

## **FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL'S STATEMENT ON THE PASSING OF BRIGADIER GENERAL CHARLES E. MCGEE**

The Friends of the National World War II Memorial (Friends) is deeply saddened by the passing of World War II veteran retired Air Force Brigadier General Charles E. McGee, one of the famed Tuskegee Airmen and a career officer in the United States Air Force for 30 years.

Friends 'chairman Josiah Bunting III said of Gen. McGee, "One of our country's greatest heroes and treasures has fallen. Gen. Charles McGee was the living embodiment of a man whose actions spoke louder than his words. His military service to his country is without question, but the way he dedicated himself to helping today's youth is where the loss will be felt the most. Gen. McGee wanted to make this country better, and his mission to teach our children and youth about the importance of values and principles will be missed, but surely not forgotten."

McGee was born on December 7, 1919 in Cleveland, Ohio. As a youth, Colonel McGee was a member of the Boy Scouts of America and earned the Eagle Scout award on August 9, 1940. He talked often of the Scout motto and "if we all lived by the Scout laws and Scout rules we would have a different country." Instead, he said, "I tried to be respectful, help others, keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."

After enlisting with the U.S. Army in October 1942, he became a part of the Tuskegee Airmen having earned his pilot's wings. By February 1944, McGee was stationed in Italy with the 302nd Fighter Squadron of the 332d Fighter Group. He was promoted to Captain, and after flying a total of 137 combat missions, he returned to the U.S. in December 1944 to become an instructor for another unit of the Tuskegee Airmen, where he remained until 1946.

After continuing to serve in the military, Gen. McGee retired in 1973, ending his military career with 6,308 flying hours and a total of 409 combat missions in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, one of the highest combat totals and longest active-duty careers by any Air Force fighter pilot in history.

President George W. Bush and the U.S. Congress collectively awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to McGee and all other surviving and deceased Tuskegee Airmen. He has also received the Legion of Merit with oak leaf cluster, Distinguished Flying Cross with two oak leaf clusters, Bronze Star Medal, Air Medal with 25 oak leaf clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal with oak leaf cluster, Army Commendation Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, Korean Presidential Unit Citation, and the Hellenic Republic World War II Commemorative Medal.

McGee was active with Friends, dedicating his time to teaching the lessons of yesterday to unite the generations of tomorrow, taking part in all six of Friends' annual summer teacher conferences. He spoke with teachers, schools, and children about his "Four P's" — principles to live by: "Perceive, Prepare, Perform, Persevere". He encouraged young people to:

- "Dream your dreams but get the good education to accomplish the desires and needs of the country,"
- "Always seek excellence and always do your best in things that you do."

- “Don’t let the negative circumstances be an excuse for not achieving.”

In February 2020, McGee, at 100 years old, presented the coin at the kickoff of the Super Bowl. Later that year he was promoted from colonel to brigadier general.

In 2021, Friends launched an annual unity award named in honor of Gen. McGee as he embodied and lived by the highest American ideals.

We celebrate Gen. McGee’s life on this day and give thanks for his service and sacrifice. Rest in peace Gen. McGee.