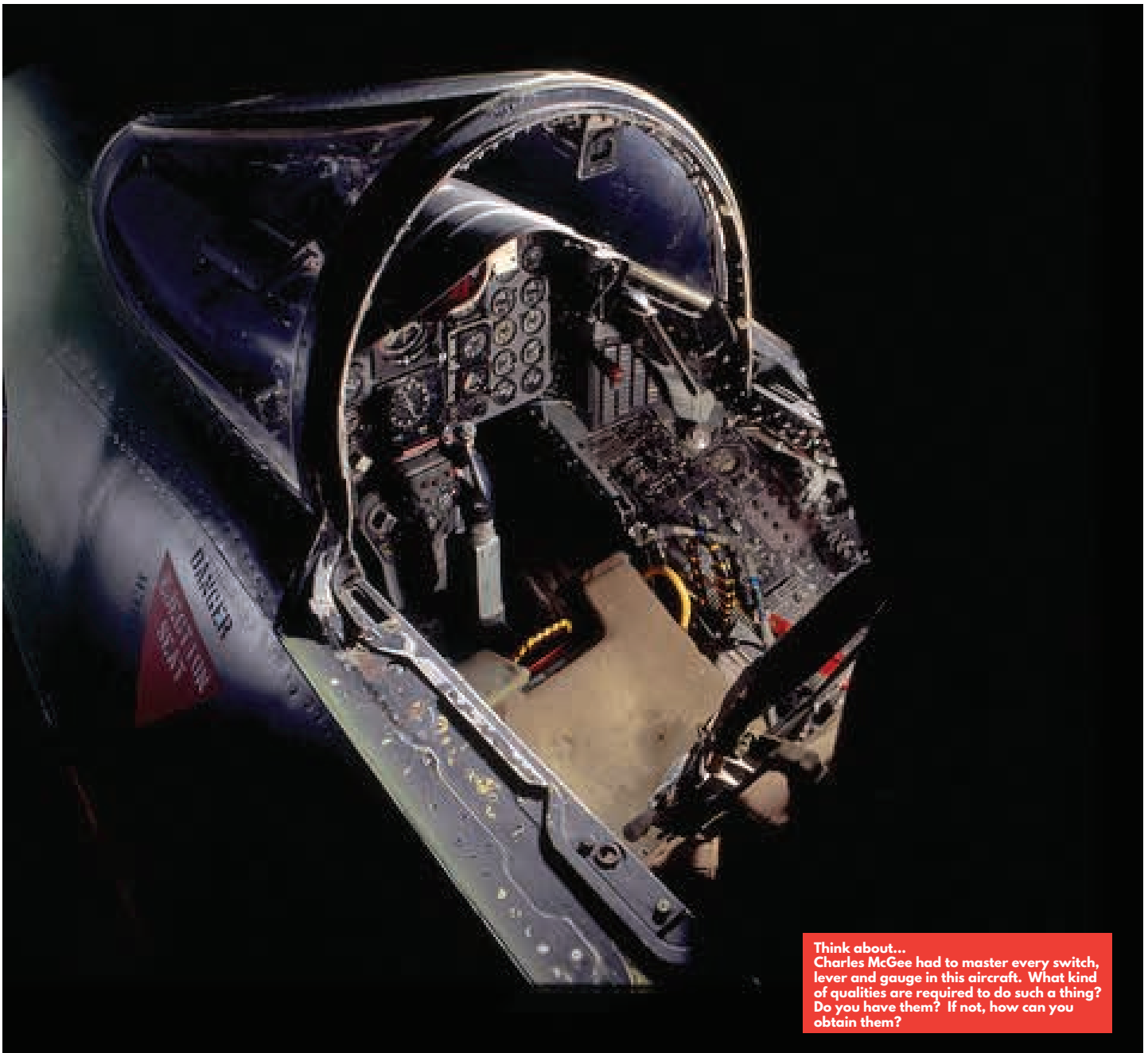


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Think about...
Charles McGee had to master every switch,
lever and gauge in this aircraft. What kind
of qualities are required to do such a thing?
Do you have them? If not, how can you
obtain them?

COCKPIT: F-4 Phantom

PHOTO: Dan Patterson

Some of the greatest tests anyone can have in their life involve learning new abilities, technologies, ideas and even ways of thinking. When Charles started out as a pilot, he was flying aircraft that had simple instruments and could barely crack 150 miles per hour. Just 25 years later, Charles was flying the RF-4C Phantom reconnaissance jet, capable of Mach Two and possessing some of the most sophisticated technology in the world. How did he do it? Little by little, mastering one task after another, over time, without giving up or trying to do too much, too soon.



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PHOTO: USAF, courtesy McGee Family



A Brigadier General wears one star on his uniform

General McGee was made a General in 2020 at age 100!



The Distinguished Flying Cross is the United States' 4th highest award for valor in flight

General McGee was awarded three DFCs (two in the Korean Conflict, one in the Vietnam War)



The rank of Eagle is the highest rank in Scouting

Charles became an Eagle Scout in 1940 and remains proud of this achievement



The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest award given to a civilian

Charles was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2007

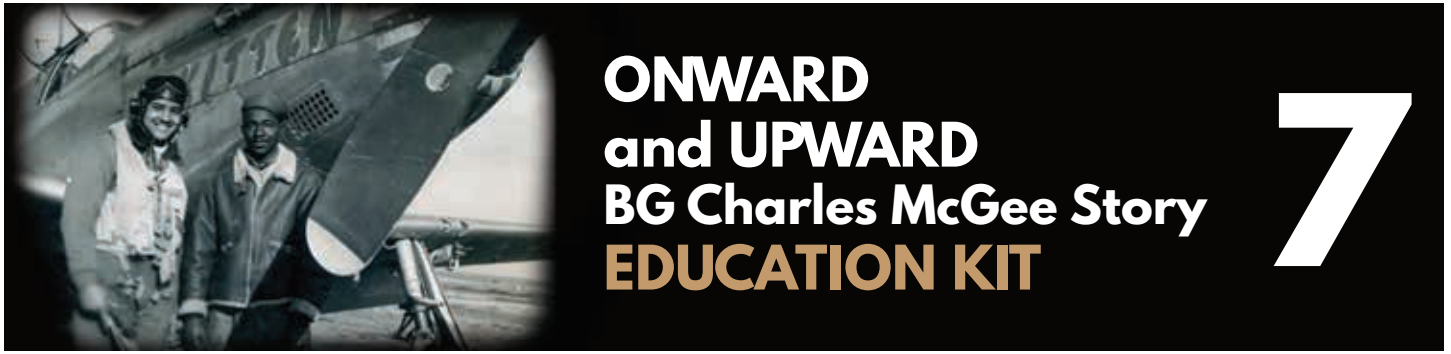
When you're good at something, others will notice and give you credit.

The awards are right represent are just a few of the medals and honors given to Charles McGee. Though he is appreciative of the honor and is proud to receive the medals, they are not his purpose or goal in life.

"I received a lot of help from my family, friends and good people along the way. It's great to get a medal but my real job is to do my best with the talents and opportunities I've been given. Then, other people can be inspired to achieve great things, too!"



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Why not listen to General McGee in his own words?

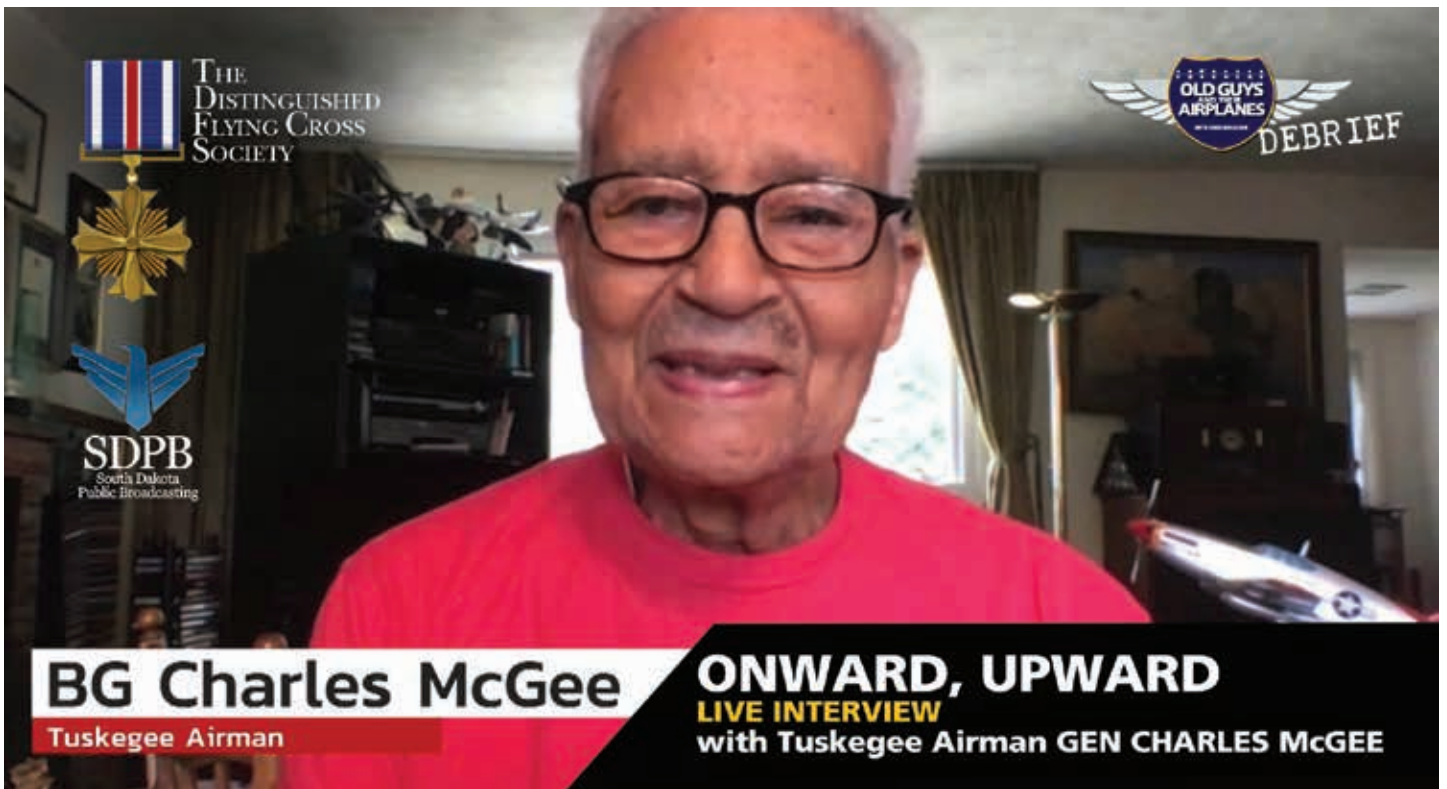


PHOTO: Old Guys and Their Airplanes

And make sure you listen for “The 4 Ps!”

On September 3, 2020, the world was in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation was rocked by a resurgence of racially-based conflict and even friendly neighbors were being divided by disagreements. General McGee himself was not feeling his best and visited his doctor. By many accounts, the times were tough for everyone. However, McGee knew that his story had the potential to inspire others to embrace hope, personal accountability and work to achieve a better future. It is with this spirit that he agreed to participate in a live, on-camera interview in front of an audience of many thousands, world-wide.

General McGee recalled his upbringing, training, combat service and other factors that contributed to the whole story of his exceptional life. Yet, he also prepared a simple guide of four words that anyone could follow to achieve similar results. He called these words, “his Four Ps” — **Perceive, Prepare, Perform and Persevere**. General McGee believes that success will follow anyone who can commit to understanding and appropriating the definition of these words. **Look them up and read their definition: how can you see the 4 Ps influencing your own life?**

Watch the live interview with OGTA host John Mollison at: www.dfcociety.org/pages/ogta-debriefs



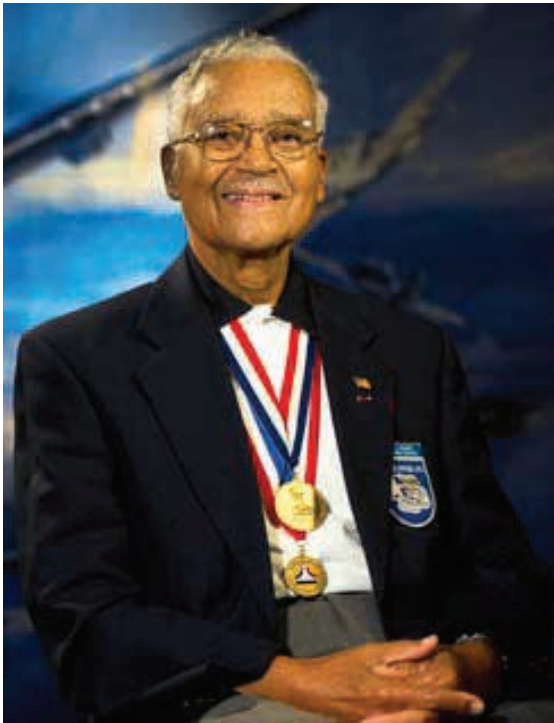
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LEARNING MORE ABOUT GENERAL CHARLES MCGEE



General McGee, wearing his Congressional Gold Medal
PHOTO: USAF

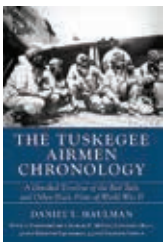


Onward and Upward
Educators Kit
<http://www.dfcsociety.net>

Tuskegee Airman
Biography
Charlene McGee-Smith, Ph.D

The Tuskegee Airmen Chronology
History book
Daniel Haulman

General McGee
Wikipedia
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_McGee_\(Tuskegee_Airman\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_McGee_(Tuskegee_Airman))



Some of General McGee' awards

CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

LEGION OF MERIT- with one oak leaf clusters

DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS - with two oak leaf clusters

BRONZE STAR

AIR MEDAL with 25 oak leaf clusters

USAF Commendation Medal with oak leaf cluster

Presidential Unit Citation

Korean Presidential Unit Citation

Hellenic Republic WWII Commemorative medal

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The Distinguished Flying Cross is a military decoration awarded to individuals demonstrate heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight.

One of the missions of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society is to share the heroic stories of its members with the world. Though especially remarkable, General McGee' story is just one of many. If you have any interest in learning more about how ordinary people can prevail under extraordinary challenges, the DFCSociety.net website is a great resource. Hundreds of DFC citations are available to read.

On behalf of the DFC Society, may General McGee's story inspire you to demonstrate your own mettle in a positive way to the good of our country and fellow citizen.

Bruce Huffman
Chairman, 2020