

Brigadier General Charles E. McGee

Charles E. McGee was born in Cleveland, Ohio on December 7, 1919. He is the son of Ruth Elizabeth Lewis McGee and Lewis Allen McGee, who was a teacher, social worker, and later a Methodist minister. As a boy, Charles McGee joined the Boy Scouts of America and earned the highly respected designation of Eagle Scout. In 1940, McGee enrolled in the University of Illinois to study engineering. While at university, he was a member of the Reserved Officers' Training Corps and Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. During the summer, he worked at a steel mill in Gary, Indiana, to pay for his university tuition.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, McGee knew that he would be called up for service, but was determined to become a pilot. He applied for the newly formed pilot training unit for African-Americans in Tuskegee, Alabama. Just two days after marrying his wife, Francis, on October 17, 1942, McGee's orders came to report for training in Alabama. He earned his wings and commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in June 1943 and departed for combat service in Europe in December as a member of what was to be known as the Tuskegee Airmen. McGee returned to the States at the end of 1944, having flown 136 combat missions.

McGee remained on active duty for thirty years, flying combat missions not only during World War II, but also during the wars in Korea and Viet Nam. He is one of the few American pilots to fly more than 100 combat missions in the three wars. During his career, he went on to various command positions including assignments in the Philippines and in the United States. He retired from the military in 1973 as a Colonel, having won numerous awards for his service and valor. After his military service, at age 58, he returned to college to complete his undergraduate degree at Columbia University.

In 2007, McGee was presented with the Congressional Gold Medal, America's highest civilian honor, by President George W. Bush. On February 4, 2020, at a ceremony in the White House, President Donald Trump promoted him to the rank of Brigadier General. Later that day, General McGee was recognized at the State of the Union Address by President Trump. Just a few days before, McGee was honored during the pre-game ceremonies of Super Bowl LIV during which he presented the coin to the officials for the opening coin-toss. He is also the recipient of the prestigious Key of Life Award presented by the NAACP.